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Women are socially, politically and economically backward in the Asia-Pacific region, progress remains especially slow in South Asia

Kathmandu, 8 March 2010— “Discrimination and neglect are threatening women’s survival in the Asia-Pacific region where women suffer from some of the world’s lowest rates of political representation, employment and property ownership. Their lack of participation in productive sector is depressing economic growth,” says the new Asia Pacific Human Development Report on Gender.

Launching the report, *Power, Voice and Rights: A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific*, Hon’ble Binda Pandey, Chairperson of the Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles Committee of the Constituent Assembly said, “Nepal has already made its way towards passing the bill on domestic violence in the legislative parliament which is a big leap in the right direction. Also the 33 per cent representation of women in the Constituent Assembly is noteworthy progress. However the big challenge of turning the Laws, Acts and Policies into implementation and practice requires change in attitude of all women and men in the country”.

Speaking at the launch event, UNDP Resident Representative Mr. Robert Piper stated, “Gender equality is good economics. Keeping women off the labour market simply costs money. Increasing their participation in the labour market will boost a country’s income, more so in countries with low current participation.”

The report focuses on three major areas of analysis illustrated in terms of Economic Power, Political Voice & Human and Legal Rights.

In the context of Nepal, the gap in women and men’s average daily earnings is alarmingly wide with women earning only 60% of what men earn while doing similar kinds of job in both the agricultural and non-agricultural sector. The report states that giving women economic opportunities also has an effect on gender-based violence - a problem common to the Asia-Pacific region. When women develop a stronger position to bargain and negotiate within their homes, it reduces their dependency on male relatives and frees them to make possibly different choices — including getting out of oppressive situations —that can improve their own welfare as well as that of their children and families.

The political voice of women has improved in Nepal with the recent secured 1/3 quota in the Constituent Assembly. In comparison, only about 1/3 of countries in Asia and the Pacific have quota systems to enhance women’s participation in politics. The report argues that the public policy decisions that the Governments make have fundamental implications on gender equality outcomes as they define the extent of opportunities and entitlements for women and men along with democratic space for civil society and for representing the interests of social groups with less representation, and effective delivery of social services.

Finally, with regards to rights, Gender-based violence is pervasive with more than one-tenth of women in the Asia-Pacific region reporting assaults by their partners. Nearly half of the South Asian countries lack laws on Domestic Violence. Nepal’s positive moves towards greater legal protection and equality for women needs to be continued.

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