



# The Zimbabwe Gender Budgeting Experience – Mainstreaming Gender in Public Finance Management

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## **Introduction**

The Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN), established in 1990, is an information-based organization committed to gender equality and equity. The organization promotes women's rights and empowerment by advocating for social and economic justice in Zimbabwe and globally. ZWRCN seeks to empower women in Zimbabwe through the provision of information, technical support and advocacy that promotes their participation and benefit from economic, social and political processes. ZWRCN has been spearheading the Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) initiative in Zimbabwe since 1999, through the Gender, Economic Policies and Public Finance (GEPPF) Programme, operating at three levels: Local, National and Regional. The programme is premised on the need to mainstream gender in government macroeconomic frameworks, policies, programmes and budgets to achieve social and economic justice. ZWRCN employs a two pronged strategy, working to strengthen both the supply and demand side of the budget process.

## **Why Gender Responsive Budgeting?**

The Government of Zimbabwe is signatory to several gender equality commitments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform of Action, the Millennium Development Goals and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. The Government has also been quick to put policies and laws in place that seek to promote social and economic justice for women. However, these interventions are seldom matched with the necessary budgetary allocations that actually translate the signature into transformation of women's lives. This is the reason why ZWRCN and its partners have spent significant amounts of energy advocating for gender budgeting, as a model and tool that ensures effective and responsive public policies for citizens, particularly women. The overall goal of gender budgeting is to reduce gender inequalities and to promote gender sensitive development policies for poverty reduction and improvement of the welfare of women and men, boys and girls through the local and national budgets.

## **Gender, Economic Policies and Public Finance (GEPPF) Programme**

Strengthening the supply side of the budget process has mainly been through building capacities of Government technocrats at both local and national government level. This has involved training in gender and gender budgeting as well as technical support in gender mainstreaming and financing for gender equality. Crucial to the success of the 'in government' process was the strategic partnership entered into in 2007 with the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). All gender budgeting activities are being coordinated through the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development and this has created government ownership of the GRB programme and recognition of GRB as a policy issue in the national development process in Zimbabwe. The Ministry of Finance has also engendered the Budget Call Circular mandating all line ministries to submit gender sensitive bids. As a result of these capacity building initiatives, the national budget has since 2007 been more gender sensitive with specific allocations to women and other marginalised groups. These allocations include the Women's Development Fund (\$2 500 000 in 2013) and 6 line ministries which have been allocated funds for gender

mainstreaming activities. The initiative has also had success in local government which is a crucial institution for change as this is where service delivery occurs, public decisions are made and resources allocated, directly affecting the daily lives of impoverished communities. Budgeting for service delivery has improved as technocrats and policy makers are able to identify the needs of different target groups, particularly the vulnerable and allocate resources to finance these needs.

Focus has also been placed on Members of Parliament in their oversight role. A lot of time and resources have been spent in training policy makers on gender and gender budgeting. However, at national level, the effectiveness of some MPs in influencing the budget process has been hindered by the highly polarized political environment in Zimbabwe, which has seen most MPs towing the party line. In addition, most of the MPs who were beneficiaries of the project were not successful in the 2013 Harmonised Elections, meaning a possible need to retrain the new cadres.

Building the demand side of the budget process and strengthening civil society to demand accountability from government has also been a major component of the project. ZWR CN has focussed on strengthening the capacity of various community groups such as faith based organisations, residents associations, informal traders associations, youth groups, people with disabilities, orphans and vulnerable children in GRB and their roles and responsibilities in as far as the budget process is concerned. Gender Budget Action Committees, which are community based advocacy groups have also been established. Strengthening communities and fostering the spirit of participation in decision making processes is key to the success of the GRB initiative as the women and men affected by the use of public resources are given a voice and made visible. Budget monitoring and expenditure tracking work has also been instrumental in strengthening ZWR CN's evidence base for promoting accountability by government to citizen's rights using the budget lens. The entry point thus far has been sexual and reproductive health service delivery for women.

### **Lessons Learnt**

Political will is crucial for the success of the GRB initiative, not just the will to accept the concept, but also the will to actually do something to ensure its success. The challenge is how to move our government from rhetoric to action. Several commitments have been made, through policy documents and strategic plans with very little financial backing. Comprehensive **gender** training is also necessary if GRB is to be well understood, appreciated and implemented correctly.

GRB is a process that Government officials need to learn over time and for which they need technical and financial support. It is very important to pace the initiative and to work within government structures for officials to take ownership of the process. The challenge is that donor programmes are time bound and sometimes very prescriptive.

Finally, the greatest lesson is that the power to change the operations of government and to influence gender mainstreaming in the budget, lies within the women themselves. A lot has to

be invested to capacitate women and other marginalised groups to participate in the budget process.

## **Conclusion**

Gender responsive budgeting offers a means to systematically address gender equality and women's empowerment through government budgets and financial management. GRB initiatives can be successful if translated into the language of government technocrats to bolster the supply side and into the language of community women and men to strengthen the demand for accountability from government. It is one thing to place gender equality as central in policies but matching budgetary allocations and budget implementation has to follow. In Zimbabwe, ZWRGN has made great strides in the institutionalization of GRB, however, more still needs to be done to capacitate affected women and men to participate **meaningfully** in the budget process.