MOBILIZING FOR BETTER BUDGETS

National plans and budgets define the direction of public services and investments essential to gender equality, but without rigorous scrutiny for gender dimensions, they can miss critical elements. Working with UN Women, a groundswell of gender equality advocates, national policymakers and international financial institutions are now championing gender-responsive plans and budgets that fully align with gender equality objectives. The time is now.

In Serbia, many of Milica Stojanovic’s friends have moved from their small village to nearby towns. She decided to stay and enjoy growing vegetables, a choice backed by a gender-responsive local public budget. It invests equally in services required by women and men, including those linked to agriculture.

CLAIMING A FAIR SHARE OF RESOURCES

In the town of Uzice, in southwestern Serbia, women civil society groups have long known what local women need most to improve their well-being: better livelihoods, for one thing. So with UN Women’s assistance, they looked at patterns of public spending, investigating whether or not local budgets were investing equally in services required by women and men. After finding that sums spent on agricultural subsidies were mostly going to animal husbandry, long dominated by men, they successfully argued for a shift in policy. Uzice agreed to channel more funds into subsidies for vegetable growing, where women farmers tend to cluster.

This is just one example of how gender analysis of public budgets in Serbia is changing the course of public finance as well as the programmes and services that depend on it. In 2018, 47 national and provincial government institutions included gender equality in their budget objectives, based on new requirements introduced in the 2015 Budget System Law. The law stipulates that all government institutions plan for at least one gender equality goal in their budgets and begin using sex-disaggregated data to measure all activities with potentially different impacts on the lives of women and men. Budget instructions issued by the Ministry of Finance in 2018 formally reinforced the imperative of gender-responsive budgeting and reporting.

Continuous advances on these issues are due in no small part to UN Women’s ongoing support, including through convening a vocal coalition of committed government officials, parliamentarians, civil society groups and other UN agencies. Expert reviews of budget documents have provided insights and recommendations, while training for nearly 800 national, provincial and local civil servants has showed them how to conduct effective gender-based budgeting that can make a substantial contribution to gender equality. Building on earlier experiences like the one in Uzice, a national review of agricultural incentives has begun identifying gaps in funding and services for women.

In a number of countries around the world, the introduction of gender-responsive budgeting has propelled consistent increases in allocations aimed at gender equality. In Mexico, sums have climbed by 37 per cent since 2012. A system to track allocations in the Dominican Republic has encouraged a consistent rise since 2015. New practices can also improve public planning as a whole. Cabo Verde used gender-responsive budget skills and tools acquired through UN Women’s assistance to integrate gender equality across the three axes of its new National Strategic Development Plan, a roadmap for localizing the Sustainable Development Goals.

In line with UN Women’s global Flagship Programme on Transformative Financing, a new partnership with the International Monetary Fund will significantly scale up the capacities of governments to implement gender-responsive budgeting.

PUTTING GENDER EQUALITY IN PLANNING

Beyond its support for integrating gender equality in broad national development planning and budget processes, UN Women has zeroed in on plans and policies around some particularly critical concerns for women’s rights and well-being, such as HIV/AIDS. In Zimbabwe, it helped bring organizations of women living with HIV into the review of the National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan 2015-2020.

The plan subsequently acknowledged high rates of new HIV infections among women and girls and emphasized the importance of addressing gender inequality and violence against women as root causes of increased HIV infections among women and girls. Women’s organizations and women’s rights activists also successfully advocated for the inclusion of initiatives on HIV and adolescent girls and young women in a funding request to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, with an approved budget of USD 8 million for behavioural change programmes, comprehensive sexuality education, and community mobilization interventions to prevent violence against women and girls.

43 COUNTRIES INCREASED BUDGET ALLOCATIONS FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT SINCE 2014