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Years of Challenge
Years of Change

Globally, UNIFEM has been at the vanguard of efforts to ensure that public policies reflect the realities of women's lives, including through the collection of accurate data. An early success story took place in India, where UNIFEM supported the process of the 1991 Census with gender-sensitive definitions of work, which resulted in a 2.6 per cent increase in the recording of the Female Workforce Participation Rate (FWPR). To engender the 2001 exercise more systematically, UNIFEM worked in partnership with the Government, NGOs and UN agencies. The FWPR increased by 3.4 percentage points - approximately 37 million women.

Milestone

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Asia/Pacific



After the Tsunami: Rebuilding Societies

Ena and her family were among the lucky few who survived the tsunami, but their village in the particularly hard-hit Indonesian province of Aceh was largely destroyed. Left with nothing, Ena applied for a loan through the Matahari Foundation, a local organization supported by UNIFEM, and opened a kiosk. Her small business has been growing quickly and she is now able to make a living.

Rebuilding women's livelihoods has been a key

concern since the tsunami hit. Loans to small enterprises, along with skills and business training, have helped to lay the foundation for a new future. In Indonesia, Somalia and Sri Lanka, hundreds of women living in shelters have been able to count on UNIFEM's support and start business activities that provide an income. Since many women lost their husbands and became heads of households, UNIFEM also conducted joint workshops with Sharia court judges to create awareness on the



LEFT: Living in a camp in Aceh after the tsunami. UNIFEM has assisted women to rebuild their livelihoods and to participate in the reconstruction of the affected areas.

inheritance and banking rights of women and children.

UNIFEM has also worked to ensure that women's perspectives are taken into account in the longer term rebuilding of tsunami-affected areas. In Aceh, where reconstruction efforts have coincided with an agreement between the Government and the Free Aceh Movement to develop a new Law on the Governing of Aceh, the consequences are particularly far-reaching.

At a meeting that brought together 400 Acehnese women, the women expressed the need for more opportunities to interact with local and national authorities and participate in decision-making. To respond to this need, Women's Mobile Discussions were held to ensure that women's voices would be heard at the policy level. As a result of these and other consultations, the draft Law on the Governing of Aceh contains a clause on gender equality and a 30 per cent quota for women in all political parties. Further provisions spell out equal employment opportunities for women as well as their right to independently conduct entrepreneurial activities.

- In 2005, UNIFEM worked in a number of countries to incorporate women's rights into key legislation. Through its programme on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in South-East Asia, the Convention's principles were mainstreamed into the Gender Equality Bill in Viet Nam. Under the same programme, UNIFEM provided recommendations for legislative reform to protect women working in the Philippines, and supported research in Cambodia to inform the National Plan of Action on Violence against Women.

Learn more: www.unifem.org/campaigns/tsunami
www.unifem-eseasia.org/projects/Cedaw

LEFT: Women in Viet Nam, where UNIFEM supported the development of a Gender Equality Bill.



LEFT PHOTO BY JOSH ESTEY-UNICEF. RIGHT PHOTO BY LES STONE-SYGMA/CORBIS

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In Cambodia, UNIFEM initiated one of the first post-conflict election projects to help women stake a claim in new political processes. Before the 1993 election, a Women's Summit trained women on political advocacy and presented political parties with recommendations to achieve women's equality. Participants soon created some of Cambodia's first women's organizations, while the election resulted in a woman being appointed as the Vice-Minister of Justice. Women's activism shaped the new Constitution, which calls for abolishing all forms of discrimination against women and guarantees women's rights on issues from maternity leave to equal pay. By 2002, a UNIFEM-sponsored voter education campaign contributed to the successful election of nearly 1,000 women into office.

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Even as HIV/AIDS exacts a heavy toll from women, public health messages often do not target or reach them. UNIFEM has found innovative ways to make information more available. A partnership with Indian Railways, the world's third largest employer, has produced a massive campaign for railway employees. It uses the Railways' extensive infrastructure of schools, hospitals, training institutes and women's associations - ready-made channels for outreach. Trained peer counsellors now circulate within railway communities with gender-sensitive messages on prevention, care and treatment. Anti-retroviral drugs are provided for free, a telephone helpline answers questions, and a revolving fund offers loans to women affected by HIV/AIDS.

Milestone

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Asia/Pacific



Protecting the Rights of Migrant Women Workers

We commit to support all efforts against illegal recruitment, human trafficking, or any policy that will violate the human rights of migrant workers, in particular women migrant workers." When recruitment agencies for migrant workers from nine countries in Asia and the Arab States came together in Bangkok at the invitation of UNIFEM, they were determined to take action against unethical operators in their midst. Financial exploitation and

deliberate misinformation of migrant women workers through illegal recruiters lead not only to economic ruin but also to the physical and sexual abuse of countless women who leave their countries in search of a better future abroad.

In the Covenant of Ethical Conduct and Good Practices, adopted in Bangkok, the recruitment agencies agreed on far-reaching business standards geared towards protecting women migrant workers. They committed themselves to informa-



ABOVE: Domestic workers from the Philippines protest against wage cuts in Hong Kong. UNIFEM works in countries of origin and destination to increase protection for women who work abroad.

tion campaigns for migrant workers and employers, to social security and insurance programmes that benefit migrant workers and to the establishment of resource and welfare centres in labour-receiving countries.

Country-specific measures are to complement the regional agreement: In Indonesia, recruitment agencies will create a blacklist of employers known to violate women's rights; in the Philippines, partnerships with law enforcement agencies are to be strengthened to prevent human trafficking; and in Nepal, a combined



ABOVE: A migrant woman in Thailand, where a conference for overseas recruitment agencies resulted in the adoption of ethical business standards.

skills training and loan programme will be set up together with the Government and private sector.

In 2005, UNIFEM's work to increase protection for women migrant workers was targeted at different levels. In Indonesia, where political structures have been largely decentralized, UNIFEM supported the drafting of a local law in the province of Blitar that addresses the dangerous or humiliating situations that can potentially occur at every stage of the migration cycle. The law, which was developed in collaboration with migrant women workers, emphasizes the need for accurate information for women considering work abroad and also spells out requirements such as the presence of a female doctor to conduct pre-departure check-ups.

UNIFEM also partnered with community-based organizations in six Indonesian districts. Through the collaboration, village information centres and skills training programmes are being established, and people intending to seek overseas employment will be able to tap into a database on recruitment agencies to make sure they are in good hands.

Learn more: <http://unifem-eseasia.org/projects/migrant>

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Since 2002, UNIFEM's responses to Afghanistan's fast-changing circumstances have been instrumental in helping Afghan women grasp opportunities amid the radical changes reshaping their lives. Legal advice, training and support to advocacy were critical for women delegates to the Loya Jirga, which enshrined women's equality in the new Constitution. UNIFEM support to the Ministry of Women's Affairs has led to the development of a National Action Plan on Women. Assistance to the permanent justice institutions is helping to reflect women's perspective in legal reform processes. A national database, set up with UNIFEM support, tracks violence against women in Afghanistan.

Milestone

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