

**Regional Workshop and Strengthen National Capacity to Address Gender Concerns
in Meeting the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific**

16 - 19 July 2012

Kunming, China

Aide-mémoire

I. Background of the Workshop

The Asia-Pacific region has had remarkable success in reducing extreme poverty and is likely to meet the 2015 Millennium Development Goal (MDG) related target of halving the proportion of people living below US\$1.25. However, much variation exists both within the region, as well as within countries and the benefits of this economic growth have not been equitable, leaving much still to be achieved in terms of social inclusion and, in particular, the advancement of gender equality.

Inclusive and sustainable development requires the full and equal participation of both men and women. A growing body of evidence indicates that gender equality contributes to poverty reduction and sustainable growth. In particular, women's increased education and participation in the labour force have been associated with improved macroeconomic performance. However, women are currently disproportionately represented amongst those living in conditions of poverty and marginalization across the Asia-Pacific region. Women's participation in the labour force is often low as a result of, amongst other factors, discrimination against their employment in higher status sectors, lower education levels and the burden of unremunerated caring responsibilities in the home. According to a recent UNDP report (2010), when women do participate in the paid economy, it is often in the informal sector, where wages are low, regulation of working conditions is not enforced and social protection, such as participation in social security, health and pension schemes, is not accessible.

Thus promoting women's empowerment, particularly their economic empowerment, can be key to both advancing gender equality, the target of MDG #3, as well as to sustainable development and the reduction of poverty (MDG#1). Practice has shown that successful approaches to empower women within sustainable development strategies employ a dual approach, on the one hand, involving initiatives to promote gender sensitivity within all policy and programmes whilst, on the other, formulating and implementing programmes directly aimed at women's economic empowerment.

However, within relevant government sectors, particularly those at the provincial/sub-national and local levels in geographical areas most affected by poverty where interventions can potentially have the most impact, in-depth understanding of the obstacles women face and the capacity to develop strategies to confront these obstacles, are often limited. These gaps currently limit the effectiveness of efforts to enhance levels of women's empowerment, particularly their economic empowerment.

II Strategy and objectives of the project

Thus, through a recently launched project, ESCAP is facilitating the promotion of regional cooperation through strengthening the knowledge base and capacity of participating countries to incorporate gender mainstreaming and equality concerns in meeting the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific. Specifically, the project will aim to contribute to the strengthening of knowledge and enhancing capacity of officials in targeted provincial/sub-national governmental structures within the participating countries¹ to incorporate gender mainstreaming and the achievement of equality in development planning, including specific strategies to promote women's economic empowerment.

In order to do so, an approach comprised of the following elements will be followed in implementing the project:

1. South-South cooperation
2. Knowledge sharing and exchange of good practices
3. Building subnational capacity

The key activities based on the above approach include (1) training workshops, (2) knowledge exchange field visits, and (3) an on-line discussion forum.

III. Workshop and knowledge exchange objectives

This combined workshop and knowledge exchange visit forms part of the above mentioned project and thus will focus on imparting knowledge and practical skills to integrate gender into policies and planning at the district/provincial level towards the achievement of MDGs. This will be an opportunity for participants of the selected countries to learn more about i) how gender can be integrated into economic and relevant social policies and plans at the district/provincial level and ii) exchange knowledge and experiences as well as visit sites of innovative projects being implemented in China to support women's economic empowerment.

¹ Country selection was based on a number of criteria pertaining to the similarity in institutional structures, particularly at subnational / provincial levels, demographic characteristics and Government commitment to improve gender equality.

IV. Format

This learning will take the form of the regional exchange of skills, knowledge and lessons learned from best practices regarding applicable and relevant approaches and methodologies, as well as the introduction of the selected Government officials² to relevant specific thematic issues related to gender mainstreaming in development planning. This will be achieved via presentations on specific topics by the facilitator, ESCAP staff and expert resource persons alongside participants' inputs and contributions in the form of group discussions and applied activities as relevant to their own context and work.

Particular attention will be given to how the advancement of women's economic empowerment can be integrated into various subnational policy and planning processes, as well as the presentation of good practices for dedicated programmes aimed at women's economic empowerment in various contexts. In addition, as noted above, knowledge exchange visits will be organized to innovative projects in China in conjunction with the training workshop, in order to ensure a broad regional sharing of experiences pertaining to gender mainstreaming, in particular for women's economic empowerment.

The experiences and lessons learned from the workshop and knowledge exchange visit, as well as policies and strategies analyzed, will help participants to determine their own priorities and identify next steps they could take to strengthen gender mainstreaming to achieve women's empowerment, particularly economic empowerment, at the sub-national level in their own countries. Indeed, it is envisaged that the participants will seek to apply some of the lessons learnt from the capacity development activities in their own institutional contexts during the course of the year following the Workshop. In a second workshop, planned for 2013, participants will subsequently be invited to share their experiences of having introduced these new approaches.

V. Participation

The Workshop will bring together country teams of sub-national/provincial level (and selected national) decision makers in development policy and planning in the fields of economic policy, relevant areas of social protection and/or rural development from Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia and Philippines.

VI. Expected substantive contributions by participants

Participants will be expected to actively engage in discussions and group work to share expertise on successes and challenges facing governments' ability to promote women's economic empowerment, as well as to identify potential institutional, legal and policy changes. In order to support the application of the skills and insights learned from the Workshop, participants will be asked to identify strategies and priority actions for follow-up. It is envisaged that, with appropriate support, the participants will seek to apply

² Selection criteria for workshop participants: (1) subnational / provincial level decision makers in development policy and planning, (2) engagement in the field of economic policy, relevant areas of social protection or rural development and (3) relative geographical accessibility of the province represented in order to facilitate potential exchange visits.

some of the lessons learnt from the workshop and knowledge exchange visit in their own institutional contexts within a year following the Workshop. Their experiences of this application will then be subject to reflection in a workshop to be held in 2013.

VII. Organizational arrangements

The Workshop will take place in Kunming, China, from 16 to 19 July 2012. It is being organized by ESCAP in partnership with All China Women's Federation (ACWF). ESCAP will prepare training materials and make travel arrangements for all participants; whereas the ACWF will make all logistical arrangements within China, including the knowledge exchange visits to be made to selected sites in and/or near Kunming. Throughout the workshop and on the site visits, both Chinese and English languages will be used. Interpretation will be available.

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