

# Editorial

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*I raise up my voice—not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard...we cannot succeed when half of us are held back.*

—Malala Yousafzai

Women include half of the worlds' population. In Africa 80% of the agriculture is looked after by women and in Asia 50% of the agriculture is taken care by women. 84% of all the household chores are done by women and they do not get paid for it. In many families, almost 4 out of 10 times the household runs on women's salaries and yet women make up two third of the illiterates in our region. One, out of three women experiences domestic violence and gender discrimination is rampantly experienced and they mostly have no role in decision making either for themselves or their families. Where are we going from here; for the same job, more sincerely done by a woman gets paid lesser than the man, and their health is not a priority at all.

Our region has more anemic, undernourished, diabetic, hypertensive, obese women and our region also boasts of maximum number of premature deliveries compared to the world figures. Any policy directed toward the upliftment of the women's health is not effective because of the sheer numbers, and we need to take steps to empower women toward their own bodies and health. Simple decisions like education, job, planning about their family size, right to decide, right to safe abortion is not possible for them.

Swami Vivekananda, once quoted, "There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved; it is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing." Thus, in order to achieve the status of a developed region, we need to transform its colossal women force into an effective human resource and this is possible only through the empowerment of women.

I feel that planning a good family is one of the most important areas to work on the region. Many countries have been able to check their total fertility rates, and those have been achieved by sheer education, empowerment, making family planning choices available and accessible, and the most importantly the population has realized the value of the size of the families and the benefits accrued not only on the family but the nation at large. We in our region need to focus on womens' health and encourage spacing between the children and promote choices and methods for this and assist couples in making their choice. Many couples get confused on the cafeteria approach offered and are unable to decide and this has resulted in more than 50% of the pregnancies happening in the region are unwanted, leading to physical, emotional and financial stress. The medical fraternity is feeling challenged because of lack of time to counsel and assist in making choice and this needs political will and empowering the mid level healthcare providers into educating and counselling beneficiaries in making informed choices. This, of course, needs strong political will and commitment of the healthcare providers as every life counts and every person born has the right to a healthy life.

I firmly believe that we need to be the change which we want to see in the world. If all of us start feeling and taking small steps toward building health of the women of our country and start empowering families on values of education and good health then our battles with disease and dissatisfaction will be won in short time.

I would like to end by this quote from Kofi Annan, the former secretary-general of the United Nations, who once stated: "There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women." Asian women are treading toward empowerment to make conscious, progressive decisions for themselves. Let us assist and nurture them in their endeavor.



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