



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women

Press Release
EMBARGOED
Until 12.00 Noon, 4 October, 2012

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UN Women Executive Director launches first ever knowledge hub for elected women representatives living in rural areas of South Asia

Knowledge centre to provide information through audio and video to overcome literacy and geographical barriers and ensure support to perform their duties

4 October 2012, Jaipur: In partnership with Governments across South Asia, UN Women's Executive Director Michelle Bachelet and four elected women representatives from South Asia launched the first ever knowledge hub for elected women representatives in rural areas across the region.

Unveiled in the presence of more than 200 women leaders, experts and policy makers, the knowledge hub will use audio and video content in different languages to reach women leaders in remote, cutting past literacy and linguistic barriers.

"This is a huge leap forward for women leaders across South Asia. The Regional Centre for Excellence will ensure that much needed information is available to them in different languages. This will undoubtedly strengthen their leadership and provide them with skills to perform their roles more effectively," said Ms. Bachelet.

Also present at the launch was Bhavana Damor, a three-term *sarpanch* (village head) from Rampur Mewada *Gram Panchayat* (village council) in Rajasthan. "Greater access to information will help us serve our communities more effectively. If our women decide to stand on her own feet, then development will be for all within the community," said Ms. Damor.

Women from Bhutan or Madhya Pradesh will be able to share their experiences by uploading audio-visual content on mobiles using an interactive application, Wi-Net. Zareena Begum from Mahboobnagar in Andhra Pradesh is one of the fifty women who have already used the mobile application. "We are finally able to air our problems and concerns through this application. We just hope someone is listening so that they can be solved," she said.

The centre was launched during a day-long Leadership Summit titled *Dialogue for Change: Women in Politics, Policies and Livelihoods*, attended by senior leaders and delegates from India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. In a message, Krishna Tirath, Hon'ble Minister for Women and Child Development, Government of India acknowledged the role that the Centre would play in empowering and educating women to become efficient leaders.

Hon'ble Minister Kishore Chandra Deo, Minister of Panchayati Raj and Tribal Affairs also conveyed his support: "The key challenges in India are mainly the low level of literacy among women and low level of women's political participation. To overcome them, the Regional Centre of Excellence needs to focus on providing knowledge through different sources."

Women's representation in national parliaments stands between 4 to 34 per cent across countries in South Asia – making a case for stronger policies. At the event, UN Women and the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) also released new research that shows that reservation works as the mere presence of women in these public spaces can transform patriarchal attitudes. Conducted amongst 3000 men and women from *gram panchayats* in three states – Rajasthan, Odisha and Karnataka, the study also finds that women leaders need strong support once they are elected. "Women cannot solely carry the burden of transforming the governing process. Additional action is needed at the policy and individual level. This is why it is encouraging to see in India that the women's reservation bill is underway," said Ms. Bachelet.

The Centre is part of a collaborative programme of UN Women, the Government of India, the Royal Government of Norway and civil society organisations to train 65,000 elected women representatives in 16 districts of 5 states to become more effective leaders. The programme covers Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh, effectively supporting nearly half a million women to participate in *gram sabhas* (village assemblies) meetings and voice their concerns to district officials on health, livelihoods, and water & sanitation. With UN Women's efforts, more women are attending *gram sabha* meetings and have increased knowledge about their duties as elected leaders.

Ms Bachelet is on a three-day visit to India to bring greater attention to women's political empowerment. On Friday 5 October, she will interact with women at a *gram sabha* meeting in Alwar district of Rajasthan.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established in South Asia to accelerate progress on meeting their rights worldwide. For more information, visit www.unwomensouthasia.org or www.unwomen.org

To know more about the virtual centre, visit www.womenchangemakers.net

About the programme: <http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/media-corner/download-brochures/>

The Changemakers film: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EML35JFjr0Y>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/Women-Change-Makers>

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