

**Women's Budget Group response to  
The Hansard Society Project on Financial Scrutiny**

**August 2005**

**About The Women's Budget Group**

The Women's Budget Group (WBG) is an independent organisation bringing together academics and people from non-governmental organisations and trades unions to promote gender equality through appropriate economic policy.

The WBG is co-chaired by Adele Baumgardt, Kate Bellamy, and Sue Smith.

If you would like more information about the work of the WBG, or to join the group and contribute to our work, please contact the, or visit our website.

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The Women's Budget Group is pleased to be able to contribute a response to the Hansard Society's review and assessment of the effectiveness of Parliament's scrutiny of financial matters.

The WBG believes that the government should incorporate a gender perspective within all policy-making to ensure that policy, and public expenditure, is gender aware, furthers equality of opportunity and recognises equally the needs of both women and men.

The issue is not whether spending is the same on women and men, but whether it is adequate to meet women's and men's different needs. The Women's Budget Group performs two main roles: encouraging government to include a gender analysis of spending and resource allocation in its work, and an external, civil society scrutinising role to ensure that this takes place.

Core activities of the group include responding to the Budget and Pre-Budget Report from a gender perspective, as well as considering the role of the Spending Review in promoting gender equality through resource allocation. However, we feel that the role of scrutiny of public expenditure from a gender perspective should be performed by the government's formal accountability body – Parliament.

Parliament's scrutiny of public expenditure should be viewed through a gender lens to ensure that a supposedly gender neutral policy isn't, in fact, gender blind. That is, unintentionally perpetuate discrimination against women or men because of their different circumstances and needs. Our response sets out examples of the benefit of using a gender lens to analyse expenditure, examples of where Parliament has played a critical role in ensuring this happens, and proposals to begin the discussion of UK Parliament's role in promoting the use of a gender lens in resource allocation.

### **Examples of conducting a gender analysis of expenditure**

#### *New Deal for Employment Programme*

The government's New Deals were introduced with the aim of promoting economic and employment opportunities for all. They are supposed to be gender neutral and open to everyone. However, their very design results in a significant gender imbalance in participants and in expenditure on the different programs.

As Katherine Rake, former Chair of the WBG, discovered by drawing on expenditure figures published in Budget 2000: Participation in the two principal New Deals, the New Deal for Young People (NDYP) and the New Deal for the Long Term Unemployed (NDLTU) are:

conditional on a particular duration of registered unemployment. However, women, especially women in couples, are less likely to register as unemployed and where they do so, are more likely to register for a short

period of time. By conditioning access on registered unemployment, NDYP and NDLTU have written into their design a typically male pattern of absence from the labour market and as a result women form a small proportion of participants on these two programs. Up to the end of 1999, 27% of participants in the NDYP were women and just 16% of participants in the NDLTU [were] women. (Rake, K. (2001) A Human Dimension)

Rake also analysed expenditure on the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) - 95% of participants are women, reflecting a similar number of woman-headed lone parent families in society. She found that expenditure on the NDLP was a mere 8% of total New Deal funding, as compared to 80% on the NDYP and NDLTU combined. On the surface, this may not appear to be a problem, as the NDLP serves fewer participants overall. But Rake went on to identify the per participant spend on each programme, and found that those participating in the NDLP received about £700, which is about half as much as those on the NDYP and NDLTU, who received £1560 and £1370 respectively.

Having conducted this analysis of expenditure from a gender perspective it is clear that the New Deals was gender biased towards men, both in design and in expenditure.

### *Spending on Sports*

Spending on sports programs also tends to be gender blind, and therefore gender imbalanced. Gender budget analysis research by the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Sports Council for Wales found that activities with high levels of female participation tended to be more dependent upon self-funding rather than receiving government financial support. For example, aerobics classes, popular among women, often require an attendance fee to cover costs. Football, however, which is much more popular with men, is subsidized by the public purse.

### **Government gender analysis of expenditure**

The Government has gone some way to incorporating a gender perspective in spending decisions and resource allocation. HM Treasury is drawing on a pilot project, which was supported by the WBG, to inform its expenditure allocation:

The pilot involved assessing the gender impact of a number of programmes, and drew on the expertise of a group of external practitioners. Its conclusions have informed the 2004 Spending Review and will be used in future expenditure and delivery processes. (para 5.7, p. 71, 2004 Spending Review)

We are pleased to see that Government is committed to taking this work forward, but are concerned that a deepening and broadening of gender analysis must take place for this to be truly effective in promoting gender equality in public spending. We believe that Parliament has an important role to play in promoting an expansion of this type of analysis within HM Treasury, and other government departments.

### **Examples of Parliamentary scrutiny of public expenditure from a gender perspective**

#### *France*

In France, Parliament's role has been imperative in achieving public expenditure that matches the needs of both women and men. In 2000, at the request of Parliament, the government of France introduced a legally required budget report – the Yellow Budget Paper - on women's rights and equality. It is intended to provide parliamentarians with a tool to effectively measure and monitor public expenditure on efforts to promote women's rights and gender equality.

Francoise Phillippe-Raynaud has written that the Yellow Budget Paper reflected Parliament's growing concern that it effectively measure and monitor financial efforts being made to promote women's rights and gender equality. He goes on:

This concern parallels the Government's avowed intention to implement a strong, dynamic policy on this issue, as reflected in the National Action Platform presented by Nicole Péry, Junior Minister for Women's Rights and Vocational Training, in June 1999, as well as the eight-line Priority Action Programme, decided upon by the Interdepartmental Committee responsible for women's rights, on 8 March 2000. (Phillippe-Raynaud, F. (2001) *The Yellow Budget Paper and Gender Equality In France*)

The paper's effectiveness has been widely recognized. The Gender and the Budget in the Fifth Report of France (2002) states that:

As both a 'mainstreaming' tool and a tool for measuring the impact of public policy on men and women, the Yellow Budget Paper on equality is an essential steering mechanism through which public actions can be directed and adjusted to ensure that equality between men and women can progress and take genuine effect.

### *South Africa*

South Africa was one of the first countries to have a gender budget initiative, set up at the end of apartheid, when the constitution was written with a commitment to equality between men and women. It was intended to bring about real and effective change, and in many ways achieved this because there was a policy of integrating gender analysis with that of race, class, geographical location and other areas of disadvantage.

The original South African Women's Budget Initiative, set up in 1994, was formed through a coalition of civil society activists and parliamentarians.

It is now a form of policy monitoring and audit, and is used to inform parliamentarians so that they are able to understand better the gender implications of the government budgets, and to exercise their parliamentary scrutiny function more effectively.

The South African situation is a progressive example of integrating a gender analysis of expenditure among a variety of actors and stakeholders. For example, gender budget analysis is even included in the curricula at several South African universities.

One of the main things the Women's Budget Initiative achieved in South Africa was to make each provincial government department aware of its implications come budget time. A set of questions for written response during the budget hearings process was handed out to each department, and while not all of them responded, many did.

### *Wales*

The Wales Gender Budget Group encourages gender budgeting because the National Assembly for Wales is committed, under the Government of Wales Act Article 120, to "make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people". The Assembly has been supportive of gender budgeting projects in Wales, for example, examining sports funding (as described above).

### *Scotland*

The Scottish Parliament has played a significant role in ensuring gender budget analysis takes place. It has formed advisory groups on equality and budgets, with researchers investigating methods of gender assessment in national budgets, and it has increased the availability of statistics disaggregated by gender, race, age and disability in order to avoid stereotypical assumptions in policies that might have different impacts on different people.

## **UK Parliamentary scrutiny of public expenditure from a gender perspective**

UK Parliament can contribute significantly to ensuring a gender perspective is included in public expenditure, as can be seen from the French, South African, Welsh and Scottish experiences. Moreover, the UK has committed to conducting this type of analysis, and it is Parliament's responsibility to scrutinize progress in achieving these commitments.

### *Commitments to analysing expenditure through a gender lens*

#### *International commitments*

Monitoring public expenditure so that it is consistent with substantive equality between men and women is part of international agreements that the UK is party to, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform For Action, and the United Nation's Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). As such, the Hansard Society cannot ignore its importance when undertaking a review of parliament's scrutiny of financial matters.

#### *UK commitments*

Promoting gender budgeting in the scrutiny of public expenditure is especially timely given that next year all government bodies will be under statutory duty to promote gender equality (as they already are with regards to race equality and disability). The public duty will extend to central government, and therefore include HM Treasury's (and other departments) expenditure commitments and actual allocations. In this sense, it would be within Parliament's remit to ensure that Government is meeting the duty to promote gender equality in its scrutinising role.

#### *Women's representation on Parliamentary financial scrutiny bodies*

Elected representatives to Parliament can influence budget formulation through drawing the attention of ministers to the needs of the people they represent. Yet no national Parliament has full equality in number of seats held by women and men, and the UK has a poor level of representation. Furthermore, women only make up about a quarter of the staff on the UK government's select committees.

If women are only present in Parliament and its select committees in small proportions, they are unlikely to be able to participate in budget decisions on equal terms with men. This is exacerbated by the way in which women tend to be assigned to the Parliamentary committees that deal with 'social' issues, rather than those centrally concerned with budget scrutiny. There are five women on the Treasury select committee, compared with nine men; and five women on the Public Accounts committee, compared with 11 men. Women need to be more – and, ideally, equally – present on such committees, because if they are not involved in budget decisions, then policy and public expenditure will not be able to truly match the needs of women in society.

## **Women's Budget Group specific proposals for discussion and consideration of the role of Parliament in scrutinising public expenditure**

The WBG suggests that Parliamentary scrutiny of public expenditure from a gender perspective could comprise a variety of elements including:

- Asking for HMT to provide a gender breakdown of expenditure figures so as to facilitate the meeting and monitoring of the Public Service Agreement (PSA) on gender equality. Such figures would also be useful, in the longer term, in gender mainstreaming all PSAs.
- Requiring Government to develop a 'Gender Budget Statement' that demonstrates a gender analysis of expenditure contained within the Budget, as in France and Australia.
- Ensuring that Parliamentary scrutinising bodies, such as the Treasury Select Committee and Public Accounts Committees, take evidence from women's organisations and women service users, to hear of the direct experience of those at the receiving end of public expenditure.
- Developing a set of guidelines and questions for Parliament's expenditure scrutiny bodies to consider a gender perspective in expenditure.
- Instituting positive action to maintain a significant proportion of women on Parliamentary scrutiny bodies.

Parliament can play an important role in scrutinising public expenditure to ensure that a gender lens is used to analyse the impact of spending.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss these proposals further, and look forward to reforms of Parliament's role, including a much-needed gender perspective in service delivery so that government is able to meet the differing needs of those it serves – women and men.

### **Works cited**

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