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Expert Group Meeting

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Learnings on Promoting Gender Responsive Budget Systems

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

Learnings on Promoting Gender-Responsive Budget Systems

Introduction

The International Budget Partnership partners with budget analysts, community organizers, and advocates in more than 120 countries to promote public budget systems that work for all people, especially those who have been historically excluded. We build people's skills, help them generate data, advocate for reform so that everyone can have a voice in budget decisions that impact their lives.

Over the past 25 years, we have normalized the notion that the public should have a say in public budget decision-making. Many international institutions and governments now espouse this principle thanks to our concerted advocacy. Public budgets around the world are much more transparent as evidenced by the 20 percent increase in global fiscal transparency scores in our Open Budget Survey. However, governments still have a long way to go in ensuring that public budget systems deliver tangible gains in everyday people's lives, and especially in the lives of women and girls. We need more concerted efforts to leverage public budgets to address inequality. Today, 71 percent of the world's population live in countries in which inequality has grown over the past three decades. This divide is starker when we examine the experience of women and other people who experience marginalization. Women are more likely than men to live in poverty. While the "official" gender pay gap has shrunk, women and girls contribute \$10.8 trillion a year in unpaid care work globally.

To address these imbalances, we need diverse government leaders who understand how public budget decisions and policies can help or hurt efforts to address inequality, and especially gender equity. Representation is important but there are few women and members of underrepresented groups in positions dealing with public finances. According to UN Women and the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions Development Initiative respectively, only 11 percent of countries have finance portfolios held by women and less than a third of all heads of national audit offices are women. We also need to ensure that all leaders, including male leaders, are attuned to the distinct challenges women face, but very few governments provide disaggregated analysis of how their budget policies impact women. For instance, a rapid assessment we undertook of 120 countries' COVID-related fiscal packages found that only three countries conducted a gender impact assessment of their response.

Considering these blind spots, we need governments to be more open to dialogue with historically marginalized communities, and especially women in these communities, to better understand whether public resources are being raised and spent in ways that improve or exacerbate inequality. For instance, we see many domestic tax policies that disproportionately burden women small-business owners. We also see a lot of underspending in public budget allocations for key social services—like sanitation and social protection—particularly for rural communities and informal settlement residents. We have also found that many public services are delivered in a gender-blind way, without consideration to the distinct challenges women face in accessing these services.

Through a flagship initiative, Strengthening Public Accountability for Results and Knowledge (SPARK), we have worked with social movements that represent excluded communities to get governments to be more attuned to their needs. Together, we have been able to open up spaces for these communities to inform and influence public budget decisions that impact their access to key services. A key part of this effort has been to debunk the notion that public finances should be reserved to public finance experts. Communities know best what they need and the challenges they're facing to access services. We equip them with budget advocacy skills so that they can present their own data and solutions to their governments to improve the delivery of services. Through these experiences, governments we work with now realize the value of community insights to make better budget decisions and deliver better services. As this program has evolved, we have worked more closely with women-led movements, or women-led chapters of larger

movements, to begin advocating for more gender-responsive budget systems. Below are insights from what we have learned from this work and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Overview of SPARK

Now in its second five-year phase, the SPARK initiative seeks to advance more inclusive, responsive, and accountable fiscal governance systems for public services prioritized by historically excluded constituencies. As part of its first phase from 2018 to 2022, we worked with marginalized communities and social movements to strengthen reform coalitions that helped shift public financial management and service delivery practices in seven countries— Nigeria, South Africa, Senegal, Indonesia, Ghana, India, and Kenya. The initiatives focused on improving budgets and service delivery in two broad thematic areas: health and sanitation (in Senegal, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and India) and livelihoods (in Ghana, Nigeria, Indonesia). On sanitation, social movements and groups worked to improve access to potable water, clean toilets, and sanitary conditions of primary health care centers and communities in Nigeria, Senegal, and South Africa. Our livelihoods programs aimed at improving access to subsidized fertilizer and other agricultural inputs such as seedlings, pesticides, and gender friendly farming/processing equipment in Nigeria and Ghana, access to social security schemes in India, and access to fuel subsidy in Indonesia.

Gender-responsive Public Services Framework

In 2018, ActionAid published the Gender-responsive public services (GRPS) framework as a guide to analyzing the governance and delivery of public services through a justice and human rights-based approach. It draws from the premise that *“opportunities to improve service quality are enabled or constrained by processes of decision-making on public services, and these are shaped by visible, invisible and hidden power.”* It also recognizes that different gender identities often have different needs and priorities for service delivery. The framework states that for public services to be fully resourced and gender-responsive, they must be:

1. Publicly funded, considering the need for *“increase in the share of budgets spent on key public services, the size of government revenues overall, the sensitivity of allocations within each service (with a focus on equity), and the scrutiny needed to ensure that money arrives (especially in disadvantaged areas)”*.
2. Publicly delivered and universal, in an effective, accountable, and decentralized manner.
3. Gender equitable and inclusive, being free from discrimination and sexism, safe and inclusive; and
4. Focused on quality, in line with human rights frameworks - available, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable.

Gender in SPARK

Considering the GRPS framework, we undertook a gender integration assessment of the first five-year phase of the SPARK initiative to take stock of and improve focused action on gender and broader equity issues. We used the following 0 to 3 scale to determine whether a project or program is designed well enough to generate transformative action in gender and equity.

Scale	Marker Description	Definition
0	Unaware/ Blind	<p>Program/ project unaware of or ignores women, men, and other genders’ respective needs, capacities, contributions, roles, power relations in society.</p> <p>Unaware or ignores that lack of gender lens to PFM issues and program strategies could also mean unintentionally contributing to exacerbating gender inequalities.</p>

1	Parity-focussed and/or awareness focus	<p>Project is generally aware of gender issues within its fiscal governance and social justice work.</p> <p>Focus on ensuring equitable number of women, men, different genders in all their diversities participating/being represented across different components of project/different phases of implementation.</p>
2	Responsive	<p>Program/project explicitly acknowledges gender inequity issues.</p> <p>Gender equity is an explicit objective of the program/project.</p> <p>Project makes sure its resources are equitably accessible by women, men other gender in all their diversities.²</p> <p>Project responds to different needs and capacities of women, men, other genders so they can benefit equitably from the project's outcomes.</p>
3	Transformative	<p>Project acknowledges gender equity issues and their root causes.</p> <p>Project assesses positive and negative implications of our work on gender equity and equality.</p> <p>The project objective aims to address gender inequity within its PFM and/or social justice focus.</p> <p>Project implements specific measures to address gendered power imbalance.</p> <p>Project implements specific measures to address negative norms, attitudes, values around gender.</p> <p>Project implements specific measures to address other fiscal governance systemic bottlenecks to gender equity.</p>

Based on this assessment, the SPARK initiatives were identified to be either parity-focused and/or awareness focused, and gender responsive. One of its initiatives on fertilizer subsidies in Ghana rated as being gender transformative. Implicitly, SPARK contributed to gender outcomes as it worked to shift power and services delivery to the most marginalized. By focusing on improving public services that most affect women and girls such as health/sanitation and livelihoods, SPARK implicitly prioritized the needs of women and girls. Women were also involved in SPARK programming even when not being specific targets of the outcomes. In Indonesia for instance, women were involved in data collection related to fisherfolks' access to fuel subsidies as some of the questionnaires were filled out by fisherwomen. Fisherwomen also participated in the dissemination of the findings and subsequent advocacy training by IBP's partner. This initiative was rated as being gender parity-focused and/or awareness focused and has since evolved to include women-led organizations and groups in its subsequent phase.

More explicitly, SPARK worked with women groups and movements such as the Small-scale Women Farmers Organization of Nigeria (SWOFON)¹ in Nigeria and The Senegalese Federation of Inhabitants

¹Small-scale Women Farmers Organization of Nigeria is a coalition of women farmer associations and groups in Nigeria who serve as a pressure group to advocate for and support women farmers to spur rural village economic development, increase food production through capacity building of small holder women farmers to demand for their rights and privileges from duty bearers.

(FSH)² in Senegal, and female budget and advocacy champions in South Africa and Ghana to identify and advocate for their needs to be included in public policy and service delivery. In Nigeria, SPARK's engagement with SWOFON focused on increasing the productivity, and access to women-friendly equipment and farming inputs, for small-holder women farmers. Its work on health sought to improve conditions around maternal health outcomes, prioritizing primary health care, and especially in Ogun state, obstetric care. The sanitation programs in Senegal and South Africa also worked with women groups—FSH in Senegal and community budget volunteers in South Africa (70% of which are female)—and engaged around needs that impacted women—potable water for household consumption and safety of public toilets. Research, policy and budget analysis, and advocacy messaging for these initiatives were framed around the needs of women and were seen as being gender-responsive.

In Ghana, SPARK contributed to gender transformation by training the Peasant Farmers Association in Ghana (PFAG)³ and government stakeholders, in particular the Women in Agriculture Directorate (WIAD), on the distinct issues women farmers were facing in accessing subsidized fertilizer. These efforts contributed to timely supply of subsidized fertilizers in the right quantities and quality and at affordable prices to smallholder farmers. SPARK also worked with PFAG to develop a gender strategy and review their constitution to include female leaders. Overall, these approaches in Ghana contributed to more women voices in budget decision-making and implementation of agricultural support.

Through SPARK's iterative learning process, it also deepened its approach to integrating gender as implementation progressed, reaping more results as the first phase of programming came to an end. In South Africa for instance, in addition to recruiting female community members and facilitators, there was greater emphasis in the last year of implementation on gender mainstreaming, such as conducting gender-based research and engaging in several gender-sensitive procurement pilots. In some informal settlements where they worked, local authorities have installed separate male and female toilets, responding to requests from women residents that distinct facilities could potentially increase their safety. In Senegal, SPARK was able to help woman-led movement FSH to unlock collaboration with government officials to improve services in informal settlements. This increased agency helped FSH members to get more civically involved—with 60 of their women members becoming municipal councilors in their settlements. They are now actively influencing local budgets in favor of their communities. In Ghana, SPARK developed a gender strategy for PFAG, while in Indonesia, more women were progressively involved in the fuel subsidy campaign for fisherfolk.

Lessons on gender

The following are three key lessons we learned from this first phase of programming.

Lesson 1. We need to deliberately shift gendered power dynamics in order to achieve gender-responsive service delivery outcomes.

Fully gender-responsive service delivery considers the need to increase the share of budgets spent on public services, the overall size of government revenues, the sensitivity of budget allocations within services (focusing on equity), and the scrutiny needed to ensure that budgeted funds are released and implemented for marginalized groups. SPARK worked with community groups to advocate for increased budget allocations for services, and to monitor the implementation of these budgets with a gendered lens. For

² The FSH is a federation of savings groups composed mainly of women who save together to improve their habitat, collect information about their neighborhoods and make their voices heard by the authorities.

³ The Peasant Farmers Association of Ghana (PFAG), is the apex Farmer-Based Non-Governmental Organization in Ghana with the mandate to advocate for pro poor agriculture and trade policies and other issues that affects the livelihoods of small holder farmers.

example, SPARK explicitly advocated for gender equity in budget allocation and implementation through its advocacy for gender-friendly equipment and agricultural inputs and fertilizers for women farmers in Nigeria and Ghana, and for obstetric care outcomes in Nigeria. In other service delivery areas, gender equitable outcomes were implicit and embedded in broader outcomes. For instance, provision of accessible potable water, sanitary, safe, and accessible toilets and improved primary health care services benefitted whole communities, but also had specific impacts on women. Having more accessible potable water in our target settlements in Senegal and South Africa reduced the workload of unpaid care provided by women and girls in these communities, as they spend an inordinate amount of time collecting water for household cooking and cleaning. An increase in access to cleaner, safer toilets in several South African informal settlements also impacted the health and safety risks women in these settlements face. Gender outcomes were also embedded in the broader livelihoods' outcomes such as women farmers and fisherfolk being part of farmers who accessed fertilizer and fuel subsidies in Nigeria, Ghana and Indonesia respectively.

However, over time SPARK recognized that women needed to have more influence over budget decision-making long-term in order to drive more sustainable and comprehensive gender-responsive system changes. In Nigeria, we helped SWOFON to gain access to budget decision-making spaces where they could consistently ensure that women's distinct needs were being considered as decisions were made around what agricultural support to provide to small-holder farmers. Their members now sit on the National Technical Steering Committee for the Agricultural Sector and on a committee that implements the national gender policy on agriculture. In Niger, Oyo and Jigawa state, SWOFON coordinators are part of committees that oversee budget allocations. They have leveraged these spaces to get fertilizer, seeds and lighter equipment for 500,000 women farmers. In Senegal, as mentioned previously, members of FSH are now municipal councilors, which allows them greater influence to ensure budgets for their communities are gender-responsive. These efforts are helping to shift power dynamics so that women can have more long-term influence over how decisions are being made.

As SPARK moves into its second phase, it will have a more intentional focus on engaging with the power dynamics and entrenched norms that hamper women's access to services. The initiative will work more closely with women-led groups to understand and focus on the service delivery issues that are most salient to them. It will focus on a gendered analysis of bottlenecks preventing equitable service delivery for women, as well as a gendered analysis of budget policies, government programs for marginalized groups, and the systems and processes for implementing and delivering these services. The strategies will also need to also consider the effects of gender-blind government policies and programs, and how social norms and socio-economic factors affect service delivery outcomes for women and girls. It also requires identifying and working to shift gendered power dynamics that prevent responsive and equitable service delivery.

Lesson 2. We need to consider intersections beyond gender that shape equity in budgets and service delivery.

SPARK focused on gender equity in budget and service delivery outcomes. However, we also realized that we needed to consider other intersections that shape power dynamics and inclusion/exclusion in public service delivery. How gender intersects with age, disability, geographic location, economic status, amongst other identity markers, determines to what extent gender outcomes are equitable.

This led us to take an intersectional approach to equitable and gender-responsive advocacy. The first phase of SPARK leveraged two opportunities to do this— working with gendered identity groups and capitalizing on gendered rights and entitlements as specified by government policies. As described in a [learning note on the role of collective agency in securing fiscal governance change](#), SPARK worked with gendered identity based groups to gain greater access to specific entitlement programs for which they were eligible and for which government's had stated commitments to deliver.

In several target countries, we partnered with groups working on the intersection of gender and disability, as well as gender and caste. In Senegal, Kenya and Nigeria, SPARK focused on access to healthcare for women living with disabilities. In Nigeria, they advocated for ramps and mobility aids at primary health care centers. In Senegal and Kenya, they pushed for women with disabilities to have greater access to health insurance through various reforms. In India, SPARK worked with the manual scavenger community that is part of the Dalit caste. The program leveraged the Self-Employment Scheme for the Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS) to build a cadre of women manual scavenger leaders to advocate for improved and consistent access to support from the Self-Employment Scheme.

In much of this work, it became clear that gendered norms are pervasive even within the marginalized communities in which we work, which is a helpful reminder that women with intersecting identities can face systemic barriers both due to their identity as part of a marginalized group, as well as due to their gender. Moving forward, SPARK will need to be attuned to the distinct needs and realities of people with intersectional identities and their barriers to access and influence government services.

Lesson 3. Organizations need to build their internal capacity to sustain gender equitable outcomes.

As identified earlier, working with women groups and movements on issues that affect them the most does not necessarily translate into gender responsiveness and transformation if uneven power dynamics are not addressed. To address these power dynamics, the first step is building the capacity of women groups and movements to articulate and express their needs in decision-making spaces (as was done well in the first phase of SPARK). Women groups and movements need to be able to navigate the inherent power dynamics in these spaces, and influence these in favor of gender equitable public service delivery.

This requires a deliberate investment in women's movements and groups that goes beyond tokenism and quotas in these spaces. Also, there is no "one size fits all" model for investment in women movements and groups. We need to take the time to know the movements, understand their organizational dynamics, and more importantly, build trust with these groups, a process that requires adequate time commitment and cannot be rushed. Furthermore, using an [Asset Based Community Development approach](#), and our unique strategic accompaniment model, SPARK recognized and built on the strengths of these groups and movements and continues to mentor them.

In the three countries where SPARK worked with women movements and groups – Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal, it invested in building the skills of individual group members with trainings on budget analyses, advocacy and community data/evidence gathering, and specifically in Ghana, gender training. SPARK deliberately invested in building the organizational capacities of these groups and movements— including supporting organizations to strengthen their financial management, reporting, and fundraising capacities, thus positioning them for funding opportunities beyond SPARK. In Ghana, SPARK supported PFAG to integrate gender into their policies and strategies, resulting in a review of PFAG's constitution to mandate that the Vice President position at the board and subnational levels be reserved for a woman member farmer during elections of new governing board members, except in cases where a woman contests for PFAG national president position and wins. This amendment to the constitution was implemented and led the election of the first-ever woman National Vice President of PFAG. In Senegal and Nigeria we supported our women partners to become part of government bodies, such as municipal councils and committees that determine budget allocations.

What's next?

Our next phase of SPARK programming seeks to integrate gender transformation in its ways of thinking, working, and enabling others by identifying new gender focused partners and working with existing partners to analyze systemic barriers that prevent equitable budget outcomes. We plan to be deliberate about

collecting, analyzing, and using gender-disaggregated data for advocacy. We will articulate from the start what gender transformation within these budget systems would look like, including shifts in norms, power dynamics, and budget processes, as well as how these outcomes will be tracked.

Building the skills of our partners to navigate various forms of power dynamics and influence these spaces towards gender equitable outcomes is imperative. Gender analyses of government programs and policies will also allow for more gender-sensitive messaging and campaign strategies. Furthermore, our strategies will include individual, systemic, and organizational gender equitable outcomes for quality service delivery and power shifting, with measures and processes for tracking gendered outcomes. In this way, SPARK will have a clearer picture of what its results have meant for women, as well as the broader communities in which it seeks to improve service delivery outcomes.