

5.7 The beginning of an experience on gender budgeting from the Basque Country: City of Bilbao

by Yolanda Jubeto

Budgets/topics analyzed:

Before starting the experience with the City Council of Bilbao last spring (2006), as we were going to follow the methodology used by the Basque Government in 2001-02, I carried out interviews with the people who had taken part in that initiative to know their impressions, balance, and main problems found in the way. I have also spoken with the main promoter of that initiative, Ana Alberdi, responsible of Emakunde in that process, who gave me all the contacts within the government structures.

At the beginning of the pilot project with the Town Council of Bilbao, all the areas of the City Council were invited to take part in it in order to analyse some relevant programmes of their Areas. The only requirements to take part in it were to have access to the reliable gendered disaggregated data, to have a specific budget attached to that program, and people dedicated to the task of gathering the information, working on it and attending the required meetings to be able to carry it out.

Finally, the topics we are working on are related to different subject matters competence of the Town Hall, such as public housing policy, public spaces for leisure of children, development cooperation aids, money-transfers to the people with material needs, consumers' information department, policies of ecological sensitised and aid to eliminate barriers to people with discapacities in the communities.

Methods/approaches used

We are using the method proposed by Rona Fitzgerald in the Basque Government's experience, adapted to the reality of the Town Hall and combined with a participatory approach, as the aim is not just to make the inner audit analysis and improve the way the planification is made and the results are measured, but also to give voice to the feminist groups (and other women's groups) of Bilbao in the process of checking and introducing improvements in the working of the public policies application in the Town Hall.

The method consists of training and then proposing the elaboration of a report which consists of two main parts (with the same main guidelines for all the departments), carried out by the people in charge of each area. In the first place, they have to describe the main characteristics of the chosen project and the principal reasons for choosing it, contextualising it within the global budget of their Area and of the Town Hall. It is also required to include a description of the workers involved in the Area, their category and working conditions. In the second part, they have to evaluate to what extent, if any, they observe a different impact of that programme on women and men, and on female and male children. They have to include their evaluation of the ways to improve the assignation of resources, in case they observe an unequal use of them, as well as to compare the expectations related to the programme and the results and the problems found on the process of analysis.

Ways of influencing the budgetary process

By making the people of the different areas who work with the budget more aware of the potential different impacts on women and men of the measures they implement. Besides, we would also like to make them be aware of the need of contrasting the results of the budget with the real beneficiary collective of it in order to improve the allocation of the budget in the following years. In summary, to be conscious of the benefits of making the budgeting process more accountable and linked to the different realities they are supposed to pretend to modify and improve.

In the second phase, we would like to sensitise the Finance Department of the Town Hall about the need to mainstream a gender aware methodology in the whole process of elaboration and evaluation of the budget, using gender indicators in all the programs of the budget where there is a chance to include them.

Strategies followed vis a vis the government

We are working with the Women's Area of the Town Hall in a highly collaborative way. They are in contact with the finance department and all the areas of the Town Hall by means of a recently established inter-areas commission, where they inform of the advances and requirements of this and other projects, and specially try to persuade them of the need of gender-friendly policy planification and implementation of the policies.

On the other hand, we are also in contact with the Basque Government's Women Institute (Emakunde), as they are working with some technicians of women's areas of several Town Halls to develop a methodology to be applied in some municipalities, once they have defined the methodology of analysis adapted to our reality. We would like to adapt it to Bilbao, if it were possible. With that aim, we are in contact with the main responsibilities of that project to follow it up.

Activities carried out to sensitise and involve a broader public/participatory approaches.

One of the main elements of the proposal we presented to the women's area of Bilbao's Town Hall was related to the need to contrast the preliminary reports of the Areas with the Women's Council of Bilbao. This is a rather new meeting point, pushed forward by the Women's Area, where a big number of women's and feminist organisations located in Bilbao are taking part in. We proposed to train them to make them aware of the importance of following up the budget from a gender perspective and of taking part in this project by being informed punctually, making proposals and in the second phase working together to introduce the improvements they consider a priority in the municipal budgets.

Thus, we have concentrated on making the effort of involvement of the women's organizations, feminist organisations and trade union's women branches, all of which take part in the Women's Council of Bilbao, as a means to get closer to the main issues that concern Bilbao's women.

Potential outcomes of the Gender Budgets initiatives

As we are in the process we haven't reached any outcome yet, though as Debbie Budlender has often said and we agree with her, at the moment one of the main positive aspects of these experiences is the process in itself. So, we are trying to manage to make the civil servants and the stakeholders, in general, more aware of the need to look at the numbers and to public resources and decisions (including the decision-making process) from a gender lens. In that way, it will be possible to make proposals to use the resources in a more equitable and efficient way, as the policies will be better adapted to the real needs of the women and men of the community.

Final remarks

In my opinion, these initiatives are a challenge to the public administration as they measure the level of inner and outer democracy that that institution promotes, not just with words but with facts.

The trajectory of many public administrations in our country has been characterized by obscurantism and a lack of transparency in the way they use the public resources. That trend has started to change in the years of democracy, but there is still a very deep rooted culture that generates many resistances to open up the black box of the budget further of the big numbers they make public every autumn. As our administration is very much decentralized, but not in a very straight cut way, we also find it difficult to analyse all the resources allocated to different administrations, which cover the different public areas where they share competences.

In summary, if the public administration wants to give an answer to the real and different needs of women and men in the community, it has to make real studies of their current situation and its evolution, in the first place. That means that it is required to gather statistical data that is reliable and systematically produced to be followed up and be able to see the changes in the living and working conditions of women and men along time and the impact of public measures. In the second place, once we know the reality, we need the other 2 Rs of the 3 Rs that the Nordic partners talk about (representation, resources, and reality) to mainstream policies, but for the whole budget, in order to evaluate all the phases of the budgeting process. And that means, in the end, political will by the part of the public authorities to carry these initiatives forward (learning in the process of doing it). Besides, they must be pushed forward also by the public consciousness of the need of gender democracy in our societies, if we really want to achieve a real democracy where the population, women and men, take active part in its progressive building.