

Introduction

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This collection of essays focuses on financing for gender equality and women’s rights, drawing on over a decade of scholarly analysis and practice on gender-responsive budgeting (GRB). The purpose of this collection is to position GRB as a means of realizing women’s rights in the debates over framing, defining, financing, implementing and monitoring the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 5, and the gender targets across the other SDGs. The universal character of the goals and the emphasis on addressing the systemic and structural dimensions of gender inequality represent a significant advance over the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The stand-alone goal to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”—SDG 5—includes targets on ending violence and harmful practices against women, addressing women’s unpaid care work, as well as addressing women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights, amongst others. The full implementation of

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these goals would substantially reduce gender inequality in these areas, but that will only happen with adequate resourcing. The book therefore offers some ideas on financing for gender equality, drawing on over two decades of GRB policy and practice. It does not present GRB as a silver bullet but rather grapples with some of the tensions of this work and asks important questions about future direction.

The overall stance of the book stems from a conviction that GRB can be a strategic lever for transformative change and that fiscal policy, as well as other public policy instruments, must be harnessed to achieve this goal. It lays claim for a particular position, which is to understand gender as a relation of power, embedded in other structures and hierarchies of economic, social and political power. An important aspect of positioning GRB in the sustainable development discourse, which interlinks the economic, social and environmental dimension, is to reclaim the early understanding of GRB that the budget is as much a political as a technical process. There is the interplay between the distribution of power and the distribution of resources.¹ There are various overlays of resistances to institutional and organizational change, which will be explicitly brought out in different chapters, in particular when transformation is also about challenging the gendered structures of power.

The book charts the key GRB milestones and trajectories, the evolving concepts, methodologies and approaches and how they have been used in different country contexts. The chapters in this volume underscore the importance of a retrospective view of GRB stretching before the 2007–08 crises. The capacity for effective GRB has been undermined well before the crises by the very dynamics in which these crises are bound. However, programmatic GRB knowledge management, scholarly investigation and feminist and women's rights advocacy may not have focused their lens sufficiently to illuminate these multiple facets. For instance, the Beijing+ 20 National Reports ask about the implications of austerity measures on the 12 critical areas of action of the Platform, but not about the implications of fiscal discipline embedded in over 20 years of economic liberalization.

The book also maps GRB in relation to the trajectories of economic liberalization building on key milestones and critical events:

- 1995** as the year of the Beijing Platform of Action, but also the creation of the WTO;
- 2001** as the year of the important GRB Conference in Belgium which triggered a second wave of GRB initiatives, building on the experiences

of the first wave stimulated by the Beijing Platform of Action, but also the launching of the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability Programme (PEFA) to orient and track public financial management reform (PFM);

2008 as a watershed year for Finance for Development, and the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW) 52nd Meeting with Financing for Gender Equality as the priority theme, and the bubbling of the systemic and interlocking crises later unfolding into financial crisis.

The authors present arguments for shaping the future trajectory of GRB through deploying a rights-based approach. This involves re-envisioning macroeconomic and sectoral policies, the conduct of public policy processes, the restructuring of systems and structures steeped in patriarchy as well as the accountability and financing frameworks for realizing women's rights and achieving gender justice. The book aims to capture the state of feminist and GRB scholarship, practice and advocacy albeit not in a comprehensive systematic way, but in an illustrative, context-driven and thought-provoking way. It will give a sense of the gap between the expectations for the SDGs to meet human rights obligations, norms and standards on the one hand and, on the other hand, the available financing for development and gender equality, including resourcing women's organizations and feminist movements. It will present inspiring as well as sobering and sometimes frustrating examples and facets of GRB practices.

The book features an edited collection of 11 essays by prominent scholars, practitioners and policy experts engaged in GRB policy and programming at the global, regional, national and local levels. It will also generate insight into GRB practice as action research, as learning by doing, on knowledge gained, such as understanding where the power and influence lies, and about the formal and informal structures of power. The book therefore has three interrelated objectives:

The **first objective** is to map the conceptual, normative, political and economic pathways of GRB over the past two decades and locate it within the financing for development landscape, specifically as shaped by the trajectories of economic liberalization.

The **second objective** is to highlight the role of women's rights organizations, feminist scholars and activists, and gender equality champions in enabling, supporting as well as influencing GRB at global, national and local levels.

The **third objective** is to document how GRB has been understood and applied in different country/regional contexts and policy environments, teasing out what has been achieved and learned and how this knowledge can contribute to positioning GRB as a lever of public action and finance for realizing women's rights in the implementation of SDGs.

The country and regional chapters locate GRB experiences and trajectories within the three periods of GRB practice applying both a retrospective, reflexive lens as well as a forward-looking lens. It grapples with the key issues of unequal distribution of resources, power, and accountability at all levels.

Each chapter in this volume concludes with a reflection on emerging trends, highlighting the gaps in knowledge and experience and proposing areas for further investigation.

NOTE

1. Norton, Andy and Diane Elson (2002) *What's behind the budget? Politics, rights and accountability in the budget process*. Overseas Development Institute, London.