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Asia-Pacific has one of world's largest gender gaps, UN report finds



UNDP Administrator Helen Clark (right) at a road side reception during a field trip to Rajasthan, India

8 March 2010 – The countries of Asia and the Pacific have not duplicated their economic success in the realm of gender equality, according to a new United Nations Development Programme (**UNDP**) report, which found that discrimination and neglect are threatening the very survival of women in the region.

“Empowering women is vital for achieving development goals overall and for boosting economic growth and sustainable development,” said UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, who unveiled the publication in the Indian capital, New Delhi, today.

The region’s women suffer from some of the lowest rates of political representation, employment and property ownership in the world. Their lack of participation, the **2010 Asia-Pacific Human Development Report** found, is also retarding economic growth.

In her address, Miss Clark pointed out that nearly half the adult women in South Asia are illiterate, a greater proportion than in any other region in the world.

Women in South Asia, she **said**, can also expect to live five fewer years than the world average of just under 71 years. While agricultural jobs account for more than 40 per cent of women’s jobs in East Asia and 65 per cent in South Asia, only 7 per cent of farms in these areas are controlled by women.

The launch of the new report, entitled *Power, Voice and Rights: A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific*, coincides with International Women's Day.

It found that nearly half of South Asia's countries and over 60 per cent of those in the Pacific have no laws in place against domestic violence.

"Discriminatory laws need to be changed, and the laws will need to be enforced," the UNDP head stressed.

The recommendations made by the publication include the removal of barriers to women's ownership of assets, expanding paid employment and enhancing investment in high-quality education and health.

It called for reforming constitutions and progressively interpreting religious principles to recognize the equal value of all human beings.

The report pointed out that quotas to increase women's political participation, along with sanctions for non-compliance, could be a helpful tool.

"Changes like those recommended in the report require steadfast political leadership," Miss Clark emphasized. "They also require men and boys to help foster attitudes and take actions which empower women."

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