



**WORKSHOP ON**

**DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS IN PRACTICE:  
APPLYING THE PARIS DECLARATION TO ADVANCING  
GENDER EQUALITY, ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

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**Gender Responsive Budgeting in Afghanistan**

**by**

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## Gender Responsive Budgeting in Afghanistan Dublin 26 April 2007



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### **The Context:**

Afghanistan has committed itself on several occasions to achieving the goal of gender equality. This new commitment is enshrined in several documents:

- The Afghan Constitution
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- The Afghanistan Millennium Development Goals
- The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS)
- The Afghanistan (London) Compact

A major challenge in the process of rebuilding the country is now to incorporate the newly acquired rights and liberties of women laid out in these documents in line with international conventions in government policies, and to put these into practice with the help of legislative and administrative reforms. In spite of the steps that have already been taken in the right direction to strengthen the role of women in society and to ensure greater participation on their part in political and economic life, there is still much room for improvement in the implementation of national political and international directives. This is partly the result of the lack of expertise available within all sector ministries and other relevant bodies. It applies in particular to the lead project executing agency, the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

### **What has the GTZ Gender Mainstreaming (gm) Project achieved so far?**

Most of the work done in Afghanistan by the project to date has focused on setting up structures, working groups, and mechanisms to give input to regular governmental budgetary and programme development processes. At this stage, the focus has been on building the political will to mainstream gender both at high levels and at the working level of ordinary civil servants, and on building the capacity of civil servants to understand and undertake gender analysis.

Because budget processes have been evolving, and because the government bureaucracy itself is in a fluid state being influenced by numerous actors, one important aspect has been to help civil servants understand good governance, the role of the civil service and budgeting, as well as gender issues.

Because the Ministry of Women's Affairs had an extremely limited capacity to conduct gender analyses, the project initially worked with the Ministry of Finance and other ministries – and then came back to the Ministry of Women's Affairs, reshaping its role in ongoing development. Since then, the Ministry of Women's Affairs has

assumed a higher profile in gender budgeting and in coordination, through the National Gender Machinery Secretariat.

### **Who has the project been working with?**

Key actors and activities in the Afghan gender budgeting process have been

- The Ministry of Finance
- The Gender Budgeting Working Group, Ministry of Finance
- The Inter-ministerial Gender Mainstreaming Working Group
- The UNDP Gender Mainstreaming Project (to start May 2007).

The idea of helping put in place a Gender Budgeting Unit came from an Inter-ministerial Gender Mainstreaming Working Group comprising the GTZ-gm project partner ministries (the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and the Ministry of Women's Affairs).

### **What has been done so far?**

Work began in 2005 and was stepped up in 2006. 2007 saw a major change when a full-time head of the Gender Budgeting Unit was appointed. The milestones along the way are laid out below:

#### **2005**

- First inter-ministerial training workshops on gender budgeting. Training in the use of basic tools. Participants: MoWA, MoF, MoC, MoLSA, MMD
- Mentoring and coaching including small training sessions with MoF; establishment of the Gender Budgeting Working Group. Participants: MoF

#### **2006**

- Inter-ministerial Working Group on Gender Mainstreaming introduced to gender budgeting concepts  
Participants: MoWA, MoF, MoC, MoLSA, MMD, MRRD
- Gender Budgeting Planning Workshop. Participants: MoF Heads of Budget
- Briefing the Parliamentary Budget Committee on gender budgeting
- Cooperation agreement between GTZ and MoF on the establishment of a Gender Budgeting Unit at MoF.

#### **2007**

- Opening of the Gender Budgeting Unit at the MoF
- Ongoing: Fine-tuning the MoF work plan and vision for gender budgeting
- The first coordination meeting to be held between MoF, the Gender Budgeting Unit, the Gender Budgeting Working Group, GTZ and UN agencies
- From May to October the project will work directly with the Gender Budgeting Unit, delivering training services and supporting the unit in the use of selected basic tools. The project does not expect the Unit to be in a position to use these tools independently for some years, because civil servants are not yet sufficiently gender aware.

**What has happened as a result of these inputs? What concrete results have been achieved to date?**

- Two sets of training materials on gender budgeting are now available in the local language (Dari).
- The MoF and other ministries are familiar with the idea of gender budgeting.
- The Heads of Budget in the Ministry of Finance are strongly committed to integrating women's needs into budgeting.
- The government is very receptive, although it is interesting to note that the Ministry of Women's Affairs has been less receptive than other ministries
- Agreement was reached between MoF and GTZ to establish a Gender Budget Unit, which was opened in March 2007. Three civil servants have been seconded to the Unit, which is headed by a GTZ staff member. The Unit will be incorporated in the organisation chart of the Ministry of Finance next year.
- Afghanistan's Gender Budgeting Vision has been drawn up by the Heads of Budget and approved.
- Engendered Sector Strategy Documents have been elaborated for the ANDS (to be approved by ANDS).
- The draft gender budgeting statement for the next budget speech of the Minister of Finance's has been written.

The aim has been to involve as many key Ministry of Finance staff members as possible, and to design the inputs with them, in line with the timetable laid down by the government. The project is trying to ensure that gender budgeting becomes an integral part of routine financial processes in all ministries. The development of the National Gender Machinery Coordination Unit is one means to this end.

**Experience to date has been very positive, revealing:**

- A high level of interest in gender budgeting in the Ministry of Finance and other key ministries
- That the Parliamentary Budget Committee comprises active women and men who are keen to see gender budgeting introduced and will ensure that the government is made accountable for this
- That highly competent staff run the budget sections of MoF
- The support of the international community on gender issues and its willingness to provide technical advice
- A relatively large national budget due to donor interest
- That the administration/civil service can be flexible and open to new ideas
- That change can sometimes happen very quickly if the requisite ministerial support is forthcoming, since Afghanistan is in an immediate post-conflict situation.

**And the challenges?**

There are also challenges and obstacles which have to be taken into account. It is important that the international community does not try to force the pace of development. It must allow the civil service to progress at its own pace, according to its own timetables. GTZ believes that a large number of gender training sessions will still be needed to enable civil servants to undertake gender analysis and provide the inputs required for project and programme design. Some of the challenges include the following:

- Government has a low capacity. Most work, particularly in the Ministry of Finance, is performed by foreign and seconded national experts rather than Afghan civil servants. Most civil servants possess only basic analytical skills, although there are of course some exceptions.
- All governmental administrative processes are new and unfamiliar to most of the civil service.
- Good governance is not firmly established, and in many cases ministers and departmental directors feel free to ignore or bypass key policies.
- The influence of central government in the provinces remains extremely weak.
- The Ministry of Women's Affairs has not demonstrated an interest in engaging on technical issues, and its capacity is very limited in the fields of budget and project development, as well as in other analytical areas. Progress is, however, being made here.
- ANDS and other policy documents largely address gender because of outside lobbying and external pressure. Resistance is now being encountered, with civil servants bringing up Islamic values whenever gender or women's rights are mentioned.

## **Outlook**

The experience of working on gender budgeting in Afghanistan shows what is possible when positive energy and a progressive vision are combined with lots of hard work. As long as the international community continues to be vocal on women's rights and human rights issues with the Afghan government, women in Afghanistan can be certain that progress can be made. If these voices fall silent, or if the volume of funding made available to tackle practical problems dries up, we can be certain that a lot of the ground now made will once again be lost.

## **Recommendations**

- Gender budgeting will be discredited if no money is made available to meet women's basic needs, and if poor people see no changes on the ground. Supporting the Government of Afghanistan's national budget is not in itself enough, if no immediate support is forthcoming for the poor.
- Gender budgeting must go hand in hand with good governance initiatives, particularly moves aiming to control corruption.
- Donors should provide breakdowns of their support to Afghanistan that indicate how much of their assistance benefits women. It still appears to be impossible to obtain this information. Could the international community not embrace the principles of gender budgeting for their own foreign aid and assistance?