



ANNUAL REPORT

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
2016-2017





UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



UN Women works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls.

PRODUCED by UN Women Asia and the Pacific Regional Office Monitoring and Reporting Unit and Regional Communications Unit

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PRINT: Clung Wicha Press

COVER: An 11-hour climb took Kanchhi Maya Tamang to the summit of Mt. Everest, with a gender equality message. She is a returnee migrant worker and an advocate for gender equality in sports and women migrant workers. UN Women's Civil Society Advisory Group in Nepal supported the mission. Photo: Courtesy of Sherpa Shepherds

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FOREWORD

It is a time of transformation in Asia and the Pacific. In 32 countries of the region, UN Women is joining women and men, governments, civil society groups, businesses and others in a common aim: gender equality.

The region's vibrant economies and societies have produced historic advances in human well-being. Women have been central to these advances, as leaders of communities and countries, as workers and innovators, as advocates for peace and security.

Yet the advances on gender equality are still not fast enough. Across the region, women are caught in a complex web of inequalities tied to gender as well as to class, ethnicity, religion and geography. They struggle to gain income, assets and services. Some now face new threats from violent extremism or climate change.

Impetus to tackle these and many other issues comes from the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was signed by more than 150 countries and which came into force in January 2016. Its 17 Sustainable Development Goals commit to "leave no one behind". In adopting the SDGs, UN Member States placed gender equality at the heart of the sustainable development agenda. Gender-responsive implementation of the agreement would not only boost the well-being of women but also sustainable development overall—social, economic and environmental.

The fifth Sustainable Development Goal, in particular, calls for women to have an equal voice at all levels of decision-making. They must have equal choice, whether in sexual and reproductive health and rights or access to jobs, property or finance. And they must be able to live their lives freely and securely.

In 2016 and 2017, as this report amply demonstrates, UN Women played an instrumental part in mobilizing people to step up efforts to achieve gender equality and contribute to other goals by the 2030 deadline. Our efforts gave women more voice, more choice and greater safety; they included women most marginalized in their societies.

Women gained elected offices in Timor-Leste and better working conditions in Cambodia and India. In Fiji, a referral system devised for survivors of violence after a natural disaster became a national protocol that meets rigorous international standards. In Afghanistan and in the Philippines' Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, women secured new recognition as architects of peace. A five-year regional programme on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) produced changes in laws, policies and national capacities that could benefit 184 million women and girls.

These are just a few examples of recent progress. Even so, much more remains to be done. Deep structural inequalities that skew the distribution of development benefits against women must be challenged. Harmful social, cultural and religious norms on gender must be eliminated and give way to a new normal in which women and men are equally able to realize their full potential.

UN Women will continue to advocate for scaled-up efforts in these areas and more. We will continue to stand in partnership with the women of Asia and the Pacific and all who seek gender equality. Acting together, we will achieve the 2030 Agenda and its promise of a more equal world.



Miwa Kato,
Regional Director,
UN Women Regional Office for
Asia and the Pacific

2016-2017 SNAPSHOT OF UN WOMEN'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



I. LEADING THE WAY TO EQUALITY

If we expand women's participation and leadership in decision-making, we can unlock progress across all the Sustainable Development Goals. When there are enough women making decisions, they can demand a full spectrum of their rights, whether in finance or agriculture, education or reproductive health or any other area of life.

Yet today, women hold more than 30 per cent of parliamentary seats in only two countries in the region, New Zealand (38.3 per cent) and Timor-Leste (32.3 per cent).¹ In half of the countries, their share is less than 10 per cent. Overall, the region is behind the global average (23.5 per cent),² with women making up less than one in five parliamentarians: 19.3 per cent in Asia and 17.8 per cent in the Pacific.³ Similar discrepancies persist in executive branches of governments.

It is time for parity; the Sustainable Development Goals aim for women's full participation and leadership in decision-making by 2030. UN Women partners with political leaders, parliamentarians, civil society advocates and others to open more space for women to participate and to make their concerns more visible. We help women achieve their powerful potential as leaders, so they can take their communities and countries towards a future that includes all people.



Alcina Carvalho Dos Santos demonstrates the public speaking skills that helped her to get elected as *Xefe Suku* (village chief) in Timor-Leste's local elections.

Photo: UN Women/Yashas Chandra

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1. Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2017, October 1). Women in national parliaments: World classification, from <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>
 2. Inter-Parliamentary Union, (2017, October 1). Women in national parliaments: World classification, from <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>
 3. Ibid.

CLAIMING NEW SPACE IN ELECTIONS

Women stood with men in leading **Timor-Leste's** struggle for independence from Indonesia, achieved in 2002. Today, their share of parliamentary seats, 32 per cent, is among the highest in Asia and the Pacific. But in the country's conservative villages, many people still think that a woman's place is not in political office.

Change is coming, though, through women like Barbara Garma Soares. In the nationwide local elections in October 2016, she was elected the first female chief of her village, Saku Sau, after tirelessly campaigning on a platform of community improvement. "I campaigned door-to-door," she says. "I didn't make promises, but I said, 'If you choose me, we have to come together to develop our village.'"

Before the elections, a reform of the national electoral law, supported by UN Women, required that there be at least one female candidate for each of the 442 village chief posts. That opened the door for Ms. Soares. She was encouraged by "100% Hau Prontu" (100% I'm Ready), a UN Women-backed project to expand women's leadership in public affairs, and joined 300 other women for training on how to run political campaigns. In some villages, women who gained the new knowledge and skills fearlessly competed against a half dozen or more male candidates. In the end, only 21 women were elected village chiefs—but that was double the number in the previous local elections, in 2009.

By 2017, a new push for equality was on—for Parliament to include gender equality provisions in legislation concerning governance of municipalities. UN Women has helped gender equality advocates join forces to analyse draft legislation and make proposals for amendments. Three demands are already on the table: municipalities must promote gender equality, involve more women in decision-making, and apply gender-responsive budgeting. One advocate, Laura Pina, says 2017 could be "the year women will be empowered as never before".

MAKING INSTITUTIONS MORE INCLUSIVE

By shaping public policies and perceptions, parliaments and news media determine much of the progress countries make towards gender equality. UN Women works with these institutions to quicken the pace of this progress.

In the Autonomous Region of Bougainville of **Papua New Guinea**, UN Women helped get different groups to reach agreement on creating the first Office of Gender Equality. The office is charged with promoting



30 laws
for gender equality
adopted or amended in
13
countries

84 CEDAW
"shadow reports"
prepared by civil
society groups in
7 countries

7
countries
increased budget
allocations for the
advancement
of women

gender equality across the Government. It is part of the office of the Chief Secretary of the Bougainville Administration and reports directly to the President of the Bougainville House of Representatives. UN Women also provided support in the review of the Department of Community Government Act. The Act now stipulates that community government elections must return, in total, equal numbers of men and women. In the 2017 poll, a total of 24 women were elected to 48 community governments.

UN Women also trains journalists to examine and correct gender biases in their stories. In **Samoa**, we sponsored special awards for journalists who endorsed women's participation in elections. On a visit to **Papua New Guinea**, UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka recognized journalists who shed light on the links between two crises there: AIDS and gender-based violence.

BUDGETING FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Across Asia and the Pacific, UN Women is a leading champion of gender-responsive budgeting, which takes women's equality and empowerment into account when deciding the collection and spending of public funds.

In **Sri Lanka**, UN Women supported meetings and trainings for government officials that led the Cabinet to mandate that 11 national ministries—as well as all provincial councils and district and divisional secretariats—allocate at least 25 per cent of investments in rural economic development to women. New funds will support gender equality in diverse areas including technical education, fisheries, housing and construction. The Ministry of Finance instructed the ministries to specify plans and allocations for gender equality measures in their 2016-2017 budgetary proposals.

In 2016, a UN Women regional report, *Gender Responsive Budgeting in the Asia-Pacific Region*, offered the first overview of two decades of advances in 26 countries. Many countries have adopted gender-responsive budgeting in principle but face capacity and other constraints in fully implementing it. The report has been widely shared with officials across the region. In **Cambodia**, the findings were used to set up a young professional technical group (with members from five ministries) that is promoting the inclusion of gender concerns in the Government's annual budget call circular. A parliamentary dialogue sparked interest in how gender-responsive budgeting can boost transparency and accountability.

BUILDING EVIDENCE FOR BETTER POLICIES

Solid evidence and data must be gathered to shape public policies that make deep and lasting contributions to gender equality.

UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality supported a study in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka by the Feminist Dalit Organization, a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Nepal, that outlined the barriers hindering marginalized Dalit women from getting education, employment and land. The study made over 30 national and regional policy recommendations. Advocates in **Bangladesh** used the recommendations to secure a government agreement to require, for the first time, a list of Dalit women eligible for public services. The list will be vital in efforts to help the women obtain the services that they are rightfully due.

In **Myanmar**, UN Women partnered with the Government, the United Nations country team and Asian Development Bank to support the first comprehensive assessment of gender equality and women's rights. In carrying out its National Strategic Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women, the Government is drawing on the assessment's

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