



# GENDER AFFAIRS PROGRAMME 4<sup>TH</sup> GENDER FOCAL POINT CONFERENCE 2019

2-5 DECEMBER 2019 | HANOI, VIETNAM

*Gender Empowerment, Sustainability and Resource Mobilization*



The Gender Focal Point Conference has become an annual tradition of the Colombo Plan—Gender Affairs Programme (GAP), endeavoring to foster an enduring relationship with all Colombo Plan member states as well as develop an advocacy platform to respond to pressing and prevalent global and regional issues concerning vulnerable groups, such as women and children.

In an effort to expand its support amongst member states, in July 2019 GAP partnered up with the Vietnam Women's Union to strengthen the capacity of the Gender and Development Faculty within the Vietnam Women's Academy.

To honor of the annual global campaign 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, on the 3rd of December, GAP and the Vietnam Women's Union debuted their newfound partnership by co-hosting a coalition of international, regional and national government officials in Hanoi, Vietnam for the 4th Gender Focal Point Conference on Gender Empowerment, Sustainability and Resource Mobilization.

The 4th Gender Focal Point Conference was held at the Center for Women and Development, where a number of high level government officials from countries the following countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Fiji, Indonesia, Iran, Korea, Lao, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and United States, in addition to representatives from a number of ministries, agencies, embassies inter-

national organizations, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations working in the field of gender affairs in Vietnam were in attendance.

Colombo Plan's Gender Affairs Director, Ms. Tooba Mayel, along with GAP team led the vision and mission of this year's Gender Focal Point Conference, with a focus on economic sustainability and empowerment of vulnerable groups, namely women, boys and girls, but also retention and sustenance of institutions, utilizing the best use

of its resources available locally, regionally and internationally.

Accordingly, sustainability and resource mobilization are processes safeguarding the longevity of aid established systems and institutions. The conference enabled the delegates with the opportunity to spotlight their respective national agendas concerning: prevention and response to Gender Based Violence (GBV), women's economic empowerment, climate related disasters and its impact on women and children (focus on indigenous women), as well as child protection and development.

Ms. Mayel spoke in respect to the new Gender Strategy, stating "the participation and commitment of each member country is essential to the overall strategy for the expansion and progress of gender empowerment and mainstreaming promoted under the umbrella of the Colombo Plan Gender Affairs Programme. Colombo Plan intends to maneuver these ideas into real action points that can be implemented to support national programs and priorities of each member country. The five year strategy was introduced to member countries with input obtained on national priorities of each nation. Furthermore, CP will exert its efforts towards the establishment of a resilient robust global network portal that will link sectors, experts, programmes and policies regionally for advancement and evolvement of relevant gender issues cross borders".

## Press Conference

On the 2nd of December 2019, the Colombo Plan and the Vietnamese Women's Union (VWU) held a Press Conference to commemorate their new partnership and launch of the 4th Gender Focal Conference.

Over 30 were invited to ask questions and partake in a discussion led by the panelists, the Colombo Plan's Secretary General, H.E. Ambassador Phan Kieu Thu, the VWU Vice President, Mme. Nguyen Thi Tuyet, the VWU Director General of International Relations Department, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Hoai Linh, and CPGAP Director, Ms. Tooba Mayel.



## Opening Ceremony



The 4th Gender Focal Point Conference commenced with an Opening Ceremony led by the Vietnam Women's Union Director General, International Relations Department, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Hoai Linh. The Vietnam Women's Union's President, Her Excellency Mme. Nguyen Thi Thu Ha (Assoc. Prof., PhD), and the Colombo Plan's Secretary-General, Her Excellency Ambassador Phan Kieu Thu (PhD) shared the stage to open the event as well as to mark their new collaborative capacity building programme.

Her Excellency Mme. Nguyen Thi Thu Ha emphasized the boarder significance of the 4th Gender Focal Point Conference: "This conference and its theme are more meaningful when the event takes place when we are reviewing 25-year implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and 5-year implementation of the SDGs...with participants of diverse backgrounds from organizations of similar mandates, I believe that the Conference will contribute greatly to promoting gender equality in member countries of the Colombo Plan." Her Excellency's statement encapsulates the crux of GAP's 5-year strategic plan.

The Chief Guest, the Vice Minister of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA), the Honorable Mr. Lee Tan Dzung, opening remarks highlighted Vietnam's noteworthy achievements in narrowing the gender gap in various fields, in addition to the improvements in women's role and status in Vietnam. He stressed that despite the mentioned positive achievements, Vietnam still faces many challenges. Nevertheless, he incited optimism by concluding his speech with: "to achieve gender equality and empower women in all the sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda, at the aim of "no one left behind", the Government of Vietnam is focusing on many solutions to overcome the challenges...we appreciate the cooperation of governments and intergovernmental organizations in the implementation of cooperative initiatives and programmes. Especially, the gender agenda of the Colombo Plan, which is currently a priority of the Government of Vietnam."



Her Excellency Ambassador Phan Kieu Thu's opening remarks paved the way for the conference moving forward: "Today we come here as individual nations, with separate stories and experiences. My goal and the goal of Colombo Plan is to aid in the development of one voice advocating for the rights and protection of women, boys and girls on a global, regional, national and local level."

Opening Ceremony was attended by embassy officials from Indonesia, Iran, Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka as well as Cuban Ambassador to Vietnam, H.E. Mrs. Lianys Torres Rivera, Mexican Ambassador to Vietnam, H.E. Mrs. Sara Valdes Bolaño, Norwegian Ambassador to Vietnam, H.E. Mrs. Grete Lochen, and Spanish Ambassador to Vietnam, H.E. Mrs. Maria Jesus Figa.

Over 20 reporters from international and national media covered the event, which came to a conclusion with expressed gratitude from the Director of the Colombo Plan Gender Affairs Programme, Ms. Tooba Mayel, and Senior Programme Officer, Dr. Nirekha De Silva. A special mention of appreciation was conveyed to the U.S. State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), who were in attendance, for their continuous support and contribution in sponsoring this event annually through Colombo Plan.

## GAP Progress and Expansion

The Gender Affairs Programme is a fairly new component of the Colombo Plan that originated as a result of a recommendation made in 2012 during the 43rd Consultative Committee meeting held in Indonesia to set up a separate programme focused specifically on gender related issues as well as the rights and protection of children, which then led to the official establishment of Colombo Plan's Gender Affairs Programme in 2014.

The first session of the 4th Gender Focal Point Conference familiarized the delegates with the Gender Affairs Programme (GAP) existing partnerships with governmental and non-governmental agencies in:

⇒ **Afghanistan:** to support women shelters and children support centers as well as the rights and protection of women and children.

⇒ **Indonesia:** to support gender capacity building via knowledge sharing and south-south collaboration.

⇒ **Sri Lanka:** to support leadership mentoring of young women to provide them with more empowered roles in their communities.

⇒ **Vietnam:** to support the capacity of the Gender and Development Faculty within the Vietnam Women's Academy.



## Introducing the GAP's 5-year Strategic Plan

At the 3rd Gender Focal Point Conference held from the 2nd to the 4th of April 2018 in Kathmandu, Nepal, delegates proposed the development of the Gender Affairs Programme (GAP) Strategy. Since then GAP has been working to develop a 5-year strategic plan through internal as well as external consultations, paving the path for a more responsive and influential Gender Affairs Programme.

A rough draft of the GAP 5-year Strategic Plan was introduced to the delegates during the first day of the 4th Gender Focal Point Conference. Dr. Stephen Van Houten, the consultant tasked to develop the GAP 5-year Strategic Plan, led the discourse utilizing the conference as the opportune moment to directly engage with the delegates of the Colombo Plan member states and collect their input to further refine the GAP Strategy.

The conference was constructed to provide the delegates with the opportunity to participate in a group discourse focused on an array of thematic discussion focused on key areas identified in the GAP 5-year Strategic Plan, which are as follows:

1. Strengthen the technical gender expertise of government institutions
2. Develop an advocacy platform to voice concerns
3. Develop a knowledge management system and knowledge hub
4. Expand and sustain resource mobilisation.

Accordingly, the delegates were divided into groups and asked to elaborate on how the Colombo Plan could assist the member states in the recognized 4 key areas in regards to gender affairs and more specific pressing and prevalent issues pertaining to gender-based violence (GBV) response and prevention, gender empowerment and economic sustainability, response to climate related disasters and its impact on women, and Children as well as child protection and child development.



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## Gender Justice— Response and Prevention of Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a phenomenon deeply rooted in gender inequality; globally remaining one of the most predominate human rights violations. GBV is violence directed against a person because of their gender. Both women and men experience gender-based violence but the majority of victims are women and girls.

Delegates from Fiji, Korea, Malaysia, Vietnam, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal and Iran, presented their national policies, legal framework, and actions undertaken to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, and to ensure essential services are institutionalized and timely offered while doing no further harm to the GBV survivor. Currently, most member states use the one-stop crisis management centers (OCMCs) model, which are usually established local hospitals/clinics. OCMCs provide women and girls with access to a range of key services when they have experienced sexual and/or domestic violence. These services include a helpline, a safe shelter, medical treatment, counselling and legal aid.

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## Gender Empowerment — Economic Sustainability



Women's economic empowerment is critical to achieving gender equality and sustainable development. As women makeup half of their societies, they are the key contributors to economies as produces of foods, managers of natural resources and as entrepreneurs and employees

Five delegates from the member states of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Laos and Pakistan, presented on the legal and active measures taken in their country to comprehensively challenge the structural blockages and common gender-discriminatory practices that deny women their basic socio-economic and political rights.

CP member states implement national projects aimed to respond to the deep-rooted problems while aligning themselves to global prioritizes, e.g. the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 5 which is dedicated to gender-equality. Examples of national projects entail home-based industry development as well as government provisions of vocational training for alternative income generating opportunities.





## Response to Climate Related Disasters and its

impact on women and children is becoming a pressing and prevalent topic. Changes in the global climate exacerbate climate hazards and amplify the risk of extreme weather disasters. When a natural disaster occurs, it usually effects poor communities first and worst. Women make up an estimated 70% of those living below the poverty line, thus, they bear the heaviest burdens. Sadly, women are often left out of the conversation about adapting to climate change.

The Sri Lanka delegate showcased how her government is taking measure to corroborate the mainstreaming of women and children into the national disaster management system, as well as highlighting the dire need for systematic gender analysis, utilization and collection of sex-disaggregated data, establishment of gender-sensitive benchmarks and indicators, and developing practical tools to support gender friendly initiatives.

## Children Protection

The Colombo Plan—Gender Affairs Programme mandate extends beyond gender affairs as its scope of work concerns children's rights, child protection and development. Every day, millions of children are forced into labor, child marriages, prostitution or insurgent/armed groups, depriving them of their childhood and basic rights to safety and security. Thus, GAP strives to create a world where every child is free from harm and permitted to enjoy his/her childhood. Without basic protections, children are at the greatest risk of death, disease, poor physical and mental development, homelessness and exploitation.

The delegate from Bhutan presented on the actions undertaken by the Bhutan government to safeguard the protection of Bhutanese children, including legislation that protects children from child labor as well as child marriages. Bhutan was one of the first countries to sign and ratify the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). To adhere to its commitment to protecting children, the Bhutanese government has recently adopted policies that promote protection of disabled children and strengthening mother-child relationship.

GAP plans to work with the Bhutanese government in the near future, as per the delegates request for support in improving government provisions pertaining to child trauma and development.



## Monitoring & Evaluation

M&E is an essential component of any project as it allows you to assess your project against its set targets. If achievements are little to none, then M&E can help you understand the strategic changes required to improve the project, i.e. theory of change.

The delegate from the Philippines presented on her government's current endeavors to link theory of change and gender audit practices and tools that have been developed by the Philippine Commission on Women to strengthen gender equality and women's empowerment through gender-responsive planning and budgeting. In recent years, the Philippines has been cited in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap as one of the top 10 best-performing countries in promoting gender equality.

### *Designing and Implementing Effective M&E Systems*

M&E has been a strength of the Gender Affairs Programme (GAP) since its inception. Nevertheless, with the new addition of GAP M&E Manager, Dr. David Wand, and renewed approach, monitoring and evaluation has taken the forefront of GAP's extended support.

Dr. Wand led the discussion on the designing and implementing effective M&E systems. Afterwards a number of delegates showed interest in GAP's support in training government officials in member states and/or developing M&E tools to further assist in the collection of data and statistics.



## Field Visits

The Gender Affairs Programme and the Vietnam Women's Union arranged field visits for the delegates to expose them to Vietnam's best practices on gender justice and equality.

Accordingly, a group of delegates visited a poultry farm that was initiated as a result of a microfinance programme, aimed at strengthening women's economic empowerment



Another group of delegates visited The Peace House Shelter, which protects survivors of gender-based violence, provides women and children with accommodation and other essential services.



## Closing Ceremony and Gala Dinner

On the final day of the 4th Gender Focal Point Conference, the Colombo Plan—Gender Affairs Programme (GAP) hosted the closing ceremony and gala dinner at The Terrace in the InterContinental Hanoi Westlake Hotel.

All delegates were invited to enjoy a final dinner together and to receive their certificates for completion of the conference. GAP invited Mme. Nguyen Thi Tuyet, the Vice President of the Vietnam Women's Union, as the Chief Guest, to give the closing speech on the successful conference and display of partnership between the GAP and the Vietnam Women's Union.

Her Excellency Ambassador Phan Kieu Thu (PhD) closing remarks captured her hope for the Colombo Plan and its member countries in the near and far future:

*Tomorrow you all will be returning to your home country with newfound knowledge and friendship as well as hope for a better future for all individuals, irrespective of race, color, gender, language, religion, politics, birth or other status. Your work in your home country as well as your participation in this conference, are gradual progresses being made to ensure the protection and promotion of the dignity, equality and absolute rights of all members of society.*

*I ask that you utilize your newfound knowledge and friendships to strengthen enduring South-South Cooperation. I look forward to seeing you all again and hearing about your successful independent as well as collective endeavors in gender affairs and children's right and protections.*

Her Excellency closed the ceremony by sharing her talents with the delegates by performing three songs in three different languages.

The GAP team aims to adhere to Her Excellency's closing remarks by presenting member countries with the opportunities to collaborate as well as facilitate coordination amongst member states to strengthen collective efforts in supporting women and children. The GAP team will also continue to provide member countries with support in all their present and future endeavors to protect and improve the lives of vulnerable groups, such as women and children.

