

Commission on the Status of Women  
*Forty-ninth session*  
New York, 28 February – 11 March 2005

PANEL III

Presentation of the Review and Appraisal Processes at Regional Level:  
Achievements, Gaps and Challenges

*Written statement\* submitted by*

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New York, Friday, 4 March 2005

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The High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its Regional and Global Outcomes took place in Bangkok from 7-10 September 2004. At the meeting, we heard from the participating governments about a wide range of initiatives taken at the country-level to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, including a number of successful initiatives. The meeting adopted by consensus a report, containing the Bangkok Communique. The Report of the Meeting and the Communique are on our website at <http://www.unescap.org>.

In the Asia and Pacific region, what progress have we made towards gender equality in the decade since the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women?

Progress has been made in improving basic human capabilities and material well-being which are covered under the Millennium Development Goals. In education, gender gaps in many countries have been reduced with high rates of female adult literacy achieved. Several countries are well on the way to achieving the MDG on eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education. In health, visible progress has been made in improving female life expectancy and reducing maternal mortality rates.

Another key dimension of gender equality is access to assets, resources and decision-making. In the labour market, more women are in formal employment and female entrepreneurs are growing in number. Microcredit and income-generating programmes have also in many instances improved the economic condition of women in poverty.

In the realm of women in politics, the region has seen an increase in parliaments where more than 20 per cent of parliamentarians are women. An encouraging development is the increased numbers of women in local government especially through quotas and affirmative action.

Yet another dimension to consider in gender equality is the need for security and reduced vulnerability to conflict situations spanning the continuum of violence from the home, the community and at the national level. With regard to gender-based violence, action taken have included legislation, support services, health measures and protective mechanisms. These approaches signify the acknowledgement of the widespread prevalence of gender-based violence and the recognition of such violence as an important issue moving it from the private to the public sphere, requiring action by the state.

For the attainment of gender equality, an enabling environment is essential and in this regard, there has been much progress at the institutional /legal level. Many countries have established or strengthened national machineries and other institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, and national policies and action plans have been formulated. Almost all ESCAP countries have ratified CEDAW and many countries have made legal reforms aimed at eliminating discrimination.

With regard to women in the media, the past decade has seen women's successful use of ICT for networking and the media for policy advocacy, and also the use of alternative media forms including newsletters, street theatre and poster campaigns.

However, in spite of the progress made, many challenges remain.

In some countries, especially in South Asia and the LDCs, the educational and health (including reproductive and sexual health) needs of girls and women remain unmet . Furthermore, in some countries, educational attainments have not led to greater employability in any countries.

In spite of higher labour force participation, women continue to be in low-paid, low-skilled jobs , and there is growing informalization and casualization , characterized by irregularity and a lack of income security.

In politics, the number of seats held by women in national parliaments remain low in many countries.

Gender-based violence remains persistent and pervasive. With regard to conflict situations, in the Asia and the Pacific region, at least 10 countries are in situations of conflict and there is a need to address the institutional and structural causes of conflict as well as recognize women's roles in conflict resolution and peace building as contained in Security Council 1325(2000).

With regard to national machineries, ineffectiveness and marginalization of the institutional mechanisms has been reported and implementation of plans and policies has been uneven. Implementation of CEDAW remains a challenge and many countries have yet to ratify the Optional Protocol.

There are also some emerging challenges for the region.

Globalization has had an uneven impact – opening new opportunities while disproportionately affecting women requiring appropriate training and reskilling as well as social protection and safety nets. Issues such as garment workers adversely affected by the phasing out of the Multi-fiber Arrangement (MFA) must also be addressed.

Linked to globalization is the importance of information technology which women must harness through action on connectivity, access, applications, capacity building and for networking, particularly for marginalized women.

The growing ease of mobility and the demand for migrant labour such as in the care economy have given rise to the feminization of economic migration. Globalization, with its facilitation of human movement and more porous national border coupled with more stringent immigration laws of recipient countries, have led to a climate conducive to the trafficking of women and children.

The increasing number of women with HIV/AIDS poses a serious threat to the ESCAP region with measures needed for prevention, treatment, care and support, and protection from stigmatization and discrimination.

The recent Indian Ocean tsunami and its devastating impact especially on the poor and vulnerable has brought home to the region the importance of women having to be involved in

environmental and natural resource and multihazard disaster management which would involve women playing an active role in early warning systems , relief and reconstruction .

We have learned lessons from this decade after Beijing, and some strategies which we can pursue further are:

- Focus more on “institutions” that can effect crucial changes such as property rights, rule of law, budgets, delivery of social services, interministerial committees, parliamentary women’s caucuses and monitoring committees etc.;
- Take a multilayered approach for holistic change, covering 3 levels- at the policy level (laws, policies, international commitments and their implementation), the institutional level (government ministry/national machinery, judiciary) and the household level;
- Refine and improve tools in the toolbox (e.g. make concepts like gender mainstreaming more user-friendly, improve statistics especially on issues like the informal sector, violence against women, trafficking, women in ICT);
- Involve and work with multiple and strategic partners (private sector, men, civil society organizations from other sectors etc);
- While continuing to pursue gender mainstreaming at all levels, also examine gender equality from an “external “context such as the impact on women of trade liberalization;
- Enhance usage of ICT and media convergence technology for networking and advocacy.
- Increase regional cooperation to share experiences, learn from good practices, provide advocacy support, and work on transboundary issues.

I will now provide some brief information on how UNESCAP supports its Members and Associate Members in addressing these challenges.

The goal of UNESCAP’s gender and development programme is to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment in the region in line with the Millennium Declaration, the Beijing Declaration, CEDAW as well as the Security Council Resolution 1325, and relevant UNESCAP resolutions and regional plans of action.

As the regional secretariat of the United Nations for the Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP has been applying its convening authority and legislative responsibility by providing both normative and technical assistance to the region’s policy makers, and especially those in the national machineries for the advancement of women. At the political level, ESCAP convenes regional ministerial level meetings on the advancement of women at which regional programmes and plans of action are adopted. ESCAP’s members and associate members recently adopted the Shanghai Declaration, during the historic 60<sup>th</sup> session of the UNESCAP Commission, held in Shanghai in April 2004, in which they reiterated their resolve to strive “to promote and support gender equality and eliminate discrimination against women”.

ESCAP convenes meetings periodically for national machineries, focussing on cutting edge issues like gender mainstreaming, gender auditing and budgeting, and monitoring and accountability. In the important area of gender statistics, ESCAP has published reports on gender statistics for 16 countries, a report on “Women and Men in the ESCAP region” as well as technical publication on the “unpaid work of women”, “gender indicators”. A report on statistical gender profile of the ESCAP region was recently published, providing information to policy makers critical for policy formulation

At the institutional level, ESCAP has done the following:

A gender mainstreaming task force with division gender focal points has been established under the leadership of the Deputy Executive Secretary. The task force is mandated to assist in formulating ESCAP’s gender mainstreaming policy, strategy and implementation tools and in monitoring.

Gender has been incorporated into programme budget and planning, and gender training courses are conducted to strengthen the institutional capacity of ESCAP to mainstream gender in all aspects of its work such as in trade, SMEs, disability, environment, ICT, regional MDG centre etc.

Through these initiatives, ESCAP looks forward to continue working closely with our members and associate members and with other regional commissions towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women. Thank you for your attention.