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**GENDER RESPONSIVE BUDGETS (GRB'S) HAVE A PLACE IN FINANCING
GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT**

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Introduction

Government budgets are the largest single source of finance for gender equality and women's empowerment for most countries. It is through national and subnational budgets that government promises are translated into practical policies and programs. The importance of the government budget combined with the slow progress in governments meeting their gender equality commitments is reflected in the growing number of international commitments that give GRB's a key role in promoting gender equality. The increasing focus given to GRB's is underpinned by compelling economic, social, good governance and rights based rationales, a growing body of theoretical work and analytical tools, and more than 20 years of practical experiences and their lessons.

At their heart GRB's involve 2 broad interrelated types of activities both technical and political in nature:

A systematic examination of budget programs and policies for their different impacts on men and women, boys and girls- **gender budget analysis;**

Decision-making that changes budgets and policies so that gender equality is promoted- **informed actions that change financing processes and gender equality outcomes**

It is generally thought that gender budget initiatives have a greater measurable track record in generating analyses than changi

We are now entering a stage in the life cycle of gender responsive budgeting where we need better answers to questions such as:

What can we expect from GRB's?

How can we assess a government's achievements in gender responsive budgeting?

How can gender responsible budgeting be made sustainable in the face of change?

This briefing paper will briefly canvass some of these issues by reporting on aspects of the Australasian and the Pacific Island Countries and Territories' experiences.

Australia

The Australian experience demonstrates that the sustainability of GRBs can be dramatically undermined when the policy context changes. If GRB's are to be a force in financing gender equality and women's empowerment then we need to know more about their adaptive capacities in the face of changing circumstances.

The Australian GRB experience has taken different forms in different policy contexts. The initial GRB's (termed women's budgets) first introduced in the mid 1980s by the Australian federal, state and territory governments emerged out of a neo-keynesian economic and political context. These exercises were of a significant scale requiring all government agencies (including the Treasury/Ministry of Finance) to assess their policies, programs and expenditures in the upcoming budget for their impacts on women and girls. The initiatives were part of the budget formulation phase where departments formulated their budgets within the parameters issued by the Treasury. The results were compiled as a budget paper tabled in parliament as part of the budget in most cases.

The neo-keynesian policy context was fundamental in shaping the way gender budgeting operated and its potential achievements. In the first instance there was a significant focus on increasing programs and expenditures that benefited women and girls. This was evidenced for several years by an introduction to most of the women's budget publications (federal and state) which listed significant new policies and expenditures. Secondly, an active role for government was assumed necessary to promote equal opportunities for women and girls and gender equality. Women and policymakers looked to the state (albeit considerable political pressure would be required) to deliver equity rather than markets.

The existence and the longevity of the first phase of the gender budget exercises owes much to the existence of highly developed women's policy machineries within the federal and state governments established in the 1970s. This women's policy machinery had been well thought out and its model had been developed by the women's movement rather than invented by government. The women's policy machinery was located at a high level within government - in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet at the federal level and in Departments of the Premier and Cabinet at the state level. This meant that the primary function of women's policy offices was to coordinate policy and assess cabinet submissions rather than to provide services to women. In this position it was soon realised that, in order to coordinate policy and assess cabinet submissions effectively, engagement with the budget was essential. If policy remained separated from the budget process the essential function of the women's policy machinery was unlikely to be fulfilled. Furthermore, feminists took jobs in the women's policy units creating a feminist presence within the state itself. These 'femocrats' (feminists working within government) worked to gain support for the idea of a gender budget among key government players. With the election of reformist governments in the

1980s, gender budgeting was adopted as one of the means by which the demands of the women's movement for equal opportunities and gender equality was to be translated into practical policies and programs and monitored.

This first phase of Australian GRBs began to unravel in the early 1990s with the introduction of neoliberal policy approaches at the federal and state levels in response to the restructuring of the Australian economy. In a climate of expenditure cutbacks, privatisation and contracting out of government services and user pay principles the women's policy machinery at all levels of government was increasingly focussing on stopping the worst from happening rather than pursuing gender equity in expenditures and revenues by other means. In 1996 the newly elected 'conservative' federal government formally dismantled the particular process of budget scrutiny that had taken place within the bureaucracy for 12 years. This was accompanied by a systematic reduction in the influence of the women's policy machinery including the non-funding of gender disaggregated statistical collections that underpinned gender analyses of the budget. Within a few more years the initial femocrat powered phase of the women's budgets had also disappeared at the state levels of government.

The shift to a neoliberal policy context repositioned gender issues in budgetary policy. Women were redefined as 'special interest' groups in the face of a government that declared it was now governing for the 'mainstream'. Nevertheless Australian governments at the federal and state levels continued to put material about gender and the budget into the public arena. During the decade from the mid 1990s to the mid 2000's at the federal level a Ministerial Statement of the budget's impact on women was released with the budget papers each year. This slim statement from the Minister for the Status of Women was compiled by the women's policy office without the need for agencies to provide any systematic assessment of the impact of their activities. The ministerial statement listed the government's achievements in relation to women proposed in the current budget. Over the past 3 years this has been augmented by additional publications on the budget's impact on women on the Office of Status of Women's website including the 'Women's Budget Kit'. This incorporated an interesting return to the earlier term of women's budgets' but little analysis. This year (being an election year) a new document, '*Budget Highlights for Women: Budget 2007-08*' has appeared on the website.

At the state level, governments publicly maintained a link between gender and their budget with various publications. In South Australia this included a 2-4 page appendix on women and the budget in the formal budget papers and a more detailed, independently developed booklet released by the state's women's policy office. However, unlike the initial femocrat GRB phase the accountability for demonstrating that a gender perspective of the budget was being developed firmly rested firmly with the women's machinery of government and the Minister for the Status of Women. At the same time most of the women's -5.(a)-2.1(ison)6.2(s7onstrati bud)-3.8(g

reasons, have not been a strong partner. While it is crucial to involve the finance ministries, their lack of knowledge of gender and the economy combined with a lack of political will, usually means these GRBs are not sustainable. The Australian exercises recognised that Treasury or Finance departments and Ministers would not be the driving force, but that the goal was to ensure that these Ministries were an essential partner. Moreover, genuine partnerships required the women's coordinating policy offices to have institutional clout.

It is evident that the sustainability of all inside government GRB's depends on the existence of active community voices demanding continued accountability from governments. The central role of the femocrats in GRB's in Australia ironically may have also served to indirectly weaken wider participation by women in the community. The publication of gender budget issues over time increasingly has been presented to women in the community

ministries have a stake in promoting better gender outcomes. One official commented that he had been completely unaware of what other ministries were doing in the area. One Ministry of Finance official commented during the pilo

and a coalition of government agencies and NGO representatives interested in trying to bring about change. A cross-ministry budget proposal was discussed with the Chief Secretary's