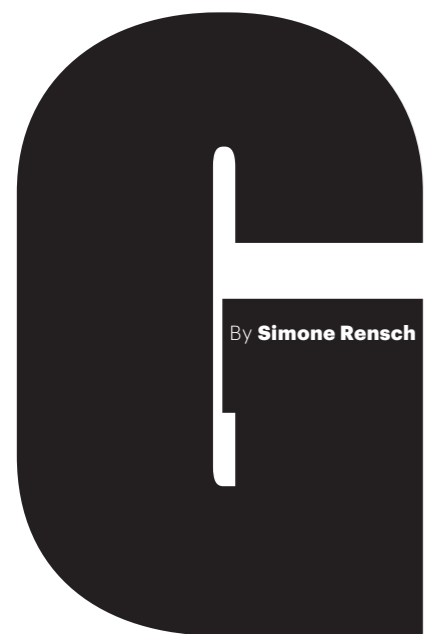


Gender budgeting can do more than advance equality – it can provide an economic boost. However, it requires resources and commitment



By **Simone Rensch**

Gender equality and female empowerment have been in the spotlight in many ways in recent months. They took centre stage at the Golden Globes after the #MeToo movement and the subsequent #TimesUp campaign shed light on sexual harassment and inequality. Millions of women and men have shared their stories, revealing instances of sexual assault and harassment everywhere from Hollywood to Westminster. The recent furore over the Presidents Club Charity Dinner in London served to underline this.

At the same time, the OECD has been urging governments to address the gender pay gap – women earn on average 15% less than their male counterparts. Iceland went beyond just enacting an anti-discrimination law, becoming the first country in the world to make paying men more than women illegal from 2018, with financial penalties. Then the BBC found itself at the centre of a

row after China editor Carrie Gracie very publicly quit her role citing a lack of pay equality at the corporation.

While women's issues tend to be confined to the fields of human rights and politics, there is an economic dimension. Gender equality can help to boost the global economy and persistent inequality can impede growth. Figures from the McKinsey Global Institute think-tank suggest that \$12trn could be added to global GDP in 2025 if countries just matched the “best gender practice” in their region. As much as \$28trn

could be added to global GDP in a “full potential scenario” where women play an equal role to men in the labour market. In the EU alone, improving gender equality could contribute to an increase in GDP per capita of up to 9.6% in 2050, the European Institute for Gender Equality says. Closing gender gaps in the workplace would raise gross domestic product in the US by 5%, by 12% in the United Arab Emirates and 34% in Egypt, according to the IMF.

There has been some progress. Countries around the world, including most of those in Europe as well as China, Vietnam and the US, have passed equal opportunity laws, adopted United Nations provisions to empower women and made pledges to improve equality in the workplace. Public financial managers may be able to play their part and give equality – and the economy – that extra boost by adopting gender-responsive budgeting.

Gillian Fawcett, CIPFA's head of Governments Faculty, says gender equality is improving at only a fairly slow pace. “Gender-based budgeting is one way that public finance managers can help in this area, as it provides a significant opportunity to ensure programmes and budgets are more gender responsive,” she tells PF.

Countries ranging from Austria and Canada to Rwanda and South Korea have turned to gender budgeting as a way to promote sex equality through their fiscal policy. Almost half of OECD countries – 15 out of 34 – have introduced, plan to bring in or are actively considering gender budgeting. International institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the European Council and Parliament, and the World Bank have called on countries to develop and implement gender budgeting.

In a broad sense, gender-responsive budgeting brings consideration of gender issues into the heart of fiscal policy from the start to the very end of the budgetary process. While this might involve the adoption of specific policies related to sex equality, it can also mean making gender a mainstream part of public financial management.

Analysing the various consequences of

spending allocations and sources of revenue, such as taxes on secondary earners in a household, helps budget-setters better understand the effects of their decisions. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, gender budgeting allows governments to better understand how revenue and spending, and the policies guiding budgets, can affect women and men differently, at both national and local levels.

Katherine Gifford, programme specialist governance and national planning at UN Women, adds: “It’s about applying a gender lens using gender analysis in the process of developing

plans and their corresponding budgets for implementation.”

In 2017, Canada joined the gender-budgeting pioneers when, for the first time, it published an assessment of its budget policy from a gender perspective to address gender gaps in education, employment and public life. Jocelyn Sweet, deputy spokesperson for the Department of Finance Canada, tells PF that even developed countries like Canada, where prime minister Justin Trudeau calls himself a feminist, have gender inequality problems.

“While much progress has been made,

there continue to be gender gaps in Canada, including in education, employment and unpaid work. For instance, nearly three-quarters of Canadian women have a post-secondary degree, but the wage gap between men and women persists,” she says.

Addressing these gender gaps is a priority for the Canadian government and, because policy decisions can have different effects on different groups of people, understanding the consequences, through the gender assessment, is key to “effective, evidence-based policy making”, Sweet says.



GETTY

GENDER AGENDA

CANADA

Canada published a gender statement to assess the gender consequences of its budget in 2017. This budget allocated resources to measures that promote a more equal labour market participation and reduced poverty and violence affecting women and girls. These include:

- Investment in childcare, allowing more women to work and take part in education or training
- Initiatives to help caregivers balance work and family responsibilities, including flexible working
- Investments to support a federal strategy to help prevent and address gender-based violence.

UK

The UK has not implemented gender-responsive budgeting, but is obliged, under the equality duty, to take diversity into account when drawing up legislation and consider if it may lead to discrimination.

FRANCE

This country's 2014 gender equality law integrates gender budgeting into policymaking and requires the gender implications of each new law to be assessed.

ITALY

Both local and national budgets have funded initiatives related to gender equality in maternal care, day care, women's employment and tackling domestic violence. Legislation in 2016 also called for the introduction of gender budgeting on an experimental basis at a national level.

GERMANY

The federal government considers equality to be a mainstream policy, and this is integrated into its budget process.

AUSTRIA

Taxation of secondary earners has been reduced to get more women into work. Reforms have also reallocated funds to tackle domestic violence to reduce medical treatment needs and lost labour.

IRAQ

Pilot projects with a focus on gender have been launched in three key service sectors – health, education, and water and sanitation – to make gender a mainstream part of government budgets.

US

The US is one of the seven countries that has not ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. However, the city of San Francisco has a gender-budgeting initiative focused on identifying women's priorities for public services.

INDIA

Gender budgeting has been implemented by local authorities to improve girls' attendance at school. It is also being used to recognise women's role in agriculture and improve their access to public services.

JAPAN

The country has recently adopted gender budgeting and prioritises gender equality in policy making and employment, improving work-life balance and relieving poverty, and by supporting women's education and health.

SOUTH KOREA

Gender budgeting has been used to fund programmes that reduce the burden of family caring on women to make it easier to work.

AUSTRALIA

Australia pioneered the concept of gender-responsive budgeting in the 1980s and was for years at the forefront of this. However, the current government has taken a step back and ceased carrying out the analysis.

MOROCCO

Since the passing of a finance law in 2014, women and girls have increasingly been reflected in government spending throughout the budgeting process.

RWANDA

Reforms have been brought in to improve girls' attendance at school to allow more girls and women access to the labour market.

THE WORLD OF WOMEN

15 out of 34

ALMOST HALF OF OECD COUNTRIES – 15 OUT OF 34 – HAVE INTRODUCED, PLAN TO IMPLEMENT OR ARE ACTIVELY CONSIDERING GENDER BUDGETING



Canada's prime minister Justin Trudeau says he is a feminist – last year, the country assessed its budget policy to close gender gaps in education, employment and public life

Civil society groups like Women's Budget Group UK apply this analysis to budgets after they have been published. But Mary-Ann Stephenson, co-director of the group, says that, to make a difference and close the equality gap, governments will have to do a gender analysis throughout the whole budgetary process.

"If you know how your policies are going to affect different groups before you implement them, then you are going to have better policies," she tells PF.

Gender-responsive budgeting is also part of good governance, experts say. It addresses not only gender but also issues of accountability and transparency in terms of budgetary allocations and beyond, giving citizens access to the information and a chance to hold governments to account for their commitments.

Gifford of UN Women says: "You can say you support gender equality and you can write certain policy, and that's all very important but, if you don't put money in to ensure that those commitments are implemented, then you're only going part way.

"Gender budgeting, when done right, is about good budgeting. And that is something every country can benefit from."

Traditional budgets, which one might consider to be gender neutral, can sometimes cause inequality. According to freelance gender and public policy consultant Roshika Deo: "The impact of the budget is not the same on everyone. Gender neutral means that the budget is inefficient and is not allocating resources according to the needs and wants of people in society. It's basically just doing it in the dark."

Inequality is not expressed just in gender terms of course. Clare Coffey,

programme inequality adviser at Oxfam, suggests the term gender budgeting may be misleading as the approach – analysing impact throughout the budgetary cycle – can be deployed to tackle inequality more widely. "We are not just talking about the genders – we are talking in particular about class, ethnicity and religion, and how gender and those different dimensions intersect," she says.

So gender responsive budgeting is about more than empowering women. While women often lag behind men on a range of measures, this type of budgeting is also about ensuring that all people have equal opportunities – including men.

In 1995, the Women's Budget Initiative in South Africa found that 20% of women and 16% of men in the country were illiterate while only 1% of the education budget was going on basic education for adults. This marginalises both adult men and women in accessing education, says Deo.

Uganda provides another example of how both men and women have benefited from gender budgeting. In the early stages of gender responsive budgeting in the east African country, it was found that 60% of all government health resources were going to the national teaching hospital. This has since changed and the resources have been better distributed to benefit both men's and women's access to healthcare, Deo says.

Ideally, gender budgeting would be something that happens automatically, Niki Kandirikirira, programme director at Equality Now, an NGO, explains.

"As you develop a budget for a country, you would look at it and say 'how do we ensure this does not disadvantage already disadvantaged groups?' and make sure

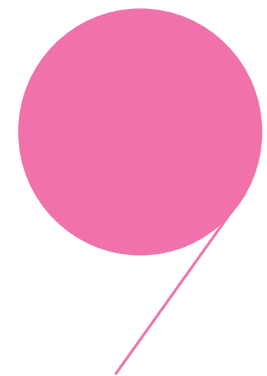


Women in Uganda: reallocating health resources through gender-responsive budgeting has benefited both women and men; the Time's Up campaign, set up by women working in Hollywood, highlighted sexual harassment and inequality



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Mary-Ann Stephenson,
Women's Budget Group UK



that it contributes to addressing the structural inequalities we have as a society," she adds.

So what is holding back progress? Integrating a gender analysis into a budget process cannot be done overnight. It requires ongoing commitment – and it may not be a priority for governments.

Rhonda Sharp, professor of economics at the University of South Australia, tells PF that budgeting is both political and analytical. She says: "The gender analysis aspect of initiatives can be quite technical and require capacities that are often not well developed within government."

Civil society organisations, such as the Women's Budget Group, have undertaken "sophisticated gender analyses to inform their policy advocacy", and Sharp says governments need to be doing this sort of analysis themselves to "change their ways".

Research by the Overseas Development Institute has identified the key barriers to gender responsive budgeting. These include a lack of political will, inadequate resources and the data needed to perform the initial gender analysis not being

available. Simon Gill, head of public finance and institutions at the ODI, tells PF that countries are often not in a position where they are ready to implement gender budgeting.

Gill says: "Just pushing gender budgeting as a means of promoting gender equality, by itself, isn't enough."

He suggests that resources put towards implementing gender budgeting may be better used elsewhere or in different ways to achieve the same goals.

"I'm not at all saying that [gender budgeting] is not worth pursuing," he says.

"But some of the basic facts and figures demonstrate that, if you can get resources more fairly allocated to address gender inequality, it can make a huge difference and in many instances this can be done without the need for an expensive reworking of the budget process."

If improving equality is the goal "let's not jump too quickly to gender budgeting as the answer before we've done our homework and looked at the most effective set of solutions", he says.

While there is broad consensus that a lack of political will and understanding of gender issues is holding back progress towards gender budgeting, some say an explicit commitment would compel governments and treasuries to act.

"A challenge is to convince the people who make the economic decisions that this will improve the impact of the money they have. Inequality in general is not good for economic growth, and pursuing policies that are gender responsive does not undermine growth," Oxfam's Coffey explains.

So if gender budgeting can help governments ensure their policies are effective, advance equality and maybe help boost the economy, is it worth the resources and commitment? Moving to gender budgeting may not be easy – resources and political will are needed – but it may be worth it in the long run. At the Women's Budget Group, Stephenson reflects: "Even if you don't care about inequality – which I think you should – policymakers should care about getting their policies right." ●