



The UNDP Asia Pacific Gender Equality Dispatch

Welcome to the bi-annual UNDP gender equality newsletter from the Bangkok Regional Hub



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Welcome to the second edition of our Gender Equality newsletter from the Bangkok Regional Hub!

It is unconscionable to think that with the region's impressive advances in fields such as economics, health, education, governance, environmental protection - and with the increasingly available opportunities to study, work, and enjoy lives - men and women today are facing the same socially constructed pressures to fit into stereotypical gender roles.

I recently interviewed working men and women about their views on gender equality in Cambodia. Many women shared with me how they had to convince their parents to let them go to university. There are still lingering social expectations that women should be the primary caregivers for children. The Philippines, for example, - the highest ranked country in the 2017 Global Gender Gap Report's 'Education Attainment' category - has almost 50% of women outside of the labour market.

Men, on the other hand, mostly emphasised their responsibilities to provide care and protection to women. To me, the issue of gender equality is not just about empowering women. If merely approached as a women's issue, we will not be able to effectively address the root causes of gender inequality. It is after all important to remember that while patriarchy may benefit men, these benefits do not affect all men. These gendered stereotypes in society are protected and perpetuated by formal and informal institutions that influence our life choices. They may be keeping women from achieving their full potential, but gendered stereotypes also condition and restrain men's life choices - though not to the same extent as women's.

So, how should we tackle changing social attitudes? Gender inequality is not a linear problem. Accordingly, solutions for reducing the inequality must take a holistic approach.

Inside this newsletter, you will find five original articles from the Bangkok Regional Hub, featuring the work of country office work-flows in Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Viet Nam, and the Solomon Islands, highlighting the ways in which UNDP programmes in the region cross-cut gender equality mainstreaming efforts, or ensure women's empowerment to accelerate sustainable development.

We also have the pleasure of featuring work from Fiji on empowering domestic violence survivors, and a blog from our UNDP colleagues in Climate Adaptation. We are delighted to highlight the cross regional programme UN-ACT in their work on forced marriages that spur migration from Cambodia to China, and the gender inequalities that might perpetuate this issue. You will also find an op-ed by our Deputy Regional Director Valerie Cliff, which originally appeared in the World Economic Forum online for International Women's Day. Finally, from our regional Gender team, Haruka Tsumori talks about how interconnected gender issues are with the achievement of other Sustainable Development Goals.

We hope you will enjoy reading these.

Koh Miyaoi - *BRH Regional Gender Advisor*

Tribal women achieving sustainable peace in the Solomon Islands



The Solomon Islands have seen their fair share of conflict. Since country independence in 1978, Solomon Islanders have maintained a lot of their traditional beliefs and social structures based around the tribe and the clan which run in parallel to systems encoded in civil law (with a Parliament and independent Judiciary). Unmet grievances opened hostilities or 'Ethnic Tensions' particularly between Guadalcanal and Malaita provinces.

Since the arrival of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) to restore public safety and security, significant challenges to sustained stability have persisted. Conflicts, sometimes violent, between members of the same community, or between members of different communities, continue to surface [even years after the formal end to the Tensions](#)[1]. In October 2000, the Townsville Peace Agreement was signed, resulting in a cessation of open armed confrontations. This peace agreement was a formal peace process that focused solely on combatants, leaving most of the longstanding grievances of local villagers unaddressed. Risks of political instability and potential Bougainville spill-over effects, exacerbated by national identity and social cohesion issues, remain a serious challenge - compounded by the vast distances of many people from central government, and limited infrastructure and connectivity.

The Solomon Islands Government with support from UNDP has staged a number of national reconciliations between Guadalcanal and Malaita provinces, communities, and families as a way forward. Importantly, the country is addressing the lack of social inclusivity in its peace talks. Representatives of Solomon Island women were not invited to participate in discussions around the Townsville Peace Agreement in 2000, even though women suffered disproportionately during the Tensions.

Conflict causes the magnification of inequalities, and with the corresponding breakdown of social networks, women become more vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation. The exclusion of women in the formal peacebuilding process acts not only as a barrier for establishing long-term peace, but undervalues women as equal citizens in communities affected by conflict. It is under appreciated how women's participation and resilience can prevent violent extremism and promote a culture of tolerance, enhance disaster preparedness, mitigate the effects of climate change, and promote policies that respect women's legitimate right to make decisions that affect their own lives.

The inclusion of women from marginalised communities is particularly important when one takes into consideration that conflict in this country was considered a product of ethnic tensions, including rural-urban migration from provinces, and fringing on customary land. Solomon Islands women are deeply committed to peace-building and post-conflict rehabilitation efforts, and have their own invaluable perspectives to bring to the negotiating table. Furthermore, when women are included in peace processes, there is a 20 per cent increase in the probability of an agreement lasting at least 2 years, and a 35 per cent increase in the probability of an agreement lasting at least 15.[2]

And yet there are still few women in leadership positions in this country. Since independence, only [three women MPs have ever been elected to the Solomon Islands Parliament](#). It is worth noting that the mere inclusion of women in peacebuilding is not enough. Women's confidence in their voices should be cultivated, and safe spaces for their thoughts to be heard should be provided.



9 - Solomon Islands Prime Minister, Hon. Manasseh Sogavare



Equipping women with negotiating tools through capacity building workshops is one way in which a programme by UNDP and UN Women, funded by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, is working toward ensuring both sustainable peace and the increased political representation of women in the Solomon Islands. Ensuring more inclusive governance ensures that peace-talks and political policy do not just benefit half the population.

The Supporting Peace and Inclusive Transition in Solomon Islands project focuses on spear-heading dialogue initiatives at the community, provincial and national level, and empowering women and youth as agents of peace. So far, the initiative has supported over 500 youth and women leaders from Guadalcanal, Malaita, and Western provinces to participate in dialogues with the government, and 21 young women leaders from 10 provinces engaged with policy makers. UNDP/ UNW has helped to facilitate Women's and Youth Summits. At these, women and youth from across the islands led to the launch of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (the first in the Pacific).

In October 2016, a National Women's summit on Women, Peace and security brought together women representatives from all the provinces in Solomon Islands to build consensus and validate the Women Peace and Security National Action Plan – the first in the Pacific. This called for collective efforts from government, CSOs, faith-based organisations, development partners to address gender inequalities and ensure women and girls are protected and equitably participate and benefit from security and peace initiatives.



The project has brought together otherwise isolated elements of the nation: Government, society, women and marginalized youth. Considering the traditional roles of women and girls in society, in partnership with MWYCFA and women’s groups (including on the National Action Plan), efforts to give a voice to this historically marginalized half of society has been ground-breaking. Key to the success of this outcome is incorporating women’s capacities at all stages – ensuring their voices are heard and that they participate in decision making. The historic role of women, bridging ethnic groups as peacebuilders, will also be leveraged in increasing understanding between groups on rights and responses to grievances.

“It is without doubt that women are vital for sustaining peace in Solomon Islands and therefore, the UN is pleased to partner with the Government in this programme that will assist efforts to consolidate and sustain the hard-won peace and stability achieved over the past decade,” said Ms Lubrani, UN Resident Coordinator, reaffirming the important role of women and young people in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and advocacy of peace and stability.

[1] Brigg, Morgan (2015), *Solomon Island National Peace Council: Inter-Communal Mediation*

[2] Laurel Stone (2015). *Study of 156 peace agreements, controlling for other variables, [Quantitative Analysis of Women’s participation in Peace Processes](#) in Reimagining Peacemaking: Women’s Roles in Peace Processes, Annex II*





10 - Photos: National Dialogue, Jun 19-20 2017, and Western Province Dialogue, Gizo - May 23-24, 2017 - Credit: UNDP/Karl Buoro

Collaborating Against Violence: Bhutan's research supports holistic violence prevention and response



The Kingdom of Bhutan currently ranks at 132 on the Gender Inequality Index – rather low on the [relative scale](#)[1]. But the country is increasingly aware of the need to improve its global position in terms of gender equality. Domestic and sexual violence, for one, is finding its way to the top of Bhutan's development agenda, demonstrating the government's commitment to establishing high levels of what it has termed 'Gross National Happiness'.[2]

In the same way that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are interlinked, so too must socio-political partnerships be formed in order to see their achievement. By working together with the Royal government of Bhutan and civil society organisations to produce a report on violence against women, UNDP is supporting the achievement other social issues that are both directly and tangentially related to gender equality mainstreaming.

In 2017, the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), together with the Austrian Development Cooperation via UNDP Bhutan, launched a survey to help create and implement a set of indicators relating to those engaged in addressing violence against women and girls. A need to take stock of the current climate affecting the various types and prevalence of violence against women and girls was recognised. They also hope to measure the capacities and capabilities of institutions currently addressing violence against women and girls to understand where and what kind of extra support they might need.

While the country has already many notable achievements on the legal, policy and plan front, acts of violence against women continue to make headlines in Bhutanese mainstream media to this day. According to NGO [Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women \(RENEW\)](#), more than [4,000 cases of gender-based violence have been reported](#) since the organisation's conception in 2004 – a concerning number considering the country's small population of around 0.79 million people. These numbers do not take into account unreported cases. Social stigma and cultural traditions often prevent survivors of violence from coming forward.

While violence affects both genders, it is primarily women who are targets; in 2014, [RENEW provided services to 382 walk-in clients of whom 367 were women](#). Deeply ingrained social biases, gendered roles, and gender stereotypes mean that many women do not even realise that what they are being subjected to is unlawful. The Bhutan National Health Survey of 2012, for example, revealed that among all women aged 15-49, [74 per cent](#) believed that a man is justified in beating his wife or partner if they neglected their children, argued with their partners, refused sex, or spoiled meals.





12 - UNDP Bhutan



13 - UNDP Bhutan

The Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA) was passed in 2013 to protect and promote the rights of survivors of domestic violence and to provide a legal basis for agencies working on these issues. There has nevertheless been some difficulty in ensuring that this policy translates to action on-the-ground.

Violence against women is complex. Governments, UN agencies, and civil society organisations will need to respond not only to domestic violence, but issues beyond the family home relating to infrastructure, health services, education, and rule of law, not to mention the pervading social attitudes towards traditional gender roles. Programmes that do work to end violence also need context-specific data to respond to a variety of issues that allow violence to perpetuate in many communities across the country. By taking a holistic approach, the Government will be able to ensure policies and ending-violence interventions are sustainable and will pave the way for other social development issues to be eradicated in the process.

The findings of the report and recommendations will then be incorporated into the country's next Five Year Plan - a series of national economic development plans created by the government - to close the gap between policy making and policy implementation, and understand how the Royal Bhutan Police, Royal Court Justice, health sector and civil society organisations can play bigger roles towards ending violence against women. In this way, by making changes to enable more equitable attitudes, the country will be one big step closer to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

[\[1\]](#) *The Gender Inequality Index is a way of reflecting the levels of inequality between women and men in three different dimensions: reproductive health (maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rate), empowerment (share of parliamentary seats held by women and share of population with at least some secondary education), and labour market participation (labour force participation rate).*

[\[2\]](#) *A guiding philosophy unique to this country, anchored around the cultivation of the collective happiness and well-being of the population.*



Tech as a Tool for Empowerment: Building Digital Literacy, Self-Belief, and Gender Equality in India and Myanmar



The Asia Pacific region on the whole has seen a staggering increase in internet and technology use over the last few years, as a result of cheaper phone tariffs, mobile phone handsets and SIM cards, greater electricity access, and the expansion of broadband connectivity - to name a few. Since March 2015, the number of active internet users in the region has risen by [27 per cent](#).

Yet this increase is not divided equally.

The digital gender gap is sizeable; globally, [12 per cent more men than women used the internet in 2017](#). In India, less than a third of all internet users are women. While 40 per cent of Myanmar's population owned a mobile phone, women in Myanmar are still [29 per cent less likely to own a mobile phone than men](#).

These low levels of women internet-users can be attributed to entrenched social attitudes towards gender roles and stereotypes. In their early years, [when parents or caregivers provide technology, girls get access at an older age than boys, and girls' access is more curtailed or supervised](#). This extends beyond the household. It was reported that in a village in Uttar Pradesh, India, for example, had banned unmarried women and girls from using mobile phones (and from wearing jeans and T-shirts).[1] The idea of [ICT-related careers](#) is still associated more with men than with women, and [women's participation in STEM careers](#) in the region remains low [2]. Singled out as a male-dominated space, gender norms also negatively affect women and girls' attitudes and self-believe in their digital abilities.

As global digitalisation rates continue to grow exponentially, changing the social attitudes that act as a barrier against women's digital literacy also becomes increasingly important. This is because breaking down the idea that women do not have the capacity, or indeed shouldn't become digitally literate will go some way towards alleviating other related social issues, such as health, inclusive governance, or economic growth. After all, if unable to access online services or without the knowledge or skills to about, say, health and sexuality, or social and political information that affects them, and the virtual resources to develop skills necessary in the global economy of the twenty-first century, half the population will continue to be left behind.

With this in mind, two UNDP programmes serve as excellent examples to show how investing in digital training for women can increase the likelihood of the achievement of other SDGs, raise women's confidence levels, take back a male-dominated space, and begin to change their community's perception of gender roles for the better.

In India, a unique smartphone based innovation eVIN ([Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network](#)) is being used to strengthen and streamline the immunisation supply chain. By providing real-time information on vaccine stocks and storage temperatures, eVIN helps to reduce vaccine shortages and wastage to ensure vaccine availability at all times, for all children. VALUE (Vaccine And Logistics Utilisation Evaluator) is a recently added element to this technology; it moves the effective management of vaccines even further along the supply chain to the last mile by recording the number of vaccines administered. The success of this technology thrives on its adoption and usage by the large team of cold chain handlers and healthcare workers at the last mile. By training the vaccine cold chain handlers and managers, nearly two-third of them being women, on how to use the app for efficient vaccine management, the initiative has had an indirect positive effect on gender equality.

The introduction of the app was met by some initial apprehension. Many cold chain vaccine handlers were older women from rural areas. Around 70-80 per cent had never used a smartphone before, and had little confidence in their ability to learn.

"I am a hard-working woman but technology was always a taboo for me. It was a new experience to handle an Android gadget and working on eVIN seemed to be very difficult. So I had my doubts whether I would be able to do it!" said Alka Sinha, the vaccine cold chain handler at a public health centre in Bihar. "We were very nervous during the first few days. But by the third day, we found some courage and decided we can do this," said fellow cold chain handler Jesamma John.

After a training workshop and continuous supervision and support, these healthcare workers gained a new sense of empowerment and confidence in their digital skills. eVIN connects men and women across states, distributing responsibilities and adding a greater sense of agency to their work. With up-to-date, reliable data at their fingertips, improving the levels of job efficiency, healthcare workers under the eVIN initiative are gaining a new sense of respect in their communities too. Where technology was originally considered the realm of men, these women are harnessing the transformative power of technology for themselves instead.



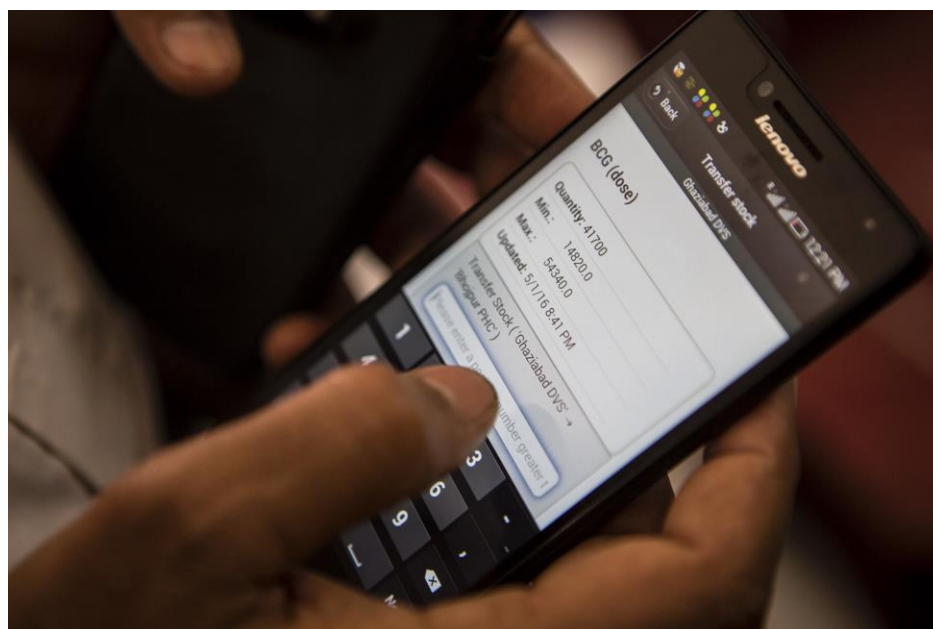
15 - eVIN, UNDP India



16 - eVIN, UNDP India



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17 - eVIN, UNDP India

Another app in Myanmar, [iWomen Inspiring Women](#), focuses on inspiring more inclusive community leadership. [A 2015 report revealed that out of the 16,785 local level Tract administrators in this country, only 42, or 0.25% are female.](#) Due to movement restrictions within the country, rural women find it difficult to form networks with neighbouring communities which affects their capacity building or knowledge sharing. Many women who might have ambitions to become community leaders or engaged

in economic ventures nevertheless feel discouraged as a result of traditional gender roles and barriers to information.

iWomen stems from an idea to connect women from different communities across Myanmar who have all involved in UNDP development activities over the last fifteen years. A joint initiative of UNDP Myanmar and May Doe Kabar, Myanmar's National Network of Rural Women, a volunteer network around the app was established, starting with 30 recruited university students. It has since expanded to more than 200 youth who are traveling across the country to introduce rural women to basics of mobile IT, and training them on how to share the app phone-to-phone with others and become iWomen App Champions.

This app now connects 22,000 women from May Doe Kabar village-based women's associations, reaching around 100,000 people including their families from 2,000 villages across Myanmar. The app allows women to share inspirational stories and poetry, receive factual hard knowledge (such as lessons shared on the app on health, agriculture, leadership etc.), channels peer support, and provides a safe and democratic space to talk about issues that are important to them. It was reported that their communities were surprised at how quickly these women picked up how to use the app. With the help of iWomen, communities are slowly changing their attitudes not only toward women's digital capacity, but also toward women's leadership.

The region still has some way to go to inspire longstanding systemic change. But by investing in women's digital skills training, we have the potential to ensure that our ever increasingly digital world benefits the many, not the few. Technology, as shown in these examples, has the power not only to connect those marginalised members of rural communities, but to empower all to enjoy the advances of development.

[\[1\]](#) UNICEF India, *Child Online Protection in India*, UNICEF India, New Delhi, 2016, p. 46; and DNA India, 'Uttar Pradesh: Muslim village panchayat bans jeans, mobile phones for girls', *Daily News & Analysis (DNA)*, 20 September 2015.

[\[2\]](#) Only three of 18 countries in Asia have an equal or above proportion of women in STEM.



18 - iWomen, UNDP Myanmar



Religious leaders challenge gendered misconceptions in Afghanistan



That religion could play a crucial role in supporting the changing of gender norms in some societies is perhaps a little unexpected.

Religious cultures have gained a reputation for keeping up traditional gender roles, rather than breaking them down. But from a moral perspective, the agendas of the three biggest religious institutions and social development are not very different. Moral purpose is at the very core of the three Abrahamic religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam; building bridges between people and their communities for peace and human rights.

In Afghanistan, a lawfully Islamic country, many contradictory opinions about women's rights persist. For example, the overwhelming majority of respondents of a UNDP national perception survey implemented in 2016 said they agreed women should have the same opportunities as men in education.[1] However, when asked about equal access to education at specific levels, support begins to taper off. Most Afghans [support women receiving basic education, such as in an Islamic madrasa \(93.6%\), but far fewer say women should receive higher levels of education, such as at a university \(72.1%\)](#). Support drops even further when there is an expectation of travel between the home and school for women.[2]

Encouraging religious leaders to preach about gender equality can do much to challenge such contradictions and gendered misconceptions. Mullahs (Muslims learned in Islamic theology and sacred law) are trained to lead prayers in mosques, teach in Islamic schools, deliver religious sermons, and

perform religious ceremonies. Members of their congregation are also more likely to approach them for dispute resolution than to go to the police or law enforcement.

The legal and religious systems are deeply interlinked in this country; mullahs deliver not only the word of the law but the word of holy scripture. Mullahs, who tend to be senior men, are also respected as a result of gendered customs. When men sit together with a male religious teacher who talks about rights of women based on Islam, more often than not information is accepted more easily than if the the same information were presented at home. Furthermore, women’s lack of power in communities is continually reinforced by low levels of literacy in rural areas. A female participant of the UNDP national perception survey noted, “Men are illiterate and even don’t have information about Islam. Religious leaders are the only people who can give them information about women’s rights because men don’t have time for getting education.”[4]

By combining religious examples with a legal framework supporting women’s rights, mullahs can be highly influential when it comes to improving gender equality. "By sandwiching a message between Arabic book ends and using frequent quotations from the Qur’an and Hadith throughout, the spoken word is given a stamp of approval essential to its legitimacy." Historically significant learned women such as Khadija, wife of Prophet Mohammad P.B.U.H, Ayesha Sedeqa, wife of Prophet Mohammad P.B.U.H who is the biggest narrator and interpreter of Ahadiths, and Fatima, daughter of Prophet Mohammad P.B.U.H, represent women who can be drawn upon to exemplify women’s right to, say, education as one example. But many religious leaders feel they lack the knowledge and training on women’s rights in Islam to deliver these kinds of messages successfully.[5]





20 - Ajmal Sherzai / UNDP Afghanistan



21 - Ajmal Sherzai / UNDP Afghanistan



22 - Ajmal Sherzai / UNDP Afghanistan



23 - Ajmal Sherzai / UNDP Afghanistan

Over the last three years, the Afghan Government's Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs, the Deputy Ministry of Information and Culture, UNDP Afghanistan and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme have been working together with 150 volunteer mullahs, training them on women's rights and gender equality to counter deeply rooted gender-based discrimination in the provinces of Herat, Balkh and Kabul. The Enhancing Gender Equality and Mainstreaming in Afghanistan (EGEMA) project hopes to build the Ministry of Women's Affairs capacity and advance gender mainstreaming by encouraging behavioural socio-cultural changes.

UNDP and UNV are working together to change social attitudes towards issues such as women's education, right to health care, violence against women, and women's economic empowerment by teaching young volunteers about gender equality, drawing heavily on religious context and evidence. These volunteers - often university students learning religious subjects - then tour these three provinces as 'Caravans', teaching Mullahs about the gender norms that prevail and act as a barrier to women's rights. There is also an important inter-generational dynamic which is strengthened between youth and the mullahs through this initiative.

Mullahs repeat lessons learned in Fridays sermons and prompt discussions. [Audience numbers range from 200 to 1000 depending on the population and sizes of the mosques.](#) This ripple-effect strategy has proven to be a particularly successful mode of mainstreaming. "Mullahs, who are the influential figures within communities, very effectively use Islam to spread gender equality messages in communities," says Fraidoon, a local youth volunteer who joined the Caravan in Balkh province. "By organising 20 Masjid Campaigns [mosque campaigns] for women's rights advocacy with local Mullahs, many of the communities' elders became aware of women's rights and their respective roles in ensuring women's rights everywhere."

By creating community dialogue, grounding ownership of the problem and challenging misconceptions embedded within the communities, these youth and mullahs are together shaping new narratives for gender equality in Afghanistan. This work will continue in 2018 while supporting the government of Afghanistan in replicating, scaling and utilising volunteer networks so communities can be supported through active citizenship.

[1] This statistic relates to a UNDP Afghanistan perception survey titled "Perception Survey (with KAP elements): Religious Leaders, Friday Sermons, and Gender Equality in Afghanistan" (2017) in which 84% of respondents agreed. This survey is due to be published in 2018.

[2] Statistics from the Asia Foundation, "A survey of the Afghan People," (2016)

[3] Perception Survey (with KAP elements): Religious Leaders, Friday Sermons, and Gender Equality in Afghanistan, (2017), Bamyan, FGD with community women, n.4

[4] Ibid., Balkh, FGD with female community members, n.3

[5] Ibid., When asked about possible obstacles in the way of preaching gender equality, religious leaders ranked a lack of knowledge women's rights as the highest (at 55 per cent)



24 - Ajmal Sherzai / UNDP Afghanistan

Communities in Fiji gain gender equality awareness and access services



Marguerite Gain returned to her mother's village after surviving domestic violence and for the past ten years she has been earning her livelihood sewing uniforms for students, dresses and shirts for her fellow village women and men using an old manual sewing machine.

The emotional scars that Marguerite still bears as a survivor of domestic violence did not stop her rising as a business woman. She enrolled in a university and studied with her son who was a university student at the time. With the certificate she earned from the university, Marguerite took another step forward and applied for a business license when the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM) visited her village as part of the team of government officers. The business license will bring her more opportunities to grow her business through accessing training and loans.

The awareness of gender equality and the elimination of gender-based violence was unequivocally promoted by the team of officers from the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Legal Aid Commission, and the Registrar of BDM. The awareness raising was conducted as part of the initiative to deliver their services to the doorstep of communities coordinated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pacific Office in Fiji. The team visited seven villages in seven districts in two provinces of the Northern Division during the global campaign of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence.

From 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to 10 December, Human Rights Day, the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign is a time to galvanize action to end violence against women and girls around the world.

During the community outreach by the team with the slogan, 'gender equality starts from the communities,' the officers from the Department of Women discussed with the villagers that when violence against women and children does occur in the communities, it should not be ignored. They encouraged both women and men to talk about the issue in the communities.

While the world has achieved progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment under the Millennium Development Goals (including equal access to primary education between girls and boys), women and girls continue to suffer discrimination and violence in every part of the world and Fiji is not an exception.

Participating in the awareness raising and accessing the services in her village, Marguerite said "The discussion and advice given by the officers were so encouraging. I've learned that these different government agencies provide different services to us, such as social welfare schemes, legal aid, BDM registrations. I am excited to receive my business license that I applied for today."

She was encouraged by the officers to participate in the training of trainers and become a business skills trainer supported by the Department.



25 - Ms Gain, Tacilevu village





Iva Batiki, who has been taking a leadership role for Savudrodro village for more than 30 years, was among the participants in the awareness session conducted in her community. She was a graduate of the leadership training provided by the Department of Women.

Iva encouraged other women in Fiji to take leadership and gave her message, “Never be quiet and shy to talk about sensitive issues like gender-based violence. Encourage everyone to participate and talk to everyone equally. The key is to show your love to everyone.”

The Fiji Government has endorsed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which calls for action by all countries to improve the lives of people and set its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Among the 17 Goals, Goal 5 focuses on achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls as it defines gender equality as not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for peaceful, prosperous and sustainable societies. Goal 16 is a commitment to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.



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26 - 'Gender Equality' in Banaban, Rabi Island, Fiji



<https://sway.com/BGht5J9HIVNkSYzk#content=vrUqM056e0rjzW>

27 - 'Gender Equality' in Tuvaluan, Kioa Island, Fiji

Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator, in his [statement](#) on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the 16 Days of Activism, said, “With gender equality and violence against women now better integrated into the Sustainable Development Goals than in any prior development framework, we have an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen efforts to address and reduce gender-based violence.”

Through strengthening people’s awareness of the social, economic and legal rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji and access to the associated government services, the UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji promotes gender equality and supports the achievement of these Goals.

The mobile awareness raising and service delivery was conducted by the Rights, Empowerment and Cohesion (REACH) for Rural and Urban Fijians Project. The REACH Project is implemented by UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji in partnership with the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, and the Legal Aid Commission and supported by the Government of Japan and UNDP.

by Tomoko Kashiwazaki, UNDP Fiji



28 - Tacilevu village, senior male villagers advocate for gender equality



29 - Savudrodro village

Women entrepreneurs contribute to national economic stability in Indonesia



In Indonesia, more women are emerging as business leaders. Among digital giants, Indonesia's top start-ups have become household names, contributing sizably to the country's economic growth; many of these start-ups are led by women. In Indonesia, small to medium enterprises (SMEs) make up 57 per cent of the GDP. [About one-third of medium-sized enterprises are owned by women](#) and this number is increasing by 8% annually.

But more needs to be done to challenge the barriers that stand in the way of securing women's position in the market. According to the World Bank, SMEs with female ownership represent 30 per cent to 37 percent of all SMEs (8 million to 10 million women-owned firms) in emerging markets, but these businesses have unmet financial needs of between US\$260 billion and US\$320 billion a year. [A Goldman Sachs report says closing the credit gap in 15 countries alone by 2020 \(including Indonesia\) could mean a 12 percent gain in per capita incomes by 2030.](#) Similarly, [UNDP Indonesia's latest research](#) shows that despite being a wise investment choice, some of the greatest unmet demand for credit by investors and banks comes from women-led, growth-oriented enterprises.

The reasons that these financial needs remain unmet is arguably as a result of socially constructed barriers. For example, [a study in Pakistan showed that, although accounts might be opened in the name of a woman, the decision-making authority around the use of those funds often lies with a male relative.](#) Gendered roles and stereotypes mean that women entrepreneurs are not seen as business savvy, reliable partners. Women entrepreneurs often lack confidence in their business acumen, especially in

male-dominated spaces such as agriculture. Women's economic success also relies on access to education and training which they may struggle to obtain in communities where cultivating women's skills is not considered a priority.

One way to tackle this problem is by actively providing opportunities for women entrepreneurs to access to resources, networks, and connections that may help expand their businesses from the local to national and international marketplace. UNDP has been supporting change by including women in community relationships, supporting business skills and financial capability trainings, and building the business case for equal economic opportunities for men and women. Crucially, investing in women in business will also benefit national economic stability, and the attainment of other SDGs in the process.

For example, a sustainable way to help farmers is to support the social enterprises that process, market and distribute their produce. Indonesia is the world's third-largest cocoa producer after the Ivory Coast and Ghana, but growing cacao is not always the easiest for farmers in Lampung, in Indonesia's island of Sumatra. The unstable cacao price has meant that the crop is being replaced by durian and papaya.





Together with Canada and Angel Investors Network Indonesia (ANGIN), UNDP is supporting women-led enterprises through networks, and advocating for access to finance for women who are establishing businesses in agricultural industries. Under this initiative, in February 2018, a roadshow was held in Lampung to help these enterprises access finance that would help their business grow, and thereby strengthen farmers' financial security too. Amongst the attendees was Sabrina Moestopo, who leads a bean-to-bar chocolate company called 'Kakakoa' and works with smallholder farmers to produce award-winning chocolates. Kakakoa has been purchasing cacao beans from approximately 1,000 farmers, restoring the agricultural workers' faith in farming beans again. Kakakoa has also generated bean-growing incentives through eliminating middle-men in the supply chain, thereby increasing the benefit to the farmer. Kakakoa is now the first Indonesian company to win prizes at the Academy of Chocolate awards in London.

One of Sabrina's biggest struggles has been gaining the capacity and knowledge to build a strong brand in a crowded space, accessing financial investment, and changing the perception of her products in a male-dominated agricultural industry. By setting up a pool of funding where investments, grants, philanthropy, and other forms of funding, can be allocated to invest in middle-sized social enterprises called the SDGs Impact Fund Negara, UNDP are inviting investors, donors and philanthropists to support a generation of women-led social enterprises to encourage a levelling of the entrepreneurial playing field.

While this initiative is doing much to support women and their local communities, more needs to be done to help remove some of the red tapes to women's access to banking, lending, partnerships and training. Women's entrepreneurial activities can do much to support governments in their quest to find the capital to help alleviate other development issues.

With thanks to Maria Karienova, Campaign Assistant at UNDP Indonesia



Empowering Ethnic Minority Women in Viet Nam to become Poverty Reduction and Community Development Change Makers



“We are proud of our green squash but we don’t know how to make the market believe in the quality of this precious indigenous product,” said Vi Thi Loc, a young Tay ethnic minority woman from Bac Kan province in Viet Nam.

Her situation changed dramatically through participating in an initiative led by UNDP in 2017 which adopted a new approach to poverty reduction. The initiative was based on the concept of Partnership for 3E (Ethnic Minority Women Economic Empowerment) in 3P (Public Private Partnership), and with 3M (Match, Mentoring, and Move), which promotes both community strength and links partners in private and public sectors to empower ethnic minority women as effective change agents and reduce poverty.

Following many years of significant poverty reduction programmes and initiatives, Viet Nam has gained considerable achievements in socio-economic growth. However, the poverty rate remains high among ethnic minority groups - particularly in rural areas such as Bac Kan, or Vi Thi Loc. Like many other ethnic minority areas, women continue to work predominantly in agriculture and domestic work, without adequate payment. There is a need to strengthen the self-reliance of ethnic minority women groups, through mutual support systems and institutionalizing the implementation of ethnic women livelihoods development under the banner of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ensuring ‘no one is left behind.’

There is also a high level of awareness among national policy makers of the role of the private sector in achieving the SDGs and in reducing poverty. This is demonstrated in the design of the national targeted

programme, New Rural Development and Sustainable Poverty Reduction 2016-2020, which has adopted the principle of supporting 'local people's business projects' in its Production Component.

UNDP's project to support this government initiative takes an approach to 'reach the furthest behind first' by facilitating the participation of ethnic minority women in the market, and building social capital for women entrepreneurs so that they can benefit from the country's socio-economic development. The programme also aims to sustain community spirits and indigenous products which are healthy and environmentally friendly, as well as create mechanisms for mobilizing financial resources, and increase the involvement of other agencies, departments and organizations operating in the field of poverty alleviation. This initiative was piloted in Bac Kan and Dak Nong provinces, with the intention to share experiences in both districts with other localities to replicate and scale up the initiative across the nation.

The programme started with the 'Ethnic Minority Fest' to identify potential ethnic minority entrepreneurship and micro businesses before incubating and connecting them to the market. Ly Thi Quyen, a 34 year-old Dao ethnic minority woman from Vi Huong commune, Bach Thong district, spoke about her experience of brainstorming her business ideas and plans with other future women entrepreneurs.

"Under the mentoring and coaching of trainers, we mapped potential partners with our group. Useful ideas for improving our indigenous product were identified during group discussion which inspired me with new ideas and concept for action," she said.

The 'Meet and Match' events helped to connect ethnic minority communities and women groups with private businesses and local government agencies. In one Meet and Match event in Bak Can province in November last year, 30 different enterprises and local NGOs met and explored business opportunities with thirteen women's production groups. Ly Thi Quyen, noted how, "Before being accompanied by the experts, our products was only sold in the provincial market. After receiving support from experts in advanced packaging design and business skills, I have expanded the market to other provinces such as Hanoi, Quang Ninh..."

Vi Thi Loc, who did not know the marketability of her indigenous green squash smiled in the meeting with mentors from VietED and GreenHub (local NGO) in a farm tour.

"Talking with the mentors, now we see our path clearly," she said.

Her business is stepping toward long-term cooperation with her business partners, organizing a group meeting in the village to discuss and develop a work plan for upcoming activities.

UNDP has provided technical support together with other government agencies and departments at district and provincial levels as well as international organisations through this programme. A total of 12 minority ethnic community groups in Ba Be and Bach Thong districts in Bac Kan province, and 10 other community groups in Dak Glong district in Dak Nong province have worked with media agencies and the Departments of Labour, War Invalids, and Social Affairs from neighbouring provinces to support minority ethnic minority communities implementing this poverty reduction Initiative in provincial areas. Through an innovative 3EPM approach, the initiative has transformed women into strong change makers for sustainable poverty reduction - mobilising the strength of small communities and social resources for local socio-economic development.



31 - Ms. Ly Thi Quyen – director of Thien An Cooperative, UNDP Viet Nam



32 - UNDP Viet Nam



33 - UNDP Viet Nam



34 - Members of Dia Linh cooperative, UNDP Viet Nam



35 - UNDP Viet Nam



36 - Members of An Binh cooperative, UNDP Viet Nam



37 - Members of Ms Mein's cooperative, UNDP Viet Nam

Gender and Forced Marriage: Cambodian women are left trapped after being tricked into marrying men overseas



Chanthy's* family in rural Cambodia was struggling financially. The money from the farm simply wasn't sufficient anymore. She herself had moved to Phnom Penh for work, but the income was not great either. Then, one day, she received a phone call from her mother.

"My mother said, 'our neighbors went [to China for marriage] and have sent large amounts of money back home, and working in Phnom Penh you can only earn US\$100 to support the family. It is not enough,'" she recalled. This marked the starting point in a cycle of deception, coercion, abuse – and, ultimately, forced marriage.

Chanthy's story is one of many captured and analyzed for a [research report on forced marriages between Cambodia and China that UN-ACT published with partners in 2016](#). The project was a response to the growing number of identified cases between the two countries. But what is a forced marriage, and how does it relate to human trafficking?

Forced marriage is not well defined in international legal and policy frameworks. One source refers to it as a form of gender-based violence, given the disproportionate and severe impact on women and girls [1]. Another classifies institutions or practices whereby women, 'without the right to refuse, [are] promised or given in marriage on payment of a consideration in money or in kind' to a third party as similar to slavery. Such institutions and practices were later included as forms of exploitation in the international definition of human trafficking, hence establishing clear linkages between the two phenomena. These linkages have become even more apparent in recent manifestations of forced

marriages, as part of patterns of commercial marriage migration including between Cambodia and China.



38 - Map of migration - UN-ACT regional report (2016)

In Cambodia, marriage is traditionally about linking two families rather than a union between two individuals, and remains customarily arranged by the parents based on economic or reputational factors. Within family units, gender roles and strong societal hierarchies have placed women in subordinate positions to men and stipulated primarily caretaking responsibilities, i.e. to ensure family harmony and honour. Following the massacres of the Khmer Rouge regime, however, large numbers of households have been female-headed, resulting in expanded responsibilities for women including important economic support functions. Hence, limited educational and professional prospects have concurred with high pressures to contribute financially to family life, leaving women with few options but to look for work outside their home country.

Labour migration systems in the region, however, are restrictive; especially for women and professions often performed by women. This has resulted in marriage migration emerging as a viable alternative for many seeking opportunities abroad.

China houses some 30-40 million more men in marriageable age than women, with significant numbers of brides being recruited abroad including from Cambodia. Many of the men live in rural environments, where more traditional lifestyles including for family and marriage prevail. This includes highly patriarchal systems, in which women are at severe social disadvantages compared to men including for educational and professional opportunities, partly as a result of sons remaining permanent members of their natal families and contributing to their livelihoods. Marriages are widely seen as transactional, whereby the spouse becomes part of the groom's family with the expectation that she contributes to their economic well-being. Indeed, it is such considerations that have led to the surplus of men in society in the first place, with gender selection having been widely performed during 30 years of one-child policy.

Both Cambodia and China prohibit international marriage brokerage and have introduced various other policies to prevent Cambodian women from marrying Chinese men. Aside from raising important rights-related questions, this has pushed potential migrants to enlist the services of irregular agents operating without transparency and accountability. Whilst anecdotal evidence suggests that some, perhaps many, of the Cambodian women living in arranged marriages in China appear content, the above research documented the downsides of the lack of oversight over brokers.

The Cambodian women interviewed were both deceived and coerced into marriages by agents to varying degrees. Some thought that they had come to China for the purpose of work and only later found out that they had to get married instead. Others were told that they needed to get married in order to find work in China, although marriage doesn't grant employment opportunities for up to five years. Further, the conditions of marriage proved to be significantly different to what was originally discussed. Confiscated passports, withheld food, restricted communication and freedom of movement, and threats of having to repay travel costs all served to coerce women into marriages. These factors were compounded by their visa status, in that respondents had entered China on tourist visas and only found out after their arrival that marriage was the only opportunity for longer-term stays.

Marriage is a highly gendered institution in both countries, involving various discriminatory customs against women. These are embedded in demographic and socio-economic factors in Cambodia and China, and significant marriage migration patterns as a result. The governments concerned have responded by curtailing migration options further, thereby pushing women to enlist the services of irregular marriage brokers without systems of accountability in place. It is in this environment that forced marriages have evolved. UN-ACT works with partners in both countries to strengthen women's agency to make own, informed choices about their future including for marriages, and to be empowered to speak out and be heard when confronted with abuse and exploitation.

**not her real name*

Sebastian Boll is the Regional Research Specialist at UN-ACT (United Nations Action for Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons). UN-ACT is a 'coordinator' and 'innovator' in Southeast and East Asia's anti-human trafficking efforts.

For more, visit the [UN-ACT website](#).

[1] Another reference can be found in CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 (2017)



39 - Christina Maza/ The World Post

Op-Ed The Fourth Industrial Revolution could smash gender inequality – or deepen it *by Valerie Cliff*



The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) almost never fails to incite contrasting predictions about the future. Critics see deepening inequality and unemployment in an era of unprecedented global wealth, as robots look poised to replace workers on the factory floor.

Proponents, meanwhile, see untold possibilities of human wellbeing in a future where prosperity is decoupled from labour and drudgery, allowing ordinary citizens to have more time to spend with their families and in creative pursuits.

This much is clear: as robots and artificial intelligence transform global production, skilled workers with college degrees will emerge the winners. Inevitably, the benefits will be distributed unevenly, and it is primarily women – from high-school dropouts to college graduates – who find the odds heavily stacked against them.

A 2016 study by the United Nations' International Labour Organization [predicted that some Asian nations could lose more than 80% of their garment, textile and apparel manufacturing jobs, as "sewbots" replace humans in factories.](#) In the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, it is young women who comprise the majority of the 9 million people dependent on jobs in these sectors, in countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Malaysia.

The vast majority of the world's working women might fare even worse, restricted to insecure and informal employment. Globally, only half of working-age women are in the labour force, and those that work earn a quarter less than male counterparts in the same jobs.

Asia has seen school enrolment rates for girls rise in the past two decades, but high dropout rates driven by social norms, early marriage and household work have thwarted the economic and social outcomes for women that might reasonably result. Transition rates from education to employment are consistently lower for women, contributing to high levels of joblessness.

And most troubling of all: women comprise a majority of the 175 million young people globally who are still illiterate.

These disparities are mirrored across the wealth divide.

Although more women graduate from university in the United States than men, they remain a minority in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) jobs that will survive into the future. [According to 2016 United States census data, only one in seven women with a degree in STEM actually works in that area.](#) This holds true for most countries.

The entrenched inequalities and discriminatory social norms that keep women restricted to low-paid, poor-quality jobs will likely be magnified by the impacts of the 4IR.

These inequalities, however, are not inevitable.

The 4IR presents us with a unique opportunity to change this, as governments recalibrate policies to future-proof their economies.

In fact, with the right mix of investments in young women and men, the Asia-Pacific region could likely ride another wave of high economic growth as its working age population peaks in the next two decades. That “wave” will only fulfil half its potential if women continue to be marginalised in economic, political and social spheres.

[The UN Sustainable Development Goals](#), adopted by world leaders in 2015, offer routes to development that go beyond the metrics of income to address the social and environmental determinants of poverty and exclusion.



40 - Image: Reuters/Toru Hanai



41 - Image: Reuters/Athit Perawongmetha

Across the Asia-Pacific region, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is scaling up its first generation of solutions that leverage technology, innovation and the opportunities opening up through 4IR to address stubborn development challenges.

In Bangladesh, the UNDP has supported the government's efforts to kickstart youth entrepreneurship in the "digital economy" [through more than 5,000 digital centres that provide paid public services to remote communities](#). Each centre, equipped with a computer and high-speed internet, is run by a rural female entrepreneur in partnership with a male counterpart – going beyond equal opportunities to ensure equal leadership. So far the platform has delivered 237 million services such as birth registration, life insurance policies and telemedicine services.

Over 100,000 young women in India, most of them from underprivileged backgrounds, are quietly shattering stereotypes on factory floors as they graduate from [plastic and steel engineering courses designed by UNDP and supported by the IKEA Foundation](#).

But there is a risk that we are tinkering around the edges if we don't concurrently tackle the structural roots of gender discrimination.

In the past decade, the Asia-Pacific region has seen remarkable improvements in closing gender gaps in education and health indicators, and yet this has not translated to corresponding gains in economic empowerment and political participation for women.

Japan has achieved gender parity in enrolment for primary and secondary education, and in health-related indicators. However, Japan's well-educated and healthy women do not participate in the labour force or political decision-making to a corresponding degree.

Old stereotypes die hard. In much of the world, it is social norms governing gender roles that threaten any real gains made through numerical parity in education or pay.

The past three industrial revolutions contributed to cementing gender stereotypes that place both men and women in restrictive roles. Without fully unleashing the power and potential of all of humanity, the benefits of the fourth industrial revolution will remain in jeopardy.

Valerie Cliff is UNDP Deputy Regional Director for Asia & the Pacific and Director of the agency's Bangkok Regional Hub.

Originally published in the [World Economic Forum](#).





42 - Image: Reuters/Amit Dave

Blog In adapting to climate change, gender is on the global agenda by *Mari Tomova*



Over one hundred years ago, in March 1911, over a million women in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland turned up at rallies on the [first International Women's Day](#). Among their demands: the right to vote, to work, hold public office, and access vocational training. It was a historical day which has since become an annual rallying point for change. Today, International Women's Day is marked globally and is an official holiday in 27 countries from Afghanistan to Guinea-Bissau to Vietnam.

The day is one on which we celebrate the achievements of women. However, it is also a day to reflect on the ways in which our world and our societies are shaped by gender.

Climate change is among the most urgent challenges of our day and it's critical to see, its impacts are not "gender neutral". In fact, the situation is worst for the most vulnerable: according to the [UNFCCC](#), in situations of poverty women commonly face higher risks and greater burdens from the impacts.

The first step to addressing the issues is recognising them. And so it's promising to see that over the past several years, with persistent advocacy and recognition of the issues, gender has been increasingly under the global spotlight.

It is worth reflecting...

The year 2015 marked a number of pivotal achievements for gender and sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Goals put a much-needed spotlight on poverty, inequality, and violence against women as key challenges of the 21st century. Sustainable Development Goal 5 focuses specifically on gender.

In the same year, the Paris Agreement called for gender equality and women's empowerment, its provisions on adaptation and capacity-building efforts urging member states to adopt gender-responsive approaches. Meanwhile the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030](#) incorporated key recommendations on gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction and promoted a stronger role for women in building resilience.

In August last year, the Green Climate Fund released its [first gender guide to climate finance](#), a manual intended to support partners on how to include women, girls, men and boys from socially excluded and vulnerable communities in all aspects of climate finance.

In Bonn in November, the COP23 presidency announced the [first gender action plan](#), highlighting the role of women in climate action.

Weeks later in Bangkok, I joined a training attended by government officials from across 17 countries of Asia and the Pacific, hosted by the [Regional Resource Centre for Asia and the Pacific at the Asian Institute of Technology](#) in partnership with the [Ministry of the Environment of Japan](#), [Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management \(WOCAN\)](#), [UNDP](#), [UN Environment](#), and [FAO](#). Participants examined why applying a gender lens matters in climate change adaptation and a range of concrete case studies including from [Kultoli in Bangladesh](#) and [Nepal](#), and left equipped with the tools for integrating gender considerations into their countries' adaptation.

Recognising issues around gender, and empowering women and drawing on their knowledge, is simply an essential part of resilience and achieving the globally-agreed 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

From fields to villages to boardrooms, recognising inequality, addressing differences and empowering women is the key to better outcomes.

We need to press for progress. As the UNDP Administrator has advocated, [the time is now](#).

Mari Tomova is a technical expert working in climate change adaptation for UNDP in Asia and the Pacific.



Blog No Gender Equality, No SDGs *by Haruka Tsumori*



There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 169 targets and 230 indicators.

Just looking at those numbers makes achieving all of them seem extremely challenging, if not somewhat impossible! But take any of the 17 SDGs and ask yourself: *“Can this goal be achieved without gender equality?”*

2030, the year by which we have pledged to achieve the SDGs is really not that far away. The latest [SDG progress report](#) launched by the UN Secretary General showed that there was an urgent need for acceleration in the rate of implementation if we want to meet our targets.

Goal 5: Gender Equality is not only recognized as an accelerator and as a goal in and of its own. With women making up half the population, not addressing gender equality can also act as a hindrance for overall development . It slows down progress.

For example, if we were to tackle bettering women’s access to sexual and reproductive health, rights and services, this would also directly link to reductions in maternal mortality and supporting the end of communicable diseases such as HIV and AIDS (SDG 3). When women and girls have autonomy over their health, it has positive effects on education (SDG 4), sanitation and hygiene (SDG 6), and employment (SDG 8).

Earlier this year, representatives of national machineries for gender equality from Asia Pacific countries (and by ‘machineries’ I am referring to national ministries such as Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, Ministry of Gender & Family, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Ministry of Women’s Affairs, National Commission on Women and Children, or Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development) gathered to share their country’s efforts and experiences in using gender equality as an accelerator to achieve the SDGs. I had the honour of sitting down with some of them to conduct [interviews](#) and ask them what gender equality meant to them and discuss the challenges they might face in their work.

While notable issues like a lack of gender-sensitive data and low levels of inclusivity in decision-making were mentioned, the one challenge that really stood out to me was the struggle they went through to have their voices heard by other ministries, and to have a seat at the table when budgetary and policy decisions are being made.

It is essential that national machineries for gender equality have a seat at the table. They are the ones who hold governments accountable for gender equality in their country, and work towards ensuring that a gender perspective is integrated into national plans. And this is important because without gender equality, goals such as ‘no poverty’, ‘good health and well-being’, ‘quality education’, ‘peace, justice, and strong institutions’ simply cannot be achieved. I realized that these men and women weren’t just gender equality champions, they were key players for the other SDGs as well.

As an intern at UNDP, I get to see how gender equality is integrated into all aspects of work.

This is because UNDP recognizes gender equality as something central to its development mandate. Strategic entry points to advance gender equality are sought after in all areas of its work. It also plays an important role in supporting national machineries for gender equality to have a legitimate place in conversations about the SDGs.

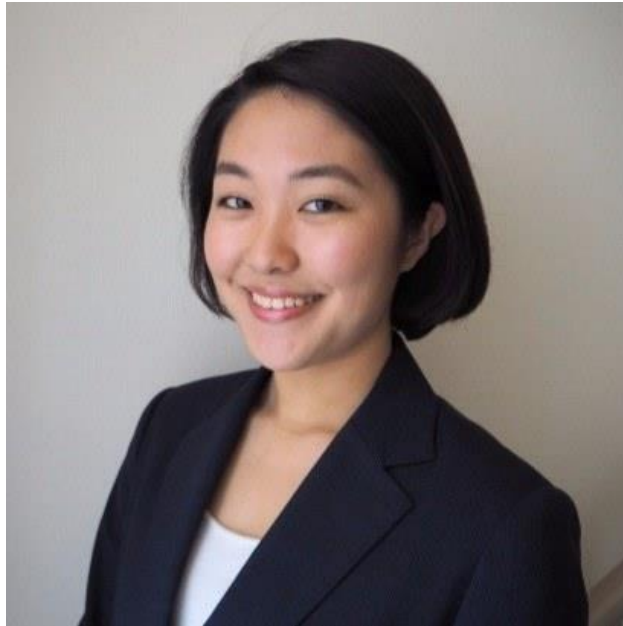
An example of these national machineries working in collaboration with UNDP is Malaysia who are currently in the process of partnering up with the private sector to implement the Gender Equality Seal

Certification Programme. This has already had huge success in Latin America, and we are hopeful to see it gain momentum in the Asia-Pacific region as well.

The way I see it, advancing gender equality is a huge opportunity and one that should not be missed.

So let's work hard, but also importantly, work smart.

Haruka Tsumori is an intern with the UNDP BRH Gender Team, and is currently pursuing a B.A. in International Relations at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan.



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Resilient nations.*