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Improving the quality of life for the girl child by using child rights and gender-sensitive budgeting: Perspectives from South Africa

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations

Introduction

> "Acceptable levels of fiscal and budgetary transparency are reached when the product of appropriate disclosure systematically matches the product of appropriate scrutiny." (Folscher 2002: 1)

Government budgets are the source of vital information for gauging governments' commitment to the realisation of rights and the attainment of gender equality. Budgets articulate the policy direction, plans and resources available for development in a specific country. South African budget statements for example may include the details of programmes for service delivery, the benchmarks as well as targets for services, the allocations for services over the medium term as well as information about spending in previous financial years[1]. The budget cycle is comprised of the following stages: formulation (where the executive puts the plan together), enactment (when it is interrogated and approved by for example by parliament), execution (when policies are carried out) and auditing (expenditure is accounted for and assessed for effectiveness) (Streak 2003:2).

Due to the fact that budgets are invaluable sources of information about the development intentions of a country, they are also highly politicised instruments. "…all budgets are inherently political. They are about choices that affect the lives and well-being of citizens, and that is the central concern of politics." (Budlender 1999: 10) However, it is imperative that citizens also have insight into the budgeting practices of their countries as well as the financial decisions executed. "…Citizens, as contributors to the public purse, have a direct interest in transparency as they are entitled to know how their government is using and managing public funds." (Claasens and Van Zyl 2005: 2) In addition, it is also important for citizen's to participate in setting the development agenda and therefore influence the budget process. This is an ideal opportunity to activate citizenship by becoming integrally involved in governance (Nomdo and Cassiem, forthcoming).

Budgets are considered institutional mechanisms for attaining gender equality and the realisation of child rights but citizen's involvement in budget processes can also afford opportunities for empowerment. This paper will firstly provide a brief description of the perspectives of child rights and gender budgeting. Secondly, it will examine the methodologies of each of these budgeting perspectives and present an example of the girl child's right to education to illustrate how each of these methodologies can be applied to improve the quality of life of the girl child. Thirdly, the paper will provide information about a South African project where children are involved in learning budget monitoring and analysis. It will focus specifically on the perspectives and experiences of the girl children in the project as well as on gender issues that came to light through the evolution of the project. In conclusion, the perspectives gained from these initiatives will be synthesised resulting in three specific lessons learnt from the South African context.

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[1] See Estimates of National Expenditure 2006/07, South Africa National Treasury

Child rights and gender budgeting perspectives

What is child rights budgeting?
"Most rights only become a reality for boys and girls once they take the form of actual services and benefits. Governments need to allocate resources to delivering such services and benefits – and this allocation takes place through the budget process. …government budgets also show what priority is being given to children's rights compared to other competing needs and demands." (Robinson and Coetzee 2005:11)

Child rights budgeting is based on the basic premise that in order to realise the rights of children (especially rights such as education that improve quality of life) it requires effective service delivery. The delivery of basic services such as water and electricity as well as social services such as hospitals and schools requires the investment of resources. These resources include inputs such as human capacity, infrastructure and material resources which all depend on the availability of dedicated financial resources. Therefore, services that realise the rights of girl children in particular need to be deliberately planned and this relates to the programmes that governments choose to fund with public finances. Monitoring the implementation of children's rights from a budget perspective – child rights budget work – is a mechanism to engage with governments and to hold them accountable (Robinson and Coetzee 2005: 5-6).

Child rights budget work is premised on the human rights principles of universality, indivisibility, participation and accountability. These principles resound with the articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of non-discrimination, best interest of the child, the child's right to survival and development as well as the child's right to be heard. The principles form the framework or umbrella for child rights budget work (Robinson and Coetzee 2005: 16-17). The CRC is not prescriptive in terms of the how budgets need to respond to children's rights. However, it provides two important guiding principles in this regard. It provides for the *progressive realisation* of rights and stipulates that states are to do this *to the maximum extent of available resources*. (Robinson and Coetzee 2005: 24). Therefore, rights-based budgeting is implicit in the intent of the CRC.

What is gender budgeting?
"Gender responsive budgets provide a means for determining the effect of government revenue and expenditure policies on women and men." (Budlender; Elson; Hewitt and Mukhopadhyay 2002: 52)

The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women is one of the eight Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs provide an important entry point for gender budgeting (Gicura in Munabi-Babiiha 2005: 11). Gender budgeting recognises that government programmes need to take into consideration the different needs of women, men, girls and boys especially as it relates to service delivery. The population is therefore not a homogenous group where a one-size-fits-all approach is perhaps most efficient but in fact least effective. There needs to be due consideration of the profiles of the target of service provision. In addition, service delivery needs to take cognisance of the different roles and responsibilities that society ascribes to individuals in the varying contexts in which they operate.

Gender responsive budgeting is not necessarily advocating for more expenditure for programmes targeted at women or girls nor the separation of budgets for women and girls. Rather the rationale behind applying gender analysis to budgeting is to understand how gender relations permeate all spheres of life and therefore affect opportunities for men and women, boys and girls. For example, girl children are often responsible for household chores, explicitly prohibiting or limiting their interaction in community governance. In addition, gender budgeting can also demonstrate how policy, programmes and institutions construed as neutral are in fact gender biased. It is also a means to ensure that there is consistency between economic goals and social development commitments (Budlender; Elson; Hewitt and Mukhopadhyay 2002: 53).

There are many techniques or methodologies for executing gender budgeting. These include: analysis of gender specific expenditure (for example, how much of the allocated money for a female adolescent health programme was spent); the promotion of gender equity within the public service or the differential impact of mainstream spending on men, women, boys and girls (for example, education spending should be analysed to determine how many girl children benefited in comparison to any of the other target groups). The outputs that can be attained are: gender aware policy appraisal (for instance, an education policy that specifically speaks to the vulnerabilities that girl children face in attaining access to education); beneficiary assessments (for example, how many girls in relation to other targeted groups have been fed through a school feeding programme); public expenditure incidence analysis; gender disaggregated analysis of the budget in time use, gender aware medium term economic policy frameworks (for example, a medium term policy direction that ensures the needs of girl children are prioritised) and gender responsive budget statements(for instance, where data is disaggregated for girls and boys that facilitates monitoring of outcomes with specific relevance to girl children) (Budlender; Elson; Hewitt and Mukhopadhyay 2002: 53-54).

Applying budgeting principles to the girl child's right to education

The Children's Budget Unit of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa has developed methodologies to undertake child right's budgeting. One such methodology is captured in the three steps outlined below (Coetzee and Streak 2004):

Step One: Investigating the meaning and scope of the right;
Step Two: Identifying government's programmes that deliver on the right – focussing on services and roll-out schedule; and
Step Three: Analysing the sufficiency of these programmes - by researching whether the programmes reached all intended beneficiaries, interrogating medium term budgets, spending patterns, expedient programme roll-out, and finally government's capacity to identify and solve implementation challenges.

Within the South African context, a gender analysis of budgets follows a five step process (Budlender 1998), namely:

Step One: Define the situation for girls, boys, women and men (as well as other subgroups e.g. rural, disabled);
Step Two: Check if a policy (policies) exists that addresses the situation;
Step Three: Establish whether money has been allocated to respond to situation;
Step Four: Determine whether the money allocated has been spent as planned; and
Step Five: Examine whether the situation initially described has improved.

While child rights budgeting and gender budgeting are two distinct approaches to budget analyses (and should not be conflated), when focusing on the girl child, these perspectives intersect. In South Africa, child rights budgeting and gender budgeting did not focus explicitly on the girl child, however, it is possible to make certain inferences about the value of this work for the improved quality of life of the girl child. Let us for argument sake assume that making primary school education free and compulsory is the basis of the legal obligation of government in relation to the right to education. We could then identify programmes that ensure all costs for inputs into education are covered aiming to fulfil this right. We could ascertain whether this programme is accessible for all poor girl children who cannot afford to pay school fees. Payment of school fees impacts on a family's decision of which child to send to school. Fee-free schools will lessen the likelihood of girls being kept at home. Therefore, this may ensure that girl children complete primary education and have a better chance at accessing secondary and tertiary levels of education improving their life prospects.

The specific example of the girl child's right to education as articulated in the CRC will be used to illustrate the potential of the intersection of child rights and gender budget work for improving quality of life.[2]

The girl child's right to education: Intersecting child rights and gender budgeting:

Step One: *Define the rights of the girl child in international conventions and examine relevant national legal instruments*
- The CRC in article 28, section 1 speaks specifically to compulsory primary education, diversifying secondary education, accessibility of higher education, vocational guidance and reducing drop-out rates. With relevance to primary and secondary education there is special mention of free or subsidised provisioning. This will entail the use of public resources to cover the inputs required for effective service delivery.
- What rights to education are articulated in the Constitution and other relevant legislation of a specific country?

Step Two: *Describe the situation that girl children face in respect of access to education*
- How many girls attend primary/secondary and/or tertiary school i.e urban versus

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[2] Some questions are drawn from Robinson and Coetzee 2005: 23

rural areas, children with disabilities, across racial groups?

- What type of challenges prevents each of these subcategories of girls from attending school?
- How many girls drop out of school? At which stage in the education phase and why?

Step Three: *Check whether educational policies speak to the situation of the girl child*

- What education policies exist?
- Do these policies refer to the challenges facing girl children e.g. drop out rates, access, safety?
- Do policies speak to a specific strategy to ensure increased intake of girls into schools to achieve gender parity?

Step Four: *Examine whether there are government programmes, capacity to implement the programmes and whether there are any challenges to the beneficiaries in accessing these programmes*

- Are there fee-free schools? For which period of schooling is education free?
- Are there specific support services to prevent girls from dropping out of school?
- Is safe, efficient transport being provided to take girls to and from school?
- Who is responsible to budget for and implement programmes and services for girl children?
- Are there dedicated personnel monitoring and evaluating the effects of programming and spending on the girl child?

Step Five: *Determine how much money is allocated and spent for each of the programmes*

- How much money is allocated per programme?
- What percentage is this allocation in relation to the total education budget?
- How much of the money was spent mid-way in the financial year?
- How much money was spent at the end of the financial year?
- Was the budget under-spent or over-spent?
- What hindered spending?

Step Six: *Determine the impact of the programme and the spending*

- How relevant was the programme in addressing the needs of the girl child? For example, in relation to planned expenditure for new schools, does the location of the school place the girl child at risk when walking to school?
- How many girl children did the programme reach?
- How has the programme improved the lives of girl children?

Step Seven (this is an overarching step): *Establish the involvement of girl child throughout the budget process*

- Where are the girl children in the budget process?
- What are the views of girl children and what do these mean for government budgeting? For example, have girl children been consulted when drafting budgets and are their views and needs apparent in programming and the final budget allocations and expenditure?

Children participating in governance project (CPG)

Step seven in the example above speaks to participation in the budget. The following case study presents a concrete example of how children's capacities are being built to participate in the budget process in South Africa. The specific impact of this initiative on the girl child as well as gender norming are highlighted.

Some of our municipal officials are interested about this project this will surely break the concrete I assumed was between children and government. (Khanya, 23/08/2005)

In 2005, the CPG project was initiated by the Children's Budget Unit of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa – a civil society organisation. The project set out to activate citizenship by giving a voice to children, as users of services, by building their capacity for engagement in governance. The aim of the project: a) to create opportunities for children in South Africa to monitor government budgets; b) to improve children's participation in and research monitoring for budgets and rights realisation that ultimately informs policy shaping; and c) to contribute to the alignment of government budgeting to rights realization.

Four children's organisations representing urban and rural children from four provinces were invited to participate. The participating organisations included: the City of Cape Town's Youth Development Programme, a foremost anti-child trafficking organisation Molo Songololo's children's group *It's Your Move*, child delegates from the Disabled Children's Action Group, and a rural based youth development initiative Life Hunters operating under the auspices of a faith-based organisation, Practical Ministries.

The project implemented a peer facilitation model for building children's capacity to engage in child rights and gender budget analysis and monitoring on local government level. A peer facilitation group, consisting of 20 children primarily aged 14 to 18, were equitably selected from each of the participating children's organisations. There was an explicit quota system to ensure the equitable involvement of girls in this leadership group. This group completed three intensive training interventions: "Linking Budgets and Rights"; "Budget Analysis as an Advocacy Tool" and "Planning a Strategic Budget Advocacy Campaign" at six month intervals. After the peer facilitators participated in the training workshops they were responsible for conducting a similar training programme with 10 – 20 budget monitors in their constituency groups.

Training for active citizenship

The training process (especially the specific skills and information they gained) was a very empowering experience for the children. A snapshot of the views of girls in the project will reflect on how they have experienced their roles as peer facilitators, the value of the information and skills gained in the project, being part of decision-making, interacting with others from different backgrounds as well as reflecting on their potential for leadership.

15 year old Audrey talks of how the training built her facilitation skills:
...we work well with the children and they had a good understanding of what we were trying to bring over (Audrey, 11/08/2005)

Learning about rights and gender budgeting as well increasing the knowledge base of how government works was integral to the training, 15 year old Audrey and 14 year old Primrose comment on the value of this information:

We learnt a lot about steps we should take in order for our rights and needs to be me. (Primrose, 10/07/2005)I learnt so much about government and how it spends its money (Audrey, 11/08/2005)

The project also involved the children in project governance, including them as full members of the reference group that provided strategic direction. Lorraine explains how affirming this was:

I learnt that children do have a voice and that there are people willing to listen to us….I learnt to use my power I have as a child and I've become confident around a lot of people. (Lorraine, 17/02/2006)

In addition, the project made a concerted effort to integrate youth from urban and rural communities, across a spectrum of socio-economic circumstances as well as encouraging cooperation between children with disabilities and those in the mainstream. Zettie, 15 years old, comments on how this had impacted on her own development:

I have learnt a lot about myself in this project even about myself and how I deal with diversity (Zettie,10/07/2005)

Especially the girls in the project verbalized how the participation in this project has impacted their perception of their goals for the future either in terms of their careers or involvement in their communities. Lorraine highlights the fact that it has equipped her for leadership:

We are being trained as tomorrow's leaders and with the skills and knowledge we learn here, we will make our difference in this world. (Lorraine, 10/07/2005)

Primrose, Audrey, Lorraine and Zettie's words have provided insight into the experiences and views of girls in the project. For the most part the training workshops and coming together to form one project was an empowering experience. However, careful analysis also shows how this development initiative was also a terrain for gender norming[3].

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[3] In this paper, gender norming refers to the processes by which girls are encouraged / coerced to behave according to societal behavioural norms set for girls, failing which they risk marginalisation or rebuke from other girls and women.

Gender perspectives in development initiatives

The CPG project also highlighted certain gendered realities the children had to face to engage in development initiatives as well as highlighting gendered roles and responsibilities of girl and boy children through the process of planning for, participating in and executing workshops. In addition, it provided insight that there was a normative code of behaviour that was deemed acceptable for young girls. The experiences and words of some of the girls in the project will be used to illustrate these points.

Khanya's story illustrates the obstacles she had to overcome to participate in a youth development initiative:

Khanya is a 17 year old Zulu girl, completing her final year of secondary education in 2005. She lives with her father, mother, siblings, cousins, aunts and grandmother in a house that her father has built. They have electricity in the house but also use paraffin stoves for cooking. Water is only accessible from a tap outside the house. She is the eldest daughter in the family but has an aunt and cousin who are near her age. In the household she is responsible for cooking and cleaning as well as participating in the care of her younger siblings. Her brothers are responsible for gardening and if the family had cows, tending them would be the primary responsibility of the boys. Khanya was only permitted to join the Life Hunters group in November 2003 despite knowing about it since February 2001. She remembers how difficult it was to convince her family that she wished to belong to a children's group. She sadly recalls:

"My parents did not want me to join the group at first because of the fact that there are both boys and girls. Culturally girls do their chores at home [and do] not mix with boys. My parents later saw that I wanted so bad[ly] to join this group" (Khanya, 23/08/2005).

The story of the difference in the behaviour of the boys and girls forming the peer facilitation group in the rural province of KwaZulu-Natal, provides insight into power dynamics between the sexes.

The boys were really popular leaders especially amongst the other boys in their constituency group. They led the fun activities such as the singing which the group enjoyed. The girls were more serious and conscientious about the work they needed to do. They always took trouble to be prepared and to take responsibility for facilitating sessions. The girls would just take control of a session. The boys were very relieved when this happened it meant that the girls would do the tedious preparation and they could act as assistants while the girls even annexed the boys' facilitation responsibilities. Instead of voicing their anger towards the boys, the girls internalised the blame. It was their mistake as they had disempowered the boys by assuming their responsibilities.

The experiences of Primrose highlight normative behaviour for girls even when they have left the domain of home and community to participate in development interventions.

Primrose is a Zulu girl - beautiful, tall and fifteen years old when we first met her in February 2005. From the beginning it was apparent that Primrose was a bit marginalised from her own group. Especially the females in the group, disapproved of her. They had a problem with the way she dressed, the way she spoke and more specifically the way she behaved around boys and men. They said her clothes were too skimpy, too short and too tight. They felt her behaviour with males was inappropriate. Moreover, they made no secret of their opinions and constantly chastised her in private and public. The other girls explained that their views were grounded in cultural and religious beliefs that dictated appropriate behaviour of especially young women.

Each of these stories is very instructive in terms of how this development initiative - meant to be an empowering process - may interface with gendered realities that can sometimes be disempowering. Development initiatives do not occur in a vacuum, they are a different terrain for negotiating gender norms. It is interesting to note how peers, even when they are still teens, need to negotiate gender roles amongst themselves. They too, like adult women, add development work on as part of their triple burden – obligations to complete school, domestic chores and participation in youth projects.

Khanya's story illustrates how she needs to convince her parents that she will not be 'negatively' influenced to neglect her household responsibilities by interacting with boys in the youth project. The interaction between boys and girls in development initiatives are also influenced by gender norms. The second story highlights the expectations that girls place on themselves as compared to boys. The boys are allowed to neglect their responsibilities with the girls taking their responsibilities very seriously and becoming upset that the boys do not show the same level of commitment. However, instead of confronting the boys, the girls blame themselves for their impatience with the boys. Primrose's story illustrates that this development initiative was also a new terrain where young women need to act appropriately as prescribed by the normative behaviour in a particular community. The basis of normative behaviour is ascribed in this case to cultural and religious prescripts.

This project has provided insights into the pragmatics and impact of development initiatives as well as the value of children being involved in monitoring budgets for gender equity and rights realisation.

Conclusion

Implicit in government budgets are the development priorities that the country has committed its resources to. Even though this budget information may be hard to access in some countries, the transparency of government budgets are integral for good governance as it is a means of holding government accountable therefore gaining access to the budgeting process is highly political. Active participation by citizens in the determining budget outcomes makes for more robust governance.

Child rights and gender budgeting initiatives conduct budget analysis from particular perspectives. Budget analysis from child rights and gender perspectives are intended to advocate for improving the quality of life of women and children who are most often marginalised from centres of power. Child rights budget work focuses on understanding the states obligation to children as well as how they fulfil this obligation by planning, implementing and budgeting for programmes that will deliver the service required to realise children's rights. Gender budgeting aims to demonstrate how government interventions may exacerbate the gender imbalances in society undermining efforts to attain gender equality. The methodologies of each of these budget analysis perspectives have been applied to an example of the girl child's right and access to education to illustrate how these perspectives can intersect. Child rights and gender budgeting have not yet been institutionalised within the budgeting process of the South African government and therefore continue as advocacy initiatives.

A commitment to government budget analysis by citizens can prove to be a very empowering experience as it builds a knowledge and skills base to actively engage in governance. The South African Children Participating in Governance project built the capacity of children for child rights and gender budgeting. Girls from the peer facilitation group in the project reflect on the way in which the project has built their capacity for leadership, opened up career options, developed lifeskills and self esteem as well as validated their participation in governance. This development project however, was also another terrain for gender norming.

Three lessons emanate from this paper with regards to the South African projects:

- Lobby for the institutionalisation of child rights and gender based budgeting to improve the quality of life of girl children.
- Recognise children (especially girls) as valued and active citizens capable of being part of the resourcing debates within a country.
- Be alert to a gender perspective within development initiatives that may guiede the empowerment intentions of projects.

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