

Stop the rhetoric and implement programmes, says Mahathir

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Governments in the Asia-Pacific region have been urged to put the rhetoric on gender perspective in development planning into practice to benefit the poor rural and urban women.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said gender-sensitive programmes would ensure the inclusion of women, not only in poverty reduction, but also in other economic activities which would help the government by increasing economic growth.

In promoting gender awareness, strategic alliances with economic planners and advisers throughout the government administrative mechanism should be established, he said.

Mahathir said this in his speech to participants of the

2nd Meeting of the Regional Steering Committee for the Advancement of Rural and Island Women Asia-Pacific here today.

He said in Malaysia the government had taken steps to ensure the removal of gender obstacles, citing the success of the Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia programme as an example of the government's sensitivity to the role and needs of rural women.

The Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia gets an initial RM200 million revolving loan fund and a RM50 million government allocation to implement smart partnership projects for women with women non-governmental organisations.

"Further efforts must be undertaken to ensure gender mainstreaming, of which gen-

der budgeting will be our top priority," said Mahathir.

Gender, he said, did not refer to male or female, but refers to the "mind-set" of a community or society on what was perceived as "appropriate and acceptable with regard to the role of men and women".

He said the traditional mindset on beliefs, attitude and biasness towards women's "perceived" capabilities, unfortunately has overridden the logic, knowledge and observation of women's actual capabilities.

Hence, he said, the call for gender-sensitivity specifically for policymakers and decision-makers was to remind them to incorporate the needs of women when formulating policies and designing development programmes.