



PRESS RELEASE

RAISING WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT RATES TO 70% COULD INCREASE MALAYSIA'S GDP BY 2-4 % ANNUALLY: UNDP

The UNDP Asia Pacific Human Development Report on Gender calls for better policies, laws and increased budgetary allocations for the achievement of gender equality

Kuala Lumpur, 15 April 2010 – Lack of women's participation in the workforce costs the Asia Pacific region billions of dollars every year, especially in countries such as Malaysia, India, and Indonesia where conservative estimates show that GDP would increase by up to 2-4 % annually if women's employment rates were raised to 70%, which is closer to the rate of many developed countries.

This was one of the key findings of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sponsored 2010 Asia-Pacific Human Development Report (AHDR), entitled "*Power, Voice and Rights: A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific*", which was launched in Malaysia today.

"If Malaysia aims to become a high-value added economy by moving up the economic ladder, it is urgent that policy makers design and implement strategies which remove barriers to women's employment, thereby also allowing more women to meaningfully contribute to the country's development," said Mr. Kamal Malhotra, UNDP Resident Representative for Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam, who went on to commend Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's recent positive statement on the integral role of women in the achievement of the country's economic transformation through the New Economic Model.

Mr. Malhotra also highlighted the Report's finding that the increase of women in the workforce in developed countries over the last 10 years is estimated to have contributed more to global growth than all of China's astonishing and unprecedented economic growth, demonstrating the good economics that gender equality in the workforce results in.

The keynote address was delivered by activist, writer and blogger Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, who made a special contribution to the Report on the subject of Muslim women in Malaysia.

Speaking on the subject of political and economic equality for women in her address, Datin Paduka Marina said, "If we truly want to achieve this goal of having more women in decision-making positions, then short-term measures with fast results are necessary. Our ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) calls for us to increase women's participation to 30% of such positions. This would mean affirmative action, where 30% of all elected positions in political parties and in state and Federal elections have to be reserved for women."

In Malaysia, women's participation in the labour force has remained stagnant at just under 50% showing little growth over the years. It remains low compared with the participation rate of men, which reached a high of 85.3% in 1995, and then dipped to 79% in 2008.

The gender wage gap between men and women by occupation in Malaysia is also of concern, with wage differentials being as high as RM1, 774 per month for senior officials and managers doing the same job. In the Asia Pacific, despite laws guaranteeing equal pay for equal work, women still earn considerably less than men, with the pay gap ranging from between 54% to 90%.

Report overview and recommendations

The Report was presented by Team Leader Dr. Anuradha Rajivan, Regional Programme Coordinator, Human Development Report Unit, UNDP Regional Centre for Asia Pacific, Colombo.

Dr. Rajivan's presentation focused on the Report's three key areas — economic power, political decision-making and legal rights, in its attempt to analyze what holds women back, and how policies and attitudes can be changed to foster a climb toward gender equality.

In view of Asia's current position at the cross-road, she said that countries in the region had the opportunity to achieve positive change if the right policies were put into place now.

The Report's main recommendations and solutions include removing barriers to women's ownership of assets, such as land; expanding paid employment; making migration safe and investing in high-quality education and health.

The Report also recommends reforming constitutions, training judicial and law enforcement personnel in gender-sensitive practices and progressively interpreting religious principles - which recognize the equal value of all human beings. Also proposed are political quotas to increase women's political participation, the enfranchisement of women into party politics, and the increased reliance on women as brokers of peace in times of emergency.

For more information on and to access the 2010 Asia-Pacific Human Development Report, please visit: <http://www2.undprcc.lk/ext/pvr/>

ABOUT THE ASIA-PACIFIC HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT: *Asia-Pacific Human Development Reports have become a regular series under the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific. The Reports provide continuing analyses of critical long term development issues relevant at both the regional and country levels. The Asia-Pacific Human Development Report Series offers the region a forum for furthering dialogues and structuring debates to support a people-centered agenda.*

About UNDP:

UNDP is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. We are on the ground in 166 countries, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges. As they develop local capacity, they draw on the people of UNDP and our wide range of partners.

For more information about UNDP in Malaysia, please visit: www.undp.org.my

Issued by UNDP Malaysia. For queries, please contact:

Jamie Menon, Communications Officer, UNDP Malaysia

E: jamie.menon@undp.org

DL: 03-2091 5154

M: 012 280 7457

F: 03-2095 2870