

GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING AND THE COVID-19 ECONOMIC RECOVERY

A Toolkit for the Public Finance Profession

This ACCA policy brief provides public sector finance professionals with technical guidance on how to incorporate gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) into their everyday roles and responsibilities. To do so, it aims to answer three main questions.

What? Why? And most importantly, How?

What?

‘Gender-responsive budgeting is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes, in all areas and at all levels. The objective is to ensure that women and men benefit equally and that inequality is not perpetuated. Gender-responsive budgeting simply means allocating resources in response to the capacities, constraints and needs of women and men, girls and boys.’ (UN Women 2016)

Why?

All 193 UN member states signed up to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and as a result, 193 UN member states agreed to achieve the goals and targets under SDG 5 – achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls – by 2030. Other international agreements, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) among others, include commitments to lift women and girls out of precariousness, violence and a general state of inequality.

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the urgency of tackling gender inequality as it has exacerbated inequalities in all parts of the world.

- While women make up 39% of global employment, they account for 54% of pandemic-related job losses (Madgavkar et al. 2020).
- 72% of global domestic workers were made unemployed as a result of the pandemic – 80% of these were women (UN Women 2020a).
- The pandemic will push 47m more women into extreme poverty (UN Women 2020b).

- The virus has also disproportionately harmed women in marginalised communities:

- globally, minority women make up a higher percentage of employees in the informal sector; these jobs are highly vulnerable to disruption and often do not provide health care or paid leave (OHCHR 2020)
- as women with disabilities in low-to-middle income countries are more likely to be unemployed or work in the informal sector, and live in poverty, the pandemic is likely to exacerbate these inequalities and push them further into hardship (Meaney-Davis 2020).

‘THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS NOT GENDER NEUTRAL, AS IT AFFECTS MEN AND WOMEN DIFFERENTLY. THEREFORE, WE MUST NOT BE GENDER BLIND IN OUR RESPONSES TO THE PANDEMIC, OR ELSE WOMEN WILL CARRY A DISPROPORTIONATELY HIGHER ECONOMIC COST THAN MEN’.

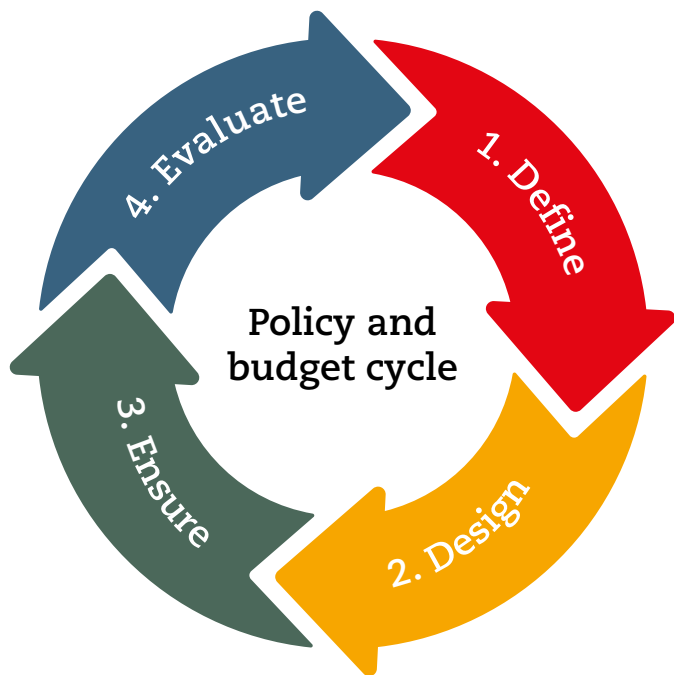
Durant and Coke-Hamilton 2020

How?

GRB can be implemented in any jurisdiction if there is the will and capacity to do so. The existence of certain factors can help ensure GRB is both a long-term undertaking and more effective when implemented.

The following elements are some of the important underlying conditions recommended by the OECD (Downes and Nicol 2019).

A political commitment to tackling gender inequality with an all-of-government approach, the institutional capacity to implement GRB and most importantly – the systematic collection of sex-disaggregated data.



When designing economic recovery packages, the following entry points can help ensure GRB is implemented throughout the policy and budget cycle.

1. Define the policy objectives using available quantitative and qualitative sex-disaggregated data

Responding to the crisis means viewing the situation through a gendered lens and seeing where the problems lie in your particular domain. What happened to gender equality as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in a given area? To know, we need to ask the right questions. For example:

What are the unemployment figures for each sector disaggregated by sex? What were they if disaggregated by sex and by race? How many women and men are employed in the informal sector? Who were the primary caregivers of children when schools closed? What happened to the levels of gender-based and domestic violence during lockdowns? Depending on the level of available sex-disaggregated data, some of these answers can be found using official sources but the quantitative data won't provide the full picture. Including qualitative information alongside the quantitative data to inform budget decision-making will provide a more holistic view of the specific focus areas. For example, when designing policies on childcare, quantitative data can help understand affordability, numbers of those affected by policy changes and number of licensed childcare providers. Yet, this information does not tell us household division of labour for childcare, working patterns of parents and family support networks. Combining quantitative data indicators with the qualitative aspects of policymaking that civil society engagement can provide will help ensure that policies are designed with the recipients in mind, to achieve the desired outcomes. For more information on data collection for GRB, see this resource from the Women's Budget Group and Oxfam (Stephenson 2019).

4. Evaluate and audit policies and budgets to ensure they have met their objectives

Performance audits focus on achieving the three E's: Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness. However, Sharp (2003) argues that this approach lacks a critical fourth 'E': Equity. This fourth 'E' would allow for the audit and evaluation stage to account for outcomes that specifically relate to achieving gender equity by including new GRB-related inputs, outputs and outcome indicators. For example, did the unemployment support scheme disproportionately benefit male workers because it targeted male-dominated sectors? If so, what was the impact of this policy and wider policies on employment for women? The Council of Europe recommends that finance professionals produce a sex-disaggregated report of end users or recipients of budget programmes (Quinn 2009).

Part of the auditing process could also include evaluating the accuracy of any equality impact assessments that might have taken place in step 2 so they can be improved upon for the next cycle. Gender audits should be carried out to evaluate the extent to which gender considerations have been mainstreamed into institutions, as well as into policies and budgets, and should seek to improve these for the next cycle. For more information on gender audits see this resource by the European Institute for Gender Equality (2019).

3. Ensure that tools of implementation support the policies and budgets in achieving their intended outcomes and are reported on for effective audit

Are adequate resources being allocated to each of these objectives? Do the relevant government departments and localities have the resources, capacity and training they need to implement GRB effectively? If these conditions aren't met at the implementation stage, the work carried out in previous stages may not produce the intended outcomes. An expenditure tracking system to monitor disbursements can also be used to monitor progress and develop a clearer audit trail for stage 4. For more information see UN Women's GRB Technical Brief (UN Women 2020c).

2. Design policies and budgets with the gender objectives in mind

Have the relevant ministries and departments received guidance and do they have sufficient skills and capacity to design their budgets in a gender-responsive way through Budget Call Circulars or similar mechanisms? Is there senior-management buy-in within the department to apply GRB? Once designed, Parliament should scrutinise and thoroughly assess the policies, and ensure that they achieve the intended outcomes. It is critical to understand whether the proposals will reduce gender inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic. To understand this better, government departments should carry out equality impact assessments of the likely implications that policies and budgets will have for both men and women. As these responses might be novel, given this year's events, analyse similar policies in other jurisdictions to understand the most likely impacts of the policies. Additionally, is the best budget approach and timescale being used? Performance-based budgeting, for example, can help implement GRB when trying to measure the impact of government spending on the people it is targeting. Zero-based budgeting could be used if GRB is a new endeavour. Medium-term budgets are likely to be more effective than short-term ones.

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