

Statement by Ms. Akiko Yuge
Director, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Tokyo Office
at the East Asia Gender Equality Ministerial Meeting
(Tokyo, 30 June 2006)

Your Excellency Dr. Kuniko Inoguchi, Minister of State for Gender Equality and Social Affairs,
Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,

First of all, I would like to congratulate Her Excellency Minister Inoguchi for her leadership in hosting this unique gathering.

1. MDGs and gender equality

Gender equality and empowerment of women, which is the third Goal of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), is at the core of all the other goals of the MDGs.

National MDG reports are the primary instrument for tracking progress on MDG targets. Almost every developing country has prepared at least one national MDG report, and some countries have prepared several reports. Making sure that national MDG reports are gender-aware, and that gender equality issues are adequately addressed in reporting on each of the Goals is essential. A gender-aware national MDG report would catalyze gender-responsive policy-making and programming, and facilitate more optimal resource allocation.

2. Human development and gender equality

UNDP has championed the concept of human development since 1990 when we commissioned the first Human Development Report. Human development is about empowering women and men. It's about building human capabilities – expanding the range of things that people can do, and what they can be. It's about enlarging people's choices in their lives. The 1995 Human Development Report introduced the gender-related development index (GDI) and gender empowerment measure (GEM). These are now used broadly and internationally as measures of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

3. Gender-Sensitive Budgeting

Let me now turn to gender-sensitive budgeting as I believe this is one of the most critical issues in promoting gender equality. National budgets – the technical instruments through which political commitments are translated into monetary terms – are a reflection of a government's priorities. Often, the differences between men and women are not recognized under the assumption of gender-neutral, broadly applicable policy objectives and instruments. As we are

all aware, policies and mechanisms that seem neutral can in fact prolong or even worsen inequality – inequality between women and men, girls and boys, and different classes and ethnic groups within societies. National budgets are no exception to this.

Gender-sensitive budgeting involves the analysis of national budgets from the perspective of their impact on women and men as well as girls and boys. Gender-sensitive budgeting promotes equity across the development spectrum by identifying who is allocated what in different development fields. These include education, health, and employment – areas that are crucial to building people’s capabilities and reducing poverty.

The concept of gender-sensitive budgeting has to be broadly understood. The budget’s complex design, contents, and negotiation processes also have to be understood. Collaboration among many groups, including civil society organizations, has to take place. By bringing women into budgetary debates and building alliances with a variety of civil society organizations, gender-sensitive budgeting will promote accountability, transparency, and sustainability. It should not be “one-off” initiatives, but rather embedded in ongoing capacity-building efforts.

The challenge is to move from analyzing budgets to formulating them to be gender-sensitive from the start. What should be useful in this meeting is to share country experiences on specific methodologies and strategies on gender-sensitive budgeting. By doing so, we can learn from each other which strategies are effective and what elements are important to make gender-sensitive budgeting successful. Sharing and disseminating good practices within the region should certainly be useful.

With financial contributions from the Government of Japan, UNDP supported gender-sensitive budget analysis in 35 countries in 2004. We also sponsored training of development practitioners, economists, representatives from ministries of finance, professors and others from more than 50 countries in gender budgeting in a series of workshops run by the world’s leading authority in the subject. We are most grateful to the Government of Japan that has been supporting gender equality and women’s empowerment in developing countries through the provision of resources to UNDP/Japan Women in Development Fund for the past 10 years.

4. Closing

In closing, I would like to reaffirm UNDP’s commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women. I look forward to promoting regional cooperation among the countries and organizations represented here to achieve our common goal of gender equality and women’s empowerment.