

## Foreword

Gender equity, gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment are very much on the policy agenda in supranational institutions such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the European Union, as well as national, regional and local governments. At the same time, in many parts of the world there has been far less progress towards social and gender justice even though governments have committed themselves to achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Statistics continue to show that women are more likely than men to be in poverty, to experience domestic and sexual violence, and less likely than men to be literate or hold positions of power in the state, the economy or in the media. There has been some progress in terms of women's visibility in government and civil society, in the narrowing of the employment participation gap and in terms of growing female literacy but deeper forms of equality remain elusive, as anything beyond a cursory glance at the very basic statistics confirms.

Participation in paid employment, for example, is undoubtedly empowering in many ways, but this paid work frequently takes place with no change in the domestic division of labour and has happened at a time when labour market participation has become more polarized and insecure. There is therefore a paradox: increasing policies for gender equality on supra national, national and local scales and within the workplace, but less dramatic changes in social practices. What, then are the barriers to further progress towards gender equity and how might these be overcome?

In recent years international attention has been focused on good governance, the deepening of democratic institutions and the spread of political rights which are important for ensuring that the voices of the socially marginalized are more likely to be heard. At the same time many of the ambitions for greater inclusion within the state and greater accountability of the state are undermined by the continued pursuit of neo-liberalism that makes these rights more difficult to achieve in practice. Thus a key barrier to greater gender equality is undoubtedly the continued dominance of neo-liberalism and the market economy in policy thought and action.

There have been some modifications to the neo-liberal model with the post Washington consensus as problems such as poverty and rising inequality between and within countries have been recognised. In key respects however, – trade and financial liberalization and tight monetary and fiscal policies - the dominance of market economies remains.

Neo-liberalism is associated with a range of economic policies that have adverse implications for the socially marginalized and for women. First, it is associated with a deflationary bias in macro economic policies which leads to constraints on public sector expenditure and low levels of economic growth. Second, it leads to a heightening of economic instability as the freedom of capital markets increases the volatility of financial flows which in turn increases economic uncertainty and makes long term planning of local economies and economic enterprises difficult. In these circumstances many firms opt for flexibility which is reflected in flexible and casualised labour markets and growth in the informal sector.

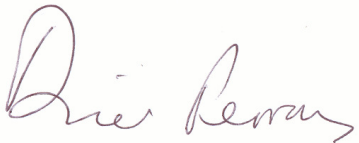
Third, the enforcement of trade liberalisation leads to a commoditisation bias in economic output which reduces the relative value of non traded goods and services, which are disproportionately associated with female employment.

In particular domestic agriculture can be undermined by subsidized production by large scale commercial producers. Finally, in combination, all of these outcomes reduce the states ability to raise finance for redistribution and social protection.

When neo-liberal policies translate into cuts or reductions in government services in what are seen as unproductive spheres such as health, welfare and education it is frequently women who fill the gap with their time and energy but this work is unrecognized in conventional economic thinking. The imagined gains in economic efficiency claimed by orthodox economists are secured through women's hidden contributions. A challenge therefore remains in terms of making these contributions from the hidden sector of the economy visible and making state policies, practices and spending patterns more responsive to the strategic and practical interests of women. In this respect gender budgets provides a key tool of policy analysis.

Gender budgeting exposes how macro economic policies appear to be technical, gender neutral and good for the economy, but in reality are highly gendered in their impact. They make it possible to see how government policies impact on the differentiated needs of women, men, girls and boys. They provide detailed analysis, technical facts and figures and as a consequence the leverage to engage with decision-makers from a strong knowledge base. Gender budgeting can expose the way that government budgets have been instrumental in transmitting and reproducing gender biases. More optimistically and by the same analysis they can also offer a way forward in terms of transforming existing gender inequities by indicating how different allocations would lead to more positive outcomes.

Gender budgeting is growing. Over 50 countries now include some aspects of gender budgeting in their economic policies. By providing illustrations of different approaches towards gender budgeting in practice in a range of countries across the globe this collection of papers provides an invaluable resource. By highlighting the widespread impact of public policies on the reproductive as well as the productive sectors these practices allow a much richer and holistic understanding of economic policies in action. An understanding of these techniques and practices is therefore vital for those who seek to ensure that public revenue raising and expenditure is consistent with the public interest including the commitment to gender equity and justice.



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