



Helpdesk Research Report

Increasing financial investment in women and girls through gender responsive budgeting

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Question

How successful has gender responsive budgeting been in increasing financial investment in girls and women, and in gender equality? Identify literature on: what approaches have worked and why; criticisms of GRB; and alternative approaches to increasing financial investment in women and girls.

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1. Overview

This rapid review identifies literature on the impact of gender responsive budgeting (GRB) in increasing financial investment in women and girls, and investment in gender equality¹. Overall, evidence indicates that it is **difficult to attribute financial change** to GRB initiatives (Budlender, 2005; Sharp, 2003). In a paper produced for the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Budlender (2005, p.

¹ This paper focuses on whether GRB increases financial investment in women and girls. For a paper looking at more general outcomes of GRB see Combaz (2013) available at: <http://gsdrc.org/docs/open/HDQ977.pdf>

11) notes that “more than fifty GRB initiatives around the world have probably produced relatively few budget changes”. Some of the literature identified does discern a limited range of impacts attributed to GRB – however, there are less specific details provided on why initiatives have been successful. Drawing from the literature that is available, some of the identified successes, and factors contributing to their success, include:

- **South Africa:** The South African Women’s Budget Initiative (SWABI) secured changes in policy and budget allocations, including the introduction of a child support grant that is paid to primary caregivers (typically women) and a zero rate of VAT on paraffin, which is a key household purchase for poor women (Budlender 2005). A key factor contributing to SWABI’s success was the wide support it received from civil society, government and international agencies.
- **Mexico:** The Mexican GRB was able to secure a 40 per cent increase in budgetary allocations to reproductive health, as well as additional funding for programmes that target maternal mortality, immigrant women, and women in agriculture (Ibid.).
- **Tanzania:** An institutionalised gender analysis in Tanzania secured a 3 per cent increase in budget allocations to the Ministry of Water for infrastructure projects that typically benefit women (Elson & Sharp 2010).
- **Kerala:** A GRB with the Indian state of Kerala provided tangible increases in the allocation of budgets to sectors that typically neglect gender issues, including infrastructure and transport. Funding provided gender friendly infrastructure in transport depots and low-cost housing for low paid workers (who are typically women) (Mishra 2011).

Enabling factors identified in the literature more broadly include: securing political support; improving awareness and capacity building; developing sound analysis and accountability; securing civil society involvement; having strong institutional mechanisms; building donor partnerships; and having consistent follow-up, monitoring and evaluation of results.

Much of the criticism of GRB stems from the obstacles initiatives encounter in implementation. Some of the **obstacles** identified as hampering the ability of GRBs to deliver greater financial investment in women and girls and gender equality include:

- Limited capacity and resources;
- High staff turnover and lack of institutional knowledge;
- Weaknesses in monitoring and evaluations;
- County context factors such as political instability, elections or limited civil society capacity;
- A lack of sex-disaggregated data to inform analysis.

In the time frame of this rapid review, it was not possible to identify comparative studies on the effectiveness of GRB against other measures to increase financial investments in women and girls. Much Public Financial Management literature advocates GRB as a means of securing an equitable distribution of resources. A number of NGOs have adopted an advocacy strategy to seek budgetary changes but there is little evidence of their effects.

2. Evidence of the success of gender responsive budgeting

The **South African** Women's Budget Initiative (SAWBI) is considered to be one of the 'most successful [GRB] initiatives', and has been able to secure changes in policy and budget allocations (ILO, undated, p. 5). This includes an increase in the allocations to the Department of Trade and Industry for small, medium and micro-enterprises (Ibid), and the introduction of a child support grant that targets young children from poor households and is given to primary caregivers (Budlender 2005, p. 11). Further, SAWBI successfully made the case for paraffin to be zero rated for VAT, as it is a key necessity for poor women (Elson & Sharp, 2010, p. 525). One of the key factors contributing to SAWBI's success has been the **wide support** it has received. A briefing paper for ILO staff notes that SAWBI "draws support from civil society, parliament, government and international agencies" (ILO, undated, p. 5). The use of a modular approach to training was also an important enabling factor as it allowed the initiative to tailor training to particular groups. Some of the additional strengths and results of the initiative identified by the ILO include: Strengthening gender mainstreaming capacity within government, including integrating gender issues in Ministry of Finance documents; and the integration of other categories of analysis in addition to gender, including race and rural-urban issues (Ibid).

In a paper produced for UNRISD, Budlender (2005, pp. 10-11) notes that the Commission on Gender Equality of the Chamber of Deputies in **Mexico** was able to achieve an increase in financial investment in women and girls. The Chamber secured a change in budget to provide a 40 per cent increase in reproductive health funding by drawing on a civil society GRB analysis. Additional funding was also provided for maternal mortality and for women in agriculture and immigrant women (Budlender 2005, p. 10).

The Gender Responsive Budgeting Project (GRBP) was developed by the **Zimbabwe** Women's Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN) in an attempt to address gender-related disparities in national resource allocation (Muchabaiwa, 2010). The project provided a gender perspective and an independent analysis of the national budget with three components: policy and programme analysis; budget inputs, outputs and outcome analysis; and budget process analysis. The budget analysis is also complemented with combined strategies of lobbying, advocacy, capacity development, stakeholder participation and partnership development (Ibid, p. 117). In this paper produced for the World Bank, Muchabaiwa (2010, p. 127) notes that the GRBP produced a "steady increase in budget allocations for issues that benefit women...directly". It also had the effect of mainstreaming gender within government, including allocating resources for gender focal persons and gender awareness campaigns. Some of the lessons identified from the experience of the Zimbabwean GRBP include (Ibid, pp. 132-133):

- Link budget analysis to an **advocacy** plan
- Improve **information** availability and accessibility
- Support and build **capacity** for economic analysis
- Build **alliances**, networks and coalitions
- Make use of the **media**
- Institute a sound **monitoring and evaluation** framework

In the India state of **Kerala**, GRB work has initiated changes in budget allocations to support gender equality in sectors which typically neglect gender issues, such as infrastructure and transport (Mishra, 2011). Impacts include: the allocation of funds for a housing scheme that provides low-cost accommodation for low paid workers, particularly women; the creation of gender friendly infrastructure in transport depots, such as separate rest rooms and drinking facilities; and the allocation of funding to provide counselling facilities for women who experience violence (Ibid, pp. 5-6).

Investment in infrastructure, particularly water and sanitation, can have multiple benefits to poor women and girls who typically bear the brunt of water and fuel collection. In **Tanzania**, the Ministry of Water institutionalised gender analysis in budgeting processes and was able to secure an increase in budget allocations to from central government from 3 per cent to 6 per cent of the budget (Elson & Sharp, 2010, p. 525).

In **Mozambique**, UNIFEM was able to secure specific budget allocations for activities that advocated gender equality in Interior and Health (Johnston et al, 2009).

Gender responsive budgeting has also had an impact on the design, delivery and funding of services. The **UK** Women's Budget Group (WBI) was able to secure changes in the policy design and rationale of Integrated Child Credit (Hafbauer Balmori, 2003, p. 46). From 2003, the credit was paid to the main carer (usually a woman) instead of the main earner (usually a man) (Ibid.). In **Indonesia**, the Women's Research Institute, a national NGO, promoted GRB in maternal health services at provincial and district levels (Elson & Sharp, 2010, p. 524). The initiative was able to secure a reallocation of funding to provide salaries of midwives (as opposed to doctors), and the purchase of medical equipment and motor bikes for midwives (instead of ambulances and buildings) (Ibid.).

Enabling factors

While literature cautions that there is no single or definitive way of initiating GRB, it is possible to isolate some features that have been noted as making a difference to the overall strengths of gender budget initiatives. Recommendations provided in the literature of how to maximise the potential of GRB to change budgets and policies include:

Securing political support

Securing the support of policymakers is the primary factor enabling the success of GRB (Fundar, undated; Austen et al. 2013; Johnson et al. 2009). Literature notes that it is particularly important to secure the support of the key government departments of planning, finance and development (Johnson et al., 2009).

Awareness and capacity building

Raising awareness of gender issues and increasing understanding among stakeholders is considered a "crucial step in developing a public argument for...changing budgets and policies" (Sharp, 2003. p. 11). Key factors in this process include unpacking budget information, analysing budget allocations, and training and building the capacity of stakeholders (Ibid.). Experience from Latin America indicates that training public servants on gender and budgets is of particular importance for the long term success of GRB (Fundar, undated). An internal evaluation of UNIFEM's GRB work notes that capacity building has an important role in creating commitment to GRB and in increasing interest among government ministries (Johnson, et al. 2009).

The media can also play a critical role in effecting budget changes by shaping public opinion. Muchabaiwa (2010, p. 133) recommends that GRB advocates should develop media strategies that enhance outreach to policy makers, citizens and other stakeholders to raise awareness and aid accountability.

Sound analysis and accountability

Changes in budgetary allocations are more likely to be introduced and sustained if they are built upon sound analysis (Sharp, 2003). Appropriate accountability processes should also be in place so that governments are held responsible for what they do and what they fail to do (Sharp, 2003, p. 18; Expert comments).

Civil society involvement

There is a broad acknowledgement that the involvement of civil society has underscored the successes of some GRB initiatives (Hafbauer Balmori, 2003, p. 47). Civil society can facilitate the introduction of gender experts, and put additional pressure on the government to be accountable for concrete actions (Ibid). Hafbauer Balmori (2003, p. 47) contends that “civil society’s involvement is a prerequisite if transparency, accountability and good governance are among the objectives of the initiative”. Alliances and coalitions among civil society groups can also enhance the political leverage of gender budget initiatives (Ibid; See also Fundar, undated).

Johnson et al. (2009) note that engaging with **gender equality advocates** has been an important factor in the success of programmes in Ecuador, Morocco and Senegal. This is particularly effective when gender and planning/finance remits are institutionally combined (Johnson et al., 2009, p. 11).

Consistent follow-up, monitoring, and evaluation of results

Effective monitoring and evaluation processes can aid cross-learning by enabling a comparison among initiatives (Sharp, 2003; Hafbauer Balmori, 2003). Monitoring is also important to gauge any changes that have occurred as a result of the GRB initiative.

Scheduling activities

Drawing from experience in India, Mishra and Sinha (2012) recommend that GRB initiatives should begin with gender planning in each sector – by identifying what the gender gaps are in the specific sector and prioritising action points to address these gaps – then by scrutinising budgets.

Strong institutional mechanisms

Strong institutional mechanisms across ministries can maximise the potential for the GRB to effect change (Mishra & Sinha, 2012). Drawing from experience in Zimbabwe, Muchabaiwa (2010, p. 132) recommends that initiatives should focus on the organisational level, rather than the individual level, to institutionalise processes and lessons, and prevent issues relating to staff changes.

Donor partnerships

Developing alliances and working in partnerships with donors can play an important role in increasing political leverage and encouraging government compliance (Johnson et al., 2009).

3. Criticisms and obstacles to gender responsive budgeting

The literature on gender responsive budgeting typically takes a supportive rather than critical approach and, as such, it was only possible to identify a limited number of criticisms. Much of the criticism that is noted derives from the political process, the hesitancy of political actors to initiate change, and the low priority accorded to gender concerns.

The Government of **India** attempted to institutionalise GRB in the early 2000s, however experts indicate there is a notable gap between what was envisioned and what has been achieved. In a peer-reviewed article, Mishra and Sinha (2012) explore the two strategies adopted by the government for institutionalising GRB – Gender Budgeting Cells (GBC) and the Gender Budget Statement (GBS) – and analyse why they did not initiate financial changes. Gender Budgeting Cells were established in each government Ministry and envisaged as being the focal points for mainstreaming gender through the GRB, while the Gender Budget Statement aimed to identify budget allocations that substantially benefit women (Ibid, p. 50). Three issues affected the success of the GRB: Firstly, there were some significant methodological errors in the GBS and no monitoring or auditing mechanism in place – thus making it difficult to assess whether the GBS had been fulfilled or not (Ibid, p. 52); Secondly, the format of the GBS – being purely quantitative – meant it did not capture the complexity of gender relations and had little to offer policy-makers in terms of formulating additional steps to make policies/schemes gender responsive (Ibid, p. 53). Thirdly, gender was given a low priority. Despite being identified a priority concern, issues of gender were often relegated to ‘additional status’, and made the responsibility of officials who were either unable to dedicate the time needed to ensure their success, or too junior to garner the buy-in required by higher officials (Ibid, p. 55). Problems can also occur when GRB is the responsibility of one individual, rather than focused on building institutional capacities.

In a peer-reviewed article, Austen et al. (2013) analyse the impact of GRB on educational expenditure in **Timor-Leste**. The GRB process involved the use of a gender-disaggregated expenditure incidence analysis (EIA) – a tool which itself was found to be a useful indicator of the inequalities of educational expenditure. However, the use of the EIA in budget and policy decision making was impeded by a range of political, cultural and technical barriers:

- Government stakeholders questioned the credibility of the data that was used in the analysis processes – the EIA made use of school attendance data collected in the Timor-Leste Living Survey, however government actors favoured their own administrative data.
- Senior officials resisted the EIA results due to their unfamiliarity with the methodology used.
- The timing of the budget process was an obstacle. Drawing from interviews with government stakeholders, Austen et al. (2013, p. 16) found that the rules of the budget in Timor-Leste permitted a limited range of entry points to influence decisions and processes. Typically, proposals have a greater chance of being integrated if the analysis is presented when the Ministry is debating new budget measures, rather than if the EIA is presented outside of this short time frame.

There were also concerns that government stakeholders were resistant to integrating gender equality in policy and budget allocations, and failed to take ownership, thinking that it was only those in the gender unit that had responsibility to address the gender issues. A final obstacle was the limited engagement of women’s movements in advocacy and accountability (Ibid, p. 17). The authors conclude that “GRB is as much a **political process** as it is a technical exercise, and its integration into decision-making processes is critical for GRB to reach its potential in practice” (Ibid).

In an internal evaluation of UNIFEM's GRB experience, Johnson et al. (2009, 2009b) identify a series of factors that have limited the success of GRB across country case studies. These include:

- Failing to develop **partnerships** and coalitions with key actors representing women's interests;
- Having no coherent **strategy** for amplifying the demand for change;
- A lack of **technical capacity** in gender and economics among programme staff and stakeholders;
- A lack of **clarity** about programme outcomes, strategies and components;
- Under-developed **theories of change** which were not expressed to, or shared among, stakeholders.

Additional obstacles

Lack of political will

Achieving budgetary changes is usually due to a combination of forces, rather than one single initiative (Budlender 2005, p. 11). Budlender (2005, p. 12) notes that GRB is "most effective when it supports the direction those policy makers already want to take" (Ibid.). In this situation, GRB can strengthen policy-makers' position; if the opposite is the case, GRB is 'likely to be ignored' unless there is strong organisation or advocacy to support it (Ibid).

Limited capacity and resources

UNIFEM's internal evaluation identifies country-specific examples where capacity-building strategies have had limited effectiveness in promoting GRB (Johnson et al. 2009, p. 11). Associated with this is the lack of monitoring and evaluation processes which prevented different perspectives on capacity building being reconciled with evidence (Ibid). UN Women's (2012) experience in India reveals that a lack of resources was a challenge for GRB processes. In particular, initiatives were often understaffed or staffed by people with limited technical expertise in gender responsive budgeting (See also Budlender & Hewitt, 2002). Evaluators recommend that customised training and tools, combined with the support of civil society organisations, could help to address this constraint.

Lack of power and institutional knowledge

A commonly articulated issue is that those involved in GRB often do not have the **power** themselves to change budgets (See for example Budlender 2005; Johnson et al 2009). This issue is particularly acute when GRB initiatives only involve gender ministries or gender focal points – who in many situations are allocated to administrative or human resources departments, or staffed by people who are too junior to make decisions (Budlender 2005, p. 12). Budlender (2005, p. 12) additionally notes that there are often capacity constraints in gender ministries, and that "staff involved often do not engage very energetically in GRBs" due to their technical nature.

Reviewing UNIFEM experience in Nigeria, Johnson et al. (2009, p. 31) find that the GRB had a limited impact due to a **high staff turnover and a lack of institutional knowledge** among state departments and ministry officials (See also UN Women's experience in India, UN Women, 2012). The authors additionally caution that the programme may have concentrated too much on working with civil society groups, to the neglect of effectively engaging state officials in decision making positions. UN Women (2012, p. 36) experience

indicates that within many ministries it is unclear who is responsible for GRB and what they are supposed to do.

Lack of donor partnerships

A lack of effective partnerships – particularly with donors supporting public sector and public financial management reform – limited the ability of UNIFEM to “leverage complementary support to enhance its efforts” (Johnston et al. 2009, p. 11).

Lack of sex-disaggregated data

A lack of sex-disaggregated data is consistently identified as one of the main obstacles to meaningful policies and programmes (Johnson 2009, 2009b; UN Women 2012). An internal evaluation of UN Women (2012, p. 47) GRB activities in India, for example, found that a lack of sex-disaggregated data was the main challenge to conducting gender budget analysis. Without such statistics, it was difficult for budget analysts to determine what women’s needs are and whether policies met these needs. In Senegal, UN evaluators similarly found that a lack of sex-disaggregated data hampered the development of gender aware indicators (Johnson et al. 2009b).

Country context

Despite achieving some successes, Muchabaiwa (2010, p. 129) notes that the Zimbabwean GRB process has faced significant challenges in its operation, particularly relating to the country context. This includes: Contentious government-civil society relations; limited information availability and accessibility; limited Parliament capacity; economic decline; and limited civil society capacity to engage in budget advocacy. Similar obstacles were identified in Nigeria, where elections caused delays to consultations and advocacy with government and stakeholders (Johnson et al. 2009, p. 31).

4. Alternative approaches

It was not possible to identify any studies that compare the effectiveness of GRB with other measures to increase financial investments in women and girls. Professor Diane Elson, a leading GRB expert, contends that it is difficult to identify increases in financial investment for women and girls outside of budget analysis programmes (Expert comments). Elson also argues that GRB itself is “very much connected to governance and reforms of financial management” (Ibid). As such, much of the **Public Financial Management (PFM)** literature suggests the use of GRB techniques in efforts to ensure a gender-aware allocation of resources (See for example, OECD 2010).

Some civil society organisations have used **advocacy strategies** to pursue greater financial investment in women and girls, however the impacts of these are often unclear. Family Care International, for instance, an international NGO focusing on maternal health, utilises ‘evidence-based advocacy’ to support greater financial investment in women’s health in Burkina Faso².

² See: <http://www.familycareintl.org/en/places/25>

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Key websites

- UN Women – Gender Responsive Budgeting: <http://www.gender-budgets.org/>

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