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PRESS RELEASE

“Gender needs to be embedded in policies and programmes”, said Shri Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairperson Planning Commission, Government of India, in his special address today, at the inaugural of the three-day Regional Conference on Development Effectiveness through Gender Mainstreaming’. A conference jointly hosted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC), it is being held at the Le Meridien Hotel, in New Delhi.

Shri Ahluwalia emphasized that gender balancing is not sufficiently mainstreamed and that the issue of gender goes beyond poverty. “It is generally recognized that there is a serious problem with regard to gender equality,” he said. He put a great deal of weight on the institutionalization of the Panchayati Raj Institutions and said that statistical evidence showed that Panchayats headed by women are more effective. Lauding innovations like self help groups, he said they are like a movement, which are creating social change and leading to transformation in terms of empowerment and taking life into their own hands. Attitudinal transformation, he commented, was more important than economic returns.

Dr. Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director, UNIFEM, delivering the keynote address at the Conference, said that 2005 is a year for reflection and moving forward...and that there is a need to accelerate change. Highlighting the importance of gender equality, Dr. Heyzer stated, “The costs of gender inequality are far too high to ignore. By not addressing gender inequality, we are re-generating poverty”. Advocating the need for going beyond the micro-credit framework, she emphasized the need to focus on how the macro-economic frameworks address the issue of the poorest women.

Touching on the area of responsibilities in development, Dr. Heyzer felt that gender equality is the responsibility of all partners, including the private sector. “The development effectiveness framework needs to address inclusion and marginalization and link human security and rights”. Focusing on the agency of women and girls, she said that there is a need to build a community of gender advocates, as well as a need to build partnerships and leadership at the highest level, focusing on action and the implementation of policies and programmes. “Development effectiveness is an act of transformation to end violence, poverty and discrimination”, she said.

Dr. Lennart Bage, President, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in his inaugural address said that when there is gender inequality, women do not reach their full potential. This, he commented, led to persistent poverty. Speaking

about the Conference, he said it was both timely and topical, and that there was a need to work together with different mandates and experiences. “The Beijing Platform for

Action (BPFA) is a milestone in recent history. This was reconfirmed at the 10 year review of the BPFA at the meeting of the Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are also re-enforcing this vision.” For poverty reduction, promoting the empowerment of women is critical, he stressed.

In his address at the inauguration, Dr. Rohinton Medhora, Vice President, IDRC, pointed out that growth in itself did not guarantee gender equality. In fact, according to him, changes in technology and structures of society impact women, with negative impacts some times, as in the case of technological advances, which have contributed to ‘missing women’.

Commenting on the theme of the Conference, Dr Medhora stated that there were traditionally two reasons: the utilitarian and the ethical humanist reason. The strength of the capabilities approach, he said, is that it does not separate these two. In the region, which has practically invented it, it is important to further flesh it out, in order to take the development effectiveness a step further. As a development research organization, IDRC is especially interested in these issues and is in the process of strengthening its gender programming.

Commenting on the joint initiative, Ms. Chandni Joshi, Regional Programme Director, UNIFEM, said that the Conference “reflects not only an excellent partnership between the agencies but also a common and shared concern, as well as commitment towards reducing gender inequality and poverty.” She highlighted the fact that there was a need to learn lessons from practices, which have worked and which have not, and upscaling successful modules. The Conference, she said, was in response to the concerns of rural women, who face poverty and inequality on a daily basis.

Dr. Ganesh Thapa, Regional Economist, Asia and Pacific Division of IFAD gave the vote of thanks.

Over the next three days, the Conference will focus on diverse issues. These include: effectiveness of financial services, micro-finance, women’s agency and beyond micro-finance; human security and social cost of gender-specific violence; the existing marginal representation of women in community management, in local and national governance; women’s right to land, assets, and other productive resources and its impact on gender relations and increased productivity; role of women in conflict prevention and their agency in building peace; and gender indicators of equality, inclusion and poverty reduction.

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