



**REGIONAL
ANNUAL REPORT**
FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
2018-2019





UN Women is the United Nations organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women supports United Nations Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the United Nations system's work in advancing gender equality.



UN Women works globally to make the vision of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls.

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Photo: UN Women/Pathumporn Thongking

FOREWORD

The year 2020 starts with the 25th anniversary of a watershed moment: the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Emerging from a global gathering of 50,000 people in 1995, and endorsed by every United Nations Member State, it is the most far-reaching blueprint for gender equality and women’s empowerment ever agreed. This year also, UN Women will mark its 10th birthday. As one of the youngest international organizations, we have come a long way in a short time. Across Asia and the Pacific, we are proud to claim a decade of achievement for women and girls in 32 countries.

UN Women will be starting our second decade with an advantage: There is now a global consensus that simply continuing with business as usual will not be enough to achieve women’s empowerment. A rising chorus of voices from women, civil society, government and the private sector is telling us that this will not achieve the fundamental improvements outlined in the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It will not make a difference to the major challenges of our time, such as climate change, or divided and unequal societies. And it will not resolve gender discrimination, with its roots in economies and political systems as well as in everyday life.

At UN Women, we are fortunate to have many partners who share our vision of moving beyond business as

usual. These partners share our high ambitions and are equally committed to in-depth, lasting progress for women and girls. They include both our long-standing supporters, as well as the emerging next generation of female activists, entrepreneurs and philanthropists. Together, we are working across societies, because gender equality is a society-wide project that requires everyone to get involved. That means not just governments and civil society, but also businesses, the media, religious leaders, men and boys, and others.

Every year UN Women covers a broader spectrum of issues than before, since every element of sustainable development has a gender dimension. For example, we are linking long-standing work on women’s economic

empowerment with improving resilience to natural disasters and climate change. In Cambodia, this means that rural women for the first time are participating in national policy forums to steer climate policy, while women-led green business models are bringing economic, social and environmental benefits to poor women and ethnic minorities in Viet Nam.

Our pioneering global work on women, peace and security has been the basis of many programmes to prevent violent extremism, where women are finally acknowledged and empowered as leaders of peace who can stop extremism before it takes off in their communities. This initiative has now directly reached 5,500 women, increased the understanding and awareness of more than 1 million individuals about the role women play in preventing violent extremism in the region, and led the Philippines to adopt its first national action plan on preventing extremism.

We are increasingly building connections between areas of expertise that have sometimes operated in isolation. This “bridging the silos” can unlock far-reaching results. For example, our Markets for Change programme, active in several Pacific countries, integrates measures to stop violence against women, bolster women’s livelihoods, build protections against natural disasters, and open spaces for women in leadership. Amid the crisis-related displacement of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people, both internally within Myanmar and over the border in Bangladesh, we are putting gender equality concerns at the centre of the humanitarian response, and linking local and displaced women in efforts to restart development and prevent a deepening of the crisis.

This is a region of dynamic, on-going change. UN Women is playing its part in this by continuously innovating, such as through Afghanistan’s MyRedLine campaign. The novel combination of social media and boots-on-the-ground activism aims to make gender equality a fundamental element of the peace process. We are changing the ways people act on gender equality as well as how they think about it. Another example of this is in China, where the discriminatory attitudes of local civil servants’ toward women are shifting. As they roll out programmes for rural women, these officials are observing in practical terms how those women can improve their incomes with a modicum of new skills.

Across all areas of work, we are focused as never before on reaching those women who lack rights and opportunities because of gender identity, location, ethnicity or disability. Our particular commitment is to reach those whose risks of exclusion are compounded

by multiple, intersecting sources of discrimination. We are offering targeted services for women with disabilities who have survived gender-based violence in Timor-Leste and those located in remote parts of the Solomon Islands.

UN Women continues to be unique in the United Nations system in our capacity to support the setting of international and regional normative standards for gender equality, while also demonstrating how to uphold these commitments in countries and communities, and coordinating the United Nations system to align its considerable expertise and capacities accordingly. With the watershed Global Compact for Migration making human rights and gender-responsive approaches core guiding principles, as advocated by UN Women globally, we are now working with governments across South and South-East Asia to retool laws and policies in line with this commitment. In selected countries we help recruiting agencies, businesses and civil society bring international standards into their practices so that migration for women is both safe and fair.

Much has changed for the good for women and girls across Asia and the Pacific. At the same time, much still remains to be done, which is why, as we arrive at Beijing+25, UN Women is bringing together gender equality activists of all generations to achieve advances that are more powerful than ever before. We call young activists Generation Equality, because we believe that in pairing the experience of the past with the dynamism of the future, we will fulfil the solemn promises of Beijing. We will end violence and discrimination against women and girls, once and for all.



Mohammad Naciri

**UN Women Regional Director
for Asia and the Pacific**

LEADING TRANSFORMATION

Women have a right to an equal share of the seats at decision-making tables—and often make significant contributions to the betterment of their countries and communities once they get there. UN Women helps women develop as leaders, enter institutions at all levels, and advance gender equality by shaping policies, budgets and public services.



Photo: UN Women/Aung Naing Soe

MYANMAR | WOMEN KNOW WHAT THEY WANT: EQUALITY—AND BETTER COMMUNITIES

Ma Hla Sein Nu comes from a long line of weavers in a poor rural community in north-western Myanmar's Rakhine State, not far from the state's main town of Sittwe. For generations, they have bent over their looms, fingers flying to produce a steady stream of the colourful sarongs favoured in the local community.

But in recent years, economic pressures have been closing in. Many men have migrated from the village. Ma Hla Sein Nu herself became the sole supporter of her elderly parents and started to struggle to make ends meet. So she considered it a stroke of good fortune when a UN Women-supported programme offered training to improve her products. She also learned about women's empowerment and gained leadership and management skills.

Most women from her village were once afraid to travel outside it, but Ma Hla Sein Nu now travels to cities around Myanmar to meet with shopkeepers and understand different local preferences for colours and materials. This has given her confidence to make and sell new products, and earn much more in the process.

Ma Hla Sein Nu has also begun organizing other women in her village to work on improving local roads and gaining a long-awaited connection to electricity. While some in the community tease her for stepping forward in such a public role, saying she now acts like a foreigner, there is no going back.

"Women know what we can do now," she says. "We are braver and stronger when we work together, and we must take the lead."

Rakhine State struggles with multiple sources of tension as well as deeply entrenched poverty, but UN Women has shown the powerful results of investing in women's leadership and ability to act. Ma Hla Sein Nu was one of more than 9,300 women who have used skills training to boost livelihoods from agriculture and small businesses, and who have emerged as advocates for change in their communities.

Daw Ma Thar Nu has also faced the challenges in Rakhine State. She lives in a camp due to conflict-related internal displacement. Through UN Women, she participated in a programme focused on helping over 60 women build skills and visibility as community leaders. Hands-on training involved holding engagement sessions with an array of local leaders as well as awareness-raising among groups of other women—the latter reached close to 10,000 people across four townships.

Through this experience, Daw Ma Thar Nu became one of four women elected to the camp management committees. Until that point, these had no female members. Today they discuss issues that were not on the agenda before, like pervasive gender-based violence. Daw Ma Thar Nu regularly meets with other women at the camp to inform them of what she learned at the training and what she is doing on the committee.

"Men still influence everything," she acknowledges. "But it is so important for women to be involved because women need to fight against that."

To reinforce the changes that female leaders make in their communities, UN Women built on a close partnership with the state's Department of Social Welfare to provide the first-ever gender training for public servants and service providers from across Rakhine. More than 150 officials have attended so far, learning about gender concepts and national and international commitments to gender equality that can be applied in delivering essential public services.



Daw Yin Yin Pyone, who directs the Department, says the new awareness is already leading to changes such as increasing budgets for vocational training for women and improved support for survivors of violence. For the first time, civil society organizations working on gender equality have a place as standing members of the state’s women’s committee.

Daw Yin Yin Pyone notes that Myanmar still has too few female leaders, but she is optimistic about the changes being set in motion. From the local to the national level, women taking leadership roles “are bright and very active”, she says. “Many more will come.”

TAKING UP NEW ISSUES IN INSTITUTIONS

Across Asia and the Pacific, UN Women works with female leaders to transform public institutions and accelerate progress on gender issues. That is the purpose behind support for the cross-party Women’s Parliamentary Caucus of the National Assembly in **Pakistan**. This has helped the caucus develop broad-based consensus on a legislative reform agenda advancing women’s empowerment and gender equality. An early priority has been to curb child marriage, which remains prevalent in the country. Other recent moves to strengthen the caucus include developing a strategic plan, organizing learning initiatives, and holding dialogues with male parliamentarians. Similar efforts are under way

with the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus in the north-western province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which is pushing for new legislation to end child marriage as well as the trafficking of women and girls, including in remote tribal districts.

In **Indonesia**, changes in judicial institutions have come through a UN Women-supported training module that helps judges avoid gender discriminatory attitudes and behaviours when adjudicating cases involving women in conflict with the law. After piloting the model, the Supreme Court committed to institutionalizing it in the training of in-service judges.

In **Nepal**, to give gender issues the prominent place they deserve in national development planning, UN Women worked with the National Planning Commission to integrate ambitious new commitments across the 15th Periodic National Development Plan. The plan now features measures for gender-responsive planning and budgeting, women’s economic empowerment, ending violence against women, and gender statistics.

MAKING SERVICES RESPONSIVE TO GENDER

Institutions that provide essential public services have some of the most direct impacts on women’s lives and hopes for equality. Yet they often fall short of women’s specific needs and rights.

“WE ARE BRAVER AND STRONGER WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER, AND WE MUST TAKE THE LEAD.”

In Pacific countries such as **Samoa** and **Tonga**, resource limitations and other challenges hamper the extension of services to all parts of the population. Gender discrimination poses additional obstacles to women, who often have less information and less mobility to access services than men.

To demonstrate possible solutions, UN Women teamed up with United Nations Development Programme and government officials under the REACH mobile service delivery programme, adapted from a successful effort in Fiji. In a 10-day pilot in Samoa in 2019, a diverse team of government officials and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) visited 10 rural communities to provide more than 900 services and related consultations. Each visit started with a session to raise awareness on human rights and gender equality. Personalized sessions followed to meet individual needs, such as for civil registration, small business development, legal advice related to divorce and adoption, assistance with property ownership, and counselling for domestic violence survivors. In Tonga, a mobile team reached people in 17 communities, a significant majority of whom were women, providing them with more than 2,700 consultations and services.

In **China**, UN Women continues to partner with the China Gender Fund for Research and Advocacy in pooling resources from multiple donors to provide small grants to Chinese institutions to advance women's empowerment. In 2018, training was provided for 920 government officials, health care providers and educators. The training built their capacities to address gender-related issues and to reach more women in poverty alleviation programmes. Work with local governments in running skills-development trainings for marginalized rural women demonstrated how such projects improve income. They also shifted discriminatory social norms by showing first-hand what women can accomplish.

As part of regional preparations in 2019 for the annual Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations in New York, UN Women brought together government officials and civil society representatives from across Asia and the Pacific, raising awareness of the theme taken up by the Commission: the essential role of social protection systems, infrastructure and services in overcoming gender inequalities. Findings

highlighted by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific included the fact that the region's governments spend almost a third more on men than on women for social protection schemes. The regional meeting concluded with recommendations to accelerate the uptake of gender-responsive social protection as well as services and infrastructure.

MOBILIZING FOR CHANGE

Across societies, including diverse population groups and generations, UN Women brings people together to amplify the call for gender equality. In **Afghanistan**, women and human rights leaders mobilized under the MyRedLine campaign, aimed at protecting women's rights in any future peace settlement. The campaign deployed social media as well as activists on the ground in remote regions to collect testimonies from Afghans on rights they are not willing to give up, such as to work, to go to school or to marry whom they choose. A first phase engaged more than 100,000 people online, a veritable chorus of voices. They made a compelling statement on what Afghans really want: to avoid a return to the days when women were systematically oppressed and humiliated.

In the **Philippines**, where a vibrant new generation of young women is coming forward as advocates and leaders, UN Women joined the University of the Philippines and youth movements to convene a Young Women's Congress. Participants strategized around advancing young women's political participation, using creative means such as theatre and art as well as discussion sessions and interactive quizzes. The forum culminated in an exhibit of paintings and solidarity messages, and a firm pledge among participants to empower each other and overcome differences to fight for gender justice.

In five provinces of **Nepal**, UN Women backed 10 intergenerational dialogues where diverse individuals and communities discussed discrimination, harmful practices and violence faced by women and excluded groups. Discussions tackled hot button issues such as gender gaps in control over resources, the preference for sons, child marriage, and religious minorities. Each dialogue resulted in local agreements on common actions to tackle priority concerns.

Collaboration with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in **Lao People's Democratic Republic** provided training for journalists from 16 prominent media houses, including the Vientiane Times and Lao National Television, to report on violence against women, a topic almost invisible in the press. Participants committed to applying new knowledge of principles to protect the rights of survivors of violence, to promote gender equality more systematically through their stories, and to encourage collective action to stop violence.

TRACKING PROGRESS OVER TIME

Continued progress on gender equality requires defining points of progress as well as remaining gaps, particularly in light of the 2030 Agenda's commitment to leave no one behind. As **Viet Nam** moved forward on its 25-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action, part of a process of global reporting culminating in 2020, UN Women joined the national Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs to draw attention to severe shortfalls in gender equality faced by many ethnic minority groups. Prominent consultations raised visibility around disparities in education and employment, among other areas. Government officials agreed to integrate the findings into the national Beijing+25 report, a roadmap for future action.

UN Women and the Asian Development Bank in 2018 co-launched the first comprehensive regional assessment of women and girls and the Sustainable Development Goals, entitled *Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific: Baseline and Pathways for Transformative Change by 2030*. Using available data from 57 countries and territories, the report highlighted stumbling blocks such as continued high rates of gender-based violence and a widening gender gap in labour force participation. In examining the pervasive lack of gender data, the report found that out of 85 gender-related indicators for the goals, 41 per cent have no regional data. Limited availability at the national level means that only 26 per cent of the indicators can draw on data from two-thirds or more of the countries in the region.

UN Women collaborated with the UNFPA and United Nations Sustainable Development Group to train more than 40 staff members from eight United Nations entities in 21 countries on applying the next generation System-Wide Action Plan (SWAP) Gender Equality Scorecard. From hiring to programmes to budgets, the scorecard helps United Nations country teams track and accelerate progress towards gender equality. In **Nepal**, based on a scorecard recommendation, UN Women trained United Nations staff members from 13 organizations on gender-inclusive communications.

NEPAL

“FINDING SYNERGY BETWEEN MY ACTIVISMS”

MY LIFE, MY CHANGE

I was born in a traditional Newar [ethnic group indigenous to the Kathmandu Valley] household in Patan, and grew up speaking Nepal Bhasa, my mother tongue. However, at school I was only exposed to Nepali and English, so I started going to libraries and reading books written in Nepal Bhasa.

From there, my journey towards exploring the issues surrounding my language and my culture started, and that is how I became a part of the Newa movement. Meanwhile, my own personal journey as a transgender person naturally inspired me to join the LGBTIQ movement.

Soon, I noticed that both movements had issues. The Newa movement is very patriarchal and heteronormative. Everyone wanted to talk about issues of ethnicity, but no one wanted to acknowledge the widespread discrimination faced by LGBTIQ individuals.

I observed similar issues within the LGBTIQ movement. Mainstream activists didn't want to speak out on discrimination based on caste, ethnicity and language, fearing that it would dilute the cause we had been working for. I found that very problematic.

This led me to start an advocacy group called Queer Youth Group. Our three basic principles are: We take gender and sexuality as a spectrum, we are intersectional, and we acknowledge diversity. I think that has helped me a lot in terms of finding synergy between my two activisms. Why don't we talk about caste within the queer movement? Why don't we talk about ethnicity?

These questions and discussions keep happening in our youth group. We are doing a kind of piecemeal activism that can have a snowball effect.

Rukshana Kapali has spoken at several national and international platforms on issues of LGBTIQ people and on heritage conservation. She recently participated in the Thought Workshop, a discussion series organized by UN Women with opinion leaders and activists in Nepal.

BREAKING BARRIERS TO ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT



Photo: UN Women/Habib Asgher

Asia and the Pacific faces a large gender gap in economic participation, reflected in the wide difference between the rates at which men and women participate in the labour force. Where women do have paid employment, they end up with a disproportionate share of the most precarious jobs. UN Women works to reshape conditions across economies, from increasing women's influence in economic policymaking to providing practical skills so women can build businesses and make better livelihoods.

PAKISTAN | FROM A BACK ROOM TO AN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS, WOMEN TAKE ON THE WORLD OF COMMERCE

Razia Sultana cannot read or write, but she does manage what is becoming an international business. From a back room in her home off a narrow lane on the outskirts of Sialkot, Pakistan, six sewing machines whirr as they churn out sports uniforms in brilliant hues of yellow, red and blue. They are destined for the United States to fulfil orders placed over the Internet.

It is far from the typical scenario for a woman with Sultana's background. She not only did not attend school, but married young, had five children, and lives in a community where women are expected to stay at home, unseen by the outside world. But a number of years ago, with her husband barely able to meet their

expenses through his salary as a factory worker, and the adults in the family skipping meals to feed the children, she started stitching footballs. There was a ready market in Sialkot, where a cluster of industries provides a steady stream of sports equipment sent all over the world.

Over time, stitching footballs took a toll, however. Pushing a needle through the heavy leather left her shoulders and back aching, so when a local NGO called Baidarie offered her training as a home-based worker, through a partnership with UN Women, Sultana jumped at the opportunity.

First, she had to convince her husband. "He said the income we have is okay and if you go outside to the training people will look down on you. So I told him I do not want our children to have the same fate that we had. He finally agreed. People from the locality did

criticize me. But I just ignored them.”

The training equipped her with basic business knowledge as well as more advanced stitching skills that allowed her to produce work gloves, a less physically demanding and better-paid task than making footballs. Sultana became one of nearly 38,000 women in four provinces who, since 2012, have passed through UN Women’s home-based worker programmes.

Many of the women come from highly marginalized backgrounds. The programmes provide a first opportunity to develop abilities and access financing and other services needed to run small businesses. In a still-conservative society, a home-based business is usually the only option for such women to earn an income and gain a modicum of economic empowerment.

Astute from the beginning, Sultana put some of the extra money she earned from making gloves back into the business, purchasing more sewing machines. She installed a concrete floor to replace the earthen one in her home, and sent her oldest child to college. But she still had an ambition for more, because as she says: “A frog in a well only knows that world. You have to think outside your well, explore a new world and try to innovate.”

She was a logical candidate when Baidarie and UN Women selected a small group of home-based workers to go through advanced training. The training was aimed at strengthening market links to larger businesses and increasing the procurement of products from women-owned firms.

For three months, a dedicated trainer helped Sultana acquire further skills to move up the value chain. She learned to stitch and design sportswear, and acquired additional machines for new elements such as attaching elastic waistlines. Sessions with the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce taught her about the Internet and its capacity to reach international markets. After her son graduated from college in early 2019, he joined her in the business and set up a Facebook page to pitch to new buyers.

Today her clients include football and basketball teams in the United States and rugby clubs in Australia. They send her the designs and sizes, and she puts her team of seven seamstresses into action to produce them. From 25 to 30 pieces a month initially, she is now at 350 a month, turning a handsome profit.

Sultana knows that there are many other women eager to follow her path. Committed to helping, she has already trained more than 200 other local women on the skills she has acquired. They too are venturing

outside the well, gaining income and empowerment, and accelerating the momentum of social change.

“The people who used to criticize me now come and ask how they can improve their income,” Sultana says. “One thing I’ve learned is that if you work hard without losing focus, success will kiss your feet.”

REACHING THE MOST MARGINALIZED

Across Asia and the Pacific, women disproportionately cluster at the bottom of economies. Poor and marginalized, they face multiple disadvantages, from disproportionate share of unpaid care work to a lack of income and assets. Reaching those who have been left furthest behind is an imperative running throughout UN Women’s actions to empower women economically.

In **Nepal**, UN Women supports gender-responsive entrepreneurship development training where women not only learn skills to make an income, but cultivate capacities to make better decisions, build confidence and excel in all aspects of their lives. In six districts, more than 2,000 women have passed through the training so far, reporting higher incomes but also more professionally run and sustainable small businesses. Many come from marginalized backgrounds as poor rural farmers, survivors of human trafficking and migrants who have returned home. With new-found skills and strength, some have taken up local leadership positions, heading village bodies as well as local business associations, and hosting networking and training opportunities for other women.

MAKING MIGRATION SAFE AND FAIR

The 2018 adoption of the Global Compact for Migration was a watershed moment, marking the first intergovernmental agreement to cover all dimensions of international migration for the world’s 258 million migrants. As a result of UN Women’s efforts and the commitment of United Nations Member States and other actors, the Global Compact includes human rights and gender-responsive approaches as core guiding principles, along with provisions to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

With Asia and the Pacific the world’s largest source of international migrants, including many women who end up far from home in low-paid, undervalued, even dangerous work, UN Women has been working to put the Compact’s gender-responsive principles into practice from the earliest stages. In the **Philippines**, government agencies, civil society organizations and experts from academia collectively defined national priorities that include investing in the participation of female migrant workers in decisions that affect them;



Photo: UN Women/Helio Miguel

investing in data collection and harmonizing gender in migration policies across government action in the Philippines.

A gender equality analysis of temporary labour agreements signed between the Government of **Bangladesh** and several countries in the Arab States region has strengthened evidence for negotiations to better protect the rights of female migrants. Training for 40 recruiting agencies jump-started the use of a new toolkit on gender-responsive employment and recruitment that provides practical steps for governments, businesses and civil society to uphold international standards and good practices. In **Sri Lanka**, UN Women developed a training manual, the first of its kind, to help labour attachés better respond to cases of sexual and gender-based violence among female migrant workers. A second manual, now integrated in regular trainings conducted by the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, explains basic rights and entitlements for female migrant domestic workers.

Under the Safe and Fair project, part of the European Union-United Nations Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls, UN Women in 2019 began collaborating with the International Labour Organization in supporting members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to make migration-related laws, policies and regulations more gender-responsive. The programme works with the governments of **Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Thailand** and **Viet Nam**. Malaysia has already taken steps to ensure that in its next national development plan, female migrants can reach services related to sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence. In Cambodia, a national

skills recognition framework for the tourism industry will extend options for female migrant workers to find safe and decent work.

Indonesia has trained civil society groups and women's networks in West Java on providing information to female migrants about their rights, reaching nearly 4,400 women in the first six months of 2019. In **Viet Nam**, more than 100 diplomats, before deployment to foreign embassies, acquired communications and service referral skills that uphold rights, safety and dignity.

Safe and Fair communications efforts have tapped social media and other tools to champion the rights of female migrant workers, reaching more than 1 million members of the public as well as policymakers, service providers and female migrants in the first half of 2019. In some countries, social media platforms have become the first forums for female migrant workers to report cases of violence and abuse and discuss ways to handle them.

Under the newly launched ASEAN Campaign on Ending Gender-Based Workplace Exploitation, research with female migrant workers and their communities identified social media and other communications channels that they use frequently use, along with messages that resonate with them. Based on the finding that many female migrant workers listen to popular music daily, the campaign released a dance song for migrant communities in Thailand. Catchy lyrics convey life-saving information on what violence is, and how to find help and protection.

CHINA

EXPANDING MARKETS FOR CHANGE

For the sixth year in 2019, UN Women's Markets for Change programme backed the efforts of female market vendors in **Fiji, Solomon Islands** and **Vanuatu** to gain a voice in market management, advocate for their rights, and improve the cleanliness and safety of marketplaces. At Gizo Market in Western Province of the Solomon Islands, vendors welcomed a new and much-improved space to trade produce, seafood and cooked food after the Government of Australia and provincial authorities rebuilt the facility from the ground up. Throughout the process, UN Women supported a market vendors' association where female vendors guided design decisions and defined rules for market management. Built to withstand cyclones, the new facility is more spacious and hygienic, with running water and washrooms. The number of market stalls has more than doubled, from 100 to 240. Amenities include a market management office and better lighting.

BUILDING RESILIENCE TO CLIMATE SHIFTS

Across **Asia and the Pacific**, UN Women is partnering with United Nations Environment Programme to help some of the most marginalized women become more resilient to climate change. Early steps have included training for government officials and journalists on using data broken down by sex, age and disability to guide more targeted actions on climate issues, including to reach women who have long been overlooked. Collaboration with United Nations Development Programme and 30 experts from around the world has provided new evidence and arguments for factoring economic and other costs specific to women into climate initiatives.

In **Cambodia**, with UN Women's assistance, rural women for the first time are participating in national policy forums that steer climate policy. Training for officials has initiated the better integration of gender into planning on environmental issues as well as climate finance. In **Viet Nam**, UN Women is supporting women-led green business models to bring economic, environmental and social benefits particularly to poor women and ethnic minorities.

TRANSFORMING BUSINESS FOR WOMEN

In 2019, the European Union and UN Women embarked on the three-year WeEmpower Asia programme. Based on evidence of the enormous contributions women make to the economy, the programme is working with private sector companies to expand economic participation and business opportunities for women in **China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand** and **Viet Nam**. Exchanges between women's groups and companies are geared towards fostering a business environment that empowers women and equipping a new generation of female entrepreneurs to flourish within it.

“WE STARTED TO REALIZE WE HAVE THE SAME RIGHTS AS MEN DO.”

MY LIFE, MY CHANGE

I used to work as a taxi driver along with my husband. Because the hours were long and I could not find the right childcare, I decided to sell the car and set up an agricultural cooperative with the help of our village secretary. This allowed me to look after my child and work.

In the first year, the cooperative had a good harvest in the test plot. However, due to a flood, the sunflowers planted in the second year all failed. I realized that we needed better seeds, a greater variety of plants and more workers who were properly trained.

In 2018, with support from a UN Women project and relevant experts, we introduced 28 different vegetables and contract farming, which helped to cut risks and make sure the income was steady. We women came together and formed a mutual aid group. We learned how e-commerce works and had a chance to sell our products through the bigger online market.

Most importantly, the project improved our gender awareness. We started to realize for the first time that women are not inferior to men. We have the same rights as men do. With our increased incomes, we have more say at home. We can invest more in the education of our children. I believe that our next generation will definitely have a better life. Empowering women benefits the entire family and our next generation.

Tie Lingmei took part in a UN Women initiative reaching about 40,000 female farmers in Qinghai Province. Tie herself hired 53 women to work on her cooperative.



Photo: UN Women/Mohammad Rakibul Hasan

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Perhaps the most pervasive violation of human rights, violence against women destroys lives, disrupts families and stalls development. UN Women joins diverse partners to improve and extend essential services for survivors of violence and to end impunity, including by holding perpetrators to account. Prevention stems from systematically challenging the social norms that allow violence to continue unquestioned.

TIMOR-LESTE | ADVOCATES MOBILIZE SOCIETY-WIDE PROGRESS TO FREE ALL WOMEN FROM VIOLENCE

It was over a decade ago, but Norberta Vicente Soares da Cruz will never forget the man bending over her, touching her body. She was in an operating room, just emerging from anaesthesia for surgery on the club foot she had had since birth. The man could have been a doctor or a technician, she'll never know. But his intent had nothing to do with medical care.

Awake but still half paralysed by powerful drugs, Soares da Cruz could not move or scream for help. "I was only able to cry," she recalls.

It was a moment that crystallized the extra vulnerabilities to gender-based violence faced by women with disabilities in Timor-Leste. Not only is sexual harassment a common phenomenon, but disability still carries a heavy stigma that treats affected

people as less deserving of care and respect. For her part, Soares da Cruz grew up hearing that she was not worth educating. Fortunate to have the backing of her family, she fought for her right to go to school.

Today she fights on a different front—for women with disabilities to realize their rights and dignity, including to live free from all forms of gender-based violence. Since 2016, she has directed the Community-Based Rehabilitation Network Timor-Leste (CBRN-TL), a leading advocate for people with disabilities. Through research, the group has confirmed that levels of physical, sexual and economic abuse against women with disabilities are acute in communities as well as at home, where many women are isolated due to a lack of mobility. Providers of health care and other services who might offer protection and safety, however, typically know little about the vulnerabilities of people with disabilities, or they assume that these vulnerabilities are somehow normal.

With these findings in hand, Soares da Cruz decided a mass shift in awareness was needed. Since 2018, CBRN-TL has partnered with UN Women to pioneer the country's first toolkit for training a spectrum of service providers to better protect, respect and provide justice to women who face violence. Intensive sessions began in 2019 for facilitators who will lead the training; they will start rolling it out nationally in 2020. "People from the top to the bottom of the Government will be more aware of our rights," Soares da Cruz says, "and the fact that we should have the same freedoms and opportunities as everyone else."

For UN Women, the work with Soares da Cruz is one of several complementary efforts to help Timor-Leste accelerate progress in upholding the rights of survivors of gender-based violence, in close collaboration with national women's organizations.

One of the leading organizations fighting gender-based violence, Fokupers, in 2018 initiated a highly charged national conversation about sexual abuse by Catholic clergy. It opened the first opportunity for survivors to come forward, and so far has resulted in the Vatican removing one priest from his parish. Another group, Asosiasaun Chega! Ba ita, or ACbit, has shone long-needed light on the brutal but mostly ignored treatment of women during Timor-Leste's long struggle for independence. A 2018 Walk to Remember and a speaking tour of sites where women were detained have linked survivors to a younger generation so the latter can learn about their history as a way of not repeating it.

For women's rights activists, there is no question that Timor-Leste's recent history of conflict still fuels high rates of gender-based violence. To break the link, much depends on establishing new norms and behaviours that support gender equality and non-violence. That is the intention of another prong of UN Women's assistance, an initiative called Connect with Respect. Operating in the fertile ground of secondary schools, it works with teachers and adolescents to cultivate peaceful school communities.

At the Cassait pre-secondary school on the outskirts of Dili, the capital, teachers and the principal report that rates of fighting and bullying have declined. Teaching practices have moved away from aggressive techniques and towards building respectful relationships with students. Students themselves have a new understanding of gender equality as the basis for a peaceful life.

"Before, we thought that girls could not speak out and did not even deserve to be in school. We were scared because a lot of girls were harassed by boys and we did not know what to do," says 16-year-old Ana Paula Soares. "Now we know that we can speak up and tell people this is not right—and we expect them to listen."

EXTENDING THE REACH OF SERVICES

Ending violence against women depends fundamentally on extending the full array of quality services required to provide protection and justice. In the **Solomon Islands**, as in much of the Pacific region, rates of gender-based violence are high, topping 64 per cent for women and girls at some point in their lives. Until recently, survivors had little recourse and suffered in silence. But through a partnership between the Ministry of Women, Children, Youth and Family Affairs and UN Women, the SAFENET Response and Referral Network has taken root in the country, and in 2019 began expanding across all nine provinces, particularly in more remote rural areas. SAFENET puts the needs of survivors first and coordinates front-line response services accordingly, linking women to police, hospitals, legal aid and whatever else they need to find safety and justice. National standard operating procedures are now in place, accompanied by a guidebook explaining application. Extensive consultations with government and non-governmental service providers in each province have assisted in tailoring the network to different localities.

Under the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls, national standard operating procedures and service referral systems have advanced in five countries. In 2019, **Kiribati** launched standard operating procedures as well as a community mobilization drive encouraging people to prevent and respond to violence. Involving 21 villages, the initiative is expected to reach half the country's population, or just under 60,000 people, by 2022. **Fiji** bolstered its national service delivery protocol to strengthen referrals, clarify good practices and delineate how different services can best work together for the benefit of survivors. The process has engaged police officers and social and health workers as well as other front-line service providers throughout the country. Supported by UN Women, specialized training for police equipped them with skills to more sensitively and professionally respond to female survivors who report gender-based violence.

IMPROVING RESPONSIVENESS TO SURVIVORS

UN Women's close partnership with other United Nations organizations on a flagship global essential services programme has stimulated significant national investment in adopting internationally known "best practice" strategies to stop violence against women, such as specialized units in criminal justice systems and social services. In Asia and the Pacific, **Viet Nam**'s Ben Tre province piloted an essential services package that is the first of its kind in the country and includes an innovative Domestic Violence Rapid Response Team. The team oversees a comprehensive response to violence by health, social, justice and security services that is expected to eventually serve nearly 2 million people. In **Cambodia**, UN Women is supporting the training of national and subnational service providers to work in line with survivors' needs and wishes, whether to press charges, seek shelter or return home. New guidelines are in place for counselling, referrals, mediation and minimum service standards.

UN Women's close partnership with provincial social welfare departments in **Pakistan** to enhance service quality has built on an assessment of nine government-run shelters across the country. In Punjab province, in the east of the country, this informed a decision that three shelters would adopt one-stop models in which all required services are readily accessible under one roof.

In **Thailand**, collaboration between UN Women, the Office of the Attorney General and the Thailand Institute of Justice sent 70 public prosecutors through training on how to best protect survivors and to use forensic and psychological tools to prosecute cases of gender-based violence. Similar training for police led one officer to develop MySis Bot, a chatbot that provides 24/7 information for survivors on a mobile device or computer. The application outlines and demystifies the legal process, helping women take the first step in seeking help without fearing stigma or judgement.

TAKING A STAND AGAINST TRAFFICKING

Women most prone to trafficking are often those most marginalized by poverty. In **Myanmar**'s poor and conflict-affected Kachin State, along the border with China, instability adds another layer of vulnerability. UN Women has collaborated with the state government, the police and local civil society organizations to develop a novel system of community mobilizers who make women and communities aware of the risks of trafficking. They also have links to the police, guaranteeing an immediate response if a case occurs. In 2018, more than 2,500 people in border communities gained essential information about prevention. New services to develop livelihood skills mean women can improve their incomes and mitigate some of the risks of poverty. Legal aid and psychosocial support aid trafficking survivors in recovering and taking their cases to court, and have resulted in the sentencing of several perpetrators.



Photo: UN Women/Pornvit Visitoran

Even for experienced front-line workers, interacting with survivors of trafficking can be sensitive. In **Thailand**, UN Women worked with national partners and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children to launch gender-sensitive guidelines to improve the immediate response of police officers and strengthen links among service providers. Thailand became the first ASEAN country to localize the guidelines, which the Commission issued in 2016.

MOBILIZING MEN AND BOYS

Since men and boys are almost always the perpetrators of gender-based violence, a major element in stopping the phenomenon is calling on them to change their attitudes and behaviours. In the Pacific, surveys have found that large numbers of men see violence against women as acceptable. Deeply rooted discriminatory norms underpin stark gender inequalities across all

areas of life, from politics to services to jobs. Through a Pacific regional dialogue on engaging men in prevention, the first of its kind, UN Women connected civil society organizations, faith-based organizations and male advocates for women's rights from seven countries. They agreed on common principles, based on best practices, for programmes working with men and boys to end violence.

In Da Nang, **Viet Nam**, with UN Women's support, 14 Male Advocate Clubs have mobilized 600 men to learn about positive masculinity, gender equality and prevention of violence against women, and to take this new knowledge into their communities. The success of the initiative led to the establishment of five new clubs in Ho Chi Minh City. As a result of participating in the clubs, men have reported powerful positive changes in their own lives as well as in their families and relationships.

INDIA

“THE IDEA IS TO MAKE SAFETY A COLLECTIVE ENTERPRISE”

MY LIFE, MY CHANGE

For women and girls, a lack of safety affects education, ability to work, what kind of jobs they take, leisure, and other access issues. In 2013, we began SafetiPin, a social enterprise based on the safety audit tool used by women's groups around the world to assess the safety of public spaces.

We made the tool into an app called MySafetipin so that women anywhere in the world can ask: “Why is this place unsafe? Do I feel safe?” It's crowd-sourced. The idea is to make safety a collective enterprise that we all work towards improving.

To ensure the benefits of SafetiPin go to everybody, we work with NGOs and do collective audits of entire neighbourhoods. Another app, Safetipin Nite, compiles photographs of the city at night, and we analyse those photographs. This two-pronged methodology of collecting data makes it as robust as possible.

In Delhi, for example, when we did the audits in 2016, we found 7,800 points in the city that were not adequately lit at night. We actually found the Delhi government improved almost 70 per cent of the lights based on our data. Now the government has asked us to do a fresh round of mapping. We are really happy that the audits are being used both by women on the street and by governments to make change.

We've also done audits in Manila as well as Port Moresby, in partnership with UN Women, and in Ha Noi with the Asian Development Bank. The Department of Women in Bogota, Colombia used the app to do safety audits along bicycle paths to decide where to place CCTV cameras, where to put improved lighting and where to put bike parking.

There are many strategies that have to be adopted but this is a very direct one that is based on evidence, and we find that city governments and municipal governments are willing to listen. I think that has been our success and we would love for many, many more cities to adopt it.

Kalpna Viswanath is co-founder and CEO of SafetiPin, a social enterprise that has worked with more than 30 cities in India and other developing countries, including in partnership with UN Women, on improving safety, planning and maintenance.

ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY IN PEACE AND IN RESPONSE



Photo: UN Women/Allison Joyce

Women are more vulnerable to disasters and less likely to participate in resolving conflicts and crises. They are also often very visible on the front lines of recovery from disaster and of building peace in their communities. UN Women acts on its mandate to ensure that humanitarian action fully integrates women and gender-related concerns, and that women's perspectives and participation are central to peace processes.

COX'S BAZAAR BANGLADESH | WOMEN BUILD BRIDGES ACROSS COMMUNITIES AND TOWARDS BETTER LIVES

For Muslims the month of Ramadan is a time of solidarity and reflection. For UN Women in 2019 it opened an opportunity to bring 100 women together across two parts of a humanitarian crisis: the Rohingya women who have fled violence and armed conflict in Myanmar, and the women in the communities in Bangladesh that are now on the front lines of hosting them. Both have been caught in one of the world's worst crises, involving a flow of nearly 800,000 refugees.

To celebrate the breaking of the traditional Ramadan fast, the women met at one of the multipurpose women's centres sponsored by UN Women in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar. Together, in a space that is safe and clean, they shared a meal, learned some basic ways to improve their health and livelihoods, and built a sense of sisterhood in the process.

"I'm extremely grateful to the people of Bangladesh for helping and supporting us," said Sonowar Begum, who crossed the river on the border between the two countries using a hand-built raft because she and her husband had no money to pay for ferry passage. She fled the destruction of her home and the deaths of several close relatives in Myanmar, and does not know when she might return.

She and other women have been fortunate to meet people in Bangladesh like Nur Mohan Akter, who open their homes to refugees when they first arrive and are in dire need, and help them obtain longer term support from humanitarian organizations. “We witnessed their misery and despair,” Akter says. “Now those needs are gradually being met, and we are close friends. We will continue to help them with what we have to the best of our abilities.”

While sympathy for the plight of the Rohingya has been high in Cox’s Bazaar, it is not an easy situation, especially as time goes on. Services in the area are under strain and many people face significant pressures to earn enough income and meet basic needs. Women and girls are especially impacted by a lack of protection amid increasing security risks, including sexual and gender-based violence. The situation also puts relationships under strain, including with intimate partners, presenting another aspect of risk to women and girls.

By bringing together and empowering women from both the host communities and the refugee camps, the multipurpose women’s centres have quickly become an important resource to sustain social cohesion. In over 500 events like the Ramadan meal, nearly 5,600 women, in roughly equal numbers from the two groups, have come to the centres to interact and to acquire skills together.

Awareness-raising sessions have picked up common concerns such as child marriage, trafficking, care during pregnancy, and hygiene. Says host community member Jahanara Begum, “We did not know much about these issues before, but now that we do, it has changed our lifestyle practices.”

Initially established amid the large flows of refugees in 2017, the multipurpose centres began as providers of life-saving services to Rohingya women and girls; a total of 17,200 used the first two centres in 2018. By 2019, three new centres had been established, extending access to over 8,900 more users. Specifically organized around the needs and rights of women and girls, the centres have pioneered a way around the long-standing blind spot in humanitarian action that assumed all refugees have the same needs.

All five centres offer services related to women’s health, protection from gender-based violence and psychosocial assistance, along with literacy classes and spaces for women to socialize outside their cramped living quarters. Through courses on livelihood skills, more than 1,400 women have learned to make handicrafts and to repair mobile phones. For many

Rohingya women who had never ventured outside their homes in their conservative community, learning to make a living is a huge step. One participant, Hasina Khatun, says: “I feel I can better support my family, and I think they respect me more. I encourage friends and family to come.”

Skills training is now being coupled with steps to forge links to local markets, such as recent handicraft exhibits and the first-ever women’s market space in the camps. These moves could eventually yield economic benefits for women in the host community as well, and are already inspiring interest among local resident women such as Rozina Akter. She says she has helped many Rohingya women regain their footing by teaching them basic handicrafts and first aid. She is looking for ways “to help improve our income and live a little better”.

In the humanitarian response to the Rohingya crisis, UN Women is a leading voice for making women and girls a priority. In 2019, in addition to expanding the multipurpose women’s centres, UN Women led the launch of the pioneering Women and Children Police Help Desk. Staffed by specially trained female police officers, it provides the first 24/7 police coverage for residents of seven out of 32 camps, a critical step amid worsening levels of gender-based violence.

With no end to the crisis in sight, these measures are based on a recognition that women’s rights and voices are vital to sustaining peace and preventing further upheaval. As they find paths to safety and empowerment, women keep hopes for a better future alive.

PUTTING PEACE ON WOMEN’S TERMS

Peace is not possible without the equal participation of women, as affirmed by a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions, starting with 1325 on women, peace and security. So in early 2019, when the transitional authority for the **Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao in the Philippines** was new, women did not let the opportunity pass. At an inaugural Women’s Summit hosted by UN Women, more than 100 grass-roots activists mobilized to establish a common Women’s Agenda to guide advocacy for gender equality.

The summit was a culmination of UN Women’s long-standing support for female leaders in Bangsamoro as the region emerges from conflict and moves towards autonomy. Women’s mobilization and skilled advocacy shaped the Bangsamoro Organic Law, ratified in 2018, which reserved seats for women in the new Parliament and Cabinet, and guaranteed that at least

5 per cent of the public budget would be allocated to gender and development. Other far-reaching provisions included guaranteeing the rights of women and marginalized groups in future climate change actions.

UN Women works on multiple fronts to empower women to build resilient and peaceful communities, and to reduce risks of violent extremism. By 2019, 5,500 women from 175 communities in **Bangladesh**, **Indonesia** and the **Philippines** had taken part in initiatives that helped them start small businesses, form cooperatives and learn marketable skills, while also initiating community conversations to foster social stability and cohesion. In Indonesia, 10 communities with over 300,000 residents have been declared “Peace Villages”, a concept now being adopted by Indonesia’s counter-terrorism agency to implement the National Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism. The Philippines has adopted an innovative National Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism that recognizes women’s critical role in leading the way towards a culture of peace.

In **Bangladesh**, with the support of UN Women, development of the country’s first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security has emphasized expanding women’s roles in peacekeeping, peacebuilding, disaster management and prevention of violent extremism. Widespread consultation with civil society resulted in more than 150 recommendations to shape essential aspects of the plan. Through a network of 21 civil society organizations, nearly 1,300 youths and women in 21 districts increased their knowledge of how to resolve issues related to violence and conflict in their communities.

As **Lao People’s Democratic Republic** cleans up a legacy of unexploded mines and other ordnance, dating back 50 years to a decade-long bombing campaign, it has successfully reduced casualty rates by 85 per cent. Most of the injured have been men and boys, who tend to be more active in public spaces contaminated by the devices. Yet women and girls face consequences too, often struggling with little education and few assets to support impacted men who can no longer earn an income. With little done to assist them, UN Women joined the Lao Women’s Union in setting up a skills-training programme for affected women in one of the country’s most impacted provinces. Women learn to increase their incomes and can join together for moral support. As a further measure, UN Women introduced a gender training tool adopted by seven mine-action organizations for activities in three provinces and the national capital.

EMPOWERING A NEW GENERATION

The first Women Peace Café at Begum Rokeya University in **Bangladesh** was launched on International Women’s Day 2019. A student-led business incubator, the café is helping 250 female students to develop 50 innovative social businesses concepts that provide income while improving people’s lives.

The incubator is one part of a partnership between UN Women and the Centre for Peace and Justice of BRAC University aimed at boosting the knowledge and abilities of 2,000 female university students. At three-day “business bootcamps” they discuss problems in their communities, including violence, sexual harassment and violent extremism. Through working with mentors, they develop small social enterprises that address the roots of these concerns, and promote peace and social cohesion on campus and beyond. Seed funding has already kick-started a community club for learning self-defence skills against sexual harassment, a student magazine on women and careers, and a programme for training women and transgender people to work in public transport.

Afghanistan held its first-ever hackathon on women, peace and security, called #code4peace. Twelve teams consisting of 75 participants (mostly women) from 27 provinces competed to develop a platform to integrate the greatest possible number of women’s voices in the peace process. In 23 rounds of peace talks with the Taliban between 2005 and 2014, women were at the table just twice. After 48 hours of working tirelessly around the clock, two teams in the hackathon tied to win the top prize. The solutions were unique in their ability to widely gather women’s voices from all 34 provinces, including those who are illiterate and without access to technology.

MAKING GENDER MATTER IN DISASTERS

Women are among the people most vulnerable to the frequent disasters in Asia and the Pacific, and key to recovery and resilience. UN Women advances gender-responsive measures in disaster risk reduction and humanitarian action through co-chairing the Regional Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group, and convening regional inputs to key initiatives, especially towards realizing the commitments of the globally agreed Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Amid flooding caused by the 2019 monsoon in **Bangladesh**, UN Women worked with the Humanitarian Coordination Team to conduct a needs assessment ensuring that a fair share the \$5.6 million in emergency funding would reach female-headed households. UN Women helped 4,200 women to restore their livelihoods through cash grants and skills training, and

worked with the Government of Bangladesh to revise its disaster management policy. For the first time, the revised policy details specific roles and responsibilities for government ministries and departments to act on the many gender dimensions of disaster management, and stipulates a leading role for the national women's ministry, working together with national and local women's organizations.

Several Pacific Island States suffered devastating natural disasters in 2018. The tropical cyclone that struck **Tonga** affected 75 per cent of the population. In **Vanuatu**, dangerous volcanic activity prompted the full evacuation of Ambae island. In both cases, UN Women mobilized experts on gender to deliver health packs and dignity kits meeting women's needs, along with assistance for survivors of gender-based violence. In the highlands of **Papua New Guinea**, about 1,000 women in communities affected by an earthquake accessed essential support services through community centres run by UN Women. Mass text messages reached 58,000 individuals with messages related to protection from gender-based violence.

Photo: UN Women/Tasfiq Mahmood



In 2019, UN Women led an innovative global gathering of 40 people working on disasters and resilience efforts in the Pacific and the Caribbean. The two regions, which consist mostly of small island developing states, share a heightened vulnerability to natural hazards and climate change. Over two days, participants developed a series of recommended actions to increase women's resilience to disaster, including by building on women's often-overlooked strengths and roles as the mostly likely front-line responders in homes and communities.

PHILIPPINES

“THAT IS WHAT WE ALL WANT: A PEACEFUL LIFE.”

MY LIFE, MY CHANGE

When I was a kid, I experienced a lot due to conflict. It was hard for me when we had to move around to different places with my parents. We had to leave many of our belongings behind and when we moved, we had to start again over and over. I was always afraid of my surroundings, and I could not study well. Even if I only heard cars running, I got scared and thought those were soldiers. Sometimes I have dreams about these times.

For these reasons, I wanted a permanent place to live for my children and a peaceful life where there is no conflict.

As a businesswoman, I sell different things that are available in the area, such as charcoal and used bottles. I participated in leadership and entrepreneurship trainings supported by UN Women. These trainings were very helpful because they gave me an opportunity to sell my products and to learn about peaceful living. Here, I learned that if a woman has her own business, she is the boss. I am now the boss in my business. I want

more trainings like this for women, for us to become competitive women of the world, not just in the Philippines.

It is important to respect each other. Respect me and I will respect you. In the community, I am willing to share these ideas of peaceful living and what I have learned regarding my business.

As a leader, I always teach other people that a leader must be a good follower. I should be the first to follow my own policies. In terms of peace, a compromise is a must for a peaceful community. If you see something that you do not like, don't be rash to your neighbours. If they throw rocks at you, throw chocolates back at them.

Many women think that our only role is to bear children. Many women in the community did not know what they could do. Now, they are asking me to train them. And I said 'yes'. I will train them on how to contribute to a peaceful community and how to support their families by making simple products. Because that is what we all want: a peaceful life.

Narimbai Dimao, 48, is a mother and entrepreneur in the Bangsamoro area of the southern Philippines. She is a leader and active participant of UN Women's programme to prevent violent extremism.

EXPANDING THE CIRCLE OF PARTNERSHIPS



Photo: Courtesy of Fast Retailing

Partnerships are the foundation of UN Women's work. Each partner adds distinctive value. Together, we all add up to more action and faster change to realize gender equality and women's rights, everywhere.

THAILAND | A YOUNG GENERATION OF ENTREPRENEURS PREPARES TO INVEST IN WHAT THEY WANT: GENDER EQUALITY

Two worlds: a fashion business and a refugee camp. Two starkly different realities.

One woman determined to connect them.

That woman is Vatanika Patamasingh. By day, she oversees a leading Thai fashion brand with a clothing line that bears her name and is modelled on runways around the world. She built the business in just a few years, stressing quality and cut, and through extensive social media outreach.

But with a long-standing commitment to women's empowerment, Vatanika wanted to do more. She became the first woman in senior management in Thailand to formally commit to the Women's Empowerment Principles, pioneered by UN Women to embed gender equality in business practices. Now she is showing the way to the future for a new generation of young entrepreneurs in Asia who want to invest not just in their businesses, but in better, more equal societies. They are rapidly defining new forms of philanthropy and innovative partnership.

One of Vatanika's first moves was to join hands with UN Women to provide life-changing support to some of the region's most vulnerable women and girls: the Rohingya refugees fleeing violence and armed conflict

in Myanmar. In Bangladesh, where nearly 800,000 people have sought shelter since 2017, UN Women's multipurpose women's centres support relief and empowerment despite dire circumstances. The centres are vital to easing trauma and preventing gender-based violence, and provide skills training and education on nutrition, health and sanitation.

But demand far outstrips supply, so Vatanika would like the number of centres to grow. "I see a group of strong women who, if they have more knowledge and education, would be able to protect themselves, to make a living, to look after their children and families," she says.

In 2019, she joined UN Women's fundraising campaign and brought in more than \$70,000 to assist refugee women. At a gala dinner in Bangkok to thank contributing actors, journalists and CEOs of Thai and Chinese businesses, another \$10,000 flowed in.

As important as the funding, Vatanika's activism on social media drew widespread attention to the immense needs among female refugees, as well as the immeasurable value of programmes like the multi-purpose centres. Instagram posts reached 4 million people and YouTube videos over 3 million.

And by sitting down for an evening with her peers in business and fashion, Vatanika not only urged them to "raise our voices for millions of women who need our support", but also modelled how that can happen, through her own example.

With UN Women in May 2019 awarding her the title of "Empower Women: Champion of Change", Vatanika now has plans to mobilize continued support for women's economic empowerment programmes in Thailand, and also further incorporate the Women's Empowerment Principles in her own business. "We need to fight for a decent world where a mother can earn enough to send her daughter to school, where a young girl can have an education, where she can be a doctor, where she can be a lawyer," she says.

It is a message that is catching on. New energy for the fight is coming from a growing number of female chief executives, such as Pranapda Phornprapha of Thailand. As the only woman on the board of her family firm, which comprises major automotive and retail companies, she knows very well what it means to be a woman in the Asian world of business.

Her experience inspired her to establish the Dragonfly platform with UN Women as a partner. Dragonfly challenges social norms and showcases the many roads

women in Asia are taking towards transformation, from triumphing over gender stereotypes to using fame and success to champion equality.

PIONEERING NEW MODES OF BUSINESS

UN Women partners with a growing number of leading companies in Asia and the Pacific on shared agendas that deliver value to women and business. In India, **Procter & Gamble** and UN Women collaborated to hold the #WeSeeEqual Summit in Mumbai in 2019. Business and government leaders and influencers shared inspiration and ideas, delving into issues such as how advertising can be a force for gender equality. Showcasing how much good businesses can do in accelerating women's empowerment, Procter & Gamble announced it would spend \$100 million on working with women-owned businesses in India, the Middle East and Africa. The company also committed to using its brand and voice, including through forums like the summit, to spark conversation and motivate change. A similar summit took place in Singapore.

As part of a global initiative, UN Women has partnered with **Unilever** in India to create safer, more empowering workplaces for rural female workers. Starting in tea gardens high in the mountains of the state of Assam, female workers, company managers and NGOs have come together to define and address safety concerns. New measures have included women-only buses for secure passage to work and confidential reporting channels for cases of violence or harassment. Based on these experiences, as well as related initiatives in Kenya, in 2018 UN Women and Unilever launched the Global Women's Safety Framework. It highlights what works to prevent violence and harassment against female workers, particularly in agriculture.

Unilever and UN Women also kicked off the WeLearn initiative in 2019. An online platform to help women unlock their full entrepreneurial potential, it offers customized learning as well as access to a supportive community. A first stage involves 5,000 women in Indonesia who are learning to start or grow their businesses and better prepare to benefit from the changing world of work.

UN Women's partnerships with advertising agencies and other members of the creative community have produced a number of striking, high-impact advocacy campaigns. At the Spikes Asia Festival of Creativity held in Singapore, sponsored by Cannes Lions, advertising agency BBDO Pakistan took home the coveted **Grand Prix for Good** award for its #StopDowrymongering campaign for UN Women. Another UN Women campaign, The Bridal Uniform, won a **Silver Spike** award for its contribution to education and awareness.

Emerging from a collaboration with Ali Xeeshan, a renowned Pakistani clothes designer, the campaign sent a child down a runway at a bridal fashion show, an undeniable reminder of the persistence of child marriage.

UNITING TO END VIOLENCE

To mark the **International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women** in 2018, diverse partners from the worlds of government, business and civil society joined UN Women to listen to survivors of gender-based violence and challenge mindsets that allow violations to continue. At storytelling events in Thailand, women shared powerful, heart-rending experiences. Model, actress and UN Women partner Cindy Bishop organized the #DontTellMeHowToDress exhibit, which displayed clothes worn by survivors of violence when they were assaulted. It garnered a national award for successfully contesting widespread assumptions that survivors are to blame. Similar exhibits took place in the Philippines and Singapore.

Events across Asia and the Pacific launched the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, which the United Nations commemorates under the Secretary-General's campaign **UNiTE to End Violence against Women by 2030**. In Nepal, all seven provincial assembly buildings across the country were lit up in the campaign's signature orange colour. Interactive events with more than 500 assembly members, staff members, ministers and civil society representatives drew attention to the vast number of cases of violence that are not reported, and the need to listen to survivors and end the culture of silencing. Participants made a public commitment to work for a future free of gender-based violence.

In the Philippines, hundreds of women's rights supporters bicycled around the historic walled section of Manila, drawing attention to the frequent harassment women and girls face in public spaces even just riding a bike. A forum co-sponsored by UN Women and Philippine Normal University spotlighted recent progressive legislation to penalize sexual harassment: the Safe Spaces Act, inspired by UN Women's Safe Cities programme.

UN Women joined the **J. Walter Thompson** creative agency to kick off the #HearMeToo campaign in Thailand with an interactive online 360° immersive experience. Running throughout the 16 Days of Activism, the platform urged visitors to find solutions to end domestic violence and highlighted the cases of women who endured violence and found the courage

to speak up. Over 20 key opinion leaders supported the campaign, which reached millions of people online. More than 2,000 screens on public transportation and outdoor billboards across the country sent the message that violence can be stopped.

INNOVATING IN THE DIGITAL SPACE

Violent extremist groups are increasingly turning to online spaces to promote radical ideas. To stop the messages where they start, UN Women has partnered with **Mythos Labs** to develop comic videos that entertain but also push viewers to think in new ways. These videos were designed to provide women and girls who may be disempowered in their communities with positive role models, showing them there are alternative ways they can make a difference and to discourage them from joining violent extremist groups that may promise them fame, money, marriage etc. Over 80 per cent of females in the target age group of 1-55 said the stories and characters in the video were new and the struggles and biases faced by the sheroes in this video were relatable. By late 2019, the three top videos in the series had garnered nearly 1.7 million views.

CALLING GENERATION EQUALITY

Young people today, Generation Equality, have the power to shape a transformed world, one where societies uphold human rights and the end of violence against women becomes a reality. The time to empower them is now.

UN Women collaborates with youths in various forums including universities. In 2019, through the **HeForShe University Tour**, debate on gender equality and gender-based violence swept across four leading campuses in Bangkok, Thailand. More than 500 students and staff members participated, driving several institutions to take critical steps such as adopting protocols to make campuses safer, strengthening partnerships between faculty and students, and initiating research on inequality and violence. Well-known social activists and sports figures joined students in sessions detailing the real and raw impacts of violence, and encouraging reflection on how to change norms and challenge stereotypes.

A group of students from one of the schools, Thailand's Stamford University, mobilized behind the #PolicyPlease campaign. It resulted in the formation of a students' gender equality advocacy club and the creation of a policy addressing gender-based violence on campus.

THE PACIFIC

TEAMING UP FOR GENDER EQUALITY

MY LIFE, MY CHANGE

Schoolteacher Neli Nabogi can still remember the laughter of parents when she first started coaching her 10-to-14-year-old students to play rugby. The much-loved sport inspires a passionate following across Fiji, yet women have never been expected to take an active part as players or coaches. Seeing a woman on the field was surprising and, for many, a source of amusement.

Considering herself a shy person from a rural family, where she remembers never feeling entitled to speak her mind, Nabogi was daunted by the response. But only for a fleeting moment. She tapped into her strength and commitment to being a teacher, coupled with the training she had received to become a coach. In an unusual turn, it had included new insights on human rights and gender equality.

“I know that they know more about rugby than me,” she says. “But then I just turned my back and said to myself, ‘I’m not going to be undermined by their looks and their comments. I am going to be stronger for the children!’”

In Fiji and many parts of the Pacific, it is still uncommon to see women taking the lead, whether the arena is politics, business, sports or many other areas of life. Yet change is coming, with women increasingly stepping into new roles. UN Women works with women like Nabogi to model new ways for women to demonstrate leadership within their communities. In the process, they are sparking a shift in gender norms for the next generation as well.

Nabogi is a graduate of Get Into Rugby PLUS, a programme that trains schoolteachers to coach students in rugby while also imparting life skills. The programme emerged through UN Women’s close partnerships with leading organizations in sports including Oceania Rugby, the Pacific regional governing body for rugby unions. Other close collaborators include Rugby Australia, the Australian Government’s Pacific Sports Partnership, and the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls.

The teachers, an equal mix of men and women, go through rigorous preparation covering coaching, techniques for athletic strengthening and conditioning,

as well as practices for “safeguarding” an approach ensuring all student players have a positive experience, physically, socially and emotionally.

Coaches learn to talk to students about human rights, to challenge gender stereotypes, and to prevent violence against women and girls. A safe, inclusive environment that values players equally regardless of gender also inculcates the practice of respectful relationships, where everyone receives consideration and support.

“It was challenging at first because even I had that mindset that the rugby game was a male sport,” Nabogi says. “This has really changed my mindset and made me a confident woman. “It’s not just about rugby. It’s about lifelong values and skills both on and off the rugby field.”

She and other teachers and coaches have already seen the difference, reporting less absenteeism and bullying and fewer discipline problems among players.

Get Into Rugby PLUS complements other steps in Fiji and the Pacific region to harness the long-demonstrated power of sports to shift discriminatory gender norms and open opportunities for women to thrive. In the lead-up to the 2019 Pacific Games, held in Samoa, UN Women supported the first-ever training for journalists on fair and empowering coverage of women in sports. The experience led to some new faces—women’s faces—on sports pages across major media.





Readers read the inspiring stories of Elenoa Kunatuba, who became the first female head coach of the Tuvalu Men’s Rugby 7s team in 2018. They saw the story of the powerhouse table tennis duo of Tetiria Utimawa and Tinabora Tekeiaki from Kiribati, who played barefoot with borrowed equipment until they were spotted by a coach.

The performance of the latter at the Pacific Games and the coverage of journalist Liz Ah-Hi, a participant in the UN Women training, drew the attention of the Government of Kiribati, prompting a recommendation to increase the national sporting budget and to empower more women through sport.

“We have a number of very talented sportswomen in Kiribati—the best even,” says the Secretary for the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sports and Social Affairs, Terieta Mwemwenikeaki. Now the need is to “consider more women competitions in sport and how we can sustain their interest”, she says.

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