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Article

Gender-Responsive Budgeting: The Case of a Rural Local Body in Kerala

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Abstract

This article discusses gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) at the local level in Kerala by studying a village panchayat, the lowest tier of rural local government. GRB of a rudimentary form, known as Women Component Plan (WCP), had been in existence at the local level for the last 20 years as a key feature of participatory planning. The study adopts a fourfold classification of all projects implemented in the panchayat on the basis of their gender friendliness and calculates allocation and expenditure under each of these categories. The data on which the article relies relate to the expenditure incurred under the annual plans rather than budgets, which are based on inflated and unreliable data. The article ends by making some observations based on the data and the overall experience of Kerala in gender budgeting.

Keywords

gender, budgeting, panchayat, local, women centered, women friendly, occasionally women friendly, women neutral

Introduction

In recent times, governments, both in the developed and developing countries, have engaged in gender budget analysis as part of the process of mainstreaming gender in their policies and programs impelled by the differential impact of government budgets on women and men. Expressions like “gender-sensitive budget,” “gender-responsive budget,” “gender budgets,” “women’s budget,” and “women’s budget statements” are often used to describe the process (Budlender, Sharp, & Kerry, 1998, p. 5). Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) is one of the ways by which governments demonstrate their commitment to gender equality by making suitable allocations in the budgets to bridge the gender gap. According to Budlender, GRB is “a form of policy analysis from a gender perspective.” More than the numbers in the budget, the focus is “on the policy and programmes underlying those numbers” and the possible results following implementation (Budlender, 2004, p. 4). It suggests that all parts of the budget take account of the needs and interests of all sections of the citizenry. Although this remains the ultimate goal, the pathway to achieving it necessarily involves addressing gaps in allocations and expenditures by investing in projects meant for women in the short to medium term because they experience greater inequality. This article looks at the initiatives in GRB adopted by the state of Kerala at the local level by taking up the case of a resource-deficient village panchayat. After a brief review of the history of GRB and its procedures, the article describes the Indian experience particularly since the Ninth Five-Year Plan. The article then proceeds to discuss the context of

participatory planning at the local level in Kerala in the background of which GRB first emerged in the state. The sections that follow include a brief review of literature, objectives of the study, methodology, methods, taxonomy, analysis of the data collected, and a conclusion.

Beginnings of GRB

The first country to start gender budgeting was Australia, way back in 1984. It appeared in the form of Women Budget Statements (WBSs) outlining the impact of the annual budget on gender equality. In 1995, South Africa and Philippines followed suit. Instead of a separate budget for women, South Africa went for the examination of the whole budget to know how differentially it had affected women and men (Budlender, 1999). It was a two-pronged initiative from within and outside government (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999; Elson, 2004). In Philippines, 5% of the budget of all national-level agencies was mandatorily to be allocated for gender and development. This was later extended to other parts of government, including the local bodies. After some years, they realized the folly of sticking to the 5% approach to GRB and began asking questions about the remaining

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95% of the budget. In the South African, Tanzanian, and Ugandan examples, nongovernmental organization (NGO) groups and governments worked together. Similar experiences can be seen in Latin America (Elson, 2004; Kapungu, 2008). Albania has a system of appointing gender equality employees in every line ministry who collect and analyze “data, particularly sex-disaggregated data,” and conduct “gender analysis to inform local policy development” (Kristin, Xhelo, & Wittberger, 2012, p. 19). In Italy, GRB was started at the local government level, which was later moved upward. Ecuador has given GRB the highest possi-

politics, and ensuring that revisions are made in budgets and policies to achieve greater gender equality (p. 88). For her, the achievement of the first goal is necessary for the realization of the second and the achievement of the first two goals for the realization of the third. Researchers have underlined the key role that needs to be played by the finance ministry for effective GRB. The existence of strong political will, active civil society, supportive parliamentarians, and women’s groups provides the right environment for GRB, according to them (Chakraborty, 2016; Stotsky, 2016; Stotsky, Shihua Kolovich, & Kabbaj, 2016). The theoretical frame-