

### **Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment: transforming economies, realizing Agenda 2030**

The special side event panel was jointly organized by UN Women, UNDP, ESCAP and UNFPA, as part of UN Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. The event was moderated by Mr. Nicholas Rosellini, UNDP Deputy Regional Director for Asia & the Pacific and Director, Bangkok Regional Hub. The panelists were Ms. Roberta Clarke, Regional Director and Representative in Thailand, UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Dr. Jeannette Gurung, Executive Director, Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture & Natural Resource Management (WOCAN), Dr. Chompoonuh K. Perpoonwiwat, Associate Professor in Economics, School of Economics and Public Policy at Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, Thailand, Ms. Anjali Sen, Regional Director, International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) South Asia Region, and Ms. Yoriko Yasukawa, Regional Director, UNFPA Asia-Pacific Regional Office.

The panel began with the discussion about how the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) have the potential to make a real difference for gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender equality is acknowledged in the agenda as a fundamental right, and as a driver of progress across all development goals, which is reflected in the stand-alone **SDG 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"** and integrating gender equality throughout the other SDGs and targets. At the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March this year, there was a consensus that realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the SDGs and targets, reaffirming the GA resolution of 25th September 2015 that "The achievement of full human potential and of sustainable development is not possible if one half of humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities."

The panel then focused on the linkages between the three SDG targets that were missing from the MDGs, that have cross-sectoral impacts and demand cross-sectoral efforts and multi-ministerial efforts in partnership with a wide range of civil society organizations, these are: **Target 5.2:** Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation by 2030, **Target 5.3:** Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, and **Target 5.4:** Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate. Violence against women and girls, harmful practices, and women's disproportional burden of unpaid work are all stemmed from unequal power relations between men and women. These outcomes may bring about not only negative effects on women and girls' capabilities but also enormous social and economic costs to the societies and nations. For example, child marriage is institutional violence against women and girls that sanctions as social and cultural norms. Pregnancy and child birth is one of the major factor for maternal mortality among girls, and girls are more prone to domestic violence. Panelists also highlighted the connection between SDG5 and other SDGs including Goal 2 on end hunger, ensure food security and sustainable agriculture as the majority of farmers are women; goal 6 on water and sanitation; Goal 7 on energy. Women are key players to combat climate change (Goal 13), in sustainable use of marine resources (Goal 14) because many women are in fishery and in protection of eco-system and forest management (Goal 15). Despite being the backbone of global food production, majority of women agriculturists are unpaid family workers, who are out of social security system and landless, one of the contributing factors for the feminization of poverty.

The panel then explored the ways forward. Recognizing that SDGs represent a great opportunity to address those issues but this is just a beginning; panelists recommended the following actions: 1) consolidate data and evidence that these SDG 5 targets are impediment to all problems in society and consolidate ethical visions at global, regional and national levels to demonstrate policy makers and those in power to invest necessary public resources to tackle with the problems. Evidences shows that costs of prevention is much less than costs of response.; 2) strengthen the voices from grassroots and promote women's rights organization to national and global levels; 3) interrogate SDG5 across various policies, including gender responsive education system, funded health care, child care, programmes on sexual and reproductive health, and labour law to allow men to take leaves to take care of the family. Improvement within justice system and the authority such as police is also needed. These improvements can be achieved by working with policy makers and parliamentarians in championing the issues, creating awareness and working jointly towards ending discrimination and VAWG; 4) institutionalizing gender-responsive budgeting, including transformative financing, taxation and expenditure. If part of disproportionate allocation of budget to military were given to health and education sectors and measures to reduce unpaid care work, we would have a more equitable society; 5) develop communication tools to promote public support and raise community awareness; 6) develop certification system, such as W+ standard which is a certification programme of measuring advancement in gender quality and transformational to women's life of investment in agricultural and natural resource management projects; and 7) promote more women to take up decision-making roles. Setting temporary special measures such as quotas is not only about promotion of women's political participation, it is about equal participation between women and men.

The panelists concluded by reaffirming that empowerment of women and girls is critical not only for the realization of the SDG 5 targets, but keeping gender equality at the centre of our development efforts will be key to the success of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs as a whole. There can be no sustainable development if the tangible and intangible barriers which hold back half the population are not addressed. The photos from the panel can be found through the following link: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/unwomenasiapacific/albums/72157666727999556>