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## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF WOMEN'S BUDGETS IN THE SOUTH

*Soon after the democratic elections of 1994, South Africa embarked on its first women's budget exercise, a collaborative venture between non-governmental organisations and the South African parliament. Some time later the South African government initiated its own exercise in gender analysis of the budget. The South African initiative has attracted a lot of interest from around the world. In a number of other countries governments and civil society players have embarked on gender analysis exercises, often with strong support from international donors. This paper discusses the ways in which these exercises can assist in addressing gender issues, as well as some of the tensions involved.*

Quite soon after the first democratic elections of 1994, South Africa embarked on its first women's budget exercise. One of the inspirations for this initiative was the Australian Women's Budget (Sharp and Broomhill, 1998). This was a collaborative venture of civil society, in the form of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the South African parliament. Some time later the South African government initiated an exercise in gender analysis of the budget. The government initiative is coordinated by the Department of Finance and serves as one of several pilots in the Commonwealth Secretariat's endeavour to engender macroeconomics (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999).

For a range of reasons the South African initiative has attracted a lot of interest from around the world. These reasons include the renewed interest internationally in gender issues resulting from the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing as well as the world's more general fascination with the South African 'miracle'. In a number of other countries governments and civil society players have embarked on gender analysis exercises, often with strong support from international donors.

The Commonwealth pilots are in South Africa, Sri Lanka and Barbados with a fourth pilot planned for The Fiji Islands. In Africa outside of South Africa there do exist initiatives in Namibia (government), Tanzania (government and NGO), Uganda (parliament), Botswana (government), Mozambique (government), Zimbabwe (academic) and Uganda (government), and a nascent exercise in Malawi (non-government). UNIFEM is supporting workshops to enable these and other countries in Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean island states to learn from the experience of the South African women's budget initiatives and the Commonwealth Secretariat exercises (UNIFEM, 1998). The United Kingdom Treasury in 1998 co-hosted a one-day workshop on the topic with the academic Women's Budget group. Elson mentions further initiatives in Switzerland (government), Canada and the United States (NGOs) (Elson, 1999: 10).

This paper discusses the ways in which these exercises can assist in addressing gender issues, as well as some of the tensions involved. Much of the discussion draws heavily

on the South African experience. This is the one best known to the author, as well as the one that is at present most wide-ranging. The paper also draws on experience in training government and non-governmental groups in other countries of the South. This experience is used in some cases to confirm the South African experience and in others to show how different social, economic and political conditions affect the potential and outcome of the exercises.

## **1. WHAT ARE WOMEN'S BUDGETS?**

Women's budget exercises, despite their misleading name, do not propose separate budgets for women. Rather the exercises involve a gender-sensitive analysis of government budgets. Two points can be noted briefly at this stage and are discussed further below. Firstly, the exercise involves analysis rather than formulation of budgets. This analysis can then constitute the basis for formulation or amendment of budgets. Secondly, the analysis does not focus only on that portion of a budget seen as pertaining to gender issues or women. In fully-fledged form women's budget exercises examine all sectoral allocations of government for their differential impact on women, men, girls and boys. Ideally, they go further to look at the impact on sub-groups of the basic gender-age groupings.

The previous paragraph refers to 'women's budgets' – the term used in Australia and South Africa. As discussed further below, the exercises would be better termed 'gender analysis of budgets'. Just as the 'women' in the name is misleading, so is the word 'budget'. A more accurate description would include the words 'policy', 'programmes' and 'performance' as well as budget. Gender-sensitive analysis of budgets proceeds from the assumption that budgets are an outcome of a process that starts much earlier.

Gender-sensitive - or indeed any - analysis of budgets needs to start with an understanding of the situation of women and men of the country concerned in relation to the sector under review. For a Ministry of Labour, for example, this would involve an analysis of the levels of labour market participation and unemployment, the industrial and occupational distribution of women and men, as well as patterns of involvement in unpaid labour whether in the home, fields or elsewhere.

The second step is an analysis of sectoral policy. This step asks whether policy correctly addresses the situation previously described. In crude terms, one needs to know whether the policy is likely to exacerbate any gender gaps identified, leave them as they are, or reduce them.

If policy is considered adequate, one can then look at the budget to see whether adequate financial and other resources have been allocated to implement the policy.

The question might seem trivial but is not so. Many governments - perhaps particularly those who are lavish in their commitments to 'improve' society - make more policies than they are able to implement immediately. A test of the level of commitment to different aspects is which policies are then under-funded.

Finally, one needs to look at how the resources have been utilised. In the simplest cases, this will involve asking how many women and men have benefited from a particular service and at what cost. The answers can provide assessments in terms of distribution and equity as well as efficiency.

The four steps above are explained with respect to expenditure. Every budget has two sides - expenditure and revenue. The way in which government collects revenue - through different types of taxes, from donors, through user fees, asset sales or borrowing - has gendered implications. So, too, does the manner in which government exempts certain categories or institutions, individuals or activities from taxes. There has been less gender analysis of revenue to date than of expenditure, but the situation-policy-budget-performance sequence would be the same for both.

The brief explanation above makes it clear that women's budget are primarily monitoring and audit exercises. They serve the purpose, for government, of providing feedback on performance. They serve the purpose for those outside government of greater transparency and accountability. For those both inside and outside government the exercise should provide information that allows better decision-making as to how policies need to be adjusted or changed and where resources need to be reallocated.

In some countries the question has been asked why one need focus on gender at all. In South Africa the initiative has sparked a range of copycat exercises, such as children's budget, disability budgets, and pro-poor budgets. These foci reflect the general concern in the country with what are perceived as marginalised groups. In Uganda the initiative is spearheaded by the parliamentary Women's Caucus, a body that includes representatives of groups regarded as marginalised in that country. In Bangladesh - and perhaps other countries - pro-poor budget initiatives have been established which ask some of the same questions as the gender budget exercises.

The South African women's budget itself is not concerned with women *per se*. It is concerned with women to the extent that they are disadvantaged. As such, it attempts to disaggregate beyond gender. One of the obvious further divisions in South Africa is race. Further significant factors include geography (in terms of the rural-urban split as well as province) and age. Each such split has implications for budgetary allocations. The provincial differences have implications for the division of resources both because of the differences in the relative poverty of citizens of different areas, as well as the fact that provinces fell under different political dispensations during apartheid.

The rural-urban differences have implications for industrial, land, agricultural and infrastructural policies. The age differences have implications for policies in health, education, welfare and other sectors.

The focus on multiple disaggregation can be seen as reflecting post-structuralist and post-modern concerns in social science. Jacklyn Cock and Alison Bernstein provide an interesting discussion on the variety of ways in which the question of difference and diversity, and related practices of affirmative action, are understood and addressed in the United States and South Africa. At a theoretical level they address the paradigms of materialism and post-structuralism and how these get interpreted and used politically. Their analysis implicitly supports the approach of the Women's Budget exercise. They argue that their "central argument is for social scientific analysis to focus less on difference and more on the disadvantages that it involves... in view of the tendency for the current preoccupation with understanding 'difference' to displace the concern with addressing inequality and disadvantage" (Cock and Bernstein, 1998:17-8).

Rhonda Sharp has devised an analytical framework that provides a good starting point both in understanding what gender analysis of budgets involves, and in taking the first steps along the road. The Sharp framework proposes that the analyst consider a budget in terms of three categories that together make up 100% of the budget. The three categories, with examples to explain them, are:

- Expenditures specifically targeted at gender issues or women, such as women's health programs, domestic violence counselling for men and special employment programs for unemployed women with young children
- Expenditures related to equal employment opportunities within the civil service, for example crèche facilities for employees' children and paid parental leave.
- General or mainstream expenditures available to both women and men, but analysed for their differential gender impact, for example analysis of the users of primary health care, government-supported literacy classes, and agricultural subsidies (see Budlender and Sharp, 1998, for further discussion and examples).

The framework has proved useful as a pedagogic tool in a number of ways. In particular, by first separating out the first two categories, the framework forces people to confront their conception of mainstreaming. This seems necessary for, all too often, it seems that the word is widely used but often poorly understood within government beyond the confines of the gender or women's machinery.

The Sharp framework has also proved useful in structuring reports of gender analysis of budgets. In South Australia, for example, sectoral staff were required to report to the Office on the Status of Women according to the three categories. More recently

the framework has been used as the basis of exercises during training sessions for government officials.

The standardised framework provides a ‘formula’ which accords more easily with a bureaucratic approach to tasks than more open-ended questions. Nevertheless, the type of issues raised are still very different from those usually addressed by financial staff. Many appear to find the issues intriguing, but struggle to see how they can incorporate them into daily work if the latter does not require them to ask questions about impact.

## **2. THE SOUTH AFRICAN INITIATIVES**

As noted above, South Africa has two initiatives – one involving NGOs and parliamentarians, and the other within national government and led by the Ministry of Finance. When the Ministry of Finance was first approached about starting an initiative, Budget Office officials asked why this was necessary if there was already a respected initiative outside government. The response both then and now was that the two initiatives have different roles.

The inside government exercise is primarily about management and accountability. It is about government itself being aware of, and monitoring, the gendered impact of its policies and budgets as well as about its reporting on its activities to parliament and civil society.

The outside government exercise is about involving citizens in the important policy area of budgets, an area from which many people – and particularly the disadvantaged – have long been excluded. The outside government exercise is also about oversight and critique, both by parliament and civil society more broadly. Those involved in the outside government exercise are probably all staunch members of the African National Congress (ANC), which is the majority party in the country. Nevertheless, there is a clear recognition that government itself cannot be expected to loudly admit to ‘failures’ in its reports. Rather one hopes for an honest acknowledgement of weaknesses, and of how much still needs to be done in respect of gender equity. The outside government exercise provides the opportunity for a stronger critical voice.

The outside government exercise is the older, and stronger, of the two initiatives. Over the years it has involved a broad range of people in different roles. For the research that forms the core of the work, it draws on people from other NGOs, research and policy institutions and universities. The research is overseen by a reference group which involves others involved in the specific sectors, whether from NGOs, universities, the national, provincial or local legislatures or government. By

adopting this method, the initiative has spread both the concept of gender analysis of budgets and some expertise in undertaking the analysis.

At this stage the outside government initiative has published five books. Four of these books (Budlender, 1996; 1997; 1998; 1999) are detailed, and fairly academic, analyses of different budgets. The first three between them cover all 27 sectoral votes in the national budget, as well as some additional chapters on public sector employment, taxation, and economic theory. The fourth book looks at donor funding to government, local government budgets, and the impact of sectoral budgets on employment creation.

The fifth book, *Money Matters: Women and the government budget* (Hurt and Budlender, 1998), was published in 1998. The book comprises ten chapters, which are simplified versions of chapters in the first two books. It is intended for a second-language English reader with ten years of education. *Money Matters* was produced out of a recognition that the more detailed books would be read by only a small proportion of the population given low levels of literacy and numeracy. The attempts to popularise the work have been taken further in 1999 with the development of workshop materials, which can be used with audiences of even lower levels of education. The materials, which are currently being piloted, were designed for use both in stand-alone workshops and as sessions in workshops, which do not focus exclusively on gender analysis of budgets.

Both the inside and outside government initiatives have used the Sharp framework of three categories. Separating out the second category of expenditure as only one of three categories has proved particularly useful in the South African context. After the 1994 elections there was much interest in changing both the gender and race profile of public and private sector employment. The public sector was seen as particularly important given the opportunities for decisive action and the part which the public sector could play as role model. The change was certainly necessary and has, in fact, proceeded quite far. The Women's Budget Initiative was one of the voices ensuring that the government efforts in this respect focus on race and gender simultaneously, rather than on promoting white women and black men.

The danger for the Women's Budget Initiative lay in the relative ease with which analysis of the gender composition of public service employment could be conducted. This could, too easily, result in gender analysis of budgets focusing almost exclusively on this aspect. It would be too easy to focus on the 1,2 million employees concerned rather than on the more important question of how the government budget was affecting the other 40 million plus citizens who were potential beneficiaries of government expenditure. The danger was averted by allocating a researcher to cover public service employment throughout national and provincial government during the



first year and asking sectoral researchers to focus on other issues in their own chapters.

Focusing on category-one expenditure also holds dangers in that an agency can, while allocating a highly visible amount for gender-specific activities, neglect examining other parts of its budget in terms of gender. The category can, however, also provide a golden opportunity for lobbying and advocacy, as is happening currently in South Africa around domestic violence.

The country's domestic violence act was amended in late 1998 so as to provide added protection and remedies for people who are abused in the domestic situation. After pressure from civil society and parliamentarians, the Minister of Justice announced that his department had allocated R2 million for implementation of the new Act. However, when asked how this R2 million was to be spent, he was unable to provide any details. The NGO has taken up the challenge and initiated research into how this and the other departments involved should be allocating both mainstream and specific budget lines to ensure that the law provides the envisaged protection.

A government budget is a central tool of macroeconomic policy. The South African initiative has not, however, seen itself as directly, or primarily, addressing macroeconomic questions. The Initiative has, much more, arisen out of a concern with the direction and success of policy formulation and implementation at sectoral level. Further, from the start the outside government initiative focused on reprioritisation – on how the available money could be better used to target those most in need. The focus on reprioritisation reflected that of the new ANC government. Within the initiative it was also seen as countering a perception that women activists were simply asking for “more”. Instead the initiative tried to suggest which government activities could be cut down so as to provide resources for programmes and projects seen as more gender-sensitive.

Inevitably, however, the initiative has dealt with broader macroeconomic issues. The need for this became especially pressing when the government, in mid-1996, introduced the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy as its new economic policy. The government maintained that GEAR in no way contradicted the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) that has been seen as the core government policy up until then. Others were less sanguine – some seeing GEAR as a thinly disguised structural adjustment programme which the country was imposing on itself. The President's statement that GEAR was “non-negotiable” fuelled criticism of the policy as it so clearly contradicted the new dispensation's promotion of participation and accountability.

The introduction to the *Second Women's Budget* commented briefly on GEAR (Budlender, 1997). The introduction noted that the new policy included virtually the same elements as GEAR, but that the focus in terms of priority had been shifted to deficit reduction. It questioned the fact that the model on which the projections were based had not been made public, with the result that it could not be examined. It raised concern as to what would fall away should – as was likely – not all elements of the policy be achievable.

The following year, the *Third Women's Budget* included a chapter, which covered the Department of Finance<sup>1</sup>. This chapter noted that the GEAR strategy “does not adopt any gender perspective on economic policy” (Valodia, 1998:93). It went on to examine in more detail what some of the key aspects of the policy – export growth, investment, growth and employment, and monetary policy – might mean for different groups of women and men given the social and economic profile of the country. The discussion drew heavily on previous work in the *First Women's Budget* in which the author of this chapter had looked at the policies and budget of the Department of Trade and Industry, including the likely effect of trade liberalisation (Valodia, 1996). The conclusion to the examination of GEAR in the Department of Finance chapter was that “an expansionary macro-economic strategy could well be more advantageous to women than GEAR” (Valodia, 1998:100).

The most visible result of the inside government initiative has been the inclusion of discussion of gender issues in documents tabled on budget day in 1998 and 1999. Unlike in Australia, it was agreed that these discussions would be published in the available documents rather than separately so as to promote the recognition that gender is a mainstream issue.

Less visibly, there has been a limited amount of work in respect of the medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF). The MTEF is a three-year rolling budget for national and provincial governments, which, three years after its first introduction, is still very much ‘under development’. One of the aspects that has particular significance for gender analysis is the focus on programme or performance budgeting. This approach focuses not only on money amounts, but also on physical outputs and outcomes i.e. measures of different services delivered and the number of people benefiting. The elaboration proposed in terms of gender analysis is that these outputs and outcomes need to be disaggregated, not only by gender, but also by other factors. This has been accepted by the Department of Finance and is reflected in their instructions to other departments. What remains to be seen is how far the different departments are able and willing to do this.

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<sup>1</sup> In South Africa only the ministers and their immediate staff are referred to as ministries.

The new MTEF has many different aims, including greater macro-economic control, greater coordination between the different spheres of government and greater transparency. In respect of the latter, the early publication of three-year proposals allows for some comment on departmental plans several months before the budget is tabled. There are also proposals for further parliamentary powers – something, for which the outside government initiative has lobbied since the beginning. Even with these amendments, however, parliamentary powers will remain limited.

### **3. INSIDE OR OUTSIDE?**

South Africa is not the only country with initiatives both inside and outside government. In Tanzania, too, there are government and NGO initiatives. In Mozambique, while the ongoing initiative is situated within government, the first workshop for Ministry officials was co-facilitated by an NGO director who also advises the President on gender issues.

The donors providing support for the initiatives promote a focus on government because governments are the primary (or sole) recipients of their funds and because they see government having more power to effect real change. Within the ambit of government, the Commonwealth initiatives and SIDA-funded initiatives in Namibia and Tanzania have had the Ministry of Finance as the lead agency, while the UN agencies have sometimes worked closely with the gender or women's machinery. The Commonwealth and SIDA have attempted to promote co-ownership of the initiatives by Finance and the women's machinery but a variety of forces have meant that the latter's role has often been minimal. These forces include the relative weakness and under-resourcing of this machinery, weaknesses (if not absence) of hard 'technical' skills, as well as a focus on small-scale projects rather than policy. (It should be noted that these factors need not be the fault of the incumbents, who often seem almost set up to fail.)

Ministries of Finance, on the other hand, are almost always among the most powerful of agencies in any government. They are often able to - and do - direct and control the other agencies in many ways, and are both revered and hated for their power. This power can be of advantage to gender analysis initiatives. The drawback is that Finance Ministries will often be under-endowed with people who understand gender issues and their relevance for the Ministry's work. The officials' training in economics is unlikely to have included gender and other social issues. It is even less likely to have included the concepts of the care economy and unpaid labour, central to a proper understanding of gendered roles and the impact of policy on women and men.

When embarking on the pilots, the Commonwealth Secretariat commissioned Gita Sen to write a paper discussing the envisaged mainstreaming of gender issues in Finance and related ministries. Sen's paper is pessimistic overall. She points to the "non-conducive institutional structures and ethos within which Finance ministries function" (Sen, 1997: 4) and to the fact that people employed in Finance ministries "often come to feel themselves more powerful on the basis of superior knowledge and skills that few others can penetrate, and hence are less open to challenge" (Sen, 1997: 12).

Sen's observations are to the point and sobering. They are, however, perhaps too pessimistic if we adopt a reformist approach, accept that change cannot happen all at once, and are satisfied with smaller successes. While pointing out the negative aspects of working with Finance, Sen herself notes that past attempts to address gender biases in government activity have often failed because of the "low institutional weight" of the agencies concerned" (Sen, 1997: 42). Engagement with Finance offers possibilities in this respect.

Sen correctly points out that Finance officials are unlikely to be sensitive to gender issues, given their training and disciplines. However, the problem is not confined to Finance. Elson notes that in the Australian initiative, which involved all agencies, one of the weaknesses was a widespread lack of understanding of gender issues (Elson, 1999: 5). Experience in a range of countries has suggested that even statistical agencies are often unaware of the import and implications of the data they produce. An advantage of working with Finance is that this ministry generally attracts some of the most educated, intelligent and ambitious government officials in any country. As Sen correctly points out, the trick is to find ways to convince these people that gender-sensitive analysis is in their interests.

Sen argues that real mainstreaming will not occur without changing incentive structures and authority patterns within Finance ministries. She states that this can only happen if the initiatives have the support of top people in the Ministry or the cabinet. In South Africa the relative strength of government support of and interest in gender analysis reflects a broader interest in the society as a whole. The post-apartheid constitution is, predictably, firmly founded on the notion of equality. Less predictably, the routine call is for a 'non-racist and non-sexist' South Africa, rather than a focus on race alone. The women's budget initiative, with its practical focus, has attracted increasing attention over the last few years as the new government and its supporters recognised the difficulties of moving from slogans to reality in implementing the many changes fought for during the years of apartheid as well as the broader aspirations of the movement for gender equity.

In addition to an overall conducive situation, and one in which change is welcomed, in South Africa the Finance Ministry has been led by a woman director-general (permanent secretary) and a woman deputy minister. Both these women have publicly aligned themselves with the initiative as a way of promoting redistribution and assisted it in different ways. From outside, the Ministry has been subjected to ongoing pressure and encouragement, particularly from the parliamentary Committee on the Quality of Life and Status of Women.

While it would be wrong to assume that all women are gender-sensitive, experience shows that several of the countries that have embarked on these initiatives have women in powerful positions. Thus in Mozambique the two top officials in the Budget Office are women. In Sri Lanka, too, the chief official is a woman. In at least one other country with a gender budget initiative the top official is married to a gender activist and he has himself attended activities addressing gender issues.

As far as outside government initiatives are concerned, Elson suggests that parliamentarians and NGOs can contribute by:

- Mobilising for gender-sensitive budget analysis;
- Contributing to government's analysis by producing relevant information and research; and
- Conducting 'shadow' or 'parallel' analyses (Elson, 1999: 9).

In South Africa both parliament and NGOs have certainly played an important role in encouraging this type of analysis. In Tanzania, too, the NGO exercise spurred on government and donors to start a parallel initiative.

There are, however, limitations on involvement from outside. The South African outside-government initiative has depended on ongoing support from foreign donors, although some actors – both government and non-government – within the country are now commissioning, and paying for, smaller studies. It has also involved major commitments of time from the researchers and others involved in producing the 'parallel' analyses.

Those outside have also had to recognise the roles and possibilities for influence and intervention of different players. In most countries even parliamentarians have very limited say in budget allocations. The budget estimates are usually tabled in finished form very near the end of the financial year. In South Africa and many other countries parliamentarians have the choice of either accepting the budget as is, or rejecting it in its totality. They do not have the option of increasing, decreasing or even shuffling allocations.

#### **4. WOMEN OR GENDER?**

The Australian exercises were all known by the generic name of women's budget and produced women's budget statements. The South African extra-governmental exercise, similarly, is known as the Women's Budget Initiative and has produced a series of 'women's budget' books (Budlender, 1996; 1997; 1998; 1999).

Some of the more recent initiatives in other countries have chosen to style themselves as gender budget initiatives. The choice reflects the general move among gender and development theorists away from women-in-development to gender-and-development. South Africa has, however, stuck to the original name. This choice is echoed in the names of the recently established parliamentary Committee on the Improvement of the Quality of Life and Status of Women as well as the Office on the Status of Women situated in the Deputy President's Office. At least one of the countries that followed South Africa's lead - Mozambique - styles its inside-government initiative as O Orcamento dos Mulheres, a direct translation of women's budget.

The South African initiative, despite the name, strives for a gendered analysis rather than a simple focus on women. Maintaining the original name in part reflects a desire to stick to the name by which the exercise has become known both in the country and beyond. The reasons extend beyond this. Firstly, in multi-lingual societies such as South Africa, and especially countries with varying levels of education and knowledge of English, the term 'gender' confuses and intimidates as often as it enlightens. Secondly, the 'women' in the title underlines the fact that, in the relations between women and men, which constitute gender, it is women who come out second best in the overwhelming majority of cases. The 'women' thus stresses the overall emphasis of the project, which is to focus on how government allocations should prioritise the disadvantaged.

The focus on gender, on the other hand, has many strong points, but also has potential weaknesses. In at least some countries it seems that the term gender is being used to dilute the focus on disadvantage. In some cases the constant reference to women and men depoliticises the issue by almost suggesting that there is no bias or that, if there is bias, the patterns are haphazard. This understanding has certainly emerged among government employees who have participated in the gender budget analysis training exercises in several countries.

The argument sometimes goes together with a simplistic call for 50-50 equality. Such a call ignores the real differences between women and men which result from biology, roles as well as other causes. The approach easily falls into a call for formal equality, or equality of opportunity, rather than the stronger substantive equality, which looks for equality of outcome. For equality of outcome, policy needs to take into account

differences in needs and differences in starting points, and needs to provide compensation in one for or another.

In some cases the call for a focus on gender rather than women goes further than simply asserting haphazard patterns of disadvantage. In at least one country in which the gender budget analysis has been introduced, the men involved continually noted their perception that men have become, or are becoming, the disadvantaged. Most commonly proponents point to the higher enrolment of girls or women in education, which now prevails in a number of Caribbean and Southern African countries. The examples offered in favour of the disadvantaged men thesis usually do not go far beyond the education one, but are nevertheless important. They need to be taken note of both so as to address the reality of the situation, as well as to examine – and challenge if necessary – the claims that male disadvantage pervades the society more generally. The type of detailed sectoral analysis involved in gender analysis of budgets provides the opportunity for just such a focus.

Some feminists who favour a return to the use of ‘women’ rather than ‘gender’ claim that when boys and men drop out of education, the disadvantages are self-inflicted. They claim that the disadvantages do not therefore merit the same attention as the structural barriers that impede the progress of women and girls. This argument is difficult to sustain. What, for example, is the difference between this male dropout reaction to societal pressures and the female reaction where only small numbers of women register for engineering studies even where the opportunities present themselves? More pragmatically, feminists need to pay attention to male dropouts if only to think about the implications for women when the men in their lives are disillusioned and hostile.

## **5. OTHER BUDGET INITIATIVES**

In 1996 a meeting of Commonwealth Finance Ministers endorsed a recommendation of the Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women’s Affairs, to initiate a programme on engendering budgets as the first step in engendering macro-economic policy. The programme was to involve pilot programmes in four countries, one in each of the Commonwealth regions. In South Africa the pilot would involve an in-government exercise to parallel the already existing outside-government one. The other countries were Sri Lanka, Barbados and The Fiji Islands. All but The Fiji Islands have at this stage conducted some form of gendered analysis of budgets.

In addition to the cross-country Commonwealth programme, a number of individual countries have embarked on their own exercises. These include Namibia, Mozambique and Botswana (inside government), Tanzania (inside and outside) and Uganda (in parliament). In late 1998 the British Treasury co-hosted a one-day

workshop on gender analysis of budgets. The Treasury has, before and since the workshop, had discussions with a small Women's Budget grouping in that country. The latter exercise, as well as initiatives in Canada and the United States, suggests that gender analysis of budgets is not something relevant only to developing countries.

The spread of the initiative bears testimony to the potential for different countries to learn from each other as well as the difficulties in doing so. As expected, there are differences in the situation of women and men in each of these countries, even though the majority are situated in Southern Africa. There are also differences in the shape and format of their budget, the arrangement of ministries, the levels of concern with gender issues, and so on. Budgets themselves are not simple things. The institutional and other arrangements, which surround budgets, are even less simple. Most people embarking on gender analysis of budgets have their time cut out understanding how things work in their own country without the added complication of understanding the similarities and differences with other countries.

Nevertheless, there are also some similarities that suggest the strong influence of the international agencies in macro-economic and financial issues, including budgets. At the most obvious level, there is a concern around issues central to structural adjustment programmes - reduction or containment of the size of the civil service, reduction in debt, privatisation and commercialisation, promotion of an open economy and so on. Each of these has gendered implications for the budget and related policies. Perhaps less obvious to people not involved in budget analysis are trends in budgeting. One example here would be performance or programme budgeting. This involves a concern with 'outputs' in terms of delivery and 'outcomes' in the form of changes in the situation rather than simply with control over monetary amounts.

As noted above in the discussion on South Africa, the shift to programme budgeting and gender analysis of budgets should have a symbiotic relationship. On the one hand, programme budgeting is in line with the focus of gender analysis on delivery - on what budgets achieve or deliver. Conversely, the disaggregation and more in-depth analysis advocated by gender analysis strengthen the insights obtained from programme budgeting. Several countries have acknowledged this symbiosis by incorporating the need for gender and other disaggregations in their budget guidelines for line ministries.

There are, however, also drawbacks in this and other shifts. Many countries appear in a constant state of flux trying to implement this change together with a host of other innovations and 'improvements' suggested by local and visiting experts, consultants and advisers. A state of flux provides opportunities in that systems are less rigid and



so more adaptable to incorporate additional aspects. On the other hand, ministry officials can be so overwhelmed with the ongoing changes that they cannot contemplate another one. Further, innovations conducive to gender analysis stand the danger of being wiped out when the next change comes into effect.

The South African example has both advantages and disadvantages in this respect. Post-apartheid society is characterised by the desire of the new rulers and the majority of the population for wide-ranging change, or indeed transformation. Many analysts are now saying that one of the weaknesses of the post-apartheid era has been the attempt to institute too many wide-ranging changes at the same time. Trainees in other countries will usually agree with the need for transformation in the South African case, and usually accept that this should incorporate gender-related elements. All too often, however, South Africa is labelled as a special case, which has little bearing on their situation.

Resistance to seeing the need for change is particularly likely in more stable societies, which deliver reasonable levels of services to a large proportion of their citizens. The view is even more likely when one works with those citizens who are employed by government. In one country, a civil servant questioned why we were talking about “change” at all. He found the term “improvement” more acceptable. In another country it was only after three days of workshop that there was more or less consensus that gender discrimination existed. On the other hand, the training and presentation must avoid being too subtle out of concern over scaring off officials. In a third workshop it was only on the third day that one participant realised that “redistribution” was core to the initiative.

As noted above, the three category Australian framework has been used in other countries as well. The specification of gender-specific expenditure as only one of three categories attempts to ensure that the exercise does not focus only on gender-specific projects or programmes. The broader focus differentiates the exercise described in this article from that of the Philippines. That country has, since 1995, had a Gender and Development Budget Policy, which states that all government agencies must allocate at least 5% of their budgets to programs and projects addressing women or gender concerns. This, in our terms, is category-one expenditure.

The strength of the Philippines approach is that it includes incentives for allocations larger than 5% through performance contracts and budget reallocations. The weakness is that the approach ignores what is happening in mainstream expenditure. Local groups have raised this weakness. Thus Diane Elson quotes a review commissioned by the Women’s Action Network for Development which says that, from the point of NGOs, “the proper approach is not to ask ‘how many funds is there for gender

concerns?’ Rather, ‘how can the use of current resources be freed of gender bias, if any?’” (Elson, 1999: 5).

The restricted focus has also been evident in other countries, despite training in the three-category approach. Thus one country conducted a fairly comprehensive analysis of several sectoral budgets, which established in the minds of the government employees concerned that there was indeed gender discrimination. The proposed solution, despite the training in the three-category framework, was to propose a special project for women, and to solicit donor funding for this project. The solution contradicted both the need for rethinking of mainstream expenditure, and the need to reallocate from the government budget itself i.e. to redistribute. The analysis of donor funding of the South African government revealed that the bulk of assistance named by the donor interviewees, as being gender-related were category-one type expenditures.

In the original conception, analysis of the second category of expenditure was seen as focusing on initiatives that promoted equal opportunity. This was relevant in a country like Australia, where several such initiatives existed. It is also potentially important in South Africa, where the constitution specifically provides for what, in the United States, is called affirmative action, but which some prefer to call corrective action. Thus clause 9(3) of the South African Bill of Rights states: “To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories or persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken”.

In other countries it is often more difficult to think of examples of category two expenditure. Often the analysis focuses, instead, on the gender profile of the public service. Such analysis, which in effect is a gender decomposition of personnel expenditures, is important in itself given (a) the large percentage which personnel expenditures (salaries and benefits) constitute of the budgets of most countries and, in particular, of non-donor expenditures; and (b) that government employees often constitute a privileged group because of more secure employment in a situation of large informal sectors and high unemployment.

The importance extends beyond this, however. It is not only the absolute number of women and men employed, but also the jobs in which they are employed. Firstly, there is the question of levels. In South Africa, for example, there are more or less equal numbers of women and men employed in national and provincial government overall. When national and provincial are disaggregated, however, the picture changes. National government, which formulates overall policy, is seen to be male-dominated, while the provinces, which deliver services such as education, health and welfare, are heavily female-dominated. Thus while 50% of public servants are

women, the latter are disadvantaged in terms of both decision-making power and payment.

Beyond these broad patterns, the analysis can also point to concern about particular jobs. In most countries participants in these exercises agree on the desirability of rape victims being able to report to female police officers. In Barbados participants suggested that a greater presence of male teachers might help address the higher male school dropout rate currently being experienced.

The three-category framework is a sectoral one, which does not address macroeconomic policy more broadly. The inside government initiatives rarely, if ever, address these macroeconomic policies. There is, however, often discussion of the budget process as officials from agencies other than the Ministry of Finance often resent their own lack of power and the strict restrictions, which they perceive the Ministry of Finance (and donors) as imposing on them. In outside government initiatives there is also usually discussion of the budget process, as this excludes outsiders even more than government officials. Initiatives have rarely dealt with macroeconomic policy in any depth. There are, however, sometimes references to the restrictions imposed by structural adjustment and similar policies, particularly on the 'social' sectors.

## **6. WHOSE AGENDA?**

The Australian women's budget was born after the mid-1980s Labour Party victory in Australia. The advent of the new government saw a significant number of feminist women entering the bureaucracy. The women's budget was one of the ways in which these 'femocrats' sought to ensure that the new government delivered to women's needs.

The South African Women's Budget Initiative was also born out of a change in government - this time from the rule of apartheid's National Party to that of the post-apartheid African National Congress (ANC). The ANC itself was committed to women's empowerment, as evidenced by its adherence to a one-third quota on its election lists. (South Africa utilises the list system, rather than a constituency-based system, for national and provincial elections.) Both the interim and final constitutions of the new regime had non-racism and non-sexism among their most fundamental principles. Prior to the elections women from across race, party, class and other divide came together in the Women's National Coalition and drew up a Charter for Effective Equality. The Women's Budget Initiative reflected the commitment of some of the over 100 new women parliamentarians to ensure that this aspirational document could become reality.

The Australian and South African initiatives were clearly driven by internal political dynamics. In some other countries, even without the direct link with political change, it has been local women who have taken the initiative. Yet in virtually all countries of the South undertaking initiatives, with the exception of Australia, donors have provided resources and support. Multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, United Nations (UN) agencies and the Commonwealth Secretariat have come out openly in favour of the initiatives. Both government and non-government bilateral organisations have provided financial and other support. In at least some countries, donors sometimes appear keener than those directly involved that the initiatives should thrive.

All donors do not necessarily share the same agendas. The World Bank's motivation for supporting gender analysis of budgets appears to focus primarily on efficiency. The Bank argues, correctly, that ignoring or impeding the potential contribution of half the population will diminish the overall levels of wealth in the society. Some of the UN agencies, meanwhile, focus more on issues of equity and empowerment. Some of the governmental and non-governmental bilateral donors see the initiatives as meeting their concerns about good governance and - particularly where they involve parliament or civil society players - public participation and transparency.

From the side of recipient countries, it is sometimes argued that the concern with gender has been imposed on countries and that governments are only assenting to it – or pretending to assent – in order to access other funds. A variant of this argument states that gender equity is foreign to the local culture. An Irish Aid document acknowledges the possibility that the “imposition of donor gender policy” could be “a form of cultural imperialism”. The document emphasises that cultures change, but states “decisions on where to focus and how to proceed must be determined by those who will live with the outcome” (Gaynor, 1995: 5).

Donors (and other interventionists, such as consultants) can ask why one should consider imposition of gender equity values any differently from imposing values of transparency, accountability and democracy. All the latter can as easily be claimed to be part of ‘culture’ as are gender issues. Gender, however, evokes much stronger feelings because it raises more personal issues for those involved. Further, any intervention is questionable if there is little apparent support from within the country.

The level of support generally depends on whom the intervention chooses as a partner. Donors are often keen to engage with governments, seeing this as where the power lies. Often, however, government employees are less likely to be committed to, or even aware of, gender issues than civil society groupings. The level of alienation can be extreme. In one workshop there was an exercise in which participants were asked to list and discuss the advantages of doing gender analysis of the budget. A

middle-level government bureaucrat answered, with no sense of embarrassment and no apparent attempt at humour: “The donors like it.”

As noted, donors often choose government interventions because of government’s perceived power. Most countries today will contain at least a small group of gender activists who would understand and support the sort of things that gender analysis of budgets advocate. Sometimes, however, these groups are small. Often, despite energy and enthusiasm, the system provides them with little power to change things. Limited chance of effect obviously limits the resources which both these groups and donors are willing to devote to the exercises.

South Africa is fortunate in this regard. In the fourth year of research the Women’s Budget Initiative focused, among other things, on donor funding to government. Donors contribute only 2% of the South African government budget – a much smaller percentage than for most of her neighbours. Nevertheless, this was seen as an important focus because of donor interest in, and advocacy of, gender issues in other countries as well as the lack of transparency by the South African Department of Finance on issues of donor funding.

One of the questions addressed to the thirty or so donors enquired as to whether they perceived themselves, the government, or both as promoting gender issues in the country more vigorously. Interestingly, at least as many respondents said that the South African government was at least as keen as the donors in this respect as said the opposite. Representatives of one of the more powerful donors observed that government was “far ahead in the game”.

In terms of the women’s budget exercise, it was civil society and parliamentarians who initiated the exercise in South Africa. Further, while there is individual and institutional support from within government, it is almost certainly the ongoing questions and interest displayed by parliamentarians and civil society, which ensures that the government continues to produce gender-disaggregated data and analysis of its activities and expenditure. In Tanzania, similarly, it was an NGO which first embarked on the analysis. It was only a year later that the government felt constrained to take action lest it – in the words of one of the civil servants – get “left behind”.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

Gender analysis of budgets is a tool for change. The analysis could help in addressing what have been termed both practical and strategic gender needs. For example, an analysis, which revealed the disproportionate burden, which women bear in relation to childcare, could, on the one hand, promote the provision of childcare facilities to relieve this burden somewhat. On the other hand, the policy and programmes could

attempt to alter the gender division of labour so that the burden did not fall so disproportionately on women. Which route is chosen depends on the level of analysis as well as the ideology of those who conduct it and can take its findings into consideration in planning policies.

Thus in a workshop in one country, most government employees participating in a workshop – and especially the men – seemed rather horrified that men might want to change nappies and that government could consider taking action to encourage this and other sharing of domestic tasks. Nevertheless, these same participants were quick to acknowledge the fact that the population of the rural areas was predominantly female, that poverty was concentrated in these areas, and that government projects should and could target women. They were also not averse to initiatives that would alleviate the domestic burden borne by women so long as this did not involve men in the work.

As with any intervention, those initiating the activity need to devise a strategy. They need to plan how to present the intervention to those from whom they expect and need support. This is particularly so when, as is often the case with gender budget ventures, there is likely to be some resistance. It is even more crucial where some of those involved in the intervention are from outside the country.

In countries without a strong commitment to gender equality, what are the attractions of such an exercise? When the idea is first introduced many react in a hesitant, if not hostile, way. The exercise is seen as implying additional work, whereas many government officials see themselves as already overloaded. The exercise is also usually seen as requiring additional money at a time when most governments are battling to reduce budget deficits.

In at least some instances this initial opposition has been allayed, or even turned around, when people realise that the exercise is not about more work or money, but about better work and better allocation of budgets. In Australia one of the drawbacks of the exercise was the amount of resources committed to the exercise itself. In that country each state as well as the federal government produced budget reports dedicated to looking at expenditure in relation to women. The focus of recent workshops in other countries has been on how the techniques can be incorporated in existing work rather than on producing separate publications. The emphasis is on encouraging officials to recognise the utility of “disaggregating” expenditure in terms of its impact on women and men, as well as in terms of other variables. As noted above, this emphasis also ties in well with the current interest in programme performance budgeting. In monetary terms, when officials start thinking of policy goals at the same time as budgets, they recognise that gender analysis can result in

expenditures that are both more efficient in targeting the truly needy, and more equitable.

Sen notes that endeavours to “sensitise” government actors through gender training have had limited success in that there is a “tendency to treat what goes on in such trainings as a spare-time activity of little consequence to their ongoing work” (Sen, 1997: 48). The budget analysis training has been somewhat different as it focuses on what the concepts and ideas mean for daily work. Increasingly the focus of training has been on practical and participatory tasks rather than theoretical inputs.

Nevertheless, while evaluations of workshops see most participants stating that they can and will incorporate what they have learnt in their daily work, the extent to which this occurs, and the impact that this has on policy and allocations, remains to be seen. In at least some cases the evaluations themselves suggest difficulties. Participants point, for example, to the need to convince the top officials who are their superiors. In some cases these responses could be evidence of buck-passing. In some cases it could be evidence of officials not realising their own power, as the reason for focusing on middle-level officials has been a recognition that those at the top are only minimally involved in the work, which forms the basis of budgets. In most cases, however, the hierarchical nature of ministries means that without the go-ahead from the top, the initiatives will not go far.

The paragraphs above focus on inside government exercises. One of the greatest strength of having a parliamentary voice in initiatives, besides the parliamentarians’ legitimated power, lies in agitating for changes before budgets are drawn up so as to influence officials rather than making changes after presentation. This provides the potential for effecting change, rather than simply analysing what has happened. The civil society voice adds strength to the parliamentary one. However civil society’s powers are more restricted than parliament’s, being confined to limited powers for submissions and addresses to parliament. In South Africa one of the strengths of the parliament-NGO partnership is that the NGOs have been able to provide solid research with which parliamentarians can motivate their comments and suggestions.

Gender budget initiatives also hold other benefits for civil society and for good governance more generally. One of the most important is the increased transparency and accountability which ensues when government engage seriously with these exercises. Transparency and accountability are not simply of theoretical value. In order to engage in effective agitation and oversight, both parliamentarians and civil society need decent information. A good, ongoing gender budget exercise provides the basis for greater involvement of people in influencing policy and budget allocations and in monitoring their implementation, even if opportunities for drafting of budgets remain minimal.

This volume of *World Development* focuses on macroeconomics and international trade. The gender budget initiatives have, to date, said little at the global level about these issues. Sectoral analysis of the ministries dealing with trade and economics provides some opportunity for this type of analysis and comment. Sectoral analysis of the Ministry of Finance itself, and the processes involved in budget formulation, provides some opportunity for comment on how macroeconomic policy is drawn up and implemented. Exercises inside government cannot be expected to provide a critique of a country's macroeconomic policy. Exercises outside government provide the space to do so. Whether this space is taken up depends on a host of political and other factors relating to the situation in the country and the situation and objectives of those involved in the initiative.



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