

**State of the World's Children Report 2007  
East Asia and Pacific Launch – Cebu City, Philippines  
Questions and Answers**

**1. Why was gender equality chosen as the main focus for SOWCR 2007?**

Girls and women have always been a crucial part of UNICEF's mandate. We know from experience that when societies discriminate against women, they are also discriminating against children. Equal rights for women in the household, the workplace and in politics will have a direct and positive effect on children both now and into the future.

This year's report is intended to contribute to the work underway to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, especially Goal 3, which focuses on gender discrimination and empowering women.

**2. What do you think are the highlights of findings for the region that require urgent action?**

This region has made enormous strides in addressing gender inequality, which has contributed to its economic prosperity and development. For example, the fact that the region has achieved gender parity in primary education with an average of 90 percent enrolment is a very important accomplishment.

But we also recognize that considerable challenges remain. We do know that national averages mask disparities within countries and often hide persistent inequalities, especially for the poorest communities and who disproportionately are made up of women and children. Many still face discrimination in accessing basic social services such as health and education.

In addition, there are number of areas of particular concern in this region.

- As this year's report notes, domestic violence is a serious problem. As the recent UN Study on Violence against Children indicated, violence in the home is widespread with as many as 275 million children caught in the crossfire. And in many circumstances, domestic violence is linked to sexual and gender based violence. Hidden, it often stems from inequalities in the household and leads to abusive relationships. In this region, long standing patriarchal attitudes as well as new economic pressures have contributed and can often lead to family breakdowns which increase vulnerability to sexual abuse.
- The other area of growing concern is against gender inequality in the workplace. In East Asia and the Pacific, almost 70 percent of females are participating in economic activity, one of the highest rates in the world. According to research conducted by UNIFEM, women constitute almost half of all migrants in Asia, as increasing numbers of women migrate, either from rural to urban areas or across borders in search of work. We know that majority are often working in low skilled jobs and subjects to rights violations and discrimination. We know that often what starts out as labour migration can end in trafficking and abuse. Roughly one third of global trafficking in women and children occurs within or originates in Southeast Asia. We need to urgently put in place better mechanisms to protect women and children and also better understand the impact of migration on families and children.
- Linked to this gender inequality and vulnerability, is the growing threat of the HIV infection. The estimated number of HIV positive women in East Asia and the Pacific has gone up from 518,900 in 2001 to 750,000 this year. As the epidemic shifts from marginalized groups, more women of reproductive age are contracting HIV from their partners. If we are to succeed in fighting the virus, we must confront this reality and tailor our prevention strategies to address their vulnerability.

**3. How does the Philippines compare with the region in these matters?**

The Philippines has done well in tackling gender inequality and discrimination. It stands out as a shining example in terms of women in politics, with many women working both at a local community as well as the national level to contribute to decision making processes. It also has succeeded in getting more women playing key roles in decision making at a household level and in economic activity.

But there is still a need to address the impact of growing disparities within the country, especially those that continue to perpetuate gender discrimination and also increase vulnerability of women and children. In the area of maternal and child health, for example, more attention is needed to ensure all women have access to services they need.

The Philippines also needs to address the social impact of migration, especially on families and children. As research data from Mexico, Ecuador and the Philippines indicate, children can suffer negative psychological effects when partners migrate abroad to work. With an estimated three to six million Filipino Children under 18 years with migrant parents, this is an area of particular concern.

#### **4. The SOWCR 2007 provides a roadmap for maximizing gender equality through seven key modes. What are the particular recommendations for the region?**

All the recommendations for addressing gender equality are relevant to countries in East Asia and Pacific. But to ensure we move forward to meet the Millennium Development Goals, there are a number of areas where we need to urgently act:

- **Financing:** Equitable and efficient investment is central to eliminating gender discrimination and fulfilling the rights of women and children. Money must be integrated with existing government budgets and plans, as well as aligned with poverty reduction strategy papers and other planning processes.

In this region, despite high economic growth in some countries, we still have to invest more in social sector spending. Governments must increase resources to education, health care and social services, and must create targeted programmes, that reach the poor and marginalized groups. This is crucial to make sure that everyone benefits from the development process.

- **Improved research and data:** Research and data on the situation of women and girls in this region are sorely lacking. We also need to have better disaggregated data that allows us to focus on areas where discrimination and inequality are greatest. Better data and analysis are critical, especially in the areas of maternal mortality, violence against women, education, employment, wages, unpaid work and time use, and participation in politics.
- **Legislation:** Comprehensive measures are required to prevent and respond to domestic violence and gender-based violence. National legal reforms in property law and inheritance rights are key, as is ensuring access to justice and legal protection for women and children. Already, we have seen positive steps taken. For example, in the area of trafficking, a number of cross border initiatives and legal agreements have been signed, such as the ASEAN Declaration on Human Trafficking. It is now imperative that we ensure these agreement and protection mechanisms are better enforced.

#### **5. How would you assess the Philippines against the region in terms of capability to implement the SOWC 2007 recommendations?**

The Philippines is in a very good position to act on the recommendations outlined in State of the World's Children Report. As already noted, they have already accomplished significant progress in the involvement of women and young people in the political decision making process. In addition, the country has a strong civil society which is already committed to creating a just and more equitable society. But like all countries in this region, the success of carrying out these recommendations requires enormous commitment. It requires political will at the highest levels as well as the engagement of all levels of society. We at UNICEF, along with other partners, remain committed to working with the Government to succeed in meeting the country's commitments to gender equality.