Asian Conference on Gender Responsive Budgeting in Penang

The Asian Regional Conference entitled *Gender Responsive Budgeting Narratives: Transforming Institutions, Empowering Communities* took place on February 24-25, in Penang, Malaysia. This ground-breaking event brought together an impressive range of speakers, chairs and facilitators from across the region and indeed around the world, including from Austria, Germany, and Portugal. Presentations were made to over 300 participants and importantly included attendees from the two local municipal councils in Penang.

The presentations and discussions over the two days centred on the current role and impact of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) within national, state/provincial and local government institutions, and how it is increasingly being linked to opening up the processes of budgeting to more directly include and empower women and men in local communities. This framed a discussion of two aspects. Firstly, certain sessions focused on the changing nature of budget planning and narrated practical examples of how the collection and use of data is providing a series of opportunities for GRB. Secondly, there was focus also on the relationship between GRB and participatory budgeting, and the extent to which empowerment of communities is, can or should be a central concern of GRB.

As the discussions unfolded, it became clear that national and local governments across the region have been changing their budgeting processes in ways that...
The purpose of the training was to increase the technical knowledge of the participants on concepts and theories in the area of gender economics, provide skills in using tools and frameworks of gender-responsive economic analysis and demonstrate linkages between gender economics and social protection programs.

On the final day of the training, the participants were able to prepare and present their ideas on developing gender-responsive social protection policy briefs based upon the subjects covered during the training course. The potentially-interesting research areas that could be undertaken are, for example, piloting cash transfers to females, linking microfinance to social insurance schemes, reforming educational curricula to reflect gender equality, and improving data collection mechanisms. The participants thereby demonstrated strong abilities in distinguishing between labour market programs, social insurance programs, and social assistance programs, as the principal domains of gender-responsive social protection.

“I expect to have more training courses like this one.”
Participant feedback at the course on Gender Responsive Economics and Social Protection

The training was organized by the UN Women Programme on Economic Livelihoods and Social Protection in Viet Nam, supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia. UN Women shall partner with IFGS in the second year of its programme to take forward some of these research pieces to further strengthen and contribute to the social protection system in Viet Nam.

Post the success of this programme, UN Women recognizes the appetite, need and value for conducting and hosting similar trainings in Viet Nam with other research agencies, key government ministries and line departments. The subject area of gender and economics coupled with social protection is urgent and timely as the Government of Vietnam is currently in the process of improving and strengthening its social protection system through the investment support of international donors.

In the following week, the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and UNDP project “Women Leadership: Empowerment of Women in the Period of International Integration” held a one-week training course on gender and economic policy. This participatory course was designed for academics, lecturers, researchers and those working in government or civil society. The main purpose of the course was to provide participants with the skills and knowledge to lead this course in their own organizations or to mainstream a gender equality perspective in their day-to-day work. It also aimed at encouraging more research in the area of gender, policy making and economics in relation to development in Viet Nam by imparting skills and knowledge on topics such as gender and macroeconomics, the role of unpaid care work in the economy, and gender-responsive policy making.

“What I’ve learned from this course is a new approach toward existing policy making issues. Now that I have been well trained, I know that many issues that we have always looked at as political can also be seen as economical problems. It is surprising at first to be aware of the fact that boosting the growth of one country’s economy initially requires the change of social perception and expectation toward women’s works...the changing process might take a long time but I believe in what Lao Tzu once said ‘The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step’”.
Ms. Dao Mai Hoa, Deputy Director, Division of Supporting Women in Economic Development, Women Union.

Both courses were led by Professor Haroon Akram-Lohdi, Chair, Department of International Development Studies, Trent University, Canada. The courses were offered in English with simultaneous translation to Vietnamese.

The UNDP training modules has been developed to respond to the urgent need of incorporating gender perspectives into national development frameworks. The modules cover a range of issues from unpaid work and gender statistics to poverty reduction, trade, finance, labour market, and gender-responsive budgeting among others. The UNDP Viet Nam translated the modules into Vietnamese.

Over 50 professionals applied to take the UNDP course of which 30 were selected. The selected fellows were professors and lecturers from the Ho Chi Minh Academy (HCMA) of Politics and the Institute of Labour, policy advisors from the MOFA, Women’s Union and the Ministry of Trade and researchers with Development and Policies Research Center and Oxfam.

The training workshop is an opportunity to learn about how gender responsive economic policies can make a difference and contribute to Viet Nam’s economic and social development. Participants appreciated the participatory teaching method and the interactions with colleagues during group work. They have requested that the remaining modules be part of a follow-up course in August. As well, the HCMA is organizing a follow-up training on gender and economics for senior members of the Party.

[Contributed, with thanks, by Ruchika Bahl, Gender Specialist of UN Women Viet Nam, Jean Munro, Senior Technical Advisor of UNDP Viet Nam, and Ngo Thu Tra, communications intern of the UNDP project Women’s Leadership: Empowerment of Women in the era of International Integration]
have become or can become more inclusive of GRB. Narratives from India, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, and Nepal for example, outlined how governments have taken the lead in setting institutional frameworks, including (to lesser or greater degrees) relevant regulations, (devolved) structures, guidelines, quotas and targeted allocations, which have supported an environment for GRB to be increasingly integral to the budgeting process. The trend to outcome-based or performance-based budgeting was hailed as being more conducive to GRB, and various speakers addressed both the limitations and the opportunities this presented. An underlying question was always whether the changes within institutional budgeting processes merely demand adjusted (gender-sensitive) technical input, or whether it fundamentally transforms the basis of the relationship between ‘government’ and ‘the people’, specifically the inclusion and empowerment of women and men in communities.

In relation to how far GRB is now seen as including a participatory budgeting approach, with explicit goals of empowering women and men, girls and boys in communities, there were stimulating discussions on the relationship between GRB and participatory budgeting and an interesting case study from Penang. It was pointed out, among other things, that ‘participation’ in and of itself does not automatically lead to any change in gender power relations, either within or outside institutions. A lot more has to happen. And there is always the possibility that ‘participation’ does not necessarily mean ‘empowerment’ (let alone of women), but is just another box to tick.

These are still early days in the regional narrative, and yet it was inspiring that there is already so much to be shared. The lively break-out sessions which charted ways forward at regional, national and local levels were full of ideas and possibilities – and cognizant too of the many challenges. There is still a long road to follow, and perhaps one missing narrative was to hear directly from women and men in communities about what exactly has been the impact of GRB in its various guises on their lives. That needs to be heard to come. In the meantime the Penang Women’s Development Corporation, together with the Penang State Government, the two municipal councils of Penang, and UN Women, are to be commended for collectively organizing a timely, thought-provoking, refreshing event, which sets a great stage for future follow-ups.

The Conference programme and all the presentations are available for download at www.grb-pwdc.org.my.

[Contributed, with thanks, by James Lochhead, GRB Consultant, Project Director, PWDC.]

---

**ASIA CONFERENCE ON GENDER RESPONSIVE BUDGETING**

Continued from page 1

**CALL FOR PARTICIPATIONS**

**South Asian Conference on Women, Work and Poverty, April 17-19, 2014**

Social Policy and Development Centre is hosting a three day South Asian Conference on Women, Work and Poverty in Islamabad, Pakistan from April 17-19, 2014. Sub-themes of the Conference are; women’s empowerment through employment, employment opportunities for female youth population, women’s employment and poverty, women’s employment and conflict, climate change—challenges and opportunities, and government responses to women’s economic empowerment.

For more information and queries, please visit the [conference website](#). [Contributed, with thanks, by Muhammad Sabir, Principal Economist of Social Policy and Development Centre]

**Workshop on Researching Women and Society in Penang, August 15, 2014**

The Women’s Development Research Centre (KANITA) of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) is organizing a workshop on researching women and society at USM in Penang, Malaysia. The workshop aims at an understanding of how a gendered approach to research enhances our understanding of how society works. It also offers practical insights into doing social research, as well as a platform for discussion on issue such as gender as an important perspective in social research and how do gender analyses lead to change. The speakers in this workshop are noted academics and advocates of gender studies in Malaysia and elsewhere.

Registration fees of Malaysian Ringgit 80 for participants affiliated with local institutions and USD30 otherwise required. Discounts apply for twinning registration with Postgraduate Conference on Gender Studies on August 13-19, 2014 (see P.5 of this issue). Participants are responsible for their own accommodation and travel arrangements. For more information, please visit the [workshop website](#).

[Contributed, with thanks, by KANITA, USM]
New Resources

Humanity Divided: Confronting Inequalities in Developing Countries

This Report visits the theoretical concepts of inequalities including their measurements, analyzes their global trends, presents the policy maker’s perception of inequalities in 15 countries and identifies various policy options in combating this major development challenges of our time.

The Report makes the basic point that in spite of the impressive progress humanit-y has made on many fronts over the decades, it still remains deeply divided. In the context, it is intended to help development actors, citizens, and policy makers contribute to global dialogues and initiate conversations in their own countries about the drivers and extent of inequalities, their impact and the ways in which they can be curbed. Some of key messages are as follows:

- On average—and taking into account population size—income inequality increased by 11 percent in developing countries between 1990 and 2010.
- Developing countries—more than 75 percent of the population—are living today in societies where income is more unequally distributed than it was in the 1990s.
- Evidence shows that, beyond a certain threshold, inequality harms growth and poverty reduction, the quality of relations in the public and political spheres of life and individuals’ sense of fulfillment and self-worth.
- Evidence shows that greater income inequality between households is systematically associated with greater inequality in non-income outcomes.
- Redistribution remains very important to inequality reduction; however, a shift is needed towards more inclusive growth patterns in order to sustainably reduce inequality.
- Reducing inequality requires addressing inequality-reproducing cultural norms and strengthening the political agency of disadvantaged groups.
- Evidence from developing countries shows that children in the lowest wealth quintile are still up to three times more likely to die before their fifth birthday than children in the richest quintiles.
- Social protection has been significantly extended globally, yet persons with disabilities are up to five times more likely than average to incur catastrophic health expenditures.
- Despite overall declines in maternal mortality in the majority of developing countries, women in rural areas are still up to three times more likely to die while giving birth than women living in urban centers.

There is a dedicated chapter on gender inequality. Evidence shows that a significant narrowing of gaps in critical capabilities like education and health has not translated for women into equivalent reductions of inequality in other domains such as access to livelihoods and political participation. Gender wage gaps and job segregation remain persistent. It would therefore appear that women have achieved greater access to employment by replacing men in more vulnerable and lower-quality jobs. Gender inequality in livelihoods and earnings determines women’s fallback positions in the household, thus, women’s ability to negotiate resources within the household.

The analysis in this Report argues that inequalities in outcomes and opportunities are interlinked and cannot be treated as separate issues. Therefore, a policy framework that systematically and comprehensively addresses inequalities should focus on moderating income inequalities, on closing gaps in health, nutrition and education, and on tackling prejudices, stereotypes and other cultural norms that reinforce discrimination.

Publisher: UNDP, January 2014, 296 pages.

Feminist Economists Respond to the IMF Discussion Note “Women, Work and the Economy”

Findings from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Staff Discussion Note “Women, Work, and the Economy: Macroeconomic Gains from Gender Equity (September 2013)” have been cited various forums by many including the IMF Chief Christine Lagarde. The key message cited often is that gender equality is good for economic growth. The Note argues, for instance, that if the number of female workers was raised to the same level as that of men, the GDP in the United States and Japan would expand by 5 and 9 percent respectively. In case of the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, the growth rates go up to 12 and 34 percent respectively (p. 4).

Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) and the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE) posted the feminist economists’ response to the Note.

Contributing economists welcomed the fact that the IMF, which has credibility and influence with finance ministers and central bankers, acknowledged that women’s lower participation in labour market and lower wages than men’s and flagged women’s unpaid work. However, the Note hasn’t addressed the role of the IMF-type macroeconomic policies in perpetuating gender inequalities. As a result, there is no policy discussions on how the IMF changes its own programmes towards gender equality and women’s economic empowerment. They also concerns of the Note’s policy suggestion to reform the child support and other social benefits. The Note argues when it is too high, such support can be disincentive for women to enter the labour market, especially those with low earnings capacity (p. 14). They argue that women’s movement into low-paid, insecure jobs is unlikely to help improving women’s as well as their children’s well-being. In many societies, women actually can benefit from greater expenditure on social welfare in order to increase their availability for productive work, increase the profitability of their businesses, and free them from the drudgery of overwork.

Other comments include the policy framework has over emphasis on formal labour market. The argument may be appropriate for the OECD countries but may have limited appeal in developing countries where the majority are in the informal and subsistence economies. In fact, the Note didn’t explore the issue of unpaid work although women’s responsibility for unpaid work is often an obstacles for them to participate in paid work outside of their home. For full articles, please visit AWID’s two part series (Part 1 and Part 2) and the IAFFE’s blog.
**Call for Papers/ Call for Applications**

**The 2014 Rhonda Williams Prize - Application deadline extended to April 4, 2014**

In memory of Rhonda Williams, associate editor of *Feminist Economics* from 1994 to 1998, the IAFFE has established a prize to help scholars from underrepresented groups in IAFFE, whose work reflects Rhonda Williams’ legacy of scholarship and activism, attend the annual IAFFE conference and present a paper.

The recipient’s work in activism, advocacy, or scholarship should demonstrate a commitment to one or more of the following issues: Inequalities based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or nationality; interrelationships among racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism; and connections between scholarship and activism. Special consideration will be given to applicants from groups not well represented in IAFFE and those with limited access to travel funds from their home institutions or international funders. This prize is targeted to junior scholars and activists.

A cover letter, a CV, and a draft of full paper should be sent to Marlene Kim, Chair, Rhonda Williams Prize, at Marlene.Kim@umb.edu by April 4, 2014.

$1,500 to be awarded at the [2014 IAFFE conference](http://www.iaffe.com) “Women’s Economic Empowerment and the New Global Development Agenda,” in Accra, Ghana, June 27-29, 2014. The funds are intended to partially defray travel costs to attend the annual conference. For more information, please visit [IAFFE conference website](http://www.iaffe.com).

[Source: IAFFE listserve]

**Postgraduate International Conference on Gender Studies, August 13-14, 2014**

The Women’s Development Research Centre (KANITA) of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) invites submission of abstracts for the conference on gender studies at USM in Penang, Malaysia. The 2014 Conference theme is *Marginality, Inclusiveness and Social Justice: Contemporary Challenges in Researching Women, Men and Gender.* The context of the discussion is the current globalising trends that have led to widening social and economic disparities, and increasing human insecurity, uncertainty and risk. Not only has the gap between richer and poorer countries been difficult to bridge, the societies in many countries grow increasingly polarised. While some layers of society have benefitted from the rapid changes, others have been left behind and marginalised, i.e. systematically excluded from accessing the rights, opportunities and resources in society.

Papers may be prepared to fit into the following sub-themes: Culture, religion and gender; entrepreneurship, micro-enterprise and empowerment; gender in culture, communication, language and the arts; globalization, transnationalism and migration; healthcare, social entitlements and social justice; law, policy and gender; patriarchy, the family and feminist discourses; sexuality, masculinity and identity politics; sustainable development and environmental issues; violence against women; and women, leadership and the political process.

Postgraduate students and young scholars who have obtained their Master’s or PhD degrees within two years prior to the date of the conference are welcome to submit abstracts (450 words) at kanita.kpicgs@gmail.com by March 31, 2014. Interested individuals who do not submit papers may also attend as participants.

Malaysian Ringgit (RM) 80 for participants affiliated with local institutions and USD40 otherwise apply for registration before May 31, 2014. Registration fee will be increased to RM 100 and USD 50 respectively after June 1. Fees will cover all meals and materials during the Conference. Participants are responsible for their own accommodation and travel arrangements. For more information, please visit the [conference website](http://www.iaffe.com).

[Contributed, with thanks, by KANITA, USM]

---

**About Us:**

UNDP is the UN’s global development network, an organization advocating for change and sharing knowledge, experience and resources worldwide to help people build a better life.

UNDP Regional Centre serves 36 countries in 24 country offices of Asia and the Pacific. A main priority of the Regional Centre is to provide **UNDP Country Offices** in the region with easy access to knowledge through high quality advisory services based on global applied research and UNDP lessons learnt. The second priority is to build partnerships and promote regional capacity building initiatives, which allow UNDP, governments and other development partners to identify, create and share knowledge relevant to solving urgent development challenges.

**Asia-Pacific GEM**, a quarterly newsletter, aims to bring news related to gender and macroeconomic issues in the region to government officials, development agencies, civil society, and academia. **The next newsletter will be released in June 2014.** Please send any relevant news items you would like to share – for example, announcements about upcoming events, calls for papers, conferences, workshops, training programmes, new publications and research papers on gender and macroeconomics, and association news – to **Yumiko Yamamoto** at UNDP Asia-Pacific Regional Centre by **15 May 2014**. The newsletter will be distributed electronically and posted on the UNDP Asia-Pacific Regional Centre website.

**United Nations Development Programme Asia-Pacific Regional Centre**

**Inclusive Growth and Poverty Reduction Practice**

**Contacts:**

3rd Floor, UN Service Building

Rajdamnern Nok Avenue, Bangkok, Thailand

Tel: +66 (0)2 304 9100

Fax: +66 (0)2 280 2700

E-mail: yumiko.yamamoto@undp.org

URL: [http://www.inclusivedevelopmentasiapacific.net/](http://www.inclusivedevelopmentasiapacific.net/)

*This quarterly newsletter was initiated under the Asia-Pacific Capacity Development project on Gender and Macroeconomic Issues, which received financial support from the Government of Japan through Japan-UNDP Partnership Fund for 2010-2012.*