
Government budgets and financing gender equality and women's empowerment

Rhonda Sharp
Professor of Economics
Hawke Research Institute for Sustainable Societies
University of South Australia

Government budgets

Matter a great dealin financing gender equality and women's empowerment.

But..... budgets and resources and their gender impacts are not restricted to government purses.

Gender responsive budgeting

Involves unlocking the positive capacities of budgets to foster equality between men and women and different groups of men and women.

Evidence that GRB's have contributed to improvements:

- on the expenditure side of the budget
- on the revenue side
- In budget decision making processes
- In aid related processes
- Improved statistics and indicators

Other GRB 'results'

- Expands 'gender mainstreaming' to economic policy
 - Brings the 'care' economy and women's time burdens into focus
 - Highlights the importance of macro, meso and micro levels of budget processes and impacts for gender equality
 - Fosters participation and political empowerment
-

Need to know more

- What can we expect from GRB's?
 - How can we assess a government's achievements in GRB's?
 - How can GRB's be made sustainable in the face of change?
-

Australasia and the Pacific Island Countries and Territories



Australian GRB story illustrates:

- the economic and political context is critical in how gender budgeting operates and what can be achieved
 - Nothing stays the same and GRB have to respond strategically to new contexts
 - A 'strong' women's machinery of government that forms contingent alliances is important shouldn't be made accountable for GRB.
-

Phase 1: Neo-Keynesian policy context

- Strong equality/reducing inequality policy role of government
 - Organised women's movement
 - Well resourced women's machinery of government
 - Institutional power of women's policy machinery and the building of contingent alliances
-

Phase 2: Restructuring and Neo-liberal policy reform

- Unravelling of the 'femocrat' GRB
 - Restructuring of the public sector along new public management principles
 - Cutbacks in the women's policy machinery
 - Formal elimination of 'women's budget' processes
 - Discourse of 'governing for the mainstream' with women re-positioned as special interest groups
 - Defunding NGO's critical of the government
-

Phase 3: Maturing neoliberalism

- Holding operations and the emergence of new forms of engagement
 - Women's machinery kept on informing the public about gender and the budget (but not called gender budgeting)
 - Refunding, but shifting the women's policy machinery to the Families and Community Services departments
 - Finding ways to engage- stopping the worst; costs of inequality; performance indicators; whole of government consultations; other spaces?
 - But.....
-

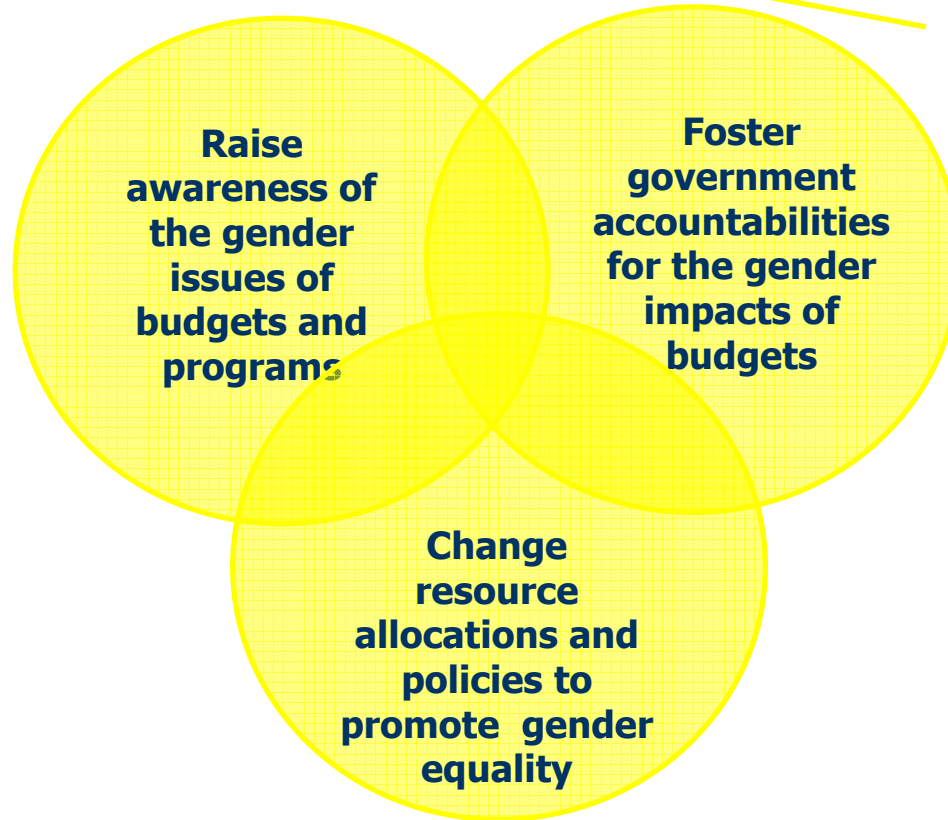
New Zealand

- Engaging with the budget from a gender perspective but not naming it as a GRB
 - Politics of naming (or not naming) GRB's
-

Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs)

- What can we expect from developing country, donor assisted GRB pilots?
 - Republic of the Marshall Island (RMI)
 - Samoa (youth/gender sensitive model)
 - Fiji (gender mainstreaming with some direct budgetary engagement)
-

Goals of Gender Responsive Budgets



(Sharp 2002)

Awareness raising was the main achievement

- Small investments in gender budget work does raise awareness and understanding in government and NGOs of gender issues in budgets and programs
 - Can open the door for changes if there is high level political commitment
-

Fostering accountability mechanisms limited in pilots

- Participants often recognised the need for changes but often don't have the authority to press for greater budgetary accountability in relation to gender
-

Can highlight what will be required to
change resource allocations

This is valuable but the momentum for
budgetary changes can quickly dissipate
when the donor assistance ceases

GRB's and financing gender equality and women's empowerment?

- Engagement with government finances is essential but GRB's are not a panacea- one component of a multi pronged package
 - A political and economic context which gives priority to equality nurtures GRB's
 - Need to find more spaces and ways to effectively engage with budgets from a gender perspective in neo-liberal political and economic contexts
 - A strong women's policy machinery, civil society voices and high level political commitment are ingredients for success
 - Donor funded initiatives need to invest in the potential that exists but also need to have a strategy for assisting in sustaining the process beyond a year or so.
-

Assessing progress?

- Assessing a government achievements in GRB is difficult for many reasons including that resource allocations and policies reflect a variety of influences and gender is a cross cutting issue
 - However we do need to sharpen our thinking about what we can expect of GRB's and know what ensures their effectiveness (or not) for any given the policy context.
 - Sustaining the engagement with budgets in a gender responsive way in the face of policy reforms and international agendas is part of assessing effectiveness.
-