

OUTCOME DOCUMENT



APO FORUM ON WOMEN'S LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND PRODUCTIVITY ENHANCEMENT

TOKYO, 5-7 FEBRUARY 2018



The Asian Productivity Organization (APO) is an intergovernmental organization committed to improving productivity in the Asia-Pacific region. Established in 1961, the APO contributes to the sustainable socioeconomic development of the region through policy advisory services, acting as a think tank, and undertaking smart initiatives in the industry, agriculture, service, and public sectors. The APO is shaping the future of the region by assisting member economies in formulating national strategies for enhanced productivity and through a range of institutional capacity-building efforts, including research and centers of excellence in member countries.

APO members

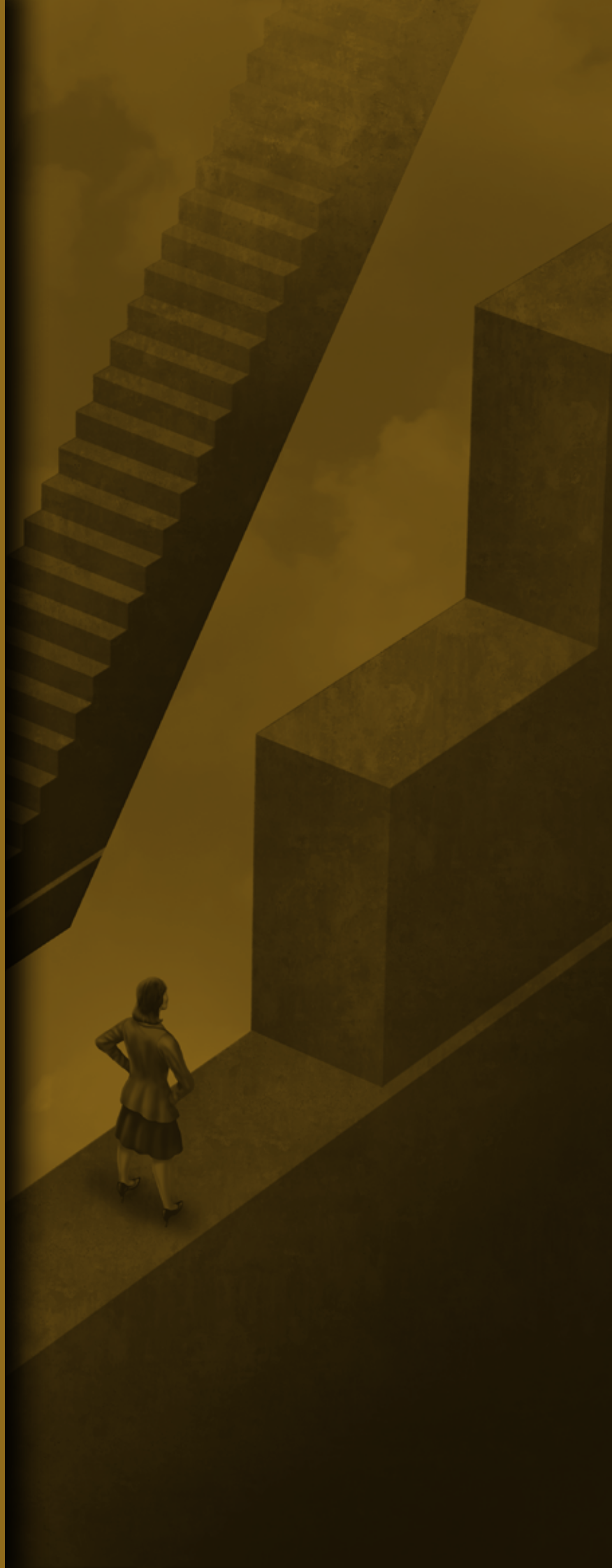
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INTRODUCTION

The delegates to the Forum on Women's Labor Force Participation and Productivity Enhancement, representing the people as well as the public and private sectors in the Asia-Pacific region, gathered from 5 to 7 February 2018 in Tokyo, Japan. The conference was organized by the Asian Productivity Organization (APO) with the support of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, involving international speakers and participants representing 15 APO member countries.

Based on the discussions and deliberations among resource speakers, APO Secretariat, and delegates, this outcome document proposes recommendations and best practices that could be disseminated and replicated by different stakeholders in APO member countries to shape a better future for women in productive economic activities, leading to overall productivity enhancement and gender equality. APO member governments are encouraged to develop action plans to implement each recommendation.



POLICY DEVELOPMENT TO PROMOTE FEMALE LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION: ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

Recommendation 1

Equality in governance, decision making, and access to and participation in power structures and leadership at all levels and in all fields is a matter of justice, respect for human rights, and good governance. Women are underrepresented in decision-making positions and overrepresented in low-paid sectors. Governments should promote women's roles in decision-making processes and increase the number of women in economic decision-making positions in both the public and private sectors through specific numerical targets for the long and short terms.

Recommendation 2

Address women's limited access to and control over productive resources and women-friendly facilities. Efforts should be made to reduce the number of women in vulnerable, informal employment through determining actions in priority areas to close gender pay gaps.

Recommendation 3

Unpaid care work should be recognized by giving it economic value and policy attention. Unpaid care work therefore should be accounted for in GDP calculations and systems of national accounts.



Recommendation 4

Government budgets and fiscal measures can play an important role in promoting gender equality. Governments are encouraged to allocate adequate financial resources through gender-responsive budgeting to achieve full gender equality in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Recommendation 5

Governments are encouraged to adopt comprehensive policies and programs to provide employment options by formulating policy and facilitating access to markets, finance, and technology to support entrepreneurship and self-employment for women.

Recommendation 6

Providing good-quality, adequate, affordable childcare facilities, long-term care systems with early childhood development programs, and facilities for people with physical disabilities is encouraged.

Recommendation 7

It is strongly recommended that APO member governments establish “Offices for Women” to deliver policies and programs to advance gender equality and improve women’s lives. This will show strong government commitment to the creation of communities where women are safe, healthy, equally represented, and valued for their contributions to society.

Recommendation 8

Governments should acquire, store, maintain, and make big data publicly available and accessible to all stakeholders free of charge.



EMPLOYERS' SUPPORT FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Recommendation 1

Addressing female labor force participation (FLFP) issues is not solely the responsibility of government. The private sector also plays key roles in increasing FLFP and productivity. It should increase women's participation in the labor force through the facilitation of work–life balance to enhance their quality of life. Future workplaces and workstyles should be gender responsive.

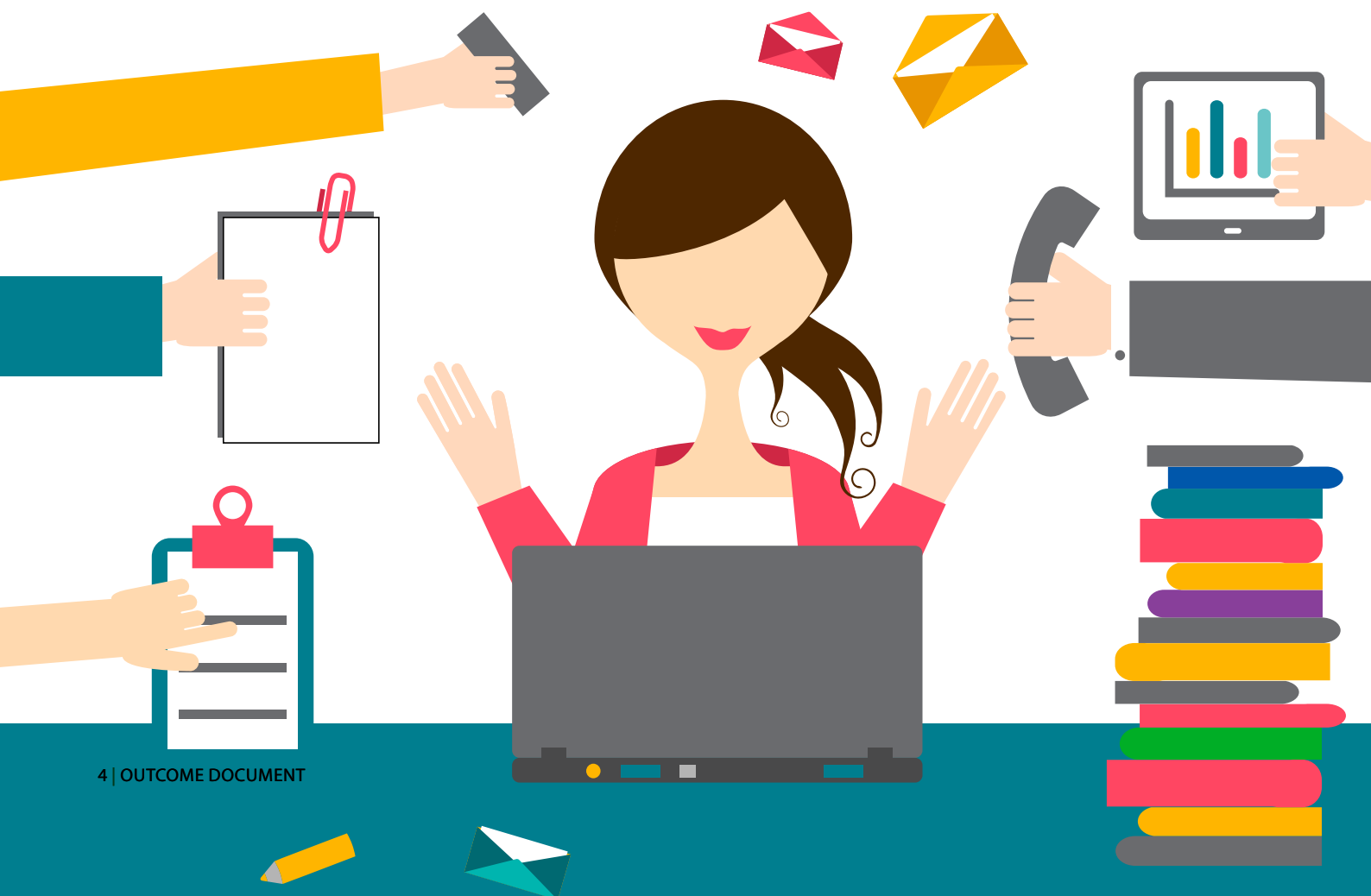
Enterprises are urged to promote family-friendly, flexible workplaces by taking advantage of ICT and teleworking/telecommuting schemes that enable women to balance work and family responsibilities.

Recommendation 2

Maternity and paternity leave policies should be put into practice and monitored internally. Employers should encourage and assist staff in taking maternity and paternity leave.

Recommendation 3

It is strongly recommended that business associations and federations design and advocate relevant programs promoting women's participation in productive economic activities through decent work in their member enterprises.



ROLE OF ACADEMIA

Recommendation 1

Under the changes brought about by technological advances and automation, along with the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0), current skills and knowledge may no longer be relevant. Academia should therefore evolve new curricula focusing on the necessary future-proof skills allowing women to stay relevant in the workforce in the digital era.

Recommendation 2

An enabling environment for women to pursue science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) career pathways should be promoted intensively in academia. Partnerships with the public sector, local communities, and businesses to transfer digital literacy to women should be enhanced. Digital literacy will provide further entrepreneurial opportunities for women in STEM-related and other fields.

Recommendation 3

More research should be undertaken for rigorous pilot testing and evaluation of proposed and existing academic courses/curricula including educating women to access big data, which will ensure the development of a strong, sound female labor force and increase their participation in national economies.



ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL/CIVIL SOCIETY/COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Recommendation 1

Eliminate the consciousness of role allocations by gender through community-based programs utilizing all types of media channels. Cooperation between civil society and academia to create comprehensive curricula that remove unconscious bias and gender stereotypes should be enhanced.

Via social partners, NGOs, and the business sector, autonomously or in conjunction with government authorities, encourage the introduction of training programs focusing particularly on new technologies to make it easier for women to enter/reenter the job market.

Recommendation 2

Special attention should be paid to gender equality at work, especially in urban areas, in highly vulnerable sectors, and for women involved in the agriculture sector. Women must be granted equal professional status in line with community legislation.

Recommendation 3

International and regional legal/policy instruments should be developed to establish relevant frameworks to advance gender equality in the Asia-Pacific, particularly in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



BEST INITIATIVES IN APO MEMBER COUNTRIES

- The concept of womenomics and the experience in promoting it in Japan should be introduced in other countries to facilitate higher FLFP in productive activities.
- Business federations such as Keidanren of Japan have made an impact on promoting women's participation in the workforce by influencing their member enterprises.
- Setting numerical targets for women in employment and in leadership positions is beneficial.
- STEM ecosystems designed with clear roles of different actors as enablers-connectors-communicators-engagers support women pursuing STEM careers.
- Tax policies for dual-income households and tax relief for private companies that establish daycare facilities should be developed.
- Subsidies are needed for childcare.
- Easy-access microloan systems for women encourage entrepreneurial activities.
- Flexible working hours should be offered for women.
- Workplaces where women are engaged in night shifts should include breastfeeding spaces and childcare facilities.
- Working hour declaration tools help balance work and life and in turn make workers more productive and efficient.
- Male champions of change are helpful in reducing gender gaps.
- Dedicated official departments/divisions for women's agendas such as the Office for Women directly under the cabinet should be established.
- Online systems to report, manage, and prevent sexual harassment are effective.
- Women entrepreneurs should be offered access to bank loans without collateral.
- Certification programs for companies promoting gender-equality programs function as incentive measures.

APPENDIX: LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Resource Persons

Japan

Dr. Hiroyuki Fujimura

Professor, Hosei Business School of Innovation Management, Hosei University

Philippines

Dr. Ronahlee A. Asuncion

Dean, University of the Philippines Diliman School of Labor and Industrial Relations

Sri Lanka

J.M. Thilaka Jayasundara

Additional Secretary, Planning & Development, Ministry of Finance & Mass Media

United Kingdom

Dr. Sukanlaya Sawang

Associate Professor, Technology and Innovation, University of Leicester School of Business

APO Secretariat

Huong Thu Ngo

Program Officer, Research & Planning Department

Participants

Bangladesh

Mahmuda Khanam

Joint Secretary, Ministry of Industry

Selima Ahmad

President, Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Vice Chairperson, Nitol Niloy Group

Cambodia

So Ponnary

Chief, Micro Small and Medium Enterprise Development Office, Department of Economic Development, Ministry of Women's Affairs

Viriya Lim

Senior Lecturer, Build Bright University

China, Republic of

Wei Tai Chun

Officer, Department of General Planning, Ministry of Labor

India

Dr. Geeta S. Tamgale

Subject Matter Specialist (Home Science), University of Agricultural Sciences

Dr. Otojit Kshetrimayum

Associate Fellow (Faculty), V.V. Giri National Labour Institute

Indonesia

Thiana Aderiani

Officer, Section for Productivity and Entrepreneurship Promotion, Directorate of Productivity, Directorate General of Training and Productivity Development, Ministry of Employment

Tresye Widiastuty Paidi

Head, Section to Supervise the Working Norm Protection for Female Night Workers, Directorate of Supervision of the Working Norms of Women and Children, Ministry of Manpower

IR Iran

Mansoureh Karimi

Women's Affairs Counsellor to the Head, Administrative and Recruitment Organization

Rahmati Fatemeh

Deputy of General Director, Labor Relations and Compensation Administration, Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare

Lao PDR

Neeorn Xayachack

Head of Division, Lao Women's Union

Sisavanh Detvongsone

Director, International Relations Division, Department of Planning and International Cooperation, Lao Women's Union

Malaysia

Anis Marina Abd. Wahab

Consultant, Malaysia Productivity Corporation

Nepal

Gurung Shobha

Vice President (Women Sector), Federation of Nepal Cottage and Small Industries

Pakistan

Homaira Adil

Manager, CEO Secretariat, Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation

Mashal Yousaf

Research Associate, Research and Planning Department, Punjab Skills Development Fund

Philippines

Maria Crisedna S. Magsumbol

Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Philippine Commission on Women

Stephanie B. Tabladillo-Yanson

Chief Labor and Employment Officer, National Wages and Productivity Commission

Sri Lanka

R.A.R.S. Mayadunne

Director (Planning), Ministry of Skills Development and Vocational Training

W.M.S.K. Weerasekara

Director, Sri Lanka Administrative Service, Ministry of Public Administration & Management

Thailand

Dr. Ruttiya Bhula-or

Lecturer, College of Population Studies, Chulalongkorn University

Vietnam

Bui Thi Huong

Head, Administrative and Personnel Division and Quality Manager, Directorate for Standards, Metrology and Quality

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