Discussion Paper: Towards Gender-Sensitive Participatory Budgeting

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this discussion paper

The purpose of this paper is to open up discussion and thinking around what a gender-sensitive model of Participatory Budgeting (PB) would look like. Looking at three case studies from gendered PB experiments in southern countries, we hope to learn what some of the possibilities and challenges are for this approach. The discussion paper briefly looks at the reasons why public authorities, NGOs and community organisations should be interested in a gendered PB and explores how existing PB models may already be, or not, gender sensitive. The paper ends with some considerations for further discussion.

What is Participatory Budgeting?

At its simplest, Participatory Budgeting can be understood as a method by which ordinary citizens influence how public authorities spend public money with the aim that budgets better reflect local community priorities. A more complex definition suggests that PB ‘brings communities closer to decision-making processes around the public budget and makes new connections between residents, political representatives, and local government officials.’

There are many different models of PB worldwide, but most have certain features in common. These include: an annual cycle of participation and decision making, a pot of money for spending, a clear geographical structure, community deliberation at local level over local and city-wide priorities, investment in capacity building and a clear process and rules. Transparency is usually overseen by a budget council made up of representatives from the community. Additionally some models of PB have a parallel thematic structure, in which community members can make needs and ideas for projects known for areas such as housing, health, transport and social inclusion. The amount of resources decided using the PB process usually increases over time, beginning with around 1% of the mainstream budget. Most models of PB are concerned with spending priorities for the mainstream budget, although in the UK examples are developing of PB being used to prioritise regeneration and other non-mainstream funding.

PB first developed in Brazil in the late 1990s, and since then over 300 cities worldwide have developed it, including in at least 25 European cities. PB has developed more slowly in the UK, but examples now include Bradford, Salford, Newcastle, Sunderland and Harrow and interest in the concept has spread to local authorities, Local Strategic Partnerships, New Deal for Communities, housing associations and others. These developments have been supported by six years of research and dissemination by the PB Unit into how PB could be applied in a UK context.

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1 ‘Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter’ ODPM (January, 2005)

2 Centre Marc Bloch (2005) Participatory Budgets from a European Comparative Approach
Other progressive approaches to public budget setting

Participatory Budgeting is only one of a number of progressive approaches to public budgets that are currently developing all over the world, particularly in the south, as the links between power, resource allocation, poverty and exclusion are increasingly theorised and addressed by practitioners. Like PB, there are many other analytical and capacity building approaches to budget setting. It is not the purpose of this paper to explore them all, but briefly they include: gender budgeting, budget monitoring capacity building programmes, social movements advocating greater transparency, legislation led approaches to budgeting and human rights centred budget analysis. Of all these approaches, this paper hopes to further discussion of the links and opportunities between gender budgeting and PB.

Why create a gender sensitive model of PB?

Some of the reasons why public authorities, NGOs and community organisations should be interested in developing a gender sensitive model include: the new statutory gender equality duty; the links between gender, poverty and social exclusion; the unequal gender relationship between participation and resource allocation; gender differences in need and use of services. Additionally, this paper draws attention to some of the ways in which PB models may already be considered gender sensitive to some degree. The main reasons why Participatory Budgeting needs to be made gender-sensitive are explored below.

a. Gender Equality Duty

The gender equality duty for public bodies will come into force in April 2007. In terms of service provision, this duty requires public organisations to demonstrate fair treatment of women and men in the delivery of policy and services as well as design services that meet the different needs of men and women. According to the Equal Opportunities Commission this will require public organisations to look at what men’s and women’s different needs are and how they are accessing and using services. Public organisations will be required to set gender equality goals in consultation with their service users and take action to achieve them. The implications of this are that public authorities developing PB have both an opportunity and a responsibility to think how gender equality can be integrated into it.

Gender sensitive PB provides a potential opportunity to address the Gender Equality Duty. Firstly, gender disaggregated statistics on both needs and accessing of services will need to be collected as part of the new duty. This information could then be used to inform budget deliberation and decision making. Secondly, the participatory processes of PB provides a clear means by which service users can be involved in setting gender equality goals in terms of directing resource allocation and monitoring it in an accountable and open way.

Conversely, models of PB which don’t consider gender equality from the outset will lead to duplication of work in data collection, analysis and consultation as this work will have to replicated elsewhere in order to meet the Gender Equality Duty.

In response to the new duty, local authorities will be looking for new and innovative ways to carry out this mainstreaming work. A gender-sensitive model of PB provides an excellent opportunity for both the mainstreaming of gender equality and PB. Otherwise, PB may run the risk of being side-lined due to its status as an optional, non-statutory extra.

b. Different experiences and use of the city by men and women

Men and women experience, need and use the environment around them in different ways. A study carried out in Manchester recently found that although men and women both prioritised crime and disorder as their top concern, there were significant gender differences in other priorities, with men naming local facilities and transport as important issues, whereas women mentioned local environment and education. Even more varied gender differences were found when factors such as age and ethnicity were considered. Similar findings have been seen in other studies. Following this, as experiences and use of services are subject to gender differences, decisions made about the budgets and delivery of those services are implicitly gendered. Although, most service providers routinely collect information about uptake, experience and opinions on services, vary few routinely collect this information in gender disaggregated form, never mind feed this information into service and budget planning.

As PB is concerned with empowering communities to articulate and meet their own needs through changing the processes underpinning power structures, gender is both an opportunity and a barrier to achieving this. The emphasis on local deliberation and valuing of personal experience of PB are two examples of how PB potentially enables men and women’s differing needs and experiences to be recognised. However, for this to happen, a system of collating and monitoring priorities and proposals by gender would be needed.

c. Links between, gender, poverty and social exclusion

The links between gender, poverty and social exclusion are well documented. There is a wealth of statistics and information to describe gender differences in income, responsibilities and access to services. The ‘feminisation’ of poverty has been studied in detail over the years, whilst in more recent times the disadvantages experienced by some groups of men relative to others in employment, education and health, have begun to receive attention. However, practical action and policies to tackle these pervasive inequalities have been rather further behind. A gender sensitive PB can begin to address some of these issues.

One of the reasons public authorities have implemented Participatory Budgeting in the past has been as a way to address issues of social exclusion and unequal distribution of resources. PB has been effective in doing this because it combines a valuing community knowledge with a relatively structured, transparent and decentralised approach. The process of deciding and deliberating community priorities in diverse and popular local forums aims to build social inclusion as well as use local knowledge to better inform decisions about how and where to invest money. PB technologies such as the Budget Matrix can factor in local deprivation statistics as well as provide accessible and clear

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4 Gender and Community Engagement in Manchester Project (Manchester Women’s Network, 2005)
information about money. There has been lots of evidence to show how PB can be an effective tool in addressing poverty and social exclusion.

Both PB and UK approaches generally take an area or neighbourhood approach to regeneration and community development. Some models of PB and some regeneration initiatives take a thematic approach, one aspect of which is sometimes gender, but in general the mainstream approach has been that of the government’s bid to ‘close the gap between the worst performing neighbourhoods.’ However, both the ongoing difficulties of achieving real change at area level and the evidence that there is a gender gap as much as an area gap, show the need to combine both an area and thematic approach.

d. Women are more likely to participate than men, but currently receive less resources

In the UK and elsewhere an inverse law seems to exist, in which women tend to participate much in community activity and do a greater share of the work, but get a smaller share of resources in comparison with men. In the last 10 years in the UK a wealth of new opportunities for participation in regeneration initiatives, service planning and governance have sprung up, which women have taken up in greater numbers than men. At the same time, more women than men tend to do unpaid work in the voluntary and community sector in the UK. However, research shows that women tend to be more represented at a local level, whereas men are more represented at a city-wide or strategic level where the powerful meet and decisions are taken. Participatory Budgeting represents an opportunity to link participation more closely with resource allocation, and as it is primarily carried out at local level PB represents an opportunity for women’s participation to be converted into influence over budgetary decisions.

e. Some models of Participatory Budgeting may already be gender-sensitive in part

To some extent PB may already be able to address gender issues. This is explored in more detail in the section looking at what opportunities may already exist to develop a more gender-sensitive PB.

CASE STUDIES OF GENDERED MODELS OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Before exploring in more details the barriers, opportunities and possibilities for a gender sensitive PB, we will look at some practical case studies which explore the role of gender and participation in budgets in three examples from Brazil, Peru and the Marshall Islands.

1. Gendering the Participatory Budget in Recife, Brasil

The first case study comes from Recife, a city in north-eastern Brasil which has had a Participatory Budget since 1995, but little success in addressing issues of social inclusion and gender inequality. In 2001 the new municipal government decided to try to address these

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5 GEM Project 2005 (op cit.)
6 More details of this case study can be found at: http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/dgb12.html#3 and in Portuguese at: http://www.cfemea.org.br/jornalfemea/imprimir_detalhes.asp?IDJornalFemea=874
The PB Unit

issues, by developing a new PB model which featured both area meetings and thematic forums. Thematic forums included: youth, women, social assistance, BME, culture and human rights. In both the thematic and geographical forums men and women are able to propose priorities and projects for next year’s budget.

The development of the thematic forum on women was led by Coordenadoria da Mulher (Women’s Coordinating Group), a group set up by the new administration to coordinate the state’s gender policies working in partnership with local NGO, the Municipal Council of Women. Together, the two groups tried to develop ways of addressing gender equality in the new PB process. Three initiatives were developed:

1. Provision of mobile play areas for children at meetings to facilitate women with childcare responsibilities to participate in the budget.

2. A campaign to encourage increased participation and representation of women in PB meetings.

3. Meetings with government officials and women activists to find ways to mobilise women into the PB process. This led to the production of pamphlets and music for community radio stations.

These initiatives brought some improvements in terms of participation. In 2004 Women represented 57% of those participating in local forums. However at the more strategic levels women were less visible, making up 45% of those at the next level of Delegates Forum and 44% of those at co-ordinating level. Although these figures represent improvements on previous years, particularly at local level, Coordenadoria da Mulher point out that major barriers to women’s inclusion and involvement exist in the absence of a gender aware culture in the local government and the lack of value placed on women’s experience and knowledge. The most important thing they now feel is to bring about discussion about gender discussion to the spaces of decision making in the PB.

2. Participatory Budgeting and gender in Villa el Salvador, Peru

The second case study comes from Villa El Salvador, Peru, a former squatter settlement in Lima. In contrast with the example from Recife, the Participatory Budget was introduced and implemented by the municipality with little attention paid to the role that women had long played in the community. The PB and participatory planning processes formed part of the local municipality’s process of formalising its relationship with a community which had for a long time had organised and managed its own basic services, having received none from the state. Like many informal settlements, the community had no infrastructure initially, but had developed networks of women’s survival organisations over the years, which identified and organised around the community’s priorities. Women spent their daily lives in the community and so developed in-depth knowledge about the community’s needs. Men, by contrast, tended to spend long periods of time away from home as they worked on the other side of the city and so did not develop similar knowledge. This meant they did not tend to participate

in the survival organisations, but instead men formed their own male dominated and led community organisations called Cuaves.

In 1999 when the municipality introduced PB and participatory planning, it was to the Cuaves, rather than the women’s survival organisations that they looked for leadership and ready made structures of participation. Gender was not integrated as a concept or practice into the new processes and no specific efforts were made to include women into the new processes, despite the long tradition of women’s participation in neighbourhood work and greater relative poverty that they experienced.

The PB that developed was unsurprisingly gender-insensitive on a number of levels. Firstly, community members were asked to propose infrastructural projects, rather than specific priorities for the PB. This left little space to raise issues of concern to women, such as domestic violence, literacy, and teenage pregnancy as priorities for spending. Secondly, meetings were held late in the evening, making it difficult for women with responsibilities in the home to participate. Thirdly, cultural and structural constraints made it difficult for women to find out about the participatory processes or take on a leadership role, thus reducing opportunities to further shape the development or content of the PB. The realities of women’s daily lives meant they had less time to get involved and further constraints were encountered by local tradition in which community affairs operated as a men’s domain. Additionally, those few women who were able to gain entry reported that they experienced added barriers of machismo from some male participants. Perhaps the most crucial failing of all was the lack of formal incorporation of the women’s survival organisations into the participatory structures where years of knowledge, learning and expertise of the community’s needs had amassed, but remained neglected and ignored.

The lack of participation and inclusion of women in the participatory processes in Villa El Salvador was at odds with local evidence that there existed a lot of interest from women in the processes. For example, a huge number of women attended a PB awareness raising event organised by a local women’s NGO.

Those documenting the experience in Villa El Salvador make several recommendations to the development of gender-sensitive PB. Firstly, PB processes it must make room for the articulation of needs as well as infrastructures. Secondly, processes should incorporate diagnosis of district problems with gender. Finally, the study implies that the links between PB, community development and social inclusion are not automatic and have to be crafted with care, otherwise new structures and processes will continue, and even reinforce, old power relations and inequalities.

3. Gender Analysis, capacity building and budget-decision making processes in the Marshall Islands

The final case study comes from the Marshall Islands, where a pilot project to link gender budgeting analysis with capacity building in order to effect policy change took place. Gender budgeting approaches are almost as ubiquitous as Participatory Budgeting, having been

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used in over 50 countries. However, the majority of gender budgeting work has remained at the theoretical level, with only a very small proportion of the work focussed on taking the approach to the next stage, to shape a gender-sensitive budget in practical terms. A pilot programme in the Marshall Islands attempted to address this by combining gender budget analysis with budget decision-making processes, with the aim of linking an enhanced understanding of the gender impact of budget decisions with project and policy work. Three methods were used to try to achieve these aims. Firstly, programmes to raise awareness and build capacity of gender issues and the gender impact of budgets and policies were carried out. Secondly, capacity building with local NGOs to both understand the gender impacts of budgets and budget decision making processes took place. Thirdly budget decision makers were engaged around a gender-sensitive policy issue, teenage pregnancy, and a steering group formed to foster budget deliberation over the issue.

Overall, the programme was not successful in influencing the overall budget, but had other important impacts on government departments and local NGOs in terms of awareness raising, capacity building around gender and budgets, and opening up budget decision making processes. Although the pilot did not take a popular participatory approach, the aims and approach of the programme shared some similarities with PB, in that it aimed to change the shape and nature of budgetary processes to better reflect unmet community needs, build capacity building with local civil society, and to develop more accountable and deliberative frameworks for budget decision making. It is interesting to wonder what would have happened had the programme lasted longer than one year and been combined with popular participatory approaches and more widespread gender awareness raising processes.

OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS TO DEVELOPING GENDER-SENSITIVE PB

What are the opportunities for developing gender-sensitive PB?

The following section explores some of the current opportunities for developing gender-sensitive PB.

Participatory Budgeting itself may already be gender sensitive, at least in parts, in some models of PB. The decentralised structure and practice of PB adopted in most cities and the social inclusion approach adopted in some PB models help facilitate this. Although not each and every model of PB contains all of the following features, in general PB can be considered a potentially gender-sensitive form of resource allocation and community engagement in the following ways:

1. Participation and decision making processes in the PB take place at local level. This is important to both men and women in several respects, in practical, symbolic and power terms. Firstly, the local level tends to be more accessible and open to women who still have less access to the transport, time and money needed to travel to city centre meetings than men. Similarly, women are more likely than men to have local commitments (such as work and caring for others), meaning that for women, a local process fits in with their lives relatively more easily than a city-wide one. Secondly, decision–making processes at local level have important symbolic meaning for women’s inclusion, as it is here that women are more likely to be visible and active, and therefore more confident about their ability and right to participate. Thirdly, by...
making decision making more dispersed and devolved to local level, both women and men can challenge power held by a few (elite) men.

2. As well as geographically, PB can allocate resources using a thematic approach to pots of money, such as health, housing, transport and social inclusion. This can help ensure that the priorities of communities of interest, which may be difficult to mobilise around at local level, can be addressed. Some PB models have included a theme on women or gender equality.

3. The transparency of PB processes enables gender monitoring and evaluation of participation, representation, resource allocation and project approval. The PB annual cycle enables the impact of participation by gender from the start of the process to eventual service delivery uptake to be measured.

What are the barriers to developing gender-sensitive PB?

The following section explores some of the barriers to developing gender-sensitive PB. Although existing models of PB may potentially already have elements which facilitate gender equality, it is important to recognise that the context in which the PB operates, as well as the nature of PB itself, may also mitigate against this. Some of these barriers to gendering PB which can be easily identified include the following:

1. Statistics on gender impact of budgets and services are hard to come by. Public organisations and service users may have ‘data collection fatigue’ and be reluctant to implement monitoring by another equalities category.

2. Lack of political will, capacity, technical expertise and understanding of gender equalities issues and budgets exists in public organisations. Few organisations collect statistics on gender beyond personnel records and information about gender uptake of services is not routinely collected.

3. Local processes and structures may not be welcoming to all without significant investment in time and resources in local level community development.

4. Gender may be perceived as a potentially divisive category. There may be a culture of participation in public authorities, partner organisations, or the community sector which prioritises togetherness and quantity over quality of participation.

5. Gender awareness may be at a very low level in community, including amongst voluntary and community groups.

6. Power holders may not see the relevance of the gender equality agenda. Male power holders may feel fear that they will be excluded or threatened by what they perceive to be a ‘feminist agenda’. Both male and female decision makers may believe that gender needs have been addressed through provision of specialist services for women. Hopefully the new Gender Equalities Duty will help address this.
7. A gendered division of labour amongst those working in the field of PB itself is another, rather more subtle barrier to mainstreaming gender equality in PB. In community development, work is often split into ‘technical/strategic’ and ‘capacity building/participation’ activities, and divided amongst men and women accordingly. The former tends to involve work with the powerful – city bosses and elected officials, and takes place in the city centre or corridors of power, whereas the latter work tends to take place with the powerless – marginalized communities, and is often located on the edges of the city. The reasons for this are complex and include pervasive gender stereotyping. Evidence suggests that in PB processes this is no different. This has implications for gender equality in PB for several reasons. Firstly, women working in the PB are less likely to be present in the places where the PB is designed, meaning their voices, opinions and needs will not be reflected in the process as a whole. Secondly, lack of involvement of men at local level will mean that local priorities may be female-biased and resulting local projects lacking in ownership of this half of the community. These considerations should represent a substantial challenge to those committed to developing and implementing a truly gender sensitive model of PB.

8. PB itself is often conceived of, and practiced with a dualistic split into ‘technical’ and ‘participatory’ spheres. Participatory Budgeting is presented as a ‘model’ or ‘technology’ comprised of a number of technical processes and mechanisms in which participation occurs. The danger here is that, the ‘technology’ is perceived as a value free and gender-neutral site, whereas the participation is understood as the ‘place’ for gender equality to be challenged and championed. This leads to the common situation where gender issues are tackled with investment in capacity building, rather than in structures. Participatory Budgeting models with programmes to build women’s confidence and ensure equal representation exist, but gender questions remain only half addressed.

9. Although decentralisation of decision making to local level is a fundamental aspect of PB, it is important to note that all models of PB also have a centralised city-wide tier of decision making. As has been discussed previously, these city-wide decision making tends to be male elite dominated. City-wide processes tend to be concerned with shaping the process, structures and rules of the PB and so represent a significant concentration of power. Together with the pervasive symbolic power of processes at this level, decisions made at a centralised city-wide level tend to be highly resistant to challenge in even the most decentralised models.

WHAT WOULD A GENDER SENSITIVE MODEL OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING LOOK LIKE?

This section outlines what steps would need to be taken in order to develop a gender-sensitive model of Participatory Budgeting. It is not an attempt to provide an exhaustive list, but to begin designing what is always a developmental and ongoing process.

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For example - monitoring of participation in PB processes tends to show that women are over-represented as local participants, whereas men are over-represented as city-wide reps or budget council members, and have a greater role (and say) in developing the PB process, rules, etc.
1. Collect and analyse gender disaggregated data on service needs, service take-up and spending on services. This information should be presented in an accessible and easy to understand format and incorporated into any consultation or participation processes around the budget.

2. Carry out gendered analysis of budgets before the PB cycle begins to identify where money is being spent and how this affects men and women. This analysis should not just be carried out by ‘experts’ but should be offered as part of the training to community members about PB.

3. Design PB processes and systems that value and respond to differences, acknowledging that men and women’s needs are not the same and that there are also differences within the two groups. The participation of both men and women in this design would be essential to achieve this. Examples would include:

   - holding meetings at times and places which will facilitate, rather than prevent participation of women
   - making local meetings ‘men friendly’
   - carrying out gender monitoring of representation and participation at different levels
   - ensure meetings and processes are both men and women friendly at both local and city level.  

4. Carry out capacity building and gender awareness raising with women and men to enable participation at all levels of the PB process. Examples could include:

   - mentoring and confidence building programmes to support women to participate at city-wide level
   - challenging exclusive practices, especially at a city-wide level

5. Carry out capacity building with officers, elected members and the community around gender issues in engagement processes, service delivery and project monitoring.

6. Ensure that the PB rules and processes are developed with the participation of a wide range of organisations and individuals from the community, not just larger voluntary sector ‘usual suspects’.

7. Develop thematic as well as geographical forums. These forums could include a women or a gender equalities theme.

8. Ensure that there is gender balance at all scales in the PB process, and if there is imbalance consider mechanisms such as gender quotas and targets to address this.

9. Monitor PB projects from a gender perspective. This would include monitoring how many projects were proposed by men and women, how many were selected, who

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10 A full list of suggestions for making meetings gender sensitive can be found in the GEM Project Toolkit, contact Manchester Women’s Network for details.
they benefited and how much spending this represented in real terms by gender. This information should make it possible to monitor whether the PB is enabling gender-balanced participation and whether the process is meeting both men’s and women’s needs.

10. Develop a model of PB which uses geographies that best capture gender differences in access to resources. Most models of PB operate on a neighbourhood level, based on assumptions that this level of geography is the most significant in terms of deprivation differences. However, gender inequality in access to resources is often only visible at the scale of the household and below.

11. Develop technocratic tools to off-set identified gender inequalities. A ‘gender weighting’ using hard statistics could be added to the Budget Matrix. This would operate in a similar way to the method by which deprivation differences between areas are factored in using geographical based deprivation weightings. This would enable gender be factored into the Budget Matrix and thereby affect resource allocation.

CLOSING THOUGHTS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

This paper has aimed to stimulate a debate about gender and Participatory Budgeting. Rather than end with fixed conclusions, the following discussion points aim to carry on the ideas proposed with a series of questions about how a gender sensitive PB model could be developed further.

Implementing a gender-sensitive PB

- Where should gender ‘sit’ in the PB process? Is a gendered approach more important at some stages than others?
- What minimum requirements need to be in place before a ‘gendered PB’ can be developed?
- How can we ensure that gender is not left off the agenda in models of PB which are developing in complex policy and political contexts?

Participation

- How do we build both the mass and strategic participation of men and women in the PB process?
- How do we ensure men are involved as much as women in developing a gendered PB?

Power

- Can a gender inclusive model of PB be developed without first addressing the gender inequalities which exist in the organisations and power structures implementing it?

Inclusion
• What is the relationship between a gendered approach and other social inclusion approaches? Will a gender approach bring its own exclusions?

Learning

• What is the impact of existing models of PB on men and women?
• What can gender budget approaches learn from PB and vice versa?

Kezia Lavan
Participatory Budgeting Unit
Manchester
September 2006