



**Vision for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific by 2030:  
Possible Future Directions for  
Asian Development Bank's Gender Work**

**Background Paper**

December 2016

Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department

*Asian Development Bank*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	-	Asian Development Bank
ADB I	-	Asian Development Bank Institute
APEC	-	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	-	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEO	-	Chief executive officer
CFO	-	Chief financial officer
DMC	-	Developing member country
EGM	-	Effective gender mainstreaming
FAO	-	Food and Agriculture Organization
GAD	-	Gender and development
GAP	-	Gender action plan
GDP	-	Gross domestic product
GEN	-	Gender equity theme
GHG	-	Greenhouse gas
GSMA	-	Groupe Spéciale Mobile Association
ICT	-	Information and communications technology
ILO	-	International Labour Organization
ITU	-	International Telecommunications Union
LGBT	-	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
MDB	-	Multilateral development bank
MDG	-	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	-	Nongovernmental organization
ODA	-	Official development assistance
PRC	-	People's Republic of China
SDG	-	Sustainable Development Goal
SME	-	Small and medium-sized enterprise
STEM	-	Science, technology, engineering and math
TVET	-	Technical and vocational education and training
UN	-	United Nations
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Programme
UNECOSOC	-	United Nations Economic and Social Council
UNESCAP	-	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
WIEGO	-	Women in Informal Employment Mobilizing and Organizing

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Countries in Asia and the Pacific have made impressive strides in establishing law and policy frameworks to promote gender equality. The region has also seen substantial improvements in women's literacy and life expectancy, but gaps persist in education, health, employment and leadership. Discriminatory norms and practices, restrictions on mobility and heavy household responsibilities also continue to limit many women's economic and social activities outside the home, dampening their opportunities for economic security, independent decision-making and personal growth.

At the same time, the Asia and Pacific region faces a number of overlapping challenges in the decades ahead, including faltering growth rates, rising inequality (both income and non-income), major demographic shifts, accelerating mobility and urbanization, and heightened risks from climate change and natural disasters. Each of these trends is likely to have different impacts on women and men, which will need to be addressed in any strategic response. The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) endorsed in September 2015, as well as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda launched in July 2015 and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change endorsed in December 2015, reflect the commitments of Asian and Pacific countries as well as the international community to respond to these and other regional challenges. The SDGs' approach to gender is especially comprehensive, including not only a stand-alone goal (SDG 5), but the integration of gender considerations through most of the other 16 Goals and related targets and indicators, including those related to poverty, hunger, health, education, water and sanitation, growth and employment/decent work, inequality, cities and human settlements, climate change, and peace, access to justice and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions.

In developing a new long-term strategic framework (Strategy 2030), ADB will be responding to the continuing and emerging challenges facing its developing member countries (DMCs), and aligning its operations with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Having made considerable progress in mainstreaming gender concerns in its operations under its current Strategy 2020 and related results framework, ADB has significant opportunities to build on these successes through the new Strategy 2030. This paper is intended to explore the gender dimensions of some of the major trends and challenges facing the Asia and Pacific region, in order to identify key gender-related priorities for countries in the region, and possible future directions for ADB's gender work under Strategy 2030.

The paper first reviews several regional trends and challenges and their broad gender dimensions, including: (i) demographic shifts and their implications for human development; (ii) economic growth, inequality and poverty; (iii) migration and urbanization; (iv) climate change and natural disasters; (v) infrastructure, technology and innovation; and (vi) governance, voice and agency.

The paper then considers the priorities that governments in the region have recently identified to close remaining gender gaps and address the gender aspects of these regional trends. The three priority areas identified by governments include (a) empowering women economically, (b) eliminating violence against women and girls, and (c) increasing women's leadership and decision-making. Especially in light of the challenges facing the region, ADB's developing member countries will need technical and financial support in order to realize these goals. Gender equality therefore should remain a driver of change in ADB's new long-term strategy.

Finally, the paper outlines a proposed vision for ADB to support accelerated progress toward gender equality in the region by 2030. This vision is of a region where all women and men, and all girls and boys have equal capabilities, rights and opportunities to enjoy healthy and productive lives and to contribute to their communities and societies. This in turn suggests a two-part approach for ADB's future gender work: (1) further strengthening ADB's gender mainstreaming approach in the context of responding to emerging regional issues, rebalancing its portfolio and increasing lending levels, and (2) sharpening ADB's direct policy engagement and investments, partnerships and knowledge work to assist DMCs in closing persistent gender gaps and addressing entrenched gender biases and harmful practices (such as child marriage and gender-based violence). Areas where ADB could play a more catalytic and transformative role, responding to emerging regional issues and supporting DMCs' commitments to the SDGs, include: (i) strengthened capabilities, (ii) economic empowerment, (iii) safe and enabling infrastructure, (iv) resilience in the face of food insecurity, and climate and other risks; (v) voice, participation and leadership, and (vi) innovative financing strategies for SDG 5. To realize this vision, the paper recommends strengthening institutional support in several key areas: (a) rebalancing ADB's loan portfolio and lending modalities; (b) enhancing gender capacity and strengthening gender networks; (c) focusing more on transformation; (d) dedicating additional resources; and (e) expanding and strengthening partnerships.

## I. Introduction

1. Asia and the Pacific have experienced remarkable progress over the last decades in sustained economic growth, poverty reduction, and human development (including increased life expectancy, school enrollments and access to clean drinking water). However, this still leaves a large “unfinished agenda” in terms of regional, national and local development. At the same time, the region faces a number of overlapping challenges in the decades ahead, including faltering growth rates, rising inequality (both income and non-income), major demographic shifts, accelerating mobility and urbanization, and heightened risks from climate change and natural disasters.

2. In terms of gender issues, the countries of Asia and the Pacific have also made impressive strides in establishing law and policy frameworks to promote gender equality. Developing countries in the region have also seen substantial improvements in women’s literacy and life expectancy, but gaps persist in education, health, employment and leadership. Secondary completion rates for girls are uneven across the region, and maternal mortality rates are still high in some countries. About half of all child brides in the developing world live in Asia, son preference is driving disturbingly high ratios of boys to girls at birth in several countries, and prevalence rates for intimate partner violence in most parts of the region are above the global average (with the highest rate of 42 percent in South Asia, followed by the Pacific at 35 percent). Despite decades of impressive growth, developing Asia is the only region where female labor force participation has dropped (from 56 percent in 1990 to 49 percent in 2013), and the regional gender wage gap (77 percent in 2011) masks wide variation across countries.<sup>1</sup> Gender discrimination, restrictions on mobility and heavy household responsibilities continue to limit many women’s economic and social activities outside the home, dampening their opportunities for economic security, independent decision-making and personal growth.

3. The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) endorsed in September 2015, as well as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda launched in July 2015 and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change endorsed in December 2015, reflect the commitments of Asian and Pacific countries as well as the international community to respond to global and regional challenges. At the same time, the 2015 regional review of the Beijing Platform for Action – the outcome document of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 – underscored the significant gender dimensions of all of the challenges facing the region, as well as the continuing relevance of the twelve areas of concern highlighted in the Platform.<sup>2</sup>

4. As discussed widely elsewhere, the SDGs represent a major leap forward from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that have informed international and regional development priorities since 2001. In contrast, the SDGs were developed through a highly

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<sup>1</sup> ADB. 2015. *Asian Development Outlook 2015 Update: Enabling Women, Energizing Asia*; UNFPA. 2012. *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*; Kiran Bhatia. 2016. “Harmful Traditional Practices: Regional Realities and Implications for ADB.” Presentation at ADB External Forum on Gender and Development Seminar, 22 June 2016; WHO et al. 2013. *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner violence*, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> These include women and poverty, education and training of women, women and health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, women and the economy, women in power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights of women, women and the media, women and the environment, and the girl child. UNESCAP and UN Women. 2015. *Report of the Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Beijing + 20 Review*, Bangkok, 17-20 November 2014.

participatory process, they have universal application, and they are much more comprehensive and challenging in scope and substance.<sup>3</sup> The SDGs' approach to gender, for example, includes not only a stand-alone goal (SDG 5), but the integration of gender considerations through most of the other 16 Goals and related targets and indicators, including those related to poverty, hunger, health, education, water and sanitation, growth and employment/decent work, inequality, cities and human settlements, climate change, and peace, access to justice and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions.<sup>4</sup> SDG 5 itself is much more comprehensive and ambitious than its MDG counterpart, MDG 3, and includes targets for (i) ending all forms of discrimination, violence, and harmful practices against women and girls; (ii) recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work and promoting shared responsibility within households; (iii) ensuring women's participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making; (iv) ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights; (v) making reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources; (vi) enhancing the use of information and communications technology (ICTs) and other enabling technologies to empower women; and (vii) adopting and strengthening laws and policies to promote gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment.<sup>5</sup>

5. ADB is currently developing a new long-term strategic framework (Strategy 2030) to better respond to the continuing and emerging challenges facing its developing member countries (DMCs), by aligning its operations with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Having made considerable progress in mainstreaming gender concerns in its operations under its current Strategy 2020 and related results framework,<sup>6</sup> ADB has significant opportunities to build on these successes through the new Strategy 2030. This paper is intended to explore the gender dimensions of some of the major trends and challenges facing the Asia and Pacific region, in order to identify some of the key gender-related priorities for countries in the region, and possible future directions for ADB's gender work under Strategy 2030.

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<sup>3</sup> Sakiko Fukuda-Parr. 2016. "From the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals: shifts in purpose, concept, and politics of global goal setting for development," *Gender and Development*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 43-52.

<sup>4</sup> UNECOSOC Statistical Commission. 2016. *Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Indicators*, Annex IV. E/CN.3/2016/2/Rev.1, 19 February 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> As discussed further in the last section, ADB accelerated its efforts in gender mainstreaming under Strategy 2020, and has already exceeded its related targets for effective gender mainstreaming in projects at entry and for realizing intended gender equality results at project completion, while expanding its gender mainstreaming work to more challenging sectors such as transport, energy and private sector operations.

## II. Gender Dimensions of Regional Trends and Challenges

6. In its initial consultations on a new Strategy 2030, ADB identified a number of regional trends and challenges to consider in charting its future direction, including demographic shifts, rising economic and social inequality, increasing migration and urbanization, heightened climate-related risks and events, and accelerating technological change. This section considers each of these trends and their broad gender implications. Given the economic, social and cultural diversity across Asia and the Pacific, these trends can play out very differently across sub-regions and countries. National-level statistics used to measure these trends can also mask stark differences between subgroups of women and men, for example, based on their location, income, age, ethnicity, citizenship, disability and other intersecting factors. The following discussion highlights some of these variations, but should be supplemented by more in-depth analysis, especially at the sub-regional and country level.

### A. Demographic Shifts and Human Development

7. The population in Asia and the Pacific increased by over one billion people in the last 25 years, and is expected to grow by another 500 million by 2030.<sup>7</sup> This in itself will strain countries' ability to manage scarce water and other resources, while ensuring food security, basic services and economic opportunities for their populations. During the same period, countries in the region will be experiencing profound demographic shifts. Already, three major trends are under way: one set of countries is undergoing a "youth bulge" with at least 20 percent of their populations between 15 and 24 years old; other countries are seeing their working-age population increase rapidly; and in another set of countries, the population is ageing rapidly with 14 percent or more at age 60 and older. Even greater shifts are expected by 2050, when half of the region's population will be over age 50.<sup>8</sup> In a number of countries in the region, the sex ratios at birth are also seriously imbalanced, with 110 or more boys born for every 100 girls (compared to a normal ratio of 105): these include People's Republic of China (PRC) (118), Azerbaijan (117), Armenia (115), Georgia (114), Albania (112), India (111), Pakistan (110) and Viet Nam (113).<sup>9</sup> This is already having profound social and economic impacts, which will be felt for decades to come. Each of these demographic shifts will have profound implications for the development trajectories of countries in the region, including gender implications.

#### 1. Growing Youth Populations

8. For countries with large and growing youth populations, the challenge over the next 15 years will be to convert their "demographic opportunity" into a "demographic dividend" by increasing and improving the quality of basic health care, nutrition and education for children and youth, and then ensuring a smooth transition from school to employment or other economic opportunities. For these priorities, progress on SDG 2 (end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition), SDG 3 (ensure healthy lives) and SDG 4 (ensure inclusive and equitable quality education) will be essential, and the targets for each of these goals require attention to the particular needs and constraints of women and girls. Substantial progress was made under the corresponding MDGs, but serious gaps remain:

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<sup>7</sup> UNESCAP. 2016. *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015*, SDG 2, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> UNDP. 2016. *Asia-Pacific Human Development Report: Shaping the Future – How Changing Demographics Can Power Human Development*, pp. 3 & 9.

<sup>99</sup> Kiran Bhatia. 2016. "Harmful Traditional Practices: Regional Realities and Implications for ADB." Presentation at ADB External Forum on Gender and Development Seminar, 22 June 2016 (citing Christophe Guilmo).



- Close to 500 million people in the region are estimated to be undernourished, with malnutrition contributing to the stunting of about 70 million children in the region as of 2013.<sup>10</sup>
- Maternal and child mortality rates have dropped markedly across the region, but are still relatively high in low-income countries and in poor, remote and ethnic minority communities. As more countries in the region transition to middle-income status, they are also undergoing a “nutrition transition” related to greater consumption of foods rich in salt, sugar and fat, and resulting in higher incidences of obesity, diabetes and other non-communicable diseases. Public health systems will need to strengthen their response to these emerging health risks, and women and girls in poorer households will be disproportionately burdened in caring for affected family members.<sup>11</sup>
- Primary enrollment and completion rates in the region improved dramatically, and gender gaps in school enrollments also narrowed significantly, over the past 15 years. However, girls’ average years of schooling (6.4 years) still lag behind boys’ (7.8 years),<sup>12</sup> reflecting the continuing pressure on girls in many communities to drop out of school for early marriage or work, or because of parents’ concerns about their safety. The SDG 4 targets and indicators therefore reflect a greater focus on fostering a safe, inclusive and gender-sensitive learning environment and positive learning outcomes for both boys and girls, with particular attention to children with disabilities, indigenous children, and other marginalized children.

## **2. Growing Working-Age Populations**

9. For countries with large and expanding working-age populations, mainly in South and Southeast Asia, the challenge over the next 15 years will be to expand economic opportunities for both women and men through creation of decent jobs and support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), while strengthening social safety nets and care support for working people and their families. As discussed further in the next section, this priority has a strong gender dimension, since female labor force participation in most countries in the region is below 60 percent and is falling for the region as a whole, in contrast to the stable or rising participation of women in other regions of the world.<sup>13</sup> While social and economic contexts vary widely across the region, some common factors likely contributing to women’s lower workforce participation include lack of appropriate education and training, discriminatory hiring practices of employers, legal and financial barriers to women-owned businesses, and entrenched social norms that inhibit women from seeking work outside the home, channel women into lower-paying sectors, and require women to shoulder most of the domestic care responsibilities (on average, three times as many hours as men).<sup>14</sup> As discussed in the next section, some of the relevant policy responses include incentives to keep girls in school; gender-responsive technical and vocational education and training and job-placement support in nontraditional sectors; employment and business law reform; and expansion of affordable child-care facilities and services for working parents.

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<sup>10</sup> UNESCAP. 2016. *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015*, SDG 2, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> ADB and FAO. 2013. *Gender Equality and Food Security: Women’s Empowerment as a Tool against Hunger*, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> ADB. 2015. *Asian Development Outlook 2015 Update: Enabling Women, Energizing Asia*, p. 44.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39 & 46.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

### **3. Ageing Populations**

10. For countries with rapidly ageing populations, including PRC and some Southeast Asian countries, the opportunities and challenges include supporting an active and healthy ageing process, while strengthening health and social protection systems and improving the living and work environments to accommodate larger numbers of older persons. As life expectancies increase and job requirements shift, the very definition of “working age” is changing, and people in the region are likely to stay economically active for longer periods. However, with the demographic shift and change in the burden of disease, more people in ages 15-60 are already dying of non-communicable diseases, compared with deaths from communicable diseases and injuries.<sup>15</sup> Health systems will need to place greater emphasis on prevention and promotion of healthier diet and exercise, as well as treatment of chronic illnesses and provision of long-term/palliative care at home and within communities. As traditional family support systems weaken due to migration and other factors, pension schemes and other social protection programs will become even more important to ensure economic and social security for older people. Housing, transport systems, public buildings and public spaces will also need to be made more accessible to the elderly, as well as disabled persons.<sup>16</sup>

11. The gender dimensions of this demographic transition are stark. Although women in the region are less economically active than men and have less opportunity to accumulate savings, their life expectancy is longer, and therefore they have more years to support themselves with fewer accumulated assets. However, only about 20 percent of women in the region are covered by pension schemes, compared to 35 percent of women globally. Discriminatory retirement regulations in a number of countries also require women to retire earlier than men, further diminishing their chances to accumulate savings.<sup>17</sup> Due to entrenched social norms, women already shoulder most of the care responsibilities for other family members, and many older women in the region already care for grandchildren as well as ailing spouses. However, with limited savings and assets, older women are less likely to be able to afford their own health care and long-term care expenses, especially those living alone.

12. At the same time, the expansion of health care and long-term care services for older populations can be expected to increase employment opportunities for working-age women. As discussed further in the next section, increasing the labor force participation of working-age women more generally can also ease the demographic transition in ageing societies, provided that complementary policies are in place to improve education and skills training for women and to relieve women’s heavy household care responsibilities. In line with the SDGs’ strong emphasis on gender equality and inclusion, governments and their development partners will need to pay careful attention to the needs and constraints of older women, and to address the existing care burden on all women, in responding to this major demographic shift.

### **4. Gender Imbalance in Populations**

13. The skewed sex ratios in several Asian countries, driven largely by strong son preference, pressure to have small families, and the increasing availability of technologies for prenatal sex selection, are already disrupting social and economic life in the affected countries.

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<sup>15</sup> UNESCAP. 2016. *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015*, SDG 3, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> UNDP. 2016. *Asia-Pacific Human Development Report: Shaping the Future – How Changing Demographics Can Power Human Development*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>17</sup> ADB. 2015. *Asian Development Bank Outlook 2015 Update: Enabling Women, Energizing Asia*, pp. 82-83.

There, women are under increasing pressure to bear sons, which can entail one or more abortions with related health and other risks. The surplus of adult men in the affected countries has created a “marriage squeeze” with negative consequences for both men and women: men may incur additional risk and expense to compete for brides in their own communities, to search for marriage partners elsewhere, or to migrate to locations with more balanced populations; at the same time, young women are under increasing pressure to drop out of school and marry early, and are at greater risk of exploitation through “imported bride” schemes and outright abduction and sale. The increasing numbers of involuntarily single men in the affected countries can also lead to frustration, resentment and various types of antisocial, violent and risky behavior, with negative consequences for themselves, as well as for women, girls, and communities as a whole.<sup>18</sup> The intergenerational consequences are likely to be significant, with diminished representation of women in social, economic and political life, and the imbalances will be challenging to undo. However, the successful experience of the Republic of Korea in reversing its own sex ratio imbalance provides one example of a way forward. In that case, a combination of factors, including increasing educational and economic opportunities for women, changes in discriminatory family and civil laws, and the active engagement of women’s organizations in advocating for law and policy changes and raising awareness, have been credited with shifting public opinion and private behavior.<sup>19</sup>

## **B. Economic Growth, Inequality and Poverty**

14. After decades of spectacular growth and increases in labor productivity, the Asian and Pacific economies began to cool in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008-09, and further deceleration is projected at least in the near term.<sup>20</sup> The earlier high growth rates experienced by China and India are credited with driving most of the region’s success in lifting 1.1 billion people out of extreme poverty between 1990 and 2015.<sup>21</sup> There are concerns therefore that under a moderate growth scenario, it will be much more difficult for the region to tackle its unfinished development agenda, including the ambitious new goals and targets included in the SDGs.<sup>22</sup> These include concerns about the prospects for eradicating extreme poverty altogether, and for reducing at least by half the proportion of people living below national poverty lines (SDG targets 1.1 and 1.2).

15. Even as Asian and Pacific countries were making progress in reducing poverty over the past 15 years, income inequality has been rising, as reflected in both Gini inequality indices and Palma ratios. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) has estimated that, had inequality not increased during this period, an additional 200 million people could have moved out of poverty in China, India and Indonesia alone.<sup>23</sup> Reflecting growing concerns about the corrosive effect of inequality on economies and societies, the SDGs include a specific goal (SDG 10) to reduce inequality within and among countries, with related targets on progressively reducing income inequality and promoting social, economic and political inclusion for all. This complements SDG 8, which aims to promote

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<sup>18</sup> Kiran Bhatia. 2016. “Harmful Traditional Practices: Regional Realities and Implications – Reflections for ADB.” Presentation at ADB External Forum on Gender and Development Seminar, 22 June 2016.

<sup>19</sup> ADB. 2016. *Asian Development Bank Outlook 2015 Update: Enabling Women, Energizing Asia*, p. 47.

<sup>20</sup> ADB. 2016. *Asian Development Outlook 2016: Asia’s Potential Growth*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> UNESCAP. 2016. *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific*, SDG 1, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> UNESCAP. 2016. *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2016: Nurturing productivity for inclusive growth and sustainable development*, p. 96.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

“sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.”

16. The SDGs’ focus on inclusive and sustainable growth, and enabling full and fair employment for all, has significant gender dimensions. Although there are variations within subregions, female labor force participation in developing Asia declined from 56 percent in 1990 to 49 percent in 2013, and the participation gap with men widened, even as female participation rates were stable or rising in other regions of the world.<sup>24</sup> In the context of moderating growth rates, it is not surprising then that unemployed and underemployed women in the region are increasingly seen as an “untapped resource” that could “give the region a considerable growth boost.”<sup>25</sup> Increasing the labor force participation of working-age women can also ease the demographic transition in countries with ageing populations.<sup>26</sup> These assumptions are bolstered by recent estimates of the economic benefits of narrowing gender gaps in the region. For example, the *Asian Development Outlook 2015 Update* estimated that eliminating gender disparities would increase per capita income in the region by 70 percent over two generations.<sup>27</sup> Using a different methodology, the McKinsey Global Institute recently estimated that if all countries in the region could approach gender parity in labor force participation in line with the fastest-improving country in the region (Singapore), regional GDP could increase by over \$4 trillion by 2025.<sup>28</sup>

17. Improving opportunities for women’s full economic participation is not simply an instrumental goal. Economic independence – particularly through paid work outside the home or family farm – is also an important dimension of women’s empowerment and well-being, enabling them to make choices for themselves and to participate more fully in household and community decision-making.<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly, then, several of the targets under SDG 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) have economic dimensions, including targets on women’s participation and leadership in economic decision-making, women’s equal access to economic resources, use of enabling technology to empower women, recognition and valuing of unpaid care and domestic work, and ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls (which could include discrimination in employment, business, access to credit, asset ownership and other economic activities). These are complemented by targets under SDG 8 (inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all) on equal pay for work of equal value, and protection of the rights and working conditions of all workers, especially women migrants and those in precarious employment.

18. Achieving gender equality in the economic sphere will involve reducing a number of persistent gender gaps and patterns in the region’s economies. In addition to participating at lower rates than men, women in the region tend to be concentrated in less remunerative sectors, such as agriculture, petty trade, and social and personal services, and in lower-paying and more vulnerable jobs within sectors, including home-based work. Many of these jobs

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<sup>24</sup> ADB. 2015. *Asian Development Outlook 2015 Update: Enabling Women, Energizing Asia*, pp. 39 & 46.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

<sup>26</sup> Heloisa Marone. 2016. “Demographic Dividends, Gender Equality, and Economic Growth: The Case of Cabo Verde.” IMF Working Paper WP/16/169.

<sup>27</sup> ADB. 2015. *Asian Development Outlook 2015 Update: Enabling Women, Energizing Asia*, p. 50.

<sup>28</sup> McKinsey Global Institute. 2015. *The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women’s Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion to Global Growth*, pp. 2-5.

<sup>29</sup> Naila Kabeer et al. 2013. *Paid Work, Women’s Empowerment and Inclusive Growth: Transforming the structures of constraint* p. 77. UN Women Publication.

correspond to traditional notions of “women’s work” and have been labeled “5C jobs – caring, cashiering, cleaning, catering and clerical work”.<sup>30</sup> Women in the region are also overrepresented among contributing family workers and in other forms of informal employment. Gender wage gaps persist in both formal and informal sectors, and women generally experience higher unemployment rates than men, although there is considerable variation across countries. Across sectors, women in the region also experience high levels of sexual harassment at work.<sup>31</sup> Only a small percentage of women own agricultural land across the region, and women continue to face discrimination in accessing bank loans, which inhibits the growth of women-owned businesses. When women access microcredit, the interest rates charged are typically higher than those available from retail banks. At the same time, women in the region continue to shoulder the main responsibility for unpaid care work within their households, devoting about three times as many hours as men on average.<sup>32</sup> As noted earlier, only 20 percent of women in the region have pensions (compared with about 35 percent of men), and discriminatory retirement regulations in several countries requires women in formal sector jobs to retire several years earlier than men, which further reduces their income-earning years and opportunities for promotion.<sup>33</sup> However, countries such as the Philippines have made impressive strides toward gender equality in the economic sphere, providing a possible model for other countries in the region: women’s pay in the Philippines is almost on par with men’s;<sup>34</sup> 56 percent of large businesses pay maternity leave beyond the legal requirement and 36 percent provide child care vouchers to employees; and 40 percent of senior positions in large businesses are held by women, including 37 percent of CEO positions and 59 percent of CFO positions in 2014.<sup>35</sup>

19. One notable development over the past 10-15 years has been the increasing interest among private sector firms, business associations and networks, impact investors and social enterprises in promoting women’s economic empowerment, based on the “business case” for gender parity in firm management, staffing, value chains and community relations.<sup>36</sup> Some of the better known initiatives include the Women’s Empowerment Principles first developed by Calvert Investments in 2004 and now supported by the UN Global Compact and UN Women, and endorsed by over 1,200 companies worldwide;<sup>37</sup> the World Economic Forum’s Gender Parity Programme; the Global Banking Alliance for Women; Groupe Spéciale Mobile Association’s (GSMA’s) Connected Women Programme; Goldman Sachs’ 10,000 Women Initiative; and various “gender lens investing” initiatives such as the Pax Ellevest Global Women’s Index Fund. These efforts have been further supported by research initiatives such as the World Economic Forum’s *Global Gender Gap Reports* and the World Bank Group’s *Women, Business and the Law* publications. At the same time, networks such as Women in Informal Employment Mobilizing and Organizing (WIEGO) and their members have continued to conduct important action research and advocacy to improve conditions and opportunities for informal sector workers.

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<sup>30</sup> UNESCAP. 2016. *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015*, SDG 5, pp. 2-3.

<sup>31</sup> Shreyasi Jha and Abha Shri Saxena. 2015. “Projected Gender Impact of the ASEAN Economic Community,” pp. 143-44. Paper prepared for ASEAN, Australian Aid, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and UN Women.

<sup>32</sup> ADB. 2015. *Asian Development Bank 2015 Update: Enabling Women, Energizing Asia*, p. 55.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>35</sup> Emmeline Verzosa. 2016. “Women’s Economic Empowerment: Philippines and APEC,” ADB External Forum on Gender and Development Seminar, 21 June 2016.

<sup>36</sup> E.g., Oak Foundation et al. 2014. *The Business Case for Women’s Economic Empowerment: An Integrated Approach*.

<sup>37</sup> The Calvert Women’s Principles were the first global code of conduct for private sector firms to promote gender equality. Calvert Investments. 2014. *Calvert Women’s Principles: A Decade of Progress*.

20. Depending on the national and local context, there are a number of possible entry points<sup>38</sup> for governments, development partners, private sector firms and networks to enhance women's economic participation in Asian and Pacific countries:

- Increasing young women's enrollment in high-quality, market-oriented technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs, particularly in higher-paying, non-traditional fields, and including access to apprenticeships and job placement support;
- Encouraging and supporting more young women in pursuing tertiary studies and careers in science, technology, engineering and/or math (STEM);
- Maximizing opportunities for women's employment in the public sector, in public employment schemes, and in publicly funded construction projects; and for public procurement of goods and services from women-owned firms (including through targets and preferences);
- Providing financial, technical, networking and other support to small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) owned by women, including through business associations, networks and alliances;
- Eliminating discriminatory laws and practices, and improving enforcement of laws guaranteeing equality and nondiscrimination, related to employment, business, access to economic resources, ownership and transfer of assets, pensions and other social protection programs;
- Introducing or strengthening laws and employer policies against sexual harassment in the workplace;
- Extending legal protections, technical and financial support, and social protection to domestic workers, agricultural workers, home-based workers and other informal sector workers;
- Promoting gender-equitable practices by private sector companies, for example, through endorsement of the Women's Empowerment Principles<sup>39</sup> and adoption of gender-inclusive business models; and
- Introducing or strengthening legally mandated maternal, paternal and family leave, and introducing or expanding affordable child-care services for working families.

### **C. Migration and Urbanization**

21. Over the past fifteen years, the Asia and Pacific region has become increasingly mobile and urban, with most migrants moving to urban centers, and these trends are expected to

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<sup>38</sup> ADB. 2016. *How Inclusive Is Inclusive Business for Women? Examples from Asia and Latin America*, pp. 37-41; ADB. 2015. *Asian Development Outlook 2015 Update: Enabling Women, Energizing Asia*, pp. 87-91; ADB and ILO. 2011. *Women and labour markets in Asia: Rebalancing for gender equality*, pp. 34-49; Shreyasi Jha and Abha Shri Saxena. 2015. "Projected Gender Impact of the ASEAN Economic Community," pp. 141-48. Paper prepared for ASEAN, Australian Aid, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and UN Women.

<sup>39</sup> See UN Global Compact and UN Women, "Women's Empowerment Principles." <http://www.weprinciples.org>

continue and even accelerate in the decades to come. Both migration and urbanization also intersect with other regional trends, including demographic shifts and increasing vulnerability to climate events and natural disasters. The significance of migration and urbanization to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is reflected in the SDGs and related indicators, notably SDG 8 (Target 8.8 promotes labor rights and safe and secure working environments for migrant workers), SDG 10 (Target 10.7 aims for orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people) and SDG 11 (which commits to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable). Both migration and urbanization also have strong gender dimensions, which will need to be factored into any 2030 strategies addressing these issues.

## 1. Migration

22. Asian and Pacific countries are major sending and destination countries for international and regional migrants. In 2013, about 95 million international migrants were from the region, and close to 60 million international migrants were located in the region, out of a total of almost 232 million migrants worldwide.<sup>40</sup> These figures also represented significant increases since the early 1990s. Regional migration is predominantly South-South and most of the flow is of temporary labor migrants. While most of this migration is regulated by governments and channeled through private recruitment agencies, many migrants resort to irregular channels, especially where official migration is restricted or subject to burdensome procedures, delays and costs.<sup>41</sup> Remittances from migrant workers to their families have also grown dramatically, and now represent a substantial percentage of GDP for a number of sending countries in the region. Based on World Bank estimates, Asian countries received the largest amount of remittances in 2015: \$70 billion to India, \$60 billion to China, and \$25 billion to the Philippines.<sup>42</sup> Some of the main drivers of regional migration – differences between countries in economic growth patterns (leading to growing wage disparities) and demographic shifts – are expected to continue to fuel migration flows in the years ahead.<sup>43</sup>

23. Regional migration is highly gendered, with men frequently migrating for construction work or work at sea, and women migrating primarily for service work, including health services and domestic work. Women are estimated to constitute 48 percent of all international migrants in Asia and the Pacific, although the gender breakdown varies significantly across countries. Women are also more likely to migrate through irregular channels, particularly where their home countries have imposed restrictions on female migration in an attempt to protect women from exploitation and abuse in destination countries. Ironically, these well-intended restrictions have increased the vulnerability of women by driving many of them to migrate without official documents and often relying on unscrupulous agents.<sup>44</sup> In some destination countries, women migrants are also subjected to pregnancy tests, which can be a basis for terminating their work contracts.<sup>45</sup> Women also represent the vast majority of “marriage migrants” in the region, as single men in countries with serious gender imbalances increasingly use agencies to locate marriage partners in neighboring countries, with mixed consequences for the migrating

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<sup>40</sup> Asia-Pacific RCM Thematic Working Group on International Migration including Human Trafficking. 2016. *Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2015: Migrants' Contributions to Development*, p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>43</sup> Witada Anukoonwattaka and Adam Heal. 2014. “Regional Integration and Labour Mobility: Linking Trade, Migration and Development,” pp. 20-21. UNESCAP Studies in Trade and Investment 81.

<sup>44</sup> Asia-Pacific RCM Thematic Working Group on International Migration including Human Trafficking. 2016. *Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2015: Migrants' Contributions to Development*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

women.<sup>46</sup> Both men and women, and boys and girls, are also trafficked within the region for forced labor and sexual exploitation; the UN has estimated that over three-quarters of identified trafficking victims are women and girls.<sup>47</sup> Migration can also impose social costs on families, including the breakdown of relationships and possible child abuse by family members assigned to look after the migrants' children. Women who are left behind by migrating husbands can face particular hardships, especially if they do not have shared ownership of family land or shared access to family bank accounts or other resources.

24. Although women migrants generally earn less income than men, they tend to remit a higher percentage of their earnings than men, and on a more regular basis.<sup>48</sup> However, in the global financial crisis, women migrants had more difficulty sending remittances. Those who lost their jobs and had to return home had more difficulty than men in reintegrating and finding new jobs, and were more likely to move into more vulnerable types of work, indicating the greater vulnerability of women migrants to economic shocks. Women in migrant households also bore most of the burden of the crisis because of their primary responsibility for managing their household's basic needs.<sup>49</sup>

25. Given the highly gendered migration patterns in the region, any initiatives to manage regional and bilateral migration flows in a safer and more orderly manner, and to improve working conditions, access to basic services, and remittance channels for migrants, will need to address the particular needs and vulnerabilities of women migrants. Initiatives to simplify and expand regular migration channels, to regulate recruiting agencies, to require contracts and minimum wages for migrant workers (including domestic workers), to provide health services and repatriation support to migrant workers, and to lower transaction fees for remittances will particularly benefit women migrants.

## 2. Urbanization

26. The increasing concentration of populations in urban areas is a global phenomenon, but this trend is particularly pronounced in Asia and the Pacific. Close to half of the region's population already live in urban centers, a dramatic increase from the 1950s when only a fifth of the population lived in urban spaces, and by 2050 the proportion of urban dwellers is expected to climb to two-thirds of the regional population.<sup>50</sup> In the past 30 years, more than one billion people have moved to cities in the region, and it is estimated that the region's urban populations will increase by another 1 billion over the next 30 years, to about 3 billion people from under 2 billion today.<sup>51</sup> The region's "megacities" with over 10 million residents will continue to grow in both size and number, and by 2025 there are expected to be 19 megacities in Asia (about half of the expected world total), with 6 of them having more than 20 million people. However, this represents less than 15 percent of urban dwellers in the region, and small and medium-sized cities will continue to house the vast majority of the region's urban populations in the decades

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 41-42.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>49</sup> ADB. 2013. *Impact of the Global Crisis on Asian Migrant Workers and Their Families: A Survey-Based Analysis with a Gender Perspective*, p. xvii.

<sup>50</sup> UNESCAP. 2016. *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015*, SDG 11, pp. 1-2.

<sup>51</sup> UNDP. 2016. *Asia-Pacific Human Development Report: Shaping the Future – How Changing Demographics Can Power Human Development*, p. 154.



ahead. This poses huge development and governance challenges for smaller cities, which tend to have much less capacity and access to resources.<sup>52</sup>

27. The region's urban centers will continue to be engines of economic growth and innovation, and the preferred destination for many young people and working-age adults.<sup>53</sup> However, urban poverty, social exclusion and inequalities are also extensive, and the region's municipal governments already struggle to provide basic services to the general population, with even less attention to poor neighborhoods and informal settlements.<sup>54</sup> The region's cities are also at high risk of natural disasters – in 2011, it was estimated that 70 percent of Asian and Pacific cities with populations over 750,000 people were natural disaster risks – and climate change will only heighten these risks.<sup>55</sup> Because the urban poor tend to locate in more environmentally precarious areas, poor urban neighborhoods and informal settlements are expected to experience the worst impact of future natural disasters and other climate-related events.<sup>56</sup>

28. The gender dimensions of urbanization are various. Cities and towns generally provide wider economic and social opportunities for young women, compared to rural areas, which helps to explain why a large segment of rural-to-urban migrants, particularly in Southeast Asia and South Asia, are women.<sup>57</sup> However, women often face serious barriers to finding good jobs or other livelihood opportunities in urban areas, due to lower education and skill levels, discriminatory hiring practices of employers, and social norms that can restrict unaccompanied women's travel and their ability to find safe housing and engage in market transactions. Urban women therefore are more likely to be employed in lower-skilled, lower-paying formal sector jobs (such as factory work), in domestic work, and in even lower-paying and more precarious informal sector work (such as market trading and home-based work).<sup>58</sup> Discrimination against women in independently renting or owning land, housing or work spaces in urban areas also places them at a disadvantage, especially in the context of urban development projects that can involve re-zoning and involuntary resettlement.<sup>59</sup>

29. The lack of adequate and affordable education, health, water/sanitation, energy and transport services in poor urban communities in the region disproportionately burdens poor women, given their traditional household responsibilities. Violence and safety concerns in urban areas also disproportionately affect women and girls, and are often linked to inadequate infrastructure. For example, the region's slow progress in improving urban sanitation services places poor women and girls at risk of harassment or violence in walking long distances to communal latrines, especially at night. Lack of reliable, affordable transport services and street lighting also jeopardizes the safety of women working night shifts in factories, call centers, health facilities and other offices.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 156-57.

<sup>53</sup> UNESCAP and UN-Habitat. 2015. *The State of Asian and Pacific Cities 2015*, pp. 61-69.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 73-77.

<sup>55</sup> UNDP. 2016. *Asia-Pacific Human Development Report: Shaping the Future – How Changing Demographics Can Power Human Development*, pp. 166-67.

<sup>56</sup> UNESCAP. 2016. *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015*, SDG 11, p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> UNDP. 2016. *Asia-Pacific Human Development Report: Shaping the Future – How Changing Demographics Can Power Human Development*, p. 161.

<sup>58</sup> UNESCAP and UN-Habitat. 2015. *The State of Asian and Pacific Cities 2015*, pp. 13 and 71-73.

<sup>59</sup> UNDP. 2016. *Asia-Pacific Human Development Report: Shaping the Future – How Changing Demographics Can Power Human Development*, pp. 163-64.

<sup>60</sup> UNESCAP and UN-Habitat. 2015. *The State of Asian and Pacific Cities 2015*, pp. 98-101.

30. The formidable challenges facing urban Asia and the Pacific in the coming decades call for more innovative, inclusive and equitable approaches to urban governance. Female elected officials and women's organizations are already playing key roles in successful innovations in urban infrastructure development, improved service delivery, and engagement with communities across the region.<sup>61</sup> In the years ahead, it will be extremely important to include mechanisms for the active participation of urban women and women's organizations – particularly those representing women from poor and marginalized communities, young and older women, and disabled women – as well as LGBT communities in urban planning strategies and processes. Only with these diverse and locally-grounded inputs can Asian and Pacific governments and municipalities meet the aspirations of SDG 11 and their own inclusive urban development goals.

#### **D. Climate Change and Natural Disasters**

31. The Asia and Pacific region is home to some of the largest emitters of greenhouse gases (GHGs), while also being one of the regions most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Industrialization, urbanization and deforestation all contributed to a 70 percent regional increase in GHG emissions between 1990 and 2012, compared with a global increase of 41 percent over the same period.<sup>62</sup> However, this regional figure masks wide variations across countries, with middle and high-income countries responsible for virtually all of the GHG emissions, led by PRC, India, Japan and Indonesia, while emissions from low-income and Pacific small island countries were negligible.<sup>63</sup> Over two billion people in the region still depend on wood and other solid fuel sources to meet household needs for cooking and heating.<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile, some of the climate impacts already being felt across the region include scarcity in water supplies, rising sea levels and warming ocean temperatures, and more frequent and severe weather events.<sup>65</sup> Some countries in the region are already facing sharp fluctuations in water availability, which will severely hamper their ability to meet their SDG 6 commitment to provide access to safe and affordable drinking water for all.<sup>66</sup> Increasing water shortages will also affect the sustainability of agriculture, with negative impacts on smallholder farmers and regional food security.

32. Over the past 50 years, the Asia and Pacific region has experienced heavier rainfall, more violent storms and extensive flooding, and more severe heat waves and extended droughts. In the past decade alone, climate-related disasters in the region, including storms and floods, resulted in almost 300,000 deaths, injured or displaced close to 1.4 million people, and inflicted economic damage equivalent to almost \$370 billion.<sup>67</sup> Poor households, who often live in environmentally exposed areas, and have limited income and assets to draw on, have suffered disproportionately from severe storms and floods, and have taken much longer to recover.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Some examples include the female elected councilors participating in urban governance in Bangladesh, and the NGO Mahila Milan that has been actively involved in urban sanitation projects in India.

<sup>62</sup> UNESCAP. 2015. *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015*, SDG 12, pp. 7-8.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, SDG 13, pp. 3-4.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, SDG 7, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> ADB. 2016. *Building Gender into Climate Finance: ADB Experience with the Climate Investment Funds*, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> UNESCAP. 2015. *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015*, SDG 6, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, SDG 13, pp. 1-2.

<sup>68</sup> UNESCAP. 2015. "Overview of Natural Disasters and their Impacts in Asia and the Pacific, 1970-2014." UNESCAP Technical Paper.

33. Consistent with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, Asian and Pacific countries are responding to climate change and climate-related disasters through a combination of mitigation, adaptation and resilience-building strategies. In terms of mitigation, various efforts are under way to increase the use of renewable energy sources, although fossil fuels still remain the dominant sources of energy, especially in the region's middle and high-income countries.<sup>69</sup> Numerous adaptation and resilience-building strategies are also in process, including efforts to introduce more "climate-smart" agricultural practices, more disaster-resilient housing and infrastructure, and disaster awareness and planning at national and local levels.

34. The gender implications of climate change and climate-related disasters are becoming increasingly clear. Given the gender divisions of labor in economic sectors, traditional gender roles within households, and persistent gender gaps in education, access to resources and decision-making, women and men can be very differently affected by climate-related events, and are likely to have different needs, constraints and priorities in responding to them. For example, water shortages and indoor air pollution from use of solid fuels for cooking and heating disproportionately affect women and girls, based on their household responsibilities.<sup>70</sup> More severe droughts and flooding in agricultural areas pose particular risks to smallholder farmers, but female farmers tend to have less access to extension services and other inputs to adopt more "climate-smart" practices. The erosion or destruction of coastal habitats can also endanger local fish stocks on which coastal communities depend for consumption, and increase the burden on local women to find alternative food sources for their families.<sup>71</sup>

35. Within poor communities, women can be particularly vulnerable to natural disasters because of their care responsibilities for children and elders, lack of awareness of disaster preparedness and the location of storm shelters, lack of transportation, inability to swim, and other factors. For example, three-to-four times as many women died in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami compared with men. National and local disaster relief efforts often disregard women's reproductive health, privacy and other needs; prioritize the restoration of men's assets and livelihoods while ignoring women's economic losses; and fail to protect women and girls from the increases in harassment and violence that often accompany disasters.<sup>72</sup> Recent research has also identified some of the longer-term, gender-related impacts of natural disasters. For example, one study of health effects of typhoons in the Philippines found that infants born within a year after a typhoon had lower birth weights, indicating the negative impact of typhoons on the health and nutrition of pregnant women.<sup>73</sup> Another study of the human development effects of typhoons in the Philippines found higher mortality rates among infant girls born after a typhoon, especially those with older siblings, which the researchers attributed to the deterioration in economic conditions following the typhoon, households' subsequent disinvestment in health care and nutritious food, and "competition" among siblings for scarce household resources.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> UNESCAP. 2015. *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015*, SDG 7, pp. 3-5.

<sup>70</sup> ADB. 2016. *Building Gender into Climate Finance: ADB Experience with the Climate Investment Funds*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>71</sup> ADB and FAO. 2013. *Gender Equality and Food Security: Women's Empowerment as a Tool against Hunger*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>72</sup> Yumiko Tanaka. 2016. "Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction," ADB External Forum on Gender and Development Seminar, 22 June 2016.

<sup>73</sup> Sarah Morrow. 2014. "Typhoons and Lower Birth Weights in the Philippines."

<sup>74</sup> Jesse Anttila-Hughes and Solomon Hsiang. 2013. "Destruction, Disinvestment, and Death: Economic and Human Losses Following Environmental Disaster." The researchers found that the mortality rate among first-born infant girls was moderate, but that it doubled if the infant girl had older sisters, and almost doubled again if the infant girl had older brothers.

36. Given the different impacts of climate change and climate-related disasters on women and men in the region, any mitigation, adaptation and resilience-building initiatives should be informed by thorough gender analysis and wide consultations with affected stakeholders including women and women's groups, and include appropriate strategies and activities to address the different needs of women and men. This approach would further the call in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change for gender-responsive adaptation measures, and would complement the gender policies and gender action plans of the Climate Investment Funds, Global Environment Facility and Green Climate Fund.<sup>75</sup> Some governments and their development partners in the region are already strengthening the gender responsiveness of their disaster risk planning, such as the "Gender Equality Actions for Hazard-Prone and Disaster-Affected Areas" developed by the Philippines ODA GAD Network.<sup>76</sup> In the past, mitigation activities have been considered more challenging to engender (compared with adaptation activities), based in part on the technical nature and scale of the projects. However, the recent experience of ADB and other development actors in mainstreaming gender concerns in clean energy and other climate-related projects provides examples for future mitigation efforts.<sup>77</sup>

## **E. Infrastructure, Technology and Innovation**

37. To support the well-being and livelihoods of the region's growing (and ageing) populations, and to fulfill the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda's commitment to more inclusive, equitable and sustainable growth, Asian and Pacific countries will need to invest heavily in appropriate infrastructure and technologies. ADB and the Asian Development Bank Institute estimated that the region would need to invest about \$8 trillion in national infrastructure to meet its needs between 2010 and 2020, including "both 'hard' (physical) and 'soft' (enabling) infrastructure."<sup>78</sup> Estimates of the region's infrastructure needs for the following decade are likely to be comparable or even higher, especially if climate-related investments are included. The final Asia-Pacific regional report on the MDGs also highlighted the importance of "developing and disseminating the best forms of technology" to implement the region's new 2030 agenda.<sup>79</sup> The SDGs, to a greater extent than the MDGs, also reflect the importance of both smart infrastructure investments and appropriate technologies to the inclusive and sustainable development of the region. While there is an implicit infrastructure or technology dimension to most of the SDGs, some of the more explicit references are in SDG 6 (ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all), SDG 7 (ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all), SDG 8 (Target 8.2 refers to technological upgrading and innovation), SDG 9 (build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation), and SDG 11 (make cities and human

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<sup>75</sup> ADB. 2016. *Building Gender into Climate Finance: ADB Experience with the Climate Investment Funds*, pp. 9-16.

<sup>76</sup> The ODA GAD Network includes the Philippine National Economic and Development Authority, the Philippine Commission on Women, and 17 development partners including ADB. ADB staff from the Southeast Asia Regional Department and Philippine Country Office were actively involved in developing the "Gender Equality Actions," which include detailed recommendations for the three stages of the disaster management cycle: (1) disaster mitigation and preparedness; (2) emergency and humanitarian response; and (3) post-disaster recovery and reconstruction.

<sup>77</sup> ADB. 2016. *Building Gender into Climate Finance: ADB Experience with the Climate Investment Funds*, pp. 22-37.

<sup>78</sup> ADB and ADBI. 2009. *Infrastructure for a Seamless Asia*, p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> UNESCAP, ADB and UNDP. 2015. *Making It Happen: Technology, Finance and Statistics for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific*, p. 20.

settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable). Asia's infrastructure and technology needs also have significant gender dimensions, as discussed further below.

## 1. Basic Infrastructure and Technology

38. The SDGs' overriding emphasis on inclusion, equity and sustainability will have strong implications for how infrastructure and technology are deployed by Asian and Pacific countries in the years ahead. Although there are variations across countries and sectors, most of the unfinished work to provide access to basic infrastructure will be in rural areas and in low-income neighborhoods and informal settlements of urban centers.<sup>80</sup> In these areas, issues of access, affordability, quality and safety will need to be prioritized so that rural and low-income urban communities benefit from future investments in infrastructure and technology. However, past experience suggests that infrastructure and technology investments will not be responsive to the needs and priorities of communities – especially rural and marginalized urban communities and social groups – unless there are mechanisms in place to seek community input and involve community representatives in the selection, design and implementation of the infrastructure projects.<sup>81</sup>

39. The gender dimensions of investments in infrastructure and technology are clear, although they can take different forms depending on the sector and socioeconomic context. Across the region, social norms tend to ascribe different roles to women and men within households; women tend to have less access to education and skills training, employment opportunities, economic resources and assets, and community decision-making; and in more conservative settings, women's ability to travel and function independently in public spaces is limited. As a result, women and men are likely to have different needs, preferences and constraints related to basic infrastructure – including water and sanitation, energy services, roads and transportation services, and public spaces – which need to be addressed to ensure that infrastructure improvements are truly inclusive and maximize their intended benefits. For example, women tend to spend disproportionately more time than men on household duties – including managing their families' water, energy, food and health needs – and therefore well-designed improvements in basic infrastructure (including more accessible public transportation) can significantly relieve women's time poverty.<sup>82</sup> However, research in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Pakistan has confirmed that sexual harassment discourages many urban women in those countries from using public transportation, leading them to take more expensive and less environmentally sustainable taxis to school or work, or discouraging them from local travel altogether.<sup>83</sup> Additional measures to address the risk of harassment therefore are needed to enable women to take full advantage of public transport in these countries.

40. Improvements in basic infrastructure and services can open up new employment and business opportunities for women as well as men. However, even in countries where both sexes have access to tertiary education, social expectations lead to "gender tracking" in which more men than women typically pursue studies and careers in STEM fields. The regional

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<sup>80</sup> UNESCAP. 2016. *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015*, SDG 6 and SDG 7.

<sup>81</sup> A focus on inclusion and stakeholder participation is already reflected in ADB's strategic approaches to investments in energy ("Energy for All"), transport ("Sustainable Transport"), water ("Water for All"), and urban development ("Livable Cities").

<sup>82</sup> ADB. 2015. *Balancing the Burden? Desk Review of Women's Time Poverty and Infrastructure in Asia and the Pacific*.

<sup>83</sup> ADB. 2015. *Policy Brief: A Safe Public Transportation Environment for Women and Girls*. Similar studies are being carried out in India and PRC.

gender gap in STEM training helps to explain why women's median share of employment in the water, energy, transport and communications sectors is so low (below 20 percent).<sup>84</sup> Proactive measures will therefore be needed to encourage and enable more young women to pursue the necessary technical training to work in infrastructure sectors. In South Asia, for example, initiatives are under way to include women engineers in the design teams for improved cook stoves and other clean energy products, and to train women as meter readers and village electrical technicians, and as retailers and repairers of improved cook stoves, solar lanterns and panels, and other clean energy products. These initiatives also involve partnerships between government, private sector firms, social enterprises and NGOs.<sup>85</sup>

## 2. ICTs and Innovation

41. ICTs will play an increasingly important role in driving innovation and providing opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship in Asia and the Pacific over the next 15 years and beyond. Seven of the top ten economies delivering ICT services and business process outsourcing are in developing Asia.<sup>86</sup> The sector has already created large numbers of jobs, particularly in urban areas in India and the Philippines. Expanded internet connectivity also opens up possibilities for conducting job searches online, for more flexible work arrangements involving telecommuting, and for online marketing and crowdfunding by micro and small entrepreneurs.<sup>87</sup> ICTs are already enabling a variety of remote education and training, e-governance, e-commerce and crowdfunding platforms in the region, as well as collaborative digital mapping to aid emergency responses to natural disasters such as Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda in the Philippines in 2013.

42. The proliferation of mobile phones and mobile applications is also expanding access to financial services, health services, agricultural extension services, market and other information in the region, particularly for people living in rural areas.<sup>88</sup> Over the past 15 years, subscriptions for fixed and mobile broadband access have multiplied in the region, but the regional average subscription ratios are still below global averages, and there are wide disparities between high and low-income countries (for example, for mobile broadband, subscription rates in 2014 were 97 per 100 people in high-income countries in the region, compared with 11 per 100 people in low-income countries). Expansion of mobile phone subscriptions has been much more rapid and diffused, reaching an average of over 93 per 100 people by 2014, with close to 60 percent of all worldwide mobile subscribers now living in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>89</sup>

43. The gender-related dimensions of ICTs in Asia and the Pacific are significant. While the ICT sector is opening up important opportunities for women's economic activity, wellbeing, and social and political engagement, gender gaps persist in digital literacy and access to ICT-related employment, the internet and mobile phones. The sector is a growing source of full-time and

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<sup>84</sup> ADB and ILO. 2011. *Women and labour markets in Asia: Rebalancing for gender equality*, p. 9.

<sup>85</sup> Bipasha Baruah. 2015. "Creating Opportunities for Women in the Renewable Energy Sector: Findings from India," *Feminist Economics*, Vol. 21, No. 2, p. 71; ADB. 2016. "Sub-Regional Conference: Going Beyond the Meter – Inclusive Energy Solutions in South Asia – Conference Report."

<sup>86</sup> ADB. 2015. *Asian Development Outlook Update 2015: Enabling Women, Energizing Asia*, p. 41.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>88</sup> Asia Impact Investment Exchange and Shujog. 2016. "6 Ways the Mobile Generation Is Changing Emerging Asia," *Impact Quarterly*, 27 July 2016. <http://impactquarterly.asiaix.com> See also Paul Mozur, "Cutting Edge in Mobile: China," *New York Times*, Business Day Section, 3 August 2016.

<sup>89</sup> UNESCAP. 2016. *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015*, SDG 9, pp. 5-6.

part-time employment, particularly for young women and men in urban centers. While supervisory and management positions tend to be dominated by men, women's share of ICT jobs at all levels is increasing. In India, as of 2009 women already represented over 30 percent of the general ICT work force and held 20 percent of managerial positions in the sector, and these numbers were expected to improve significantly. At about the same time, women in the Philippines already held about 65 percent of all professional and technical positions in the ICT sector. However, slower progress has been made in other countries.<sup>90</sup>

44. High percentages of women surveyed recently in India, Indonesia and PRC confirmed that mobile phones enable them to save time and money, to stay in touch with friends and family, and to feel safer and more independent. However, nearly two-thirds of all women without access to a mobile phone live in South and Southeast Asia. Most of those without mobile phone access tend to have lower incomes and lower education levels. Some of the main barriers to mobile phone access for women include cost, lack of digital literacy and social norms that inhibit women from owning or freely using a mobile phone.<sup>91</sup>

45. ICTs and ICT-enabled initiatives have the potential to narrow gender gaps and help to empower women and girls in Asia and the Pacific, in line with SDG 5 (Target 5.b specifically refers to enabling technology including ICTs). For example, internet access can enable women to take online courses, telecommute, and carry out a range of personal and business transactions online, which can help them balance education, work, household duties and leisure activities, and this can be particularly helpful to older women and women with disabilities.<sup>92</sup> Digital ID cards issued by governments, combined with internet or mobile access to bank accounts or digital wallets, can enable women to safely receive money transfers under various social protection programs. Online or mobile bank accounts can also provide women with a safe and convenient means to save money and engage in a variety of financial transactions.<sup>93</sup> Mobile apps such as Banglalink Emergency in Bangladesh and Fightback in India can also enable women to seek emergency help while traveling.<sup>94</sup> Grameenphone's Village Phone Program, which has expanded mobile phone access and provided income opportunities for over 200,000 female village phone operators in poor and rural communities of Bangladesh, provides a model for other gender-inclusive ICT businesses.<sup>95</sup> Community ICT centers, such as those set up in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Malaysia, Philippines and other countries in the region, are already providing both women and men in poor and remote communities with a convenient location for obtaining digital literacy training, accessing the internet, and engaging in online transactions.<sup>96</sup>

46. A number of organizations, including ICT companies and associations, also have active programs to narrow the gender divide in the sector and to promote women's and girls' empowerment, including the Association for Progressive Communication's Women's Rights Programme (which advocates for greater participation of women in decision-making on internet

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<sup>90</sup> ITU. 2012. *A bright future in ICTs: Opportunities for a new generation of women*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>91</sup> GSMA. 2015. *Bridging the gender gap: Mobile access and usage in low- and middle-income countries*, pp. 12, 22 & 40. Publication of the GSMA Connected Women program.

<sup>92</sup> ADB. 2015. *Asian Development Outlook 2015: Enabling Women, Energizing Asia*, p. 88.

<sup>93</sup> Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion. 2015. *Digital Financial Solutions to Advance Women's Economic Participation*. Report prepared for the Turkish G20 Presidency.

<sup>94</sup> GSMA. 2015. *Bridging the gender gap: Mobile access and usage in low- and middle-income countries*, p. 52.

<sup>95</sup> Grameenphone. "Village Phone." <http://www.grameenphone.com/about/corporate-information/corporate-responsibility/village-phone>

<sup>96</sup> ITU. 2009. *Community ICT Centres for the Social and Economic Empowerment of Women*.

policy and governance, and for measures to eliminate online violence and harassment), the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women, GSMA's Connected Women program, the International Telecommunications Union's Girls in ICT Portal, and Microsoft's Digigirlz initiative. A number of organizations focusing on financial inclusion for women – including the Global Banking Alliance for Women and Women's World Banking – also have a strong emphasis on mobile money.

47. In the years ahead, it will be important for governments in the region and their development partners, including the private sector and philanthropy, to narrow the digital divide by integrating digital literacy in all levels of education, providing incentives for more girls to pursue advanced training and careers in data science and related fields, and improving the availability and affordability of ICT services, particularly for women and girls in poor and rural communities.

## **F. Governance, Voice and Agency**

48. It is widely acknowledged that the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda will require effective institutions and institutional capacity at all levels. This is reflected most directly in SDG 16, which calls for the promotion of “peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development..., access to justice for all and ...effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.” SDG 5 also includes a number of related targets to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,” including those related to law and policy reforms, women's participation and leadership in all levels of decision-making, and elimination of all forms of discrimination, all forms of violence against women and girls, and harmful practices such as child marriage. In its medium-term review of Strategy 2020, ADB also noted the need for governance reforms and capacity building to support inclusive growth and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>97</sup>

49. In recent decades, governments in Asia and the Pacific have significantly strengthened their laws, policies and institutional frameworks to promote gender equality, including through constitutional guarantees, removal of discriminatory laws and adoption of new gender equality laws, adoption of gender equality action plans, establishment of ministries or other “national machineries” to mainstream gender considerations in government decision-making, introduction of gender-responsive budgeting, and collection of more sex-disaggregated data to inform policymaking. However, significant gaps remain. In developing Asia, one-third of national constitutions still do not protect against gender-based discrimination, and a large number of regional countries do not guarantee equal pay and nondiscrimination in employment, or equal rights in inheritance.<sup>98</sup> The national machineries to promote gender equality still have relatively low status within national governments and are chronically under-staffed and under-resourced. (A recent UNESCAP survey found that in the vast majority of reporting countries, the national machinery for gender equality received less than one percent of the national budget allocation.) Efforts to mainstream gender considerations in the work of sectoral ministries, for example, through the establishment of gender focal points and other mechanisms, are often hampered by weak communication and coordination with the national machinery for gender equality. Despite progress in some areas, national development statistics are not consistently disaggregated by sex.<sup>99</sup> However, initiatives such as ADB's and UN Women's Benchmark Publication on Gender

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<sup>97</sup> ADB. 2014. *Midterm Review of Strategy 2020: Meeting the Challenges of a Transforming Asia and Pacific*, pp. 17-18. Manila: ADB.

<sup>98</sup> ADB. 2015. *Asian Development Outlook Update 2015: Enabling Women, Energizing Asia*, pp. 60-62.

<sup>99</sup> UNESCAP. 2015. *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Asia and the Pacific: Perspectives of Governments on 20 Years of Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, pp. 79-85.



Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific will help identify critical gender data gaps and improve efforts to track the region's progress toward gender equality.

50. A number of governments in the region have taken steps to increase women's representation in all branches of national government, as well as local government. However, in developing Asia on average less than ten percent of government ministers are women, far lower than in other regions (other than the Middle East and North Africa).<sup>100</sup> Women's representation in national parliaments in Asia (less than 20 percent on average) and in the Pacific (less than 14 percent on average) also trails other regions, other than the Middle East.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, across the region women are under-represented in the judiciary, senior civil service, and senior levels of private sector companies.<sup>102</sup> However, regional averages mask significant variations across countries. For example, in the Pacific, the representation of women in national parliaments ranges from almost 39 percent in Timor-Leste (the twentieth highest ranking in the world) to zero in Micronesia, Palau, Tonga and Vanuatu.<sup>103</sup> Affirmative measures in particular countries, such as reserved seats or quotas for women in national parliaments, local government bodies, and corporate boards, have also been successful in increasing women's representation in these bodies.<sup>104</sup> As discussed earlier, female elected officials and women-led civil society organizations have made particular contributions to urban governance and development in several of the region's megacities.

51. The success of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda – and SDG 5 in particular – will also depend on changes in informal institutions, including changes in norms and practices that are discriminatory and harmful. As discussed earlier, persistent patterns of son preference combined with readily available technology for prenatal sex selection has led to skewed sex ratios in several Asian countries, with serious social, economic and political repercussions. The incidence of child marriage in developing Asia is also extremely high, accounting for about half of all child brides in the developing world.<sup>105</sup> A recent study of ASEAN countries found widespread patterns of sexual harassment across key economic sectors, even where protective legislation exists.<sup>106</sup> Prevalence rates for intimate partner violence in most parts of the region are also above the global average, with the highest rate of 42 percent in South Asia, followed by 35 percent in the Pacific and 28 percent in Southeast Asia.<sup>107</sup> As recognition of these pervasive problems increases, countries in the region have been responding through multi-pronged approaches, including enactment of legislation, creation of multi-sectoral action plans, sensitization of officials and staff in the local justice system and service providers, provision of integrated services to violence survivors, and awareness-raising campaigns that engage with

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<sup>100</sup> ADB. 2015. *Asian Development Outlook Update 2015: Enabling Women, Energizing Asia*, pp. 74 & 77.

<sup>101</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2016. "Women in National Parliaments, as of 1 September 2016."

<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

<sup>102</sup> UNESCAP. 2015. *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Asia and the Pacific: Perspectives of Governments on 20 Years of Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>103</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2016. "Women in National Parliaments, as of 1 September 2016."

<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

<sup>104</sup> ADB. 2015. *Asian Development Outlook Update 2015: Enabling Women, Energizing Asia*, pp. 74-77.

<sup>105</sup> UNFPA. 2012. *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*.

<sup>106</sup> Shreyasi Jha and Abha Shri Saxena. 2015. "Projected Gender Impact of the ASEAN Economic Community," pp. 143-44. Paper prepared for ASEAN, Australian Aid, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and UN Women.

<sup>107</sup> WHO et al. 2013. *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner violence*, p. 47.

men, young people, sports clubs, faith-based organizations and others.<sup>108</sup> Much more concerted effort will be needed in the years ahead, involving key stakeholders and partners at all levels, to reshape social norms and practices to better support gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the region.

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<sup>108</sup> UNESCAP. 2015. *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Asia and the Pacific: Perspectives of Governments on 20 Years of Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, pp. 45-48.

### III. Regional Commitments to the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific

52. As discussed above, the Asia and Pacific region faces a number of daunting and interconnected challenges in the years ahead, including major demographic transitions, rising inequality in a moderating growth environment, increasing mobility and urbanization, intensifying risks from climate change and climate-related disasters, and accelerating technological change. All of these trends are likely to have different impacts on women and men, and on girls and boys, although there are also likely to be wide variations in impact between countries and regions, and across different economic and social groups within countries. Given the extent of the challenges ahead, the countries of the region will need the full economic, social and political engagement of all citizens and residents to realize their commitments to inclusive and sustainable development, reflected in the SDGs as well as their own national development plans. However, to enable the full participation of both women and men, and girls and boys, in the region's 2030 Agenda, governments working with partners and local stakeholders will need to accelerate their efforts to close key gender gaps and remove structural barriers to women's and girls' full enjoyment of their rights, capabilities and opportunities. This is not a separate agenda, but an integral part of the Sustainable Development Agenda outlined in the SDGs.

53. The targets under SDG 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), together with the gender-related targets and indicators under most of the other 16 Goals, provide a comprehensive framework for regional and national actions to further gender equality over the next 15 years and beyond. Given the diversity of countries across the region, at least some countries are likely to localize the SDGs and set even more ambitious "SDG plus" targets in some areas, as was done under the MDGs,<sup>109</sup> and each country is also likely to prioritize actions in those SDG target areas where the largest gaps and barriers exist.

54. In terms of regional priorities, the recent regional 20-year review of progress and remaining challenges in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action is instructive as well. Through their Beijing + 20 national reports and responses to a regional survey administered by UNESCAP, the governments of the region identified three priority areas for future action, which closely correspond to targets under SDG 5:

(1) **Empower women economically** (through various means including providing market-relevant knowledge and skills; promoting women's employment and access to productive resources; reducing the gender wage gap; promoting decent work, entrepreneurship and the rights of informal sector workers; and accounting for women's unpaid care work);

(2) **Eliminate violence against women and girls** (in various forms including child marriage, domestic violence, violence against elderly women, and trafficking); and

(3) **Increase women's leadership and decision-making in public life** (through identifying and building capacity of women with potential to lead, engaging male "champions" to promote gender parity in leadership, and affirmative action measures such as quotas and targeted funding).<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> A coalition of women's organizations in Indonesia, Gerakan Perempuan Peduli Indonesia (GPPI), has already published a proposed set of detailed gender-related indicators for the SDGs in Indonesia. GPPI. 2016. *Proposed Gender Perspective Indicators in the Sustainable Development Goals in Indonesia*.

<sup>110</sup> UNESCAP. 2014. *Review of the progress and remaining challenges in implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Asia and the Pacific: Note by the Secretariat*, p. 15. E/ESCAP/GEWE/1, 7 October 2014.

55. Other priorities highlighted by governments in the regional Beijing + 20 review include (a) improving access to sexual and reproductive health and rights; (b) developing gender-aware responses to the impacts of climate change; (c) promoting the security and rights of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict settings; (d) challenging negative stereotypes and attitudes about women and girls; (e) strengthening gender equality laws and policies; (f) protecting women's and girls' rights through legal literacy, free legal assistance and civil birth registration; (g) addressing the particular needs of different groups of women and girls (e.g., based on location, race or ethnicity, income level, refugee status, or disability); and (h) strengthening the collection of gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data for use in evidence-based policymaking.<sup>111</sup> For most of these additional priority areas, there is also a corresponding goal or target in the SDGs.

56. In the Beijing + 20 regional review, the governments of the region also noted key requirements for accelerating implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action going forward, which will be highly relevant to the implementation of SDG 5 and other gender-related commitments in the SDGs. These include (1) political commitment and a "whole of government" approach to promote gender equality; (2) awareness-raising among parliamentarians, the justice sector, other government officers and the general public on the urgency of acting on gender equality; (3) strengthening the capacity of those responsible for implementing gender equality policies and plans through training and other types of technical assistance (for example, on gender-responsive budgeting); (4) strengthening knowledge-sharing and collaboration with other government offices and with civil society; (5) investing additional financial resources to accelerate progress; and (6) enhancing accountability for gender results through stronger, measurable targets and indicators and collection of sex-disaggregated data.<sup>112</sup>

57. Given the multiple forms of gender bias and discrimination that persist across countries and sectors in Asia and the Pacific, it would seem reasonable for countries to take a multi-pronged approach to narrow key gender gaps and tackle entrenched biases. At the same time, the diversity of social, economic and political contexts across the region necessitates that any policy, strategy or intervention to promote gender equality must be grounded in the realities of the national and local settings. One-size-fits-all "solutions" therefore are not likely to be appropriate or useful. At the same time, the diversity of national and local experiences in addressing particular gender gaps and discriminatory norms and practices can provide alternative models to be adapted and tested in different settings. As noted earlier in this paper, there are many examples from the region of successful initiatives to reduce gender gaps and promote gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in particular sectors and issue areas. Continuing to share these experiences through regional fora such as UNESCAP, ASEAN and APEC will be even more important in the years ahead, as countries tackle more challenging gender issues such as entrenched son preference, child marriage, the rebalancing of care work, and sexual harassment and violence. Development partners such as ADB can also make valuable contributions to the gender equality agendas of DMCs by sharing promising and innovative approaches, supporting pilot initiatives and helping to scale up successful models.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-17.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18.

## IV. Possible Future Directions for ADB's Gender Work Toward 2030

### A. Context

58. ADB is a recognized leader among the MDBs in mainstreaming gender considerations in its operations.<sup>113</sup> Building on over a decade of good practices and institutional innovations under its Policy on Gender and Development approved in 1998, ADB accelerated progress in gender mainstreaming under Strategy 2020 and its related corporate results framework. In particular, by 2015 ADB exceeded its targets for effective gender mainstreaming in projects at entry (45% and 55% of all new projects and of new ADF-financed projects, respectively) and for realizing intended gender equality results at project completion (70% of all projects originally categorized as GEN or EGM), while expanding its gender mainstreaming work to more challenging sectors such as transport, energy and private sector operations.

59. ADB's Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Operational Plan for 2013-2020 (OP) has provided the roadmap to translate ADB's commitments to gender equality under Strategy 2020 into measurable results. The Operational Plan's results framework includes a number of targets to improve the gender quality at entry of both country partnership strategies and loan projects, to increase the number of loan projects with a gender (GEN) theme and initiatives to support legal or policy reforms, and to improve implementation of project gender action plans. In its medium-term review of Strategy 2020, ADB noted that mainstreaming of gender considerations in ADB's operations, on its own, would not be able to narrow stubborn gender gaps and address discriminatory gender norms. ADB therefore committed to make more direct investments to narrow gender inequalities in (i) completion of secondary and tertiary education; (ii) vocational and technical skills training; (iii) access to productive assets, labor-saving technology, employment and other income-earning opportunities; (iv) business development services for entrepreneurs; and (v) financial services and access to credit.<sup>114</sup>

60. As discussed earlier, Asian and Pacific countries have made progress in strengthening laws and policies to promote gender equality and in narrowing some gender gaps, but challenges remain. Developing Asia has seen substantial improvements in women's literacy and life expectancy, but gaps persist in education, health, employment and leadership. Secondary completion rates for girls are uneven across the region, and maternal mortality rates are still high in some countries. Child marriage and strong patterns of son preference persist in several countries, and prevalence rates for intimate partner violence in most parts of the region are above the global average (particularly in South Asia and the Pacific). Despite decades of impressive growth, developing Asia is the only region where female labor force participation has dropped (to 49 percent in 2013), and the regional gender wage gap (77 percent in 2011) masks wide variation across countries.<sup>115</sup> Gender discrimination, restrictions on mobility and heavy household responsibilities continue to limit many women's economic and social activities

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<sup>113</sup> See, e.g., Rekha Mehra and Geeta Rao Gupta. 2008. "Gender Mainstreaming: Making It Happen," in *Equality for Women: Where Do We Stand on Millennium Development Goal 3?* (Mayra Buvinic et al, eds.). Washington, DC: World Bank.

<sup>114</sup> ADB. 2014. *Midterm Review of Strategy 2020: Meeting the Challenges of a Transforming Asia and Pacific*, pp. 24-25. Manila: ADB.

<sup>115</sup> ADB. 2015. *Asian Development Outlook 2015 Update: Enabling Women, Energizing Asia*; UNFPA. 2012. *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*; Kiran Bhatia. 2016. "Harmful Traditional Practices: Regional Realities and Implications for ADB." Presentation at ADB External Forum on Gender and Development Seminar, 22 June 2016; WHO et al. 2013. *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner violence*, p. 47.

outside the home, dampening their opportunities for economic security, independent decision-making and personal growth. Researchers at ADB and elsewhere have also estimated the significant economic cost of continuing gender disparities in the region in terms of lost per capita income and GDP.<sup>116</sup> In a context of moderating growth rates and ageing populations in several countries, the large numbers of unemployed and underemployed women in the region are also increasingly seen as an “untapped resource.”<sup>117</sup>

61. As explored in the previous sections, the mega challenges facing the region are hardly gender-neutral. All of the major development trends in Asia and the Pacific – including the “youth bulge” and increasing ageing populations, moderating growth rates and rising inequality, greater mobility within and between countries and rapid urbanization, technological change, and heightened vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters – have gender-differentiated impacts that need to be addressed in any strategic response. The importance of gender equality in the region’s 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is also reflected in the ambitious gender-related targets and indicators included in the SDGs – both the stand-alone goal on gender equality (SDG 5) and most of the other 16 goals. Especially in light of the other major challenges facing the region, ADB’s DMCs will need technical and financial support in order to realize their SDG commitments to gender equality by 2030. Gender equality therefore should remain a driver of change in ADB’s new long-term strategy. However, given the enormity of the challenges facing the region, and the entrenched gender inequalities that still exist, more innovative and intensified approaches are called for.

## **B. Vision for Gender Equality by 2030**

62. A possible ADB vision for gender equality in Asia and the Pacific by 2030 would be of a region where all women and men, and all girls and boys, have equal capabilities, rights and opportunities to enjoy healthy and productive lives and to contribute to their communities and societies. This in turn suggests a two-part strategy, in which ADB (a) further strengthens its gender mainstreaming approach in the context of responding to emerging regional issues, rebalancing its portfolio and increasing lending levels, and (b) sharpens its direct policy engagement and investments, partnerships and knowledge work to assist DMCs in closing persistent gender gaps and addressing entrenched gender biases and harmful practices (such as child marriage and gender-based violence). Both the refreshed approach to gender mainstreaming and stronger focus on catalytic and transformative<sup>118</sup> work would build on innovative activities that are already being piloted in selected countries and sub-regions. Areas where ADB could play a more decisive role, responding to emerging regional issues and supporting DMCs’ commitments to the SDGs, include:

63. **Capabilities.** ADB’s health interventions could continue to address women’s and adolescent girls’ unmet sexual and reproductive health needs, non-communicable diseases

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<sup>116</sup> ADB. 2015. *Asian Development Outlook 2015 Update: Enabling Women, Energizing Asia*, p. 50; McKinsey Global Institute. 2015. *The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women’s Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion to Global Growth*, pp. 2-5.

<sup>117</sup> ADB. 2015. *Asian Development Outlook 2015 Update: Enabling Women, Energizing Asia*, p. ix; Heloisa Marone. 2016. “Demographic Dividends, Gender Equality, and Economic Growth: The Case of Cabo Verde.” IMF Working Paper WP/16/169.

<sup>118</sup> In this paper, “catalytic” refers to efforts that ADB can take to accelerate progress toward gender equality in the region, for example, through more intensive collaboration and co-financing with other development partners. “Transformative” refers to steps ADB can take to address persistent gender inequalities, biases and harmful practices (such as child marriage and gender-based violence) through its operations.

disproportionately affecting women, and prevention of as well as comprehensive responses to gender-based violence. Education projects could continue to address safety and other concerns preventing girls from transitioning to and completing secondary school, while ensuring a gender-inclusive learning environment for both girls and boys. Social protection projects could include incentives and activities to keep girls in school, promote more equitable sharing of care duties and elimination of violence within households, extension of social protection to informal sector workers, and support for elderly care policies and programs. In the area of social protection, ADB could build on the gender innovations included in its loan support to the Philippines' conditional cash transfer program, Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, and the Benazir Income Support Program in Pakistan. The groundbreaking work currently being done in the East Asia Regional Department, to develop loan projects supporting elderly care support systems in PRC and social protection for disabled persons in Mongolia, would hopefully be expanded to other regions as well.

**64. Economic empowerment.** Building on ADB's current portfolio of TVET projects, women's access to quality jobs in nontraditional, higher-paying sectors could be enabled through enhanced TVET programs that are market-driven and include internship or apprenticeship opportunities at the end. ADB could also more systematically support women's entry in and participation across sector value chains, especially in sectors with opportunities for high-value job creation. (Different strategies would be needed, depending on the nature of the local constraints to women's economic participation.) Going beyond the usual scope of an SME project, integrated business support could also be provided to women-led micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, including access to finance, business development services and linkages to larger firms and markets, as well as reform of biased business laws, policies and practices. Equal employment opportunities in a safe work environment could also be promoted through ADB's private sector operations and inclusive business initiatives (e.g., through adherence to core labor standards and the Women's Empowerment Principles endorsed by over 1,200 companies through the UN Global Compact).<sup>119</sup> The portfolio of private sector loans to and investments in gender-inclusive businesses (including start-ups) could also be expanded.

**65. Safe and enabling infrastructure.** ADB could more systematically support safe, gender-responsive and sustainable transportation systems, energy systems, cities and workplaces through its transport, energy, urban development and private sector operations. Time-use studies could be incorporated more regularly in the design and monitoring of social infrastructure projects to better track the impact on women's and girls' time poverty.<sup>120</sup> Internet and mobile technology initiatives could also improve women's access to financial services, market information and health reminders, and ensure their personal safety. In these sectors, ADB could build on innovations already piloted in the Central and West Asia Regional Department to address the risk of sexual harassment for women taking public transportation,<sup>121</sup> and in the South Asia Regional Department to expand employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for young men and women in the energy sector.<sup>122</sup> Particular attention could be paid to employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for women in renewable energy and other "green" technology businesses.

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<sup>119</sup> UN Global Compact and UN Women. "Women's Empowerment Principles." <http://www.weprinciples.org>

<sup>120</sup> ADB. 2015. *Balancing the Burden? Desk Review of Women's Time Poverty and Infrastructure in Asia and the Pacific*.

<sup>121</sup> ADB. 2015. *Policy Brief: A Safe Public Transportation Environment for Women and Girls*.

<sup>122</sup> ADB. 2016. "Sub-Regional Conference: Going Beyond the Meter – Inclusive Energy Solutions in South Asia – Conference Report."

66. **Resilience.** Food security, climate mitigation and adaptation, and disaster risk management projects, in addition to addressing the different vulnerabilities of women and men, could also build the capacities of women to serve as technical experts, conveners and leaders in decision-making at all levels. Women's entitlements to land and natural resources could also be protected and strengthened. In these areas, ADB could build on its substantial experience in mainstreaming gender concerns in agriculture, aquaculture, forestry, and more recently in clean energy and climate finance.<sup>123</sup>

67. **Voice, participation and leadership.** The Asian Women Leaders' Program model that ADB successfully piloted over the past three years could be continued at the regional level and replicated at national levels. ADB could also strengthen partnerships with the UN Global Compact, APEC, Australia and other actors promoting women's leadership in the region. In sector operations, there could be more systematic attention to enabling women's active participation and leadership at all levels through targeted capacity support. ADB could also continue to support women's cooperatives and NGOs, and to promote women's representation on project steering committees and government and private sector boards.

68. **Innovative financing of SDG 5.** Building on its recommendations in *Making Money Work: Financing a Sustainable Future in Asia and the Pacific*, ADB could play a leading role in developing innovative mechanisms to pool funds to support implementation of SDG 5 (gender equality and empowerment of women and girls) in selected DMCs. These could include variations on the sector-wide approaches introduced previously in education and health sectors, as well as policy-based and results-based programs to accelerate gender equality reforms and strengthen country systems supporting gender equality. Support could also be given to innovative financing vehicles such as development (or social) impact bonds to test fresh approaches to promoting women's and girls' empowerment. The resources tapped could include funds from government, the private sector, UN partners, bilateral donors, development banks, NGOs, philanthropy and other sources.

### C. Realizing the Vision

69. To implement this more catalytic and transformational gender vision, ADB would ideally strengthen institutional support provided in a number of key areas:

(a) **Rebalancing portfolio and lending modalities.** The extent to which ADB can contribute to narrowing gender gaps in its DMCs will depend largely on the sectors and subsectors that are open to investment. To support inclusive and sustainable development with a stronger focus on correcting economic, social, and gender inequalities, ADB's overall lending portfolio will need to be rebalanced to include more support for human and social development. To have more transformative impact, ADB's gender portfolio will also need rebalancing to include more projects and programs with a GEN theme, ideally including policy-based loans supporting systematic changes such as gender-equitable law and policy reforms. The Gender Equity Thematic Group Committee should also continue to review the gender implications of results-based lending.

(b) **Enhanced gender capacity and strengthened gender network.** The gender competency of all operational staff and country-level counterparts should be strengthened to better address emerging regional issues (such as gender and climate change) and entrenched

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<sup>123</sup>ADB. 2016. *Building Gender into Climate Finance: ADB Experience with the Climate Investment Funds*.



gender issues (such as gender-based violence) in country and sector portfolios. Building on its success in supporting the gender capacity of national machineries for gender equality as well as sector ministries, ADB could support a “whole of government” approach to gender mainstreaming in selected countries. This support could also extend to the collection and use of more gender-inclusive statistics. The ADB gender team’s skills should also be strengthened to make greater use of ICT and to collaborate with a wider range of actors (including private sector, impact investors and philanthropy) on innovative partnerships and financing mechanisms.

(c) **Greater focus on transformation.** ADB has gained rich experience in systematically integrating gender equality objectives in its loan projects through the use of project gender action plans (GAPs). However, the targets and indicators that are included in project GAPs and monitored through project implementation often do not capture substantive changes in gender gaps, gender relations, or women’s and girls’ empowerment. Country and project diagnostics could be strengthened to better understand and address structural gender inequalities, persistent gender biases and harmful practices. Project designs could more systematically include indicators of transformative changes to be supported (such as changes in discriminatory laws, policies, practices or attitudes, and indicators of increased empowerment of women and girls). More rigorous methodologies could also be used to measure the impact of gender-focused interventions, including the collection of sex-disaggregated data at baseline and endline stages, and the inclusion of an appropriate counterfactual (e.g., baseline and endline data on both project and comparison groups) where resources and expertise are available. ADB’s gender-related knowledge work could also be enhanced to include more action-oriented gender research and capturing of lessons learned in the field. Staff incentives (such as performance reviews and rewards) could also be better aligned with this focus on supporting more transformative initiatives.

(d) **Dedicated resources** will be needed to support bank-wide catalytic and transformative gender work; to pilot rigorous impact evaluations of selected GEN and EGM projects; and to document, synthesize and share good gender equality practices, both internally and externally. Based on the final version of this document, ADB’s human resource needs to execute its gender equality vision could be mapped for the next few years, including possible increases in gender specialist staffing and options for rotating gender specialists to enable greater knowledge sharing and professional development.

(e) **Partnerships** will play an increasingly important role. While continuing to collaborate with other multilateral development banks, ADB would benefit from expanding and strengthening its partnerships with UN agencies (especially UN Women), bilateral development agencies, and research institutions that have already been working on some of the more challenging gender issues in the region. ADB should continue to work with and support national machineries for gender equality, gender focal points in sector ministries, gender working groups of in-country donors and NGOs, and women’s organizations and networks in-country. Recent efforts to engage with youth-led organizations and young people in the region through social media and other means should also be continued. Potential new partners in the area of women’s economic empowerment could include, for example, the APEC Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy, the Global Banking Alliance for Women, GSMA’s Connected Women Programme, the Women’s Empowerment Principles Initiative hosted by the UN Global Compact and UN Women, and Women in Informal Employment Mobilizing and Organizing (WIEGO). Partnerships with corporate social responsibility divisions of private sector companies, impact investors and corporate and private foundations could also be pursued.

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