

August 2011



# BREAKING NEW FRONTIERS FOR GENDER RESPONSIVE BUDGETING

## THE KERALA MODEL



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## Introduction

What makes the work on Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) appear in a different genre of scholarly work on gender, is that national budgets, policies and budgetary processes come to the centre stage of feminist scrutiny—an area that has hitherto been on the periphery of the gender agenda. Yet the gap between the pitch of the current state of work on GRB and the potential that this line of enquiry throws up is amply large—the silver lining being the possibilities that this gap opens up to propel more work in this area- work that is more innovative.

GRB as a tool is witnessing tremendous buy-in from government and civil society alike. The last count shows that more than 90 countries across the globe have engaged with GRB in the past ten years. Currently, there are 60 countries engaged in some form of GRB work and UN Women is supporting 44 of them. For a tool that was experimented with only in the mid 1980s (in Australia), this is not insignificant by any standard. Part of the reason for this significant upscaling could be that GRB puts the limelight on budgets – a powerful instrument of governance and yet an area that traditionally the women's movement has given only scant attention (unlike say for instance, other issues like violence, conflict, HIV and AIDS, among others).

However, one is tempted to argue that part of the reason for this buy-in could be that GRB can be done as an entirely technical exercise, sometimes even as an a-political exercise confined to disaggregating public expenditure by its incidence on men and women and can just stop at that. Can a mere technical scrutiny of allocations, delinked from a political understanding, achieve transformation of either budgetary processes or outcomes? This paper argues that a significant opportunity lost, if we don't seize the opportunity that the huge endorsement of GRB within government quarters offers, and expand as well as ground the GRB discourse in a critical feminist analysis.

## Experiences of GRB in the Asia Pacific region

The experiences of GRB have been wide-ranging across the Asia Pacific region—in terms of the strategies used; the actors involved; and the levels of engagement. If all these were to be put on one canvas, a colorful yet incongruous, motley picture would emerge. If there is one message that comes out clearly it is that there is no one blueprint for GRB. Yet, in terms of what countries in Asia Pacific have done on GRB, two important 'first steps' seem to emerge. These are (a) a large number of trainings and capacity building workshops on GRB have been organized; and (b) Gender Budget Statements of sector plans and budgets have been produced<sup>1</sup>. Both of these are important 'first steps' as countries begin with GRB.

Trainings and capacity building workshops in GRB for policy makers have attracted a large amount of resources made available either by donors or national governments. The results

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<sup>1</sup> A Gender Budget Statement is a statement produced by the government which states the implications of a particular budget on gender equality or women's empowerment. It attempts to analyze a particular budget for its gender implications.

of such trainings could be very sustainable – projects come and go but capacities of national government machineries built on GRB, will remain within the host country. That being said, there is also a need to look critically at GRB trainings and capacity building workshops. Most countries lack a systematic roadmap of where these trainings or capacity development strategies should lead to. There is often little clarity on what level of change is desired from capacity development approaches—individual changes (for instance, Finance Ministry Officials being able to understand GRB), collective changes (for instance, Finance Ministry Officials being able to bring out a Gender Budget Statement), or systemic changes (the capacity of the entire budget making process to be more gender responsive). It is important to understand what level of change one is striving for, since this will have important bearings on training strategies. New work on understanding the different capacity development needs has been done<sup>2</sup> and can be a valuable resource in guiding capacity development for GRB.

The other first step that many countries have taken in GRB is to produce Gender Budget Statements. Gender Budget Statements are produced by governments, usually with the active involvement of Ministry of Finance as well as sectoral ministries. Gender Budget Statements are a useful tool as they attempt to scrutinize from a gender lens, budget documents that often are difficult to comprehend. However, depending on a host of factors, the formats being used and the level of details being provided, differs drastically from one country to another. There are inherent limitations in the methodologies and formats being used to produce Gender Budget Statements in several countries, there are some advantages as well.<sup>3</sup> In India, for instance, it is definitely a step towards greater transparency as in one document one gets an estimate of how much of the budget of the government is going towards women<sup>4</sup>. Other countries use formats that are more qualitative and less quantitative, Pakistan and Indonesia's GRB Statements, for instance<sup>5</sup>. (The focus in more qualitative formats is to identify the gender issues in the programme and sub programme and then try to assess the inputs, outputs, achievements and indicators from a gender lens). The other distinct advantage of various line ministries going through the grill of producing Gender Budget Statements is that at least it triggers a consciousness amongst the implementing agency officials and ultimately the policy makers of figuring out how responsive each programme/policy has been to gender equality concerns. However, it is important to keep reemphasizing that Gender Budget Statements *is not equal to* Gender Responsive Budgeting. Gender Budget Statements could be a tool that some countries have chosen to use, but the ultimate objective should be to make budgets and policies more gender responsive. Merely interrogating public expenditure, or its incidence, does not suffice. There should be instead a better format for Gender Budget Statements with an adequate mix of qualitative and quantitative data.

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<sup>2</sup> Unifem (now UN Women) Capacity Development Strategy for GRB, unpublished paper.

<sup>3</sup> 'Gender Budgeting Statement: Misleading and Patriarchal Assumptions', *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 29, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> 'What Does Budget 2007-08 Offer Women?', *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 21, 2007

<sup>5</sup> 'Gender Responsive Budgeting in Pakistan: Experience and lessons learned', by *Nadeem Mahbub* and *Debbie Budlender*, Nov 2007 and Assessing gender responsive local capacity development in INDONESIA, Copyright © UNDP 2009

While GRB is getting unprecedented attention at the policy making level (several countries have endorsed the use of the tool, call circulars/budget circulars issued by the Ministry of Finance in several countries now explicitly mentions GRB and the need to disaggregate budgets by gender, several countries have started producing Gender Budget Statements and others are experimenting with other GRB tools, etc.,) it is important to ask ourselves critical question about what this tool has meant for the reality of women's lives? Has it translated into better outlays and outcomes in the lives of women at the grassroots in any significant way? Has it resulted in more gender equitable development outcomes? As an advocate of GRB, my main concern is to see that GRB is a transformative tool that leads to improved public policy that responds to women's priorities and addresses inequalities faced by women. I would say that in some countries, the full potential of GRB work is yet to be explored and more significant effort is needed by practitioners, policy makers and women's organizations to ensure that GRB is not an exercise on paper that is isolated from the institutional, political and policy making sphere of public policy. This paper tries to identify the lessons learnt from the experience in the state of Kerala in India to address this challenge in order to ensure the tremendous potential of GRB to significantly touch the lives of grassroots women remains untapped.

### **The Kerala Model**

Kerala, the southernmost state of India stands apart from other states with a consistently higher level of human development comparable with that of many advanced countries but with a much lower per capita income<sup>6</sup>. When it comes to gender, Kerala has been applauded for the status of women, especially for the advances it has made in women's education and health. Kerala is also the state in India with the highest female to male sex ratio. However, in the recent years, the achievements of the state as regards gender are being questioned as these improvements in gender indicators have come along with an increase in incidents of gender based violence, increase in cases of depression and suicide which can be attributed to the lack of autonomy and powerlessness experienced by the women in the State, poor participation and representation of women in politics, high workload and household responsibility on the differential wage structure between males and females in spite of powerful trade union movement in the state<sup>7</sup>. People many are struggling to understand the "gender paradox" of Kerala, which refers to the 'contradiction' whereby women's high showing in socio-demographic indicators of development exists simultaneously with their low public participation and the increasing incidence of violence upon them.

However, when it comes to GRB, Kerala is chartering a new course and addressing some of the long standing gaps that have existed in GRB work in several countries. Although the state has initiated the process of preparing GB Statements there is a clear understanding that GRB needs to go beyond that. The real achievement of GRB in Kerala is that efforts have been made to reach women at the grassroots. Better still, it is not just in those sectors that have been traditionally perceived as "soft sectors", such as health and

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<sup>6</sup> Human Development Report, Kerala, 2005

<sup>7</sup> 'Situation of Women in Kerala, The Gender Paradox', Sakhi, Kerala

education. GRB work in Kerala steers right into the heart of sectors such as infrastructure, roads, ports, etc., that have been most resistant to gender incursions into their domain, let alone incursions of GRB.

What is fundamentally different about the Kerala model is that it focuses on developing schemes that address women's specific needs and priorities and realigning other existing schemes to make them more gender responsive GRB comes in to ensure that *funds are made available for these schemes (or components that can contribute to gender equality within existing schemes) to the extent possible.*

## Gender Friendly Infrastructure

Infrastructure planning and policy almost always pay scant attention or neglect gender issues. To facilitate women's participation in the public sphere, it is important to ensure that infrastructure acknowledges the needs of women as users. For instance, a survey of public offices in the districts of Kerala showed that a number of public buildings and public transportation facilities do not have separate toilets for women. It is in this context that a major scheme on **Gender Friendly Infrastructure** has been formulated (Infrastructure here is used in a broad sense to include social infrastructure to facilitate women's participation in the economy as well in addition to physical infrastructure). Several departments are involved in this scheme including Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC), Public Works Department (PWD), Police, Ports, Housing, and also Health, Social Welfare and IT sector.

Some of the highlights of this scheme include: Firstly, basic amenities such as separate rest rooms, toilets, drinking water facilities being built in all depots and sub depots of Kerala State Road Transport Corporation; and separate toilets for women in public buildings in the district and block headquarters (administrative units) which do not have one (under the aegis of the Public Works Department).

Secondly, many rural women have to commute long distances for work in urban areas and acknowledging that women (single women or women heads of households) and poor women in particular, cannot afford to rent apartments in urban areas, due to prohibitive costs, **an innovative housing scheme** for low paid workers, in particular women, has been developed in Poojapura (Trivandrum corporation) and Kakkanad (Cochin corporation). These flats have government regulated low rentals and can be rented by poor women either for the family they head or by a group of poor women pooling their resources (this is under Kerala State Housing Board in the Housing Department). While at the moment 33 percent of the flats are reserved for women, in some sets of coming flats 100 percent will be provided to women. In addition working women's/ college students hostels are also being set up by Public Works Department and Higher Education Department.

Thirdly, to ensure **the safety and welfare of women workers** in minor ports, two buses for conveyance of women workers in Beypore and Vizhinjam (Ports) and night shelter for fisherwomen in two fish landing centres have been arranged. Also since women have to wait for several hours at the fish drying units, separate waiting rooms have been created

for women to ensure their safety and to ease the waiting stress (under the aegis of the Harbour Engineering and Fisheries Department).

Fourthly, since much of the increase in women's labour force participation rate in India is in the informal sector, infrastructure facilities for skill enhancement of women students have been set up in ten Women's Colleges across the state (under the IT Department) to facilitate women's access to employment in new sectors of high growth importance such as IT. This is seen as a measure to move women labor from sectors characterized by low wages, low growth and drudgery.

Under the Kerala State Women's Development Corporation), a particularly successful programme for developing communicative skills and English learning besides basic computer knowledge has been set up. The REACH programme not only provides the physical infrastructure but also the basic skills to help women move from the informal sectors to the formal economy. These courses are available free of charge for women living below the poverty line and at nominal charges for women above the poverty line.

Fifthly, for **women survivors of violence**, a counseling room (the *Bhoomika* counseling centre) has been provided in the General Hospital, Trivandrum. The centre provides counseling to those identified by doctors of the hospital as survivors of domestic violence. In addition, the *Bhoomika* counseling centre has trained medical staff on issues of violence. They also have an outreach radio programme on violence. Likewise, the Homeopathy Department, Health and Family Welfare Department of the Government of Kerala, has launched its first gender based programme for women's health care—*Seethalayam*—which seeks to address women's mental, physical and social health. This centre has just been started and it has conducted training programmes for doctors on health needs of women, with a focus on violence. To begin with, it dealt with issues like how to give medical and non-medical support to women affected by violence. The overall objective of the centre is to provide comprehensive health services to women.

Also since an increasingly large number of women are being diagnosed with breast cancer (the most common types of cancer reported by women are breast cancer, cervix cancer and thyroid cancer) at the Regional Cancer Centre, which treats more than 13,000 cases of cancer every year, funds have been made available by the State Planning Board to augment advanced facilities for early detection of cancer for women such as digital mammogram, increasing the screening and diagnostic facilities of cancer in women in peripheral centres, equipment for early diagnosis and treatment of cervical cancer.

In some states in India police stations have started programmes for women and gender trainings for their own staff. But what is new and different in Kerala is that Victim Support Cells have been set up that provide women coming to police stations a space (physical space) to discuss issues such as sexual violence which they would feel uncomfortable discussing in public. However, more importantly, and in a move that will have significant impact on women survivors of violence who approach the police, an amount of Rs. 10,000 per police station (and within that there is a cap of Rs. 500 per sitting), has been earmarked to be used by the police to facilitate the woman's conveyance costs between the

police station, hospital, counseling centre, legal support cells, etc. as well as for other incidentals. For a poor woman who walks out of a violent household without any support, availability of this small amount of resources at the police station will be of great help. Kerala's Police Department is the first and probably amongst the very few, if not the only Police Department in the country to have a planned scheme!

While one could argue that these schemes appear to be addressing practical needs of women, by ensuring mobility, security and safety and by facilitating their integration with and access to the market, they also address strategic gender needs of women.

### **The Income Support Scheme and Food Security Scheme**

In addition to *Gender Friendly Infrastructure*, two other major schemes of importance from a gender lens are the ***Income Support Scheme*** for self employed workers in traditional industries like coir, handlooms, khadi and fisheries who fall below poverty line category and the ***Food Security Scheme***.

The Income Support Scheme ensures Rs.150 per day for at least 100 days of work; its mode of implementation is flexible and will vary depending on the specificity of the industry (Labour Department together with coir, handloom, khadi and fisheries departments).

The Food Security Scheme (as part of the larger Programme on Food Security in the state), also addresses a critical gender gap. In the light of growing evidence of agriculture becoming feminized and to recognize women farmers in their own right, collective farming ("sangha krishi" ) activities of Kudumbashree, is one of the largest women's empowerment projects in the country with over 3.7 million members. This scheme will be implemented through women's collectives in agriculture and animal husbandry including poultry. For the first time agriculture and animal husbandry in which women work in large numbers will have a major scheme that focuses exclusively on women, operating under Departments of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry.

### **Conclusion**

The traditional school-book definition of GRB says that GRB is not only about more budgets or resources for women. The Kerala Model of GRB turns this discourse on its head and says while women's empowerment requires other things, we also need to ensure greater resources for women, as the gender agenda is an underfunded agenda, no matter which yardstick one uses. There are many other approaches to GRB that go beyond GB Statements and disaggregating numbers and more effort is needed in these directions.

*(The author is grateful to Dr. Mridul Eapen, Former Member State Planning Board Kerala, whose work in Kerala inspired this article).*