Gender Equality
Bridging the Gap

Asian Development Bank
Why Invest in Gender Equality

Gender Inequality has significant economic and social costs.

Rapid economic growth in Asia and the Pacific has sharply reduced the number of people living in extreme poverty. Despite this, gender disparities still exist in girls’ school enrollment and completion rates, access to health and nutrition services, employment and income opportunities, and participation in decision making and political institutions.

Some estimates suggest the region is losing more than $40 billion per year as a result of women’s limited access to employment opportunities and due to gender gaps in education.

Gender Equality Matters

The empowerment of women promises enormous gains.

Gender equality needs to be pursued both for social and equity considerations and because it makes good economic sense. Underinvestments in women are missed opportunities to correct gender disparities and to capture and harness the economic and human capital potential of women—that is, 50% of the country’s population. Investments in women and gender equality will deliver higher growth rates, faster poverty reduction, and better education and health outcomes for household members, especially children.

More than 100 million people could be lifted out of poverty if women had the same access to productive resources as men.

In countries, such as India, Indonesia, and Malaysia, the gross domestic product would increase by up to 2%–4% annually, if women’s employment rates were raised to 70%, from 30% at present.

Temporary special measures, and social protection measures, are necessary to accelerate progress for women. This means giving women greater access to resources, goods, money, and employment opportunities.

1 UNESCAP. 2007. Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific.
Facts, Figures, Challenges*

Food Security
There are 600 million malnourished people in Asia and the Pacific, and most of them are female.

Missing Women
Close to 100 million women are estimated to be “missing” due to pre-birth sex selection and male preference, combined with discriminatory treatment and sheer neglect in health and nutrition. The male–female sex ratio has widened in some countries in the region. More boys than girls are born in Asia than in any other region of the world.

Education
While gender gaps in primary education have been substantially reduced, gender parity in secondary education still remains a challenge.

Labor and Employment
In Asia and the Pacific, only 36% of women aged 15 and over are in the labor force. In South Asia, only 20% of women are in paid employment outside agriculture—the lowest rate among the world’s regions. With about 60% of the world’s poor living in the region, women remain more vulnerable to poverty than men because they earn less and have limited economic opportunities. In South Asia, 80% of all jobs for women are as self-employed persons or as unpaid family workers.

Money Matters
The earnings gap between women and men is wider in Asian countries than in Latin American countries. In Bangladesh, women’s cash wages are, on average, half those of men; in Nepal, women’s daily wage is 72% of the male wage; and, in Mongolia, women earn 80% of the male wage.

Violence against Women
Only about half the countries in Asia and the Pacific have adopted laws on domestic violence. More than 40% of women in Bangladesh and Samoa, and 60% in Kiribati and Solomon Islands, have experienced physical violence by their intimate partners. In Papua New Guinea, the figure is close to two-thirds.

Land, Inheritance, and Property Rights
Across Asia and the Pacific, women are disadvantaged by statutory, formal, and customary laws on inheritance and property rights. There are few women farm owners in the region despite the fact that 65% of women in South Asia, and 40% in East Asia, are employed in agriculture.

Power and Voice
Women hold only 18% of legislative seats in Asia, and 15% in the Pacific. This limits their power and voice.

Maternal Health
Two-thirds of countries in Asia and the Pacific are “offtrack” for reducing maternal mortality. In South Asia, more women die in childbirth—500 for every 100,000 live births—than in any other part of the world, except Sub-Saharan Africa. Three out of the six countries that accounted for more than 50% of all maternal deaths in 2008 were in Asia and the Pacific. About 44% of global maternal deaths occur in Asia and the Pacific. South Asia has the world’s second highest maternal mortality ratio after Sub-Saharan Africa.

Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS
In Asia and the Pacific, between 1990 and 2007, the female proportion of adults living with AIDS nearly doubled—to 29%.

Gender and the MDGs
The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 on Gender Equality, and MDG 5 on Maternal Health, will not be achieved in Asia and the Pacific. This is a cause for great concern.

ADB’s Strategy 2020

The long-term strategic framework—Strategy 2020—of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) recognizes that gender equality and women’s empowerment are critical for achieving economic growth, reducing poverty, and supporting socially inclusive development.

- Strategy 2020 includes “promoting gender equity” as one of the five drivers of change.
- The corporate results framework to measure performance includes concrete numerical gender mainstreaming targets to be met by 2012. Gender performance is tracked and reported annually.

Policy on Gender and Development

ADB’s Policy on Gender and Development (GAD) is the guiding framework for gender and development activities. The Policy adopts gender mainstreaming as the key strategy for promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment.

The Policy requires gender equality considerations to be addressed across the full range of ADB operations—from country strategies to the design and implementation of gender-inclusive projects and programs.

Putting Policy into Action

ADB’s Gender and Development Plan of Action 2008–2012 is the road map for translating the GAD Policy into concrete actions and programs. The Plan of Action prioritizes three areas of action: country strategy and projects, capacity development and policy support, and organizational effectiveness.
ADB Results

Gender Mainstreaming Targets for 2012

ADB has set project gender mainstreaming targets to be met by 2012, to accelerate progress toward meeting the gender equality and women’s empowerment goals.

- 40% of all ADB projects
- 50% of Asian Development Fund projects

In ADB, projects defined as “gender mainstreaming” refer to projects that explicitly and directly support gender equality and/or women’s empowerment objectives through access to social services, economic and financial resources and opportunities, basic rural and urban infrastructure, and/or enhancing voices and rights.

Gender mainstreaming performance is measured by assigning gender categories to all ADB projects. A four-tier project gender categorization system has been developed to assess the gender-responsiveness of projects. Based on the gender content, projects are assigned the following categories: (i) gender theme, (ii) effective gender mainstreaming, (iii) some gender benefits, and (iv) no gender elements. Only the first two categories are counted as “gender mainstreaming” as these projects directly support gender equality and women’s empowerment goals.

In 2010, ADB met its 2012 gender mainstreaming targets. Approximately 42% of all and 53% of Asian Development Fund operations were categorized as “gender mainstreaming.” When projects with "some gender benefits" are added, 86% of ADB projects addressed gender issues.

ADB’s Gender Performance 2006–2010

![Graph showing ADB Projects with Gender Mainstreaming](chart.png)
Mainstreaming Gender

ADB promotes gender mainstreaming across all operations—country strategies and programs, economic and sector work, and technical assistance and loan and grant projects.

Engendering Infrastructure

Breaking New Ground:
Gender in Urban Mass Transit Project

Safety, security, and affordability are critical considerations in designing gender-inclusive urban mass transit projects. Well-lit metro stations, women-only carriages, ticketing systems for multiple short trips, and gender-friendly physical design contribute to promoting greater utilization of public transport systems by women. The Ho Chi Minh City Mass Rapid Transit Program in Viet Nam has been designed to promote safe and secure physical mobility of women, provide women with better income-earning and employment opportunities, and allow women to better manage their domestic and child-caring responsibilities. The gender design features include targets of 20% construction and 30% station jobs for women; dedicated waiting spaces for women on platforms, shop spaces for female-owned businesses, women-only carriages with additional child seating and storage space for prams/shopping, secure street lighting around stations, and easy access drop-off and pick-up points; ticketing systems and train schedules to suit multiple trips and intermodal transport usage; marketing to women as metro users; gender capacity development for project staff; and special attention to households headed by females in livelihood restoration support after resettlement.
Lighting Up Women’s Lives

Women in Papua New Guinea (PNG) confront serious challenges, such as giving birth in poorly lit health posts, performing the strenuous and time-consuming task of collecting firewood, cooking in smoky kitchens, and have limited skills for employment and income generation. An energy project is changing all this by giving women a voice in decision making and providing skills training for income generation. The PNG Town Electrification Investment Program includes provision for 30% female participation in community consultations, skills training for village committees and households (minimum 50% women), 50% female participation in village power and water committees, jobs for women in project construction and ongoing maintenance, equal pay for equal work, an HIV/AIDS awareness campaign, and gender awareness and capacity-building training for the energy utility. The power and water committees are important conduits for influencing and shaping the governance and use of energy and water supply for the future.
Making Roads Work for Women in Cambodia

Gender issues in road construction are being tackled through gender-responsive project design to create employment opportunities for women, reduce women’s work burdens, and provide them with faster and easier access to essential education and health services. The design of the Rural Roads Improvement Project includes provisions for women’s employment in road construction and maintenance by setting targets for hiring women and reserving small contracts for post-construction road maintenance works. Road shoulders are designed with sealed surfaces to enable carts with wheels to reduce the burden on women and girls who haul water in rural areas. Speed bumps to slow traffic through villages, road safety signage, and community-based road safety campaigns with at least 50% women community facilitators will help reduce traffic accidents. To address potential downside impacts of road corridors, the project includes an HIV/AIDS and human trafficking prevention program to be conducted during and after construction. Vulnerability mapping, emergency management, and early warning systems for climate change adaptation will involve women in the planning and operation of the systems, as well as in community-based work programs, such as planting and caring for roadside trees, for eventual climate change adaptation.
Economically Empowering Women

Bangladesh—More Cash from Different Crops

Spinach, beans, ginger, and mangoes are just some of the “new” crops providing more than 250,000 small farmer families (more than half of whom are women) with increased incomes, extension services, new technologies, skills training, and access to microcredit and up-to-date price information. The Northwest Crop Diversification Project (NCDP) is helping households switch from growing traditional rice to cultivating more lucrative crops.

Hazera Begum, who has three children, earns about $45 a month from her new enterprise—producing eggplants, spinach, country beans, and other vegetables. That is double the amount that her husband earns as a rickshaw driver. “We are very happy now, as my children can go to school. We have renovated our house, and I am looking for an extra lot to produce leeks, tomatoes, and other high-value vegetables,” she said, adding that she was also selling compost soil to other project farmers.

The NCDP is helping women and their families to maximize returns and increase the output and quality of produce. Physical infrastructure is being developed with improvements to market access roads and the construction of new markets with special facilities and selling spaces for women vendors. Training of women in marketing management has also been pioneered. A key element of this project was to empower 100,000 women farmers by creating Small Farmer Groups (SFGs).

Almost 51% of SFGs were women’s groups, about 50% of beneficiary farmers were women, and about 51% of those receiving loans were women. In Gochirampur village, where the project beneficiaries are nearly all women, weekly meetings are held where they can discuss their enterprises, pay back loans, and talk about other issues of concern.

“These weekly meetings give us opportunities to talk about our children’s education, health, irrigation, and other matters, and we try to help each other solve problems,” said 40-year-old Zaheda Islam. “With this advice from other women, I have been able to improve my business and, for the first time, I have been able to engage in discussion with my husband about important family matters.”

Credit Unions Support Women’s Businesses in Uzbekistan

Rana Khalilova had no credit history so banks would not lend her money to fulfill her dream of owning a grocery store. So she approached the credit union and secured a loan in no time. She realized her dream; expanded her business to include a beauty salon, and a car repair and spare parts shop; and now employs 15 people.

In Uzbekistan, credit unions supported under the Small and Microfinance Development Project have enabled many women like Rana Khalilova to borrow money for starting new businesses and for other income-generating activities. Khalilova is a member of the Osiyo Trust, the largest credit union in the country. Although she can now borrow from banks at a lower interest rate, Khalilova prefers to stay with the credit union because she gets good advice on business matters from its staff. Another female credit union member said that a big advantage of credit unions is that they can process small loans in just 1 or 2 hours.

The Small and Microfinance Development Project has worked closely with the Association of Business Women, which participated in the design of the project to facilitate women’s involvement and ensure projects benefits also flowed to women. As a result, the project has been instrumental in helping Uzbek women access credit for their businesses and microenterprises, and obtain financial and business advice—thus economically empowering women.
Jobs for the Girls: Closing the Skills Gap in the Lao PDR

Jobs for the girls—hairdressers, hospitality, and home economics or mechanics, welders, and carpenters? The Strengthening Technical and Vocational Education and Training Project (TVET), in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, is gearing up to shatter this traditional stereotypical divide. Stipends will be provided to girls for training in traditionally male trades—automotive and mechanical repair, carpentry, furniture making, electronics, plumbing, and metalwork; incentives will be given to training providers to enroll girls in trade courses; and wage subsidies will be provided to enterprises for employing girls. The project sets female quotas (20%) for training in three priority skill areas: construction, furniture making, and automotive and mechanical repair. Key access constraints of distance, proximity, and cultural attitudes are tackled through building student dormitories and reserving 50% spaces for girls; setting a 40% girl trainee target; providing vouchers to training institutions for skilling girls in nontraditional trades and a 6-month wage subsidy to employers who hire girls trained under the voucher scheme; setting a target of 20% women TVET teachers; and supporting a social marketing campaign to promote nontraditional skills training and occupations for young women. These gender-inclusive project design features are tailored to give girls a better chance for employment, entrepreneurship, and potentially higher future incomes. It also provides a mechanism for “closing the skills gap” between the demands of the labor market and the supply of skilled trade workers.
Hostels and Twin Cabs Tackle Purdah in Pakistan

Purdah is part of everyday life in Pakistan’s North–West Frontier Province. Women are secluded, their physical movements outside the home restricted; interactions between unrelated women and men are discouraged. In this cultural environment, how can rural development projects involve and deliver services equally to both women and men? One simple answer—recruit female field–workers as project staff. But simplicity is not a trademark of this tribal frontier province. Rather, a complex tapestry of cultural taboos, restrictions, and perceptions needs to be negotiated.

In an innovative response to the requirements and constraints of purdah, the design of the Pakistan North–West Frontier Province Barani Area Development Project, Phase II, included the construction of women’s hostels in rural areas to accommodate female project staff (teachers, health care workers, and agricultural and livestock extension workers), and the procurement of twin cab project vehicles with separate compartments enabling unrelated male and female staff to travel together to project sites. These design features facilitated movement of female staff around the project areas safely, securely, and in a culturally appropriate manner.

These pioneering gender design features were critical for expanding outreach to women and giving women the chance to participate in project activities and ensuring equal benefits for women. At completion, the project had trained 1,550 women on health issues, including 1,080 as traditional birth attendants; 588 women’s community organizations were established and trained in technical skills to improve their income and livelihoods; 110 non-formal primary schools were established; 231 women were trained as primary schoolteachers, exceeding the target by 65%; 11 female staff offices were constructed; and nearly 2,000 women were trained in village development planning and community mobilization.
Women in Nepal face a multitude of disadvantages. Women’s literacy and school completion rates remain low; maternal mortality rates remain high; inheritance laws and property rights favor men; employment and wage discrimination continue to persist in both public and private sectors; and social and cultural practices reinforce the lower status of women. Recognizing that reducing gender disparities and making progress on gender equality requires a multi-pronged approach, the Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women Project was designed as a comprehensive, multisector project addressing the multiple disadvantages confronting women in Nepal. The project simultaneously tackles different facets of discrimination against women—legal, social, and economic. While the project is still under implementation, some positive results achieved so far include 8,000 women and an equal number of men provided with knowledge on their legal and administrative rights and obligations; nearly 5,000 women received skills training for income generation; 900 women wage laborers provided with skills training and awareness on wage rights; and community infrastructure was provided to reduce women’s work burdens. Some 10,973 households have installed improved cooking stoves and water mills while 40,000 people are benefiting from community infrastructure schemes consisting of toilets, drinking water facilities, road/trails, small irrigation schemes, and micro hydro power. In addition, police personnel from women police cells, prosecutors, and advocates were trained on women’s legal rights. The midterm progress review indicates that there are promising signs of reducing gender disparities and making progress on gender equality.
Policy and Capacity Development

ADB engages in policy dialogue with partner countries on gender equality and women’s empowerment through its policy-based programs, investment projects, and technical assistance. Regular and systematic policy dialogue has led to gender-responsive policy and law reforms, the passage of gender equality laws, temporary special measures for women’s representation in local government bodies, and landownership and joint land titling for women.

Gender Equality Law in Mongolia

It took 10 years of campaigning by women’s groups to pass the groundbreaking Law on Promotion of Gender Equality. The legislation removes legal discrimination against women, and establishes gender quotas within the context of political, legal, economic, social, cultural, and family spheres. ADB supported the awareness-raising process for members of the Mongolian Parliament through a grant financed under ADB’s Gender and Development Cooperation Fund.

ADB has also supported gender equality legal reform initiatives in

- **Nepal** – to remove gender discriminatory provisions in existing laws through the 2006 Gender Equality Act; and for the introduction of an affirmative action policy and program to increase the representation of women in the civil service.
- **Pakistan** – introduction of Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Bill; affirmative action for recruitment of female judges; amendments to family laws to speed up divorce proceedings.
- **Viet Nam** – supporting the preparation of the Law on Gender Equality.
- **Fiji** – the Family Law Act, which removed discrimination against women in land, children, and financial rights.
Gender Capacity Development

ADB actively supports gender capacity development of partner countries through implementation of project gender action plans of ADB-financed projects, workshops and trainings, lateral learning initiatives, and technical assistance projects. ADB’s gender specialists work closely with government implementing agencies to build and strengthen gender and development capacity.

Support to Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries in Cambodia

In collaboration with Cambodia’s Ministry of Women, ADB supported the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) prepare and adopt a sector-wide gender policy and strategy. The policy and action plan resulted in the establishment of a Gender Unit (with 3 male and 4 female staff) chaired by the Undersecretary of State; mainstreaming gender in seven agriculture sector working groups; development of a 3-year work plan to implement the MAFF Gender Policy funded under the Agriculture Sector Development Program; integration of gender training in all three agricultural schools; and promotion of women to decision-making positions in the MAFF.
Learning and Knowledge Sharing

Lateral Learning Events

Regional peer exchange and lateral learning initiatives on gender mainstreaming help inform and develop the gender capacity of our government partners, especially sector agencies and policy makers. The 2009 regional lateral learning event in New Delhi, India, on Gender, Environment and Natural Resources brought together project directors (mainly male engineers) from government agencies to showcase their projects achieving good gender results. Learning from peers rather than only gender specialists has proved to be a successful gender training model. Other similar lateral learning events focused on infrastructure, entrepreneurship, and economic empowerment.

The Gender Equity Community of Practice

The community of practice shares and disseminates information on good practices, facilitates and prepares knowledge products, forges and strengthens partnerships with other development partners, and supports capacity building of staff. It meets regularly and sponsors knowledge seminars and events to exchange information, share experiences, and learn from cutting-edge research.
Knowledge Products

ADB produces gender knowledge products, such as country gender assessments; gender tool kits, such as the gender and law tool kit; multilingual gender sector checklists; and research studies on human trafficking, gender and local governance, gender and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and good-practice case studies. Rapid gender equality results assessments of ongoing projects to learn lessons have also been produced for eight countries, covering 24 projects.

Gender Assessments

ADB, in partnership with government and other development partners, prepares Country Gender Assessments (CGAs) to inform and feed into the development of country partnership strategies. Governments also use the CGAs as strategic planning documents for supporting gender equality and women’s empowerment programs.

Gender Sector Checklists

Sector checklists assist staff, consultants, and partner countries to address gender concerns across the different sectors. They guide users through all stages of the project cycle to conduct gender analysis; map out gender issues; identify constraints and obstacles to women’s greater participation in the sector; determine priorities; and design gender-inclusive strategies, components, and performance indicators to respond to gender equality and women’s empowerment issues.

Other knowledge products focus on specific current issues, such as how to tackle gender inequality in labor markets and support sustainable crisis recovery.
Partnerships

ADB works closely and in partnership with UN agencies, other multilateral development banks, bilateral agencies, and nongovernment organizations to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment across Asia and the Pacific. Joint knowledge products have been produced. ADB is also active in various gender and development networks. At the country level, gender specialists work closely with government and development partners.

The Multilateral Development Bank Working Group on Gender

The Multilateral Development Bank Working Group on Gender (MDB–WGG) was established to facilitate cooperation, information exchange, and dialogue on common issues and concerns. Key features of the activities have focused on joint knowledge products and the promotion of joint events to bring greater attention to gender issues in bank operations. Currently, the MDB–WGG is supporting a series of workshops on gender and infrastructure across three regions—Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean and Africa.

External Forum on Gender and Development

The External Forum on Gender and Development (EFG) is a consultative and advisory body to ADB. It is composed of external gender experts, academics, and activists from across the region. It provides a forum for dialogue between ADB and different sectors of civil society on ADB’s approach and program of activities to address gender equity. The EFG enables ADB to

- tap regularly into current thinking on regional gender issues; and
- maintain an ongoing regular dialogue with key gender and development experts from government, academia, nongovernment organizations, and civil society.
Supporting Innovation and Research

The Gender and Development Cooperation Fund (GDCF) assists ADB to implement the Policy on Gender and Development and the Plan of Action. It supports piloting innovations and providing small grants to facilitate gender-inclusive design and implementation of ADB-financed projects. To date, the $12 million GDCF has influenced the designs and implementation of more than 100 loan and grant projects (equivalent to $6 billion). The GDCF also supports research and publication of gender knowledge products.

Promoting Gender Inclusion in Central and West Asia

This technical assistance project, in collaboration with other partners, aims to strengthen capacity to integrate gender perspectives in program design, implementation, and monitoring. Support will be given to innovative and strategic approaches, and the capacity to collect, analyze, and use sex-disaggregated data, through needs analyses, training workshops, and technical assistance. It will also fund pilot initiatives with potential to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Better Employment Opportunities for Women

In collaboration with the International Labour Organization, ADB is implementing a technical assistance project that seeks to identify potential labor market and social protection reforms to promote decent and expanded employment opportunities for women. The project will conduct national-level labor market analyses in Cambodia, Kazakhstan, and the Philippines and suggest ways to expand employment options and decent work for women.
Gender Equality: Bridging the Gap
The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is committed to gender equality. Strategy 2020, ADB’s long-term strategic framework, recognizes that gender equality and women’s empowerment are critical for achieving economic growth, reducing poverty, and supporting socially inclusive development. Thus, promoting gender equity is one of the five drivers of change. ADB’s Policy on Gender and Development adopts gender mainstreaming as the key strategy for promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment. It requires gender equality considerations to be addressed across the full range of ADB operations—from country strategies to the design and implementation of gender-inclusive projects and programs.

About the Asian Development Bank
ADB’s vision is an Asia and Pacific region free of poverty. Its mission is to help its developing member countries reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of their people. Despite the region’s many successes, it remains home to two-thirds of the world’s poor: 1.8 billion people who live on less than $2 a day, with 903 million struggling on less than $1.25 a day. ADB is committed to reducing poverty through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration.

Based in Manila, ADB is owned by 67 members, including 48 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.