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HARVESTING EQUALITY: UNVEILING THE POTENTIAL OF GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING IN AGRICULTURE

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In the world of policymaking, the call for inclusivity and equality has grown louder than ever. Budgets affect women and men differently because policies, programmes, and funding for them have varied and unequal effects on them. These effects consider the various groupings of women and men (aged, young, urban, rural, etc.). One avenue that holds tremendous promise in addressing these concerns is Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB). While it has gained significant traction across various sectors, its potential impact on agriculture policies is particularly noteworthy. In this critique, we delve into the realm of GRB and its application in shaping more equitable and effective policies in the critical domains of agriculture and climate change.

Common Issues That Women Encounter in Agriculture

Policies and programmes and the way they are funded have different and unequal impacts on women and men— taking into account that women are impacted by several enduring equity issues. Globally, women are more affected by food insecurity and malnutrition, and they also have less access to property rights and other productive resources and services. To achieve the rights to food, land, water, equal pay, and economic opportunities—all of which depend on sufficient national budget allocation, public spending, and monitoring—parliamentarians can play a significant role in promoting gender equality in agriculture.

To evaluate how each intervention meets the distinct needs of men and women as well as their access to resources and services, GRB use a variety of techniques. Reprioritizing resources and conducting an effect evaluation serve as tools for tracking the intervention's implementation.

Gender analysis is relevant and important! It addresses gender-related concerns at all stages of the budget cycle to assess inequalities in society and ensure that women and men benefit equally from government expenditure.

Gender mainstreaming is a mean to achieve gender equality' as GRB analyses how government revenue is raised and spent—who gets the most or least benefit, who has more or less expense burden, and what is the impact on inequality and women's unpaid care work.

Understanding Gender-Responsive Budgeting

Gender-Responsive Budgeting is a strategic tool designed to advance gender equality and promote the empowerment of women through the allocation of resources in public policies. It operates on the premise that budgets are not neutral and can reinforce existing gender disparities. By incorporating a gender lens into budget formulation, implementation, and evaluation, GRB aims to identify and rectify gender-based inequalities in resource distribution.

"GRB" stands for "gender-neutral budget line," which allocates government spending equally between men and women. Rather, it examines the budget from the standpoint of gender to see how it would address and cater to the various requirements of men and women. It may also entail evaluating how gender features connect with other dimensions (such age, class, or religion) to ensure that no one is left behind, particularly the most vulnerable.

FAO (2023) defines 'GRB as a separate budget line for women where, nor dividing government expenditure 50:50 between women and men. Instead, it looks at the budget from a gender perspective to analyze how it will meet and respond to the different needs of women and men, girls and boys. It can also involve an assessment of the intersection of gender aspects with other dimensions (for example age, class or religion), making sure no one is left behind, especially the most vulnerable people.

The Promise of Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Agriculture

Agriculture, as a primary driver of many economies, stands to benefit significantly from the incorporation of gender-responsive approaches. GRB can break down barriers that limit women's access to resources, such as land, credit, and technology, thereby boosting

productivity. When agricultural budgets consider the unique needs of both men and women, it can lead to more effective and sustainable development.

However, the effectiveness of GRB in agriculture policies depends on its integration at every stage of the budgetary process. Mere lip service to gender considerations without tangible budgetary adjustments may fall short of bringing about real change. Furthermore, a comprehensive assessment of the challenges faced by women in agriculture is crucial for crafting targeted interventions.

Gender-Responsive Budgeting Helps Governments To

- Promote and enact global agreements for gender equality and rural development.
- Fulfil international pledges on gender equality and rural development.
- Enhance gender awareness among policymakers to ensure budget and policy considerations address the diverse needs of men and women.
- Establish robust accountability measures for public resource allocation, with a focus on supporting women.
- Optimize public resource utilization, highlighting gender equality's potential for significant gains in agriculture, rural development, and food security.
- Enhance budget transparency for universal understanding and encourage widespread public participation.
- Expose government priorities and policy impact gaps for greater transparency.

GRB Statement Adopted in India

In 2000, India introduced gender-responsive budgeting in the public sector, complemented by the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women. Subsequently, in 2004–2005, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) embraced the mission of "Budgeting for Gender Equity." This initiative led to the formulation of a Strategic Framework, emphasizing key aspects of gender equality are:

- Establishing specialized Gender Budget Cells within various ministries and departments.
- Conducting orientation sessions for both government and non-government stakeholders to familiarize them with the principles and tools of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB).

- Compiling databases that are sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive to facilitate comprehensive gender analysis.
- Formulating a gender budget charter outlining principles and guidelines for gender-inclusive budgeting practices.
- Issuing annual reports through the Gender Budget Statement, detailing the progress and impact of gender-responsive budgeting efforts.
- Creating central coordinating centers for GRB at both national and subnational levels to serve as focal points for effective implementation and coordination.

Consequently, the gender budgeting statement saw a significant expansion, encompassing over 33 demands for grants. There was also a notable increase in the presence of gender-responsive budgeting cells across various ministry departments. The gender statement further categorized gender-sensitive allocations into distinct programs aimed at benefiting women, emphasizing a clear distinction between public expenditure and allocations specifically designed to support women-centric initiatives.

The Four Stages of the budget cycle

1. Gender Analysis and Planning

- This stage involves conducting a thorough gender analysis to identify how budgetary decisions impact different genders.
- It includes setting gender-sensitive objectives and priorities to address gender inequalities.

2. Budget Formulation with Gender Mainstreaming

- Integrating gender considerations into the formulation of budget proposals and allocations.
- Ensuring that budget priorities reflect the needs and priorities identified during the gender analysis stage.

3. Gender-Responsive Budget Implementation

- Putting the budget into action, with a focus on implementing programs and policies that promote gender equality.
- Allocating resources to gender-responsive initiatives and tracking expenditures to ensure they align with gender-specific goals.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation with a Gender Lens

- Regularly assessing the impact of budgetary decisions on gender equality.
- Conducting gender-sensitive audits and evaluations to measure the effectiveness of gender-responsive budgeting measures.

Critique and Challenges

While the concept of GRB holds immense promise, there are notable challenges in its implementation. Critics argue that translating gender-responsive intentions into concrete budgetary allocations is easier said than done. Skepticism also surrounds the actual impact of GRB, with some asserting that it may be more symbolic than substantive, failing to bring about tangible changes on the ground.

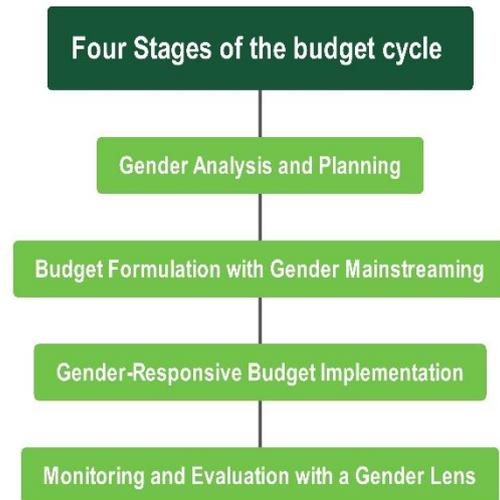
Moreover, GRB's success depends heavily on accurate and comprehensive gender-disaggregated data. Many countries still lack the necessary data infrastructure, hindering the effective implementation of GRB in policymaking. To overcome this, investments in data collection and analysis must be prioritized.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the adoption of Gender-Responsive Budgeting in agriculture and climate policies represents a step in the right direction towards a more equitable and sustainable future. However, it is crucial to acknowledge and address the challenges in its implementation. A commitment to genuine gender equality requires not just rhetoric but tangible actions backed by resources. As we navigate the complex terrain of policymaking, integrating GRB into the heart of our strategies can pave the way for a more inclusive and resilient world.

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