

Gender-Responsive Budgeting in South East Europe: Advancing Gender Equality and Democratic Governance through Increased Transparency and Accountability

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GENDER RESPONSIVE BUDGETING IN ALBANIA¹

Background and Country Focus

From the beginning of 2007 until March 2008, UNIFEM work on gender responsive budgeting (GRB) in Albania focused on: identifying entry points for use of GRB as a tool for increasing the integration of gender into local and national policies; and subsequently raising awareness, understanding and commitment among potential partners in central and local government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Given the complexities of the use of GRB as a tool for gender mainstreaming, this incremental approach has been necessary to ensure the strategic identification of entry points and that selected partners commit to and understand the principles of gender responsive budgeting.

Within the context of UN Reform, UNIFEM, as the lead agency on gender in the UN Country Team (UNCT), has also worked to ensure that the UNIFEM work on gender budgeting in Albania

¹ Updated June 2008

aligns with and supports the broader governance and regional development work envisioned by the UNCT under the “One UN Programme”².

GRB and UN Reform – One UN in Albania

In January 2007, Albania was selected to be one of the eight pilot countries for UN reform and the implementation of the “One UN” initiative. In light of that, upon request of the Government of Albania and the UN Country Team, UNIFEM established a country office in May 2007. While initial GRB activities began prior to the establishment of UNIFEM office, full implementation of GRB plans began after finalization of the One UN Programme document. This was to ensure that UNIFEM's work on GRB in Albania would both support the UN broader work on good governance and regional development, but would also conceptually fit into the UN Join Programme on Gender, for which UNIFEM is the lead coordinating agency.

Under the Joint Programme, UNIFEM's work on gender budgeting is incorporated so as to ensure improved coordination with other UN agencies working on gender mainstreaming. In supporting the creation and the strengthening of governmental gender equality mechanisms, UNIFEM will coordinate the UN's work in this regards, and will conduct technical trainings on gender budgeting, CEDAW and the application of the Gender Equality Legislation. Furthermore, UNIFEM's GRB work in the 4 regions will link up to the larger UNCT plans on reducing regional disparities through increasing support to regional development.

In light of this and based on extensive consultations with government and NGO counterparts, UNIFEM's GRB work for 2008-2009 in Albania will focus on the following:

- Building approaches to ensure that state social services support women's unpaid care work in the home, and in doing so, increasing local authorities' inputs into central government programmes;
- Increasing policy and budgetary linkages between the National Strategy on Gender Equality and Domestic Violence 2008-2010 (NSGE-DV) and the National Strategy for Social Protection;
- Supporting three to four municipalities in implementing the NSGE-DV through identifying local-level gender equality priorities and using GRB tools to ensure that local policy processes incorporate women's voices and address women's needs;
- Supporting local municipalities in increasing women's participation in local participatory budgeting processes;

Results to Date

Mapping the Entry Points

To guide the identification of the above-specified priorities, UNIFEM supported the development of a study on unpaid care work of women, and making it visible through participation. The main NGO partner, Advanced Studies Centre (ASC), analyzed women's unpaid care work in the home in 10 regions with various geographic and economic characteristics. The rationale for this was three-fold:

- i) To improve understanding of the linkages between women's unpaid care work and their economic engagement, as women in Albania are the least economically active compared to women in other countries in the region.
- ii) To analyze how the state supports women's unpaid care work in the home, thereby allowing greater opportunities for women to engage in public life

² As part of the broader One UN's work on gender equality in Albania, UNIFEM is ensuring close cooperation with the Austrian-supported “Equity in Governance” programme (EiG) in building the capacity of gender equality mechanisms in government at central and local level. In this context, EiG and UNIFEM are coordinating the capacity building/trainings being conducted in the four regions where GRB activities are carried out.

- iii) To provide baseline data and analysis to support UNIFEM in identifying possible regions where commitment and interest exists to pursue sustained gender budgeting interventions, and possible issue-driven and/or policy driven entry points for GRB.

The study “Unpaid care work: The invisible burden of women” documents many of the complex issues that are at play within the private domain of the household and that affect differently the lives of women and men. It focuses on care for children and the elderly, access to health care, social protection, and household utilities. It finds that women have many difficulties to enter, stay and return to the formal labour market, due to lack of employment opportunities, limited skills beyond traditional sectors, but also due to their overload with housework and care for family members. The latter limits not only their time, but also their exposure to public and social engagements. Among the study recommendations are areas for state and NGO response towards increased access to and quality of social services, higher participation of women in the decision making process at local and central level, and increase in local NGO awareness on decentralisation processes and their impact on women. The study also emphasizes the need to improve the linkages between social protection strategies and services and the legal frameworks for advancement of gender equality.

The report was officially launched during national conference in March 2008 where around 40 participants from central and local authorities, NGOs, international organizations, academia and experts participated. Participants showed great interest in the topic and recognized the study as unique attempt to put forward on the public agenda a new concept in Albania – that of the contribution of women’s household work to the nation’s economical and social development. UNIFEM is currently using the study to advocate for changes in data collection, policy design and allocations in order to alleviate women’s unpaid care work burden and release their potential for other productive activities and more leisure time.

Gender Responsive Budgeting at Local Level

Based on the findings of the unpaid care work analysis, and so as to launch the local level GRB work in Albania, UNIFEM and ASC organised a national awareness-raising seminar targeting four priority regions – Kukes, Lezhe, Shkoder and Elbasan. These four regions were selected based both on need³ and on expressed interest by local authorities to engage further in working on gender equality issues. Participants in the seminar included experts or directors in the Social Services, Budget, Policy Development and Strategies Departments.

As follow up to the above, UNIFEM is currently conducting awareness-raising roundtables, targeting more specifically public authorities and NGOs in each of the four regions. The roundtables familiarize participants on the links between GRB and unpaid care work and are tailored to each region. Using the results of the study, as well as the 8 objectives of the NSGE-DV, brainstorming sessions are held to identify the key gender equality and women’s rights issues in each region and the policy opportunities that exist to address these priorities using GRB. In this way, UNIFEM activities on gender budgeting are supporting the process of localizing and implementing the NSGE-DV. At present, two of the four roundtables have been held. On the basis of the roundtables and consultations, UNIFEM has secured firm commitment for further gender budgeting work with the municipality of Elbasan, and is in process of negotiating formal partnership with the municipality of Kukes.

³ Three are located in the North of Albania, which is a priority area of both government and donors, and are among the poorest regions in the country.

Participatory Budgeting Process in Elbasan Municipality

The municipality of Elbasan is one of the few in Albania to adopt a “participatory budgeting” process. Given the municipality’s commitment to increasing citizens’ participation in policy and budgetary processes, UNIFEM has been working with the municipality to ensure that women participate fully in the process and their concerns are taken into account. In October 2007, UNIFEM supported monitoring of the extent and nature of women’s participation in 10 public hearings, as part of the participatory budgeting process. The monitoring revealed that women participate in public hearings to a lesser degree than men, and when they do, they are rarely vocal in expressing their priorities. It pointed to areas of improvement of the participatory budgeting process and actions that can be taken by both the municipality and NGOs to ensure stronger participation of women. UNIFEM will offer technical assistance in the implementation of such actions for the 2009 budget. This increased participation may not result in “women-specific” interventions at the policy/budgetary level, but will lead to local budget which reflects the needs of the entire population.

Linkages between Social Protection and National Strategy on Gender Equality and Domestic Violence

UNIFEM is in the process of consultation with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (MoLSAEO) with regards national-level GRB process, whereby UNIFEM will support increasing the policy and budgetary linkages between the NSGE-DV and the National Strategy on Social Protection.

Planned Activities for 2008

- Establishment of a core team of practitioners on gender budgeting, from government and civil society, based in the four selected regions and Tirana;
- Support Municipality of Elbasan in the 2009 participatory budgeting process to increase its outreach to women in local communities;
- Increase capacity of municipal staff in two/three regions on gender budgeting and its application in local budgetary processes;
- Support local NGOs in monitoring specific local and national government budgets and advocating for increased integration of gender equality priorities into policy and budgetary processes;
- Map out the measures and steps needed to improve policy and budgetary linkages between the NSGE-DV and the National Strategy on Social Protection.