Toward Gender Equality in East Asia and the Pacific

A Companion to the World Development Report

OVERVIEW
Well known for their economic success and dynamism, countries in the East Asia and Pacific region must tackle an increasingly complex set of challenges to continue on a path of sustainable development. Learning from others within the region and beyond can help identify what works, what doesn't, and why, in the search for practical solutions to these challenges. This regional report series presents analyses of issues relevant to the region, drawing on the global knowledge and experience of the World Bank and its partners. The series aims to inform public discussion, policy formulation, and development practitioners’ actions to turn challenges into opportunities.
OVERVIEW

Toward Gender Equality in East Asia and the Pacific

A Companion to the World Development Report
This booklet contains the Overview along with a list of contents from the forthcoming World Bank book, *Toward Gender Equality in East Asia and the Pacific: A Companion to the World Development Report*. To order copies of the full-length book, published by the World Bank, please use the form at the back of this booklet.

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Over the past few decades, the East Asia and Pacific Region has been the most economically dynamic region in the world. In most countries in the Region, incomes have grown dramatically, and with that growth, absolute poverty has declined rapidly. Most of the Region’s economies have also shifted away from agriculture and toward manufacturing and services. Rapid growth, structural transformation, and poverty reduction have been accompanied by progress toward gender equality in several key areas. Economic development has led to the closing of gender gaps in school enrollments and a decline in maternal mortality rates: girls in the Region as a whole now enroll in secondary schools at a higher rate than boys, and maternal mortality has fallen by half over the past 20 years. Access to economic opportunities has also increased, particularly among younger, better educated women. In many ways, women in East Asian and Pacific countries are better positioned than ever before to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from development.

Yet, the experience of the Region illustrates also how growth and economic development are not enough to attain gender equality in all its dimensions. Women still have less access than men to a range of productive assets and services, including land, financial capital, agricultural extension services, and new information technologies. Substantial employment segregation by gender remains. Women are less likely than men to work in formal sector jobs and more likely to work in poorly remunerated occupations and enterprises. Despite the closing of education gaps, women still earn less than men for similar work all across the Region. Women in East Asian and Pacific countries still have a weaker voice and less influence than men, whether within the household, in the private sector, in civil society, or in politics. And women across the Region remain vulnerable to gender-based violence, often at the hand of an intimate partner.

The main message of this book, *Toward Gender Equality in East Asia and the Pacific*—a regional companion to the *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development*—is that policy makers in the Region need to understand why progress in closing gender gaps has been mixed and to implement corrective policies where gaps remain persistent. The reason is that gender equality is both an important development objective in its own right as well as good development policy. A growing body of evidence shows that promoting gender
equality in access to productive resources, economic opportunity, and voice can contribute to higher economic productivity, improve the economic prospects and well-being of the next generation, and lead to more effective development policy making. Yet, gender equality in many areas does not happen automatically. Thus, gender-aware public policy is required if countries are to achieve both gender equality and more rapid development.

As a regional report, *Toward Gender Equality in East Asia and the Pacific* focuses on issues that are particularly pertinent to the Region. Among other things, the report examines the gender dimensions of several emerging trends in the Region—increased global economic integration, the rising use of information and communication technologies, migration, urbanization, and rapid population aging—all of which are generating new opportunities, but also new risks, for promoting gender equality. The report also contributes to the development of new data and evidence on gender and development, significantly strengthening the ability of countries to formulate evidence-based policy in this area.

Drawing on this evidence base, the report identifies four priority areas for public action in the countries of East Asia and the Pacific. First, promoting gender equality in human development remains important where gender gaps in education and health outcomes remain large. Second, policies to close gender gaps in economic opportunity have a critical role. Such measures are often warranted on both equity and efficiency grounds. Third, initiatives to strengthen women’s voice and influence—and to protect them from violence—are also called for across the Region. Strengthening women’s agency will enhance the quality of development decision making and, thus, development broadly. And, finally, public policy can foster the opportunities and manage the risks associated with emerging trends in the Region; taking a gender-aware approach to policy making in this area will lead to better gender—and development—outcomes.

This report shows that in East Asia and the Pacific, as in other parts of the world, gender equality is both the right development objective as well as good development policy.

Pamela Cox
Regional Vice President
East Asia and the Pacific
The World Bank
This study has been prepared by a multi-sectoral, multidisciplinary team led by Andrew Mason under the guidance of Bert Hofman and Sudhir Shetty. The report was written by a core team comprised of Reena Badiani, Trang Van Nguyen, Katherine Patrick, Ximena Del Carpio, and Andrew Mason, with substantive contributions from Jennifer Golan, Patricia Fernandes, Anne Kuriakose, Daniel Mont, Rea Chiongson, and Sarah Iqbal. New data analysis for the report was carried out by Juan Feng, Reno Dewina, and Flora Nankhuni, using the East Asia and Pacific Region’s Poverty Monitoring Database. Background papers for the report were written by Sarah Iqbal, Nayda Almodovar Reteguis, Yasmin Klaudia bin Humam, Josefina Posadas, Reena Badiani, John Rang, Benedikte Bjerne, Chris Sakellariou, and Dongxiao Liu. Qualitative studies on women’s economic decision making in Fiji, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and Vietnam were coordinated by Carolyn Turk and Patti L. Petesch as part of a 22-country research effort carried out under the auspices of the World Development Report 2012 on gender equality and development. Production support was provided by Lynn Yeargin, Cathryn Summers, and Mildred Gonsalvez.

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<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>BPS</td>
<td>Badan Pusat Statistik</td>
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<td>BREAD</td>
<td>Bureau for Research and Economic Analysis of Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women</td>
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<td>EAP</td>
<td>East Asia and Pacific</td>
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<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations</td>
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<td>FCND</td>
<td>Food Consumption and Nutrition Division</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>gross domestic product</td>
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<td>HNP</td>
<td>Health Nutrition and Population</td>
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<td>ICRW</td>
<td>International Center for Research on Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>information and communication technology</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<td>KILM</td>
<td>Key Indicators of the Labour Market</td>
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<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>Lao People’s Democratic Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIPH</td>
<td>National Institute of Public Health</td>
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<td>NIS</td>
<td>National Institute of Statistics</td>
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<td>NSD</td>
<td>National Statistics Directorate</td>
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<td>NSO</td>
<td>National Statistics Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>ORC</td>
<td>Opinion Research Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>purchasing power parity</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAR</td>
<td>special administrative region</td>
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<tr>
<td>SME</td>
<td>small and medium enterprise</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPC</td>
<td>Secretariat of the Pacific Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUSI</td>
<td>Survey of Cottage and Small-Scale Firms (Survei Usaha Terintegrasi)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nation Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>WDI</td>
<td>World Development Indicators</td>
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<td>WDR</td>
<td>World Development Report</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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In recent decades, women across the globe have made positive strides toward gender equality. Literacy rates for young women and girls are higher than ever before, while gender gaps in primary education have closed in almost all countries. In the last three decades, over half a billion women have joined the world’s labor force (World Bank 2011c). Progress toward gender equality in East Asia and the Pacific has been similarly noteworthy. Most countries in the region have either reached or surpassed gender parity in education enrollments. Health outcomes for both women and men have improved significantly. Female labor force participation rates in the region are relatively high. Yet, despite considerable progress in this economically dynamic region, gender disparities persist in a number of important areas—particularly in access to economic opportunity and in voice and influence in society. For policy makers in East Asian and Pacific countries, closing these gender gaps represents an important challenge to achieving more inclusive and effective development.

The East Asia and Pacific Region’s significant economic growth, structural transformation, and poverty reduction in the last few decades have been associated with reduced gender inequalities in several dimensions. The region grew at 7 percent on average between 2000 and 2008 (figure 1), the structure of the region’s economies has shifted away from agriculture toward manufacturing and services, and extreme poverty has fallen dramatically. Indeed, the share of the region’s population living on less than US$1.25 a day has declined by more than 50 percent since 1990—from among the highest rates of poverty in the world to among the lowest (figure 2). Growth, structural transformation, and poverty reduction have been accompanied by considerable progress toward gender equality in several key areas, particularly education and health. Many countries in the region have experienced closing gender gaps in school enrollments and declining maternal and child mortality rates.

But growth and development have not been enough to attain gender equality in all its dimensions. Women still have less access than men to a range of productive assets and services, including land, financial capital, agricultural extension services, and new information technologies. Substantial employment segregation by gender remains. Women are less likely than men to work in
Pacific countries still have a weaker voice and less influence than men, whether in household decision making, in the private sector, in civil society, or in politics. Moreover, women across the region remain vulnerable to gender-based violence, often at the hand of an intimate partner.

This report clarifies empirically the relationship between gender and development and outlines an agenda for public action to promote gender equality in East Asian and Pacific countries. The report was written as a companion to the World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development (World Bank 2011c) and is intended as a tool to help policy makers in the region promote both gender equality and more effective development. Following the World Development Report 2012, this report focuses on gender outcomes in three domains: (a) endowments—human and productive capital; (b) economic opportunity—participation and returns in the economy; and (c) agency—women’s voice and influence in all facets of society.

The report makes several distinct contributions to policy makers’ understanding of gender, development, and public policy in East Asian and Pacific countries.

- First, the analysis focuses on issues that are particularly relevant to the region. Compared with other developing regions, for example, female access to basic education is no longer a first-order concern in most East Asian and Pacific countries. Gender stereotyping and gender “streaming” in education still represent critical challenges, however, and thus receive particular emphasis in the report.
- Second, the report examines the gender dimensions of several emerging trends that are important to the region’s development: increased global economic integration, rising use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), migration, urbanization, and rapid population aging. These trends have gender dimensions that

Figure 1: The East Asia and Pacific Region has experienced rapid economic growth

Source: World Development Indicators (WDI) database.

Figure 2: Poverty reduction in the East Asia and Pacific Region has been impressive

Source: PovcalNet online poverty analysis tool.
Overview

• Third, the East Asia and Pacific Region is vast and diverse, with important differences in economic and social characteristics that affect progress toward gender equality. The report accounts for intraregional diversity in a way that is not possible in a global report. Particular emphasis is placed, where possible, on the challenges faced by countries in the Pacific as distinct from those in East Asia.

• Finally, the report has undertaken extensive empirical analysis of gender equality using a newly created database of household surveys for the region. In doing so, the report has contributed significantly to the development of indicators and evidence on gender, development, and public policy that were not available previously.

**Why does gender equality matter for development?**

*Gender equality matters intrinsically.* Nobel prize–winning economist Amartya Sen transformed the discourse on development when he argued that development not only is about raising people’s incomes or reducing poverty but rather involves a process of expanding freedoms equally for all people (Sen 1999).1 Viewed from this perspective, gender equality is intrinsically valued. The near-universal ratification and adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)2—and the subsequent commitment of the international community to Millennium Development Goals 3 and 5—underscores a near-global consensus that gender equality and women’s empowerment are development objectives in their own right.

*Gender equality also matters for development.* A growing body of empirical literature from around the world demonstrates that promoting gender equality is also good development policy, or as stated in the *World Development Report 2012* (World Bank 2011c, 3), “Gender equality is smart economics.” Indeed, the literature shows that greater gender equality in endowments, access to economic opportunities, and agency can (a) contribute to higher productivity, income growth, and poverty reduction; (b) improve the opportunities and outcomes of the next generation; and (c) enhance development decision making. This section explores the evidence on these three pathways, in turn.

**Gender equality can contribute to higher productivity and income growth**

For households and economies to function at their full potential, resources, skills, and talent should be put to their most productive use. If societies allocate resources on the basis of one’s gender, as opposed to one’s skills and abilities, this allocation comes at a cost. Indeed, the economic costs of gender inequalities—whether caused by the persistence of traditional norms or by overt discrimination—can be considerable. A recent study commissioned for the *World Development Report 2012* found that in the East Asia and Pacific Region, output per worker could be 7 to 18 percent higher across a range of countries if female entrepreneurs and workers were to work in the same sectors, types of jobs, and activities as men and to have the same access to productive resources (Cuberes and Teignier-Baqué 2011).

Evidence suggests that misallocation of female skills and talent commonly begins before women enter the labor force, when families and societies underinvest in girls’ schooling. A number of cross-country studies have found a robust inverse relationship between the size of the gender gap in education and gross domestic product (GDP) growth, controlling for average education levels and other factors associated with economic growth (see, for example, Klasen 2002; Knowles, Lorgelly, and Owen 2002).3 Moreover, to the extent that young women (or men) choose fields of study on the basis of their gender rather than their abilities,
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this too will exact costs not only on individuals’ employment and earnings, but also on a country’s economic productivity more broadly.

Gender inequalities in access to productive assets also have costs in terms of productivity and income. Microeconomic studies from a number of countries across developing regions show that female farmers and entrepreneurs are inherently no less productive than male farmers and entrepreneurs; rather, they tend to have less access to productive inputs. A recent study by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that equalizing access to productive resources between female and male farmers could increase agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5 to 4.0 percent (FAO/Sida Partnership Cooperation 2010).

A number of studies show that gender-based violence also imposes significant costs on the economies of developing countries through lower worker productivity and incomes, lower human capital investments, and weaker accumulation of social capital (Morrison, Ellsberg, and Bott 2007). In addition to indirect costs, gender-based violence has large direct economic costs on society. A study in the United States found that the direct health care costs of intimate partner violence against adult women were more than $4 billion USD in 1995 (USCDC 2003). Reducing gender-based violence would thus have significant positive effects on the region’s economies by reducing health care costs and increasing investments in women’s human capital, female worker productivity, and women’s accumulation of social capital.

As the global economy becomes more integrated, the productivity effects associated with greater gender equality are likely to be increasingly important to East Asian and Pacific countries. Recent studies on the relationship between gender and trade suggest that gender inequalities have become financially detrimental for countries in a world of open trade (Do, Levchenko, and Raddatz 2011). To participate effectively in an increasingly competitive world, countries will need to harness their resources efficiently by improving opportunities for all and allocating labor on the basis of skill instead of gender. Gender inequality, whether in endowments, economic opportunities, or agency, reduces a country’s ability to compete in this increasingly globalized economic environment (World Bank 2011c).

Promoting gender equality is also an investment in the next generation

A large body of cross-country and country-specific literature shows that healthier, better educated mothers have healthier, better educated children, which can be expected to positively affect children’s future productivity and economic prospects. The effects begin even before childbirth. In Timor-Leste, highly educated mothers and those in the wealthiest households are more likely to have their babies delivered by skilled attendants than less educated mothers and those from poorer households (NSD, Ministry of Finance, and ICF Macro 2010). Similarly, Demographic and Health Survey data show that Cambodian women with little education are relatively less likely to receive prenatal care and assistance from trained health personnel during birth deliveries than women with more education (Johnson, Sao, and Hor 2000). A mother’s health and nutrition status is also found to strongly affect children’s physical health as well as cognitive and noncognitive abilities, which can have long-lasting developmental and societal consequences (Naudeau et al. 2011).

Higher labor force participation as well as income earned and assets held by women have also been shown to have positive effects on the next generation. In Indonesia, for example, women with a higher share of household assets before marriage tend to use more prenatal care and are more likely to have their births attended by skilled health care providers (Beegle, Frankenberg, and Thomas 2001). Similarly, in China,
increasing adult female income by 10 percent of the average household income raised the fraction of surviving girls by 1 percentage point and increased years of schooling for both boys and girls. In contrast, a similar increase in male income reduced survival rates and educational attainment for girls with no impact on boys (Qian 2008). Studies from across developing and developed regions (for example, from places as diverse as Brazil, Ghana, South Africa, and the United States) show that income in the hands of women positively affects their female children's health (Duflo 2003; Thomas 1995); commonly, the marginal effects of income and assets in the hands of mothers are larger than effects of similar income and assets in the hands of fathers.

Reductions in gender-based violence through greater female agency can also have important intergenerational benefits. Several studies show that experiencing domestic violence between parents as a child contributes to a higher risk of both women experiencing domestic violence as adults and men perpetrating violence against their spouses (Fehringer and Hindin 2009). In Timor-Leste, 56.4 percent of women who were victims of spousal violence had a father who beat their mother (NSD, Ministry of Finance, and ICF Macro 2010). In Cambodia, women who reported that their mothers experienced domestic violence were more likely to experience physical and psychological domestic violence as well (NIPH and NIS and ORC Macro 2006). Efforts that increase women's safety and security and that reduce domestic violence can thus lead to lower intergenerational transmission of violence within families.

**Strengthening women’s voice can enhance the quality of development decision making**

Several studies show that women and men have different policy preferences (Edlund and Pande 2001; Lott and Kenny 1999). Despite perceptions in some East Asian and Pacific countries that women do not make as good leaders as men, studies suggest that capturing these gender-based differences in perspective can lead to not only more representative but also better decision making. Evidence from South Asia suggests that development policy making can benefit from greater gender equality in voice. As an example, a study of women elected to local government in India found that female leadership positively affected the provision of public goods at the local level in ways that better reflected both women's and men's preferences (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004). Similarly, studies from rural India and Nepal found that when women who were previously excluded from decisions about local natural resource management had greater voice and influence, local conservation outcomes improved significantly (Agarwal 2010a, 2010b).

Women’s collective agency can also be transformative, both for individuals and for society as a whole. For example, for a group of ethnic minority women in rural China, information sharing among them has helped empower them and raise their social standing in the Han-majority communities into which they married (Judd 2010). In a more formal setting, over the last 15 years, migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong SAR, China, have been engaged in civic action focused on local migrant workers’ rights as well as international human rights (Constable 2009). These efforts have contributed to the enactment of laws that now provide migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong SAR, China, with some of the most comprehensive legal protections in the world.

**Recent progress, pending challenges**

Over the last few decades, most East Asian and Pacific countries made considerable progress toward gender equality in several dimensions. In other dimensions, gender disparities have been more persistent. This section reviews recent progress and pending challenges in the region, noting where economic growth and development have
contributed to advances and where they have been insufficient.

Growth and development have been accompanied by reduced gender inequalities in several dimensions

Many gender gaps in education have closed. Over the last few decades, boys’ and girls’ schooling outcomes have converged at levels that are high by international standards. East Asia and the Pacific has performed better than other developing regions, in terms of both increasing female and male educational enrollments and raising the female-to-male enrollment ratio. In 2010, the region had the highest primary school ratio of female-to-male enrollments among all developing regions; at the secondary level, only Latin America and the Caribbean had a higher female-to-male enrollment ratio (figure 3).

Key health outcomes have improved. During the past half century, the region has experienced significant advances in several health indicators. Fertility rates have sharply declined, and under-five mortality rates have halved since 1990 for both boys and girls. Noteworthy gains have been made in birth attendance by health professionals. In addition, the East Asia and Pacific Region has seen substantial declines in the maternal mortality rate, from approximately 200 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 100 in 2008 (figure 4).

Gender gaps in labor force participation have narrowed. Female labor force participation in East Asian and Pacific countries is high by international standards (figure 5), and among younger cohorts, female labor force participation has tended to rise over time. Moreover, as countries grow and develop, women are increasingly moving into jobs in the nonagricultural sector and are migrating to urban areas in search of better employment opportunities. Trends and patterns of labor force participation look similar to those observed in the United States and other countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) during their economic transformations.

In many ways, women in East Asia and the Pacific are better positioned today than ever before to participate in and contribute to their countries’ development.

Despite progress, important challenges to promoting gender equality remain

Progress has been uneven across the region. Substantial variation remains across countries, both in overall enrollment rates and in female-to-male enrollment ratios. Countries such as Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), and Papua New Guinea still have relatively low enrollment levels and low female-to-male enrollment ratios, particularly at the secondary school level. Furthermore, although countries have experienced convergence in enrollment among the young, substantial gaps still remain in the educational endowments of adult populations.
Maternal mortality remains high in lower-income countries and in several Pacific countries (figure 4). In Lao PDR, for example, maternal mortality rates were still more than 500 deaths per 100,000 births in 2008, among the highest rates in the world. Indonesia’s maternal mortality rate remains high compared to other countries in the region at similar levels of development.

Substantial differences in labor force participation occur across countries in the region, even among countries with similar income levels. Relative to their income levels, countries such as China and Vietnam have substantially higher rates of female labor force participation than the world average, whereas participation is near the world average in countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines, and below average in countries such as Fiji and Malaysia (figure 5).

Within countries, interactions between gender and other socioeconomic characteristics can often exacerbate disparities. Economically disadvantaged and minority populations often experience lower educational enrollments, for example. In Vietnam, school participation among 15- to 17-year-olds is substantially higher among the Kinh and Hoa (Chinese) majorities than among many of the 52 ethnic minority populations. Among the more economically disadvantaged and less well integrated Hmong, Dao, and Khmer minorities, far fewer girls attend school than boys (Baulch et al. 2002). Geographic distance, or remoteness, can also serve to compound gender disadvantage. Women in remote rural areas commonly have limited access to health care, significantly raising the risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth. While Vietnam has experienced noteworthy declines in maternal mortality on average over the last decade, progress has been much slower in remote and ethnic minority regions (World Bank 2011b).

Some gender disparities fail to close—or close very slowly—with development

More than a million girls and women per year are “missing” in East Asia. Among the most concerning issues is that despite growth and development, the problem of missing girls remains significant. The term “missing women” was first coined...
Gender disparities in access to and control of productive resources. Gender disparities in access to and control of land and farm inputs are pervasive in the region despite growth and development. Women remain less likely to own land than men. And when women, or specifically, female-headed households, do own land, they typically have smaller holdings (figure 6). Female-headed households also tend to have poorer access to other productive inputs and support services, including livestock holdings and access to agricultural extension services.

Despite high labor force participation, important gender inequalities in economic opportunity remain. Women still earn less than men in nearly all sectors in all countries in the region (figure 7). Gender wage gaps increase with age, reflecting in part lower levels of experience among women caused by workforce interruptions and reduced working hours during childbearing years, as well as gender disparities in education among older cohorts. Gender wage gaps in the region are also strongly influenced by occupational and sectoral segmentation, mirroring patterns seen in the United States and other
OECD countries. Together, differences in education endowments, experience, and industrial and occupational segregation explain up to 30 percent of observed gender wage disparities in East Asian countries (Sakellariou 2011).

Gender wage gaps in the region are often greatest among men and women with relatively low education and skill levels. Several studies from East Asian and Pacific countries point toward “sticky floors,” that is, wider wage gaps at the bottom than at the top of the earnings distribution (figure 8). The finding of sticky floors contrasts with studies from OECD countries, which more commonly find “glass ceilings,” that is, larger wage gaps among higher-earning men and women.

Women are more likely to work in small firms, to work in the informal sector, and to be concentrated in lower-paid occupations and sectors. Within firms, women are more likely than men to be temporary workers. Such employment segregation affects a number of economic outcomes by gender, including earnings, returns to education and experience, social security coverage, and exposure to shocks. Substantial gender-based occupational and sectoral segregation is seen in all countries and does not decline with development. In fact, employment segregation tends to increase as economies become more diverse with development. Economic growth and, in particular, urbanization appear to make occupational and sectoral segregation by gender more pronounced, particularly during the early stages of economic structural change.

Similarly, female-led enterprises tend to be smaller and more precarious than male-led enterprises (figure 9). The micro, small, and medium firm sectors are important segments of most East Asian and Pacific economies and contribute a substantial fraction of GDP. Female-led enterprises across the region, particularly in the informal sector, have lower profits, are less likely than male-led enterprises to be registered, have fewer employees and assets, and are more likely to be home based or to operate out of nonpermanent premises. Although
female-owned and -managed enterprises are not inherently less productive, they tend to be smaller, less capitalized, and located in less remunerative sectors.

Women in the region still have less voice and influence than men. Women’s household decision-making power in East Asia and the Pacific is relatively high, but levels of autonomy vary across the region. Women’s autonomy in the household can be measured in several ways, including control of assets, freedom of physical mobility, and voice in decision making. By several of these measures, including control over large household purchases and visiting family and relatives, women in East Asian countries appear to have relatively high autonomy compared with women in other developing regions (World Bank 2011c). Women in the Pacific have relatively less control over their own earnings, however. Over 15 percent of women in the Marshall Islands, 15 percent in Samoa, and 13 percent in Tuvalu report that their husbands control their cash earnings (figure 10). Moreover, 58 percent of partnered women in the Solomon Islands and 69 percent of partnered women in Vanuatu report that they have experienced some sort of controlling behavior by their partners. This includes preventing them from seeing family, wanting to know where they are at all times, forbidding contact with other men, and controlling their access to health care (SPC and NSO 2009; VWC 2011).

Women’s voice and influence in the public domain—as measured by representation in national and local political assemblies—remains low. The share of female parliamentarians in East Asian and Pacific countries is just below the global average, at approximately 18 percent in 2011. Despite economic growth and development in the region, this figure has barely changed since 1990. Although the share of women in national assemblies varies considerably across the region, it is systematically lower in the Pacific than in East Asia (figure 11). Indeed, in no country in the Pacific does the share of parliamentarians who are female exceed 10 percent, and four countries—the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, and the Solomon Islands—have no female parliamentarians.

The prevalence of gender-based violence is high in the region, and particularly so in the Pacific where the prevalence of domestic violence is among the highest in the world. As can be seen in figure 12, 68 percent of ever-married women 15–49 years of age in Kiribati, 64 percent in the Solomon Islands, and 60 percent in Vanuatu have experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner (SPC, Ministry of Internal and Social Affairs, and Statistics Division 2010; SPC and NSO 2009; VWC 2011). Although no nationally representative data exist for Papua New Guinea, studies conducted at the subnational level suggest that domestic violence is just as prevalent (Ganster-Breidler 2010; Lewis, Maruia, and Walker 2008). This violence is a linchpin to a bigger story; violence against women represents the extreme deprivation of voice and freedom among

**FIGURE 10** Who decides how wives’ cash earnings are used varies widely across the region

![Chart showing percentage of wives, husbands, and couples deciding how wives’ cash earnings will be used](chart)

Sources: Demographic and Health Surveys, various years.
women and, as such, is often associated with a lack of agency in other dimensions.

**Awareness is increasing that men and boys—not just women and girls—face gender-specific risks.** Some countries in the region have started to experience a reverse gender gap in education; girls’ secondary school enrollment now exceeds that of boys in China, Fiji, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Samoa, and Thailand. Reverse gender gaps at the tertiary level are sometimes even starker: in Thailand, 122.4 females were enrolled for every 100 males in 2008. In addition, men across the region experience higher levels of morbidity and premature mortality related to substance abuse. The prevalence of smoking and drinking among males in East Asian and Pacific countries is much higher than the prevalence among females.

**Figure 11**  
Women’s representation in parliament is low, especially in the Pacific

![Figure 11](image1.png)  

**Figure 12**  
Violence against women is high in the region

![Figure 12](image2.png)  
Sources: Demographic and Health Surveys, various years, and government surveys.  
Note: Data for Thailand are for Bangkok and Nakhonrissawan only, and data for Japan are for Yokohama only.
Why do many gender inequalities persist?

Low household incomes, weak service delivery, and traditional norms can impede gender equality in education and health

Where gender gaps in education are still observed, low income coupled with high costs of education can limit household demand for schooling. Traditional gender norms and practices also strongly influence household schooling decisions. Participants of focus group discussions in a qualitative research exercise in Papua New Guinea report, for example, that parents value boys’ education over girls’ education. The reason is that males will carry the family name and become household heads whereas females are expected to submit to their husbands and be caregivers and homemakers.

Weak systems of service delivery also constrain progress in education—overall as well as for girls. In Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Papua New Guinea, for example, school enrollments are low overall, and gender gaps persist. Low enrollment rates in Papua New Guinea also reflect limited physical access to schools and high dropout rates. Poor and sparse school infrastructure, poor teacher attitudes and attendance, lack of teachers in remote areas, and negative pupil behavior all contribute to low overall enrollments. Long distances to schools have been observed to make school attendance costly in both Cambodia and Lao PDR, particularly for girls, because long travel distances raise safety concerns.

FIGURE 13  Women are concentrated in certain fields of study, such as education and medicine, but are underrepresented in law and engineering

Source: Sakellariou 2011.
concerns among parents. The lack of toilets at many schools makes attendance more difficult for girls than boys.

Gender streaming in education largely reflects societal norms and expectations and has implications for gender inequalities in job placement and earnings. Substantial differences remain in the composition of education between men and women in the region (figure 13). Economic returns or comparative advantage of females and males in different fields of study do not appear to explain education streaming. Social norms about appropriate work for women and men, role models in the labor market, and gender stereotyping in school curricula play important roles. In East Asia and the Pacific, teaching materials more frequently portray males than females in active and leadership roles. Women are often depicted as secretaries, assistants, nurses, and teachers whereas men are portrayed as doctors, politicians, or police officers. Gender streaming in education ultimately affects the type of work that women and men do and, importantly, affects their respective abilities to take advantage of existing and emerging economic opportunities.

Poor service delivery and cultural norms about birthing practices contribute in large part to high maternal mortality in several East Asian and Pacific countries. Poor access to quality obstetric health services, particularly in remote rural areas, places women at higher risk for maternal death. Rural areas tend to be less well served by the health system, and rural residents have much lower access to birth deliveries attended by trained staff than do urban residents. Evidence shows that poor health infrastructure and long distances to the nearest health center are both important barriers to reducing maternal mortality in Cambodia and Lao PDR. In addition, culture and tradition play an important role in the choice of health practices, such as the location of childbirth, the use of skilled birth attendants, and sterilization practices. Preferences can vary from birth deliveries at home to deliveries in the forest, including beliefs that women do not need prenatal care or delivery supported by skilled attendants. These factors take a heavy toll on women during pregnancy and pose higher risks of mortality related to birth complications.

Strong son preference, intensified by declining fertility and the availability of prenatal sex-identification technology, underlies the observed skewed sex ratios at birth in a few East Asian countries (China, Vietnam, and to a lesser extent now, Korea). Parents’ choices to keep and care for boys over girls can depend on social norms and values, different economic opportunities by gender, and the benefits parents expect from a son compared to a daughter, including material support in old age. Although many societies have some mild degree of preference for sons, the interplay of culture, state, and political processes can generate extreme patrilineality and highly skewed child sex ratios. In addition, the manifestation of son preference is influenced by public policies—for example, China’s one-child policy and Vietnam’s two-child policy—and the spread of prenatal sex-determination technology since the early 1980s. For these reasons, economic growth and development alone do not necessarily reduce son preference and sex ratios at birth in East Asia.

Gender norms about masculinity play a strong role in influencing the excessive tobacco and alcohol consumption observed among men in many parts of the region. Smoking and drinking are commonly viewed as masculine behaviors. Men and boys feel substantial pressure to accept gender stereotypes that they should be strong and tough. In contrast, social disapproval of women who smoke keeps the smoking prevalence among women very low in Vietnam, for example. Survey data indicate that the primary reason why most Vietnamese women do not use tobacco is the expectation that “women shouldn’t smoke.” Survey respondents consider this factor more influential in affecting smoking behaviors than health concerns.
Norms regarding women’s household roles and disparities in productive resources constrain economic opportunity

Gender norms related to the allocation of time to household work affect women’s opportunities in the labor market because they are expected to take primary responsibility for home and family in addition to any market role. Responsibility in the household fundamentally affects all outcomes in the market sphere—from where women work and what they do to how much they earn. Women work longer total hours than men and devote significantly more time to domestic and caregiving activities (figure 14), particularly in households with small children. Many women temporarily leave the labor force when they must care for small children or the elderly. Trade-offs between household and market work can be particularly stark in rural areas, where women can spend long hours on domestic chores because of poor infrastructure and a lack of alternative childcare options. Indeed, differences in the types of work that women and men do, along with higher rates of female presence in the informal sector, are in part caused by women’s greater need for workplace flexibility to facilitate management of their dual household and market roles.

Female-headed households in the region tend to have less access to land because of the interaction of complex legal, social, and economic factors. In the majority of countries in East Asia, statutory law does not differentiate property inheritance by gender. However, parallel statutory and customary legal systems in a number of East Asian and Pacific Island countries mean that women are not treated equally to men in the implementation of the law. Gender inequalities persist also in access to other productive inputs and support services—from livestock holdings to agricultural extension services. Although evidence on access to credit is mixed across the region, female entrepreneurs in several countries, including Timor-Leste and Tonga, report greater difficulty than their male counterparts in accessing credit. Such disparities in access to productive resources continue to impede gender equality in access to economic opportunity.

A substantial share of the gaps in productivity and profits between female- and male-led firms can be accounted for by gender-based segmentation of enterprises by sector, firm size, and firm characteristics. This “sorting” of firms is found among both formal and informal enterprises and reflects both gender norms regarding time allocation to household and market work and differential access to productive inputs. In Indonesia, for example, the food, retail, and garment manufacturing sectors—where female entrepreneurs are most likely to locate—are among the least capital-intensive and productive sectors (figure 15). By contrast, the transport sector—where male entrepreneurs are most likely to locate—has higher productivity and capital intensity.

Broader constraints to business development, such as cumbersome registration procedures, affect both female- and male-led enterprises (figure 16). The most important issues vary by country, but, within any given country, both male and female entrepreneurs often identify similar challenges—competition, difficulty in accessing finance,

**FIGURE 14** In Lao PDR, women—particularly those with young children—must balance household and market work

![Figure 14](image-url)
and lack of electricity—and in comparable magnitudes. Evidence suggests that such constraints may be more onerous among small and informal firms than among larger firms, however, so to the extent that female-led firms are smaller and more likely to be informal, they are likely to be more adversely affected.

**Gender inequalities in endowments and economic opportunity limit women’s agency...**

A woman’s agency is affected in fundamental ways by her endowments and access to economic opportunities. Gender inequalities in educational attainment, economic assets, and own earnings can hinder women’s abilities to influence their circumstances in the home, to enter and participate effectively in politics, or to leave bad or dangerous household situations. In Indonesia, for example, women with little or no education are less likely to participate in decisions involving their own health care, to make household purchases, or to engage regularly in social activities than women with at least a secondary education (BPS and ORC Macro 2003). In China and Cambodia, women with less education are less likely to enter politics—for reasons of norms or statute—than women with higher levels of education (Maffii and Hong 2010; Wang and Dai 2010). Moreover, worldwide evidence suggests that a woman’s ownership and control of her own assets and income is associated with a decreased risk of intimate-partner violence (Agarwal and Panda 2007; ICRW 2006; Pronyk et al. 2006; Swaminathan, Walker, and Rugadya 2008). Women’s income can also positively affect their accumulation of assets, which in turn positively affects their ability to leave an abusive partner, to cope with shocks, and to invest and expand their earnings and economic opportunities (World Bank 2011c).

**... as do traditional norms regarding women’s roles ...**

Social norms and practices can limit women’s voice and influence in the home or in society. As previously noted, traditional norms about women’s roles within the home constrain their economic opportunities and thus their decision-making power within the home. Traditional gender norms
and social expectations also shape people’s views about women’s roles in the public sphere. Surveys conducted in several East Asian countries indicate, for example, that a majority of men—and sometimes a majority of women—think that men make better political leaders than women (figure 17). Similarly, in parts of rural China, many people still think of women as less capable (disuzhi), and local norms dictate that they should confine their activities to the domestic settings (Wang and Dai 2010).

... and complex legal environments and, often, weak access to justice

The legal setting, along with people’s access to justice, establishes the underlying environment in which women (and men) can exercise agency in the home and in society. Whether women and men are equally supported under the law, and whether their rights are protected in practice thus critically affect their voice and influence in society. Laws and access to justice also create the environment in which women and men can (or cannot) access resources and economic opportunity and accumulate assets, which also affects their agency. In several countries in the region, the legal environment is affected by not only statutory but also customary law.

Plural legal environments, where both statutory and customary laws are practiced, can create important challenges to promoting gender equality in voice and influence. Statutory laws, customary (and sometimes religious) laws and practices can affect women’s voice and influence in different ways when they bestow different rights by gender. Moreover, in practice, the interaction between statute and custom can mean that women’s legal status varies substantially across ethnic (and religious) groups, even within a single country. This interaction can affect women’s rights in marriage and divorce, reproductive health, education, asset ownership, inheritance, and freedom of mobility, among other things, which in turn can fundamentally affect the extent of women’s agency.

In some countries, inadequate legal protection, weak implementation and enforcement, and social tolerance enable gender-based violence. Although more than three-quarters of countries in East Asia have strengthened legislation on domestic abuse in recent years (including, for example, Indonesia, Korea, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam), in the Pacific, more than 60 percent of countries still lack sufficient legislation on domestic violence (UNDP 2010). Even when countries have appropriate legislation in place, women remain unprotected by the legal system because the laws remain largely unenforced. A recent study found, for example, that officers in the Fiji Police Force Sexual Offences Unit often have unwelcoming attitudes when dealing with female victims (UNFPA 2008). The same is true in some areas in Cambodia, where many local officials still believe that a husband can threaten his wife despite the laws in place (UNDP Cambodia and VBNK 2010).

Emerging opportunities and risks in an increasingly integrated world

Several emerging trends in the region will present both new opportunities and new
risks to achieving gender equality. East Asia and the Pacific are at the forefront of several global trends: increasing global economic integration, rising availability and use of ICTs, increased domestic and cross-border migration, rapid urbanization, and population aging. Because these trends have gender dimensions, they will affect the evolution of gender equality in the region. In many ways, these trends will bring with them new opportunities for gender equality. For example, increased economic integration, greater access to ICTs, and increased migration will likely all contribute to increased income earning opportunities for women. Along with new opportunities, however, these emerging trends will bring new risks.

Increasing global integration will likely continue to be an important source of nonagricultural employment growth for women, who are already highly represented in export-oriented sectors (figure 18). And greater employment and earnings in export-orientated industries can contribute to greater female independence and autonomy in decision making. At the same time, increasing global integration can increase economic risk and uncertainty, as shocks are quickly transmitted across integrated markets. A number of studies find that while shocks do not necessarily have more adverse impacts on women than men, they do have gender-differentiated effects on outcomes as diverse as employment, earnings, labor force participation, education, health, and nutrition (see, for example, Bruni et al. 2011; Rodgers and Menon forthcoming).

Advances in ICTs are opening up opportunities for both men and women throughout the region. New and emerging technologies, if accessible, can help increase women’s welfare through a number of channels by opening new economic opportunities, empowering women by breaking down information barriers, facilitating engagement of women in isolated communities in distance learning, and enabling them to take collective action. In Malaysia, for example, female entrepreneurs have created self-help cyber communities to network and share information about starting and running a business. Limited evidence suggests that women in the region may still have lower access to information technologies than men, however. Although data from China show rapid growth in access to ICT services, Chinese women are still less likely to use the Internet or to subscribe to mobile phone services (figure 19). Widening gender gaps in access to ICTs raise the risk of rising disparities in economic opportunity and voice going forward.

High economic growth and increased economic integration over the past three decades have spurred significant migration across the region. Women constitute nearly half of all migrants in East Asia and the Pacific and are increasingly migrating in search of better economic opportunity. Female migrants dominate a number of occupations and sectors, including labor-intensive manufacturing and export-oriented industries, and domestic work. Migration can provide women with increased economic opportunity, give them the chance to improve their knowledge and skills, and increase their agency through raising their contributions to family income.

**FIGURE 18** The share of female workers in export-oriented firms is relatively high

![Figure 18: The share of female workers in export-oriented firms is relatively high](source: World Bank staff estimates using Enterprise Surveys database for 2002–06. Note: Share of female workers = female workers/total workers.)
At the same time, migration brings with it important gender-specific risks. For example, many female migrants work as domestic workers, an occupation with particularly weak worker protections in most countries. Female migrants are also disproportionately susceptible to human trafficking.

Many East Asian and Pacific countries are experiencing unprecedented levels of urbanization as migrants move to urban areas in search of economic opportunity. Between 2000 and 2015, Indonesia, China, and Cambodia are predicted to see an increase of the population residing in urban areas by 17, 13, and 9 percentage points, respectively (UN 2010). Urbanization affects all aspects of life, from the nature of employment to the availability of services to one’s ability to rely on extended family and community networks for support. These changes almost certainly have gender-specific impacts. While urban areas can open up a wider range of economic opportunities for both men and women, women’s ability to take advantage of new opportunities is likely to depend more fundamentally on the nature and availability of urban services—for example, whether transportation systems facilitate their safe travel to job sites or affordable child care can compensate for the loss of extended family networks.

Finally, the high-income economies in East Asia are experiencing rapid population aging. Most emerging countries in the region have also begun this process; dependency ratios are already increasing in many middle-income countries in East Asia and the Pacific. Old-age dependency is expected to increase even more quickly in the coming decades (figure 20). Population aging is likely to have gender-differentiated effects at all age levels. Gender differences in time devoted to caring for the elderly imply that in the absence of institutionalized care services, women are likely to bear the brunt of the increased demand for elder care (Dwyer and Coward 1992; Ofstedal, Knodel, and Chayovan 1999). In addition, while women tend to live longer than men, gender differences in education and labor force participation imply that women are less likely to be vested in formal pension systems and may have fewer assets to ensure a basic level of well-being in old age.

At present, these emerging trends have gender dimensions that are not commonly accounted for by policy makers. Nonetheless, these trends will generate a distinct set of challenges for promoting gender equality going forward. An important role for public policy, therefore, will be to support women (and men) in taking advantage of emerging opportunities while protecting them against the emerging risks.

**Toward gender equality in East Asia and the Pacific: Directions for policy**

The collection of evidence points to four priority areas where public policy can contribute to greater gender equality and more effective development in East Asian and Pacific countries:

- First, promoting gender equality in human development remains a priority where gender gaps in education are large or health outcomes are poor; closing gaps in human...
development, where they persist, is likely to yield high returns.

- Second, taking active measures to close gender gaps in economic opportunity is often warranted on both equity and efficiency grounds. Which policy levers will yield the highest returns depends on the structure of the country’s economy and which specific constraints are most binding.

- Third, taking measures to strengthen women’s agency—and to protect them from violence—is also called for across the region; strengthening women’s voice and influence will contribute to the quality of development decision making and thus to development more broadly.

- Fourth, public policy has a critical role in fostering new opportunities and managing emerging risks associated with increasing global economic integration, the rising role of ICTs, increasing migration, rapid urbanization, and population aging.

The following sections examine policy approaches to promoting gender equality in East Asia and the Pacific in these four priority areas, drawing on recent experience from the region and beyond.

**Promoting gender equality in human development**

**Closing persistent gender gaps in human development**

In countries with unequal gender outcomes in education and health, the priority remains improving these outcomes. In East Asia and the Pacific, gender gaps in human development at the national level tend to persist where overall outcomes are low. In such cases, public action to strengthen countries’ education and health systems will be called for to improve gender (as well as overall) outcomes. For countries with more localized gender disparities, for example, among specific ethnic groups or in remote, rural regions, more targeted interventions may be warranted. The exact constraints vary by country context, but the evidence makes clear that both demand-side and supply-side factors are responsible for these poor human capital outcomes.

Policies can thus have an impact by improving service delivery (for example, through infrastructure, staffing, incentives, and use of ICTs) and implementing demand-side interventions (for instance, through cash transfers to poor households, information campaigns, and improved accountability). For example, Indonesia’s school construction program in the 1970s significantly increased education attainment and future earnings (Duflo 2000).

In Cambodia, a scholarship program targeted at girls and a related program targeted at boys and girls from low-income households led to an increase in school enrollment of at least 20 percentage points (Filmer and Schady 2008, 2009). Evidence indicates that to reduce maternal mortality, interventions that ensure basic infrastructure and improve accountability for service delivery are important. Approaches to providing services that take into account traditional norms and practices also show promise. For example, Malaysia
has adopted programs that provide guidance that traditional birth attendants on hygiene practices, diagnosis of complicated cases, and information on the importance of prenatal care.

**Reducing gender streaming in education**

For East Asian and Pacific countries where gender equality in access to human capital is no longer the dominant concern, addressing education quality—specifically, gender streaming in education—will have high returns. Although concerted efforts in both education and the labor market will be needed to break gender “silos” in education and, consequently, in the economy, significant steps can be taken within the education system. One important step involves reform of school curricula to address the transmission of gender stereotypes through the education system. Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam have reviewed curricula and revised learning materials or encouraged better practice without gender stereotyping. Other active interventions may be warranted, including information campaigns, financial or nonfinancial incentives, and efforts to create gender-friendly environments in higher education. Providing information on wages and career paths in these programs before individuals choose their courses may help reduce gender streaming in training. In the United States, for example, the Science Connections program offered monthly science workshops for girls plus a summer science weekend for families to increase girls’ knowledge about and interest in nontraditional careers in science. Scholarships that support women (and men) in entering nontraditional fields may provide another avenue for breaking down gender silos in education.

**Promoting balanced sex ratios at birth**

In the few countries with “missing girls” at birth, rooted in the prevalence of son preference, active measures are needed to address the issue. Even where laws against sex-selective abortion have been enacted, strong incentives to select the preferred gender still induce expectant parents to bypass the law, and enforcement of such laws is difficult. Existing evidence suggests a more promising approach is to adopt policies that aim to enhance family perceptions of the value of daughters. While general policies to promote economic development may play a role, Korea’s recent experience suggests that introducing interventions to influence norms and facilitate the spread of new social values may also be important, rather than relying on efforts to raise female education and labor force participation alone. Information campaigns, financial incentives, and improved social security for the elderly can all contribute to changing societal preferences and behaviors. China has been adopting several of these types of programs. For example, the National Population and Family Planning Commission scaled up the Chaohu pilot through the national Care for Girls campaign in 24 counties with severe gender imbalance. This campaign went beyond advocacy and media publicity alone; direct financial incentives for parents to raise daughters have also been introduced. Preliminary evidence suggests that these programs have had some impact on reducing imbalances in the sex ratio at birth.

**Addressing male-specific gender issues**

Paying attention to male- as well as female-specific gender issues is appropriate for reasons of basic welfare as well as for development effectiveness. In this context, initial signs of reverse gender gaps in education in several countries should be monitored closely. While the long-term implications of male disadvantage in education are still to be understood, depending on the underlying causes, it could have both economic and social consequences. Moreover, excessive tobacco and alcohol consumption among males in many parts of the region deserves policy attention; the social costs are usually higher than private costs because of the negative effects of these behaviors on other members of the society. Possible measures to tackle this challenge include providing information about the health risks of excessive tobacco and alcohol consumption, enacting
or increasing taxes on tobacco and alcohol, imposing regulatory measures on advertising, and restricting smoking in public sites. The Thai Health Promotion Foundation, for example, uses alcohol excise tax revenues to support the operation of an alcohol control center and a research center on alcohol consumption, to support advertising campaigns to reduce alcohol-related traffic accidents, and to promote abstinence and increase knowledge about the links between alcohol use and domestic violence.

**Taking active measures to close gender gaps in economic opportunity**

*Mitigating trade-offs between women’s household and market roles*

Women often face stark time trade-offs between household and market work, particularly in rural areas. In such contexts, programs targeted at reducing women’s time on household work—for example, through investment in infrastructure—are likely to increase women’s ability to engage in market-based income-earning opportunities. In Lao PDR, for example, evidence indicates that having access to electricity extends the hours available for both productive and leisure activities, particularly for women and girls (World Bank 2011a).

Policies that support women in balancing their caregiving and market roles are also important in strengthening their access to economic opportunity. Access to affordable and accessible child care can be critical in this regard. Community child care centers, particularly those targeted at low-income neighborhoods, have been found to increase maternal employment in a number of Latin American countries. The importance of affordable child care, particularly as urban areas expand, can be seen from recent experience in the region. In Mongolia and China, reductions in subsidized child care in the 1990s and 2000s have significantly and negatively affected female labor force participation in urban areas.

Parental and paternity leave can promote greater parity between the sexes by facilitating a more equitable division of child-rearing responsibilities and allowing women to have the same opportunities as men for advancing their careers in the formal sector. Within the region, only Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines currently have provisions for paternity leave. While the principles behind paternity (and parental) leave are appealing, evidence from the OECD on the take-up of paternity leave is mixed, suggesting that providing paternity leave alone is not sufficient to change the current gender division of child-rearing responsibilities within households; rather, such leave policies need to be combined with other approaches to breaking down gender norms regarding household caregiving.

*Breaking down gender silos in the labor market*

A key element of breaking down gender silos in the labor market involves supporting young women and men to invest in skills on the basis of their productivity rather than on the basis of gender norms and perceptions regarding “appropriate” occupations. Beyond efforts to reduce gender streaming in education, programs that help both women and men understand employment options outside of gender silos will likely improve the allocation of talent toward jobs in ways that improve both equality of economic opportunity and productivity. In Kenya, for example, a micro and small enterprise voucher program, called Jua Kali, provided its female beneficiaries information about wages in a range of occupations. Preliminary evaluation of the program suggests that 5 percent of women who received the information switched to more lucrative (often “male”) jobs as compared to those who did not receive the information (Hicks et al. 2011).

Breaking down social norms and perceptions about gender roles in the workplace is an area where the public sector can lead by example, particularly with respect to enabling women as leaders and managers. The public sector is in a unique position to establish good practice in this regard by encouraging women’s professional advancement, either
through direct measures such as targets or quotas or through specialized training programs. In this context, the government of Malaysia has put in place a system of quotas for female managers in the public sector. In Mexico, the government initiated a system of grants to firms to address gender-related employment issues in the workplace, including fostering greater female participation in management.

**Eliminating resource constraints on female-led farms and enterprises**

Despite progress, women continue to have less access to a range of productive resources than do men as a function of their gender rather than because of their innate productive capabilities. Public policies thus have an important role to play in promoting gender equality in the control of productive inputs—whether land, agricultural extension, technology, or financial capital. Improving women’s access to productive assets can play an important role in raising enterprise productivity in both the farm and nonfarm sectors. Following are some examples.

- Several countries in the region have made headway in recent years in increasing ownership and control of land. In response to concerns about persistent gender inequalities in land, several countries—including Indonesia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam—have recently adopted gender-sensitive reforms in land titling. Since the 2004 Land Law in Vietnam, all new land tenure certificates must include the names of both spouses. Qualitative assessment of the reform’s effects in three provinces suggests that joint titling improves opportunities for women to access loans, empowers women in case of disputes, and leads to more mutual decision making (World Bank 2008). Because the reasons for women’s lower access to land differ across the region—from unfavorable legal frameworks to cultural norms and practices that deem land to be a “male asset”—effective policies to increase female land holdings need to account for context-specific constraints.

- Gender inequalities in access to information and training, extension services, and other productive inputs constrain the productivity of female-led enterprises, both within and outside agriculture. In Papua New Guinea, where training and extension services are more likely to reach male than female farmers, a recently launched agriculture training program includes several components focused on closing the gap between rural women’s economic needs and the inputs and services provided. Similarly, in Cambodia, the Cambodia-Australia Agricultural Extension Project has addressed two key constraints that have limited female farmers’ access to agricultural support: the project has increased by 80 percent the number of female extension workers and undertakes special initiatives that account for female farmers’ relatively lower levels of literacy.

- While evidence on access to finance in East Asian and Pacific countries is mixed, women do face particular challenges in accessing credit, especially given their poorer access to land, an important source of collateral. Beyond financial constraints, training programs that improve business skills may be implemented to address gender differences in entrepreneurial capital. In this context, an impact assessment of a women’s entrepreneurship training program in Aceh, Indonesia, found that business planning and management training helped promote greater confidence among women trainees, create or strengthen social networks, and identify ways to improve the business environment for female entrepreneurs (ILO 2008).

As in the case of education and health, broad systemic weaknesses—whether in the form of cumbersome registration procedures, weak systems of financial intermediation, or lack of electricity—affect both female- and male-led enterprises. Evidence suggests that such constraints may be more onerous among small and informal firms than among larger firms and, therefore, may constrain
female-led enterprises disproportionately. As a result, interventions that focus on improving the overall investment climate and particularly on promoting small business development will be important. Addressing systemic as well as gender-specific constraints will thus be critical to promoting gender equality in economic opportunity.

Creating an enabling environment for gender equality in employment

Public policy can strengthen the enabling environment for gender equality in formal employment. An important element of this is to ensure that women and men face a level legal playing field with respect to jobs and sectors. Labor regulations that result in asymmetries in the employability and costs of hiring male and female workers can be found across the region. Ostensibly protective legislation, in the form of restrictions on women working at night, working overtime, and working in so-called dangerous sectors, serves in practice to inhibit women’s economic participation. Priority should be given to reducing labor market restrictions that limit women’s employment options. Where the original concerns motivating these policies are still valid—for example, health and safety issues—measures should be taken to ensure that these concerns are addressed more directly through workplace safety codes, provision of safe and reliable transport infrastructure, and so on.

Active labor market policies are another means of overcoming gender differences in access for formal employment. For example, wage subsidies may induce employers to hire female workers whom they may not have otherwise considered, due to lack of information about their workplace productivity. This intervention thus provides the opportunity to reduce gender stereotypes by enabling employers to observe women’s skills directly, and it can facilitate women gaining valuable labor market experience. Skills training programs may also enable women and men to move into professions outside of gender silos, particularly when paired with apprenticeship opportunities. Although evidence on the effect of active labor market policies in East Asia and the Pacific is limited, studies from Latin America and the Middle East suggest that well-designed active labor market policies can help improve women’s employment outcomes.

Affirmative action policies have also been used to overcome gender-specific barriers to employment, whether caused by implicit or overt discrimination in hiring and promotion. The literature reflects some debate regarding the benefits and costs of affirmative action, but the collection of evidence (largely from high-income countries) suggests that carefully designed policies can help break down barriers to female employment with little or no adverse effects on firm productivity (World Bank 2011c). Affirmative action in hiring and promotion in the public sector can have important demonstration effects. In 2004, the government of Malaysia introduced a quota for the public sector of 30 percent female representation across all decision-making levels, including positions such as department heads or secretary-general (ASEAN 2008). Whereas in 2006, women held 24.6 percent of top positions in the public sector, by 2010, the figure had risen to 32.0 percent. More recently, the Malaysian government set a target for 30 percent of corporate board positions to be held by women by 2016.

Taking measures to strengthen women’s voice and influence

Measures to increase women’s endowments and economic opportunity, such as those described previously, contribute to strengthening their voice within the household and in society. Educated women in good health, with assets and income, are better able to act on their preferences and influence outcomes that affect themselves and others in society. In addition, several other policy approaches can directly promote women’s agency and reduce gender-based violence.

Supporting initiatives to transform gender norms and practices

While gender norms may be persistent, they are far from static. Individual experiences
as well as large-scale political and economic processes are capable of bringing about dramatic, and often rapid, social change. In East Asia, increasing economic integration and rising access to ICTs are not only transforming the economic landscape but also increasing flows of information in ways that may serve to transform gender norms in the region. Similarly, migration and rapid urbanization across the region are bringing with them the possibility of newly defined roles for men and women, as women and men alike are exposed to new ideas and production modalities.

The education system can be a vital source to change social norms that perpetuate gender inequality. The integration of gender equality principles into the school and professional curricula can address the value system of children early on and, over time, transform social norms (Utomo et al. 2009). Evidence of the positive effects of changing the curriculum is available for adults in Thailand where gender sensitivity was integrated into the curriculum in the Chulalongkorn medical school. Evaluation of the program showed that respondents were more aware of gender issues and tended to apply gender concepts and concerns in their work and personal lives (WHO GWH 2007).

Provision of information through television programming can also play a critical role in changing social norms, especially with respect to fertility and gender-based violence. Evidence shows that people can be prompted to rethink gender roles in society when they are exposed to new information and experiences that challenge existing norms. In Brazil, despite strong traditional norms in favor of having many children, increased exposure to the opposite behavior by popular women in soap operas led to a measurable decline in fertility (Chong and La Ferrara 2009; La Ferrara, Chong, and Duryea 2008). In India, increased exposure to television contributed to decreased acceptance of wife beating, lower fertility rates, and noticeable shifts away from son preference (Jensen and Oster 2008).

**Strengthening the legal and institutional environment**

Nearly all countries in the region have acceded to CEDAW, signaling commitment to adhering to internationally agreed-upon norms regarding gender equality. An important pending agenda is to ensure that domestic legislation and the institutions of implementation and enforcement are aligned with countries’ commitments. Where comprehensive legal reform is not possible, governments should identify priorities for action. For example, in contexts where women’s agency within the home remains weak, a case exists for reforms to focus on rights in marriage and divorce, inheritance and maintenance laws, and protection of women from gender-based violence, which can strengthen the enabling environment for greater voice and influence in the household. As part of the process of monitoring progress toward gender equality, governments should undertake regular assessments to ensure that legal gaps are being filled and that relevant laws are being enforced. In countries where multiple systems of law coexist, assessing customary practices to ascertain whether they limit women’s agency and then developing strategies to address these limiting factors will be important.

Strengthening the capacities of institutions to enforce the law and increasing knowledge of the law are also critical. Both financial and human investments need to be made to ensure that public sector personnel, such as judges and police, have the knowledge and capacity to actively enforce laws intended to protect women and to promote gender equality. Concerns have been raised that police forces in several countries in the region, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, have been too passive in investigating trafficking and enforcing anti-trafficking laws (U.S. Department of State 2011). The Cambodian Women’s Crisis Center began a community program that increases the awareness of violence against women and of the legal rights of women, including the law on domestic violence.
and protection that was implemented in 2005. The program promotes initiatives to strengthen enforcement of the law by providing information and training to local authorities and developing community support networks.

Increasing women’s access to justice
Financial costs and travel distances often are de facto barriers to women accessing justice, even when the appropriate laws and institutions are in place. In that context, developing and implementing innovative methods to improve access to the judicial system can help women exercise their agency in the courts when needed. The use of mobile courts, for example, such as those in rural areas of China and Indonesia, provides a solution to the problem of accessibility and security for women who wish to exercise their rights in the legal system but who are unable to travel to the court. Technology, such as telephone hotlines and websites, can be used to undertake basic legal transactions. For women with few economic resources, waiving or subsidizing the costs of legal aid can help reduce financial barriers to accessing the judicial system.

Enabling women’s participation in politics and policy making
Active measures to promote women’s participation in policy making can be effective in increasing female representation in local and national assemblies in many contexts. A range of affirmative action mechanisms have been used in developing countries. Quotas have been used in several countries, sometimes in the form of constitutional changes to reserve a specified number of posts for women and sometimes through legislative and political party quotas. Quotas can be informal (and voluntary) or mandated formally at the subnational or national level (Dahlerup 2006). The idea is to provide temporary measures to break down barriers to the entry of women into politics. The suitability and impact of different forms of quotas or targets differ depending on the specific context. Data suggest that these measures can be effective in increasing female representation in elected bodies. They can also help transform people’s views about the efficacy of female political leaders (Beaman et al. 2009). At the same time, electoral quotas do impose constraints on the democratic process. It is thus important to keep this—as well as the expected benefits of increasing female participation in politics—in mind when determining when and how to enact such measures.

Pursuing a multipronged approach to reducing gender-based violence
Reducing gender-based violence requires action on a number of fronts: efforts to increase women’s voice within the household; enactment and enforcement of appropriate legislation and strengthening of women’s access to justice; provision of adequate support services for victims of violence; and use of the media to provide information on women’s rights, to increase social awareness, and to shift social norms with respect to violence.

Countries that take a strong stance on gender-based violence legislation and enforcement can make positive strides against such violence in short periods of time. Cambodia saw a significant decrease in the incidence of domestic violence between 2000 and 2005, largely attributed to strong efforts by the country’s Ministry of Women’s Affairs, which introduced draft domestic violence legislation in 2001. Four years later, in October 2005, the National Assembly adopted the legislation. The new law criminalized acts of domestic violence, provided for the protection of victims, and enabled neighbors or local organizations to intervene if they witnessed domestic violence. As a complement to the law, women’s organizations and other nongovernmental organizations carried out information campaigns to disseminate information on people’s basic rights and responsibilities under the law.

Governments also need to provide adequate support services for victims when violence does occur. This support can include a range of services, from police and judiciary to
health and social services. In Malaysia, the government established integrated one-stop crisis centers in hospitals that provide easy access to medical care and social services, and facilitate reporting of violence to specially trained police officers (World Bank 2011c).

**Creating space for women’s collective agency**

While promoting women’s individual agency is important, supporting women’s collective agency can be an effective way to empower women to advocate for and promote effective public action toward gender equality. Experience from around the region highlights the potential of enabling women’s collective agency. For example, during the debate in Cambodia leading to the 2005 Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims, the Cambodia Committee of Women, a coalition of 32 nongovernmental organizations, persistently lobbied the government and the Ministry of Women’s Affairs to secure the legislation’s passage. Similarly, in Fiji, the Fiji Women’s Crisis Center campaigned successfully for the implementation of a nationally representative quantitative survey on violence against women; the results of this survey are scheduled to be released in 2012. Partnerships with the private sector, including women’s business associations, can provide an important space for women to interact, learn, and advocate for gender equality. A recent initiative to increase women’s participation in the private sector’s dialogue with government in Cambodia, through the Government Private Sector Forum, has induced policy makers to undertake new initiatives addressing the needs of female entrepreneurs.

**Fostering new opportunities, managing emerging risks**

A new and important challenge for policy makers will be to help foster emerging opportunities and, in particular, to manage emerging risks associated with increasing economic integration, increasing access to ICTs, migration, rapid urbanization, and population aging. Many of the emerging opportunities can be fostered through the types of efforts to promote greater gender equality in endowments, economic opportunity, and agency discussed in this report. For example, where gender gaps in ICT use are growing, ensuring that women have access to these new technologies may require active measures similar to those discussed earlier to ensure equal access to other types of productive resources. Managing emerging risks, however, may require additional policy approaches, such as the following.

Greater economic integration will bring with it increased exposure to employment shocks that will have gender-differentiated effects. Adequately addressing the risks associated with economic integration will require designing social protection programs that take into account the different risks faced by female and male workers. Building on the lessons from recent economic crises, several developing countries, including some from East Asia and the Pacific, have begun to recognize the gender dimensions of risk and shocks in the design of programs. In Indonesia, for example, a conditional cash transfer program, Keluarga Harapan, targets households with members who are particularly vulnerable during times of crisis, such as pregnant and lactating women.

As female migration across the region increases economic opportunities for women, it creates new concerns about female migrants’ welfare. Protecting female migrants from exploitative situations, including sex work and human trafficking, will also require a gender-aware approach. Greater protection through better laws, enforcement, and monitoring; improved information flows; and safety nets will better address the vulnerabilities specific to women traveling abroad. Specific areas for action include improving legal protections for female migrants, strengthening the monitoring and credibility of recruitment agencies, and developing and providing welfare and support services to assist female migrants. Governments in both sending and receiving countries will need to actively address the
issue of human trafficking through prevention, protection, and prosecution. Gender-awareness training for people involved in the migration process will improve their ability to identify and assist abused female migrants, including those trafficked or at risk of being trafficked.

Growing urbanization in the East Asia and Pacific Region has presented women not only with increased economic opportunities but also with particular challenges, such as limited access to child care and higher security risks in urban areas. Thus, policy makers need to ensure that child care, education, infrastructure, transportation, and water and sanitation policies take into account women’s specific social and cultural needs. Rigorous laws and policies to protect women in urban areas from the risk of violence and exploitation are also warranted.

Rapid population aging in the region is likely to have important gender-differentiated effects, among other things, because older women may increasingly find themselves living as widows. Along with risks from urbanization and the breakdown of extended family support networks, these women are likely to find themselves at increased economic risk, having accumulated relatively few assets and mostly lacking access to formal social security. In this context, designing old-age income security programs that can protect women from destitution in old age will have an increasingly important role. In addition, policy makers should consider ways to strengthen care for the elderly to ensure that women do not bear an undue burden of caregiving as the region’s population ages.

Filling knowledge gaps

Finally, while much has been learned from recent global and regional evidence on gender equality and development, much remains to be understood empirically to help inform effective public action. Continuing to close data and analytical gaps will thus be important to better understand policy priorities, the effects of specific interventions, and the costs and benefits of different policy options. To fill knowledge gaps, additional gender-disaggregated data need to be collected. Moreover, additional empirical analysis, both on long-standing gender issues and the gender implications of emerging trends in the region, will enable policy makers to better promote both gender equality and more effective development.

Notes

1. Sen (1999) defines freedoms and “unfreedoms” in five categories: (a) political freedoms, (b) economic facilities, (c) social opportunities, (d) transparency guarantees, and (e) protective security.

2. Adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly, CEDAW is often referred to as the international bill of rights for women. The convention defines what constitutes discrimination against women and provides an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. To date, it has been ratified by 187 countries worldwide (http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/).

3. It is important to interpret these studies with caution, given the difficulty in establishing a causal relationship between gender equality in education and growth in cross-country studies.

4. Evidence from Africa and Latin America, for example, suggests that ensuring equal access to productive assets and technologies could significantly raise agricultural production and household income (Goldstein and Udry 2008; Quisumbing 1995; Udry 1996).

5. Globally, poverty and gender often interact to compound gender inequalities (World Bank 2011c). In East Asia and the Pacific, poverty does not appear to be as important a contributor to gender disadvantage in education as elsewhere, however. Survey data from several countries in the region indicate that gender gaps in enrollment do not vary substantially or systematically across income quintiles.

6. For data on land holdings, by gender, in China, see de Brauw et al. (2011). Data on other countries are based on World Bank staff calculations, using household survey data.

7. As of the end of 2011, only six countries in the world had not ratified CEDAW. Two of those countries are in the Pacific: Palau and Tonga (CEDAW, http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/).
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