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## **Women an untapped resource**

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English

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THE current economic crisis is a chance to advance the economic opportunities of women in the region, and in the process, aid recovery and growth, UN undersecretary-general Noeleen Heyzer said yesterday at the 14th Apec Women Leaders Network meeting.

'Women represent an untapped resource for most economies in the Asia-Pacific,' said Dr Heyzer, who is also the executive secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for the Asia-Pacific (Escap).

'Our region loses US\$42-47 billion a year by restricting women's access to employment. Up to US\$17 billion a year are lost in the region due to gender gaps in education.'

Speaking to some 600 women leaders from business, government, academia and civil society, Dr Heyzer shared Escap research which showed the economic cost of restricting women's access to work, education and health services.

Even though women have 'emerged as the flexible labour force par excellence', she said, 'their entry into the workplace has coincided with trends towards outsourcing and subcontracting; relegating women's jobs to the informal sector without any job security or benefits'.

Especially in this current economic crisis, many of these structures and systems pose inherent risks to women's economic contributions, raising their vulnerabilities.

The extensive government spending now being rolled out in many economies could incorporate policies that would bring about more inclusive and sustainable development, Dr Heyzer said.

She suggested monitoring public expenditure along gender lines, investing in social protection and sustainable agriculture, promoting intra-regional trade as a buffer against economic shocks, as well as protecting micro-credit - a lifeline for many women and the small businesses that they run.

In the long term, more needs to be done to improve access of girls and women to education and training, and, increased corporate social responsibility to protect pay equity, she added.

The recommendations made by the Apec Women Leaders Network as a result of the two-day meeting, echoed Dr Heyzer's views, calling upon Apec leaders to invest in policies and programmes that promote gender equality and women's economic security.



## **UN urges govts to tap women to fight global downturn**

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English

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SINGAPORE, Aug 5 (Reuters) - Governments in the Asia Pacific should come up with more stimulus projects that help drive an economic recovery by tapping into the female labour force, rather than just creating construction jobs that mainly employ men, a senior U.N. official said on Wednesday.

U.N. Under Secretary-General Noeleen Heyzer said governments should also spend on health, education and agricultural services to create jobs for women.

"Women represent an untapped resource for most economies in Asia Pacific," Heyzer told an Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) seminar on women's affairs. "Our region loses between \$42 and \$47 billion a year by restricting women's access to employment."

The Asia-Pacific has the world's second highest ratio of employed women of working age at 49 percent -- mainly low-skilled workers in labour-intensive manufacturing industries, such as textiles and apparels, leather products, and electronics.

Governments around the world have launched huge stimulus packages to fight the worst downturn in decades, with many using infrastructure projects to create jobs and growth.

Battered by the contraction of trade, the region's developing countries' average growth rate has fallen to 2.8 percent this year from 8.8 percent in 2007, despite the robust growth rates of China and India, Heyzer said.

"We must make sure that growth is more inclusive and socially equitable," Heyzer told ministers and women leaders from 21 Asia Pacific economies, adding governments needed to do "gender budgeting", ensure funding for micro-credit schemes and include women in steps to improve food production and food security.

Another 24.8 million people could lose their jobs as the crisis unfolds, rolling back development gains made over the last 10 years, said Heyzer, also executive secretary for the U.N. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (Reporting by Nopporn Wong-Anan; Editing by Neil Chatterjee)