



# **RIISING TO THE TOP?**

A REPORT ON WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN ASIA

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# FOREWORD

Asia lies at the heart of global growth, and women lie at the heart of Asia. Over the course of the last thirty years, nowhere has the progress been so rapid and yet the contrasts run so deep. While women have made significant advancements in health, education and employment, they continue to lag their male counterparts in reaching leadership positions. The reasons for this are many and varied, but to continue in this direction would put in peril Asia's many achievements. Numerous studies have now shown that countries with greater numbers of women in leadership positions, across sectors, outperform those that do not. Building on women's achievements of recent years, now is the time to push forward and to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the state of women's leadership in Asia.

In that effort, the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Singapore and the Asia Society undertook the writing of this report, *Rising to the Top? A Report on Women's Leadership in Asia*, which looks at published data on gender equality and women's leadership in Asia, develops a pathway for thinking about women's leadership, and draws conclusions with an eye toward the future. While the relationship between the two organizations goes back many years, especially through our connection to the Dean of the School, Professor Kishore Mahbubani, the idea for this report stems from interactions at previous iterations of the Asia Society's Women Leaders of New Asia Summit.

As women enter the Asian workforce in large numbers and step into leadership positions at institutions across the public and private sectors, there is a growing need for new forums to explore the important role of women's leadership in Asia. Few professional networks of Asia-Pacific women currently exist to explore and address these issues. To address this gap, in 2010 the Asia Society launched the Women Leaders of New Asia (WLNA) initiative, which is fast

becoming the premier cross-sector women's leadership network in the Asia Pacific region.

Each year, the WLNA Summit fosters discussion around a new paradigm of leadership that recognizes the contribution that women leaders in Asia can make. As Asia's global influence in the political, cultural and economic spheres continues to strengthen, the Summit seeks to explore the new role that women leaders of "New Asia" can play. It is around these Summit discussions that the idea for a report on the state of women's leadership in Asia first took root and it is at the 2012 Summit, to be held in China with the report launch in Shanghai and the conference in Zhenjiang, that these discussions will continue.

I wish to express our sincere appreciation to the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, and to Astrid S. Tuminez, the Vice-Dean (Research) and lead author of the report. Astrid's tremendous commitment to women's issues and this report shines through on each page. With the assistance of Kerstin Duell and Haseena Abdul Majid, the report will both stand the test of time, while providing ideas for future research and collaboration. I also owe special thanks to my Asia Society colleagues from the Global Leadership Initiatives team for all of their efforts to bring the report to print.

The authors and Asia Society gratefully acknowledge funding for this report from The Rockefeller Foundation and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

At such a time of unprecedented change in the global conversation on women's issues, we hope that this report will be informative and instructive. The road forward is bright, but it would be brighter if we can work together to address the many outstanding issues. Together with the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy we take this first step with plans for many more.

Vishakha N. Desai  
President  
Asia Society

# WHAT THIS REPORT COVERS

This report presents published data on gender equality and women's leadership in Asia. The data comes from multilateral, private and academic institutions (see Bibliography and Data Sources). *The Global Gender Gap Report 2011 (GGG Report 2011)*, which synthesizes data from a range of original sources, is heavily referenced.<sup>1</sup> This report extracts salient findings on Asia-Pacific countries and provides qualitative insights from secondary research. It also highlights some best practices and provides illustrative stories.

The following three sections of this report address: 1) the general challenge of women's leadership in Asia; 2) the *pathway* of women's leadership, divided into what the report calls Foundation, Pipeline, and Outcomes; and 3) conclusions, policy recommendations and notes on further research. In the *pathway* section, *Foundation* refers to the initial survival, health, and education of girls, and examines how countries rank in creating the baseline from which women leaders might emerge. *Pipeline* covers labor force participation, employment opportunities, and other intermediate indicators that show how easy or difficult it is for women to leverage their health and education to move into the professions. What do various indicators say about women's ability to sustain participation in the labor force and advance to leadership positions? Finally, *Outcomes* will report what we know of women's leadership in specific sectors in Asia as a whole. The final section will synthesize insights from the data, articulate policy implications, and suggest areas for further research.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rise of Asia has become a powerful thesis. China, once dismissed as poor and backward, is now the world's second largest economy. India, with its own billion-strong population, advanced science, and powerful entrepreneurs, is yet another engine of Asia's rise. Add to this the powerful economies of Japan and South Korea, and the dynamic countries of Southeast Asia—and a picture emerges of rising wealth, rising confidence and rising leadership.

Yet, Asia's breathtaking economic growth and demographic strength are inextricably intertwined with deep inequality, endemic poverty, environmental degradation, political instability, and other threats. To address these problems, Asia will need all its human talent, including women. Unfortunately, in Asia, leadership remains male-dominated, with few women attaining top positions in the public and private sectors.

Among the key findings of this report are:

- Asia's rising prosperity has narrowed the gender gap in many countries and bodes positively for the future rise of women leaders. The gender gap is closing on health and survival, educational attainment, economic opportunity, and political empowerment. This implies that the women of Asia can leverage rising personal endowments as well as increasing structural opportunities for future leadership. Family and dynastic factors have also catapulted some women in Asia to the highest levels of political leadership. Indeed, Asia has seen more women heads of state than any other region in the world. Asian women have also joined the ranks of the world's most rich and powerful. All these create an impetus that will help change dominant perceptions of women as subordinate to, and/or less competent than, men.
- But despite overall progress in women's attainments, significant variation remains among Asian countries and territories. Of 22 Asia-Pacific countries ranked in the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report 2011*, the top five performers are New Zealand, the Philippines, Australia, Sri Lanka, and Mongolia. The bottom five are Pakistan (at the very bottom), Nepal, India, Republic of Korea, and Cambodia.
- Data for actual indicators of women's leadership in Asia are limited and do not consistently cover the same set of countries. With these limitations in mind, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand consistently rank among the top three in women's leadership. When singling out economic and corporate parameters such as women in senior management, female advancement,

remuneration, and wage equality, the general top three performers are joined by Singapore, Mongolia, Thailand, and Malaysia.

- In the political sphere, the countries of South Asia, which perform worst in overall gender equality and women's attainment, actually lead among the top five countries in political empowerment (Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India); number of women in parliament (Nepal, Pakistan); number of women ministers (Bangladesh); and women leaders in subnational government (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh). This contradictory picture is partly due to the region having the most number of women who have become heads of state because of family and dynastic connections (and *not* because of greater gender equality). Moreover, affirmative action has significantly increased women's representation at different levels of government. For women in South Asia, ongoing challenges include sustaining political leadership gains, translating these into genuine benefits for greater numbers of women, and engaging more support to fight new discrimination and persecution that sometimes arise in response to affirmative action.
- Development in general is beneficial to women's leadership, but the relationship between human development and women's leadership is not directly proportional. Some economies in Asia with the highest human development rankings (e.g., Japan and South Korea) also perform most poorly in some measures of women's leadership (e.g., women in senior management, women on boards, wage equality, remuneration and political empowerment). Others, such as Singapore and Hong Kong SAR, China, continue to have significant gender leadership gaps despite their high human development.
- In Asia, concrete measures are needed to address the "leaking pipeline"—i.e., many women opt out of their professions when facing the transition from middle- to senior-levels of management. In one survey, the percentages of women dropping out in the transition from middle- to senior-level management are as high as 70.24 percent (Japan), 52.88 percent (China), 48.83 percent (Hong Kong SAR, China) and 45.90 percent (Singapore). More systematic support is needed to facilitate women's choice to persevere in their professional lives without giving up their roles as mothers and caregivers. This can include mentoring, maternity and paternity leaves, better childcare and elder care, and more gender-equal retirement and pension schemes.



- Culture and entrenched social norms are intractable obstacles for women's leadership in Asia. To address cultural and social norms that impede women's leadership, a broad campaign is needed to educate people and push for change in the *valuation and perception* of girls and women. Three shifts need to happen: 1) societies must perceive girls to be as valuable as boys; 2) societies must view women as having roughly similar abilities and potential to lead as men; and 3) societies must be more open to gender roles that involve women leading outside the home and men doing more in the home. These shifts will give women more equal voice and agency in the home and in society at large, and facilitate their role as leaders.
- There are no easy answers or quick steps to changing social norms. Education for men, women and youth is part of the equation. Affirmative action programs are also part of the answer, but change will take time. For example, in India, over time, exposure to female leaders at the local level reduces bias and boosts the aspirations and educational achievement of young women. Besides affirmative action, governments, particularly China and India, can increase media campaigns and other steps to end sex selection against baby girls. More laws (and better implementation) are also needed to reduce domestic violence against women and to enhance women's bargaining power through greater property ownership, access to legal and other support services, and ability to leave marriage. In Pakistan and Indonesia, encouraging examples show how partnerships among government, police, women's groups, paralegals and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) add up to strengthen women's voice and agency, and thus their potential to contribute more fully to society. □



# THE PROBLEM OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN ASIA

## Rising Asia, Rising Women?

The rise of Asia,<sup>2</sup> defined in terms of Asia becoming the world's dominant economic power, has become a powerful thesis. China, once dismissed as poor and backward, is now the world's second largest economy, with an annual gross domestic product (GDP) of nearly US\$5 trillion. In recent times wealthier and more established nations have gone to China hat-in-hand, asking for assistance during financial and economic crises. India, with its own billion-strong population, advanced science and engineering, and powerful entrepreneurs, is yet another engine of Asia's rise. Add to this the powerful economies of Japan and South Korea, and the post-dictatorship, post-communist and post-independence countries of Southeast Asia—and a picture emerges of rising wealth, rising confidence and rising leadership.

Yet, Asia's breathtaking economic growth and demographic strength are inextricably intertwined with deep inequality, endemic poverty, environmental degradation, political instability, and other threats. In other words, a dark shadow looms alongside Asia's rise.<sup>3</sup> This contradictory context highlights the need for diverse and capable human capital and leadership to continue driving Asia's growth and competitiveness, while also skillfully managing and addressing the thorniest problems that confront the region.

This report is driven by the premise that, in Asia, as in the West, the talents and ambitions of women are needed to drive progress in all spheres of human activity. Women have already contributed to Asia's rise, but have more to contribute to a diversified and sustainable Asian human capital pool. What is the story of women's leadership in Asia? To

what extent are women in Asia now contributing to top levels of strategy, decision-making and innovation? In the past five decades, Asia has seen more women at the apex of political power than any other region in the world; girls are becoming healthier and better educated; and more women than ever before are entering Asia's workforce. Women in Asia are closing some of the gap with males in health, education and employment, but they continue to be severely under-represented in the top echelons of formal leadership. Women also continue to be paid less than men for similar work, and more women in Asia are dropping out in the transition from middle to top management roles, thus creating a "leaking pipeline" of leadership.<sup>4</sup> Finally, cultural and social norms continue to disadvantage women who aspire and work towards positions of leadership.

What is the overall state of women's leadership in Asia today? Does the rise of Asia also mean the rise of women leaders? How many women leaders are there in the public and private sectors in Asia? What insights can we glean on women's leadership in the non-profit sector? What are the critical junctures in women's pathway to leadership and what challenges do they face? What best practices and policies help women sustain their professional journey and enhance their chances of attaining senior leadership positions?

## The Persistent Gender Gap

Asia is home to two-thirds of the global population and two billion of the world's women. Although Asia's women have contributed significantly to growth, efficiency, and productivity in the region, they continue to face disadvantages in formal leadership. Often,

in public discourses, mass media, religious practices, and traditional policies, women in Asia are portrayed less as visible and effective agents of change and progress, but as subjects of sexual predation, victims of conflict and war, or recipients of microfinance and other assistance. Leadership in Asia, as elsewhere, tends to be associated with men. Although corporate research has amply documented the immense loss that Asian (and all other) economies and public administrations suffer by ignoring or under-utilizing their female labor pool, yet gender stereotyping persists. In view of the many challenges Asia faces and will face in the coming decades, the inattention to female human capital appears shortsighted and unaffordable. Tapping female leadership talent thus becomes an imperative for survival and competitiveness in a global economy fraught with demographic imbalances, severe inequalities, limited resources, and unpredictable challenges.

To be sure, Asia's economic rise in the last two decades has benefitted girls and women. But a significant "gender gap" persists. This refers to disparities in the distribution of resources between women and men (regardless of the overall level of these resources) that ultimately translate into economic, political, educational, health and other disadvantages for women. The annual *Global Gender Gap Report (GGG Report)*, sponsored by the World Economic Forum, has tracked these disparities across the world since 2006, examining four specific areas: health, education, economic opportunity and political empowerment.

The *GGG Report 2011* ranks 135 countries, representing 90 percent of the world's population. The bullish news is that more

than 96 percent of the gender gap on health outcomes and 93 percent of the gap on educational attainment have been closed. However, in economic participation, only 59 percent of the gap has been closed and in political empowerment, only 18 percent.<sup>5</sup> For the Asia-Pacific region, the *GGG Report 2011* notes that 65 percent of the gap has been closed and that the region ranks highest (among six regions compared<sup>6</sup>) on political empowerment. However, Asia-Pacific comes in last on health and is second-to-last on economic participation. It ranks fourth on educational attainment. These rankings, which cover the regional average, also mask substantial country variations. They include not only high scorers such as New Zealand (6) and the Philippines (8), but also laggards such as Malaysia (ranked 97), Japan (98), Cambodia (102), Republic of Korea (107), India (113), Nepal (126), and Pakistan (133).<sup>7</sup>

A United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report in 2010 notes that Asia-Pacific countries remain behind the curve on gender equality. Individual country efforts to correct gender disparities have not been sustained, and women remain chronically under-represented in political, economic, and legal institutions. Entrenched notions of female second-class status are difficult to overcome, even when public policy measures are formally taken. As a result, women in the Asia-Pacific region experience a “deficit in power and voice.”<sup>8</sup>

### Many Opportunities, Limited Talent

According to UNDP, limits in women’s participation in the workforce cost the Asia-Pacific an estimated US\$89 billion per year. This is especially acute in South Asia, where gender gaps in education and employment account for lower annual per capita growth rates compared to East Asia.<sup>9</sup> Such limits are at odds

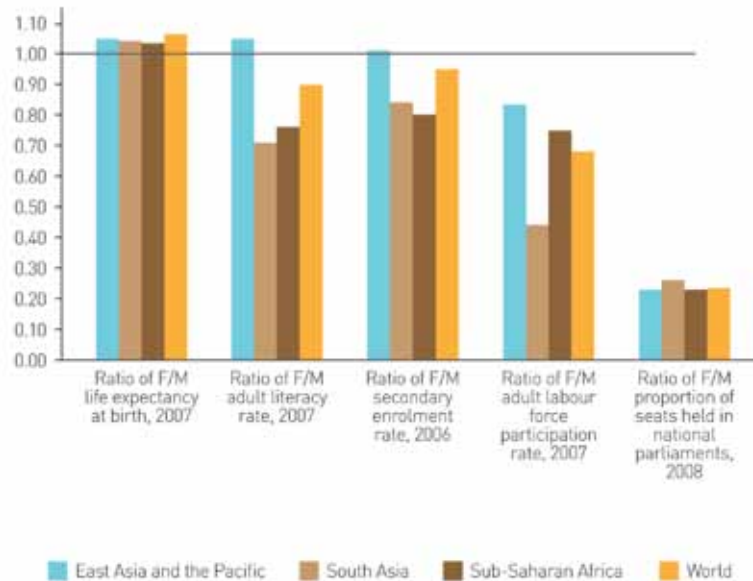
with women’s increasing qualifications and the acute need for talent in the Asia-Pacific region, where 45 percent of employers report difficulties in filling job vacancies due to lack of available talent. This lack of talent matters less in China, where only 24 percent of employers report difficulties in hiring qualified personnel, but is particularly acute in Japan and India, with 80 percent and 67 percent of employers reporting similar difficulties, respectively.<sup>10</sup> This problem is expected to worsen with shifting economic and demographic trends, signifying that overwhelming demand for talent in Asia will continue significantly to outweigh supply.<sup>11</sup>

Economic growth in recent decades has facilitated women’s access to education and training. At the secondary and tertiary school levels, girls often outperform boys. In a few Asian countries, general health and development indicators have also reached, or are

near, parity with the Western world. Thus, a pipeline exists of well-educated and increasingly ambitious women who are, theoretically, poised to take on leading roles. Yet, many of these women fail to make the transition from education to professional life or from lower-level to top professional positions. In other words, women in Asia are increasingly equipped to lead but still face obstacles in reaching and sustaining formal positions of leadership. Integrating the female half of the available talent pool into leadership structures in the public and private sectors is particularly relevant in developed countries, where women account for more than half of university graduates.<sup>12</sup> In Japan and Singapore, two nations with ageing societies and low birth rates, the matter of women’s talent and leadership becomes a compelling issue.

The solution to the talent gap in Asia may be “hiding in plain sight”<sup>13</sup>; there are millions

Figure 1: Asia-Pacific Often Ranks Low on Gender Indicators



Source: World Bank 2009, cited in UNDP, *Power, Voices, and Rights: A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific* (2010), p. 2

of women in the workforce, many of whom are highly skilled and ambitious. Indeed, as Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Ripa Rashid contend, “As we enter the second decade of the new millennium the face of top talent in emerging economies is most likely to be that of a woman.”<sup>14</sup> This vision, however, is far ahead of reality.

### **Culture, Tradition, and Social Norms**

Tradition, culture, and social norms play an important role in determining whether girls are born, educated, enter the workforce, and, ultimately, exercise leadership. Cultural norms are highly resistant to change, and herein lies a thorny challenge for Asia. Paradoxically, women in Asia are preservers of culture and tradition, but they are also victims of cultural practices that undervalue female identity and undermine female roles and contributions. Moreover, traditional gender roles remain strong in Asia, particularly for married women, who are expected to bear the bulk of domestic responsibility towards children, spouses, and ageing parents. In this context, societal change must happen without vilifying entire cultures or religions that, not least, tend to be integral to personal and national identity. Such change must also happen without pitting men and women in a bitter, adversarial relationship. For women who aspire to be leaders, this means navigating a complex personal and socio-cultural journey to leadership.

One impediment to women’s advancement in Asia is the much-analyzed sex ratio imbalance, particularly in China, South Korea (where the situation is improving), India, Vietnam, Hong Kong SAR (China), Taiwan, and Singapore. This imbalance reflects and perpetuates a gender bias against girls and women. Sex-selective abortion due to a culture of preference for sons, for example,

eliminates many girls outright and creates a shrinking pool from which to draw future female leaders. In addition, research shows that women face formidable obstacles in societies with a surplus of (unmarried) males. These include increased gender-based violence, human trafficking, and broader socio-economic instability.<sup>15</sup>

Culture and social norms tend to be resistant to change, but modernization and economic development—processes long underway in Asia—do challenge traditional norms and expectations. For example, while divorce remains relatively rare in Asia compared to the West, increasingly Asian women who enter the workforce are opting out of marriage entirely. Financial independence, greater education, and general pessimism about marriage are some of the factors contributing to the decline of marriage among Asian women. Rates of non-marriage are especially striking in Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, and Singapore, but this is not (yet) the case in China or India.<sup>16</sup> Greater education (especially for women), urbanization, industrialization, and physical mobility are also re-shaping familial relations and expectations in ways that undermine female-unfriendly traditions, such as a preference for sons. This is well-documented, for example, in the case of South Korea.<sup>17</sup>

In many Asian countries the concept of the family as society’s bedrock appears to be eroding due to a silent flight from marriage, migration, urbanization, and other factors.<sup>18</sup> Tensions involving culture and traditional norms on one hand, and modernization, economic development, and globalization on the other will impact the trajectory of women’s leadership. Although tradition still favors male leadership hierarchies and may stigmatize women who work and lead in non-traditional spheres, the situation in Asia is becoming more fluid. Women are finding a surer

footing in the workplace and their “power of the purse” is increasing.<sup>19</sup> In coming years, men and women, and Asian societies in general, will be required to renegotiate and redefine roles in ways that, hopefully, will improve women’s representation in leadership.

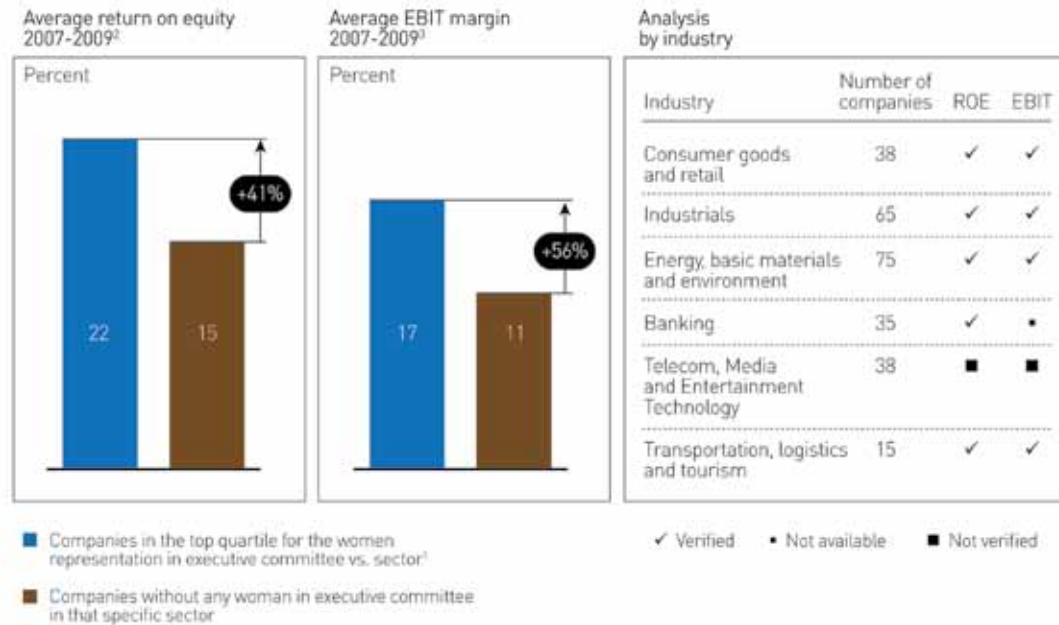
### **The Case for Women’s Leadership**

Since the 1960s, scholars, advocates and public figures have built up a compelling case for gender equality and women’s leadership. In 2000, when 189 nations agreed on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG’s), gender equality and women’s empowerment were singled out as “effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable.”<sup>20</sup> The literature on women’s leadership tackles the matter as a case of gender rights and social justice. Increasingly, however, many articulate a business case and a development-sustainability case for women’s leadership.

### **The Business Case**

- A number of studies provide evidence correlating a strong record of promoting women into the executive suite with higher profitability compared to sector competitors.<sup>21</sup> McKinsey & Company (2007) also reports that, gauging by nine criteria of organizational excellence, companies with women representing at least a third of their senior teams outperform those with no women in senior leadership. Further, leadership behaviors observed more frequently in women than men also positively impact a company’s performance.<sup>22</sup>
- Market capitalization is significantly higher in companies with women on their boards than those without.<sup>23</sup>
- McKinsey’s *Women Matter 2010* study examines 279 companies and finds that

**Figure 2. Companies with A Higher Proportion of Women in Their Executive Committees Have Better Financial Performance**



<sup>1</sup> Top quartile: 25% of the companies of the sector with the highest share of women in the executive committee  
<sup>2</sup> ROE: Average calculated on 2007-2009 period for 279 companies  
<sup>3</sup> EBIT: Sample of 231 companies: Banks, insurance and financial services have been excluded  
 Note: Scope: 6 European countries (UK, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Norway) and the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China)  
 Source: Corporate websites; Datastream; McKinsey analysis

Source: McKinsey&Company, *Women Matter 2010. Women at the Top of Corporations: Making It Happen*, p. 7.

the Return on Equity (RoE) of top-quartile companies (i.e., those with the highest share of women in their executive committees) exceeds by 41 percent the RoE of the bottom quartile (i.e., companies with no women on their executive committees). At the same time, operating results for 231 companies show the companies with greater diversity exceeding by 56 percent the results of the group with no women in leadership roles.<sup>24</sup>

- Companies with significant numbers of top female managers not only perform better in terms of profit, but also in innovation. The same argument applies to

countries with women in leadership roles and better performance in national economic stability and growth.<sup>25</sup>

- Reducing gender inequality could play a key role in addressing problems posed by ageing populations, shrinking labor pools, and mounting pension burdens.<sup>26</sup>
- Diversity (including gender) is a strategic advantage for companies because diverse groups tend to outperform homogeneous groups if both groups' members have equal abilities. This is especially the case when solving difficult and complex tasks that require innovation in competitive environments.<sup>27</sup>

### The Development-Sustainability Case

- Countries with high levels of discrimination against women tend to be those performing most poorly on the UN Millennium Development Goals.
- The UNDP's *Human Development Report* (HDR) makes a strong case for the correlation of gender equality and women's empowerment with equity, sustainability, poverty, and environmental degradation. The 2011 report notes that "[new] analysis shows how power imbalances and gender inequalities at the national level are linked to reduced access to clean water and improved sanitation, land

degradation, and deaths due to indoor and outdoor air pollution, thus amplifying the effects associated with income disparities. Gender inequalities also interact with environmental outcomes and make them worse. At the global level governance arrangements often weaken the voices of developing countries and exclude marginalized groups.”<sup>28</sup>

- Countries with higher female parliamentary representation are more likely to set aside protected land areas, as a study of 25 developed and 65 developing countries reveals.<sup>29</sup>
- Countries with higher female parliamentary representation are more likely to ratify international environmental treaties, according to a study of 130 countries constituting about 92 percent of the world’s people.<sup>30</sup>
- Of 49 countries that reduced carbon dioxide emissions between 1990 and 2007, 14 belonged to the Very High Human Development Index countries, 10 of which had higher than average female parliamentary representation.<sup>31</sup>
- The number of women’s and environmental NGOs per capita was negatively correlated with deforestation in a study of 61 countries between 1990 and 2005. That may be partly because of women’s incentives to avert the negative effects of deforestation on their workload, income, and health.<sup>32</sup> □

### Mixed Results from Including Women on Corporate Board Tables

Some studies show mixed results from including women on corporate boards. Having women on corporate boards, for example, does not necessarily lead to better performance at the firm. However, the literature underlines the following benefits from women’s participation on boards and in senior management teams:

- Women tend to bring a skill set that benefits different aspects of team work: empathy, flexibility, communication and collaboration;
- Women tend to be more risk-averse (with implications for firms endangered by excessive risk-taking);
- Women contribute to “social sensitivity” and collective intelligence by bringing varying perspectives, opinions and expertise that would otherwise not be found on all-male teams; and
- Women are more diligent in attending board meetings and influence male board members to improve their attendance.

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Sources: “Limited Seating: Mixed Results on Efforts to Include More Women at the Corporate Board Table,” Knowledge@Wharton, 26 October 2011, in <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/articlepdf/2861.pdf?CFID190216711&CFTOKEN=24169347&jsessionid=a830d97945ad7a3766f24c79b224e2b57015> (accessed 3 March 2012); Siri Terjesen, Ruth Sealy, and Val Singh, “Women Directors on Corporate Boards: A Review and Research Agenda,” *Corporate Governance. An International Review* 17 (3):2009, pp. 320-37; and Clara Stigring and Frida Lyxell, “Is There a Business Case for Women on Boards?,” Goteburg University, School of Business and Law, Bachelor Thesis, in [http://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/26850/1/gupea\\_2077\\_26850\\_1.pdf](http://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/26850/1/gupea_2077_26850_1.pdf) (accessed 6 March 2012).



## PATHWAY TO LEADERSHIP

### **Foundation: Women's Survival, Health and Education**

#### Survival and Health

Early survival, health and well-being, followed by education constitute the foundation of women's leadership. In Asia, foeticide and neglect threaten the survival of girls and diminish the pool from which to draw future female leaders. Amartya Sen, the Nobel laureate in economics, initiated the discourse on "missing girls" when he noted the paradox that women generally had higher life

expectation than men, yet between 60 and 100 million "women" were missing from the demographic matrix. Subsequent research linking demographics, gender, and cultural norms highlight that women *disappeared* because they were terminated *in utero* or soon after birth; their births were not registered; or they were fatally neglected as infants.<sup>33</sup>

The norm for son preference, combined with medical advancement and one-child or two-children policies in China and India, respectively, have had significant demographic and socio-economic consequences.

Sex-selective abortion has engendered highly unbalanced sex ratios at birth, with long-term implications for fertility, availability of marriage partners, social unrest, and state security.<sup>34</sup> China has the highest ratio at 1.133 males for every female born, followed by India (1.120), Vietnam (1.117), Taiwan (1.084), and Hong Kong SAR, China (1.075).<sup>35</sup> As a result of their "missing women," India and China rank second-last and third-last, respectively, of 135 countries in the *GGG Report 2011's* health and survival sub-index.<sup>36</sup>

In the Global Gender Gap rankings, girls'



survival and health in Asia are most precarious in India (ranked 134 of 135 countries), China (133), Vietnam (130), Pakistan (123), Bangladesh (123) and Nepal (111). In India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, malnutrition is a key factor, with these countries having the highest number of underweight children below the age of five. Other important variables are poor sanitation, scarcity of medical personnel, and lack of antenatal care. In China or Vietnam, some health indicators are significantly higher, but sex-selective abortion (as in South Asia) drastically lowers these countries' overall ranking on girls' health and survival.<sup>37</sup>

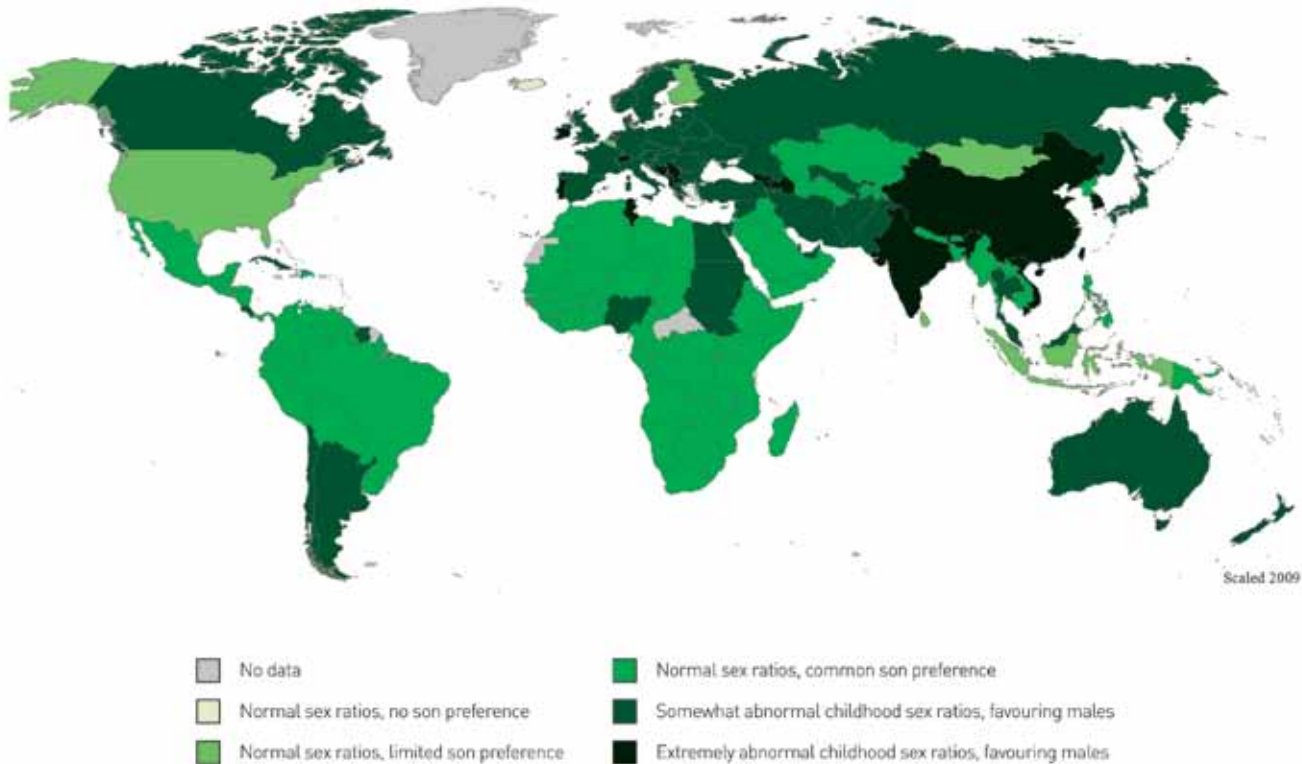
The female adolescent fertility rate is another key indicator for health, as well as education. Higher adolescent fertility rates

are correlated with a cascade of negative outcomes, including poor health, discontinued education, and restricted employment opportunities and career choices. This implies that, in societies with high adolescent fertility, the pool of future women leaders may be narrow. World Health Organisation (WHO) statistics on Asia show that the highest numbers of adolescent mothers are found in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Laos, and Nepal, while the lowest numbers are in South Korea, China, Japan, and Singapore.<sup>38</sup> The highest maternal mortality ratios in Asia also correlate with adolescent fertility and are found in Afghanistan (1,400 per 100,000 live births), Laos (580), Nepal (380), Timor Leste (370), and Bangladesh (340). Asia-Pacific countries

with the lowest maternal mortality ratios are Japan (6), Australia (8), and Singapore (9).<sup>39</sup> Although serious problems in women's health remain, women's life expectancy in South Asia (India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) over the last 20 years has actually improved due to increased public expenditure on health, changes to divorce and inheritance laws that give women more control, and a higher minimum age for marriage.<sup>40</sup>

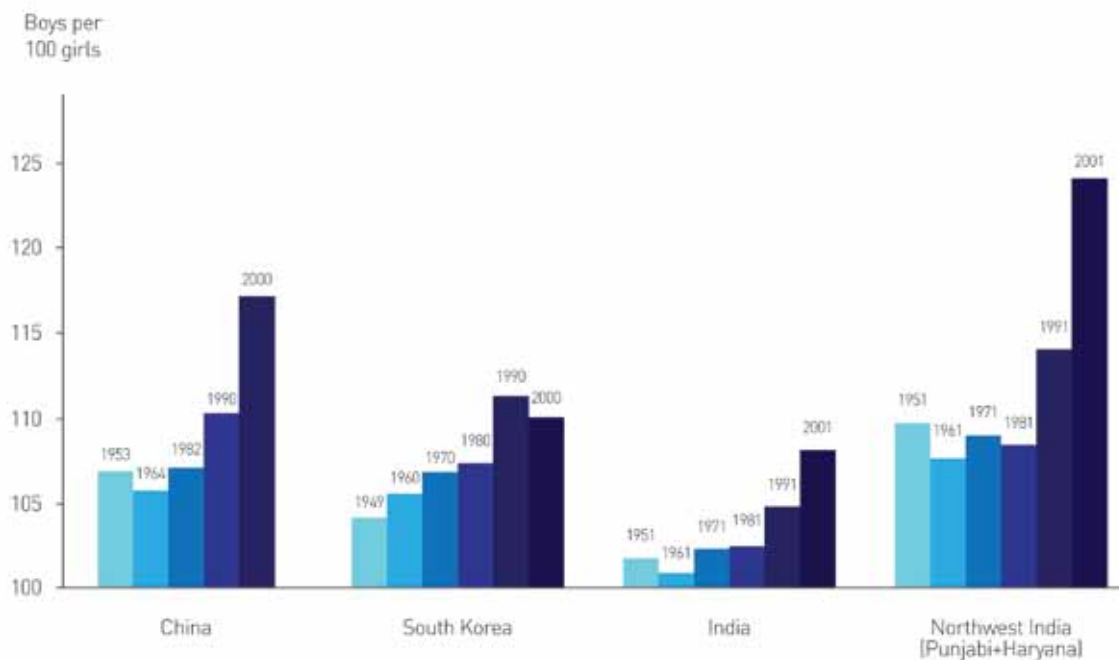
Figure 3 captures son preference in Asia compared with the rest of the world. Accompanying tables show data on women's health and survival, healthy life expectancy (gender gap), female adolescent fertility, and maternal mortality rates in Asia-Pacific countries.

**Figure 3. Son Preference and Sex Ratio**



Source: WomanStats Project Database, in <http://womanstats.org/mapEntrez.htm>

### South Korea—reversing traditional son preference



Notes: The numbers above the bars indicate the year in which the census was taken. The data for India are for the age group 0-6.  
Sources: Official national censuses for each country

Until recently, family law in South Korea reinforced Confucian traditions of son preference. The Korean Civil Code of 1958, for example, stipulated that families must be headed by eldest sons, and inheritance ran exclusively through the male line. Women were transferred to their husbands' family register upon marriage, with all children born belonging to the family of the father. In 2005, the Supreme Court abolished the legal basis for male dominance over South Korean families.

Scholars argue that in South Korea factors associated with development have helped reverse traditional norms for son preference. Development created normative changes throughout society, causing the norm to decline. Further, industrialization, urbanization and education led to an increase in portions of the population that could earn a living independent of their lineage—i.e. they could acquire jobs purely on the basis of their skills and qualifications and could also prepare savings for old age. Urbanization also broke highly inflexible customary rules of inheritance. To implement greater gender equity and give a daughter land, for example, would have involved the radical action of passing land out of the lineage framework. Under rural living conditions, the entire male lineage would have violently resisted such a move. However, in urban areas, non-farm occupation parents could easily share savings and assets with a daughter, with the aid of legal recourse. Finally, women's higher education and older age at marriage were also associated with a diminished preference for sons.

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Source: Woojin Chung and Monica Das Gupta, "The Decline of Son Preference in South Korea: The Role of Development and Public Policy," *Population and Development Review* 33, No. 4 (2007):757-83.

### **All Girls Allowed (AGA)—opposing entrenched prejudices against female offspring**

The preference for male offspring is a long-standing, persistent, and prevalent global phenomenon in traditional societies in which sons carry the family line across generations and bear the responsibility of caring for their parents in their old age. Daughters, on the other hand, are lost through marriage, and in many societies, marrying off a daughter means parting with a sizeable portion of hard-earned family savings in the form of bride payment or dowry.

Preferences for male births over female births has led to pre-natal sex selection (resulting in the destruction of female fetuses), abandonment and trafficking of young females, forced abortion and forced sterilization. Population control measures, such as China's one-child policy, may lead to unintended amplification of such aggression and threat to the survival and plight of women and girls in their countries.

All Girls Allowed (AGA), a non-governmental organization based in the People's Republic of China, seeks to address these ills by countering persistent negative societal attitudes towards female offspring in China. An initiative of the Jenzabar Foundation based in Boston, Massachusetts, AGA counters the strong community and familial dismay, displeasure, and disapproval that accompany the news of a female offspring yet to be born, or already born. It does this by heralding both events with celebratory gifts: women expecting female babies are given an initial one-off cash gift of 100 yuan in their second and third trimesters of pregnancy, and a monthly stipend of the same amount after the birth of child. These cash gifts not only save females from being aborted and abandoned, but also provide a tangible and practical means of financial support to their families to alleviate child-rearing costs. Most importantly, the program sends a robust and revolutionary message of respect for, and recognition of the value and worth of a female child, and in turn, of women of all ages.

Source: <http://www.allgirlsallowed.org/>

**Table 1. Health and Survival (based on sex ratio at birth and female/male healthy life expectancy ratio)**

Country	Rank	Score
Thailand	1	0.9796
Fiji	1	0.9796
Philippines	1	0.9796
Japan	1	0.9796
Sri Lanka	1	0.9796
Cambodia	1	0.9796
Mongolia	1	0.9796
Australia	74	0.9739
Malaysia	78	0.9736
Korea, Rep.	78	0.9736
Iran, Islamic Rep.	85	0.9714
New Zealand	92	0.9697
Singapore	101	0.9677
Indonesia	106	0.9663
Brunei Darussalam	108	0.9658
Maldives	111	0.9658
Nepal	111	0.9612
Pakistan	123	0.9557
Bangladesh	123	0.9557
Vietnam	130	0.9458
China	133	0.9327
India	134	0.9312

Source: *Global Gender Gap Report 2011*

**Table 2. Healthy Life Expectancy**

Country	Female (years)	Male (years)	Female-Male Ratio	Rank
Mongolia	62	55	1.13	7
Thailand	65	59	1.10	11
Korea, Rep.	74	68	1.09	16
Philippines	64	59	1.08	19
Cambodia	55	51	1.08	25
Japan	78	73	1.07	36
Fiji	64	60	1.07	39
Sri Lanka	65	61	1.07	42
Malaysia	66	62	1.06	44
Vietnam	66	62	1.06	44
Singapore	75	71	1.06	60
China	68	65	1.05	74
Australia	75	72	1.04	82
Iran, Islamic Rep.	62	60	1.03	91
New Zealand	74	72	1.03	98
India	57	56	1.02	111
Indonesia	61	60	1.02	113
Brunei Darussalam	67	66	1.02	116
Maldives	64	64	1.00	118
Nepal	55	55	1.00	118
Bangladesh	55	56	0.98	131

Source: *Global Gender Gap Report 2011*

**Table 3. Adolescent Fertility Rate <sup>41</sup>**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Births per 1,000 girls aged 15–19 years</b>
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	1
Korea, Rep.	2
China	2
Japan	5
Singapore	5
Malaysia	12
Maldives	14
Myanmar	17
Australia	18
Mongolia	19
Pakistan	20
Sri Lanka	28
Brunei Darussalam	31
Vietnam	35
Thailand	43
India	45
Bhutan	46
Cambodia	52
Indonesia	52
Philippines	53
Timor-Leste	59
Papua New Guinea	70
Nepal	106
Lao People's Democratic Republic	110
Bangladesh	133
Afghanistan	151

Source: See footnote 41. The table shows the number of births per 1,000 girls aged 15–19 years per year from 2000–2011.

**Table 4. Maternal Mortality Ratio**

Country	Maternal Mortality Ratio (per 100,000 live births)
Australia	8 [6-10]
Bangladesh	340 [170-660]
Brunei Darussalam	21 [13-34]
Cambodia	290 [180-480]
China	38 [23-60]
Fiji	26 [14-48]
India	230 [150-350]
Indonesia	240 [140-380]
Iran, Islamic Rep.	30 [18-50]
Japan	6 [5-8]
Korea, Rep.	18 [16-20]
Malaysia	31 [14-68]
Maldives	37 [21-64]
Mongolia	65 [27-150]
Nepal	380 [210-650]
New Zealand	14 [12-15]
Pakistan	260 [140-490]
Philippines	94 [61-140]
Singapore	9 [8-10]
Sri Lanka	39 [26-57]
Thailand	48 [32-68]
Vietnam	56 [27-120]

Source: See footnote 41. Bracketed numbers show the range between the uncertainties estimated to contain the true maternal mortality ratio with a 95 percent probability.



## Education

Globally, women constitute two-thirds of nearly 867 million illiterate adults. Three quarters of the world's illiterate population resides in Asia, and five of the eight countries that host two-thirds of the entire global illiterate adult population are Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, and Pakistan. Women in rural areas in Asia also have particularly low literacy rates—e.g., Pakistan (16 percent), Nepal (25 percent), Bangladesh (31 percent) and Bhutan (10 percent). Among six regions ranked in the *GGG Report 2011*, Asia-Pacific ranks fourth overall on educational attainment. The Philippines (ranked 1) is singled out as the only country in the region to have closed the gender gap in education.

Significant gender gaps remain in Nepal (ranked 128 of 135), Pakistan (127), India (121), Cambodia (116), Bangladesh (108), Sri Lanka (103), and even in wealthy Singapore (100). But, in tertiary education, the gender gap is narrowing in places such as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.<sup>42</sup>

Research has consistently shown that the returns on investment in girls' education are highest in developing countries. As *TIME* magazine reports:

“An extra year in primary school boosts girls' eventual wages by 10 percent to 20 percent. An extra year of secondary school adds 15 percent to 25 percent. Girls who stay in school for seven or more years typically marry

four years later and have two fewer children than girls who drop out. Fewer dependents per worker allows for greater economic growth. And the World Food Program has found that when girls and women earn income, they reinvest 90 percent of it in their families. They buy books, medicine, bed nets. For men, that figure is closer to 30 percent to 40 percent.<sup>43</sup>”

In Asia, parents continue to regard the pay-off from girls' education to be lower than that for boys. In some cases, sending girls to school means a double burden, not only because of school fees that must be paid, but also because girls, not boys, are traditionally expected to substitute for women in housework.<sup>44</sup> Surveys

taken by the Pew Global Attitudes project show a significant undervaluing of girls' education, with a solid majority in India (63 percent) and about half of those surveyed in Pakistan (51 percent) and China (48 percent) indicating that they view university education as more important for a boy than for a girl.<sup>45</sup> Across Asia, societies undervalue girls' enrollment in school in large part because of the common practice that women "transfer out" of their own families upon marriage, allowing their husbands' families to reap the returns on investments made in their education.<sup>46</sup>

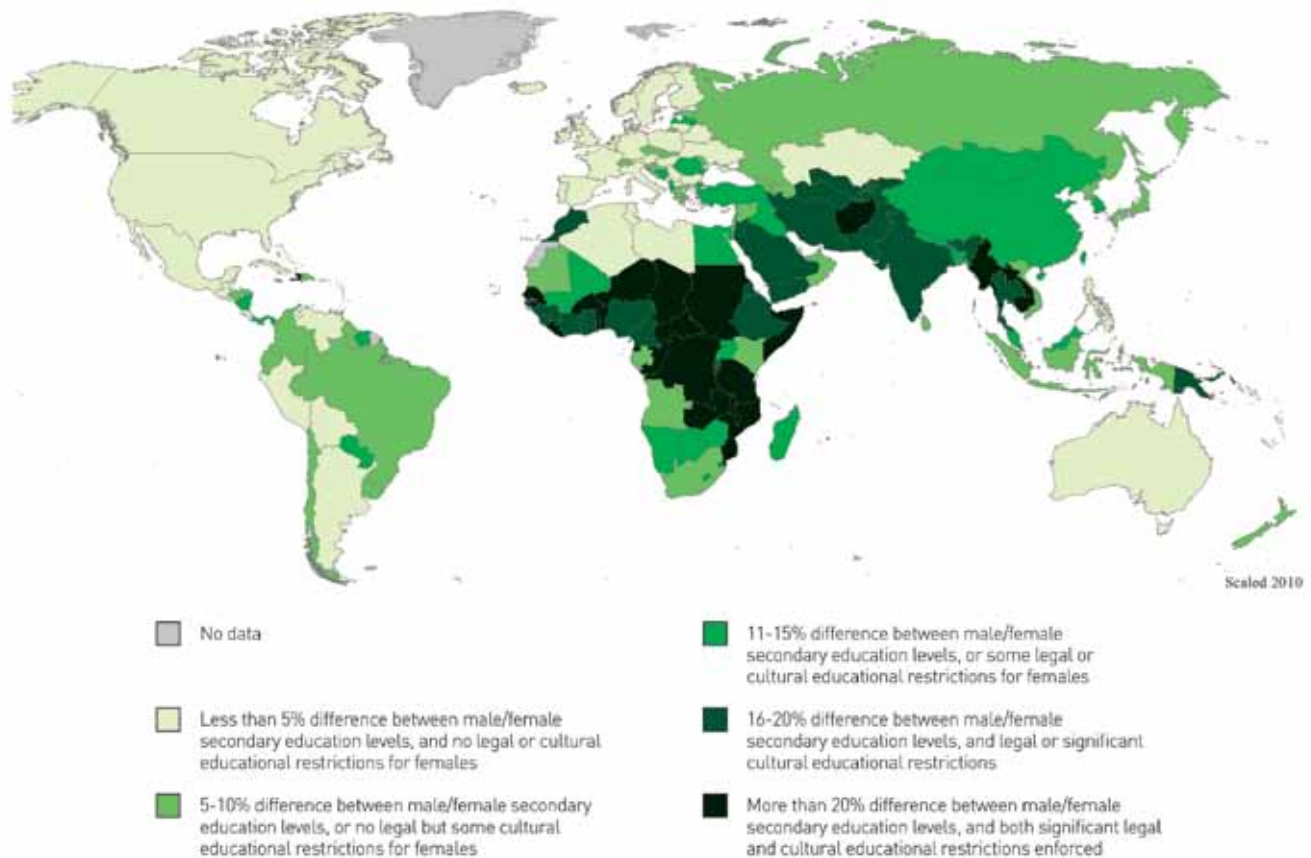
Increased family income and affluence, however, mitigate beliefs and practices that obstruct investment in girls' education. In Asia, tertiary education has become a marker of the "middle class," with girls' secondary and tertiary education being highly sensitive to income in places such as India and Malaysia. This dynamic can feed a virtuous cycle in which tertiary education leads to higher wages, thus further reinforcing family income that, in turn, supports more education. In India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam, the benefits of tertiary education are evident in the

significantly rising wage gap favoring those with a tertiary education over those without.<sup>47</sup>

Unsurprisingly, women's educational attainment is highest in the industrialized countries of Singapore, South Korea, Japan, and the economy of Hong Kong SAR, China and lowest in the developing countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Laos, and India.<sup>48</sup>

Figure 4 shows discrepancy in education globally. Tables 5 and 6 following show the *GGG 2011* rankings on educational attainment and tertiary enrollment (2006 and 2011) in the Asia-Pacific region.

**Figure 4. Discrepancy in Education**



Source: <http://womanstats.org/mapEntrez.htm> (accessed March 17, 2012)



**Table 5. Educational Attainment**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Australia	1.0000	1
New Zealand	1.0000	1
Philippines	1.0000	1
Mongolia	0.9946	47
Brunei Darussalam	0.9938	52
Malaysia	0.9906	65
Maldives	0.9896	69
Fiji	0.9893	70
Japan	0.9862	80
Thailand	0.9855	82
China	0.9815	85
Indonesia	0.9671	93
Korea, Rep.	0.9481	97
Singapore	0.9381	100
Sri Lanka	0.9329	103
Vietnam	0.9257	104
Iran, Islamic Rep.	0.9251	105
Bangladesh	0.9168	108
Cambodia	0.8651	116
India	0.8369	121
Pakistan	0.7782	127
Nepal	0.7589	128

Source: *Global Gender Gap Report 2011*

**Table 6. Tertiary Enrollment**

Country	2006				2011			
	Female	Male	Female-to-Male ratio	Rank	Female	Male	Female-to-Male ratio	Rank
Maldives	—	—	—	—	0	0	2.40	3
Brunei Darussalam	—	—	—	—	22	13	1.76	11
Mongolia	48%	29%	1.64	1	64	41	1.55	22
New Zealand	74%	53%	1.40	1	99	68	1.45	29
Australia	80%	65%	1.23	1	94	71	1.32	46
Thailand	45%	38%	1.20	1	51	39	1.31	49
Malaysia	38%	27%	1.41	1	41	32	1.30	51
Philippines	32%	25%	1.28	1	32	26	1.24	62
Fiji	—	—	—	—	17	14	1.20	66
China	17%	21%	0.85	78	25	24	1.07	81
Iran, Islamic Rep.	—	—	—	—	38	35	1.07	82
Indonesia	15%	19%	0.79	83	23	24	0.96	93
Japan	51%	57%	0.89	76	55	62	0.89	96
Pakistan	3%	4%	0.80	82	5	6	0.85	99
Vietnam	—	—	—	—	8	11	0.73	106
India	9%	14%	0.66	86	11	16	0.70	109
Korea, Rep.	69%	109%	0.63	89	82	117	0.70	110
Bangladesh	4%	9%	0.50	97	6	10	0.56	116
Cambodia	2%	4%	0.46	101	5	9	0.54	117
Sri Lanka	—	—	—	—	3	6	0.50	120
Nepal	3%	8%	0.40	103	3	8	0.40	130
Singapore	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Source: *Global Gender Gap Report 2011*

**PACOS TRUST—*using education and community involvement to enhance the quality of life of indigenous communities, particularly women and children***

PACOS TRUST is an NGO in Sabah, Malaysia that focuses on enhancing the quality of life of indigenous communities, especially women and children. Founded in 1987 by two schoolteachers, the Lasimbang sisters, the organization became fully registered in 1997 and now receives funding from international agencies, private donors, and members. It has helped create job opportunities for young women as well as employment for women who have been victims of domestic violence. A distinctive program run by PACOS is the Early Child Care and Development (ECCD) training and support program. Through ECCD, PACOS gives basic and advanced training for indigenous preschool teachers to enable them to start up and run their local community preschools consistent with the educational standards and curriculum mandated by the Ministry of Education. At the same time, ECCD trains teachers to integrate and emphasize indigenous knowledge and culture in their schools. PACOS believes that providing equal educational opportunity is crucial for a generation of indigenous children who will be facing complex challenges in Sabah. PACOS works with many in the local communities to refine indigenous concepts and constantly adapt to suit the needs and aspirations of the communities being served. Through this initiative, parents are able to understand better the challenges of modern society. Instead of putting their children to work as early as the age of six, they have an opportunity to educate them instead, thus building a better foundation for future alternative employment for their children. This is particularly important given that many indigenous communities have lost their access to natural resources and traditional means of livelihood.

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Source: <http://www.sabah.net.my/PACOS/> and Haseena Abdul Majid, Personal Notes from Working with PACOS.

**Room to Read—*educating children to promote world change***

An advocate of poverty alleviation through the educating of girls and women, **Room to Read** partners with communities across the developing world to promote literacy and gender equality in education by establishing libraries, constructing classrooms, publishing local-language children's books, training educators and supporting girls' education. An award-winning non-profit organization with its headquarters in San Francisco, **Room to Read** was founded on the belief that World Change Starts with Educated Children.

Operating in ten countries in Asia and Africa, the organization's five core programs are adapted to suit the needs of the population of each of these countries. To ensure a personal commitment to each country's educational progress, local teams familiar with the challenges ahead are employed. The organization also partners with national ministries of education to ensure that programs are sustainable and that teachers and librarians are provided for the schools and libraries built. **Room to Read** receives funding and volunteer support from many individuals, families and institutions internationally.

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Source: <http://www.roomtoread.org/>

**Table 7. Economic Participation and Opportunity**

Country	Rank	Score
Mongolia	3	0.8500
New Zealand	11	0.7747
Philippines	15	0.7632
Singapore	16	0.7585
Australia	18	0.7565
Brunei Darussalam	20	0.7552
Vietnam	40	0.7106
Thailand	41	0.7090
China	50	0.6825
Cambodia	75	0.6315
Maldives	86	0.6019
Malaysia	95	0.5941
Japan	100	0.5673
Indonesia	101	0.5642
Sri Lanka	102	0.5598
Fiji	116	0.4972
Korea, Rep.	117	0.4934
Bangladesh	118	0.4932
Nepal	121	0.4606
Iran, Islamic Rep.	125	0.4443
India	131	0.3960
Pakistan	134	0.3446

Source: *Global Gender Gap Report 2011*

**Table 8. Women's Economic Opportunity Index**

Country	Rank	Score
New Zealand	8	81.2
Australia	10	80.5
Japan	32	68.2
Singapore	34	66.7
South Korea, Rep.	35	66.2
Thailand	48	56.8
Malaysia	49	55.3
Philippines	63	50.4
China	65	49.4
Sri Lanka	73	47.5
Vietnam	79	43.7
Indonesia	82	43.1
India	84	42.7
Cambodia	92	39.2
Iran	103	33.0
Bangladesh	104	32.6
Pakistan	108	29.9

Source: Economist Intelligence Unit, *Women's Economic Opportunity Index*, June 2010. Un-weighted Total of All Category Scores (0-100, where 100=most favorable)

## Pipeline: Women's Employment and Economic Participation

Employment and economic opportunity are crucial steps to women's advancement. More women have been joining the workforce for decades, but women's participation in the formal labor market continues to lag significantly behind that of men. As summarized by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU):

“ Women's economic opportunities are influenced not just by a country's regulatory environment but also by social attitudes and customs. ...[Women's] participation in the formal labor force remains well below that of men. Women are also paid less than their male counterparts, and men continue to dominate in sectors with higher wage-earning potential, such as technology and finance.... [Even] where legislation is intended to help women, implementation is often weak and opportunities remain limited.<sup>49</sup> ”

### Economic Participation and

#### Opportunity

How large is the gap in economic participation and opportunity between men and women? The *GGG Report* measures this gap by examining five variables (using International Labor Organization [ILO] data plus calculations and an opinion survey conducted by the World Economic Forum): 1) ratio of female labor force participation over male value; 2) wage equality between women and men for similar work; 3) ratio of estimated female earned income over male value; 4) ratio of female legislators, senior officials and managers over male value; and (5) ratio of female professional and technical workers over male value.<sup>50</sup> As Table 7 shows, Asia shows significant variance, with the highest

Table 9. Labor Force Participation Gap

Country	Female	Male	Female-to-Male ratio	Rank
Vietnam	74	81	0.92	13
Mongolia	71	80	0.88	27
China	74	85	0.88	34
Cambodia	76	87	0.87	35
New Zealand	72	85	0.85	43
Australia	70	83	0.85	45
Thailand	70	85	0.83	52
Nepal	66	82	0.81	58
Brunei Darussalam	62	78	0.80	63
Maldives	59	79	0.75	75
Singapore	60	82	0.74	78
Japan	62	84	0.73	80
Bangladesh	62	85	0.73	83
Korea, Rep.	55	76	0.73	84
Philippines	51	80	0.63	94
Indonesia	53	87	0.61	100
Malaysia	47	82	0.57	106
Fiji	40	80	0.50	117
Sri Lanka	38	80	0.47	119
Iran, Islamic Rep.	33	76	0.44	122
India	35	85	0.42	123
Pakistan	22	88	0.26	135

Source: *Global Gender Gap Report 2011*

rankings going to Mongolia (3 of 134 countries), the Philippines (15), and Singapore (16); followed by Vietnam (40), and Thailand (41); and trailed in the lowest rankings by Pakistan (134), India (131), Nepal (121), Bangladesh (118), and South Korea (117).

The EIU's Women's Economic Opportunity Index (WEOI) is a broader index that tracks 26 indicators, including: (1) labor policy and practice, (2) access to finance, (3) education and training, and (4) women's legal and social status. In short, the index seeks to capture the "set of laws, regulations, practices, customs and attitudes that allow women to participate in the workforce under conditions roughly equal to those of men, whether as wage-earning employees or as owners of a business."<sup>51</sup>

The WEOI covers 113 economies, but, unlike the *GGG Report's* Asia-Pacific coverage, it does not include Brunei, Fiji, Mongolia, Maldives or Nepal. Its rankings are listed in Table 8.

Both the *GGG Report* and WEOI rank New Zealand, Australia, and Singapore as the best countries in the Asia-Pacific region for women's economic opportunity. Both indices roughly overlap in the rankings of Thailand, Malaysia, and China, but diverge in rankings on the Philippines, Japan, and Cambodia. They converge again on lower rankings for Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. The nuances of these rankings may be debated, but it is worth noting South Asia's lagging status, which is consistent with most parameters highlighted in this report.

### Labor Force Participation

The Labor Force Participation Rate, or LFPR, measures the proportion of a country's working-age population that engages actively in the labor market (by working or looking for work). This rate provides an overall

**Table 10. Advancement Gap: Legislators, Senior Officials and Managers**

Country	Female	Male	Female-to-Male ratio	Rank
Philippines	55	45	1.21	2
Fiji	51	49	1.04	4
Mongolia	47	53	0.90	6
New Zealand	40	60	0.67	17
Australia	37	63	0.58	25
Brunei Darussalam	35	65	0.54	34
Singapore	31	69	0.46	48
Malaysia	24	76	0.32	75
Sri Lanka	24	76	0.32	76
Thailand	24	76	0.31	79
Vietnam	22	78	0.28	83
Indonesia	22	78	0.28	85
China	17	83	0.20	90
Maldives	14	86	0.17	97
Nepal	14	86	0.16	100
Cambodia	14	86	0.16	101
Iran, Islamic Rep.	13	87	0.15	102
Bangladesh	10	90	0.11	109
Korea, Rep.	10	90	0.11	111
Japan	9	91	0.10	112
India	3	97	0.03	123
Pakistan	3	97	0.03	124

Source: *Global Gender Gap Report 2011*

**Table 11. Advancement Gap: Professional and Technical Workers**

Country	Female	Male	Female-to-Male ratio	Rank
Philippines	62	38	1.64	12
Thailand	56	44	1.25	26
New Zealand	55	45	1.25	27
Mongolia	55	45	1.20	31
Australia	54	46	1.16	34
China	52	48	1.08	46
Vietnam	51	49	1.05	52
Maldives	49	51	0.95	67
Sri Lanka	47	53	0.89	71
Japan	47	53	0.87	73
Singapore	45	55	0.82	78
Indonesia	45	55	0.81	80
Malaysia	42	58	0.71	83
Korea, Rep.	41	59	0.69	87
Brunei Darussalam	37	63	0.58	91
Iran, Islamic Rep.	33	67	0.50	98
Cambodia	33	67	0.48	101
Bangladesh	22	78	0.28	108
Pakistan	22	78	0.28	109
Nepal	20	80	0.24	112
Fiji	9	91	0.10	116
India	-	-	-	-

Source: *Global Gender Gap Report 2011*

indication of the available supply of labor. The ILO reports that the gender gap in LFPR rates has narrowed from 32 percent to 26 percent between 1980 and 2008. Moreover, women's share in vulnerable employment has decreased in the same period from 55.9 percent to 51.2 percent. However, higher female LFPRs indicate progress only in economic participation, but do not measure equality of wages or quality of employment. Thus, a high LFPR may simply hint at a large number of working poor due to female part-time and non-traditional employment, unemployment, and under-employment. Overall, ILO found a continuing gender disparity, in that:<sup>52</sup>

“...the circumstances of female employment—the sectors where women work, the types of work they do, the relationship of women to their jobs, the wages they receive—bring fewer gains (monetarily, socially and structurally) to women than are brought to the typical working male.”<sup>53</sup>

In Asia, the female LFPR is highest for East Asia and lowest for South Asia, where more than six in ten women of working age remain economically inactive. In East Asia, 64 percent of women are in the labor force, the highest percentage of employed women in the world. Southeast Asia and the Pacific follow, with 54 percent female LFPR.<sup>54</sup>

The latest figures for women's LFPR in the Asia-Pacific region are found in Table 9. But historically, a few details are worth noting:

- Asian Tiger Story (Hong Kong SAR, China; Taiwan; Republic of Korea): From the 1960s to 1990s, female LFPRs increased dramatically in these countries—26 percent for Singapore and approximately 10 percent for the others. Women became preferred workers for light, labor-intensive manufacturing in electronics and other low-wage sectors. Female labor participation rose,

**Table 12. Percentage of Women at Senior Level Positions**

Country/Economy	Average (percent)
China	20.72
Hong Kong SAR, China	22.77
India	9.32
Japan	7.77
Malaysia	27.57
Singapore	21.5

Source: Community Business, *Gender Diversity Benchmark for Asia 2011*.

**Table 13. Percentage of Women Dropping Out from Middle to Senior Levels**

Country/Economy	Average (percent)
China	-52.88
Hong Kong SAR, China	-48.83
India	-37.49
Japan	-70.24
Malaysia	-32.89
Singapore	-45.90

Source: Community Business, *Gender Diversity Benchmark for Asia 2011*.

but women did not necessarily benefit in terms of equality of wages and working conditions.<sup>55</sup>

- Thailand: In 2008, women's LFPR was 65.9 percent, compared to 81.0 percent for men. The gender wage differential in 2010 was 5 percent, and highest among the most highly skilled of the occupations—e.g., accountants and computer programmers. Gender segregation between industries and sectors was low compared to other countries. Between 1997 and 2007, a

fairly sharp decline occurred in the share of women engaged as contributing family workers, with more women shifting into self-employed, wage, and salaried work. Still, the share of women in unpaid family work remained high at 29.9 per cent in 2007.<sup>56</sup>

- South Asia: In Sri Lanka, female LFPR was 34.6 percent compared to 75.1 percent for men (2008). This is in line with South Asia as a whole, where the regional figure is 35.1 percent, but

**Google—providing a safe and comfortable commute for women**

To address the primary reason why women consider quitting their jobs, the US-based technology company Google provides a shared cab service for all workers at its sites in Hyderabad, Bangalore, and Gurgaon in India. Clean and air conditioned cabs in which commuters are able to plug a data card into a laptop and connect with the Internet or take meetings via teleconference, are part of Google's solutions to the stress of commuting. This fully subsidized service is extended to employees who use the company-subsidized child care facility: both parent and child enjoy the company cab ride home. A female staff member who leaves work alone after 8 p.m. and uses the shared cab service is accompanied by a security guard. Both the transport supervisor and the female employee have the driver's identification number, and the supervisor knows what time she plans to leave, and keeps track of her ride home to ensure her safety. If she leaves with others, the male employee gets dropped off last regardless of where he lives.

Source: Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Ripa Rashid, *Winning the War for Talent in Emerging Markets: Why Women are the Solution* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011), pp. 219-21.



### Goldman Sachs India—*supporting women with maternity leave, flexible work arrangements and work-life skill development*

Indian women, like their Asian counterparts in other countries, bear much of the care-giving and household responsibility in nuclear and extended families. Unable to cope with this and the heavy demands of a career, many drop out of the workforce. The arrival of a newborn is a strong trigger for such transitions, despite the government-mandated 12 weeks of maternity leave.

Goldman Sachs India goes a step further by allowing for an extra four weeks of maternity leave. This benefit is enjoyed by approximately 4 percent of the company's female staff at any one time, a percentage that will rise as more women join the workforce. To promote better work-life balance, the US-based financial services organization also provides flexible work arrangement, such as working from home or working on a half-day schedule.

In 2009, the firm launched a cross-divisional maternity mentoring program that pairs new mothers with experienced working mothers. The latter explain maternity benefits to the new mothers, discuss with them how to make a successful transition back from maternity leave to the work place, and provide advice on balancing motherhood with a full-time career. Managers, most of whom are men, are trained to be supportive of the needs of their female employees and encouraged to provide "flextime arrangements," which include formal or informal work-from-home options and extended maternity leave.

Source: Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Ripa Rashid, *Winning the War for Talent in Emerging Markets: Why Women are the Solution* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011), 217-19.

**Table 14. Female Labor in Agriculture**

Country	Percentage of Female Labor Employed in Agriculture
Nepal	90.5
India	89.5
Pakistan	79.4
Cambodia	65
Vietnam	53
Bangladesh	45.6
Sri Lanka	41.5
China	41.2

Source: Sustainable Development Department (SD), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in <http://www.fao.org/sd/WPdirect/WPre0107.htm> (accessed March 17, 2012).

displaying high variance. Nepal's female LFPR is 63.2 percent, while Pakistan's is 21.2 percent. In India, only one in three women above the age of 15 is considered economically active versus 83 percent of men. Poverty-induced child labor is also a severe problem. Adult women (aged 15 and above) comprise only 27 percent of all employed persons in India, while girls account for 42 percent of all child employment. Young girls bear the brunt of poverty, while women's economic activity is limited. In Bangladesh, the female LFPR is 58.7 percent (2009). The country has strong gender-based occupational segregation, with women concentrated in lower-paying industries and without access to the same types of jobs as men.<sup>57</sup>

- China: Women's LFPR in China is very high at 74 percent.<sup>58</sup>

### **Wipro—retaining, supporting and enabling female staff**

At Wipro, an Indian global IT services and consulting company provider headquartered in Bangalore, women make up nearly 30 percent of the 120,000-strong workforce. Yet, only 5 percent working in management at the vice presidential level or higher, and fewer than 20 percent are managers. Women of Wipro (WoW), an initiative that enables women to strategically build their careers at Wipro, was created as a reflection of the company's belief in the profitability of having more women in its workforce.

WoW began with a series of ongoing self-defense workshops for women employees across India and brochures on personal safety for new employees across the company in 2008. Subsequently, on-site vacation camps were organized for employees' children during the long spring school holidays to allow female staff to spend more time with their children.

The company conducted an in-depth research project to understand the needs of high-potential female employees. The results showed that different interventions are required at different life stages. It was found that women in the early stage of their career benefited most from being exposed to varied, challenging roles and female role models, while those in the mid-career stage needed child-related and work-life balance support. Wipro's WoW program sponsored mentoring experiences, career advice blogging, outside speakers, and other inspiring programs for the company's early-career female staff, while offering extended maternity leave, with six extra unpaid months following the standard three months' paid leave to mid-career women. About 90 percent of the women who take maternity leave now take a full nine months off, and the implementation of a digital newsletter to keep women better informed of company developments persuaded 75 percent of women who had taken extended leaves to return to the company when the leave period ended.

To ensure that the new mothers who return to work have the child care they need, Wipro sourced top day care centers with commuting services near its workplaces and secured subsidized rates. WoW also reshaped the company's annual succession planning to bring more women into the leadership pipeline, hiring senior female talent from outside the company to increase the number of high-level role models for its female workforce.

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Source: Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Ripa Rashid, *Winning the War for Talent in Emerging Markets: Why Women are the Solution* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011), 225-27.

### **Ernst & Young India—strengthening support and encouragement for female staff**

Ernst & Young organizes Family Day for the families of female employees. The aim is raise families' awareness and understanding of the work that their female family members do at the organization. Such events include show-and-tell sessions about the work environment and day-to-day work experiences.

The company also offers a minivan service for its staff. Women constitute 90 percent of the users of this subsidized door-to-door pickup-and-drop-off service. To further retain its female employees, an on-site playroom has been constructed with a desk for mothers of small children to use when they return from maternity leave.

Ernst & Young also has a RAVE (a Random Act of Value and Excellence) program. RAVEs come in the shape of paper hearts, presented to staff for a job well done. To further create an atmosphere of positivity, a bell is rung in the office whenever a major company accomplishment milestone is reached.

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Source: Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Ripa Rashid, *Winning the War for Talent in Emerging Markets: Why Women are the Solution* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011), 168-70.

## Work Quality and the Feminization of “Bad Jobs”

The quality of female participation in the formal labor force is captured in part by the “Advancement Gap” between women and men, as shown in Tables 10 and 11. Among the ranks of legislators, senior officials and managers, women in most Asia-Pacific countries still have a substantial gap to close. The picture improves among professional and technical workers, where 8 of 22 Asia-Pacific countries have either closed, or nearly closed, the gap between men and women.

The *Gender Diversity Benchmark for Asia 2011* report,<sup>59</sup> published by Community Business based in Hong Kong SAR, China, provides texture on the “advancement gap” by showing how women are dropping off from management ranks between middle and senior levels. Culling data from 21 participating companies in China and its territory Hong Kong SAR, India, Japan, Malaysia and Singapore, the report finds that:

- Women’s representation in corporate organizations is highest at junior levels, and lowest at senior levels across all countries.
- Many companies have a female majority at the junior level of employment, but women’s representation at the senior level is far below the national female labor force participation rate for all countries.
- The highest percentages of women employed are in China, followed by Malaysia, Hong Kong SAR, China and Singapore. India has the lowest percentage of women employed.
- Malaysia performs best with an average of 27.57 percent women at senior level positions, while the worst performing is Japan, with 7.77 percent (See Table 12).
- On average, women drop out of the workforce when going from middle to senior level positions at a rate of 48.04

**Table 15. Remuneration Gap: Estimated Earned Income (Purchasing Power Parity US\$)**

Country	Female	Male	Female (with 40,000 cut-off)	Male (with 40,000 cut-off)	Female-to-Male ratio	Rank
Brunei Darussalam	38,656	62,967	38,656	40,000	0.97	3
Singapore	35,060	66,054	35,060	40,000	0.88	6
Australia	32,861	46,295	32,861	40,000	0.82	10
Mongolia	3,141	3,912	3,141	3,912	0.80	12
New Zealand	23,856	34,258	23,856	34,258	0.70	25
Vietnam	2,409	3,511	2,409	3,511	0.69	29
Cambodia	1,532	2,315	1,532	2,315	0.66	38
China	5,331	8,215	5,331	8,215	0.65	43
Thailand	6,185	9,865	6,185	9,865	0.63	51
Philippines	2,642	4,429	2,642	4,429	0.60	60
Maldives	3,969	6,952	3,969	6,952	0.57	68
Bangladesh	1,000	1,823	1,000	1,823	0.55	80
Japan	20,572	44,892	20,572	40,000	0.51	87
Malaysia	8,365	19,486	8,365	19,486	0.43	107
Indonesia	2,487	5,915	2,487	5,915	0.42	109
Korea, Rep.	15,830	38,590	15,830	38,590	0.41	113
Iran, Islamic Rep.	6,564	16,386	6,564	16,386	0.40	114
Fiji	2,455	6,536	2,455	6,536	0.38	117
Nepal	628	1,689	628	1,689	0.37	118
Sri Lanka	2,542	7,070	2,542	7,070	0.36	120
India	1,518	4,960	1,518	4,960	0.31	121
Pakistan	—	—	—	—	—	—

Source: *Global Gender Gap Report 2011*

**Table 16. Remuneration Gap: Wage Equality Survey**

Rank	Country	Survey Data*	Female-to-Male Ratio
4	Malaysia	5.67	0.81
5	Singapore	5.65	0.81
10	Mongolia	5.46	0.78
17	Thailand	5.37	0.77
23	Philippines	5.32	0.76
27	Brunei Darussalam	5.25	0.75
29	New Zealand	5.22	0.75
30	Sri Lanka	5.21	0.74
33	Cambodia	5.16	0.74
50	China	4.82	0.69
53	Vietnam	4.80	0.69
58	Indonesia	4.72	0.67
76	Australia	4.50	0.64
86	India	4.35	0.62
93	Japan	4.21	0.60
96	Iran, Islamic Rep.	4.19	0.60
103	Pakistan	4.03	0.58
105	Bangladesh	3.99	0.57
118	Nepal	3.72	0.53
126	Korea, Rep.	3.57	0.51
—	Fiji	—	—
—	Maldives	—	—

Source: *Global Gender Gap Report 2011*. \* (1 = Not at All – Significantly Below Those of Men; 7 = Fully – Equal to Those of Men)

percent, with Japan performing worst at 70.24 percent (see Table 13).

Another gloomy aspect of female labor participation is the fact many women remain trapped in insecure employment, while unpaid family work limits their access to labor markets.<sup>60</sup> Employment of low-skilled women tends to be clustered in the lowest-paying and low-productivity sectors (even when compared to equally low-skilled men). This includes subsistence agriculture, which remains the primary source of livelihood for many women in developing countries.<sup>61</sup> The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reports that, in many Asian countries, women comprise the majority of agricultural workers (See Table 14). Many are illiterate. They carry the burden of dual responsibility for farm and household production and management, while their family labor contribution is undervalued or not counted at all.

#### Wage Gap, Maternal Health, and Retirement Policy

Globally, women earn 20–30 percent less than men for similar work performed. This unequal situation reflects female disadvantage at the work place and is thus an impediment to women's leadership. In Asia, the lack of policies mandating equal pay for equal work, and virtually non-existent enforcement mechanisms where such policies do exist, make the region a wage policy laggard.<sup>62</sup> The World Economic Forum notes that women in BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China) and N-11 countries (including Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines, Pakistan, South Korea and Vietnam) earn less than half of what men earn.<sup>63</sup> In South Korea, in professions such as accounting, the wage differential is such that women could earn as much as 33 percent less than men. In Bangladesh, women in the (male-dominated) construction, hotel, and restaurant industries earn an average

**Figure 5. Women among Asia’s Rich and Powerful (part 1)**

*Forbes’ “The World’s 100 Most Powerful Women”* in 2011 includes 12 Asian women from business, politics, and multilateral organizations, compared to only five in 2010.

Rank	Who
#4	Indra Nooyi, Chief Executive, PepsiCo, India
#7	Sonia Gandhi, President, India
#20	Cher Wang, Cofounder, Chair, HTC; VIA Technologies, Taiwan
#26	Aung San Suu Kyi, General Secretary, National League For Democracy, Burma
#33	Chan Laiwa & family, Chair, Fu Wah International Group, China
#43	Chanda Kochhar, CEO, ICICI Bank, India
#48	Zhang Xin & family, cofounder, CEO, SOHO, China
#59	Yingluck Shinawatra, Prime Minister, Thailand
#65	Sri Mulyani Indrawati, Managing Director, World Bank, Indonesia
#68	Margaret Chan, Director-General, World Health Organization, China
#72	Ho Ching, CEO, Temasek Holdings, Singapore
#99	Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, Founder, Chair, Biocon, India

Source: “The World’s 100 Most Powerful Women 2011,” *Forbes*, August 2011, in <http://www.forbes.com/wealth/power-women/list> (accessed November 15, 2011).

**Table 17. Asia-Pacific Economies/ Percentage of Women in Senior Management Positions**

Country/ Economy	Percentage of Women in Senior Management
Thailand	39
Philippines	39
Hong Kong SAR, China	33
Malaysia	28
New Zealand	28
Taiwan	27
Vietnam	27
China	25
Australia	24
Singapore	23
India	14
Japan	5

Source: Grant Thornton International, *International Business Report*, March 2012.

of 30 percent less than men per hour, while the smallest wage gaps are found in the (female-dominated) service industries, such as education, health, and social work.<sup>64</sup> The *GGG Report 2011* tracks the “remuneration gap” among countries through two measures: Estimated Earned Income and an Executive Opinion survey on wage equality for similar work. It’s rankings are shown in Tables 15 and 16.

Another impediment to women’s advancement is poor protection of maternal health, which correlates with low and disrupted female employment and high maternal mortality. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA)

estimates that one woman dies every minute from pregnancy complications or childbirth, with the direst situations in the world’s poorest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Elsewhere, the ILO reports that Asia-Pacific countries (along with the Middle East) have “particularly low” levels of conformity with the latest ILO standards on maternity leave (duration of leave, benefits provided, and source of funding). And though 65 percent of Asia-Pacific countries provide statutory maternity leave of at least 12-13 weeks (as of 2009), actual implementation is an open question.<sup>65</sup>

On the matter of retirement policy, Asia has the highest percentage of countries (52 percent) that impose three or more years’ difference between the statutory (pensionable) retirement age between men and women, according to the EIU. Women are forced to retire younger than men despite a longer life expectancy. The usually mandatory pensionable age, combined with typically lower wages and fewer years in the labor market due to family responsibilities, severely disadvantages women. Their career span is cut short, reducing the time to accumulate retirement savings and/or pensions and curtailing overall

**Figure 5. Women among Asia's Rich and Powerful (part 2)**

Fortune's international list of the "50 Most Powerful Women in Business 2011" (excluding the US) includes 22 women from Asia (8 from China, 6 from India, 3 from Singapore, 2 each from Hong Kong SAR, China and Japan, and 1 from Taiwan)

2011 Rank	2010 Rank	Name	Company	Country/Economy
#5	#10	Chanda Kochhar	ICICI Bank	India
#8	#14	Sock Koong Chua	Singapore Telecom	Singapore
#11	#16	Ho Ching	Temasek	Singapore
#17	#21	Yafang Sun	Huawei Technologies	China
#19	#20	Deborah Henretta	Procter and Gamble	Singapore
#20	—	Cher Wang	HTC	Taiwan
#24	—	Zhang Xin	SOHO China	China
#25	#23	Umran Beba	PepsiCo	Hong Kong SAR, China
#26	#17	Mianmian Yang	Haier Group	China
#29	—	Fengying Wang	Great Wall Motor	China
#33	—	Shikha Sharma	Axis Bank	India
#34	—	Junko Nakagawa	Nomura Holdings, Inc	Japan
#35	#36	Neelam Dhawan	HP	India
#36	#37	Yoshiko Shinohara	Tempstaff	Japan
#37	#38	Shumin Yu	Hisense Group	China
#41	—	Naina Lal Kidwai	HSBC	India
#42	#46	Wei Sun	Morgan Stanley	China
#43	#45	Li Xiaolin	China Power Int'l	Hong Kong SAR, China
#45	—	Hera Siu	SAP	China
#46	#47	Jing Ulrich	JPMorgan Chase	China
#48	#48	Preetha Reddy	Apollo Hospitals Group	India
#49	—	Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw	Biocon	India

Source: "50 Most Powerful Women in Business – International 2011," Fortune, October 17, 2011, in <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/most-powerful-women/2011/global/> (accessed November 15, 2011).

**Table 18. Women on Boards (Catalyst)**

Country/ Economy	Score (percent)
New Zealand	9.3
Hong Kong SAR, China	8.9
Thailand	8.7
China	8.5
Australia	8.4
Singapore	6.9
Malaysia	6.3
Taiwan	6.1
India	5.3
Indonesia	4.5
South Korea	1.9
Japan	0.9

economic opportunities. Women's shorter time in employment also limits their professional experience and opportunities for promotion, thus stunting the chances for leadership.<sup>66</sup>

### Outcomes: Women's Leadership in Asia Today

In a recent report, *The Economist* notes that:

“[Women] have made great strides in all kinds of careers, but they still find it much harder than men to bag the most senior jobs... [Men] and women fresh out of college or university are being recruited in roughly equal numbers; half-way up the ladder a lot of the women have already dropped out; and

### Singapore's "Meritocracy"

A study of all Singapore Exchange-listed firms from 2008-2010, covering more than 730 companies and over 5,000 director positions, casts doubt on the proposition of a gender-blind meritocracy. More than 60 percent of SGX-listed firms had no women at all on their boards, while overall, women held only 6.9 percent of boardroom seats in 2010. Compared with six other Asia-Pacific countries/territories in the study (see Table 19), Singapore came in at second to last in boardroom gender diversity, with India in the lowest position. The study also identifies other patterns: Most female directors were young, i.e., under 40 years old, and retired earlier than men. Among directors aged 65 and above, only 1.5 percent were women. Little indicates a trend change any time soon, particularly when considering that 158 more board seats will have to be given to women for Singapore to achieve at least a 10 percent female representation in the boardroom.

Singapore does better in terms of higher representation of women among executive managers, especially corporate chief financial officers. Data from KPMG show that 28 percent of companies listed on the Singapore Exchange have female CFOs. Among Singaporean companies, female CFOs jump to an even higher percentage—44 percent.

Some question the idea of meritocracy and argue that it may actually impede women's advancement. Specifically, merit is often assessed subjectively by individuals with their own internal and often unconscious biases. In interview panels, men tend to present better and are more authoritative and directive; they may thus be regarded as superior not necessarily by how they will perform but by how well they present themselves.

**Table 19. Women on Boards (percent)**

Country/ Economy	Women on Boards (percent)
Australia	10.1
Hong Kong SAR, China	8.6
China	8.1
Malaysia	7.8
Singapore	6.9
India	4.7

Sources: Marleen Dieleman and Sherwin Lim, *Singapore Board Diversity Report: Gender Diversity in SGX-listed Companies*, Singapore: Centre for Governance, Institutions and Organizations, 2011; Ang Fung Fung and Mak Yuen Teen, "Bigger Representation in Business," *Business Times*, March 8, 2012, 13; and Deborah May, "Where East Meets West," *Today* (Singapore), December 17, 2010, 22.

at the top there are hardly any left... [The] most senior jobs remain almost exclusively male.<sup>67</sup> »

Despite the rising visibility of Asian women leaders, the conclusion that only a few females reach the top holds true in Asia, as elsewhere in the world. What are the highlights of women's leadership in Asia today?

### Women's Leadership in the Private

#### Sector

In its 2012 International Business Report (based on a survey of 12,000 business leaders in 40 economies), Grant Thornton notes that women globally hold only 21 percent of senior management positions, down from 24 percent in 2009 (See Table 17). The wealthy G7 countries lag behind the global average, with only 18 percent of women holding senior roles. Southeast Asia ranks highest, with

**Table 20. Categories of Women Entrepreneurs in Asian developing countries (by reasons/motivations for starting the business)**

Category	Main reason/motivation
Chance entrepreneurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To keep busy</li> <li>• Was hobby/special interest</li> <li>• Family/spouse had business</li> </ul>
Forced entrepreneurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial/needed the money</li> <li>• Control over time/flexibility</li> <li>• Challenge, try something on one's own</li> <li>• Show others I could do it</li> </ul>
Created or pulled entrepreneurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be independent</li> <li>• Self satisfaction</li> <li>• Example to children</li> <li>• Employment to others/do something worthwhile</li> </ul>

Source: Tulus Tambunan, "Women Entrepreneurship in Asian Developing Countries: Their Development and Main Constraints," *Journal of Development and Agricultural Economics* 1, No. 2 (May 2009):033.

### **SHARE –empowering women with microfinance**

SHARE (Society for Helping, Awakening Rural Poor through Education) is a micro finance institution that operates mostly in the rural areas of Andhra Pradesh and in Chhattisgarh and Karnataka in India. Its mission is poverty reduction by providing financial and support services to the poor, particularly women, for viable and productive income-generation enterprises enabling them to use their skills and reduce their poverty.

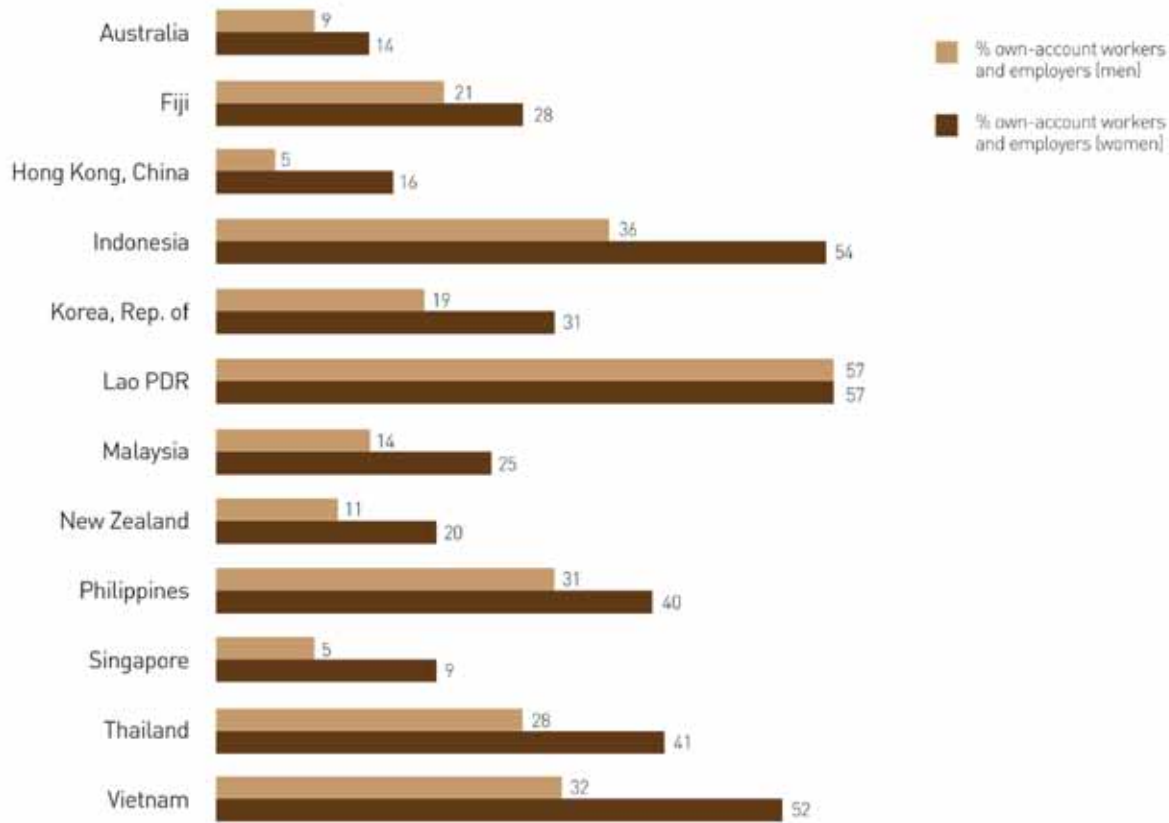
SHARE provides loans to rural women whose income is less than US\$8 a month, far below the World Bank's poverty line of US\$30 a month. These loans range from US\$50 to US\$100, and are used to fund entrepreneurial projects. These could be small businesses such as a grocery, market stall, or internet kiosk. Some clients use the much-needed cash to purchase equipment for existing family enterprises. For example, one bought a bicycle for the purpose of transporting wheat to the market. The transport costs saved allowed her to 50 percent of the profits from the sale of the wheat.

SHARE loans money to eight-member women's groups belonging to the same community. This creates strong social pressure as all are aware that the other members would have to make up for any defaults. Perhaps because of the community factor, since 2004, SHARE has an impressive repayment rate on the more than US\$71 million it has disbursed in 3,000 villages of India. Seventy-seven percent of its 197, 000 clients have experienced a significant reduction in poverty over the past four years with 38 percent no longer being considered poor. As is often highlighted with the mention of microfinance, the women grow empowered, changing not only their financial status but also their mental attitudes.

Source: <http://mixmarket.org/mfi/share#ixzz1pjAYIb5r>



**Figure 6. Proportion of Men and Women Engaged in Entrepreneurship, Formal and Informal, Selected East Asian and Pacific Economies**



Source: International Labour Organisation Key Indicators of the Labour Market, latest available data, 1998–2008

32 percent female participation in senior management. Among individual rankings globally, Thailand and the Philippines rank second, with 39 percent women in senior management. Asia also performs better than the rest of the world in the number of companies with female chief executives. While the global average is 9 percent, Southeast Asia has 15 percent, with Thailand leading at 29 percent, followed by Vietnam (14 percent), and the Philippines (13 percent). Japan ranks last among 40 economies, with only 5 percent women in senior management, and India third from the bottom with 14 percent.<sup>68</sup>

A 2011 study of Women on Boards in 44 countries (conducted by Catalyst, a non-profit research and advocacy group) reports the highest percentages of female board representation in Norway (40.1 percent), Sweden (27.3 percent) and Finland (24.5 percent). Of 13 countries and economies covered in Asia, New Zealand (9.3 percent) and Hong Kong SAR, China (8.9 percent) lead, but these numbers are relatively low. South Korea and Japan, two of Asia's most economically developed countries, perform dismally, with 1.9 percent and 0.9 percent, respectively. India (5.3 percent) and Indonesia (4.5 percent) rank low as well, and could theoretically do better, given

their large populations and the implied pool of potentially qualified women (See Table 18).

A 2009 study of companies on the Hang Seng Index (HSI) in Hong Kong SAR, China showed 47 different women holding 52 of 585 directorships. This was comparable to Australia (8.3 percent), but lower than that of the UK (11.7 percent), U.S. (14.5 percent) and Canada (15 percent). Of 42 companies listed on the HSI, 28 (66.7 percent) had women on their boards, while 14 companies (33.3 percent) had none.<sup>70</sup> In India, among 100 companies on the Bombay Stock Exchange in 2010, 48 different women held 59 (5.3 percent) of a total of 1,112 directorships. Only 46 or less

than 50 percent of the companies had women on their boards, while 54 companies had no female representation at all.<sup>71</sup>

Worldwide, women directors cluster in specific sectors. The largest percentages of companies with at least three female directors are in media (19.8 percent), insurance (18.3 percent), banking (17 percent), and retail (16.7 percent). The lowest percentages are in automobiles and parts (3.8 percent), chemicals (3.8 percent), and industrial goods & services (3.9 percent).<sup>72</sup> Changes in policy and practice to promote more women in senior management are taking place, but slowly. In a 2010 Accenture survey of 524 senior executives from 20 countries (including Asia-Pacific), 57.8 percent of senior executives from Australia, China, India, Malaysia and Singapore indicated that they were preparing more women for senior management roles than in the last five years.<sup>73</sup> In Australia, as of 1st January 2011, revised Corporate Governance Principles and Recommendations require companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange to report specific information on gender diversity. This is hopeful given that women's representation in senior management positions in Australia and New Zealand has been practically stagnant since 2004.<sup>74</sup>

Entrepreneurship is another area where, theoretically, women could advance in leadership positions. However, systematic data on women's leadership in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are difficult to find. In China, women have made great strides in entrepreneurship, constituting 29 million or a quarter of the national total of China's entrepreneurs. Further, 7 of the 14 women in *Forbes'* 2010 list of the "The World's Richest Self-Made Women" are from China.<sup>75</sup>

Scholarly studies of SMEs and women's economic opportunity in Asia underline the following:

- SMEs are a critical sector of many Asian developing country economies, accounting for an average of more than 95 percent of companies and providing 90 percent of all livelihood, especially for women and youth.
- Women in Asia do not enjoy the same economic opportunities as men, including opportunities to take on entrepreneurial risk and become their own bosses.
- Most women entrepreneurs work in micro-enterprises (defined as fewer than five full-time employees) characterized by low barriers to entry and exit; low capital and skills requirements; and low technology needs.
- In Indonesia, 85 percent of women entrepreneurs own small-scale businesses and women decrease in number the larger the enterprises get; it is assumed that bigger and more complex enterprises in Asian developing countries operate predominantly under a "man culture."
- Most women go into entrepreneurship not because of "pull" factors but "push" factors, including poverty, unemployment, emergency needs, or precautionary motives in case the men are unable to provide for family needs (See Table 20).
- Positive developments for women include reform in property rights law that remove discriminatory provisions; simplified business entry procedures and e-government processes; and increasing opportunities for productive women entrepreneurs to scale their businesses above the micro and small sectors.
- The low representation of women entrepreneurs in Asian developing countries can be attributed (but not limited) to: low education and lack of training; heavy household duties that constrain the time women entrepreneurs can devote

to business; unequal laws or inadequate implementation of more gender-equal laws; cultural attitudes and discrimination against women as paid workers, business owners and asset holders; and lack of access to formal credit and other facilities.<sup>76</sup>

### Women's Leadership in the Public Sector

In the public sector, women's political participation precedes leadership. Women have had a long history of voting in Asia-Pacific, with New Zealand granting women voting rights as early as 1893 (after Maori men in 1867, and European men in 1879). Australia followed in 1902, with most other Asia-Pacific countries introducing universal suffrage by the 1950s. Bangladesh is a latecomer, but only because it did not become independent until 1972. Although Asian women have consolidated enormous voting power in many countries, they hold only a fraction of appointive or elective offices.<sup>77</sup> Large variation may also exist in women's representation at different levels of political leadership. In China, for example, at the national level, only 13 of the 204 elected members of the Chinese Communist Party's central committee are women. Moreover, the percentage of female central committee members shrank from 11.4 percent in 1977 to 7.6 percent in 2002. However, at the provincial level, female official representation is more than 80 percent.<sup>78</sup>

Tables 21–24 and Figure 7 capture snapshots of women's political participation and empowerment in the world, in general, and in the Asia-Pacific region, in particular. "Political Empowerment" from the *GGG Report 2011* refers to "the gap between men and women in political decision-making at the highest levels." Three ratios underpin "political empowerment": 1) ratio of women

to men in ministerial-level positions; 2) ratio of women to men in parliamentary positions; and 3) ratio of women to men in terms of years in the executive office (president or prime minister) in the past 50 years.<sup>79</sup>

#### Women Heads of State

The Asia-Pacific region has had more women at the peak of political power than any other region, beginning with the world's first female head of state, Sirimavo Bandaranaike (Sri Lanka), in 1960. Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Sri Lanka and the Philippines have all had female political chiefs, in some cases more than once. This has been remarkable, given Asia's long association with patriarchy and women's subordination. The rise of women to the apex of political power, however, has little to do with gender equality in political participation. Rather, women's rise to power has been "historically more distinctive than leadership routes for men."<sup>80</sup> In particular, in Asia, family or dynastic connections appear to be the strongest factor for women's rise to the top. In many cases, women inherited the political mantle from fathers, husbands or other male relatives who were imprisoned, killed or martyred.<sup>81</sup> Asia thus features the paradox of women rising to the heights of power in staunchly patriarchal and paternalistic societies with less empowerment of the general female population. Asia has the world's highest number of female heads of state while also having a low percentage of females in its parliaments.

#### Women in Parliament

Globally, the percentage of women in legislatures has increased to 19.5 percent. In Asia-Pacific, New Zealand and Nepal lead, followed by Australia. The laggards are Sri Lanka, Mongolia, and Myanmar.<sup>82</sup> Asian countries that have adopted constitutional and/or

**Table 21. Political Empowerment**

Country	Score	Rank
Sri Lanka	0.4126	7
New Zealand	0.3797	8
Bangladesh	0.3591	11
Philippines	0.3314	16
India	0.3119	19
Australia	0.1861	38
Nepal	0.1745	43
Pakistan	0.1547	54
China	0.1496	57
Indonesia	0.1400	61
Vietnam	0.1107	76
Cambodia	0.1093	78
Singapore	0.1014	83
Korea, Rep.	0.0972	90
Thailand	0.0828	97
Japan	0.0724	101
Malaysia	0.0517	115
Maldives	0.0392	119
Fiji	0.0358	123
Mongolia	0.0318	125
Iran, Islamic Rep.	0.0166	130
Brunei Darussalam	0.0000	132

Source: *Global Gender Gap Report 2011*

Table 22. Years with Female Head of State

Country	Female	Male	Female-male Ratio	Rank
Sri Lanka	23	27	0.85	1
India	18	32	0.56	4
Bangladesh	18	32	0.54	5
Philippines	16	34	0.46	6
New Zealand	11	39	0.28	9
Pakistan	5	45	0.10	20
China	4	46	0.08	22
Indonesia	3	47	0.07	24
Australia	1	49	0.02	37
Korea, Rep.	1	49	0.02	40
Mongolia	0	50	0.00	51
Brunei Darussalam	0	50	0.00	52
Cambodia	0	50	0.00	52
Fiji	0	50	0.00	52
Iran, Islamic Rep.	0	50	0.00	52
Japan	0	50	0.00	52
Malaysia	0	50	0.00	52
Maldives	0	50	0.00	52
Nepal	0	50	0.00	52
Singapore	0	50	0.00	52
Thailand	0	50	0.00	52
Vietnam	0	50	0.00	52

Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2011

**Table 23. Women in Parliament**

Country	Female	Male	Female-male Ratio	Rank
New Zealand	34	66	0.51	17
Nepal	33	67	0.50	18
Australia	25	75	0.33	32
Vietnam	24	76	0.32	34
Singapore	22	78	0.29	41
Pakistan	22	78	0.29	41
Philippines	22	78	0.28	43
China	21	79	0.27	48
Cambodia	21	79	0.27	50
Bangladesh	19	81	0.23	66
Indonesia	18	82	0.22	67
Korea, Rep.	15	85	0.17	79
Thailand	13	87	0.15	87
Japan	11	89	0.13	97
India	11	89	0.12	98
Malaysia	10	90	0.11	104
Maldives	7	94	0.07	120
Sri Lanka	6	94	0.06	122
Mongolia	4	96	0.04	123
Iran, Islamic Rep.	3	97	0.03	126
Brunei Darussalam	—	—	—	—
Fiji	—	—	—	—

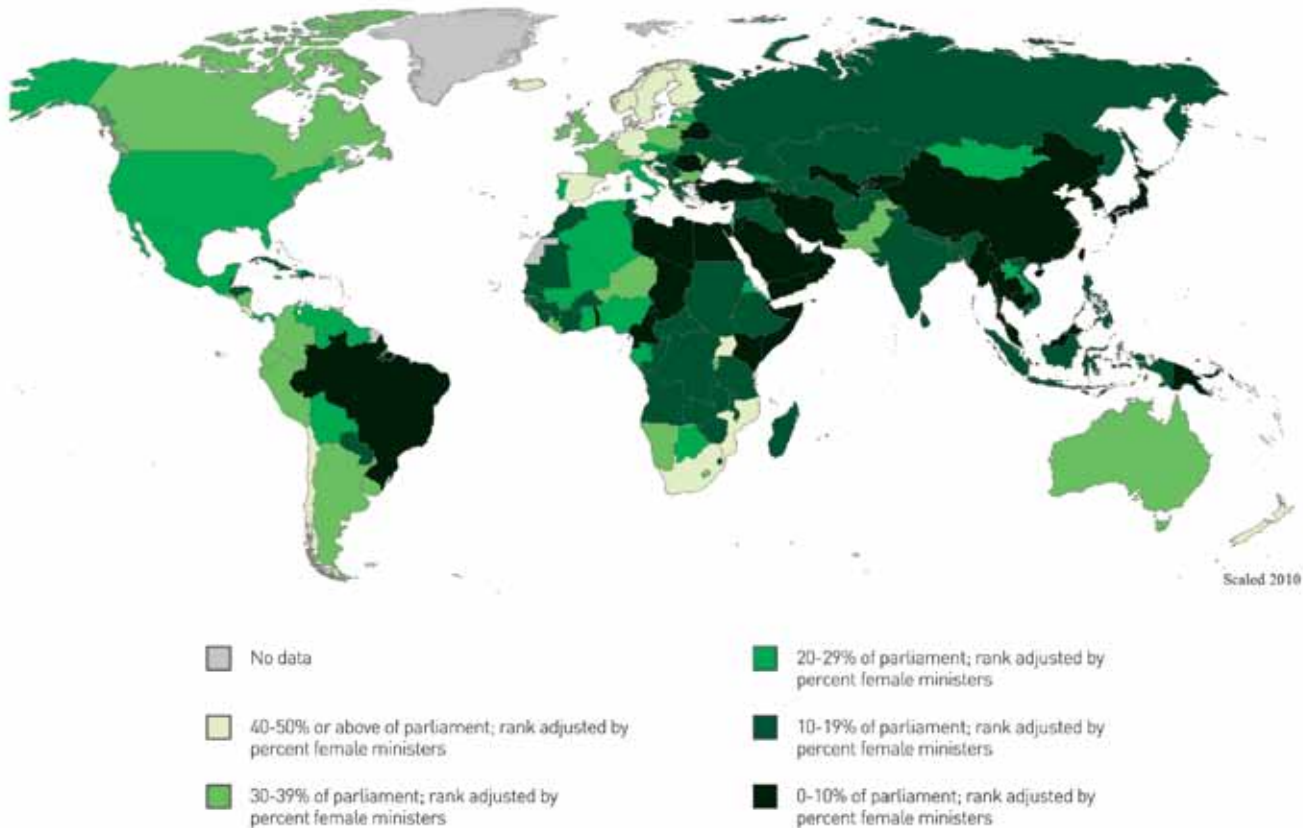
Source: *Global Gender Gap Report 2011*

**Table 24. Women in Ministerial Positions**

Country	Female	Male	Female-male Ratio	Rank
New Zealand	29	71	0.40	26
Australia	23	77	0.30	41
Bangladesh	16	84	0.19	65
Indonesia	14	86	0.17	69
Philippines	14	86	0.16	71
Korea, Rep.	13	88	0.14	75
Thailand	13	88	0.14	75
Japan	12	88	0.13	79
China	12	88	0.12	82
India	10	90	0.11	87
Cambodia	10	90	0.11	90
Fiji	9	91	0.10	95
Nepal	8	92	0.08	99
Pakistan	8	93	0.08	101
Mongolia	7	93	0.08	103
Malaysia	7	93	0.07	108
Maldives	7	93	0.07	108
Sri Lanka	6	94	0.06	115
Singapore	5	95	0.05	121
Vietnam	4	96	0.04	124
Iran, Islamic Rep.	3	97	0.03	127
Brunei Darussalam	0	100	0.00	129

Source: *Global Gender Gap Report 2011*

Figure 7. Governmental Participation by Women



Source: <http://womanstats.org/mapEntrez.htm>

election law quota regulation for their national parliament include Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan and the Philippines. While these countries perform respectably in female representation in parliament, they are not among the top-ranked in closing the gender gap for women in parliament.

#### Women at the Ministerial Level

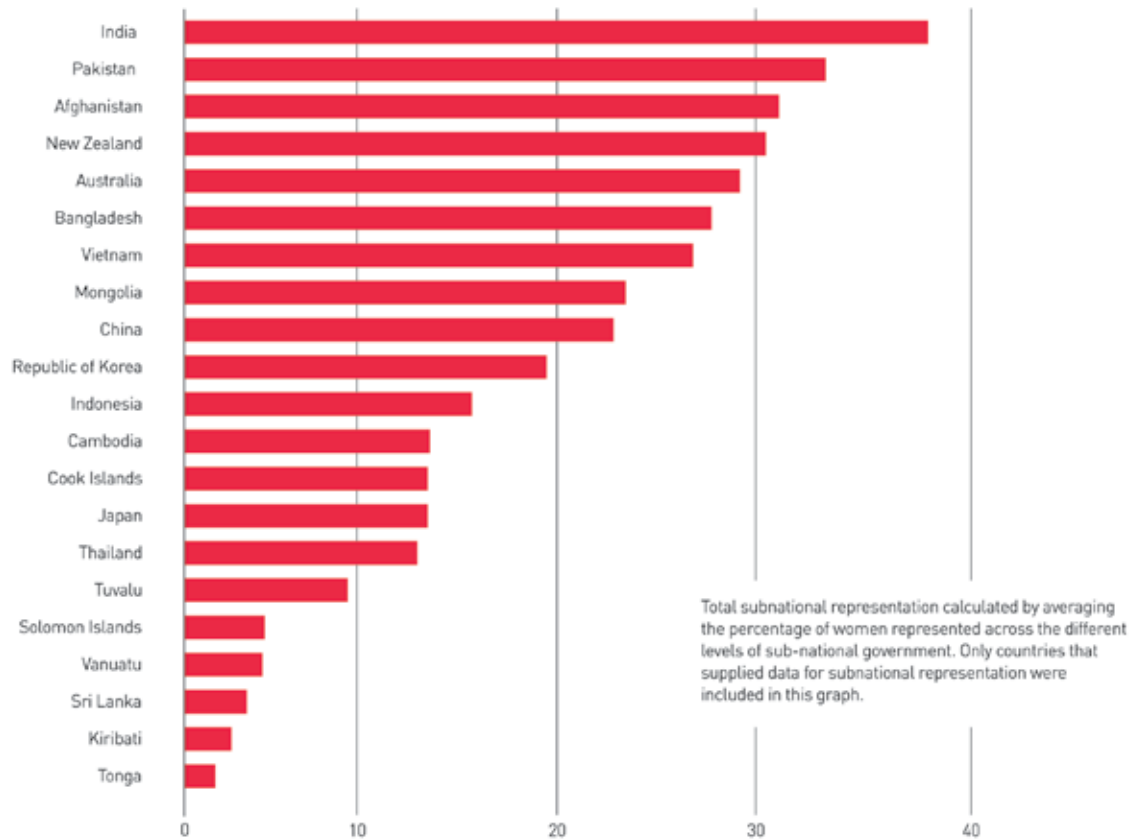
The Asia-Pacific region features few female ministers, with New Zealand ranked 26 of 135 countries covered in the *GGG Report 2011*. Australia (ranked 41) and Bangladesh (65) follow, while countries at the bottom include Sri Lanka, Singapore, Vietnam and Brunei Darussalam.

#### Women in Subnational Governments in Asia-Pacific

Women presidents, ministers, and parliamentarians often draw the most attention, but female leaders at the subnational level are also important. For many citizens, these leaders are their only point of contact with government. Subnational leaders also tend to have responsibility for basic services that have a direct impact on people's lives (e.g., water and health services). Government policy, specifically, affirmative action, has significantly augmented women's leadership below the national level. In India, for example, a 1994 constitutional amendment reserved one-third of the seats in

village-level government bodies for women. Because of such policies, South Asian countries including India (1<sup>st</sup>), Pakistan (2<sup>nd</sup>), and Bangladesh (6<sup>th</sup>), rank among the highest in women's average representation in subnational leadership. This is a positive development, but one that has not yet translated into a more consolidated political power base for women in general in South Asia.

Comprehensive data on women's leadership in subnational governments are not readily available. But in 2010, UNDP published the first status report on women's representation in local governments in the Asia-Pacific region, covering rural, urban, district, and provincial or regional councils.

**Figure 8. Total Subnational Women's Representation (percent)**

Source: UNDP, *Women's Representation in Local Government in Asia-Pacific. Status Report 2010*, p. 8.

### Women's Leadership in the NGO and Non-Profit Sector

Women's leadership in the non-profit sector in Asia has not been systematically tracked. However, women have traditionally been more active than men in the NGO and non-profit sector. In Asia, women leaders have engaged in decades of charity work, social activism, research, and advocacy. They have addressed issues including livelihoods for women, health, education, environmental degradation, conflict resolution, human trafficking, domestic violence, water and sanitation, and others that affect women and children disproportionately. Women leaders

in the non-profit sector have also leveraged international networks, funding, and platforms (including UN-sponsored conferences, World Bank initiatives, and others) to change policy as well as societal values and mindsets. Women in Asia, like their counterparts in the West, are likely to have used the non-profit route as an alternative pathway to leadership (outside of the traditionally male-dominated government and corporate sectors).<sup>83</sup>

### Women's Leadership in Conflict Resolution

The majority of casualties in modern wars are women and children. Indeed, women are

disproportionately affected by conflict, and a small but growing body of research highlights women's pivotal agency in conflict resolution and peace-building.<sup>84</sup> Yet women are starkly under-represented in peace negotiations. Only 2 percent of signatories to 21 major peace agreements between 1992 and 2009 were women, and no women have been appointed chief or lead peace mediators in UN-sponsored peace talks.<sup>85</sup> In Asia, a high number of violent conflicts exist. Women may not lead in the traditional sense in peace negotiations, but they do *exercise* leadership in unconventional but effective ways to advance peace. This includes, for example,



**“Sex Strike” for Peace—women doing leadership  
without formal authority**

In the southern Philippines, women from the rural village of Dado in the province of Maguindanao staged a “sex strike” in July 2011 to bring peace and a little bit of prosperity to the 102 families in their village. The southern Philippines has been the scene of violent conflict for many decades. In addition to an insurgency against the government by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the area is also witness to many clan and family conflicts over land, money and political power. In Dado, the women had formed a sewing business to help support their families, but could not bring their products to market because sporadic shooting and other threats of violence made the village road impassable. The head of the women, Hasna Kandatu, said she and her colleagues warned their husbands that they would be cut off from sex if they continued to cause trouble. Her husband recalls being told, “If you do bad things, you will be cut off, here,” indicating the area below his waist.

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Source: “Maguindanao Women Stage ‘Sex Strike’ for Peace,” *Philippine Star*, September 17, 2011, 8.

women using traditional law to resolve conflict in parts of Indonesia; “Mothers for Peace” using the emotive power of motherhood to advocate for peace in the Philippines; women’s use of “kitchen politics” or meals in private homes in Nagaland, India to facilitate dialogue between armed groups; and threatening a sex boycott to stop men from fighting in the southern Philippines.<sup>86</sup>

**Revisiting Culture, Tradition and  
Social Norms**

Culture, tradition, and social norms can be slippery concepts. But when the World Economic Forum polled women from 600 companies in 20 BRIC and OECD countries, the respondents cited their “country’s general norms and cultural practices” as one of the top three barriers to women’s rise to leadership. In Asia, scholars have examined

such cultural factors as the dominance of the Confucian tradition in China, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Vietnam, and the economies of Hong Kong SAR, China and Taiwan. Research on women in management highlights Confucian-informed patriarchal hierarchy as an impediment to women’s leadership at the work place. Embedded normative beliefs about male dominance and female subordination influence gender role stereotyping, negative social attitudes towards rising female managers, unfriendly work environments, relegation of wives’ careers to second class status (as opposed to their husbands), and lower earnings for women. In China, gender equality embedded in communist ideology has mitigated the impact of Confucian patriarchy. Notwithstanding changes in politics and legislation, “deeply entrenched cultural values and traditions appear to pose

the greatest barriers to women’s progress in organizations” throughout Asia.<sup>87</sup>

Confucian cultural values and norms are linked to societal lack of support and even disapproval of women’s leadership. In Vietnam, after the war, for example, women began moving into leadership roles in their villages but faced resistance by men. Underlining traditional gender discrimination, women were accepted as workers, but not as people who governed.<sup>88</sup> In Japan, too, women executives who broke the traditional mold of women as quiet followers, consumers, and service providers, have suffered vicious public insult. In the words of Japanese filmmaker, Juzo Itami, “For a woman [in Japan] to achieve real power, she has one of two choices. She can renounce men forever and launch herself on the rough road to corporate success, which means universal unpopularity for the rest of her life. Or she can become geisha and get some powerful men to support her along the way.”<sup>89</sup> Despite significant advances in

women’s health and education (half of Japan’s university graduates are women), Japan lags in women’s leadership. Government statistics show that, in the private sector, only 6.2 percent of women hold positions as section managers or higher. And, in the central government, women hold only 2.2 percent of director-level positions and above.<sup>90</sup>

In Malaysia and Indonesia, social pressures related to Islamic guidelines may also take their toll on women’s ability to climb up the rungs of professional success. A study of female managers in Malaysia notes, for example, that restricted mixing between the sexes prevent women from tapping into powerful male networks and mentoring opportunities. Malaysian female managers report social pressure as the second most common career barrier (in contrast, male managers did not mention social pressure as a barrier

**Figure 9. Social Institutions & Gender Index: South Asia**

Country	Score	Family Code	Civil Liberties	Physical Integrity	Son Preference	Ownership Rights
Sri Lanka	0.05914	46th 0.23	98th 0.30	15th 0.17	1st 0.00	66th 0.35
Bhutan	0.16251	43rd 0.21	84th 0.30	54th 0.35	118th 0.75	1st 0.00
Nepal	0.16723	62nd 0.37	84th 0.30	48th 0.30	101st 0.50	79th 0.52
Bangladesh	0.24465	95th 0.58	103rd 0.60	47th 0.28	118th 0.75	79th 0.52
Pakistan	0.28324	64th 0.38	103rd 0.60	47th 0.28	118th 0.75	79th 0.52
India	0.31811	100th 0.61	103rd 0.60	15th 0.17	118th 0.75	79th 0.52
Afghanistan	0.5823	110th 0.72	121st 0.81	91st 0.52	122nd 1.00	109th 0.68

Source: OECD, My SIGI: Region—South Asia, in <http://my.genderindex.org/ranking/> (accessed April 3, 2012).  
(0=low/no discrimination; 1=high discrimination)

**Figure 10. Social Institutions & Gender Index: East Asia and Pacific**

Country/Economy	Score	Family Code	Civil Liberties	Physical Integrity	Son Preference	Ownership Rights
Philippines	0.00788	8th 0.04	1st 0.00	3rd 0.09	1st 0.00	53rd 0.17
Thailand	0.01068	41st 0.16	1st 0.00	15th 0.17	1st 0.00	1st 0.00
Hong Kong SAR, China	0.01465	26th 0.10	1st 0.00	1st 0.00	89th 0.25	1st 0.00
Singapore	0.01526	25th 0.10	1st 0.00	34th 0.26	1st 0.00	1st 0.00
Cambodia	0.02202	38th 0.14	1st 0.00	48th 0.30	1st 0.00	1st 0.00
Viet Nam	0.03006	6th 0.03	1st 0.00	60th 0.39	1st 0.00	1st 0.00
Lao PDR	0.03577	51st 0.32	1st 0.00	23rd 0.22	1st 0.00	43rd 0.17
Mongolia	0.03912	30th 0.12	1st 0.00	48th 0.30	89th 0.25	43rd 0.17
Myanmar	0.04629	35th 0.14	1st 0.00	60th 0.39	89th 0.25	1st 0.00
Fiji	0.0545	8th 0.04	1st 0.00	60th 0.39	1st 0.00	66th 0.35
Indonesia	0.12776	59th 0.35	103rd 0.60	79th 0.39	1st 0.00	1st 0.00
Papua New Guinea	0.20936	50th 0.28	1st 0.00	60th 0.39	118th 0.75	78th 0.51
China	0.21786	1st 0.00	1st 0.00	48th 0.30	122nd 1.00	1st 0.00

Source: OECD, My SIGI: Region—East Asia and Pacific, in <http://my.genderindex.org/ranking/> (accessed April 3, 2012).  
(0=low/no discrimination; 1=high discrimination)

### Chinese Entrepreneurs and Billionaires

In China, the heritage of Mao Zedong's "women hold up half the sky"—a view of women as a resource that ought to be deployed outside the home—fueled the rise of many women in professional fields. As a result, Chinese women, who make up 49 percent of the population and 46 percent of the labor force, have achieved a higher proportion in the top layers of management than women in many Western countries. In East Asia, China leads in terms of women in senior management. During China's economic reform period, communist values met the capitalist market system and a flexible business environment became the norm. In this context, Chinese businesswomen started to thrive. 29 million (a quarter of the national total) of China's entrepreneurs are female. Five of the *Financial Times*' "Top 50 Women in the World of Business 2011" are Chinese. Half of the 14 billionaires on Forbes magazine's 2011 list of the world's richest self-made women are from mainland China (one UK-based, and one in Hong Kong SAR, China). Many of them are property magnates; the others focus on retail and consumer goods. The pathway for female entrepreneurs tends to lead from excellent universities to high posts at large, state-owned enterprises, allowing women to build up business acumen, managerial skills, and networks that later enable them to raise capital for their new enterprises.

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Sources: "The Sky's the Limit," *The Economist*, November 26, 2011; Financial Times, *The Top 50 Women in World Business 2011*, 30.; and "World's Richest Self-Made Women Billionaires 2011," *Forbes*, March 3, 2011, in <http://www.therichest.org/world/forbes-richest-self-made-women-billionaires/> (accessed November 15, 2011).

at all). Social pressure in the work place arises because women are single, married late, are divorced, don't have children, and hold a man's job. In other words, they are not conforming to traditional notions of womanhood. Women managers also report that their jobs are treated as secondary to their husbands' careers, and they fear that their husbands would follow the social norm that values successful men but punishes successful women.<sup>91</sup>

In Thailand, social attitudes also hinder women's advancement. This is, in part, rooted in Buddhist cultural norms that endow men with higher status and greater authority than women. Women are often compared to the "hind legs" of an elephant, while the men are the "front legs." In other words, men lead and women follow. This results in widespread gender stereotyping, and little support for, and even stigmatization of, women who do end up in top management positions. More

damaging, women themselves internalize cultural norms and may develop low ambition, low assertiveness, and low self-confidence—thus forfeiting their chances for leadership.<sup>92</sup>

In Asia, tradition and social norms dictate that women be the primary caretakers and caregivers at home, meeting the needs of husbands, children, elderly parents and in-laws. Despite the abundance of affordable domestic help and the availability of assistance from relatives, women continue to feel tremendous family pressure. In 2011, the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy did two informal surveys on two separate occasions, involving approximately 50 women leaders from throughout Asia. When asked to pick the three greatest challenges to women's rise to leadership in Asia, "Constraints of Family Life (Husband, Children, and Parents)" was by far the respondents' top pick, followed by "Organizational Policies and Practices Favoring Men Over Women." "Cultural

Barriers" came in third in one survey, and fourth in the other.<sup>93</sup> While these were informal polls, it was telling that a majority of women leaders from diverse professional backgrounds felt similarly challenged by their family duties. Thus, even while women's qualifications, income, and independence are dramatically improving, their status and roles at home remain entrenched. Japan presents a powerful illustration: although women are well-educated and many have careers, statistics show that, at home, Japanese working women work an average of 30 hours a week compared to only three for their husbands.<sup>94</sup>

An important index that may be used as a proxy for culture, tradition, and social norms is the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), which covers 102 non-OECD countries. Instead of measuring gender equality by showing inequality in outcomes (e.g., in educational attainment, health, or economic and political participation), SIGI measures the

inputs that lead to gender unequal outcomes. Social institutions are defined as “long-lasting codes of conduct, norms, traditions, and informal and formal laws that impact on gender equality.” The variables captured include family code, son preference, physical integrity (i.e., violence against girls and women), ownership rights and civil liberties. For Asia-Pacific, South Asian countries show the highest discrimination against women, while East Asia and the Pacific show mixed results (See Figures 9 and 10).<sup>95</sup> □





# CONCLUSIONS, POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS, AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

## Conclusions

In its *World Development Report 2012*, focused on “Gender Equality and Development,” the World Bank recognizes that the equal rights of women and men are an independent, priority value in development and not just an instrument for economic growth and efficiency. In its report, the World Bank highlights women’s progress in education, life expectancy and labor force participation. At the same time, it notes continuing problems: the excess death of girls and women in low- and middle-income countries (estimated at

3.9 million girls under the age of 60 per year); disparities in girls’ schooling; unequal access to economic opportunities; and unequal voice and control in households and in society.<sup>96</sup>

The continuing problems highlighted by the *World Development Report 2012* are also echoed in this present report. The norm of son preference, for example, still prevails in parts of Asia; although the number of “missing girls” has declined overall in Asia between 1990 and 2008, in China and India alone, the World Bank estimates that more than 1.3 million girls are not born every year due to overt

discrimination and the availability of ultrasound technologies that allow households to determine the sex of the fetus before birth.<sup>97</sup>

Thus, from the very start, girls in Asia face significant obstacles to fulfilling their human potential, in general, and their potential for leadership, in particular.

The data presented in this report highlight a few generalizations about women’s leadership in Asia at this juncture:

- Asia’s rising prosperity has narrowed the gender gap in many countries and bodes positively for the future rise of

## Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Nepal—*integrating gender sensitivity to the budgeting process*

To enhance aid effectiveness, countries and international organizations have advocated or adopted Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB). GRB aims to: 1) hold governments accountable for their commitments to gender equality and women’s rights, and 2) ensure regular monitoring of progress in mainstreaming gender into development programs (as captured in the annual budgeting process). Under the leadership of the Ministry of Finance, Nepal introduced GRB into its budgeting process in 2007/2008. The Ministry organized a GRB Committee, whose membership includes representatives from the National Planning Commission, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Ministry of Local Development and United Nations Development Fund for Women. The committee’s mandate includes designing a methodology for monitoring budget allocations and expenditures from a gender perspective; assessing the impact of development policies on women and men; and providing sectoral ministries with policy guidelines for implementing GRB.

The Finance Ministry analyzes budget allocations using five equally-weighted indicators:

1. Women’s capacity development;
2. Women’s participation in program formulation and implementation;
3. Benefit incidence of public expenditures on women;
4. Support to women’s employment and income generation; and
5. Positive impact on women’s time use and care work.

Although GRB implementation in Nepal has many challenges to overcome, the institutionalization of GRB is helpful towards enhancing gender sensitivity in policy-making and promoting more deliberate and targeted programs that address gender inequalities. The GRB initiative can strengthen Nepalese women’s welfare and access to leadership opportunities as GRB conceptualization is further refined, practical capacities for implementation are augmented, execution and monitoring are conducted more systematically, and policy attention shifts more from inputs to results. GRB coverage also needs to expand to larger economic policies such as taxation and privatization, and to sectors such as law, home and police, and communications.

women leaders. Progress can be measured in the areas of women's health and survival, educational attainment, economic opportunity, and political empowerment. This implies that the women of Asia can leverage rising personal endowments as well as increasing structural opportunities for future leadership. Family and dynastic factors have also catapulted some women in Asia to the highest levels of political leadership. This gives greater visibility to female leadership role models, even if it does not necessarily change the overall structure of gender inequality. Further, Asia's economic rise has pushed Asian women into the ranks of the world's most rich and powerful, creating an impetus for changing perceptions in the region of women as being subordinate to, and/or less competent than, men.

- Despite women's overall gains in Asia, there is significant variation among individual countries in terms of progress in closing the gender gap. Among Asia-Pacific countries ranked in the *Global Gender Gap Report*,<sup>98</sup> the top five performers are New Zealand, the Philippines, Australia, Sri Lanka, and Mongolia. Pakistan ranks lowest, followed by Nepal, India, Republic of Korea, and Cambodia. The data for actual indicators of women's leadership in Asia are limited and do not consistently cover the same set of countries. With these limitations in mind, data on leadership in the private and public sectors show the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand consistently among the top three. When singling out economic and corporate parameters such as women in senior management, female advancement, remuneration, and wage equality, these three top performers are joined by Singapore, Mongolia, Thailand, and Malaysia.
- On the political front, the countries of

South Asia, which perform worst in overall gender equality and women's attainment, actually lead among the top five countries in political empowerment (Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India); the number of women in parliament (Nepal, Pakistan); the number of women ministers (Bangladesh); and the number of women leaders in sub-national government (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh). This contradictory picture is partly due to the region having the most number of women who have become heads of state because of family and dynastic connections (and *not* because of greater gender equality). Moreover, affirmative action has definitely increased women's representation at different levels of government. For women in South Asia, ongoing challenges include sustaining political leadership gains, and translating these into genuine benefits for greater numbers of women; and engaging more support to fight new discrimination and persecution that sometimes arise in response to affirmative action.<sup>99</sup>

- Development in general correlates positively with gender equality. Development is thus beneficial to women's leadership, but the relationship between human development and women's leadership is not directly proportional. Some economies in Asia with the highest human development rankings (e.g., Japan and South Korea) also perform most dimly in some measures of women's leadership (e.g., women in senior management, women on boards, wage equality, remuneration and political empowerment). Others, such as Singapore and Hong Kong SAR, China, continue to have significant gender leadership gaps despite their high human development. A key contention is that culture and social norms remain intractable obstacles for women's leadership in these and other Asian economies.<sup>100</sup>

## Policy Recommendations

Policy has its limits, particularly where the human and institutional resources for implementation are inadequate. However, efforts to change practice must continue. Several policy recommendations arise from this report:

- Governments in Asia (many of which have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW]) should commit more deliberately and explicitly to advancing women's leadership in the next decade. Women now make up 40 percent of the global labor force, 43 percent of the world's agricultural labor force, and more than half of the world's university students. Governments need to act more systematically to develop and harness this human capital for sustainable development and greater human welfare. One concrete step that more governments in Asia can implement toward this end is Gender-Responsive Budgeting, which integrates a gender perspective in planning, drafting, implementing and evaluating government spending. This helps ensure that public resources are not used directly or indirectly to discriminate against women or men.
- The highly developed (but also highly male-dominated) economies of Japan and the Republic of Korea must do more to enhance women's representation in employment and leadership. For Japan, a widely-cited Goldman Sachs study argues that deploying women's talent (through employment) could increase Japan's labor force by 8.2 million and its GDP by 15 percent. For South Korea, a Harvard Business School study highlights the advantages that accrue to foreign firms willing to hire talented Korean women managers who may be locally overlooked due to traditional discrimination. The finding was that a 10



percent nominal increase in the percentage of female managers correlated with a 1 percent nominal increase in profitability, after controlling for other factors.<sup>101</sup>

- More countries and territories in Asia should consider affirmative action measures over a specified number of years as the fastest way to increase women's leadership representation in the public and private sectors. Among the 46 nations in the world with political quota systems, for example, women comprise 21.9 percent of elected offices; in contrast, those without quota systems have only 15.3 percent. Evidence shows that affirmative action in general can be done without adverse effects on efficiency.<sup>102</sup> Potential leaders in this area might include Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong SAR (China) and other Asian economies.
- In Asia, public and private sector institutions must take concrete measures to address the "leaking pipeline" by more systematically supporting and facilitating women's choice to persevere in their professional lives without giving up their roles as mothers and caregivers. With the right support, more women in Asia would be able to better manage the pressures of home and career, and make the transition from middle to senior levels of responsibility. Support for working women can include systematic mentoring, maternity and paternity leaves, better childcare and elder care, and more gender-equal retirement and pension schemes. Research shows that in countries where it is relatively easy for women to work *and* have children, female employment and fertility both tend to be higher.<sup>103</sup>
- As Asia rises in affluence, pioneering women leaders in the corporate sector should take the initiative to develop and apply a "pay it forward" ethos in their

respective countries, territories or regions. This means that a few women leaders must take on the challenge of creating and put into operation networks to mentor the next generation of female leaders. In Asia, family networks tend to be paramount in cultivating the next generation of leaders, but it is crucial that Asian elites go beyond kinship and invest more broadly in developing female talent and nurturing future leaders (See highlight on W.O.M.E.N. in America).

- Women feature heavily in two spheres of economic activity in Asia: agriculture and entrepreneurship. In both spheres, women's work tends to be particularly low in productivity and scale. Women are also often pushed into these sectors because of poverty, unemployment, and emergency needs. These sectors, however, represent an opportunity to nurture female leadership, especially at local levels. In both agriculture and entrepreneurship, women's productivity and leadership may be improved through policies that provide women greater access to capital, skills training (e.g., in budgeting and financial planning), technology, and networks. Governments, corporations, banks and NGOs can all play a role in this area.
- To address cultural and social norms that impede women's leadership, a broad campaign is needed to educate people and push for change in the *valuation and perception* of girls and women. This is a complex and slow process that will require long-term commitment and resources so that three shifts can happen: 1) societies will perceive girls to be as valuable as boys; 2) societies will view women as having roughly similar abilities and potential to lead as men; and 3) societies will be more open to gender roles that involve women leading outside the home and men doing more in the home.

These shifts will definitely give women more equal voice and agency in the home and in society at large, and facilitate their role as leaders.

- There are no easy answers or quick steps to changing social norms. Education for men, women and youth is part of the equation. Affirmative action programs are also part of the answer, but change will take time. For example, in India, despite the fact that women village council leaders delivered improved public services, their constituents expressed less satisfaction and a lack of appreciation. However, over time, exposure to female leaders reduces bias and boosts the aspirations and educational achievement of young women.<sup>104</sup> Besides affirmative action, governments, particularly China and India, can increase media campaigns and other steps to end sex selection against baby girls. More laws (and better implementation) are also needed to reduce domestic violence against women and to enhance women's bargaining power through greater property ownership, access to legal and other support services, and ability to leave marriage. In Pakistan and Indonesia, encouraging examples show how partnerships among government, police, women's groups, paralegals and NGOs add up to strengthen women's voice and agency, and thus their potential to contribute more fully to society.

### Further Research

Moving forward, a few themes for further research include:

- Why are women politicians in Asia unable to do more to promote women's rights and empowerment?<sup>105</sup> Is this true of leaders from dynastic backgrounds as well as those who worked their way harder and longer to the top? What can be learned

### **W.O.M.E.N. IN AMERICA, INC. (W.omen O.ptimizing M.entoring E.ducation and N.etworking)—*learning from outside Asia on the power of networks and mentoring***

The W.O.M.E.N. in America Leadership Program was conceived by a core group of 11 Senior Executive female leaders from various organizations who met at the 2008 FORTUNE Most Powerful Women's Summit in San Diego, California. These women share a passion for helping professional [American] business women, early in their career lifecycle to advance through unique mentorship, education, and networking opportunities.

The objective of W.O.M.E.N. in America is to position women early in their careers for future success by providing an exclusive three-year experience that builds targeted leadership skills, creates a valuable support network to be leveraged over time, and leaves mentees feeling inspired to “Pay It Forward”—i.e., help develop the new generation of professional women leaders.

W.O.M.E.N. in America targets aspiring, high potential women with:

- Four to seven years of post graduate business work experience;
- Demonstrated leadership potential to “breakthrough” to a high influence, executive leadership position;
- Diverse personal backgrounds and professional experiences;
- Clear career direction and aspirations;
- Careers in industries/functions in which significant barriers to success have historically existed;
- Highest integrity; and
- Desire to learn and “Pay It Forward”

The mentoring program contains three clusters, pairing mentors and mentees in the same industries:

- Professional & Corporate Services (e.g., Finance, Banking, Law, Consulting);
- Business Entrepreneurs and Marketing (e.g., Marketing, Small Business Owners); and
- S.T.E.M. (e.g., Science, Technology, Engineering and Math industries)

Mentees have access to an exclusive network of high profile and successful female executive leaders who provide practical and authentic leadership advice that addresses mentees’ specific needs. The Program has three phases:

#### **Phase 1 - Mentoring & Development (Years 1 and 2)**

Mentees engage in active Cluster participation, education, and mentoring. They attend Cluster gatherings (generally every six to eight weeks), Subject Matter Expert led Tri-Cluster events (includes all mentees and mentors as well as special guests providing unique experiences and learnings), and other events addressing leadership development needs and current challenges.

#### **Phase 2 – “Paying It Forward” and Transition to Alumnae Network (Year 3)**

Mentees are required to “Pay It Forward,” and are invited at the end of the year to present updates on their “Pay It Forward” initiatives to the Board or at a Tri- Cluster meeting. Mentees play a special role in the orientation of the subsequent class of new mentees, acting as informal mentors to the newest members and being available to answer questions and expand their network. Upon successful completion of their “Pay It Forward” year, Mentees will be formally inducted into the W.O.M.E.N. in America Alumnae Network.

#### **Phase 3 – W.O.M.E.N. in America Alumnae**

All graduates remain in the Alumnae Network and independently continue to “Pay It Forward” in their professional lives. Through the Alumnae Network, graduates will take advantage of the natural networking that has formed with fellow Alumnae and the Mentors they have met through the program.

about, and from, female political leaders who did take on women's agendas? What are their successes and how did they succeed? Do women leaders at local and regional levels address more gender-focused problems than their counterparts at the national level?

- How do women *exercise* leadership without formal authority? A series of case studies from Asia on this question might elucidate differences between western and Asian notions of leading, and could be instructive on how women effectively navigate leadership in highly patriarchal societies. Areas for research may include women in academia, women in art, women in conflict and post-conflict situations, women in healthcare, and women in religious organizations.

- Research is also needed on women's self-perception and internalization of the culture, tradition, and social norms that relegate them to second-class status. On one hand, for example, women participate in son preference, marginalize younger women within punitive kinship structures, and otherwise perpetuate practices that reinforce patriarchal norms and practices. On the other hand, women also challenge prevalent gender discourses and norms that favor men and boys for social, economic and symbolic reasons. How do women's attitudes and discourses change? In addition to macro processes such as urbanization, what local measures and examples have effectively diminished the legitimacy and impact of gender-biased norms and practices?<sup>106</sup>

aided? Can leaders (especially men) extend the much-vaunted "Asian pragmatism" to women so that their potential and talent are used more fully? At present, many Asian countries still do not take the most pragmatic approach towards their women, leaning more on old cultural, traditional, and social norms.

It is high time to change this. It will not only benefit women, but society at large and Asia as a whole. □

### Asian Pragmatism

Women have contributed significantly to Asia's rise. In turn, what are the women of Asia owed? How can they be rewarded and

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# ENDNOTES

1. The *GGG Report* and others often cite indicators from the same sources, resulting in substantial data overlap across reports. All data in the *GGG Report* are converted to female/male ratios. Thus, for example, a country with 20 percent women in parliament gets a ratio of 20 women/80 men=.25 as the score on this variable. The score reflects the *gap* between women and men's attainment levels, rather than the levels themselves. For more on methodology and calculations, see Ricardo Hausmann, Laura D. Tyson, and Saadia Zahidi, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2011 (GGG Report 2011)* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2011), 3-7.
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