

*Partners Meeting on  
Gender Responsive Budgeting Programme*

*(Rabat, November 2006)*

*Opening remarks by Joanne Sandler, UNIFEM*

Honorable Minister, Honorable Ambassador, and honorable guests and partners, mes dames et, messieurs

It is a great privilege to share this podium with our long-time partners in work on gender-responsive budgeting.

- Our thanks to the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco for hosting this meeting and for joining us in a multi-country effort to push the boundaries of Gender Responsive Budgeting. Our partnership with the Ministry of Finance in Morocco has opened the door to partnerships with an increasing number of ministries of finance around the world and we thank Morocco for creating this model.
- Our deep appreciation to the Government of Belgium for nearly 7 years of consistent partnership with UNIFEM on Gender Responsive Budgeting. We thank Belgium for the second phase support, but also for its visionary support to the much riskier first phase that brought GRB to more than 20 countries. The first phase undeniably put Gender Responsive Budgeting on the map as a key tool for enhancing accountability to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment, a goal agreed to by all countries that endorsed the Millennium Declaration.

- We also welcome our partners from Ministries of Finance, Planning, Agriculture, Health and Women's Affairs and NGOs in Ecuador, Senegal and Mozambique who we are privileged to have with us today.

The fact that we are holding this meeting is a testimony to the progress that has occurred in the world in relation to the goal of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. Just ten years ago, this meeting would have been impossible to imagine. In 1996, there were – possibly – no more than five countries in the world that had even minimal knowledge of Gender-responsive Budgeting. The idea traveled from Australia to South Africa, primarily because of the commitment of a handful of visionary economists, parliamentarians and women's rights advocates. It was then picked up by organizations like UNIFEM, UNDP, the Commonwealth Secretariat., GTZ, the EU and others. UNIFEM was fortunate to partner with the Government of Belgium, the OECD, and the Nordic Council of Ministers, and the Commonwealth Secretariat and IDRC to hold a global meeting in Brussels in 2001 that called for every country in the world to incorporate gender responsive budgeting by 2015. Belgium then honored that call by providing ongoing support to UNIFEM to promote the spread of capacity and commitment.

And so, today, just five years after the Brussels meeting, gender responsive budgeting has become a worldwide movement, with concrete activities in more than 40 countries and requests for assistance from scores of other nations. It is a tool that supports technical know-how, advocacy and policy

change in both developing and developed countries, as relevant in the Nordic countries as it is in sub-Saharan Africa.

I want to make four main points in the next couple of minutes. Firstly, to review some of the main learning from work on gender budgets; secondly, to highlight some of the achievements; thirdly, to summarize what this phase of the work is designed to achieve and some highlights from efforts to date; and finally, what the future challenges are.

### Two key lessons learned

- After many years of working with gender budgets, we think it is important to highlight that gender budgeting is not, in essence, about budgeting at all. Just as a microscope is not really about magnification. Gender budgeting focuses on budgets to help us understand how to move from policy to practice. Specifically, for instance, in the context of the MDGs, if a country has a policy to achieve full gender equality in elementary education, the budget needs to reflect revenue and expenditures that will make that policy commitment a reality in the lives of all men and women and boys and girls. Gender budgets is like a microscope that helps us to see interactions that perpetuate inequality and identify strategies for addressing these.
- It is also important to affirm that gender budgeting is not just a technical tool. It is tool for transformation. It is political, because, to be effective, it requires participation and understanding by many actors: ministries, parliamentarians, bureaucrats, civil society and

others. It opens the budget process up to many different constituencies and creates a sense of shared responsibility and shared ownership.

### Examples of key achievement to date

Just as a microscope in the hands of a talented scientist can lead to discoveries that we could never have imagined, gender budgets in the hands of talented government and civil society partners can lead to changes that we could never have envisioned. We have seen this in a growing number of countries: at local level, we have seen government and citizens work together to apply gender-responsive budgeting, leading to mutual agreements to start loan funds for women. Gender-responsive budgeting is generating analysis that supports policy advocacy leading to improvements in women's access to health services, water and protection from domestic violence. At national level, we see government ministries, parliamentarians, and women's organizations work on Gender responsive Budgeting leading to allocations that take national plans for women's advancement into account in poverty reduction strategies. These are small steps forward but they are the building blocks upon which the second phase is based.

### GRB Phase II

This brings me to my third point: what this phase of the GRB programme is designed to achieve and some highlights of progress to date. UNIFEM and our many partners learned a lot about how to build capacities and support innovation in the first phase of our programming. In this second phase, the Belgian government has supported an intensive focus on four countries: Morocco, Senegal, Ecuador and Mozambique. There are two ambitious and focused results that we are seeking in this work. Firstly, that national budget

processes and policies in the four countries reflect gender equality principles. And secondly, that priorities of poor and excluded women are reflected in budget allocations. These results, we believe, are consistent with efforts to promote the Millennium Development Goals, to eradicate poverty, and to support national ownership and mutual accountability between donor and recipient countries in the context of the aid effectiveness agenda.

The four countries chosen for more concrete application of gender-responsive budgeting were selected because of their potential to achieve these results but also generate important learning. In the next session you will hear their experiences.

- You will hear about how in Morocco, twelve sectoral ministries analyzed their programmes, policies and budgets from a gender perspective to contribute to the second gender budget report for the 2007 finance law.
- You will hear about how in Senegal and Mozambique, teams are using Gender responsive budgeting to bring concrete evidence that strengthens the gender responsiveness of poverty reduction strategies.
- You will hear about how in Ecuador, the National Women's Machinery in partnership with the Ministry of Finance are bringing a gender perspective to finance policies, including incorporating gender in the criteria for awarding grants from an oil revenue fund to social sector programmes.

### Challenges and the importance of this meeting

This now brings me to my final point. Why are we here? Our colleagues from the four partner countries, UNIFEM and Belgium have committed to

actually changing allocations for gender equality and to institutionalizing gender budgeting in government ministries and in official budget processes. We have committed to achievements that will live on long after this programme ends. So this meeting is an opportunity for partners from four very different environments, with very diverse opportunities and obstacles, to learn from each other, to inspire each other, and to challenge each other. This meeting will engage participants in validating the gaps and gains identified through a mid-term review of the four initiatives, change course based on perceived opportunities and challenges, and identify technical resources that can support each country to continuously improve.

Ultimately, the value of GRB can only be judged on its ability to contribute to progress on gender equality and women's empowerment. The impact of illiteracy, poverty, maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS and domestic violence on women and girls remains disproportionately high, even as the participation of women in public life remains disproportionately low. The commitments to achieving gender equality and women's human rights in CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and countless other agreements have reached historic levels, while the allocations and expenditures for implementing these has not kept pace. Advocacy and campaigns -- like the 16 Days of Activism to End Violence against Women that started on November 25<sup>th</sup> and is being commemorated throughout Morocco and worldwide today -- are important for putting critical gender issues on policy agendas. But advocacy alone is inadequate. Gender budgeting is generating concrete evidence and concrete data upon which we can build better and more focused policies and programming. That is why we are here. And we hope that, through this programme and the many that other bilateral, multilateral and NGO partners

are supporting simultaneously, gender-responsive budgeting will grow in usefulness, impact and sustainability to make significant contributions to the ultimate goals of equality, development and peace.

I end by acknowledging that we are only here because of the hard work of many tireless individuals: the staff and leadership of the Ministry of Finance in Morocco, the staff of UNIFEM and especially those in Morocco have put a huge amount of time and energy into organizing this meeting. I know you join me in congratulating and appreciating them.

Let me end again with our heartfelt thanks to the Government of Morocco for its steadfast partnership. I thank all of you for your attention, for taking time out of your busy day, and for joining us to get this meeting off to a positive and productive beginning.