

V. Future Directions

The Asia and Pacific region has made progress toward Goal 3, particularly in narrowing gender gaps in primary and secondary education and raising literacy rates. However, progress on the indicators of economic and political empowerment under Goal 3 has been mixed, and most countries are not reducing maternal mortality rates fast enough under Goal 5. The region's uneven performance under the other MDGs also affects the prospects for improving women's capabilities, access to resources and opportunities, and security. This mixed report card is consistent with the region's recent assessment of progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, which is reflected in the Bangkok Communiqué adopted by members of UNESCAP in September 2004 (see Appendix 1). The Communiqué notes that gains have been made in several key areas of the Beijing Platform, but that there are still gaps and challenges that need to be addressed.

At the recent World Summit, governments from the region reaffirmed the broad development goals outlined in the *Millennium Declaration*. In particular, they confirmed the importance of implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in order to achieve the MDGs, and they endorsed a comprehensive agenda to achieve gender equality and empower women (see Appendix 2). These World Summit commitments provide a sound framework for governments and other stakeholders in the region to intensify their efforts to narrow gender gaps and empower women and girls. This section summarizes some of the common challenges to gender equality and women's

empowerment in the region, and then provides examples of promising interventions and supportive institutions to guide future actions.

Regional Challenges

Traditional gender norms, stereotypes, and practices. MDG progress reports from across the region confirm that the persistence of traditional norms and assumptions related to gender roles and women's capabilities significantly hampers efforts to narrow gender gaps and empower women. Patterns of gender discrimination are seen most starkly in sex-selective abortions, forced marriages and various forms of violence against women and girls, but are also reflected in girls' lower participation rates in school, women's high rates of anemia, high levels of maternal death and disability, gender segregation and gender wage gaps in employment, women's low rates of landownership, and women's limited participation in decision-making bodies at all levels of government. These patterns of discrimination and exclusion are compounded for women in marginalized groups, including ethnic minorities, disadvantaged castes, refugees and internally displaced persons, migrants and the disabled. The entrenched attitudes and behaviors related to gender roles and women's status point to the continuing need to sensitize and win the support of male decision makers and opinion-leaders—including government and political party officials, community and religious leaders, business leaders, teachers, and health professionals—for measures to promote gender

equality and empower women and girls. There is also a need for greater investment in gender sensitization and behavior change strategies targeting men as partners, parents and co-workers. In specific programs and projects, this means that more attention needs to be given to “software” activities, such as gender sensitization of government staff and community leaders, community awareness-raising on gender issues, social mobilization of women and supportive men, and other measures to ensure that women and men can participate equally.

Migration and displacement. The increasing mobility of women as well as men, both within countries and across borders, is another regional trend with major implications for gender equality and women’s empowerment. Migration for work has become a major safety valve for poor households and has opened up opportunities for many young women to escape the restrictions of rural life and live and work on their own. However, migration can cut short adolescent girls’ education and migrant workers often do not have the legal status to access health and other basic services in their destination city or area. Migration also entails special risks for women and girls, including risks of harassment and violence en route to their destination, and harsh and abusive treatment by their employers. At worst, those who rely on agents to help them find work may instead be trafficked into forced sex work or other exploitative conditions. Some countries, such as the Philippines and Sri Lanka, have developed programs to support their overseas workers, especially women, and other countries, including Bangladesh and Nepal, are following suit. Several countries in the region are also taking steps to prosecute human traffickers and provide support to trafficking survivors. However, there is much more that countries can do to improve the status, living conditions, and security of migrants within their borders—both internal migrants and those from neighboring countries. Conflicts and natural disasters also force large numbers of people to migrate to urban centers, other regions, and across borders. Refugees and internally displaced persons typically find themselves in even more precarious living conditions than voluntary migrants, with limited access to basic services, few income-generating opportunities, and exposure to harassment

and violence. Displaced women—especially widows and other single women with small children—are especially vulnerable in these circumstances, but they rarely have a voice in relief and reconstruction efforts. Countries in the region can do much more to include women’s organizations and affected women in relief and reconstruction planning and programs, and to address the particular needs and constraints of displaced women following conflicts and disasters.

Globalization and regional integration. Asia is “the most ‘globally integrated’ region in the world,”⁹⁶ and several of its outwardly-oriented countries have achieved remarkable rates of growth. The lowering of trade barriers, promotion of export industries, and increasing interconnectivity through television and the Internet have had dramatic impacts on regional economies and societies. The lowering of trade barriers has also created large export opportunities for the region’s farmers and manufacturers. However, small farms and micro and small businesses—which women are more likely to manage—are at a disadvantage in the global and regional marketplace due to their smaller scale; more limited access to credit, technology and market information; exclusion from trade associations; and lack of awareness of trade rules and practices. They may also be undercut in local markets by cheaper imports of agricultural products and manufactured goods. Young women in particular have benefited from the rapid expansion of export manufacturing jobs in several countries. However, the experience of such countries as Republic of Korea, Philippines, and Thailand shows that the low-skilled manufacturing jobs predominantly occupied by women are also among the first to be eliminated or subcontracted as industries restructure to become more competitive. Export processing zones also can be exempted from local labor laws and regulations, which increase the risk of worker exploitation and abuse. To ensure that poor women and men benefit from the expansion of trade and regional integration, it will be extremely important for governments and regional bodies to analyze the gender-related impacts of these trends, to support small farmers and businesses, and to help displaced workers upgrade their skills or find alternative livelihoods. Governments and export manufacturers should also be encouraged to take

the “high road” by adhering to core labor standards and promoting decent work.

Decentralization. Most countries in the region are also in the process of decentralizing the delivery of basic services and other government functions to subnational levels, including planning and revenue-raising activities. Several MDG progress reports note that this trend presents both opportunities and risks for achievement of the MDGs. In principle, decentralization brings government service providers closer to citizens and should encourage them to provide higher-quality and more locally appropriate services. However, Indonesia and the Philippines report that decentralization has disrupted the delivery of basic services, especially in the health sector. Moreover, Kazakhstan and the PRC report that decentralization has left poorer regions chronically underfunded and unable to maintain basic health, water supply, and sanitation services. These service disruptions and deficiencies fall hardest on the poorest households, and especially poor women. The decentralization of political decision making also presents both risks and opportunities for women. There is a tendency for local elites, who are usually male-dominated, to control locally elected bodies. In conservative rural areas, male-dominated local bodies may establish local rules or condone traditional practices that discriminate against women and girls. However, the legislation of quotas and reserved seats in several countries has opened up space for women to participate in local decision making, with positive results for women and for communities as a whole. Nevertheless, locally elected women, particularly in conservative rural areas, need political support to overcome resistance from male leaders and capacity building to function effectively.

Laws and policies supporting gender equality. Most countries in the region have comprehensive law and policy frameworks in place to support gender equality and protect women’s rights. These include constitutional provisions or statutes guaranteeing equal rights and protection and national action plans to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment. Some countries have also enacted—or are considering—laws prohibiting domestic violence, other forms of violence against women, and trafficking. However, the Bangkok Communiqué con-

firmers that countries in the region share several problems in implementing these laws and policies:

- The national institutions charged with coordinating government efforts to promote gender equality are chronically understaffed and under-resourced; they are often excluded from key planning and budget exercises; and they have only tenuous links with key central ministries (such as finance and planning) and with sector ministries.
- Finance, planning, and sector ministries have little technical capacity to identify and address gender issues in their own operations. This seriously undermines countries’ policy commitments to “mainstream” gender concerns in all key sectors. Line ministries in the “hard” sectors are particularly ill-equipped to carry out “software” activities, such as gender and social analysis, consultations with women and other excluded groups, community awareness-raising, and social mobilization.
- Women, especially from poor and marginalized communities, have limited awareness of their rights and limited resources and power to assert these rights and protect themselves from violations. Law enforcement officials are frequently insensitive or biased, particularly toward poor women and women from disadvantaged castes and minority groups, and laws protecting women’s interests are not well enforced. Formal judicial processes are generally inaccessible to poor women, and traditional dispute resolution mechanisms tend to enforce patriarchal norms.

Regional diversity. Given the diversity of cultures, physical environments, economic systems and governance structures across the region, and wide differences within countries, it is extremely important for gender equality strategies to be based on thorough analysis of local conditions and constraints; consultations with women and men from different social and economic groups in both urban and rural areas; and locally appropriate and tested approaches. While the diversity within the region cautions against “one-size-fits-all” solutions, it also presents a tremendous opportunity for cross-learning. Many

The strategic priority areas for achieving gender equality and empowerment as identified in the Millennium Project are also relevant for scaling up in the Asia and Pacific region. They include post-primary education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, time-saving infrastructure, property rights, employment, gender-based violence, and representation in national and local government.

of the world's great success stories in narrowing gender gaps and empowering women have occurred in Asia and the Pacific. In this sense, the region is a rich laboratory for testing innovative approaches to gender equality, and countries have much to share and learn from each other. Innovative NGOs and their affiliates, such as BRAC (formerly the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) and Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, and Indian and Thai affiliates of Slum/Shack Dwellers International, have already inspired similar NGO initiatives elsewhere in the region and in other parts of the world. At a government level, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand are sharing their success and expertise in gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting with other developing countries through their south-south cooperation programs. Regional institutions, such as ADB and UNESCAP and other international partners, have also facilitated sharing of gender-related expertise among countries in the region. To ensure that all countries in the region make steady progress in narrowing gender gaps and empowering women, more regional exchanges of expertise and experience will be extremely valuable and should be strongly supported by the UN system, the development banks, bilateral donors, and foundations.

Promising Initiatives

Based on a comprehensive survey of worldwide trends, initiatives and research results, the UN Millennium Project has recommended seven strategic priority areas for achieving gender equality and empowering women, almost all of which were endorsed by governments at the recent World Summit (see Box 5 and Appendix 2).

These strategic priorities are already reflected in the national gender action plans of most countries in the region, as well as in specific initiatives supported by governments, development agencies and banks, NGOs, and community-based organizations (CBOs). They provide a useful agenda for future cooperation to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the region. This subsection highlights examples of initiatives being taken in each area.

Postprimary education for girls and young women. The UN Millennium Project has

made a compelling case for continuing girls' education through secondary and higher levels based on the empowerment benefits for adolescent girls.⁹⁷ The strategies successfully used to increase girls' participation in primary school apply equally to secondary school (see Box 6). The strong tendency for young women to select tertiary courses in "traditional" fields, such as teaching and nursing, has been addressed in the Philippines, for example, through scholarships in science and technology and technology-based training specifically for women, as well as an affirmative action policy to encourage women to enroll in industrial courses. Cambodia is introducing night school programs in urban areas to encourage young working women to continue their education.

A major challenge for countries is to provide nonformal education to women who have been bypassed by the formal education system, especially in rural and ethnic minority areas. The Viet Nam government, collaborating with the Viet Nam Women's Union, recently launched a community-based literacy and postliteracy program targeting ethnic minority women. The Philippines also has established an alternative education system for indigenous women and girls, which includes child-minding centers so that women and older girls can attend classes while still minding their young children and siblings. India's Mahila Samakhyas Programme (Education for Women's Empowerment), launched in 1987, is an innovative government-sponsored program promoting literacy, practical learning, and confidence-building through the formation and support of self-help groups, especially among landless and socially excluded women. The program now operates in 46 districts in nine states, and has inspired a number of spin-off initiatives, including a new project to develop video and audio material learning resources for self-help groups.⁹⁸

Guaranteeing sexual and reproductive health and rights. As the UN Millennium Project and others have argued, sexual and reproductive health and rights are essential to women's empowerment and have a number of spillover benefits for women, their families, and communities. Investments in sexual and reproductive health services, such as family planning, are also extremely cost effective. Key health sector inter-

Box 5: Strategic Priorities for Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women

United Nations Millennium Project Recommendations

- Strengthen opportunities for postprimary education for girls while simultaneously meeting commitments to universal primary education
- Guarantee sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Invest in infrastructure to reduce women's and girls' time burdens
- Guarantee women's and girls' property and inheritance rights

- Eliminate gender inequality in employment

- Increase women's share of seats in national parliaments and local governmental bodies

- Combat violence against girls and women

World Summit Commitments

- Eliminate gender inequalities in primary and secondary education by the earliest possible date and at all educational levels by 2015

- Ensure equal access to reproductive health

- Guarantee the free and equal right of women to own and inherit property; ensure secure tenure of property and housing by women; and ensure equal access for women to productive assets and resources, including land, credit, and technology.
- Promote women's equal access to labor markets, sustainable employment, and adequate labor protection
- Promote increased representation of women in government decision-making bodies, including through ensuring equal opportunity to participate fully in the political process
- Eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and the girl child, including during and after armed conflicts

Sources: UN Millennium Project, *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women* (2005); UN General Assembly, 2005 World Summit Outcome (para. 58).

ventions include universal access to such reproductive health services as family planning, prevention and treatment of STIs, nutrition programs, attendance of skilled health personnel at deliveries and access to emergency obstetric care, and safe abortion (where legal). School programs and community awareness raising on health, nutrition, family planning, and prevention of STIs, including HIV/AIDS, are important interventions outside the health sector.⁹⁹ Extending reproductive health services to adolescents, and involving men in family planning and maternity care, are also essential elements of a successful reproductive health strategy.¹⁰⁰

Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand are credited with rapidly expanding access to reproductive health services for women and lowering maternal mortality rates, even while at low levels of economic development¹⁰¹ (see Box 7). Similar strategies are being pursued in many other

countries in the region, often through the Safe Motherhood Initiative. However, most of the progress made in these countries has been in urban areas. Maternal mortality rates in rural areas remain stubbornly high, due in large part to insufficient investment in rural health facilities, inadequate skill-upgrading and incentives for rural health personnel, formal and informal fees and costs that discourage rural women from seeking health care, and insufficient attention to the traditional attitudes that discourage or prevent women from accessing health services, especially in conservative rural areas of South Asia. Nevertheless, innovative partnerships, such as the Averting Maternal Death and Disability (AMDD) program, have demonstrated that Malaysia's success can be replicated even in remote and conservative rural areas (see Box 8).

Formal and informal fees and other costs—for example, for transport, drugs and accommo-

Box 6: Achieving Gender Parity in Secondary Enrollment in Malaysia and Bangladesh

Since 1990, Malaysia has succeeded in closing the gender gap in secondary enrollments even in its least developed states through a combination of programs including textbook loans; food and milk supplements in rural schools; school health services; boarding facilities for students from remote areas; special education; updating of school curricula, particularly in science and information technology; and upgrading of teachers' credentials. This commitment to education is reflected in public expenditures for education, which rose from 6% of total development expenditures in 1970 to 26% in 2003.

Several less-developed countries in the region are pursuing similar strategies. Bangladesh moved from a large gender gap in 1990 to a reverse gender gap by 2001. Bangladesh's Female Secondary School Assistance Program has received much attention, in particular its stipend program for rural girls, which is intended to cover all direct school costs as well as uniforms and transport. A recent gender assessment of an Asian Development Bank-financed project supporting this program confirmed the success of the stipend program in raising adolescent girls' enrollments. However, the assessment also found that less progress was being made in other areas, such as the recruitment of female teachers to match the higher enrollment of girls, and that this was undermining the project's success. In one nongovernment school, for example, only two female teachers were available to search 400 girls before an exam under new procedures to prevent cheating. The assessment concluded that a more comprehensive gender plan, addressing all of the constraints to adolescent girls' school achievements, would ensure more positive and sustainable results.

Sources: Government of Malaysia and UN Country Team, *Achieving the Millennium Development Goals: Successes and Challenges* (2005); ADB, *Gender Equality Results in ADB Projects: Bangladesh Country Report* (2005).

Box 7: Improving Maternal Health in Malaysia

Between 1970 and 1980, Malaysia's national maternal mortality rate dropped from 141 to 56 (per 100,000 live births), and declined steadily to 19 in 1990. Between 1980 and 2000, the states with the highest maternal mortality rates also made impressive progress. The mortality rate for Pahang state, for example, fell from 151 to only 24. Maternal mortality rates among ethnic groups have also narrowed substantially. The mortality rate among Bumiputra was over 200 in 1970, but has declined steadily and now is only slightly higher than the rates for Indian and Chinese women.

The highest maternal mortality rates are now among non-Malaysian migrant women, who accounted for 42% of all maternal deaths in 2000. Malaysia attributes its success to the steady expansion and upgrading of the primary health system in rural areas, coupled with specific strategies to promote family planning and encourage rural women to use trained health workers and health facilities for deliveries. These strategies included integrating family planning into basic rural health services; establishing alternative birthing centers in rural areas; upgrading midwives to community nurses, and training traditional birth attendants to avoid harmful practices and work as partners with professional midwives and nurses; accommodation, vehicle loans, and special allowances for health personnel in rural areas; enlisting community leaders to support community health workers and provide resources for emergency transport; and "confidential enquiry" into maternal deaths to identify weaknesses in the referral systems or health facilities. These strategies have been supported by increasing public expenditures for health, which rose from 3% of total development expenditures in 1970 to 7% in 2003.

Source: Government of Malaysia and UN Country Team, *Achieving the Millennium Development Goals: Successes and Challenges* (2005).

Box 8: The Averting Maternal Death and Disability Program

The Averting Maternal Death and Disability (AMDD) program partnership, which includes United Nations agencies, governments, international and local nongovernment organizations and medical associations, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, achieved impressive results over a 5-year period in improving the availability, quality and use of emergency obstetric care (EmOC) in several Asian countries, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand and Viet Nam.

In Bangladesh, for example, an AMDD-supported project substantially increased the number of functioning comprehensive EmOC facilities throughout the country. Between 2000 and 2002, the number of women with obstetric complications who were treated in project-supported facilities increased by 70%, while the fatality rate from these complications was cut from 3.5% to 2%. The AMDD program focuses not only on improvements in health facilities and staff skills, but also on the social and economic barriers that prevent women from accessing health services. In Pakistan, for example, the AMDD partner Save the Children has been working with the Ministry of Health and provincial and district governments to address serious staffing shortages in rural health facilities in Sindh Province, and working at the district and community level to increase awareness of women's right to access health services.¹⁰² These activities have supplemented an ADB-funded women's health project in which a recent gender assessment found that insufficient effort was being made to recruit and retain female health staff and to carry out behavior change and social mobilization activities.

Source: AMDD, *Making Safe Motherhood A Reality: Report on Year 4 (2003)*.

dation—remain a significant barrier to poor women in accessing health care. Countries in the region are addressing this through universal health insurance schemes or more targeted programs for poor and vulnerable groups, including fee exemptions, free health cards, and reimbursement of health costs from health equity funds.¹⁰³ However, practices of charging informal fees within public health facilities can be entrenched and difficult to undo, and fall hardest on the poorest women and their families. In Bangalore, India, the Public Affairs Center has used consumer surveys and “report cards” to expose the persistent demand for bribes made by health workers in maternity hospitals.¹⁰⁴

Time-saving infrastructure. The UN Millennium Project argues that strategic investments in water and sanitation, energy, and transport systems can substantially reduce the hours that women and girls in rural areas spend on such routine tasks as collection of water and fuel, while also providing significant health and economic benefits. Governments in the region generally recognize the benefits for women and girls of improvements in basic infrastructure, especially water supply and sanitation. However, the ben-

efits of women's participation in the design and maintenance of basic infrastructure are less appreciated, and women are not routinely consulted or involved in basic infrastructure projects. This is due in large part to the limited expertise of government engineering and transport ministries in gender and social analysis and participatory planning, and their tendency to focus mainly on procurement, construction and other “hardware” activities, giving much less attention to community mobilization and other “software” activities. However, with support from external agencies and NGOs, sector ministries and local governments are successfully involving women in the design and construction of basic infrastructure, and as a result these public facilities are equipped to meet the needs of both women and men.

The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) in Bangladesh has become a model for gender-responsive infrastructure development. In recent rural development projects supported by ADB, LGED consulted locally elected female officials on the design and use of various public facilities. Based on input from these officials, the flood refuge centers con-

structed under the projects have separate areas for women; public markets include vendor areas for women traders; local government buildings have separate rooms and toilet facilities for women officials and their constituents; road contractors were required to pay women road workers equal pay for equal work and to provide them with water and toilet facilities; and labor contracting societies were organized for women to work on road maintenance and other project activities.¹⁰⁵ In urban development projects, the involvement of female officials and women's organizations can also improve the quality of the public facilities being built, and ensure that these facilities are used and maintained. In an urban environmental improvement project in Viet Nam, for example, the Vietnam Women's Union is in charge of the household sanitation component of the project, which is expected to mobilize more women to participate in sanitation awareness and other activities.¹⁰⁶ In Mumbai and Pune, India, an organization of poor urban women, Mahila Milan, has worked with NGO partners and government agencies to construct improved housing and public toilets in slum areas, based on Mahila Milan's designs, which address the privacy, security, and other needs of poor women and girls.¹⁰⁷

Property rights. Property rights, particularly related to land, significantly enhance women's economic opportunities and provide security in the event of the death of a spouse, divorce or separation, or land disputes involving other relatives, neighbors, government agencies, or land developers. However, women's entitlement to own land and other assets (such as family businesses) can be limited by customary norms and practices; biased or inconsistent statutes and regulations governing land, marriage, inheritance, contracts, and other matters; biased land reform, registration, and titling programs; lack of awareness or bias among officials involved in land administration and dispute settlement; and lack of awareness among women and men of their property rights. A common flaw in land laws and regulations, and in the procedures for registering and titling land, is the recognition of the "head of household"—generally assumed to be the husband or male elder—as the sole legal owner of family land.¹⁰⁸ MDG progress reports and recent gender assessments confirm the per-

sistence of traditional biases against women's ownership of land, particularly in parts of South Asia, among patrilocal and patrilineal ethnic groups in the GMS and Southeast Asia, and in Pacific countries with strong patrilineal traditions, such as the Fiji Islands. Gender blindness in the implementation of recent land reform programs in several transition economies, especially in Central Asia, has also resulted in significant gender inequalities in rural landownership. Nevertheless, there are promising examples in the region of law and policy reforms, community mobilization and government-nongovernment partnerships to correct these inequities.

In India, an alliance of human rights and women's organizations advocated successfully for amendments in 2005 to the 1956 Hindu Succession Act, which will remove gender inequalities in state laws governing the inheritance of agricultural land by Hindu citizens. Daughters, including married daughters, will now have an equal share in joint family property.¹⁰⁹ The Philippines also amended a 1936 regulation on the sale of public lands, which had prohibited a married woman from applying to purchase or lease public land without her husband's consent. Landownership certificates under the agrarian reform program must now be issued in the name of both husband and wife. In several transition economies in the region, actions have been (or are being) taken to ensure that recent land allocation schemes operate fairly from a gender perspective (see Box 9).

Gender issues related to land tenure arise in a number of other settings, including slum upgrading, resettlement of households in connection with development projects, sale or lease of government-controlled land for private use, and the restoration or relocation of communities after natural disasters or resolution of civil conflicts. It is extremely important to build gender awareness among the government officials administering these programs, and to develop strategies to ensure gender equality in any related land allocations. NGOs and CBOs can also play vital roles in mobilizing both women and men in affected communities. CBOs in India, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, for example, have effectively negotiated with government authorities to acquire land and provide individual or collective tenure rights to their members—

Box 9: Ensuring Gender Equity in Land Privatization in Transition Economies

In the Lao PDR, the Lao Women's Union lobbied effectively to ensure that the new Land Law would protect the traditional rights of ethnic Lao women to inherit family land. As a result, the Land Law expressly provides for the names of both husband and wife to be recorded in the register of family-owned land, and considerable attention has been paid to women's land rights in two land titling projects supported by the World Bank and the Australian Agency for International Development. Data from the first of those projects show success in raising the awareness of government staff and participating communities, with close to 40% of land titles issued to women and about 30% in joint ownership. However, the land titling projects have been limited mainly to urban areas. There has been less attention to gender issues in the allocation of agricultural land, which is governed by different procedures and managed by different government authorities. This gap will be addressed under the new National Strategy for the Advancement of Women (2006–2010).

In other transition countries, efforts are under way to address the bias in earlier land reform programs, which resulted in privatized land being allocated mainly to men, with female-headed households obtaining smaller and inferior land parcels. Tajikistan's land code was amended in 2004, and amendments to the Kyrgyz Republic's land code have been drafted and are under consideration. In Viet Nam, the land law is silent as to which family names should be listed on land-use certificates, but the new law on family and marriage stipulates that land-use certificates must list the names of both husband and wife. However, Viet Nam reports that women's names still appear on only about 2% of existing land-use certificates, and there is no formal program for reissuing the certificates, which would require resources and specific instructions to local officials. In its national MDGs, Viet Nam has included a target to issue land-use certificates to both husbands and wives, which indicates high-level political commitment to continue to address the issue.

Sources: ADB, Lao PDR: Gender, Poverty and the MDGs (2004); UNIFEM, Fact Sheet: On the Agenda - Women's Right to Own Property (2005); UN Country Team in Viet Nam, Millennium Development Goals: Closing the Millennium Gaps (2003).

who are predominantly poor women in slum settlements—in connection with several slum upgrading and resettlement projects.¹¹⁰ In Sri Lanka, some of these organizations are now working with local authorities to rebuild or relocate homes of members in tsunami-affected areas, and to ensure that they have secure tenure.¹¹¹

Employment. Paid employment enhances women's autonomy and security and also finances essential household expenditures on food, education, and health care. However, the returns on women's employment are limited by “gender typing” in postsecondary education and by horizontal and vertical segregation in labor markets, which channel women primarily into lower-skilled, lower-paid jobs with limited chances for promotion. In agriculture and in the informal nonagriculture sector, where most women in the region work, working conditions are strenuous and there is little if any social protection.¹¹²

Especially since the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the line between formal and informal employment for women has blurred, as more manufacturers have downsized and replaced full-time factory jobs with part-time or contract work paid on a piece-rate basis. Even in a factory setting, female workers can have limited rights and protection if they are subcontractors hired by an outside agency, they are migrants without legal status, or the factory is exempted from local labor laws under policies to promote foreign investment and export manufacturing.¹¹³ Lack of public or community-based childcare services also limits women's employment options and forces poor women with small children to rely on subsistence farming or home-based work to supplement family incomes. Nevertheless, there are a number of initiatives under way in the region to improve work opportunities and conditions, especially for poor women.

Most countries in the region have labor laws and regulations in place that support the core labor standards of the International Labour Organization, as well as workplace safety, maternity leave and other employment issues relevant to women. These laws and regulations are not well enforced and generally do not apply to work in agriculture or the informal sector. In export processing zones, more limited labor standards may also apply. However, some countries are pursuing law and policy reforms to address gaps in their labor law frameworks (see Box 10).

Public employment schemes, and paid work on publicly-funded development projects, are important sources of income for poor women, especially in rural areas. In India, 30% of job opportunities under certain wage employment schemes are reserved for women. Studies from Bangladesh and India report high levels of women's participation in employment schemes, although they may be allocated fewer days of work and paid a lower wage than men.¹¹⁴ In basic infrastructure projects, poor women often work on construction crews, but they are typically paid less than men, have only rudimentary toilet facilities and accommodation, and may be subject to harassment or violence. The external agencies that finance infrastructure projects can play an important role in working with their gov-

ernment counterparts to address these problems. For example, in infrastructure projects supported by ADB, civil works contractors are generally required to pay equal wages to women and men, and several recent projects include targets for women's employment and provisions on safe working conditions and facilities for workers. A recent gender assessment of an ADB-supported infrastructure project in Bangladesh found that progress had been made in raising women's construction wages and increasing women's access to more highly skilled work. However, the assessment cautioned that strong commitment and close monitoring by the executing agency would be needed to maintain and improve performance in this area.¹¹⁵

Workers' associations in several countries in the region are playing critical roles in advocating for the rights of their members and also providing a range of support services. The most famous is SEWA in India, which was the first union of informal workers—including both urban and rural—in the world. In addition to advocating law and policy changes, such as India's new national policy on street vendors, SEWA has established a number of affiliates, including a co-operative bank, village-based savings and credit groups, producer cooperatives, and providers of various services to its members (including health

Box 10: Regional Reforms to Strengthen Labor Law Frameworks

In 2004, India adopted a national policy on street vendors, who are mainly women. The policy includes provisions on vendors' legal status, designation of vending zones, promotion of vendor associations, access to credit and social security benefits for vendors, and integration of street vendors in urban zoning and development. In Singapore, the business federation, employers' federation, and national trade union congress recently issued a Code of Responsible Employment Practices, including nondiscrimination in employment on the basis of sex, age, disability, and other factors. The Philippine Economic Zone Authority has established a committee to investigate complaints from workers in economic zones and has set up women's desks in some of these zones. The Philippine Government has also issued guidelines for informal cooperatives and associations to make contributions to the national social security program on behalf of their members. In the People's Republic of China, the law on the protection and rights of women was recently amended to make sexual harassment unlawful. (Recent opinion polls indicate that this is a major workplace problem, especially for women in service industries.) In Viet Nam, a gender equality law is being drafted that is expected to address employment issues related to women. The Mongolian Government plans to introduce new legislation on workplace discrimination.

Sources: UNIFEM, *Progress of the World's Women 2005: Women, Work and Poverty*; national MDG progress reports and reports on implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

care, childcare, insurance, marketing, housing, and basic infrastructure).¹¹⁶ The Asian Women's Union, Filipino Migrant Workers' Union, and Indonesian Migrant Women's Union advocate the rights of Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong, China. The Chinese Working Women Network provides a range of support services to internal women migrants working in export processing zones. Organizations of home-based workers, such as Siyath Foundation in Sri Lanka, provide marketing and sales support to their members, ensuring better prices for their products.¹¹⁷

Recognizing the precariousness of women's wage employment, particularly in low-skilled manufacturing jobs, several countries are developing or expanding programs to retrain laid-off factory workers for other occupations, including jobs in services and self-employment. The Philippines, for example, has established a one-stop shop for training and employment services, including scholarships, access to credit, and job referrals. Cambodia plans to upgrade its "women in development" centers to more full-service women's empowerment centers, which will offer women training in market research, business development, and access to credit so that they can build micro and small enterprises. Malaysia is piloting two new Internet portals for women—one as a general resource link and the other to assist handicraft producers and other small entrepreneurs to market their products and services. In Bangladesh, the national women entrepreneurs' association is involved in developing the Government's new policy on small- and medium-sized enterprises, which will support targeted training, credit, and business development services for women entrepreneurs.

Migrant workers—both internal and cross-border—are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, and have limited access to basic services and virtually no legal protection because of their irregular status. Sending countries, such as the Philippines and Sri Lanka, have established comprehensive support programs for overseas workers, including regulation of employment agencies, pre-departure orientation, and outreach services in their embassies in major destination countries. Bangladesh and Nepal are beginning to introduce similar measures. The Lao PDR and Thailand recently signed a memorandum of understanding to regularize the work sta-

tus of some Laotian migrants. Hong Kong, China, a major destination in the region, requires employers of foreign domestic workers to use a standard employment contract, including provisions on minimum wage and time off, and recognizes migrant workers' unions.¹¹⁸ There is still much more that regional countries can do to regularize the status of migrant workers—including their own citizens who migrate from rural to urban areas—and to ensure that they have access to health care and other basic services, as well as legal protection from exploitation and abuse.

Violence against women and girls. Gender-based violence—including domestic violence, sexual assault and sexual harassment outside the home, and trafficking in women and girls—is a major cause of female death and disability in the region, and a major contributor to women's economic and social disempowerment. It inflicts substantial direct and indirect costs on women, their families and communities, including health-related costs, lost workdays and reduced productivity, and negative impacts on children. Because of its pervasiveness and complexity, multiple strategies have been developed to address the problem, including school and community awareness programs, law enforcement measures, health and other support services for victims, and improvements in public facilities to increase women's safety.¹¹⁹

In Asia and the Pacific, violence against women in its various forms has received increased attention over the past 10 years, due in large part to the documentation and advocacy of women's organizations. A recent survey by the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) found that, as of 2003, most countries in the region had criminal penalties for rape and sexual assault; 7 countries had legislation on domestic violence, with 13 others in the drafting process; and 9 countries had legislation on sexual harassment.¹²⁰ Some countries have also legislated against specific forms of violence, such as dowry deaths in India and acid attacks in Bangladesh. Some countries have recently introduced legislation against human trafficking, especially of women and children, and regional frameworks to combat trafficking are now in place in the GMS, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Countries have also adopted various strategies to address gen-

der-based violence in a comprehensive way. Bangladesh, for example, has carried out public awareness campaigns, established crisis centers and a hot-line system for vulnerable women, reserved certain public buses for women, and set up special tribunals to try particularly egregious cases of violence against women. Several countries have set up women's police desks to deal with female victims of violence. Like Bangladesh, Thailand reserves certain public buses for women, and India reserves certain train cars for women. In such countries as Cambodia and Timor-Leste, local government bodies are specifically mandated to address cases of domestic violence. NGO initiatives in Cambodia and the Philippines are enlisting men to campaign against gender-based violence and to intervene in specific cases of abuse.¹²¹ While many promising initiatives are being taken, they are often not adequately funded, or are compromised by general budget cutbacks. UNIFEM, for example, reports that the women's police desks in Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand are at risk of being shut down because of understaffing, and the Philippines' plan to open crisis centers throughout the country has not been carried through.¹²²

In addition to advocating legislation and other government action against gender-based violence, women's organizations in virtually every country in the region are engaged in community awareness-raising and providing vital support services to victims of violence. Their activities include creative use of media (including posters, pamphlets, theater, videos, and radio spots) to raise public awareness about the problem; sensitizing police, border officials, prosecutors and judges to take gender-based violence seriously and to deal sensitively with victims; training teachers to identify children who are victims of abuse; working with local officials and traditional dispute settlement bodies to deal more sensitively with violence cases; running crisis centers and hotlines for victims and potential victims of violence; and providing legal services to victims.¹²³ Many of these initiatives have been very effective on a small scale, but need to be expanded with strong support from national and provincial governments.

There are also opportunities to reduce the risk of violence through appropriate planning and construction of public facilities, such as markets,

train stations, bus terminals and bus stops, public restrooms, and street lighting. The involvement of women's organizations and women in local government can ensure that women's safety concerns are incorporated in these designs. The CPTED¹²⁴ methodology, which has been used successfully by urban planners in other regions, could also be useful, especially in urban development projects.¹²⁵

Women's representation in political bodies. The representation of women in public decision making, especially through elected bodies, is an important aspect of women's empowerment and democratic governance. It ensures that women's concerns are taken into account in decision making, and can improve the transparency and responsiveness of government officials, especially at the local level.¹²⁶ However, traditional biases against women's involvement in public life, entrenched interests of community and political party leaders (who are mainly men), and women's own lack of confidence and experience in the public arena prevent many women from running or being elected to public office. In Asia and the Pacific, several countries have addressed this inequality by legislating reserved seats for women in the national parliament and/or locally elected bodies. These include Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan in South Asia, the PRC and Taipei, China in East Asia, and Indonesia and the Philippines in Southeast Asia.¹²⁷ In others, legislated or voluntary quotas on party lists have been used to increase women's representation. The Lao PDR and Viet Nam, for example, have achieved relatively high levels of women's representation in their national parliaments through quotas based on statutes and government directives. Timor-Leste's success in electing a relatively large percentage of women in its first elections was due in large part to the advocacy of women's groups, which persuaded political parties to include more female candidates on their lists. In general, systems of proportionate representation, in which there are statutory or voluntary quotas for women on party lists and every other slot is assigned to a woman, are the most successful in increasing women's representation.¹²⁸

In national parliaments, a relatively small number of female legislators can have limited influence to lobby for legislative action on behalf

of women, or to comment on other proposed legislation or the national budget from a gender perspective. They are also more likely to be appointed to committees on education, health, and women's and children's affairs, with little or no voice in committees on taxation and expenditures, agriculture, commerce, and security. Female legislators also may not have a united view on issues relevant to women. However, the experience of such countries as the Philippines shows the effectiveness of coalitions between like-minded legislators (both women and men), women's organizations, and the national focal agency for gender in promoting law reforms on electoral politics, business opportunities for women, sexual harassment in the workplace, gender-based violence, trafficking and other issues, as well as gender-responsive planning and budgets.¹²⁹ Women's caucuses, such as Thai Women Parliamentarians and the caucus recently formed in the Lao PDR national assembly, can also be effective vehicles for promoting gender concerns. Regional organizations, such as the Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics, also provide training and facilitate networking and information sharing among female parliamentarians.¹³⁰

At the local level, female elected officials have greater opportunity to improve the delivery of basic services and other government programs, especially for poor and socially excluded households; to ensure that family and other local disputes are resolved fairly; to promote community-based initiatives on such issues as domestic violence, drug abuse, and trafficking; and to provide positive role models for young women and girls. These actions contribute directly and substantially to the achievement of virtually all the MDGs at the local level. Men's traditional involvement in community decision making, the dominance of local elites (primarily male), and women's limited literacy and lack of experience in public office can inhibit women from standing for election or being elected, and can undermine their credibility and effectiveness once in office. However, experience from several South Asian countries demonstrates that elected women can work effectively even in conservative rural areas, especially when they receive capacity building and other support from local NGOs and work together with local women's groups, and

when local male leaders also receive sensitivity training (see Box 11).

There are many other local bodies in which gender balance is vital to ensure that both women's and men's interests are represented, and to achieve better development outcomes including progress toward the MDGs. These include municipal authorities, village development committees, dispute settlement committees, local health committees, school committees, water user groups, sanitation committees, and groups for managing community land and other resources. Although there are variations between and within countries, women's representation in these local bodies is often low, for many of the same reasons that limit their participation in legislative bodies. Unfortunately, the gender-balance requirements for these institutions, if any, tend to be ad hoc, and therefore women's interests and perspectives are not consistently reflected in local decision making. It is worth noting that virtually all countries in the region have endorsed the Beijing Platform for Action, which calls for a minimum of 30% women in decision-making positions. To implement this commitment, several countries in the region including Malaysia, Nepal, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Viet Nam—have set general targets for increasing women's participation in public decision making at all levels. To implement the Beijing Platform and also contribute to progress toward the MDGs, it would be desirable for all countries in the region to set general targets of at least 30% for women's participation in decision-making bodies at all levels, including local institutions. In rural areas where women's mobility and public interactions are restricted by conservative social norms, women's self-help groups and other women-only groups could be given more formal voice in local decision making. External agencies and NGOs involved in local development projects have important roles to play in supporting the participation of women in the local institutions with which they work, and providing training and other support so that these women can gain confidence and function more effectively.

Supportive Institutions

Strategic initiatives to reduce gender gaps and empower women and girls are more effective

Box 11: Strengthening the Capacity of Locally Elected Women Officials

In Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), a national nongovernment organization (NGO), has provided training to female union parishad members as well as the (male) union parishad chairs in several poor districts. In one capacity-building project supported by the Asian Development Bank, the female participants received training on union parishad procedures; the union budget and allocation process; their role as union members; skills such as running meetings, negotiation, and mediation; available government and NGO services; family and property laws; and the procedures in local arbitration courts (shalish). Following the training, the female councilors became much more active in identifying vulnerable community members for government safety net programs, accessing development resources for rural infrastructure projects, and arranging training, microcredit, and work opportunities for poor women in the community. About 60% also participated in shalish, which encouraged more women and poor people to come forward with their grievances.

The project also facilitated the setting up of local development forums, in which elected women and their constituents could meet with local representatives of line ministries and NGOs to discuss ways to match local needs with available programs. These forums provided key opportunities for the elected women to present their constituents' concerns directly to government officials, and enhanced their authority and credibility within their communities. In addition, the project recommended changes in the local government ordinance and related procedures to clarify the functions of elected women and men, their participation in local government committees, and other matters.

Other mechanisms for increasing women's voice in local government, which have been used successfully in some states in India, include women's quorum requirements for village assemblies and earmarking of local development budgets for women's development activities (selected and managed by women's groups). In Cambodia, the planning and budget committees for commune councils must include a woman and man from each village.

Sources: ADB, *Gender and Governance Issues in Local Government: Regional Report on Technical Assistance in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan* (2004); UNRISD, *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World* (p. 199) (2005).

when they are supported by equitable and responsive institutions. These include law and policy frameworks, government planning and budget processes, accountability and enforcement mechanisms, and partnerships with women's organizations and other key actors. Regional partnerships can also play a key role, especially on gender issues that have cross-border implications. This subsection considers some of the gender-responsive institutions already in place in Asia and the Pacific. The discussion draws heavily on countries' recent progress reports on their implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Law and policy frameworks. Virtually all countries in the region provide constitutional or statutory guarantees of gender equality, nondiscrimination and protection of women's rights. However, there are still gaps in these frameworks and weaknesses in enforcement. Several coun-

tries are still in the process of drafting new laws on gender equality, domestic violence, and other matters. Other countries are revisiting and strengthening laws already in place. Malaysia, for example, has had a domestic violence law in place since 1994, and is now considering measures to improve the issuance of protective orders and provide counseling to victims. Some countries are also in the process of identifying and amending discriminatory provisions in other laws. The Republic of Korea, for example, has already corrected over 770 laws and regulations, and earlier this year amended its civil law to abolish the traditional family registry system, which only allowed men to be registered as family heads. In Nepal, amendments to 137 discriminatory laws have been drafted and are pending approval. Recent land reforms in some of the transition economies illustrate the risk that new laws, drafted without adequate consideration of

gender issues, can inadvertently introduce new forms of discrimination. Kyrgyz Republic is addressing this issue by now requiring that all proposed laws be analyzed from a gender perspective. The land reform cases also illustrate the importance of considering the traditional norms and practices that may conflict with or undermine a particular law reform, and addressing these through awareness-raising activities involving both men and women. The land-titling projects in the Lao PDR, for example, have included gender-awareness activities for the government staff involved, as well as for women and men in the project areas.

Virtually all countries in the region have also introduced policy frameworks to promote gender equality and empower women, based on the Beijing Platform for Action. The framework frequently includes a strategy or policy, as well as a detailed plan of action. In India, several states have established their own policies on women's empowerment. Pakistan is also pursuing innovative gender policy reforms at both the federal and provincial levels (see Box 12).

Countries have established various mechanisms to implement their gender policies and action plans. Common structures include a government-wide committee or commission to provide high-level support; a ministry or department to coordinate implementation of the policy at the national level and with local governments; a network of gender focal points in other key ministries to ensure that the policy is mainstreamed in their activities; and a gender working group or network to coordinate with donors and NGOs. While these mechanisms look promising on paper, most countries report weaknesses in their operation, due to inadequate staffing and funding of the focal ministry or department, its insufficient policy leverage with other key ministries, and limited commitment and capacity in the other ministries to address gender concerns.

Several countries have adjusted their gender policy mechanisms to overcome these weaknesses. In the Republic of Korea, for example, the Women's Policy Coordination Committee is chaired by the Prime Minister, which signals high-level political support for the Women's Development Act and Basic Plan for Women's Policies. Thailand recently designated chief gen-

der executive officers—high-ranking officials in each ministry and department—to oversee the development of plans for promoting gender equality within their areas. In Viet Nam, 45 ministries/agencies and 61 of 64 provinces have established their own committees for the advancement of women, which coordinate with the National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam (NCFAW) and the Vietnam Women's Union. NCFAW conducts annual missions to monitor the gender-related activities of ministries/agencies, provinces and cities and reports its findings directly to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister then requests the relevant agencies to address the issues raised by the NCFAW in its report. This structure promotes accountability across ministries and levels of government for implementation of the National Strategy and Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women. In some countries, key sector ministries are also developing specific gender strategies for their sector. In Cambodia, for example, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has developed a gender education policy and gender mainstreaming strategy, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is now developing a gender strategy through an agriculture sector development program supported by ADB. In India and the Philippines, the earmarking of a fixed percentage of appropriations for gender-related activities has also improved the incentives for sector ministries and local governments to implement the national gender policy (discussed further below).

National planning and budget processes. As a cross-sectoral issue, gender equality and women's empowerment should be fully addressed in national development plans, poverty reduction strategies, expenditure frameworks and budgets. Until recently, national gender policies and action plans have been given relatively little attention in these important processes, or gender has been treated as a separate “sector” with little spillover to other sectors and areas. For example, the national poverty reduction strategies recently developed by countries in the region typically discuss the relationship between poverty and gender, and identify gender issues in such traditional sectors as education and health, but they rarely analyze gender issues in other key sectors, such as agriculture

Box 12: Pakistan Gender Reform Action Plans and Gender Support Programme

To address the structural barriers to gender equality in Pakistan in a more comprehensive manner, the Ministry of Women Development and provincial women's departments have prepared federal and provincial gender reform action plans (GRAPs) in consultation with other ministries, provincial governments, parliamentarians, nongovernment organizations and development agencies. The GRAPs include measures to improve women's representation in political and administrative structures, and to change planning and budgetary processes in order to narrow gender gaps in public expenditure and the delivery of basic services. Thus far, the federal cabinet and the provincial cabinets of Balochistan, Punjab and Sindh have approved their respective GRAPs. The implementation of the GRAPs is being supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) through its larger devolution support program, and by the Canadian International Development Agency and other development partners. A recent gender assessment found that the inclusion of the GRAPs in larger governance reform programs gave greater prominence to gender issues at the policy level, but that the GRAPs still faced many challenges in implementation, especially in conservative regions such as the Northwest Frontier Province.

Through the Gender Support Programme (GSP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and bilateral development agencies are also providing technical support to the Government of Pakistan in the areas of women's political participation, economic empowerment, creation of an enabling social environment, and institutional strengthening. Some of the specific initiatives under the GSP include (1) drafting a strategic framework for the Women's Parliamentary Caucus; (2) supporting the training and networking of women councilors through a Women's Political School; (3) supporting gender-responsive budget analysis at national and sub-national levels; (4) supporting alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to deal with cases of gender-based violence in a more equitable and sensitive manner; and (4) strengthening the capacity of the National Commission on the Status of Women. The GSP builds on the achievements of UNDP's previous Gender Equality Umbrella Project, which included the training of over 27,000 women councilors elected to local government in 2001, drafting of legislation mandating gender review and analysis of proposed government projects, initiation of gender-sensitive budget processes within the Ministry of Finance, and a comprehensive social audit on abuse against women. The GSP is closely linked with the UNDP governance program in Pakistan, and coordinates closely with ADB on the GRAP implementation process (mentioned above) and with bilateral donors and civil society partners.

Sources: ADB, Gender Equality Results in ADB Projects: Pakistan Country Report (2005); UNDP, Summary: Gender Support Programme; UNDP, Gender Support Programme: Self-Assessment Report (2005).

and basic infrastructure. They typically include a “gender” section, based on the national gender policy and action plan, but do not include a cost estimate of the activities proposed in the “gender” section. The UN Millennium Project has recommended that countries revise or update their national poverty reduction strategies (or national development plans) to align these strategies better with the MDGs, and fully cost the interventions needed to achieve the MDGs (or more ambitious national goals). If countries follow this recommendation, it will provide an opportunity to integrate gender concerns better in all key sectors supported by the strategy, to identify gender-related targets and indicators, and to cost the gender-related activities outlined

in the strategy.¹³¹ To succeed, however, it will be extremely important to involve the national gender ministry or department in key phases of the process, and to ensure that women's organizations and other civil society groups supporting gender equality have meaningful opportunities to participate.

The costing of interventions needed to achieve the MDGs—including the gender-specific goals—also provides an opportunity to correct the serious underfunding of national gender policies and action plans. Several countries in the region already have some experience in applying gender analysis to public revenues and expenditures. The Philippines, and more recently India, have gone further and mandated the ear-

marking of expenditures for gender-related activities. Since 1995, all departments and agencies in the Philippine Government have been required to allocate at least 5% of their appropriations to projects designed to address gender issues. In its Ninth Plan, India introduced a Women's Component Plan, which earmarks 30% of funds under various development and welfare schemes for women beneficiaries. A detailed costing of the major interventions needed to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment under Goal 3 would complement these gender budget provisions by identifying activities that are not yet adequately funded, especially in non-traditional sectors and on such issues as political representation and violence against women.

Accountability and enforcement. Many laws that promote gender equality and women's empowerment—including labor laws, property and inheritance laws, laws establishing a minimum age of marriage, and laws against gender-based violence and trafficking—are not fully implemented or enforced. This can be due to a lack of staff and other resources in the enforcement agencies (such as labor ministries and land administration offices), lack of gender awareness and sensitivity on the part of law enforcement officials and court officers, women's lack of awareness of their rights or their lack of power and resources to seek legal protection, and tension between the formal laws and traditional norms and practices. There is increasing recognition in the region of these barriers to justice, especially for poor and socially excluded women. Where new laws or regulations are being introduced—for example, the new land law in Cambodia—it is now much more common to see training for government officials and community-awareness activities included in the law reform program. Many NGOs in several countries have also been providing legal literacy and legal aid services, especially to poor and marginalized women. Special courts and other tribunals have also been set up, for example in Bangladesh, to provide faster and more accessible relief to poor women, especially in cases of violence. There are also initiatives under way to address gender bias in the judiciary and law enforcement. In the Philippines, for example, a Committee for Gender-Responsiveness in the Judiciary has developed a 5-year plan to mainstream gender concerns in

the judiciary, including gender training of judges and a gender review of judicial policies. In Pakistan, reforms of the judiciary and law enforcement are being implemented under an access-to-justice program supported by ADB.

Accountability mechanisms are also needed in order to provide incentives for government officials and others to implement gender-equitable laws and policies. As noted above, some countries, such as Viet Nam, have built an accountability mechanism into their policy framework by providing for annual audits of the performance of ministries and agencies, and reporting of the results to high-level officials. Women's organizations and other civil society groups can also make government officials more accountable through monitoring and audit activities. As noted in Section V.B, the Public Affairs Center in Bangalore, India, has used patient surveys and "report cards" to publicize the persistent demand for informal payments in maternity hospitals, and to generally measure the quality, availability and affordability of other basic services. In Kerala, India, women's groups have audited the implementation and impact of anti-poverty programs implemented by local government.¹³² In the Philippines, 400 local councils of women are monitoring local government unit policies and programs.

As noted in the earlier discussion of Goal 8, donor support for gender equality initiatives in the region is uneven, and tends to be concentrated in the education and health sectors to the neglect of other sectors. More consistent tracking of donors' gender-related programs is needed to ensure that donors follow through on their own policy commitments to gender mainstreaming, and that they are providing appropriate and effective support to the gender equality goals of their developing country partners. Civil society organizations can play important roles in ensuring that donors are accountable for the gender-related results of their assistance programs, for example, through independent gender audits and assessments of donor-supported programs.

Partnerships. Some of the main challenges to achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls across the region reside in deep-seated assumptions about women's and men's capabilities and roles, entrenched practices (such as early marriage), and community tolerance of

domestic violence and other forms of abuse. Traditional norms also influence the drafting and implementation of laws, regulations and policies, and shape the attitudes of government officials and private sector employers. Especially in rural areas, women are often unaware of their rights and entitlements under government programs intended to benefit them, or do not have the mobility and resources to claim these benefits and protection. In these circumstances, community awareness raising, social mobilization, and behavior change activities involving both men and women are essential to any interventions intended to improve women's access to basic services, income-generating opportunities, or participation in local decision making. Most government ministries have limited skills and incentives to implement these "software" activities at the local level. However, women's organizations and other NGOs and CBOs have a comparative advantage in precisely these areas. In virtually every developing country in the region, these organizations have piloted innovative approaches to the delivery of health services, informal education, formation of self-help groups, legal empowerment, inclusion of women in community decision making and development projects, and campaigns to promote "social goods," such as girls' education, family planning, safe sex and safe migration, and to discourage "social bads," such as domestic violence and trafficking. Sector ministries and local governments in many countries have sought out these organizations as partners to improve their own outreach and services, especially in poor and remote communities. Community-level partnerships between government and civil society groups experienced in working with poor women and men should be a key feature of any future interventions to improve women's capabilities, opportunities, security, and rights.

In their recent reports on progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, several countries in the region also confirm the importance of strategic alliances between the government's focal ministry or department for gender and women's organizations. These partnerships are particularly useful for proposing law reforms and policy changes, and improving the

responsiveness of government programs and government officials to the needs of poor and socially excluded women. For example, in the Republic of Korea, a campaign by women's organizations to abolish the discriminatory family registry system persuaded the Ministry of Gender Equality to establish a task force, whose recommendations led to the introduction of a bill in the National Assembly to abolish the system. For greater impact, these partnerships also should extend to parliamentarians (both women and men). In its progress report on implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Ministry of Women's Affairs of Cambodia acknowledges that it will need to lobby more effectively with parliamentarians when it resubmits its draft law on violence against women. The UN system (particularly UNDP and UNIFEM), the development banks, and bilateral development agencies have also been key partners with the national focal institutions for gender, providing both financial and technical support. Going forward, it will be important for these external agencies to help the focal institutions build their technical capacity to participate in national processes, such as the development of an MDG-based national poverty reduction strategy (or development plan) and medium-term expenditure frameworks. The recent success of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Cambodia in influencing the national poverty reduction strategy and the Cambodian MDGs, and its involvement in the piloting of medium-term expenditure frameworks with other key ministries, demonstrate the potential of these focal institutions to have an impact at the national policy level, despite their limited resources and political capital.

Regional initiatives. Virtually all the inter-governmental bodies in Asia and the Pacific support the regional and national goals of gender equality and women's empowerment through their existing programs. UNESCAP convened the recent review of regional progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, and its Gender and Development Section provides research, technical, and networking support to member countries to assist them in implementing the Beijing Platform and CEDAW. About 40% of ADB loans to its developing member countries have

specific gender goals or seek to mainstream gender concerns; it also provides gender-related technical assistance.¹³³ Other regional focal points on gender are the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Gender Focal Point Network and Women Leaders' Network, the ASEAN Committee on Women, the Pacific Women's Bureau, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Autonomous Advocacy Group of Prominent Women Personalities. The APEC Gender Focal Point Network and the Pacific Women's Bureau, in particular, have supported projects to disseminate good practices in gender integration. The SAARC Autonomous Advocacy Group is advocating greater attention to improving women's educational and economic opportunities and ending violence against women in South Asia.

In recent years, the main regional bodies have expanded their activities related to various social development issues, including human

resource development, HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases, food security, employment, migration, and trafficking. All these areas are relevant to the achievement of the MDGs and all have clear gender dimensions. The main gender focus to date has been in the area of trafficking, including the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution and the ASEAN Declaration Against Trafficking in Persons Particularly Women and Children. (Six countries also recently signed a memorandum of understanding on Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons in the GMS.) Attention to gender concerns has been less consistent in other areas. To maximize the social impact of regional cooperation, regional organizations should include gender analysis and ensure gender balance in all of their cooperative activities (including scholarship, training, and exchange programs). These principles of gender integration would also increase the social benefits



of other initiatives, such as the regional economic cooperation programs supported by ADB in Central Asia, the GMS, and South Asia.

As noted earlier, the Asia and Pacific region houses a wealth of successful experiences in closing gender gaps and empowering women and girls. Bilateral cooperation and exchanges facilitate the sharing of these diverse experiences within the region. Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand have been particularly active in sharing their expertise in gender integration through their south-south technical cooperation programs, and the Philippines has proposed a regional training institution to expand and institutionalize these programs. Successful NGOs, such as BRAC, Grameen Bank, and SEWA, have also become models and resources for NGOs in other countries in the region, providing training, participating in staff exchanges and sharing good practices and other resources. The UN system, the development banks, and bilateral agencies also have supported a wide range of bilateral and regional exchanges of gender expertise and experience. For example, the World Bank recently hosted a regional workshop on good practices in integrating gender concerns in national poverty reduction strategies, including both government and nongovernment participants. ADB recently sponsored a series of peer training workshops in which (male) government officials from several countries shared their experiences in mainstreaming gender concerns in rural development projects. These types of exchanges should be continued and expanded.

Several regional NGOs and NGO networks

also support research, training and advocacy on gender issues. Asia Pacific Women's Watch, for example, links women's organizations and researchers from the region who are monitoring countries' implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and recently organized the regional NGO forum for the ten-year review of the Beijing Platform. The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development and International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific support women's organizations in promoting and protecting women's rights and monitoring countries' implementation of CEDAW and other international human rights instruments. As mentioned earlier, the Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics provides training and networking support to women parliamentarians and others in the region. These and other organizations and networks are key mechanisms for sharing regional expertise and experience, and supporting country-level initiatives, to promote gender equality and empower women.

In recent years, governments, the UN system, regional bodies and NGOs have begun to coordinate much more effectively to address human trafficking as an urgent regional problem with clear gender impacts, for example, through the UN interagency project to combat trafficking in the GMS. A similar coordinated approach would also be beneficial to address other regional issues with gender implications, such as regional harmonization of skills training and accreditation, the regularization and support of migrant workers, and control of HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases.

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