

**Workshop on “Parliaments and Gender Budgeting”  
Cotonou, Benin – October 4 to 6, 2005**

**FINAL REPORT**

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**Workshop Background**

Oversight of the budget process is a key parliamentary function and parliamentarians have a pivotal role to play not only in approving the national budget but also in overseeing its proper implementation and monitoring results to ensure proper allocation and spending. In order to adequately evaluate whether governments are allocating appropriate resources to meet the needs of both men and women in society, parliamentarians can benefit from gender responsive budgeting to better monitor and control fiscal policies and hold government accountable. Yet the concept of gender budgeting is very new to parliaments and very few parliamentary committees are involved in gender analysis from a budget perspective.

In order to increase parliamentary knowledge and capacity to undertake gender analysis during the budget process, the ACPSP Gender Equality Network organized a regional workshop in Benin from October 4 to 6, 2005. The workshop was conducted in French and focused on bringing together parliamentarians from 5 francophone countries in the region including Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Senegal. Rwanda had been invited to attend but was unable to participate. Experts involved in the program were from the host country of Benin.

**Workshop Objectives**

- To provide an introduction to the concepts of gender budgeting to a number of both women and men parliamentarians from francophone West Africa and to offer concrete tools and mechanisms to enable the participants to use gender analysis and raise gender equality questions to government during upcoming parliamentary budgetary sessions.
- To offer an opportunity for exchange and sharing of best practices between parliamentarians and experts from the region, for the purpose of highlighting to what degree countries in the region have already included gender analysis in their budget process and to facilitate a process of Parliamentary involvement and commitment to this policy tool.
- To provide a platform for parliamentarians to develop an action plan and commit to steps they can undertake over the course of the next budgetary session and throughout the life of their legislature to promote gender sensitivity and scrutinize the budget from a gender perspective.

### ***Participants***

The workshop was well attended with 30 parliamentarians representing the 5 countries invited. 13 women MPs participated in the workshop representing 43% of participants. 17 male MPs also participated representing 57% of the group.

The First Vice President of the Benin National Assembly and the Minister of Finance and the National Economy were both present for the opening ceremony. A dozen representatives of the press were also at the opening session and media coverage of the event was strong both in newspapers and on the radio/TV.

### ***Workshop Program***

The program was balanced between formal presentations by experts followed by plenary discussion and two working group sessions to undertake a case study exercise and secondly to develop an action plan and follow up recommendations.

A very comprehensive program was delivered addressing a variety of interrelated issues:

- An overview of gender concepts and definitions;
- Review of the budget cycle and the process of budget elaboration;
- The role of parliamentarians in the budget cycle- focus on oversight and monitoring;
- Gender responsive budgeting;
- Gender budgeting and linkages to PRSPs;
- Case studies on education sector in Benin

### ***Day One***

Presentations on the first day were meant as a review of fundamental concepts and also as a primer for the more detailed study of gender responsive budgeting.

The first presentation focussed on the theme of “gender and development” and reviewed some of the definitions and basic gender concepts. The presenter, Madame Sarafatou Olodo from the Ministry of Family and Social Planning, made the distinction between sex which is biology and gender which is largely defined by social roles. She also highlighted the importance of gender analysis and its linkages to reducing poverty and other inequalities.

Discussions were focussed on the linkages between gender equality and other obstacles such as poverty, illiteracy, poor economies and so forth. Many of the participants highlighted efforts made in their respective countries to address gender inequality including the creation of a Ministry of Women’s Affairs in Senegal, gender focal points in each ministry in Benin and a law on quotas of a minimum of twenty-five percent for female representation in all national administration in Niger and a quota of ten percent female representation in the legislature.

The second presentation of the day was delivered by Mr. Bertrand Codjia, Director of the Budget at the Benin Ministry of Finance who reviewed the various steps of the budget cycle. Hon. Soulé Adam, President of the Finance Committee, further elaborated on the role of parliamentarians and finance committees in the budget process. The discussion that

followed highlighted many of the frustrations of parliamentarians with regard to their restricted involvement in the budget process and how limited they feel their role is given that they are not consulted during the elaboration of the budget and given a negligible amount of time to approve such a lengthy and detailed document. Many of the parliamentarians present felt powerless to truly influence the budget process. Contributions from the various MPs demonstrated that lack of time, information and expertise creates serious impediments for parliamentarians to actively contribute to budget oversight.

The general discussion on the role of parliamentarians continued into the afternoon session with formal presentations by each country. Each delegation had been asked to prepare a short intervention to highlight steps taken in their respective governments and/or parliaments to integrate gender analysis and elements of gender budgeting. All of the presentations highlighted the strong control of the Executive in the budget process and the almost ceremonial role of national assemblies in reviewing and approving the national budget. In terms of gender budgeting, each of the presenters made clear that this was a new concept that had not been integrated in their parliaments. In some cases, the concept of gender budgeting has been adopted in specific ministries as part of pilot projects to mainstream gender.

Some of the highlights from the country presentations include:

- Burkina Faso with support from the Dutch introduced gender budgeting training for the Finance Committee in 2004 in order for them to take gender into consideration in the 2005 budget process
- Ministry of Education in Burkina Faso has identified specific gender targets to increase girl enrollment et literacy rates among women from 64.5% in 2002 to 69.3% in 2006
- The Niger National Assembly has created a gender network as well as a women's caucus
- Ministry of Education in Mali has developed disaggregated data to monitor how policies are affecting girls and boys, women and men.
- Senegal has launched the MTEF process which will help Government set certain priorities and indicators in the area of gender
- The Finance Committee in Benin organizes public consultations and public hearings during its budget review to hear the concerns of experts and citizens including women's groups
- Benin now offers free education to girls in the rural sectors in efforts to increase the enrollment and education of girls
- The Ministry Responsible for Family in Benin has introduced new microfinancing projects to increase the economic independence of women

Exchanges following the country presentations centered on ways to increase parliamentary oversight and control of the budget. The facilitator intervened to raise the fact that the national budget is not an event but a process and highlighted again the numerous entry points over the course of the budget cycle for parliamentarians to be involved in monitoring the elaboration but also the implementation of the budget. This intervention opened the door to discuss mechanisms to increase public participation and consultation in the budget

process. MPs studied the role of parliamentarians in involving civil society and monitoring at a grassroots level budget implementation.

The discussion also returned to the question of gender analysis and whether a focus on budgetary reform and emphasis on MTEFs and program-budgets could assist in better analyzing budget priorities from a gender perspective.

### *Day Two*

Day Two was dedicated to an introduction to the concept of gender budgeting and sharing tools and mechanisms that parliamentarians can use to integrate gender budgeting in their work. Professor Marie Odile Attanasso made two formal presentations. The first centered on the rationale for gender budgeting and demonstrated the linkages between gender inequality and PRSPs. By understanding and tackling the problems of female poverty, a government can improve overall economic performance. Her presentation demonstrated how inequality for women, whether it is in the education, health or agricultural sector, has an impact on the national economy and limits the development of the country.

In her second intervention, Prof Attanasso provided some concrete examples of tools to undertake gender analysis as part of a budget review. These include the study of gender disaggregated data, undertaking gender causal analysis, investigating resource allocation and program delivery from a gender perspective. Professor Attanasso demonstrated using disaggregated statistics how women can be disadvantaged by certain budget components such as tax cuts for landowners (most women do not own land) or farming subsidies or even fuel taxes that may have been developed in a gender neutral way but that can discriminate against women and men differently. Her main emphasis for parliamentarians was that they take steps to understand and investigate the realities for women on the ground in their countries and for them to analyze what factors hinder equality. Once they are aware of the inequality factors, parliamentarians are in a better position to analyze whether budget priorities are likely to impact positively or negatively the situation of women and men in various sectors.

Interventions from participants following the presentations on gender budgeting were encouraging as MPs looked for ways to increase the participation of women in the budget process and also proposed mechanisms to reduce inequalities in the economy. Many participants raised the issue of decentralization and the important of providing more budget authority and flexibility to local governments since they are in a better position to analyze at a micro level whether resources are reaching men and women in an equal way. Participants felt the local participatory budget approach was the best way of incorporating gender. Others raised concern on the heritance laws in their respective countries and the fact that women are not landowners and are discriminated against when it comes to agricultural programs and subsidies despite their major role in the agricultural sector.

With regard to the role of parliamentarians in gender budgeting, MPs felt that it would help for women MPs to have a stronger voice within finance committees to raise issues of gender equality and raise awareness among their male and female colleagues alike. The

participants seemed willing to acknowledge the importance and value of gender budgeting but also felt that this was a rather large challenge given the limited commitment of their own governments to gender budgeting at this stage and the restricted role of parliamentarians in the budget process.

### **Case Study on the Educational Sector in Benin**

In the afternoon, participants were separated into three groups and asked to examine a real case study based on figures from the Benin Ministry of Education which showed that despite an increase in funding for education and an increase in overall national enrollment, the enrollment of girls remained consistently lower than boys. Participants were asked to identify some of the possible causes for such disparity and provide recommendations to address this issue.

With regard to the causes of such disparities, the groups highlighted a number of factors which could be grouped under the following headings:

1. Social factors
  - Discrimination in the family between boys and girls at birth
  - Religion
  - Teen weddings and pregnancies
  - Parental ignorance
  - Domestic tasks that keep girls away from school
  - Sending girls to work early for financial gains for the family
2. Poverty
  - Minors in the labour force
  - High cost/fees of education
  - Weak family revenues
  - Malnutrition and famine
  - Large families with too many children
3. Educational system
  - Insufficiencies and inadequate infrastructures
  - Unprofessional behaviour of teachers
  - Sexual harassment of girl students
  - Schools built in far away zones, inaccessible to most children
  - Drop out rate of girls
  - Lack of female leadership in the development of educational policies to promote girl education
  - Lack of qualified teachers
4. Other environmental factors
  - rural exodus to urban centres
  - confusion and homesickness when children forced to change regions to attend higher levels

Parliamentarians identified the following recommendations to deal with such obstacles:

1. Social factors
  - Increase awareness at all levels
  - Reduce the domestic tasks of both girls and women in the home
  - Legislate to have a minimum age for marriage and update the laws on family
2. Poverty
  - Support women through micro-finance programs
  - Train women with micro-projects
  - Encourage women to form associations and support groups to undertake joint income-generating activities
3. Educational system
  - Clearly define educational policies in the national budget
  - Make schools more accessible in rural areas and create drop-in centres for girls
  - Improve training and increase number of teachers
  - Provide better pay and more recognition for teachers
  - Involve parents in the education of girls
  - Introduce civic education and health education in school programs
  - Reintroduce the system of boarding schools
4. Other environmental factors
  - Decentralize development projects to avoid mass exodus from rural areas
  - Increase number of colleges for girls to avoid them leaving their families to pursue education

This case study exercise was successful in that it enabled parliamentarians to discuss and question some of the root causes of inequality not only in a sector such as education but also within the formal and informal economy which leads to disparities between boys and girls and men and women. In each of the groups participants were able to draw from their own context and country situation including religious and traditional factors. Participants also shared some of the actions taken by their governments to improve girls' education and together were able to provide several recommendations.

### ***Day Three***

The final day of the workshop was devoted to the development of an action plan for parliamentarians.

In the end, in order to synthesize and reduce the number of proposals to a reasonable and manageable size, the three groups agreed to the following action plan with specific timelines

- 1. Lobby the various actors involved in gender work within the government, parliament and civil society to raise awareness on issues of gender budgeting (4<sup>th</sup> trimester of 2005)**
- 2. Organize a parliamentary day in each of the parliaments represented at the workshop to hold a restitution session and share findings from this workshop (2nd trimester 2006)**
- 3. Create an ongoing mechanism for exchange between parliamentarians from the region and at a Pan African level on issues of gender budgeting (3rd trimester 2006)**
- 4. Initiate pilot projects in each parliament to put into practice gender analysis (4th trimester 2006)**

### **Results Achieved**

While it is relatively early to monitor results for this activity, the post-activity evaluation highlights the following results:

- Increased understanding of participants of the linkages between poverty reduction and gender equality and how these realities can impact on the budget and vice versa
- Parliamentarians deepened their understanding of gender concepts and the value of gender analysis and indicated that they can make use of this new information in their legislative and oversight functions
- Participants expressed a willingness to further their training in the area of gender budgeting and increase the role of parliamentarians in monitoring gender inequalities in the budget process
- Development of an action plan to increase awareness and implementation of gender budgeting in the five parliaments represented at the workshop
- Increase awareness and commitment from male MPs to promote gender equality in Parliament and engage in gender budgeting initiatives
- Recognition among women MPs that increase the number of women in key committees such as Finance can help achieve greater gender equality in the policy and budget process