The East-West Center and Gender Equality: The Multiplier Effect

I pledge to value women’s and men’s contributions equally

#PledgeForParity
For nearly six decades, the East-West Center has provided transformative educational, leadership, and capacity-building experiences for change makers across the US–Asia Pacific region who return home to positively impact their communities.

We have empowered thousands of future women leaders who have thrived in our diverse and inclusive community and sensitized future male leaders to the importance of gender equality. Today, many have a gender equality multiplier effect (GEM) in their professions, communities, and in the region.

Their accomplishments contrast sharply with the persistent reality of gender inequality in the world today. No country has reached gender equality in practice, and some 90 percent of countries still have at least one gender discriminatory law. Lack of opportunity harms not only women but their communities and countries, deprived of their full contributions to governance and the economy. Research demonstrates that advancing women’s equality can add $12 trillion to global growth.*

In response, all UN member countries have adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development agenda, including Goal 5, seeking to “promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.” It is a crosscutting goal, necessary to the success of other goals. SDG5 declares that by 2030 all women and girls must enjoy equal access to quality education, economic resources, and political participation as well as equal opportunities with men and boys for employment, leadership, and decision-making at all levels.

Addressing such critical issues of common concern is the East-West Center’s mission. We are committed to gender equality, which we advance in five ways:

- Empower leaders through advanced education and training with a gender lens
- Provide evidence-based data and informed analysis about gender-related issues
- Support the legal rights of women and children
- Engage communities, global coalitions, networks, and partnerships in support of UN Sustainable Development Goal 5
- Contribute to scholarly work on women and leadership

Empower leaders through advanced education and training with a gender lens

The Changing Faces Women’s Leadership Seminar is a two-week leadership and professional development seminar for women social and business entrepreneurs from Asia, the Pacific, and the United States. It enhances leadership skills and entrepreneurial capacity, promotes an experiential approach to innovative entrepreneurship and leadership through community example, and expands national and regional networks.

The annual #galswithLEI Forum celebrates the Leadership, Entrepreneurship, and Inspiration of female business and social entrepreneurs in generating jobs and strengthening communities. Workshop panelists and special guests include Hawai’i-based established women leaders, millennials, high school girls, and the international Changing Faces Women leaders.

Fertility and Social Policy: The East-West Center works in collaboration with national governments, universities, and research centers in the Asia Pacific region to provide policymakers with information on women’s health, fertility, and economic and social status.

In India, the Center helped conduct national surveys to assess the health and nutrition status of women and children as well as women’s access to family planning. In China, the Center conducted collaborative studies on fertility preferences that helped support the government’s decision to drop the “one-child policy.”

In Asia’s high-income countries, where fertility decline is a concern as women increasingly struggle to combine their career aspirations with their desire to build a family, the Center is collaborating on a major project to assess potential policy responses.

Provide evidence-based data and informed analysis about gender-related issues

Gender and the HIV Epidemic: Working with international partners and national counterparts, the Center has developed two of the most widely used models for generating improved policy responses to the HIV epidemic. In eleven Asian countries it is helping to quantify the risks to women and develop cost-effective programs to help women protect themselves from HIV.

Counting Women’s Work (CWW): CWW is conducting comparative analyses of women’s labor and economic contributions at home (unpaid “women’s work”) and in the market. One question the project addresses is whether women’s and girl’s home responsibilities inhibit their ability to pursue an education or opportunities to earn income. CWW is a project within the National Transfer Accounts (NTA) research network, which is shedding light on the economic impact of changes in population age structure in more than 60 countries around the world.

Women in the Workplace: In a partnership with the Peterson Institute for International Economics, research is illuminating the role that women leaders play in the workplace, and the factors that help and hinder their advancement. One project analyzes survey data of 22,000 public-listed business firms from 91 countries around the world to assess the impact that women are having in senior leadership positions. Results demonstrate that businesses can significantly increase profitability, with a 6 percent “diversity dividend” for companies with at least 30 percent female leaders.
Support the legal rights of women and children

The Asian International Justice Initiative (AIJI) is a partnership between the East-West Center and the WSD Handa Center for Human Rights and International Justice at Stanford University. AIJI promotes the legal rights of women and children in Southeast Asia as part of its work on rule of law. It published the report Inaccurate Numbers, Inadequate Policies on the challenges of assessing the true scale of human trafficking and will produce six episodes on forced marriages and gender-based violence for its TV series on the Khmer Rouge Trials in Cambodia, as well as an international documentary film. AIJI contributed to the Human Rights Resource Centre’s baseline study on abuse of women and child migrants in ASEAN. Several of its Summer Institutes, attended by regional policymakers, have focused on the rights of women and children.

Kiesha Haughton
Managing Director, Maryland Women’s Business Center, which has served more than 5,000 women since 2010

“The phenomenal women that I met in 2010 gave me a broader perspective on entrepreneurship and leadership, highlighting what women globally have in common. The bond we established has led to multiple reunions and hopes for more.”

Kalpana Sankar
Co-founder, Hand in Hand, India, a global microfinance NGO with 3,000 employees and 30,000 volunteers on four continents, credited with creating 1.5 million jobs

“The program’s emphasis on peer mentoring allowed participants to learn from each other’s rich and varied experiences. Each woman’s struggle and success inspires the other to do more, to reach higher, and to conquer bigger obstacles.”

Engage communities, global coalitions, networks, and partnerships in support of UN Sustainable Development Goal 5

The East-West Center co-leads two global coalitions to promote UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 in support of gender equality:

Gender Equality and the Law Global Advisory Taskforce: Together with the UN Global Compact, the Center supports UN member country commitments to reduce discriminatory laws.

Girls, Women, and the Global Goals: Thirty partners have made specific commitments to promote women’s economic participation, address violence against girls and women, and advance women’s leadership in private and public sectors. From 2016 to 2021 this community of practice has made a collective commitment to directly impact over 900,000 individuals in over 60 countries across six continents and spend more than $15 billion with women-owned businesses.

Alumni Networks: EWC Alumni Services foster networking and collaboration of women across programs and countries through follow-on events and social media platforms. Women’s Leadership Retreats bring together alumni across programs and years in cities around the region to create a supportive network for action. A recent connection took an alumna of the Changing Faces entrepreneurship training program to Samoa, where she will work with another alumna to source organic product from local village women for her growing business.
Contribute to scholarly work on women and leadership

*Women and Leadership Around the World* (International Leadership Association Series) features the East-West Center’s Changing Faces Women’s Leadership Seminar as a model for amplifying women’s social and economic impact.

*Gender and the Changing Face of Higher Education in Asia Pacific* is forthcoming from the Asia Pacific Higher Education Research Partnership, of which the East-West Center is a founding and primary member.

The Center is developing a series of books about women leaders in Oceania and the Asia Pacific.

About the East-West Center

Since 1960 the East-West Center has developed generations of leaders who address common issues of critical concern in the Asia Pacific–US region. The Center, founded by the US Congress, promotes better relations and understanding and is committed to a collaborative approach to problem solving and to the value of a diverse and inclusive community.

We bring people together for cooperative study, research, and dialogue to exchange views, build expertise, and develop policy options.

Our international residential campus is located in Hawai‘i, the most multicultural state in the United States. It is adjacent to the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, in Honolulu. The Center’s Washington, DC, office focuses on preparing the United States for an era of growing Asia Pacific prominence.