

Promoting Gender Sensitive Budgeting in Scotland

The Experience of the Scottish Women's Budget Group

Conference on:
Economy and Gender Responsive Budgeting

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Scotland

The Background

- Devolution - July 1999
- The Consultative Steering Group (CSG) and the Scotland Act 1998 - 'of the people and for the people'
- Scottish Parliament - Equal Opportunities a founding principle and commitment to transparent and consultative governance
- Mainstreaming agenda endorsed - "the aim must be to embed into the process of policy formulation and the way in which the Parliament works, the principles and commitment to promote equal opportunities for all and to eliminate the effects of past discrimination" (CSG, 1998)
- The Equal Opportunities Committee of the Parliament and the Equality Unit of the Executive



Women Make a Difference in Scotland?

- Women in the pro-devolution campaign
- Women in the Parliament
- The 'shape' of the new institutions....
- Scottish Parliament - commitment to transparent and consultative governance
- Mainstreaming agenda endorsed - "the aim must be to embed into the process of policy formulation and the way in which the Parliament works, the principles and commitment to promote equal opportunities for all and to eliminate the effects of past discrimination" (CSG, 1998)
- The Equal Opportunities Committee of the Parliament and the Equality Unit of the Executive
- 'Talking' about gender within a more 'gender friendly' political environment



The May 1997 UK election victory of New Labour meant that devolution, the transfer of power from the UK Parliament at Westminster, now seemed likely to become a political reality. A referendum was held on 11 September 1997 on the government's proposals for a Scottish parliament and the Scottish electorate produced a clear majority in favour. The first Parliament took up its full legislative powers in July 1999.

The women's movement in Scotland recognised the potential opportunities offered by a devolved government, directly responsible for a number of policy areas, to promote issues relating to gender equality and subsequently engaged positively with the pro-devolution campaigns. Many of these women were committed feminists who were also well placed because of their senior positions in public bodies, universities, trade unions, and other aspects of public life, to access senior politicians and decision-makers. The activities of the women's movement proved to be instrumental in shaping the new institutions with specific respect to the Scottish public policy making process. The blueprint for the new Parliament recommended adopting a model of governance where the concepts of sharing power, accountability, access, participation and equal opportunities would be paramount. The priority given to the promotion of equal opportunities can be directly attributed to the influence of both individual women and organisations representing Scottish women working together to secure a gender sensitive political environment in the 'new' Scotland.

The favourable policy framework implied by a commitment to mainstreaming combined with the increased presence of women in the new Parliament indicates real potential for promoting gender equality throughout the policy process and across the range of public policy interventions. Thus women in the 'new' Scotland are more visible at an institutional level, have more influence and have been very successful in engaging with both the structures and processes

What Kind of Difference?

- **More visible at an institutional level -**
Women more 'visible' - 39.5% MSPs; more consultation-
Women in Scotland Consultative Forum (1998-2003),
Scottish Women's Convention (2003-?).
- **Has this made a difference to
'ordinary' women's lives?**
 - policy v's process
 - Scottish Women's Budget Group - successes/failures



The Scottish Women's Budget Group

- Established May 2000
- Members from range of organisations - academic, trade unions, statutory and voluntary organisations and local communities
- Resources limited!!!
- Activities unlimited!!! - Responding to budget documents, requests to give evidence to committees, responding to policy related consultative documents, raising awareness, building capacity



Established in May 2000, SWBG is a campaigning, information and research organisation set up to ensure that gender-impact analysis is embedded within the Scottish public-policy process. Although the work of the group has been, and continues to be firmly focused on actual patterns of public expenditure and associated processes, they have engaged with the new Scottish institutional framework at a range of levels. This has involved directing their activities primarily at Finance Ministers, the Finance Committee of the Parliament and officials in the Finance Department of the Scottish Government, as well as making the case for gender budgeting to various government ministers, parliamentarians, and government officials from across a range of policy-related departments. The group has promoted the case that the budget reflects the social and economic priorities of a government and represents the spending needed to put policy into practice. Claims of 'gender neutrality' with reference to the budget fail to reflect adequately how spending decisions have differential impacts on men and women, boys and girls. The practices and processes associated with drawing up the budget do not normally account for how the lives of girls and women differ as compared with boys and men. Thus 'gender neutral' can more accurately be described as 'gender blind'. In their numerous responses to the Scottish Government's budget, SWBG have continually pointed out how the different needs and resources available to men and women will affect the way they access everything from jobs, to public services such as housing, transport, education and training. By taking account of these differences, policy-makers can ensure better policy targeting, more effective delivery and greater equality.

Governing Principles

- Transparency
- Participation
- Sustainability
- Long Term Strategy
- Country Ownership



Although international experience has not produced a simple and uniform model for application in the production of gender sensitive budgets, lessons have been learned and a number of crucial ingredients have been identified. In considering how best to proceed with adapting and applying the range of tools and methods developed a number of governing principles should direct any future course of action:

Transparency - In embarking upon a programme of reform aimed at developing a more gender aware approach to the national budget it is vital that greater transparency of, and accountability for budget processes, becomes an established feature of the political process.

Participation - Equally important is a commitment to engage in more participatory methods of governance and initiatives should encourage as wide a range of views as possible, specifically including the views of those whose needs are often neglected in the policy design, implementation and evaluation process.

Sustainability - The development and application of gender budgeting tools (such as gender impact analysis, gender disaggregated expenditure analysis, etc) should build on existing budgetary mechanisms to ensure sustainability. A necessary first step in the process would be to establish how the budget is prepared and presented

Long Term Strategy - The programme of reform should be viewed in the longer term with review mechanisms set in place to ensure continuous improvement.

Understanding the Budget Process

- 1st step in Scotland
- Key in building capacity
- Dynamics of the budgetary process
- Role of Parliamentary Committees
- Identifying both key stages and key actors
- Relevance of Finance Department



Tracing developments in Scotland following devolution will highlight the significant progress made to date in promoting a more gender sensitive approach to the budget process. However, with reference to the governing principles, outlined above, there is still a lot to be achieved. The Scottish story is worth telling in that whilst advances can be noted in terms of increased transparency and participation, which will hopefully be sustainable in the long term, the practice remains far removed from the theory. That is, the commitment to 'gender proof' the budget in Scotland has been continually publicly stated but policies remain on the whole 'gender blind'.

In developing a gender sensitive approach to budgeting one of the first steps is to gain an understanding of the actual budget process. This involves identifying the key actors, the relevant stakeholders and any potential access points. This was considered crucial within a Scottish context given the recent changes in the political and economic environment. Following devolution then, the process of drawing up the annual budget in Scotland was therefore novel to all concerned. For SWBG then an identified crucial first stage in promoting gender sensitive budgeting in the 'new' Scotland was to specifically secure funding to engage in research which mapped the first annual budget process and to disseminate the results of the research as widely as possible. This would serve to build capacity around issues relating to understanding the budget and would effectively promote the goal of ensuring transparency within the context of budgetary processes and decisions regarding the allocation of public resources. This activity has proved invaluable for SWBG and the actual research output can be identified as a **tool** in progressing with their agenda in Scotland. Furthermore, one of the important lessons learned from this exercise is the difficulty associated with ensuring transparency given the political nature of the budget. However, developing an awareness of the actual process and keeping up to date with the dynamics of the process is crucial for those working towards gender sensitive budgeting in any country.

Scottish Gender Budget Initiative?

- No examples of actual policy shifts
- Actual budget remains gender blind! - women in golf???
- Gender Equality v's "Closing the Opportunity Gap"

However

- Greater transparency - "Understanding the Budget Process"?
- Greater participation - forging new partnerships
- Contained within the Equality Strategy of the Scottish Government (Nov 2000) a commitment to:
'assess the equality impact of spending plans and decisions as part of the mainstreaming agenda'
- Pilots in Health and Sport - reported in Budget docs 2006/07
- Equal Opportunities Committee from 2007



In their commentary on the Budget for 2006-7, SWBG drew attention to the practice of presenting policy initiatives targeted at promoting equality in conjunction with the theme of 'Closing the Opportunity Gap'. For SWBG, this 'suggests the policy and resource interventions to address the complex gamut of the structural causes of gender inequality stem from/are underpinned by a singular focus on poverty reduction [and] this position is not in keeping with an overall mainstreaming agenda' (SWBG 2005: 2)

However progress can be identified. In addition to greater transparency and participation a key indicator of progress is the establishment of the Equality Proofing Budgets Advisory Group (EPBAG) in 2000. (I will say more on this later) One of the first tasks of the group was to undertake some pilot research in health and sport. The pilot studies were considered to be a useful approach to identifying practical ways of assessing the equality impact of budgets and spending plans. However, the work to develop the means of making the link between policy and process did not happen in earnest until 2005. Over the period from January to September 2005, academic researchers, expert advisers and government officials from the Finance Department, the Equality Unit and the respective spending agencies worked in collaboration to complete the pilots with the aim of feeding into the preparations for the next multi-year spending review. The collaboration involved establishing an evidence base with regard to gender-based inequalities, in particular policy areas within the health and sport budgets, mapping the policy and budget process and establishing both formal and informal links within these two policy areas, and the use of available technical expertise in the field of gender budgeting. Although the delay in making tangible progress was a cause for some frustration for SWBG, the group nonetheless welcomed the inclusion in the Draft Budget 2006-7 of an update on the pilot work. The introduction to the Draft Budget emphasised that the pilot work will 'track the process of policy formulation and resource allocation with respect to these two

Progress

- **Transparency**
Understanding the Scottish Budgetary Process
- **Participation**
Equality Proofing Budgets Advisory Group, Parliamentary Committee System and Consultation
- **Sustainability**
Mainstreaming Pilots and Budgetary Reform
- **Long Term Strategy**
Focus on process rather than policy shifts
- **Country Ownership**
Health and Sport pilots; Modern Apprenticeship study



The Scottish budget process involves three main stages: the setting of priorities and expenditure strategy; the presentation of detailed expenditure proposals in the publication of the draft budget; and the enactment of the budget bill. The Scottish Parliament has the power to vary the standard rate of income tax, but the current administration has chosen not to use this power. Therefore the focus of SWBG is on the public spending allocation process in Scotland.

This process is designed to promote transparent annual budgeting and to accommodate the enhanced scrutiny role of the Parliament. Following their initial written response to the first round of spending proposals, members of SWBG were invited to a meeting with the Minister of Finance. A key outcome from this meeting was agreement on behalf of the Scottish Executive to establish an advisory group that would act to raise awareness and to develop understanding of equality proofing budgets both within the Executive and throughout the wider policy making community in Scotland. The Equality Proofing Budgets Advisory Group (EPBAG) was set up in October 2000 and SWBG are formally represented on this group.

Lobbying by SWBG and other groups has contributed to improvements in the presentation of budget documents. These now set more specific objectives and targets. Representation on the Equality Proofing Budgets Advisory Group, combined with the workings of the Parliamentary committee system, continue to afford SWBG the opportunity to influence the budget process.

The Finance Committee holds a potentially key role in equality proofing the Budget. The Finance Committee issue guidance to the subject committees on scrutinising the budget. The various subject committees submit their reports on

Barriers

- **Transparency**
Dynamics of the budgetary process and accountability
Equality statements - 'invisible' or rather subsumed
"It's all mainstreaming now anyway"
- **Participation**
Capacity of SWBG
- **Sustainability**
Understanding (or lack of) gender as a concept
Change of Government and momentum lost
- **Long Term Strategy**
In the long run we are all dead!
- **Country Ownership**
Focus on process hard to quantify



There remains a long way to go before Scotland makes the link between a commitment to gender equality and the process by which resources are allocated to meet such a goal. In making progress in this regard, a staged approach is important, involving: research and awareness raising; building capacity to conduct gender-budget analysis through pilot work and ensuring relevance to the Scottish context; and disseminating and promoting the approach to the wider public. In Scotland first steps have been taken in relation to the first two stages. However, the pace of change to date represents only slow and faltering progress towards gender sensitive budgeting. Although recognised as an ambitious goal involving a long term strategic approach, caution needs to be exercised in using such as an excuse for lack of progress. As John Maynard Keynes is so famously quoted: 'In the long run we're all dead.'

Frustrations

- Role/Function of SWBG
- Process v's Policy
- Fiscal Squeeze - Value For Money!
- 'Closing the Opportunity Gap'
equality and gender mainstreaming lost within wider social justice agenda
- Current focus on 'sustainable economic growth'
- Gendered nature of recovery plan??



Thus there has been significant progress in working towards gender sensitive budgeting in Scotland. Transparency in the budget process has been enhanced in that there is a greater understanding amongst key stakeholders of the actual mechanisms and stages involved in drawing up the annual spending plans, there is a formal working relationship with the Government via the Advisory Group and there is a formal commitment contained within the Equality Strategy to assess spending plans with specific reference to gender.

However, despite such positive developments in the past eight years, there has been no evidence of actual policy shifts to promote gender equality and the budget itself remains gender neutral. Although there is implicit recognition, both on behalf of the Government and SWBG, that in practice gender proofing the Scottish budget is part of a long term process, and thus incremental change is welcomed as necessary in working towards the longer term goal, the lack of significant shifts in policy is proving frustrating. The almost exclusive focus on process is resulting in less obvious outputs and it is therefore becoming more difficult to maintain the enthusiasm of those most directly involved in promoting gender sensitive budgeting in Scotland. For SWBG this has led to significant barriers in progressing with their work.

More Frustrations?

- Shopping List Analogy
- Access Points?
- Capacity of SWBG

BUT

- Perceptions of us?
- Focus on Economic Literacy



Shopping List - we have the commitment, institutional framework and policies in Scotland. That is, someone has gone to the bother of thinking about it and actually writing the shopping list but no-one is doing the shopping and when they do it's the wrong person (I.e forgets half the stuff on the list or reinterprets the list)

Access Points - how meaningful is the consultation process and when should it happen? Need to engage more effectively with the Parliamentary Committees - has been increasingly important in determining progress for SWBG

Membership – this is a big issue. Where do we have meetings, how often and what is the focus. Need to diary dates around the budget and do the rest remotely. Less academic and more focused on lobbying but this causes tensions when considering our role in working with the Government on the pilots? How do we resolve this?

The perceptions of SWBG though are enlightening:

this strategy of persistence and repeatedly stating one's case may be perceived by public officials and politicians as indicative of a formidable lobby that '*is not going to go away.*' Evidence to date points to the relative success of the group's lobbying strategy within political, bureaucratic and resource constraints but at a high cost in terms of their relative capacity