

Empowering Women

Asia consultation, Hong Kong Nov 14 - 18

PURPOSE OF PAPER

The purpose of this paper is to provide the basis for a discussion on women's empowerment, especially in the context of Asia, at the Anglican Alliance Asia consultation. It establishes some basic information on the level of women's empowerment in various regions throughout the Communion and the main challenges women in these areas continue to face. The effectiveness of initiatives implemented thus far is explored and the experience of the Anglican Church is also considered. Potential options for future work by the Church, possibly specific to some regions, are presented.

1. CONCEPT OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Amongst other definitions, empowerment may be looked upon as the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such ability.¹ To this day, women perform 66% of the world's work, produce 50% of the food, but earn 10% of the income and own 1% of the property.² This striking imbalance is justified by a tracking report of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) published in 2010. It indicates that progress in women's empowerment has been sluggish on all fronts—from education to access to political decision-making.³

The United Nations (UN) considers gender equality and the empowerment of women (MDG 3) to be at the heart of the MDGs and preconditions for overcoming poverty, hunger and disease.⁴ Not only is it an MDG in itself, gender empowerment will accelerate progress on the other MDGs⁵ by promoting:

1) Poverty reduction (MDG 1)

- research conducted by the Royal Commonwealth Society confirms that young women who are economically empowered in decent, secure work or successful small businesses are better equipped to create a solid future for themselves and their families⁶
- mothers are more likely to spend their income on the welfare of the household, thereby creating conditions for the next generation to move out of poverty

3) Reduced under-five mortality (MDG 4)

- children also benefit from better maternal education through improved hygiene practices, better nutrition, lower fertility rates, and therefore higher per child expenditures

4) Improved maternal health (MDG 5)

- more education, greater control over own fertility and better nutrition improve expectant mothers' chances for healthy pregnancies and normal births

¹ Naila Kabeer, *Resources, Agency, Achievements*: (published in July 1999)

² UN Women, *Facts & Figures on Women, Poverty & Economics* (accessed on Aug 2011)

³ United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2010* (accessed on Aug 2011)

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, *Achievement of the MDGs not on Track* (edited on June 2008)

⁶ The Royal Commonwealth Society, *Because You're a Girl – Growing Up in the Commonwealth* (published in 2011)

2) Universal primary education (MDG 2)

- the greater the mother’s control over resources in the household, the more resources households allocate to children’s education, health and nutrition

5) Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other infectious diseases (MDG 6)

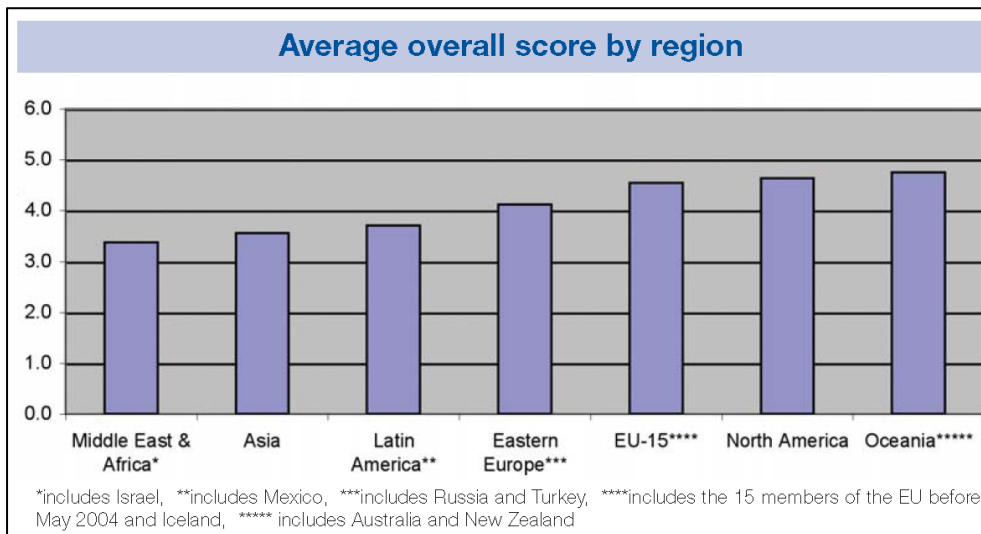
- reduced likelihood of contracting HIV and other diseases

Therefore, it is clear that women’s empowerment should be pursued not merely as a human rights priority, but as a critical means of alleviating poverty worldwide.

2. WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT ACROSS THE REGIONS

The chart below is adapted from the 2005 World Economic Forum publication. It ranks regions across the world, based on 5 dimensions of women’s empowerment – namely economic participation, economic opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment and health and well-being.⁷ Countries are ranked on a scale of 1.0 to 7.0, with those faring the best given a score of 7.0. The graph presents general findings on the average level of women’s empowerment from different regions relative to each other. As the indicators used may not be all-encompassing, results should be taken as indicative rather than conclusive. They do however indicate the relative levels of women’s empowerment in the regions of the world.

The International Anglican Women’s Network (IAWN) exists to enable and empower women in the Anglican Communion, and has identified combating HIV, malaria and Tuberculosis among its priorities.



DISCUSSION POINT 1

Consider the general level of women’s empowerment in your country with reference to (i) economic opportunity and participation, (ii) health, (iii) education, (iv) political participation.

2.1. Africa

Most African countries, such as Nigeria and Sierra Leone, rank relatively low in terms of women’s empowerment. In the Commonwealth gender equality report card (2011), countries are measured

⁷ World Economic Forum, *Women’s Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap* (published in 2005)

against a range of indicators from life expectancy, education, political participation to wages. In fact, UN Women noted that many African women and their communities are worse off today than they were a decade ago. For millions of African women, hunger, violence, exclusion and discrimination are their everyday realities.

That being said, work on providing healthcare and support has been undertaken by the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa (CAPA). Alongside other faith-based organisations, the Church accounts for over 60% of quality health care service delivery. Making primary healthcare services accessible and affordable is especially crucial to women in the remote communities of Africa.

On the political front, UN electoral intervention and parliamentary quotas in post-conflict societies, such as Rwanda and Burundi, has vastly increased women's political participation. Despite real efforts to promote equal representation of men and women in parliament, a majority of women may still remain disadvantaged vis-à-vis men with regard to education, legal rights, health and access to resources.⁸

2.2. Latin America and the Caribbean Islands

Given the diversity in economic structures between Latin American countries, the level of women's empowerment is unexpectedly similar across the region. Due to historical circumstances, many of the Latin American states have already revised their constitutions to explicitly guarantee equality between men and women. Regional growth through international trade has also brought about an increase in employment of ethnic or migrant women; some of whom are able to create small businesses, allowing them to be more financially capable. Nonetheless, data published by the World Economic Forum in 2005 indicates that economic participation of women in Latin America remains extremely low, even when economic opportunities are abundant.⁹ These trends suggest a greater role the Church may play in helping women take advantage of opportunities for greater economic empowerment, including by providing access to finance through micro-finance schemes.

In Latin America, economic, social and human indicators of quality of life and development are consistently lower among indigenous women. Work initiated by Primate's World Relief Fund (PWRDF) emphasizes training for capacity building and advocacy, policy work, and the building and strengthening of networks and grassroots groups. Regional networks, for instance the Women's Pastoral Training Program and the Continental Network of Indigenous women in Guatemala, have been able to train more female leaders and open more spaces for women's participation in development. These communities benefit as women take their places in public deliberation and decision-making.¹⁰

2. 3. Pacific Islands

Women's empowerment in the islands largely varies across the region. A ranking published by the Royal Commonwealth Society indicates that the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea were countries where women found it hardest to survive.

In the Pacific, the UNDP is working with governments to advance women's legal rights and access to justice.¹¹ While women in the Pacific islands now have equal access by law to participate fully in

⁸ Elizabeth Powley, *Rwanda: Women Hold Up Half the Parliament* (published in June 2010)

⁹ World Economic Forum, *Women's Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap* (published in 2005)

¹⁰ Primate World Relief and Development Fund, *Latin America-Caribbean Program* (accessed on Aug 2011)

¹¹ United Nations Development Programme, *Fast Facts: Gender Equality and Democratic Governance* (published in Jul 2011)

political processes, a research paper from the Australian National University claims that there remains discrimination at all political levels and cultural opposition to women’s involvement. Violence and physical intimidation are common especially in rural areas, where women still lack the power to have their voices heard. Only 41 of 2,875 candidates were women in Papua New Guinea’s recent national elections.¹² This phenomenon is visible in the Solomon Islands as well. This suggests that accompanying legislation, there is a need for greater support in subverting widespread cultural prejudice against women’s political involvement.

With Christianity as a critical factor in political formation and a defining factor in the Pacific Islands for education, health, civil society and values, the church has great potential and responsibility in promoting women’s social and political participation. Formal women groups, such as the IAWN and Mothers’ Union, already established across most Pacific islands can continue to play an important role in building a more supportive environment for women’s leadership.

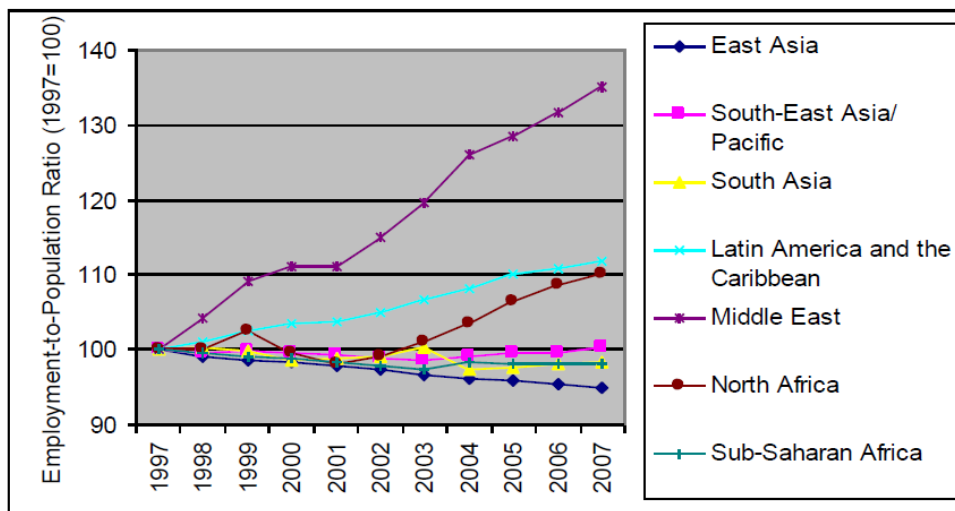
2. 4. South Asia

In Asia, the level of women’s empowerment is vastly different across the continent. The region of South Asia, in particular, encompasses mostly developing countries. In comparison to the Southeast Asian cities, a large majority of South Asian countries have vulnerable economies; women in these places generally lack economic opportunities and basic social protection to a greater extent.

2.4.1. Increasing Economic Opportunities

A World Bank publication (2009) highlights that South Asia has the lowest female participation rate in its formal labour force, as compared to the rest of the world.¹³ In fact, as seen in the chart included below, female employment vis-a-vis population ratios has stagnated in the past decade, despite growth in the manufacturing and services industry of the region.

Figure 11: Female Employment-to-Population Ratio (1997-2007; 1997=100)



Source:

International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2008

¹² Pamela Thomas, *Gender, Civil Society and Political Participation* (accessed on Aug 2011)

¹³ World Bank, *Accelerating Growth and Job Creation in South Asia* (edited in Oct 2009)

In terms of understanding the economic challenges faced by women in South Asia, the latter can be broadly categorised into three groups – namely women in the subsistence agricultural sectors, low-wage women labourers and female migrant workers.

-Women in the Subsistence Agricultural Sectors

As a group traditionally denied land ownership or claims to inheritance, many women in the rural areas have little or no access to economic opportunities. They are usually limited to finding work in the subsistence agricultural sector and confined to managing their households. This is especially so in India and Pakistan, where rural women are often unable to move freely around their communities and find themselves in charge of the household when men in the family migrate to the cities for work. As a report by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare of India reveals, men there are twice as likely as women to be employed, albeit with very small per annum increases in women's employment.

-Low-Wage Women Labourers

On the other hand, women labourers in the urban city centres of countries such as China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka or Thailand, are often low-paid workers most vulnerable to economic shocks.¹⁴ Recent trends of globalisation and the shift of productive capacities from the global North to the South have made Asia one of the key recipients of foreign investment. Much as this has brought about economic opportunities for women, this dependence can be devastating during economic downturns. The recent global economic crisis has been quoted to plunge a further 22 million women into unemployment, and is expected to lead to female unemployment rate of 7.4%. Additionally, Sri Lanka and Cambodia have each lost 30,000 mostly female garment industry jobs to date (the garment industry accounts for at least half of export earnings in both countries).¹⁵ In China, women have often been the first to be laid off as state-owned enterprises have down-sized and become more efficient.

The World Bank highlights two ways in which women are disproportionately affected during global economic crises¹⁶ :

- a reduction in women's income – usually due to the tightening of microfinance lending or a fall in remittances back home – potentially increasing household poverty risk
- an increase in hours of work for women – such as in entering the labour force and adjusting their time and effort in the home
- altering of fertility and adjusting investments in children's health or education

According to the ILO Bureau for Gender Equality, women's lower employment rates, weaker control over property and resources, concentration in informal and vulnerable forms of employment with lower earnings, and less social protection, all place women in a weaker position than men to weather the crises.¹⁷

-Women Migrant Workers

Female migrant workers constitute 50% or more of all migrant workers in Asia¹⁸ , usually holding jobs at the bottom of the employment ladder such as labour-intensive manufacturing and domestic work.¹⁹ They are often victims of double discrimination, both as women and as migrants.

¹⁴ I. Guérin, Santosh Kumar and I. Agier, *Microfinance and Women's Empowerment* (published in Nov 2010)

¹⁵ UN Women, *Facts & Figures on Women, Poverty & Economics* (accessed on Aug 2011)

¹⁶ World Bank, *How Do Women Weather Economic Shocks?* (published in Dec 2010)

¹⁷ UN News Centre, *Number of Unemployed Women to Soar Amid Economic Crisis* (published in Mar 2009)

¹⁸ UN Women, *Women Migrant Workers* (accessed on Aug 2011)

The Philippines remains the largest supplier of labour in Asia; its annual outflow represents about 1% of the labour force.²⁰ Most common risks associated with labour migration include:

- trafficking and forced labour
- recruitment malpractices, i.e. fraudulent job offers and exorbitant placement fees
- sexual and physical harassment
- under or non-payment of wages

Mitigating these risks to women migrant workers and strengthening their social safety net is a real challenge. It not only entails providing on-the-ground legal support and counselling for women migrant workers, but also calls for greater networking and co-operation between exporting and importing countries of South Asian labour. Another obstacle will be in encouraging these migrant workers against cultural consumerism and to make more informed decisions with regards to managing their already minimal finances.

2.4.2. Improving Education

For every 100 boys out of school, there are still 117 girls in the same situation across the world. Broadly speaking, South Asia is the region where, apart from Sub-Saharan Africa, girls' education lags most severely behind boys.²¹ There is, however, great variation between countries and increases with secondary or tertiary education. The UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) outlines key barriers specific to educating girls²² :

- family earnings – opportunity costs of education
- lack of legal frameworks around education
- expectations and treatments of girls and boys from early stages of childhood
- issues of safety and security around school affecting girls

Share of education in government expenditure is minimal and GNPⁱ is low in South Asia, particularly so in Bangladesh and Pakistan (2.2% & 2.1% respectively). Elsewhere in East Asia, education expenditures are over 3%.²³ However, closing the gender gap in education is a multi-faceted challenge not solely affected by government expenditure.

Rising costs of education is a major problem in South Asia. In Vietnam, recently introduced fees for education have almost certainly contributed to the growing trend in early dropout. This factor is even more so reflected in China, where it is reported that a family with one or more children studying in school or kindergarten spends nearly a third of an urban household's annual income on children education. While China's rural residents usually spend only half as much as their urban counterparts, as a proportion of their income, education costs are even steeper for them.²⁴ Poor training facilities, low wages and a concomitant loss in professional status have been reasons that enrolments for teacher training have fallen considerably. Consequently, quality of education in South Asia remains low, with high student-teacher ratios especially in the rural regions.

In 2005, UNICEF estimates that South Asia, alongside Africa, will not meet the gender parity goal in primary education at its current pace of progress.²⁵ Precisely because education is one of the keys

¹⁹ International Labour Organisation, *Facts on Labour Migration in Asia* (published in Aug 2006)

²⁰ *Ibid*

²¹ Australian Int Dev Assistance Bureau, *Gender and education in Asia and the Pacific* (pub in Jun 1994)

²² UNGEI, *Overcoming Barriers To Girls' Education In South Asia* (published in 2009)

²³ Australian Int Dev Assistance Bureau, *Gender and education in Asia and the Pacific* (pub in Jun 1994)

²⁴ China Daily, *Education Costs One Third of Family Income in China* (updated in Aug 2006)

²⁵ UNICEF, *Millennium Development Goals: Education* (accessed on Aug 2011)

to unleashing the female potential and equipping woman with necessary literacy and skills to join the formal workforce, the challenge of education should be prioritised.

2.4.3. Eliminating Violence against Women

The Primates note gender violence as a global phenomenon and all but a small percentage of such violence is perpetrated by men against women, with devastating effects on individuals, families and societies.²⁶ Violence against women encompasses a wide range of abuses, including physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family and in the general community, including trafficking, sexual abuse of children, dowry-related violence and other traditional practices harmful to women. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) states that the greatest numbers of victims are believed to come from Asia, amongst other regions.²⁷ Dowry murder occurs predominantly in South Asia, where official crime statistics in India indicate that close to 7000 women were killed in 2002 as a result of this practice.²⁸

The costs of violence against women are enormous; they impoverish not only individuals, families, communities and governments, but also reduce the economic development of each nation. A UN Report on violence against women stated that this issue will not be eradicated without political will and commitment at the highest levels to make it a priority locally, nationally, regionally and internationally.²⁹ Beyond state legislation, in addition, socio-cultural attitudes that reinforce women's subordinate place in society will also have to be eliminated.

2.5. Southeast Asia

The empowerment of women takes a different form in the more developed countries of South East Asia (SEA), in comparison to their South Asian counterparts. Women here enjoy access to better health and sanitation facilities. They have more control over their finances and greater decision-making influence. State legislation granting women equal rights to inheritance, basic education and divorce tend to be more comprehensive. Nonetheless, empowerment of SEA women is very much still an on-going process.

2.5.1. Career Development

This challenge may be limited to women from the more developed countries, but remains a stark reality in the wealthier Asian states. Women face barriers in climbing the upper levels of management in Asia, notably Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore. In Japan, for instance, even with the Equal Employment Opportunity Law, the percentage of women holding management jobs in Japanese companies and the government had only rise about 10 points from 1985 to 2005 – a minimal improvement for a 20-year long period.³⁰ A study concluded that major barriers to Indian women's advancement to corporate leadership include lack of mentoring of women, lack of awareness by women of company politics and an inhospitable corporate culture.³¹ The ILO further suggests that perceptions of the social and occupational roles of men and women often overly influence appointment decisions. Many decision-making structures are wholly or mostly composed

²⁶ Anglican Communion, *Letter to the Churches of the Anglican Communion from the Primates of the Anglican Communion* (published in Jan 2011)

²⁷ UNFPA, *Violence Against Women Fact Sheet* (accessed on Aug 2011)

²⁸ UNIFEM, *Violence against Women* (published in Nov 2007)

²⁹ UN General Assembly, *In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence Against Women* (published in Jul 2006)

³⁰ Rakesh Chandra, *Women Empowerment in India* (published in Dec 2007)

³¹ SHRM India, *Perspectives of Women in Management in India* (published in 2009)

of men, contributing to a general condition of gender blindness and incapacity to recognize the presence of qualified women.³²

2.5.2 Political Participation and Women Leadership

Only 19% of the world’s parliamentarians are women and discrimination against women persists in laws and practices.³³ In terms of leadership, gender imbalances also exist in many civil society organisations.

Commonly referred to as the “Asian Paradox”, an analysis at regional level reveals a very low rate of representation of women in power structures and decision-making positions in quantitative terms. This is so despite having women historically reaching very high power levels, as chiefs of state, prime ministers, presidents and general secretary in political parties in countries such as Sri Lanka and the Philippines.³⁴

Results from a gender analysis across 7 SEA countries suggest that at all levels, women are mainly concentrated in less prestigious positions with a reduced Budget, and/or positions related to issues symbolically linked to women. Some examples are namely health, education and social welfare aspects. When they hold decision-making positions, the fact of being in minority in a world of men weakens the initiatives that they wish to or could take for promoting gender equality and for eliminating discrimination against women.³⁵

DISCUSSION POINT 2

- a) *Prioritise the challenges women in your respective countries are facing.*
- b) *Share what has been done so far in meeting the challenges in these areas.*

CASE STUDIES OF WOMEN EMPOWERED ACROSS THE REGION

1. Financial education programme by Mothers’ Union in conjunction with Five Talents

Objective(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to provide a holistic approach to empowering some of the most marginalised peoples in the world • meet MDGs of (i) reducing poverty, (ii) increasing the participation of women and girls in education and employment, (iii) tackling HIV/AIDS and improving child health
Project Location(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burundi, Malawi and Sudan
Project Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • women are first equipped with basic literacy and numeracy skills and become accredited learners, before learning business skills and money management • groups form community-based organisations to give strength to their savings credibility, and to promote security for group members • each week group members come and contribute to the overall savings and group members are able to receive small loans to meet the start up costs of a small business initiatives

³² International Labour Organisation, *Glass Ceiling: Women in Management* (Updated in 2004)

³³ United Nations Development Programme, *Fast Facts: Gender Equality and Democratic Governance* (published in Jul 2011)

³⁴ Carla Kaehler and Paula de Dios Ruiz, *Gender Analysis of Women's Political Participation in 7 SEA Countries* (published in 2008-2009)

³⁵ *Ibid*

2. HIV education centre by St. John's Cathedral, Hong Kong

Objective(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to raise health awareness amongst migrant workers, when their needs are not prioritised by the local government and medical services are not easily accessible meet MDGs of (i) reducing poverty, (ii) increasing the participation of women and girls in education and employment, (iii) tackling HIV/AIDS and improving child health
Project Location(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hong Kong
Project Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provision of reproductive health (including HIV/AIDS, sexual and women health) education and awareness programmes mainly to cater to foreign domestic workers from the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and India organising a series of educational programmes including an annual AIDS Festival campaigning in neighbouring countries, such as Singapore and Malaysia, for a day off per week for domestic workers

3. Maternal health programme by Episcopal Relief & Development

Objective(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to support the achievement of MDG 5, which charges the international development community with improving maternal health, and the integrated effort to reduce the mortality rate of children and women's empowerment address the barriers preventing many women in developing countries from receiving maternal health care, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> delays in accessing the health facility delays in the decision-making at home to seek medical attention delays in receiving care at the health facility
Project Location(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dominican Republic
Project Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> partnership with a clinic on a community health program to address the needs of pregnant women and their children in San Pedro de Macoris programme trains local health promoters to educate communities on skills in pre-natal and neonatal care as well as tuberculosis, malaria and dengue fever prevention and the prevention of complications from chronic disease aims to reach over 5,000 women of child-bearing age between 2008 and 2011

4. Peace-building workshops by the Women's League of Burma, in partnership with PWRDF

Objective(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to work collectively to advance women's strategic participation in the peace and democracy movement make calls at local, national and international levels to eliminate discrimination and violence against women in Myanmar
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Project Location(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Myanmar
Project Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Peace Builders’ training workshops primarily to build the capacity of women to understand gender issues and systematic violence against them • make calls at local, national and international levels to eliminate discrimination and violence against women in Burma • raise community awareness and develop understanding of the importance of addressing women’s strategic needs for long lasting peace and democracy • women and other community members who attend the training become trainers who then commit themselves to become lifelong advocates

DISCUSSION POINT 3

- a) *Are there any of the case studies useful in meeting the specific needs of women in your local communities?*
- b) *Which one of them would be most feasible for future implementation? **OR** If there are already similar projects implemented in your countries in what ways are they different from the case studies discussed so far?*
- c) *Which of the issues do you feel is a priority for empowering women?*

ⁱ **Gross National Product (GNP)** is the market value of all products and services produced in one year by labour and property supplied by the residents of a country, i.e. allocates production based on ownership