

Very often when discussing the phenomenon “gender”, it is misunderstood as government programs favoring women over men. It actually benefits both sexes by creating an environment where both enjoy unhindered.

For nearly two decades, all Rwandan institutions from the lowest administrative units to the central government have been allocating the national cake in rather unconventional way. Rwanda’s government agencies have devised a formula whereby a portion of the budget goes to advancing gender balance. It is a process known globally as Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB).

Over the years, various countries have made attempts to create women-centric schemes and allocate funds for them. Gender-Responsive Budgeting goes beyond this; it is related explicitly to allocating portions of national budgets to promote women’s advancement and study the gendered impacts of such allocations to different government departments. It also considers how money is raised to make the budget, in terms of direct and indirect taxes and fines, and how this affects men and women differently.

Rwanda has been doing this as a policy stance since 2013. It is a legal requirement to have a gender-responsive budget. The Organic Law on State Finances and Property Law No.12/2013 makes gender balance in public financial management a fundamental principle. Under this law, it is mandatory to include a gender budget statement as one of the annexes to the national budget framework paper submitted to Parliament, and all public entities are required to submit activity reports to specify how plans for gender balance have been implemented.

A review of the current revised 2021-2022 budget, shows that from district level, up to the ministries, each has allocated as much as 30% of the development budget to aspects that support gender development. We have provided a preview of the budget.

The United Nations adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, which mainly contained pledges and guidelines for countries to reduce gender inequality. Although CEDAW does not include a specific provision on budgets, its principles require that women have both formal and substantive equality, which means that policies should account for differences in their impact on men and women. Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) was first introduced at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing, China, to inculcate in decision-makers the principle of looking at national budgets

through a gendered lens.

With representatives from 189 governments, over 17,000 participants and two weeks of debate, the GRB was brought into the mainstream at the event, and governments, NGOs, civil society organisations and academics have advocated for its use since then.

The Fourth World Conference produced the Beijing Platform of Action, which contained the specific reference of using budgets for the advancement of women, in chapter VI (Financial Arrangements) clause 345:

“Full and effective implementation of the Platform for Action, including the relevant commitments made at previous United Nations summits and conferences, will require a political commitment to make available human and financial resources for the empowerment of women. This will require the integration of a gender perspective in budgetary decisions on policies and programmes, as well as the adequate financing of specific programmes for securing equality between women and men.”

For the case of Rwanda, every year, the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, together with the Gender Monitoring Office, compile key sectoral gender and family issues. They then propose priorities and targets to inform the concerned sectors and institutions for consideration when planning and budgeting.

For example, in the last financial year, the Agriculture ministry had various targets including; increase percentage of rural women accessing agricultural loans from 8.9 per cent to 12.8 per cent. The energy sector set a target of reducing the percentage of households using firewood for cooking for at least 58.6 per cent. In the transport sector, one of the many targets was to ensure there are seats on public transport which are reserved for pregnant women. The Ministry of Defense is scheduled to begin construction of female quarters in all its barracks, in addition to a whole host of other projects.

The introduction of GRB initiatives was aimed at achieving equal opportunities for men and women in the labour market and enabling equal access to the means of production. These factors were expected to facilitate overall improvement in population welfare and higher national growth rates.

Since 2006, the Global Gender Gap Report has measured the extent of gaps

between women and men on the parameters of health, education, economy and politics. In terms of closing the gender gap in the domains of economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment, a regional analysis shows that Rwanda is the best-performing country in Sub-Saharan Africa, and Bangladesh is the best-performing country in South Asia.

In July 2020, the Observer Research Foundation released a comprehensive study analyzing the budget programmes of Rwanda, India, and Bangladesh. The study found that Rwanda “has moved beyond considering gender as a cross-cutting area in various strategies and has fully integrated it as a separate entity in the planning and budgeting process”.

In 2010-11, MINECOFIN submitted the national budget with the gender budget statements of four pilot sectors—governance, agriculture, infrastructure and the private sector—following the issuance of the first budget call circular.

This budget call circular was the launch of the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework, which prompted the different “budget Agencies to start preparing their budgets” from a gendered lens. Since then, gender budget statement reports are prepared and submitted to MINECOFIN and presented to parliament during budget hearings every year.

MINECOFIN prepares a ‘Budget Framework Paper,’ which includes the ‘Consolidated Gender Budget Statements’ in its annexe.

Article 68 of the Organic Budget Law on State Finance and Property is a follow-up to the gender budgeting statement plans, wherein all ministries, departments and agencies must prepare and submit annual implementation reports. These contain sections on output planned activities, accomplished activities, planned targets achievement against planned targets, approved budget FY, and executed budget vs approved budget comment/reasons for variance.

“While the objective of the ministries is mostly common, in attempting women’s advancement in economic, political and social participation, Rwanda seems to have also successfully implemented legislation and auditing in the governance department,” reads the study by the Observer Research Foundation.