
BUILDING FORWARD BETTER

**OUTCOME REPORT OF
REGIONAL DIALOGUE ON COVID-19 RECOVERY:
BUILDING FORWARD BETTER WITH WOMEN'S
LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION**



From
the People
of Japan



BACKGROUND

UN Women has implemented a series of regional and country-level initiatives in the Mekong region to promote women's participation and leadership in COVID-19 response and recovery, with generous support from the Government of Japan. **In close collaboration with its partners, UN Women organized the “Regional Dialogue on COVID-19 Recovery: Building Forward Better with Women's Leadership and Participation” in Bangkok on 15-16 March 2023** to mark the completion of its initiatives.

The objectives of the Regional Dialogue were to identify key lessons learned were to identify key lessons learned and good practices for addressing the challenges faced by women, particularly vulnerable women, during the pandemic; share knowledge and lived experiences of the impact of COVID-19 on women's leadership and participation; facilitate networking and collaboration; and identify ways in which countries can better prepare to address future crises. **The event brought together 146 participants from government agencies, the private sector, civil society organizations (CSOs), international non-governmental organizations, and the United Nations and other international organizations.**

The Regional Dialogue consisted of ten sessions organized around three main key themes. These themes included “the effects and lessons learned from the COVID-19 response”, “current gender integration in recovery efforts”, and “what is still needed in the context of recovery efforts and building back better for the future”. The sessions covered a wide range of topics, encompassing women's leadership, gender data, regional response and recovery frameworks, women's economic participation, the humanitarian, development and peace nexus, intersectionality, innovative approaches to women's participation, youth leadership, and the next steps for recovery.

These sessions were organized in a panel format, with both in-person and virtual attendance options, allowing participants to engage in lively discussions and share valuable insights into the topics covered.

The two days of lively discussions yielded four major key takeaways. Firstly, a multisectoral approach that involves collaboration between governments, CSOs, and the private sector must be implemented to effectively tackle the impacts of the pandemic on women and girls and ensure their sustainable and long-term recovery. **Secondly,** effective recovery policies must incorporate gender analytical data to ensure that the specific needs and challenges faced by women and girls are adequately addressed. **Thirdly,** despite the vital roles played by women in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts in Asia, women remain underrepresented in strategic decision-making processes and there is a need to take concrete steps to ensure their full inclusion. **Lastly,** the complexity of overlapping issues such as the pandemic, climate change, and conflicts, as well as the diversity of their impacts such as security and inequality require holistic and comprehensive interventions, consulted with communities and informed by community needs.

The Regional Dialogue served as a platform for collaboration among a variety of stakeholders toward building a more gender-responsive approach to recovery at the national and regional levels. This success was made possible by the thought-provoking discussions of the panelists, the active participation of the audience, and the networking opportunities provided.

This outcome report provides a detailed overview of the sessions covered, with a focus on the objectives of each session, summary of the main points of discussion, examples of good practices from discussions, as well as key recommendations.



SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

Theme One: Impacts and Lessons Learned on COVID-19 Response

Session 1: Impact of COVID-19 on Women Across Socio-Economic Spheres

Objectives:

This session aimed to unpack the range of ways in which women and girls have been negatively impacted by the pandemic.

Speakers and Moderator:

Ha Linh, Communication and Foreign Affairs Officer, Center for Women and Development, Viet Nam Women's Union

Chaipasird Phunphouvanna, Programme Coordinator, Oxfam in Lao PDR

Thak Socheat, Executive Director, Cambodia Women Crisis Center

Sara Duerto Valero, Statistics Specialist, UN Women

Maria Holtsberg, Deputy Regional Director OIC, UN Women (Moderator)

Main Points of Discussion:

The panel discussion centered on the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on women and girls, including increased risks for gender-based violence (GBV), unemployment, and unequal distribution of care and domestic work. The discussion also emphasized the importance of a multi-sectoral approach to addressing these challenges, **the gendered impacts of intersecting crises, and the underutilization of available gender data.**



Photo: UN Women/Ploy Phutpheng

The panelists noted that many women with formal jobs experienced reduced work hours, while those working in the informal sector lost their jobs altogether. Moreover, despite the already overwhelming burden they carried pre-pandemic, the pandemic has led to a significant increase in women's unpaid care work. In addition to these challenges, there has been a sharp increase in cases of domestic violence, including in Cambodia, Viet Nam and Lao PDR, exacerbating an already alarming trend. The panelists noted that lockdowns not only led to a spike in the number of cases of domestic violence against women but also made it more difficult for women to escape their abusers and seek help. Women's organizations faced challenges in reaching out to survivors of violence in both Myanmar and Cambodia to provide support. There was a strong emphasis on the importance of a multi-sectoral approach and collective action by governments and service providers to assist survivors access services.

The discussions highlighted that the pandemic, coupled with other crises such as climate-related disasters, has led to a significant increase in poverty rates, posing a serious threat to food security and potentially affecting millions of people. Because of the frequency of crises, the Asia-Pacific region was described as particularly vulnerable, with women and girls disproportionately affected, facing an increased risk of food insecurity. Therefore, panelists stressed the importance of giving women's and girls' issues top priority in order to effectively address poverty reduction in the context of multiple intersecting crises.

The panelists noted that, despite the abundance of available evidence, current policies and frameworks fall short of comprehensively addressing gender issues. In most countries, including ASEAN Member States, gender-sensitive policies focused on GBV, but very few addressed care work and women's economic security. The panelists concluded that available gender data is not being well utilized to inform policy.

Highlighted Good Practices:

Center for Women and Development (CWD) is responsible for the operation of Peace House Shelters in Viet Nam, which were established to provide survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking with comprehensive support, including housing, healthcare, psychological counseling, and vocational training. Despite an increase in domestic violence cases, the number of women attending the Peace House Shelters



Photo: UN Women/Nicholas Axelrod

decreased due to movement restrictions during the lockdown. CWD continued to provide online and off-site support through emails and a hotline.

Cambodia Women Crisis Center (CWCC) provided online counselling for women and girls who had experienced gender-based violence, as well as hygiene and sanitary support for women in quarantine centers.

In Lao PDR, **Oxfam** provided food and hygiene packages during the lockdown, and it focused on initiatives that aimed at empowering women economically. These targeted interventions were informed by the results of a survey conducted by Oxfam to assess the impact of the pandemic in Lao PDR through a gender lens.



Key Recommendations:

- Develop and implement comprehensive strategies to address the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on women and girls. This should be a priority for governments, CSOs, and the private sector.
- Develop guidelines for women to help them understand how they can deal with domestic violence.
- Increase the use of online counselling for survivors of violence to ensure their access to services and improve staff capacity to provide counselling for GBV.
- Launch more initiatives for women's and girls' economic recovery and for income generation.

Resources:

ADB and UN Women, [Two Years on: The Lingering Gendered Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Asia and the Pacific](#), 2022.

Asia-Pacific Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group, [Gender Equality Post COVID-19](#), 2021.

[Oxfam, Amnesty International, and UN Women, Women's Unpaid and Underpaid Work in the Times of Covid-19, May 2020.](#)

UN Women, [COVID-19 Resources](#).

UN Women, [The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ethnic minorities in Viet Nam, regarding their access to social protection and direct cash transfer policies, from a gender equality lens](#), 2021.

Session 2: Women's Leadership in COVID-19 Response

Objectives:

The objective of this session was to understand the current state of women's leadership and participation in COVID-19 response and recovery in Asia and to identify recommendations to better support their leadership and participation.

Speakers and Moderator:

Chamaiporn Siangyen (Kay), Researcher, Humanitarian Advisory Group

Phearong Sdeung, Executive Director, Bantey Srei Organization

Kohinoor Yeasmin, CEO, TARANGO

Sopheha Khun, Country Programme Coordinator for Cambodia, UN Women
(Moderator)

Main points of discussion:

The panel discussion focused on **the critical role women and women's rights organizations (WROs) have played across Asia in COVID-19 response and recovery, the barriers to their full participation, and the opportunities presented for WROs during the pandemic.**



Photo: UN Women/Nicholas Axelrod

The discussions emphasized the critical roles played by women and WROs in specific aspects of the COVID-19 response and recovery across Asia, particularly at the community level. Despite their significant contributions, the panelists noted that a lack of recognition and underrepresentation in decision-making forums prevents WROs from taking on transformative leadership at the national and strategic levels. Barriers to women's participation were classified as safety barriers, which relate to physical and psychological safety, and access barriers, such as lack of awareness of and invitations to meetings. However, the panelists noted that these barriers are not consistently recognized or addressed. Likewise, the panelists also underlined that funding for WROs during the pandemic has been insufficient, inhibiting their ability to lead response and recovery initiatives.

The panelists noted that the lack of access to technology within communities presented a significant challenge for WROs. Engaging with women through online training, for example, proved difficult in Cambodia because some areas lacked access to mobile networks and the Internet. Likewise, their staff struggled with both mental health and financial issues. However, during the discussion, the panelists also emphasized that the pandemic had also given WROs opportunities, such as promoting collective action and the engagement of WROs and governments.

Highlighted Good Practices:

Tarango, in partnership with UN Women and funded by the Government of Japan, expanded its integrated shelter house model in Bangladesh during the pandemic. Tarango's shelter houses provide integrated services for women and girls who have experienced violence, including through medical and legal support, psycho-social counselling, and financial and vocational training.



Key Recommendations:

- Recognize and draw on the expertise of women and WROs by documenting their successes and strengthening relationships with representatives of diverse communities.
- Ensure response and recovery forums and meetings have the representation of women and WROs.
- Support the forums that bring WROs together.
- Ensure long-term partnerships with adequate funding and capacity sharing, and address barriers to women's participation, including safety and access barriers.

Resources:

UN Women and Humanitarian Advisory Group, [Leading from Offstage: A Regional Synthesis of Women's Leadership and Participation in COVID-19 Response and Recovery in Asia](#), 2022.

UN Women, Humanitarian Advisory Group, and Insights, [Measuring Women's Leadership in COVID-19 Responses in Bangladesh](#), 2022.

UN Women and Humanitarian Advisory Group, [Measuring women's leadership in COVID-19 response and recovery in Tamil Nadu](#), India, 2023.

UN Women and Humanitarian Advisory Group, [COVID-19 Recovery in Nepal: A Case Study of the Role of Women's Leadership](#), 2023.

UN Women and Humanitarian Advisory Group, [Tracking the Progress and Impact of Women's Leadership in COVID-19 Responses in the Philippines](#), 2021.

UN Women and Humanitarian Advisory Group, COVID-19 Recovery in Thailand: A Case Study of the Role of Women's Leadership, 2023.

UN Women and Humanitarian Advisory Group, Measuring women's leadership in COVID-19 responses in Viet Nam, 2023.

Asia-Pacific Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group, Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility, and Voice, [Gender and COVID-19 Vaccines: Listening to Women-Focused Organizations in Asia and the Pacific](#), 2021.

Theme Two: Current Gender Integration in Recovery Efforts

Session 3: Using Gender Data to Inform COVID-19 Policies and Recovery

Objectives:

The aim of this session was to discuss the mismatch between policies and the gendered effects of the pandemic despite available gender data; identify barriers and enablers to evidence-based decision-making; and explore the importance of gender data to better prepare for future crises, including by showcasing available evidence and tools on what worked in the past and what may work in the future.

Speakers and Moderator:

Sneha Kaul, Statistics Analyst, UN Women

Maria Kristine Josefina Balmes, Deputy Director for Operations, Philippines Commission on Women

Liat Biron, Ending Violence Against Women Response Programme Officer, UN Women

Sara Duerto Valero, Statistics Specialist, UN Women (Moderator)

Main Points of Discussion:

The panelists discussed several topics throughout the panel, including the gap between the availability of **gender data and policy, the challenges of gathering data on GBV during the pandemic, as well as the significance of conducting rapid gender assessment surveys and utilizing big data in times of crises.**

One of the main points raised by panelists was that the mere availability of gender data is not enough to be translated into gender-transformative policies. The panelists highlighted several reasons why gender data is often not taken into account when formulating policies, including the underrepresentation of gender experts at COVID-19 task forces, inadequate data literacy, and a general lack of knowledge on how to access reliable gender data. There was also an emphasis on the lack of required collaboration to strengthen the gap between data consumption and production.

The panelists also emphasized that restricted movements posed additional ethical and practical challenges in collecting reliable data to assess the impact of the pandemic on GBV. Such difficulties in collecting data during times of crises require more innovative methods such as the use of big data, as well as the utilization of rapid gender assessments. However, the panelists emphasized that there is not always a need to

collect data and that existing data already indicates that GBV increases during times of crisis, which must be considered when developing policy responses to crises.

Highlighted Good Practices:

Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) conducted a survey to assess the impacts of the pandemic on women entrepreneurs, which revealed that many women had to close their businesses and lacked digital literacy. PCW provided technical assistance and capacity building based on the results of this survey. Likewise, using the data they had gathered, PCW was able to identify a rise in the incidence of GBV and partnered with government agencies and Asia Foundation to use the emergency hotline to respond to cases of GBV. They also provided training for those working on the national hotline to effectively respond to GBV.

UN Women utilized big data to examine the link between the COVID-19 pandemic and online misogyny, which revealed that online searches related to GBV increased in seven countries including India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand. In addition, there was also an increase in health-related searches, indicating that many survivors turned to online services due to barriers preventing access to face-to-face services.



Key Recommendations:

- Produce data that is timely and quickly available to decision makers. Such data can be obtained through rapid gender assessment surveys and big data studies.
- Promote gender data awareness.
- Build statistical literacy and capacity of decision-makers.
- Facilitate the dialogue between policy makers and data producers to enable that data gets used.
- Build streamlined coordination mechanisms.
- Make VAW a priority issue for crisis planning.
- Make sure survivors can reach services online and offline.

Resources:

UN Women, [Social Media Monitoring on COVID-19 and Misogyny in Asia and the Pacific](#), 2020.

Session 4: Engendering Regional Frameworks for COVID-19 Response and Recovery: Experiences from Southeast Asia

Objectives:

The purpose of this session was to discuss gender mainstreaming in the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF). It sought to explore the ways in which gender data is foundational to each Broad Strategy in the ACRF, outlining practical measures on gender mainstreaming in each, and most importantly, highlight the key gender-responsive policy measures and practices taken in each to enable collaboration and exchange not only within the region but also showcasing ASEAN leadership and commitment towards a gender-responsive recovery globally. This panel discussion showcased ACRF implementation, learning from country-level experiences on mainstreaming gender equality throughout the recovery scheme and actions of ASEAN.

Speakers and Moderator:

Arief Rizky Bakhtiar (Abe), Senior Project Officer, ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework Support Unit, ASEAN Secretariat

Ngo Hoang, Vice Director of Legal Department, Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs

Kanokrat Keuakij, Assistant Secretary General, Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre and Coordination Center for Children and Women

Ryce Chanchai, Governance and Women, Peace and Security Lead for Indonesia and ASEAN, UN Women (Moderator)

Main Points of Discussion:

The panelists discussed several topics throughout the panel, including **ASEAN's response and recovery activities, its progress in advancing gender mainstreaming efforts, barriers that limit ASEAN's ability to engage with a diverse range of actors, and the relevance of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda for addressing emerging and existing health crises.**

Three types of response and recovery activities were highlighted during the discussions. The first is multistakeholder dialogues and consultations, which were acknowledged as an area that could have more enhanced efforts. While the current approach recognizes entities affiliated with ASEAN or those registered with ASEAN Chapter, it was noted that it is not sufficiently inclusive in responding to challenges. However, discussions also highlighted that ASEAN is working to establish a more consultative forum as well as explore ways to promote gender mainstreaming in its efforts. In this connection, ASEAN is interested in further developing evidence-based policies to inform its decision-making, guiding gender mainstreaming efforts in recovery. The third activity

is capacity building through initiatives such as the Go Digital ASEAN initiative which has the potential to increase women as targeted beneficiaries.



The discussions emphasized ASEAN's progress toward implementing a more comprehensive gender strategy that will help inclusive recovery. It was noted that 287 gender-related policies have been enacted in ASEAN countries to address the uneven impact of the pandemic on women, and 87 gender-sensitive measures and unpaid care policies have been launched with the goal of ensuring economic security. Other strategies, frameworks, and initiatives that were mentioned during the discussions include ASEAN's Gender Mainstreaming Strategy Framework 2021-2025, ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for SME Development 2016-2025, ASEAN Framework on Support Food, Agriculture, and Forestry Small Producers, Cooperatives, and MSMEs, Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Work Plan IV, ASEAN Regional Framework on Protection, Gender, and Inclusion in Disaster Management 2021-2025, ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security, as well as ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025.

The panelists also focused on the obstacles that limit ASEAN's ability to engage with a diverse range of actors and effectively pursue a gender mainstreaming agenda, such as the ACW and ACWC's broad responsibilities, limited workforce, and budgetary constraints. However, as a way forward, the panelists emphasized the importance of inclusion for long-term resilience, as well as staff capacity building and gender analytical data.

The inclusion of diverse stakeholders in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts is considered crucial, particularly in conflict-affected situations where tensions are high and the context is fragile. The discussions underscored the importance of involving various stakeholders, including women, to prevent health crises from exacerbating the already existing tensions in fragile contexts, as well as the relevance of the WPS agenda for addressing emerging and existing health crises.

Highlighted Good Practices:

In the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand, the Government pursued an inclusive strategy in responding to COVID-19 and engaged with various actors including CSOs, women organizations, the private sector, as well as religious leaders. This inclusive approach not only increased the vaccine rate in the region, but also provided opportunities for women to play active roles in COVID-19 response efforts especially at the community level. This also resulted in an increase in the number of women participating in local policy and decision-making processes. Moreover, women leaders worked together with a faith-based leader to mediate cases of GBV. In this connection, a partnership with UN Women is also key to promote gender-responsive approach to COVID19 response especially in the Southern Border Provinces as well as in promoting social cohesion in the relief and recovery efforts.

In Viet Nam, the Government has implemented policies aimed at assisting employers, employees, and children. Additional assistance has been provided to pregnant employees and those raising children under the age of 6. In addition, the Government has actively promoted the prevention and response to GBV and children in the media and strengthened the capacity of service providers to effectively support the women and children who have been victims of violence.

Resources:

ASEAN, [ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework](#), 2020.

ASEAN, [ASEAN Regional Framework on Protection, Gender, and Inclusion in Disaster Management 2021-2025](#), 2021.

ASEAN, [Action Agenda on Mainstreaming WEE in ASEAN](#), 2021.

ASEAN, [ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework \(2021-2025\)](#), 2021.

ASEAN, [ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security](#), 2022.

ASEAN, [Go-Digital ASEAN](#), 2021.

ASEAN, [SME Academy](#).



Key Recommendations:

- Strengthen the implementation of regulations on mainstreaming gender equality issues in the development and implementation of policies.
- Promote communication activities on gender equality to raise awareness and change behavior of the community, focusing on diversifying communication forms to suit each target group, geographical area, and population.
- Prioritize activities to attract the participation of men and boys in realizing gender equality.
- Develop legal mechanisms to protect migrant workers, paying particular attention to the issues of migrant women workers.
- Prioritize gender responsive budgeting.
- Take into account the insights from multiple stakeholders to refine the existing strategies and initiatives.

Session 5: Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment to Building Inclusive and Resilient Economies in the Asia-Pacific

Objectives:

This session brought together key stakeholders across the business ecosystem to discuss opportunities to advance women's economic empowerment in the Asia-Pacific, including policy actions to get more women into the workforce, as well as persistent challenges to women's economic empowerment, such as women's disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work.



Speakers and Moderator:

Speakers/Presenters:

H.E. Lenny N. Rosalin, Deputy Minister for Gender Equality, Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, Indonesia and Indonesia Representative of the ASEAN Committee on Women

Susan Nio, Founder, LoveCare

Nattinee Netraumpai, Head of Corporate Affairs, Unilever Thai Trading Limited

Keiko Nowacka, Senior Social Development Specialist (Gender and Development), Asian Development Bank

Kyaw Myat Soe, Director, ImpactHub Yangon

Siriporn Rathie, Programme Manager for WE RISE Together, UN Women (Moderator/Presenter)

Main Points of Discussion:

The session started with a presentation by the moderator/presenter on **challenges faced by women's micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) across the Asia-Pacific region and Women's Economic Empowerment Principles (WEPs)**. The presentation shed light on the fact that despite efforts to address gender disparities, substantial gaps still persist in various areas such as equitable pay, labor force engagement, high and medium-skilled employment, business ownership, and representation in leadership positions. The moderator/presenter underscored that the pandemic has further exacerbated these disparities, disproportionately impacting women with job and income losses as well as an increased burden of domestic and care responsibilities. The presentation further emphasized that the implementation of the WEP principles would ultimately support and drive greater opportunities for women's MSMEs.

The discussions also covered **the pathways to support women's economic empowerment and the challenges in the care industry**. The pathways to empowerment were described as promoting skilled job creation, particularly in non-traditional sectors (e.g. energy, transport) for women, expanding social protection for financial resilience, fostering gender-responsive entrepreneurship ecosystems, expanding gender lens investing, supporting gender-responsive policy frameworks (GRP, taxation; GRB; trade), and promoting workplace gender equality. Furthermore, there was a particular emphasis on the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work as a challenge to women's economic empowerment. With respect to the role of the business, there was a strong emphasis on the inclusion of the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion in operations and policies.

The panelists brought attention to the challenges in the care industry, such as the extra care work performed by women at home and the gender bias against male care workers as a result of societal gender norms that often associate care work with women and femininity. Additional challenges to the care sector include limited policy and legal frameworks and unstandardized business practices. There was a particular emphasis on the importance of strengthening the childcare sector by increasing investments in childcare across the Asia-Pacific and challenging the social norms around gender in the care industry.

Highlighted Good Practices:

Asian Development Bank (ADB) mainstreamed gender into its COVID-19 emergency responses focusing on social assistance, economic stimulus, and health measures. Some of these gender-responsive measures include cash and other transfers to individuals (pregnant women, widows, women living with disabilities) and households (using existing channels to ensure cash given to women), MSME loan payment deferrals, employee wage subsidies in the garment industry, as well as insurance, transportation, cash incentives for health workers, and uninterrupted reproductive health services and support to survivors of gender-based violence.

Women's Entrepreneurship Finance Initiative is an international financial intermediary fund to address financial and nonfinancial constraints faced by women-led SMEs in developing countries, governed by 15 countries and administered by the World Bank. The **Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi)** would incentivize participating commercial banks in **Viet Nam** to restructure existing loans or extend new loans to at least 500 women-led SMEs. It is complemented by a specialized business counseling program and an entrepreneurship ecosystem approach.

The Government is expected to release its new White Policy on Women's Entrepreneurship in 2023.

Greater Mekong Subregion Healthy Border Project: ADB's project is providing services such as reproductive health services for migrant workers and their families.

UNILEVER strengthened its commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion in its operations and policies. It has committed to spending €2 billion annually on diverse businesses worldwide by 2021, as well as to increasing diverse representation at all levels of leadership, aiming to have 5% of its workforce made up of individuals living with disabilities. UNILEVER has also pledged to strengthen its commitment to gender considerations through its focus on gender promotions and pay, training for women in leadership, ending violence against women, and maternity and paternity support. UNILEVER also supports queer individuals through its PRIDE Network.

Impact Hub provided training and mentoring for women entrepreneurs on time management and work-life balance to help them manage the burden of care work.

LoveCare is the first carer marketplace in Indonesia. It has signed the WEPs and is committed to empowering women in the care sector, as well as challenging gender norms, and promoting positive changes in the care industry.

Amartha Mikro Fintek is a microfinance marketplace that provides access to business capital for MSMEs in rural areas and is one of the signatories of the WEPs in Indonesia

Foodpreneur Bersinar Program is a collaboration between Amarthta Mikro Fintek and Sunlight and Tokopedia. The program aims to enable micro food and beverage businesses among Amarthta borrowers to sell their products through the online marketplace at Tokopedia Nyam.



Key Recommendations:

- Support women-led businesses.
- Invest in women's start-ups.
- Prioritize skills development for women and men, with particular attention to STEM, nontraditional sectors, geek economy, green jobs, and more higher value added jobs within the care and health sector.
- Promote gender-responsive entrepreneurship trainings to maximize women's participation and their contribution to the economy.
- Partner with private sector and women's organizations to provide training and mentorship and funding for women-led MSMEs.
- Advance workplace and marketplace equality.
- Measure and report progress towards gender equality and the SDGs.
- Commit to advance WEPs by, for example, creating guidance and regulation for private sector gender-reporting.

Resources:

UN Women, [Advancing Gender and Business Reporting to Implement the Women's Empowerment Principles \(WEPs\) as Part of an Inclusive COVID-19 Economic Recovery](#), 2022.

Seedstars, Bopinc and WeEmpowerAsia, [Innovating in uncertain times: How startups are shaping the care industry](#), 2021.

UN Women, [Research on barriers and opportunities to improving outcomes for Women Migrant Workers through skills development in Thailand](#), 2021.

Session 6: COVID-19 Recovery in the Nexus – Transforming from Emergency Aid towards Long-term Recovery

Objectives:

The purpose of this session was to explore the importance of conscientious programming at the humanitarian, development and peace nexus in building a more resilient post-pandemic future.

Speakers and Moderator:

Lahpai Nang Kha, Project Manager, Ethnic Equality Initiative, Kachin State Women's Network

Hannaleena Polkki, Protection, Gender and Inclusion Coordinator, Asia Pacific Disaster and Climate Crises Unit, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Leigh Fuentes, Humanitarian Partnership Platform Coordinator, Care Philippines & Willyn Valmores (Weng), Program Director for Mindanao, Assistance and Cooperation for Community Resilience and Development

Mona Stella Mariano Ramos, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Adviser for Asia Pacific, World Vision International

Athena Galao, Programme Analyst for Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction, UN Women (Moderator)

Main Points of Discussion:

Throughout this session, the discussions centered on **the challenges faced by the humanitarian community as a result of the complexity of overlapping crises and the diversity of their impacts, the importance of holistic and comprehensive interventions, and the lessons learned from the pandemic.**

The discussions noted that the complexity of overlapping issues such as the pandemic, climate change, and conflicts, as well as the diversity of their impacts such as security and inequality posed significant challenges for humanitarian actors. There were multiple crises occurring together with the pandemic, such as conflicts and climate disasters, yet there was no



sufficient preparedness for multiple overlapping crises. During the discussions, it was emphasized that organizational definitions that established rigid boundaries between different contexts such as emergency, conflict, and development needed to be re-evaluated and revised internally to reflect the complexity of crises. Additionally, it was also noted that international and domestic tensions undermined global partnerships and hindered response efforts, and that humanitarian organizations did not give sufficient consideration to the “whole-of-society” approach. Mobility restrictions posed another significant challenge for humanitarian organizations to reach out to children and people living with disabilities, especially those who did not have access to digital tools. Despite the challenges they faced, panelists also noted the innovative gender-responsive strategies their organizations adopted based on gender-responsive needs assessments.

The panelists shared their perspectives on the lessons learned since the beginning of the pandemic. These discussions yielded four key takeaways. First, community engagement is key to resilience and effective response to pandemics. Second, more proactive methods of receiving feedback are required to ensure effective accountability mechanisms. Third, in conflict-affected areas, top-down measures based on a strong military approach are ineffective and, in fact, increase insecurities. Finally, the humanitarian community must better understand the fundamental links between human health, climate change, and biodiversity.

Highlighted Good Practices:

ACCORD maximized its local capacities and pre-established partnerships in the delivery of life-saving assistance to the communities affected by natural hazards and conflicts. Through the help of local communities and their partnerships with local government units, they were able to support vaccination campaigns, provide information sessions on infection prevention, and facilitate vaccinations for many individuals, the majority of whom are women and children. They also incorporated an integrated risk management approach in programming. The examples provided include a holistic approach to delivering aid, which includes food aid along with the facilitation of essential health services, and information sessions on agriculture and reproductive health rights and entitlements for internally displaced peoples and host communities. In addition, they also explored the use of reusable sanitary pads, cloth masks, and locally available materials for shelter repairs and the construction of temporary rural spaces.

In Kachin State, **Kachin State Women’s Network** implemented initiatives on addressing GBV, enhancing women’s capacity development, and promoting their economic empowerment under the peace, development, and humanitarian nexus.



Key Recommendations:

- Strengthen local capacity and build resilience.
- Work with faith-based organizations to change social behaviors and norms, particularly on child marriages and GBV.
- Understand the community's diverse needs.
- Move towards holistic and comprehensive interventions reflecting multiple overlapping crisis with compounding impacts, consulted by communities and informed by community needs.
- Have inclusive data and analysis to understand the unique needs of specific groups.
- Facilitate dialogue between communities and duty bearers.
- Improve the capacity of front-liners and local government units, particularly low income municipalities with limited capacity to respond to crises.
- Adopt a whole-of-society approach to help support long-term recovery.
- Strengthen the capacity of local women's organizations.
- Document learnings and outcomes to influence policy and future interventions.
- Focus on building trust, equity, and local action.

Resources:

CARE, [Rapid Gender Analysis of COVID-19 in the Philippines](#), September 2020.

UN Women and UNDRR, [Action Brief: Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction and Response in the Context of COVID-19: The Asia-Pacific Region](#), 2020.

Session 7: Intersectionality in COVID-19 Recovery Efforts

Objectives:

The purpose of this session was to highlight the value and contributions of people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ individuals, and people with diverse SOGIESC, as well as the unique challenges they faced during the pandemic. It aimed to share knowledge, raise awareness, empower local leaders from the community, and support inclusive partnerships.

Speakers and Moderator:

Jean Chong, Co-founder of Sayoni; Executive Director and Founder of ASEAN Feminist, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Network; Chairperson of ASEAN SOGIE Caucus

Supaanong Panyasirimongkol (NuNu), Networking and Collaboration Officer, Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability

Aiko Akiyama, Social Affairs Officer, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Ryan Joseph Figueiredo, Executive Director of Equal Asia Foundation (Moderator)

Main Points of Discussion:

Discussions focused on **the constraints and challenges lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) individuals and people with disabilities encountered in Southeast Asia during the pandemic, as well as their resilience.**

Based on data gathered through in-depth interviews with 50 LBQ people from 10 Southeast Asian countries between September and October 2020, the discussions revealed that the pandemic exacerbated pre-existing structural and systemic inequalities faced by LBQ communities across the Asia Pacific. These challenges include increased threats to livelihoods and security, intensified risks of conflicts and domestic violence, inequalities in healthcare access, quality, and affordability, deepening social isolation and mental health concerns, stigmatization, discrimination, and hate speech, and further constraints on LBQ organizing and community support. Despite challenges, it was noted that LBQ individuals and groups exercised resilience and creativity to fulfill their needs, including by distributing emergency food and basic necessities, providing psychosocial support, and organizing advocacy campaigns for LGBTIQ inclusion politics.

The panelists also discussed the impact of the pandemic on people with disabilities, noting that the exclusion and lack of access to education, services, and employment that already existed pre-pandemic got amplified during the pandemic. Several issues were raised during the discussions, including sexual harassment and domestic violence during the lockdown, as well as job losses, particularly in the private sector/technological

industry. The panelists also underlined that there are more women with disabilities than men with disabilities, yet women and girls with disabilities are not empowered in terms of their economic, social, and political participation.

Highlighted Good Practices:

Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability’s project **“Promoting Physical Activities of Persons with Autism, Intellectual Disabilities and Psychosocial Disabilities in ASEAN Countries to Cope during COVID-19”**.



Key Recommendations:

- Build regulatory mechanisms to ensure that marginalized social groups are included in laws, regulations, and administrative rules.
- Fill the gap between regulation and practice and make sure practitioners are aware of disability inclusion policies.
- Build adequate and accessible social protection schemes for PWDs.
- Prioritize action to have more women with disabilities in decision making processes at all levels
- Boost funding for LBQ and LGBTIQ organizations.
- Engage in dialogues with the private sector and leverage their power to provide services.

Resources:

Sayoni, Making the Invisible Visible in Southeast Asia: How COVID-19 Escalates Violence and Discrimination against LBQ Communities, 2020.

Theme Three: What is Still Needed for Recovery Going Forward?

Session 8: Youth Leadership in COVID-19 Recovery

Objectives:

The purpose of this session was to discuss how the **interlinkages between COVID-19, gender inequality, GBV, and climate change disproportionately affect young women and girls.**

Speakers and Moderator:

Phatteeya Yongsanguanchai, Climate Activist, 30 for 2030

Louise Mabulo, Chef, Farmer & Entrepreneur, 30 for 2030

Jannatul Mouwa, Executive Director, BINDU Nari Unnayan Sangathan

Shreyasi Jha, Senior Gender Advisor, UNICEF (Moderator)

Main Points of Discussion:

The discussions focused on **the pandemic's impact on young women in conjunction with other crises, as well as the active roles that young women played in their communities during the pandemic.** The panelists emphasized that the pandemic has presented significant risks for young people in the Asia-Pacific in the areas of education, employment, and mental health, and made them vulnerable to early marriages and GBV. The discussions also underlined that the pandemic cannot be viewed in isolation, as it is intertwined with other crises such as climate change, and it is essential to acknowledge their overlapping impact on young women. Despite the unique impacts of these intersecting crises, the panelists noted that youth across the Asia-Pacific have been denied a voice in decision-making, with young women, in particular, being excluded from politics due to sociocultural norms. However, these discussions also revealed that young women are taking active roles in their communities, focusing also on the initiatives they developed to help their respective communities, particularly during the pandemic. Panelists have also emphasized that recovering sustainably from the pandemic and climate change requires young people to be included as equal partners, including in development programs, and that allowing women to participate in politics will empower them as active citizens.





Key Recommendations:

- **Advocating for youth-led solutions:** Young people have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, and they have unique insights and perspectives that can inform the development of effective solutions. Youth leaders can advocate for policies and programmes that prioritize the needs of young people, such as access to education, mental health support, and economic opportunities.
- **Mobilizing communities:** Young people are often at the forefront of social movements and can leverage their networks and social media platforms to mobilize communities around COVID-19 recovery efforts. They can organize campaigns to promote vaccination and other public health measures, as well as volunteer initiatives to support vulnerable populations.
- **Partnering with government and stakeholders:** Young leaders can work with government officials and other stakeholders to ensure that youth perspectives are included in decision-making processes related to COVID-19 recovery. They can also advocate for youth representation on task forces and committees that are responsible for developing recovery plans. This also includes developing national and private funding schemes to consistently fund existing youth-led businesses and youth-led non-profit organizations (both registered and unregistered) that focus on COVID-19 recovery, such as initiatives tackling girls and women's health during a global crisis or COVID-19 protection and prevention measures.
- **Innovating and adapting:** The pandemic has forced many organizations and industries to adapt and innovate in order to survive, and young people are well positioned to lead these efforts. Youth leaders can bring fresh ideas and new approaches to the table, such as the use of technology to deliver innovative products and services.
- **Financial inclusion and literacy:** Young women entrepreneurs could benefit from access to funds and opportunities from the local, national and international levels. To achieve this, they require the support of formal and non-formal education, including capacity building, mentoring and peer-to-peer support, as well as assistance with administrative procedures for funding. Women should and must have financial autonomy, especially in moments of crisis when they are particularly vulnerable.

Resources:

UN Women, [30 for 2030](#).

UN Women, [Gender Equality Update 33: Youth Innovation and Intervention In the times Of COVID-19](#), 2021.

Session 9: Approaches to Strengthen Women’s Leadership and Participation in Governance

Objectives:

This session aimed to discuss ways to strengthen women’s leadership to influence governance reforms, and political and peace processes. Furthermore, it explored how digital platforms and technologies were used to make these processes more effective and accessible to women; and address inequalities as part of the COVID-19 relief and recovery.

Speaker and Moderator:

Soraya Jamjuree, Academic from Prince of Songkla University; Coordinator of the Network of Civic Women for Peace (CIVIC WOMEN); President of the Coordination Centre for Children and Women in Southern Border Provinces (CCCW-SBP)

Sokchan Phoeurn, Senior Programme Manager, CARE Cambodia

Eleonore Fournier-Tombs, Senior Researcher, United Nations University

Koh Miyaoi, Regional Gender Advisor and Team Leader, UNDP (Moderator)

Main Points of Discussion:

The session noted that **digital technologies and platforms promoted women’s participation** in a variety of ways, including in accountability mechanisms. The discussions framed digital community scorecards as an innovative way to collect data during the pandemic to understand women’s and girls’ unique needs. These digital technologies not only amplify women’s and girls’ voices by providing them with a platform to give feedback to service providers and express their needs, but also keep local governments accountable. It was thus concluded that digital community scorecards proved to be effective during the pandemic and are key to increasing women’s and girls’ participation and ensuring the accountability of service providers and decision-makers.

The discussions also shed light on how **digital technologies promoted women’s participation and empowerment along the humanitarian, peace, and development nexus**. The panelists, for instance, noted that women utilized the radio and online media to raise awareness about preventing the spread of the pandemic in Thailand’s Southern Border Provinces, and they provided training for women on how to sell their merchandise online. It was also emphasized that digital media was used to promote an inclusive peace process.



Photo: UN Women/Ploy Phutpheng

There was also a focus on **the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on women's security**, including discriminations and exclusions that women experienced online during the pandemic. However, it was noted that **AI also advances the WPS agenda**, including its participation pillar, as evidenced by the widespread use of social media platforms by WPS organizations. These platforms are utilized for advocating for women's rights and fundraising, among other purposes.

Highlighted Good Practices:

Coordination Centre for Children and Women in Southern Border Provinces (CCCW-SBP) utilized the radio and online media to raise awareness about preventing the spread of the pandemic in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces. They provided training for women to help them sell their merchandise online and utilized digital media to enhance the inclusiveness of the peace process in the Southern Border Provinces.

CARE utilized **digital community scorecards** during the pandemic which enabled them to collect timely data and tailor their services to the needs of women and marginalized groups. The use of digital scorecards boosted inclusive governance and accountability by allowing marginalized groups to raise their voices while keeping service providers accountable to their needs. **CARE's Implementation of Social Accountability Framework (ISAF)** framework played a key role in bringing together stakeholders to advance the delivery of inclusive public services, gender equality, and women's empowerment.



Key Recommendations:

- Promote women as leaders in AI development and leadership.
- Develop tools for those issues that are common for women, such as gender-based and sexual violence.
- Scale up digital country scorecards at the industry level to empower women in the workplace.
- Develop national-level policies that increase the digital literacy of people living in poverty and ensure their access to digital platforms.
- Encourage the use of online platforms to promote the WPS agenda and to ensure that peace dialogues are inclusive of all.

Resources:

United Nations University, Institute on Computing and Society, [Developing inclusive AI policy in Southeast Asia](#), 2023.

Monash Gender, Peace and Security Centre and UN Women, [Gender Analysis of Violent Extremism and the Impact of COVID-19 on Peace and Security in ASEAN: Evidence-based Research for Policy](#), 2022.

UN Women, [Action Brief - From Warfare to Peace building: Employing Artificial Intelligence for Women, Peace and Security](#), 2022.

UN Women, [Big Data Analysis on Hate Speech and Misogyny in Four Countries: Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand](#), 2023.

Session 10: Closing Discussion – Next Steps and Moving Forward

Objectives:

The final session sought to bring the discussions to a close by identifying the key areas in need of advocacy, policy changes, and further programming from governments and other stakeholders, as well as emphasizing the ongoing need for recovery efforts.

Speakers and Moderator:

Yoshiko Motoyama, Chief of International Organization and Deputy Permanent Representative of Japan to UN ESCAP

Anasuya Sengupta, Senior Social Policy Specialist, Development Pathways

Yu Matsuoka, Diversity Promotion Department, Sekisui House

Norul Mohamed Rashid, Policy Advisor on Governance and Peace & Security for Asia and the Pacific, UN Women

Patchari Raksawong (Moderator)

Main Point of Discussion:

The panelists discussed **the gendered effects of fiscal austerity as a measure of debt management**. It was highlighted that, while recovering from the pandemic, there are alternative approaches to fiscal austerity that are better suited for gender, economic, and social justice, such as reallocating public expenditures, using fiscal and foreign exchange reserves, expanding social protection coverage, and contributory revenues, and eliminating illicit financial flows. The discussions also emphasized the importance of transforming temporary emergency measures into sustainable mechanisms that will eliminate gender disparities, full coverage, and adequacy gaps in social protection, and ensure that all employees are effectively protected.

The panelists also discussed **the lessons learned from the pandemic from their perspectives**. This includes the increasing responsibilities that men took over in the care of their children during the pandemic. It was emphasized that remote work provided an opportunity for men to spend more time with their families and take on more responsibility, particularly in the care of their children. During the discussions, it was also noted that the pandemic has proven that care is an integral, yet undervalued, component of economies. The other lessons highlighted include other key topics, such as the importance of gender-disaggregated data for effective policy response, the increase in GBV during times of crisis and fragility, the ongoing barriers preventing women from participating in strategic decision making, and the critical role of women-led organizations in response and recovery.

The panelists outlined **the key priorities to ensure the recovery of lost gender-equality gains**, including strong gender data and informed policy response, investments in

affordable and accessible care services, mitigation strategies targeting the economic empowerment of women and building their resilience, programming at the humanitarian, development, and peace nexus, and gender-responsive social protection and gender-sensitive pension systems.

Highlighted Good Practices:

Malaysia extended the coverage of the Employment Injury Scheme to migrant domestic workers, providing them for the first time with medical benefits and protection due to workplace injuries.

Sekisui House facilitated events with its female and male staff on childcare and promoted remote work to assist men in taking more care responsibilities.



Key Recommendations:

- Achieve fiscal consolidation by pursuing strategies that are more favorable for gender, economic, and social justice.
- Invest in childcare services and long-term care to meet care needs throughout the life cycle.
- Develop gender-responsive social protection systems.
- Adopt a comprehensive human security approach that takes into account health, food, and climate-related threats, among others.
- Develop programming along the humanitarian, development, and peace nexus to ensure community resilience.
- Support women to rebound in the work place, including by ensuring workplace equity.
- Create enabling conditions for women to pursue careers and receive equal pay for equal work.

Resources:

UN Women and UNDP, [Government Responses to COVID-19: Lessons on Gender Equality for a World in Turmoil](#), 2022.

UN Women, OHCHR, UNFPA, [Are Governments investing in caring and just economies? A gender and human rights assessment of COVID-19 fiscal stimulus measures in Asia and the Pacific](#), 2023.

SUMMARY

Organized by UN Women, in close collaboration with its partners, the “Regional Dialogue on COVID-19 Recovery: Building Forward Better with Women’s Leadership and Participation” was held in Bangkok on 15-16 March 2023. The event marked the finalization of UN Women’s regional and country-level initiatives in the Mekong region to promote women’s participation and leadership in COVID-19 response and recovery under the support of the People of Japan.

The Regional Dialogue brought together over 145 participants with the objectives to identify key lessons learned and good practices for addressing the challenges faced by women during the pandemic; sharing knowledge and lived experiences of the impact of COVID-19 on women’s leadership and participation; facilitating networking and collaboration; and identifying ways in which countries can better prepare to address next crises. Over the course of two days, panelists and audience members shared stories, exchanged ideas, and collaborated on solutions to ensure a long-term and sustainable recovery for women and girls post-pandemic.

The two days of lively discussions yielded four major key takeaways.

1. A multisectoral approach that involves collaboration between governments, CSOs, and the private sector must be implemented to effectively tackle the impacts of the pandemic on women and girls and ensure their sustainable and long-term recovery.
2. Effective recovery policies must incorporate gender analytical data to ensure that the specific needs and challenges faced by women and girls are adequately addressed.
3. Despite the vital roles played by women in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts in Asia, women remain underrepresented in strategic decision-making processes and there is a need to take concrete steps to ensure their full inclusion.
4. The complexity of overlapping issues such as the pandemic, climate change, and conflicts, as well as the diversity of their impacts such as security and inequality require holistic and comprehensive interventions, consulted by communities and informed by community needs.

Through the thought-provoking discussions of the panelists, the active participation of the audience, and the networking opportunities provided, the event served as a platform for collaboration among a range of stakeholders toward building a more gender-responsive approach to recovery at the country and regional levels.



BUILDING FORWARD BETTER WITH WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

REGIONAL DIALOGUE
ON COVID-19 RECOVERY
MARCH 2023

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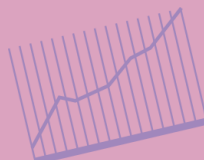
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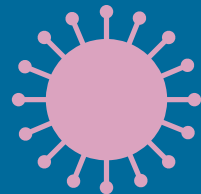
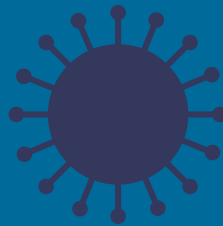
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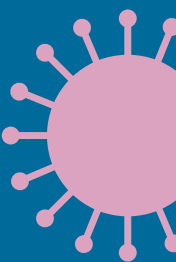
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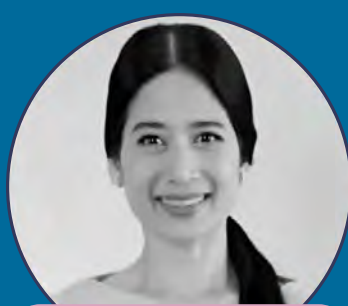
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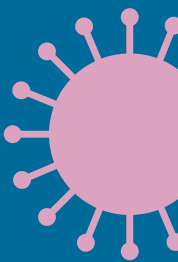
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