

# POWER, VOICE and RIGHTS

A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific

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## Main Messages

- 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.
- Within the region there are disparities, with East Asia and the Pacific pulling ahead of South Asia on many indicators of gender equality such as health, adult literacy and economic participation. The divergence has become so magnified that today South Asia ranks close to or lower than sub-Saharan Africa while East Asia and the Pacific can show impressive achievements, including the highest rates of women's economic participation in the world.
- Asia-Pacific lags behind on gender equality in relation to other developing regions, including basics such as protecting women from violence or upholding their rights to property. Owning assets like land and homes empowers women and also reduces the risk of domestic violence as they are in a better negotiating position.
- The gap between political participation of men and women is large world-wide. Despite women's very visible presence and contribution in its public sphere, the Asia-Pacific region contains the second-lowest percentages of women parliamentarians in the world—the Arab States has the lowest.
- The after effects of the global economic downturn, high on policy agendas, should be seen as an opportunity, not an excuse to delay gender equality. Gender equality is an issue of economic pragmatism as much as of social justice.
- Gender equality is a right, gender equality is good economics, and gender equality promotes democracy and long term stability.

- All available resources must be mobilized to achieve gender equality at this decisive time. These include: making international commitments a reality; crafting economic policies to support gender equality; collecting better data backed by stronger capacity for gender analysis; making the content of education more gender-equal; boosting political participation; pursuing gender equitable laws; closing gaps between laws and legal practices; and fostering new attitudes.

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