

PRESS RELEASE



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Asia-Pacific has one of the world's worst gender gaps

Gender equality is good economics, promoting democracy and long term stability

Despite Asia's impressive economic progress in the recent decades, gender equality is still a distant reality for many in the region. Across Asia and the Pacific women face severe deficits in power, voice and rights. Public action strengthening women's economic power, political voice and legal rights is the most effective intervention for enabling women's empowerment.

The 2010 Asia-Pacific Human Development Report "Power, Voice and Rights: A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific", published on the International Women's Day, concludes that deep rooted gender inequality holds back the region's achievement of the 2015 Millennium Development Goals.

The Report focuses on three key areas – economic power, political decision-making and legal rights – to analyse what holds women back, and how policies and attitudes can be changed to foster a climb toward gender equality. Asia, the Report asserts, is standing at a crossroads. By putting the right policies in place now, countries in the region can achieve positive change.

Lack of women's participation in the workforce costs the region billions of dollars every year. In countries such as India, Indonesia and Malaysia conservative estimates show that GDP would increase by up to 2-4 percent annually if women's employment rates were raised to 70 percent, closer to the rate of many developed countries. In Lao PDR the gap between numbers of men and women participating in the workforce is significantly smaller than in many other countries in the region. But women, in general, still earn less than men: the ratio shows that a woman's US dollar in the Lao PDR is less than 80 cents in comparison to every USD men earn.

Asia-Pacific women hold only a handful of legislative seats, fewer than anywhere else in the world except in the Arab region. Women in Asia-Pacific rarely make it to elective office, and the Pacific sub-region accounts for four of the world's six countries without any women lawmakers. Development

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level, however. doesn't necessarily correlate with high political participation for women; women in Japan and the Republic of Korea hold just 10 percent of legislative seats, while in the Lao PDR, women account for 25.2 per cent of all parliamentarians – one of the highest rates in the region.

Although women predominate in agriculture, they head only 7 percent of farms, compared to 20 percent in most other regions of the world. The Lao PDR, with an agricultural labour force that is 53 per cent female, has a national law stating that men and women are equally entitled to hold property; any property purchased during marriage is regarded as jointly owned. Land owned by a woman prior to her marriage remains hers, as does any land she inherits from her parents.

Removing barriers to women's ownership of assets, such as land; expanding paid employment; making migration safe and investing in high-quality education and health are some of the main solutions recommended for addressing the problems in the region. But equality cannot be delivered from the top alone – an attitudinal change is necessary for a genuine transformation.

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For more information and to access the 2010 Asia-Pacific Human Development Report and the complete press kit please visit:
<http://www2.undprcc.lk/ext/pvr/>

ABOUT THE ASIA-PACIFIC HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT: Asia-Pacific Human Development Reports have become a regular series under the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific. The Reports provide continuing analyses of critical long term development issues relevant at both the regional and country levels. The Asia- Pacific Human Development Report Series offers the region a forum for furthering dialogues and structuring debates to support a people-centered agenda.

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