

NTS BULLETIN

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March 2021

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Women's Empowerment in the Post-Pandemic World



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THE EMPOWERMENT of women requires the existence of evolved societies that value diverse voices - a gain from inclusive and equitable policies. While economic development and the growth of a nation are marked by, among other factors, a resilient workforce, good economic planning and visionary leaders, it does not necessarily have to involve 'evolved' thinking as far as gender relations are concerned. Many countries are testament to that. But the last year, under a global pandemic, has revealed the downside risks of not planning for crisis with a gendered lens. The question now remains: should such gender-neutral thinking still find a place in crisis management and recovery policies? While economic growth and progress give an aggregative push upwards for all, the impacts of a crisis are selective in terms of who bears the brunt of suffering. Nothing reflects this scenario better, on a global

scale, than the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women.

Women comprise the bulk of the world's frontline health workers - approximately 70 per cent of the global health workforce - and they have been at significant risk of infection. However, women represent just a quarter of senior roles in the industry. Given their predicaments from ill-fitting PPEs to their constant risks of exposure and increased workload, women have not occupied the right 'space' to make decisions around their own safety and well-being as healthcare and frontline workers. The rise of domestic violence is another well-documented impact of COVID-19. The Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), a women's rights group in Singapore, has reported increases in the number of family violence calls since the country's lockdown began in April 2020, with a 137 percent increase in May 2020. In Indonesia, the

Legal Aid Foundation of the Indonesian's Women's Association for Justice has had their domestic violence cases at least tripled two weeks after lockdown measures were imposed in Jakarta, the highest they have documented in a similar period.

The UN analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women has identified key areas that leave women and girls most vulnerable, including unemployment and economic and livelihood impacts for the poorest women and girls. In the Asia-Pacific, 68 per cent of employed individuals work in the informal sector, with a higher proportion of women involved. Women tend to be mostly employed in industries such as travel, hospitality, textile manufacturing and retail sales, most of which have been adversely affected by the pandemic. Tens of thousands of female workers are concentrated in the informal sector. including domestic work, working for family members, and as seasonal agricultural workers.

Many were quick to point out that countries headed by female leaders were effective in taking action and doing the necessary in terms of shutdowns and pandemic preparedness. As many would like to claim the positive impacts of female leadership and there are many positives it is the openness of societies where such leadership prevails that is crucial, the abilities and strengths of these leaders notwithstanding. Such societies tend to be open to diverse and varying ideas and abilities and extract the best from a varied pool of talent. Such societies have no reservations about placing women in leadership roles. They are genuinely inclusive and welcome a plurality of voices and ideas. Therefore. they tend to do better in decision-making under difficult circumstances leaving 'outliers' in plans and programmes that try to manage and mitigate impacts. Where we seek to rebuild and recover, women, as active members of the labour force, as heads of families, as educators, as political leaders, and as citizens. should not be sidestepped in

planning for the 'new normal'.

We have seen what existing gender-neutral crisis management policies have resulted in. Many are still living with the effects of it. It should therefore be the goal of any nation hoping to recover at the soonest to make women's empowerment part of new structures of governance. Although gender mainstreaming and gender equality programmes exist at different levels of governance, from global to regional to national, it would require a shift in the collective social psyche to make a difference. This would require concerted efforts at reimagining gender roles and recalibrating social policies around a more gender-specific rather than a gender-neutral angle. Ultimately, these efforts should lead to reassessment of the importance of women's roles in society, which includes formalising, by any means possible, their active and sustained involvement in the rebuilding and recovery of their nations.

Suggested Readings

- UN Women. 2020. Will the Pandemic Derail Hard-Won Progress on Gender Equality?
 New York: UN Women. https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/07/spotlight-on-gender-covid-19-and-the-sdgs
- UN, 2020. "Impact of COVID-19 on Women." Policy Brief. 9 April 2020. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy_brief_on_covid_impact_on_women_9_apr_2020_updated.pdf
- WHO, 2019. "Delivered by women, led by men: A gender and equity analysis of the global health and social workforce." *Human Resources for Health Observer Series No. 24.* https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/311322/9789241515467-eng.pdf? sequence=1&isAllowed=y

CLIMATE CHANGE

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

New climate pledges 'far short' of meeting Paris Agreement goals, UN warns

A UNFCCC report analysed the updated climate action plans submitted by 75 nations ahead of November's COP26 climate summit and found that current policies will not come close to meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Eoin McSweeney and Hannah Ritchie CNN

27 February 2021

EU bets on data to prepare for climate change impacts

The European Commission will launch an observatory of data and tools on climate and health to anticipate threats like heat death or the spread of disease as global warming pushes vector-borne illnesses into new regions.

Today

24 February 2021

Climate change: Will China take a 'great leap' to a greener economy?

Tackling climate change may emerge as a key goal for China when it unveils its 14th five-year plan. The scale of ambition will be reflected in the numbers for economy-wide growth, carbon used per unit of GDP, and targets for non-fossil fuel in the overall amount of energy consumed.

Matt McGrath

BBC

4 March 2021

Top oil and gas lobbying group close to backing a carbon tax

The American Petroleum Institute is edging closer to endorsing a carbon tax, a tool that would make fossil fuels more expensive, boost prospects for renewable and nuclear energy, and curb pollution that is driving climate change.

Steven Mufson

The Washington Post

3 March 2021

Climate change trade-offs stark but S'pore trying to break out of constraints

Singapore is attempting to break out of constraints through careful, long-term planning and innovations in policy and technology. Workers would also have to shift to jobs in new areas of growth needed for modern green ecosystem.

Audrey Tan

The Straits Times

5 March 2021

PUB campaign highlights impact of climate change on Singapore's coastlines, water supply

A future where Singapore's reservoirs have no more water after a prolonged dry spell and where rising sea levels threaten the low-lying coastline may become a reality if nothing is done to fight climate change.

Cheryl Tan
The Straits Times

8 March 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Circular economy and plastics: A Gap-analysis in ASEAN member states

A shift to a circular economy will require coordinated policy interventions at all stages of the life-cycle of plastics, including resource extraction and refining, design and manufacture of products, trade and retail, use and reuse, recycling, and final disposal.

Akenji, L., et al.

Brussels: European Commission Directorate General for Environment and Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development

Jakarta: Association of Southeast Asian Nations

2020

In deep water: Current threats to the marine ecology of the South China Sea

China's island construction, drilling activities, and overfishing have pushed the marine ecosystem of the region to the brink of collapse, and the destruction of coral reefs and the marine life they support is threatening the food and energy security of the littorals.

Pratnashree Basu and Aadya Chaturvedi New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

World Environment Day

World Environment Day is the most renowned day for environmental action which has been celebrated annually since 1974. This year, the theme is biodiversity – a concern that is both urgent and existential.

Worldwide

5 June 2021

IWA World Water Congress & Exhibition

The Congress & Exhibition will engage stakeholders and key contacts within the conventional water sector and beyond. It is a vital opportunity to learn about the Nordic water challenges and solutions, including participation in technical site visits.

Copenhagen, Denmark

11-15 September 2021

ENERGY SECURITY

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

Singapore lays out plans for green and sustainable future

Government officials announced sweeping new measures that will change the way people live, learn and play - building on the Singapore Green Plan 2030 framework. These include renewed push for electric vehicles, energy-efficient buildings and carbon-neutral destinations, among others.

Audrey Tan The Straits Times 5 March 2021

Nuclear energy, ten years after Fukushima

If nuclear energy is to have a meaningful role in deep decarbonisation, the nuclear industry must consult the public regarding reactor research, design, regulation, location and waste.

Aditi Verma, Ali Ahmad and Francesca Giovannini Nature

5 March 2021

Carbon tax makes PH energy sector uncompetitive: DOE chief

The Secretary of the Department of Energy claimed that instead of imposing carbon tax, the Philippines will explore other clean energy sources, such as nuclear, to bring down the cost of electricity.

Kris Crismundo Philippine News Agency 9 March 2021

Malaysian firm to buy stake in five solar farms in Vietnam

A subsidiary of Malaysia's largest power utility, Tenaga Nasional Berhad, plans to acquire a 39% stake in five Vietnamese solar power projects from Singapore's Sunseap Group.

Thuy Nien VNExpress 10 March 2021

Philippines to host South East Asia's first floating energy storage solution

To be completed by the end of 2021, the floating power barge will enable a fast supply of electricity to areas with limited infrastructure and is a mobile asset, enabling relocation or trade.

Power Engineering International 10 March 2021

10 years on, Japan mourns victims of earthquake, Fukushima nuclear disasters

Japan is again debating the role of nuclear power in its energy mix as it targets net carbon neutrality by 2050. But an NHK public TV survey showed 85% of the public worries about nuclear accidents, akin to the devastating Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Reuters Channel News Asia 11 March 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Vietnam's solar power boom: Policy implications for other ASEAN member states

Vietnam now boasts the highest installed capacity of solar power in Southeast Asia, generating 16,500MW at the end of 2020. Generous feed-in tariffs and other supporting policies are a key proximate driver towards this achievement.

Thang Nam Do and Paul J. Burke ISEAS Perspective No. 28

2021

Regional energy trends report 2020: Tracking SDG7 in the ASEAN Region

Tracking the region's progress toward achieving targets under Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG 7) in the areas of ensuring universal access to electricity and clean cooking, increasing the renewable energy share of the energy mix, and accelerating energy efficiency serves to illuminate the trends and challenges leading up to 2030.

UN ESCAP and ASEAN Centre for Energy
2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Role of Academia in Shaping the Energy Transition in ASEAN

Celebrating the first anniversary of the ASEAN Researchers Network on Energy and Climate Change (ARNECC) in February 2021, a public webinar was held to discuss the role of academia in shaping the policy for climate-friendly energy transition in ASEAN.

Recorded Webinar

25 February 2021

Accelerating Clean Energy Transitions (Option 2) | Davos Agenda 2021

Energy experts discussed policies, practices and partnerships that are needed to scale up clean energy investments in emerging economies

Recorded Webinar

17 February 2021

FOOD SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Investors seed indoor farms as pandemic disrupts food supplies

Amid the pandemic, investments in indoor farms reached a recordhigh of US\$394 million in 2020, doubling in average from the previous year, supported by Bayer AG and Amazon.com. These offer lower spoilage rates for food shipped over shorter distances.

Rod Nickel

Reuters

18 February 2021

How should we measure food security during crises? The case of Nigeria

The Food Insecurity Experience Scale by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, has shown discrepancies from the Food Consumption Score (FCS) collected nationally. Further metrics for dietary diversity are needed to triangulate the state of food insecurity.

Jonathan Lainsharad and Tandontara Vishwanath Food Security Portal

21 February 2021

China steps up focus on food security in major policy document

According to China's annual rural policy blueprint or "No.1 document", communist party committees will now shoulder responsibility for food security, in addition to local government, amid concerns about stability of food supplies.

Reuters

The Straits Times

22 February 2021

Farmers and rights groups boycott food summit over big business links

The UN's 2021 Food Systems summit has drawn flak from farmers/rights groups for adding big business-supported precision agriculture and genetic engineering to the agenda. They argue that big business has been part of the problem.

John Vidal

The Guardian

4 March 2021

'Food security is security': Brazil's urban farm success story

The Horta de Manguinhos project, Latin America's largest community farm, is helping at least 800 families survive the coronavirus outbreak, as well as employing more than 20 local workers at a time when Brazil grapples with a pandemic-battered econo-

Charlotte Peet

Aljazeera

6 March 2021

China seed industry seeks better laws to support innovation

The chairman of state-owned Chemchina company, which acquired multinational seed giant Syngenta in 2017, called for a revision of China's seed law and regulations to boost innovation in new plant varieties.

Reuters

Channel News Asia

10 March 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Norm conflicts as governance challenges for Seed Commons: Comparing cases from Germany and the Philippines

This article discusses the problem with intellectual property rights regimes in seeds and argues for a "commons" approach to allow for greater use of productivity-enhancing seeds in developing countries.

Julia Tschersich Earth System Governance, Vol. 7 2021

Responding to food security during COVID-19: Lessons from evaluations

In this brief Issue Note, the OECD shares lessons from evaluations of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic from a food security perspective, including the insight that "food access issues can be alleviated when a shock-responsive, social protection system is in place."

OECD

Issue Note 1: Food Security

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Plenary Lecture 12: Food Security, during Agricultural Innovation, 8th Asia-Korea Conference on Science and Technology

During this seminar chaired by Prof. Nam Jon Cho of NTU, private company heads and academics discussed technological solutions to key issues like antimicrobial resistance and animal health.

Recorded Webinar 26 February 2021

Virtual Event: Global Food Security Index 2020 Launch

The Economist launched The Global Food Security Index' 9th edition, which examined the drivers of food security in 113 countries. New categories were introduced to assess countries' climateand natural resource risk-exposure.

Recorded Webinar

1 March 2021

HEALTH SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Covid: Airline industry travel pass ready 'within weeks'

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) says it expects its digital Covid Travel Pass will be ready "within weeks". The pass is an app that verifies a passenger has had the COVID-19 tests or vaccines required to enter a country.

BBC

23 February 2021

Global Covid-19 herd immunity may take nearly 5 years, new data suggests

The pace of history's biggest vaccination exercise is picking up exponentially, but at current rates, it could still be almost five years before most of the world get their shots.

Joyce Teo

The Straits Times

1 March 2021

COVID antibody treatments show promise for preventing severe disease

Two clinical trials suggest that specific antibody treatments can prevent deaths and hospitalisations among people with mild or moderate COVID-19 — particularly those who are at high risk of developing severe disease.

Heidi Ledford

Nature

12 March 2021

Sea of resilience: How the Pacific fought against Covid

The Pacific's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been one of self-reliance and resistance: to turn to its communities and churches, its lands and seas. But even without high rates of infections from the virus, the impact of the pandemic has been widespread, and profound.

Ben Doherty

The Guardian

12 March 2021

'Masking works': Austin fights back as Texas loosens Covid-19 restrictions

Local jurisdictions have decided to keep their coronavirus safety protocols, drawing ire from Texas' state politicians.

Alexandra Villarreal

The Guardian

14 March 2021

WHO mission to Wuhan to publish COVID-19 origins report this week

The much-anticipated report from the international mission to Wuhan to investigate COVID-19's origins is set to be published, following intense US and Chinese pressure over its contents.

AFP

Channel News Asia

15 March 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Epidemiological and clinical characteristics of early COVID-19 cases, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

This study describes the epidemiological and clinical characteristics of the first few hundred cases of COVID-19 identified in the country, including estimates of sensitivity and specificity of selected symptoms.

Nicola L Boddington et al.

Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 99, No. 3 2021

Access to female contraceptives by Rohingya refugees, Bangladesh

This study aims to determine the prevalence of the use of contraceptives among female Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and its associated factors.

Md Nuruzzaman et al.

Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 99, No. 3 2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

[GLOBAL WEBINAR SERIES] The Fight Against Covid-19: A Humanitarian View in the Philippines

How is it like combating the COVID-19 pandemic in an archipelago country like the Philippines? What does it mean to be the unsung heroes confined inside the laboratory? This webinar examined these questions.

Recorded Webinar

25 February 2021

Precision Public Health: Transforming Health with Data

This webinar explored some real-life applications of Precision Public Health and examined case studies on how clever use of data can fundamentally transform public health.

Recorded Webinar

2 March 2021

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

The case against cash

While there are no problems with cash transfers per se, the financial technology we rely on to implement these transfers remains problematic. Not only does it enable the surveillance of already vulnerable people on a significant scale, it also benefits service providers monetarily.

Paul Currion

The New Humanitarian

22 February 2021

Predict, prepare, protect: How to manage risk in a post-COVID world

The world's ability to predict the future has greatly improved. As such, the 2021 generation of leaders should use this ability to shoulder this historic responsibility to deal with the current global disaster and strengthen international systems to prepare for future disasters.

Christina Bennett and Daniel Clarke The New Humanitarian

23 February 2021

Then and Now: 25 years of aid worker (in)security

From the 1990s when most aid workers felt protected due to their perceived neutrality and apolitical goodwill to the 2000s when attacks on aid workers became more common, hostility towards aid workers have increased significantly. This has led to evolving approaches to security that keep workers safe while still allowing humanitarian operations to continue.

Jessica Alexander and Ben Parker The New Humanitarian

25 February 2021

As disaster response changes, data lead the way

COVID-19 has become a watershed moment in the awareness of the power of reliable data in informing policy decision. As disasters increase in intensity and frequency, the creation of collaborative data-driven efforts to inform targeted disaster response and preparedness, has also risen in importance.

Amarica Rafanelli

DirectRelief

27 February 2021

Opinion: 5 steps to tackle climate disasters during a pandemic

Many regions are grappling with not just COVID-19, but also various other challenges including population movement and climate disasters. This article looks at the suggestions made by over 40 leaders in the field to improve the sector's COVID-19 responses.

Alexander Matheou

Devex

4 March 2021

How the integration of health and disaster risk reduction can set Asia-Pacific on a path towards resilience

While the COVID-19 pandemic was unexpected, its effects could have been mitigated by the global guidelines put in place to manage similar occurrences. However, the lack of the health-based hazard planning in most national disaster risk reduction strategies has led to the current situation. Going forward, a multi-sectorial, multi-hazard approach is vital.

Omar Hussein Amach UNDRR

5 March 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

The role of social capital in disaster resilience in remote communities after the 2015 Nepal earthquake

Social capital is widely regarded as a key element in recovery from and resilience to disasters. Yet, little attention has been paid to the specificities of what supports or undermines remote rural communities' social capital in disasters. This paper assesses how different forms of social capital 'matter' more in different phases of recovery.

Sarita Panday et al.
International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, Vol. 55

2021

IASC operational guidance on data responsibility in humanitarian action

This system-wide Operational Guidance, which is a first, will ensure concrete steps for data responsibility in all phases of humanitarian action.

Inter-Agency Standing Committee Results Groups 1 on Operational Response

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Covid-19 and the Future of Digital Humanitarian-

This webinar explored the digital trends and risks emerging in the COVID-19 context. It delved into themes including: successful examples of digital technology, like mobile money for cash assistance; risks exacerbated by the crisis, including the digital divide; and changes to the ecosystem and how humanitarian actors engage with other actors.

Recorded Webinar

24 February 2021

Shifting into a Forecast-based Regional Humanitarian Response - ARMOR Webinar Series #3

This webinar discussed how ASEAN has addressed various impacts of climate change through anticipatory action as well as the potential applications to be implemented for disaster preparedness purposes.

Recorded Webinar

8 March 2021

MIGRATION

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Malaysia says undocumented migrants will not be arrested during mass Covid-19 vaccination programme

To ensure the success of Malaysia's vaccination programme, the government has assured undocumented migrants that they will not be detained when they come forward for the vaccine. However, with the government having gone back on similar assurances made last year, there has an uphill task ahead to build trust.

Ram Anand The Straits Times

18 February 2021

A year since COVID-19, dorm life leaves migrant workers still hoping for better

Although it has been a year since the pandemic started to hit the migrant worker dormitories in Singapore and 6 months since they were able to return to work, life inside the dormitories has barely changed with strict restrictions still enforced.

Derrick A Paulo and Sara Grosse Channel News Asia

21 February 2021

Nepal's bid to deter women's job migration draws fury

Recently unveiled by the government, a new measure would require women aged under 40 to provide the consent of their families and local offices to travel abroad. Justified by the authorities as a move to clamp down on human trafficking, this measure is being heavily criticized by people and activists on the ground.

Lekhanath Pandey MSN

25 February 2021

One year on: How the pandemic has affected refugees, asylum seekers, and migration

While the high death rates predicted to hit refugees and IDPs living in camps and urban areas due to COVID-19 have not come to pass, the impacts of the pandemic on these groups have been far more pernicious.

Eric Reidy The New Humanitarian

10 March 2021

Migrant worker segregation doesn't work: COVID -19 lessons from Southeast Asia

Migrant workers have been blamed for outbreaks in their countries of residence due to major outbreaks in these populations. However, policy responses concentrating on discriminatory actions have not solved the root of their vulnerabilities, and have instead increased the discrimination they face from the rest of the community.

Peter Vandergeest The Conversation

10 March 2021

Achieving safe, orderly and regular migration in Asia-Pacific

From 10 to 12 March, the Asia-Pacific region reviewed the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration adopted by United Nations member states in 2018. This review highlighted the situation of migrants in the region, best practices and gaps in the framework.

Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Chihoko Asada-Miyakawa and Cynthia Veliko The Jakarta Post

12 March 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Populations, precarity and pandemics: The demographics of inequality and Covid-19 in Southeast Asia

The recent resurgence of cases in countries such as Thailand and Malaysia has further highlighted the link between labour migrants and their poor living conditions. As such, this link between socio-economic conditions and rate of infection must be examined further, with governments taking this into account when creating policies.

Kevin S. Y. Tan and Grace Lim ISEAS Perspective No. 12

2021

Locked down and left out? Why access to basic services for migrants is critical to our COVID-19 response and recovery

This report looks at the "invisible wall" which has blocked migrants from accessing basic services since the start of the COVID -19 pandemic and is now preventing them from accessing vaccines, even where they are included in a country's policies.

N. Hoagland and A. Randrianarisoa Red Cross Red Crescent Global Migration Lab 2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Using the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration as an Interpretative Tool for Legal Practitioners

This webinar brought together experts in the field to discuss the importance of the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and how it can be used in the legal context.

Recorded Webinar

12 February 2021

Migration, Mobility, and the Mekong

This webinar featured a panel of experts to discuss the shifting demographics of the Mekong region and how it is affecting the everyday lives of the people living there.

Recorded Webinar

25 February 2021