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
Bangladesh, Cambodia, Republic of China, Fiji, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Republic of Korea, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam.
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:
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