

# POWER, VOICE and RIGHTS

A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific

**Embargoed until 8th March 2010, 10:30 am (New Delhi time)**

## FAST FACTS

### *Basic Capabilities*

- In the Asia-Pacific region, South Asia's rankings for many gender gap indicators are often close to or lower than those in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Life expectancy: East Asia and the Pacific are clearly ahead. Female life expectancy at birth was 74 years in East Asia and the Pacific in 2007, compared to 66 years in South Asia. Male life expectancy at birth was 70 years in East Asia and the Pacific and 63 years in South Asia.
- In South Asia, the gap between female-male enrolment grows sharply as girls and boys move upward through the education system: Even at the primary level girls are disadvantaged with a ratio of 94 per cent female to male enrolment rates; this ratio steadily declines to 84 per cent at the secondary level and further drops to 71 per cent at tertiary levels. The primary and secondary gaps in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are the largest in the world.
- More women die in childbirth in South Asia—500 for every 100,000 live births— than in any other part of the world except sub-Saharan Africa.
- The gap between political participation of men and women is large world-wide. The Asia-Pacific region contains the second-lowest percentages of women parliamentarians in the world —the Arab region has the lowest.
- More boys than girls are born in Asia as a whole than in any other region of the world. And the divide is increasing over time. East Asia has the highest male-to-female sex ratio at birth —119 boys for every 100 girls.
- In 2007, the number of women and girls who were “missing”—who died because of discriminatory treatment in access to health and nutrition or who were eliminated before they were born —was close to an estimated 100 million in seven Asian countries.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The seven countries are Bangladesh, China, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Korea, Nepal and Pakistan. Together China and India account for an estimated 85 million of these “missing” women.

## ***Economic Power***

- More than 65 per cent of female employment in South Asia and more than 40 per cent in East Asia is in agriculture—yet women in the Asia-Pacific region head only 7 per cent of farms, compared to 20 per cent in most other regions of the world.
- A total of 67 per cent of East Asian women participate in the labour force, above the global average of 53 per cent, but South Asian women are far behind, at only 36 per cent.
- In countries such as India, Indonesia and Malaysia conservative estimates show that GDP would increase by up to 2-4 per cent annually if women's employment rates were raised to 70 per cent, closer to the rate of many developed countries.
- In South Asia and parts of East Asia and the Pacific, differences between male and female unemployment figures stand at twice the global average.
- A majority of women in the region —and up to 85 percent in South Asia— are in “vulnerable” employment, such in the informal economy or low end self-employment, far above the global average of 53 per cent.
- Women earn less than men in Asia-Pacific countries —women earn 54 to 90 per cent of what men earn.
- Globally, Asia has the largest number of microcredit borrowers and the highest percentage of poor women borrowers. In Asia 98 per cent of microcredit borrowers in 2006 were women, compared with 66 per cent in Africa and 62 per cent in Latin America.
- The flow of women into business in Asia-Pacific is steady; up to 35 per cent of small or medium enterprises in the region are headed by women.

## ***Political Voice***

- The Asia-Pacific region contains the second-lowest percentages of women parliamentarians in the world. Even Asian countries with much higher levels of development like Japan (lower house) and the Republic of Korea have just 10 per cent and 14 per cent women in their national legislatures. The Pacific sub-region alone has four of the six countries in the world with no women legislators.
- Only about one-third of Asia-Pacific countries have a gender quota in place for Parliament.
- Some Asia-Pacific countries emerging from conflict such as Afghanistan, Nepal and Timor-Leste have used the opportunity to significantly enlarge women's political representation. Women's parliamentary representation is about 33 per cent in Nepal and 29 per cent in Timor-Leste.

## ***Legal Rights***

- More than half the countries in South Asia<sup>2</sup> favour men in land inheritance laws, compared to 1 out of 3 in East Asia. In the Pacific, the rates are even higher: About 2 out of 3 countries have customary and formal laws on asset inheritance that discriminate against women.
- More than one-tenth of women in Asia and the Pacific report assaults by their male partners. Yet nearly half of the countries in South Asia and more than 60 per cent of those in the Pacific have no laws on domestic violence.
- In Asia and the Pacific, women's representation in justice systems remains low. Women police officers, for instance, range between 2 to 19 per cent of police forces in parts of Asia-Pacific where data is available.
- Discrimination in economic and social rights against women edged upward in developing countries across Asia-Pacific between 2004 and 2007. In East Asia and the Pacific, the percentage of countries with high economic discrimination increased from zero in 2004 to over 7 per cent in 2007. During the same period, in South Asia, the already high share increased from 33 percent to 44 percent.
- Aside from the Middle East and North Africa, Asia-Pacific has the highest percentage of CEDAW States Parties with some form of reservation. The nature of reservations varies and is influenced by factors such as religion and national constitutions and laws.
- Asia-Pacific is second only to the Middle East and North Africa in the percentage of countries that have not signed the CEDAW Optional Protocol, a complaint mechanism meant to strengthen enforcement of the Convention.

***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/>***

\* \* \* \* \*

***For further information, please contact:***

***In Bangkok:*** Cherie Hart, Telephone: +66 2 288-2133, Mobile: (66 81) 918 1564, [cherie.hart@undp.org](mailto:cherie.hart@undp.org);

***In New Delhi:*** Surekha Subarwal, Telephone +91 11 2462 8877 ext. 346, Mobile: +91 98 1015 3924, [surekha.subarwal@undp.org](mailto:surekha.subarwal@undp.org);

***In Colombo:*** Rohini Kohli, Telephone: +94 11 452-6400 ext. 122, [rohini.kohli@undp.org](mailto:rohini.kohli@undp.org)

---

<sup>2</sup> South Asia includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.