

**Regional Forum on Gender-responsive Budgeting in Asia and the Pacific
18-19 July 2017, Bangkok**

CONCEPT NOTE

1. Background

As set out in the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as in national laws and policies, achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is essential for economic, social and environmentally sustainable development and enabling women and girls to reach their full potential. At the regional level, the "Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment"¹ was adopted by member States of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in November 2014. Among the four key areas for action highlighted in the Ministerial Declaration are "Strengthen accountability systems" and "Increase financing." One indicator for action in these areas is "Institutionalized gender-responsive budgeting² across the public sector, whether by legislation, regulation or other means."

Building on the principles of good governance related to transparency, efficiency and accountability, gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) serves as a strategy to promote the goal of gender equality and gender mainstreaming by paying attention to revenue raising and spending of government finances. Specifically, it entails: i) an analysis of the gender-differentiated impacts of the budget; and ii) a process of adjusting budgetary decision-making and priorities, in accordance with the differential needs of women and men.

The emphasis on equity and equality of outcome means that resources are allocated according to need and effectiveness, as distinct from a 50/50 allocation of resources between women/girls and men/boys. Gender-responsive budgeting is essentially both a political and technical undertaking, with the potential to be a powerful tool for social transformation and eliminating inequality.³

¹ The Ministerial Declaration was adopted by ESCAP members and associate members at the "Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review" and subsequently as ESCAP Resolution 71/13 on the "Implementation of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment", at the 71st session of the Commission in May 2015.

² The national budgetary processes and policies encompass both resource revenue and expenditure and are responsive to (a) the different needs, interests and priorities of women and men, girls and boys, and (b) the differential impacts of financial expenditure on the lives of women, men, girls and boys. Gender-responsive budgeting may manifest as collection and use of sex-disaggregated data; sex-disaggregated beneficiary assessments and analysis of the impact of a budget on time use; gender aware policy analysis; gender audit; sex-disaggregated public expenditure analysis; sex-disaggregated tax incidence analysis; gender-aware economic policy frameworks and gender budget statements.

³ Oxfam, Action Aid, Care and Women's Organisations Network of Myanmar (2016) A Case for Gender Responsive Budgeting in Myanmar.

In terms of women's economic empowerment, gender-responsive budgeting is beneficial in fostering women's participation in economic decision-making, recognising unpaid work, addressing income gaps, allocating resources that foster women's salaried and entrepreneurial work and in supporting women's access to and control of resources.

While the Asia-Pacific region has made progress in terms of developing laws and policies on women's rights in recent decades, limited financing remains a key obstacle to implementation. Many countries continue to allocate less than one per cent of the national budget to their national women's machineries, face financing gaps as high as 90 per cent for implementing national action plans on gender equality, and receive minimal amounts of foreign development assistance which target gender equality as a main objective.⁴

Overarching challenges faced by countries in the region in advancing GRB initiatives include issues related to the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms, limited leadership and capacity of actors, as well as contextual factors, including budget transparency and the political climate. Aside from these factors, the utility of gender-responsive budgeting in these countries could also be further enhanced through the more extensive disaggregation of data by sex, increased investment in technical capacity as well as the engagement of a broader range of stakeholders, including civil society.⁵

Notwithstanding these obstacles, innovative strategies have emerged from around the region, which provide the basis for useful lessons to be learnt and adaption to national contexts in advancing gender-responsive budgeting towards the achievement of the SDGs and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

2. Objectives of the Forum

The specific objectives of the Forum are as follows:

- i. To build momentum in the advocacy on the importance of gender responsive budgeting in Asia and the Pacific by sharing experiences from across the region;
- ii. To identify key recommendations to strengthen the application of gender-responsive budgeting in national contexts; and
- iii. To enhance dialogue and partnerships around sustainable financing for achieving gender equality and the 2030 Agenda.

Furthermore, in the run-up to this Forum, national consultations have been held in China, Lao PDR and Cambodia with a view to deepen the knowledge, understanding and practical skills of senior officials in the application of gender-responsive budgeting across the various ministries and agencies. This Forum provides a timely opportunity to review progress made and remaining challenges since the completion of these consultations.

3. Participants

The Forum will bring together senior government officials from national women's machineries, Ministries of Finance, Planning and various line ministries who have been and will be involved in implementing gender-responsive budgeting.

⁴ UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (2016) Gender Responsive Budgeting in the Asia-Pacific Region: A Status Report. Bangkok.

⁵ Ibid.

Participants will be expected to:

- actively engage in discussions, share their ideas and raise questions regarding challenges and strategies for implementation of gender-responsive budgeting approaches;
- formulate priorities to enhance application of gender-responsive budgeting principles in practice, with a focus on the next budget cycle

4. Key Elements of the Forum

Key sessions of the Forum will include:

- Overview of gender-responsive budgeting concepts and approaches;
- Sharing of national good practices on gender-responsive budgeting from Asia and the Pacific;
- Gender-responsive budgeting at local levels;
- Innovative approaches to advance gender-responsive budgeting;
- Formulation of key priorities to effectively institutionalize gender-responsive budgeting in national contexts.

5. Organizational Arrangements

In terms of format, the Forum will comprise of presentations and open discussions. The programme for the Forum is contained in a separate document.