

4.3 Using Political Change to Promote Gender Sensitive Budgeting in Scotland: The Experience of the Scottish Women's Budget Group – by Ailsa McKay¹⁵

The Scottish experience with gender budgeting has been reported in a number of formal publications¹⁶. The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief outline of the 'story so far' within a Scottish context and to highlight how the activities of the Scottish Women's Budget Group (SWBG) remain a crucial aspect of ongoing developments.

Promoting Gender Sensitive Budgeting in Scotland – The Changing Political Landscape

The new millennium marked a period of significant political and economic change in Scotland. The May 1997 UK general election witnessed the start of a process whereby Scotland would benefit from the establishment of a new Scottish Parliament and Executive, directly responsible for a number of policy areas. The election victory of the New Labour government meant that devolution, the transfer of power from the UK Parliament at Westminster, now seemed likely to become a political reality. A referendum was held on 11 September 1997 on the government's proposals for a Scottish parliament and the Scottish electorate produced a clear majority in favour. The first Parliament took up its full legislative powers in July 1999. This change in the political horizon was accompanied by a commitment to advance an agenda of equality mainstreaming throughout the public policy process.

The favourable policy framework implied by a commitment to mainstreaming combined with the increased representation of women in the polity (following the May 2003 election 39% of Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) are women) indicates real potential for promoting gender equality throughout the policy process and across the range of public policy interventions. The emergence and subsequent activities of the Scottish Women's Budget Group (SWBG) can be arguably linked positively with this more 'woman friendly' political landscape.

The Story of the Scottish Women's Budget Group

Recognising the opportunities afforded by the principles and operation of the new Scottish Parliament, Engender, an information, research and networking organisation for women in Scotland, hosted a seminar in November 1999 to consult with groups and individuals with an interest in forming a women's budget group. The seminar was attended by women from a range of organisations and was addressed by a representative of the UK based Women's Budget Group. Inspired by the work of the UK group, the overall outcome from the meeting was that there was indeed a desire to establish a Scottish based group, to work in close consultation with the Women's Budget Group and to learn from their experience. Although the formal establishment of such a group was to take several months, the immediate action of several of the women attending this initial seminar secured the potential for further progress.

Soon after the seminar, the new administration, the Scottish Executive, produced a consultation document containing proposals for the first round of spending allocation for 2000-2001 and 2001-2002, which presented the emerging SWBG with a particular focus. A collective response commenting on the gender impact of specific proposals and calling for a framework to be established to ensure a gender impact analysis was incorporated in the budget process was submitted. The re-

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¹⁶ For background details on the development of SWBG see McKay et al (2002). A more up to date account of the work of the group is provided in McKay (2006). Mackay et al (2005) provide an evaluation of the impact the groups activities have had in shaping the policy process in Scotland.

sponse was received with interest and referred to by the Minister for Finance in his opening statement presenting the first Budget Bill to Parliament;

...our consultation has given us new ideas and ways in which to improve the budget process. The group Engender¹⁷ – which as its name implies, is concerned with gender issues – suggested that we needed to conduct a gender audit across our spending programmes to assess their overall impact on women. I have told it that I intend to develop that idea for the future.¹⁸

As a result of this, representatives of SWBG were invited to give evidence to various Scottish Parliamentary Committees and to attend a meeting with the Minister for Finance to discuss proposals for ensuring that gender impact analysis would become an integral feature of the spending allocation process. These meetings served to further develop a cross party political interest in ensuring that future policy debates, particularly those relating to the budget statement, incorporated a gender impact analysis. However, concern was expressed regarding the appropriate mechanisms and tools to be employed.

Responding to these concerns, members of Engender and the loosely formed SWBG began establishing networks of contacts, gathering relevant literature and developing expertise on gender impact analysis and the budget process. Given the range and concentration of activity this required, the need to formalise the Scottish group, and to develop a working strategy, quickly became evident. Thus the Scottish Women's Budget Group (formerly known as Engender Women's Budget Group) was formally constituted in May 2000 with the aim of ensuring that gender impact analysis becomes a mainstream part of the Scottish public policy process. The group brings together women from academia, local communities, the statutory and voluntary sector and trade unions. Although individual members of the group contribute on a voluntary basis, Engender, Oxfam GB and Glasgow Caledonian University support the work of the group.

SWBG's overall aim is to encourage the Scottish Parliament and the Executive systematically to apply gender analysis throughout the policy and resource allocation processes. Key to the work of SWBG is the ability to convince the key players in the Scottish policy making community of the relevance of gender in the budget process. Thus, although the work of the group has been, and continues to be firmly focused on actual patterns of public expenditure and associated processes, they have engaged with the new Scottish institutional framework at a range of levels. This has involved directing their activities primarily at Finance Ministers, the Finance Committee of the Parliament and officials in the Finance Department of the Scottish Executive, as well as making the case for gender budgeting to various government ministers, parliamentarians, and government officials from across a range of policy related departments. The group has promoted the case that the budget reflects the social and economic priorities of a government and represents the spending needed to put policy into practice. Claims of 'gender neutrality' with reference to the budget fail to reflect adequately how spending decisions have differential impacts on men and women, boys and girls. The practices and processes associated with drawing up the budget do not normally account for how the lives of girls and women differ as compared with boys and men thus 'gender neutral' can more accurately be described as 'gender blind'. In their numerous responses to the Scottish Executive's planned spending allocations, SWBG have continually pointed out how the different needs and resources available to men and women will affect the way they access everything from jobs, to public services such as housing, transport, education and training. By taking account of these differences, policy-makers can ensure better policy targeting, more effective delivery and greater equality.

In progressing with their agenda, SWBG have employed a variety of means, including submission of evidence and commentary to the Scottish Executive and the Finance, Equal Opportunities and

¹⁷ SWBG was formerly known as Engender Women's Budget Group

¹⁸ Jack McConnell, Minister for Finance, Opening Stage One Debate on Budget (Scotland) Bill 26th January 2000.

Local Government Committees of the Parliament in response to consultation and other documents relating to public expenditure in Scotland and the budget process. The group has developed both formal and informal links with the new political institutions and their work and expertise has been recognised at both a national and international level (Mackay et al, 2005). In successive years, the group has highlighted strengths and weaknesses in relation to progress towards gender responsive budgeting and has successfully built a reputation as 'an effective politically powerful lobby' (ibid, 2005:31). A number of symbolic and practical gains can be linked directly to the group's activities.

The public endorsement of gender budgeting was subsequently translated into policy speak in November 2000 with the launch of the Equality Strategy, which contained a commitment to put in place a framework for assessing the Scottish Budget with reference to equality issues (Scottish Executive, 2000). In addition it seemed that there was strong political will to move beyond talking and to establish practical means for progressing with an overall equality focused agenda for government with specific reference to budgeting processes;

Best value is for all.... Equality proofing will be embedded in the detailed processes of departmental spending and the secondment of research help. The advisory group that we will announce soon will take that forward (Scottish Executive Minister for Finance, 20 September 2000).

The setting up of the Equality Proofing Policy and Budgets Advisory Group (EPPBAG), involving officials from the Executive's Finance Department and Equality Unit along with representatives from the statutory equality agencies and SWBG, provided the group with a formal framework for engaging with the Scottish Executive in promoting a more gender aware approach to the budget. The overall purpose of EPPBAG is to raise awareness and to develop understanding of equality proofing budgets¹⁹ both within the Executive and throughout the wider policy making community in Scotland. Although perhaps symbolic gestures, the Equality Strategy combined with the advisory group at least served to ensure that SWBG's agenda remains live and in the public domain.

The 'secondment of research help' referred to by the Finance Minister materialised when EPPBAG commissioned research which mapped the first annual budget process.²⁰ This was considered crucial given that, following devolution, the budget process was novel. Key lessons learned from this exercise pointed to the difficulties associated with ensuring transparency given the political nature of the budget. However, developing an awareness of the actual process and keeping up to date with the dynamics of the process is crucial for those working towards gender sensitive budgeting in any country. Furthermore the research output proved an effective tool for building capacity and raising awareness of the links between the budget and policy processes, including policy implementation. Gender sensitive budgeting therefore serves to make explicit the link between policy and spending allocations across all government activity.

Another important step forward was the decision of EPPBAG in 2002 to undertake some pilot research in health and sport to assist with the process of developing tools and mechanisms appropriate to the Scottish public policy environment. The pilot studies were considered to be a useful approach to identifying practical ways of assessing the equality impact of budgets and spending plans. In August 2003, a briefing for the Scottish Parliament claimed that the Scottish Executive was making "steady progress on developing mechanisms for equality impact assessment of budgets and spending plans"²¹ However, the work to develop the means of making the link between policy and process did not happen in earnest until 2005. Over the period from January to September 2005, academic researchers, expert advisors and government officials from the Finance Depart-

¹⁹ "Equality proofing the Scottish budget is the mechanism for linking the mainstreaming of equality in the policy process with the appropriate distribution of resources." (Scottish Executive, 2003: 36).

²⁰ See Mckay and Fitzgerald, 2002.

²¹ Kidner C and Curtis S (2003) Mainstreaming Equality Issues. SPICe briefing, 5 August 2003, 03/58. Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament.

ment, the Equality Unit and the respective spending agencies worked in collaboration to complete the pilots with the aim of feeding into the preparations for the next multi-year spending review. The collaboration involved establishing an evidence base with regard to gender based inequalities in particular policy areas within the health and sport budgets, mapping the policy and budget process and establishing both formal and informal links within these two policy areas and the use of available technical expertise in the field of gender budgeting. Although the delay in making tangible progress was a cause for some frustration for SWBG, the group nonetheless welcomed the inclusion in the Draft Budget 2006-07 (Scottish Executive, 2005) of an update on the pilot work and commended the work as:

... indicative of the Scottish Executive's commitment to promoting a more gender aware approach to the resource allocation process. The pilot studies have developed in line with an approach that makes explicit the interdependence of the policy and spending processes as well as recognising the work as part of an overall mainstreaming agenda (Measuring Up: Delivering on Gender Equality in the Scottish Budget. Scottish Women's Budget Group – Budget Response, 2005:2).

The report providing the outcomes from the pilots in health and sport is not yet in the public domain. However, in view of the time delay in completing the pilot projects, publication of the results is pressing and the best practice tools developed should be promoted as a priority. SWBG continue to campaign for such and via EPPBPAG will work to ensure that both the outputs and the processes associated with the pilot projects are appropriately disseminated.

Conclusion – Policy versus Process – Possible Tensions?

Thus there has been significant progress in working towards gender sensitive budgeting in Scotland. Transparency in the budget process has been enhanced in that there is a greater understanding amongst key stakeholders of the actual mechanisms and stages involved in drawing up the annual spending plans, there is a formal working relationship with the Executive via the Advisory Group and there is a formal commitment contained within the Equality Strategy to assess spending plans with specific reference to gender.

However, despite such positive developments in the past four years, there has been no evidence of actual policy shifts to promote gender equality and the budget itself remains gender neutral. Although there is implicit recognition, both on behalf of the Executive and SWBG, that in practice gender proofing the Scottish budget is part of a long term process, and thus incremental change is welcomed as necessary in working towards the longer term goal, the lack of significant shifts in policy is proving frustrating. The almost exclusive focus on process is resulting in less obvious outputs and it is therefore becoming more difficult to maintain the enthusiasm of those most directly involved in promoting gender sensitive budgeting in Scotland. For SWBG this has led to significant barriers in progressing with their work.

Furthermore the focus on process in Scotland has served to identify key barriers in developing gender budgeting in any country;

- Transparency of the budget process is very difficult to achieve and sustain considering the dynamics of budgetary reform processes. Also given the political nature of budgets it is often unclear as to who is accountable for particular reforms/change.
- Participation is difficult to sustain when there is little evidence of progress in terms of policy developments. This combined with the fact that members of SWBG contribute on a voluntary basis has served to diminish the resources in terms of human capital available to the group. There has been a tendency to switch the emphasis from examining the actual way budget decisions are made to looking at the policy outcomes and whilst this is useful in itself, it can result in detracting from the key issue – the role of the budget in in-

forming such policy outcomes and thus the role of the budget in sustaining and even creating gender inequalities.

SWBG members will continue to work to resolve these issues and will endeavour to share their experiences with others.

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Using Political change to Promote Sensitive Budgeting in Scotland: The Experience of the Scottish Women's Budget Group

Presentation for the Gender Budgeting Networking Event, Vienna, 5-7th Feb 2006, by Ailsa McKay

<h3>Scotland - The Background</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Devolution - July 1999• The Scottish Budget Process? - Spending only• Scottish Parliament - commitment to transparent and consultative governance• Mainstreaming agenda endorsed - "the aim must be to embed into the process of policy formulation and the way in which the Parliament works, the principles and commitment to promote equal opportunities for all and to eliminate the effects of past discrimination" (CSG, 1998)• The Equal Opportunities Committee of the Parliament and the Equality Unit of the Executive 	<h3>The Scottish Women's Budget Group</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Established May 2000• Members from range of organisations - academic, trade unions, statutory and voluntary organisations and local communities• Resources limited!!! - No Worker/Pt time Worker/No Worker• Activities unlimited!!! - Responding to budget documents, requests to give evidence to committees, responding to policy related consultative documents, raising awareness, building capacity 
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<h3>Governing Principles</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transparency• Participation• Sustainability• Long Term Strategy• Country Ownership 	<h3>Understanding the Budget Process</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1st step in Scotland• Key in building capacity - output is a tool• Dynamics of the budgetary process• Role of Parliamentary Committees• Identifying both key stages and key actors• Relevance of Finance Department 
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3

4

Scottish Gender Budget Initiative?

- No examples of actual policy shifts
- Actual budget remains gender blind! - women in golf???
- Gender Equality v's "Closing the Opportunity Gap"

However

- Greater transparency - "Understanding the Budget Process"?
- Greater participation - forging new partnerships
- Contained within the Equality Strategy of the Scottish Executive (Nov 2000) a commitment to:
'assess the equality impact of spending plans and decisions as part of the mainstreaming agenda'
- Pilots in Health and Sport - reported in Budget docs 2006/07



5

Progress

- **Transparency**
Understanding the Scottish Budgetary Process
- **Participation**
Equality Proofing Budgets Advisory Group, Parliamentary Committee System and Consultation
- **Sustainability**
Mainstreaming Pilots and Budgetary Reform
- **Long Term Strategy**
Focus on process rather than policy shifts
- **Country Ownership**
Health and Sport pilots



6

Barriers

- **Transparency**
Dynamics of the budgetary process and accountability
Equality statements - 'invisible' or rather subsumed
"It's all mainstreaming now anyway"
- **Participation**
Capacity of SWBG
- **Sustainability**
Understanding (or lack of) gender as a concept
- **Long Term Strategy**
In the long run we are all dead!
- **Country Ownership**
Focus on process hard to quantify



7

Frustrations

- Role/Function of SWBG
- Process v's Policy
- Fiscal Squeeze - VFM!
- 'Closing the Opportunity Gap'
equality and gender mainstreaming lost within wider social justice agenda



8

Policy v's Process

- Where do we go from here?
 - Scotland - lack of 'tangible' results
- Experience Elsewhere
 - HM Treasury and Basque Initiative
 - GB Network
- Focus on Policy or Process?
 - Need to find a way of doing both?
 - Need to think about the way things are done as well as the outcomes of those decisions.



9

Past 12 Months

- Declining Membership
- Lack of Progress (tangible) Scottish Exec
- Change of Minister
- Staff Changes in EU and Finance
- Offer of funding support from SE?



10

Rethink?

- Re-organise SWBG.
Tasks - membership, training, budget responses, profile, parliamentary work
- Pilots
- Budget Process
- Economic Literacy



11

Pilots

- Sport and Health - Why?
- Start with an issue - Health Inequalities
- Smoking Cessation/Active Schools
- Methodology
- Partnership - Scottish Executive, SWBG and academic team
- Progress reported in Budget Documents
- Outputs - report, guidance and action plan for next steps



12

Can Women Make a Difference

Gender Budgets - Lack of Understanding?

1. The role of economic theorising/analysis in the policy process - a 'perceived wisdom'!
2. The relevance of gender in the formal allocation process (i.e. the budget is 'gender neutral')

Building Capacity and Securing Future Engagement

- * *Economics for Gender Equality: Developing Fluency in Economics from a Feminist Economics Perspective????*
- * *The role of IAFFE??*



13

Frustrations?

- Shopping List Analogy
 - Access Points?
 - Membership
- BUT**
- Entries in Budget Docs
 - Perceptions of us?
 - Focus on Economic Literacy



14