



THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN INTRODUCING GENDER- RESPONSIVE BUDGETING: THE CASE OF SERBIA

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INITIATIVES IN SERBIA

- Entry points identified:
 - Provincial government (gender equality authority since 2002, legal act on gender equality 2005, team)
 - Civil society eager to engage at the local/municipal level



BACKGROUND – CIVIL SOCIETY AND GENDER

- Relatively strong women's movement:
 - grassroots presence
 - long history of antiwar and antinationalist activism and on GBV issues, political representation
 - 36 organizations participate 2005-6 in creating a National Plan of Action on Women
 - Push for quota in local elections in 2004 (with pressure from outside plus alliance with women in parties)
 - But weak on economic issues/governance
- Weak legal and institutional framework for gender equality (except Autonomous Province of Vojvodina)
- Capacity building efforts and initiatives – STAR initiative, NOR Women Can Do It – integrated economic decision making and considerations of budgets in gender equality trainings for women in all sectors



BACKGROUND: FRAMEWORK

- No national Gender Equality Law at time project began
- Province: legal act on gender equality 2005, affecting GEMs in its territory (stronger)
- Constitution introduces “equality between women and men” and “positive measures policy” in 2006
- Gender Equality Mechanisms (GEMs) at the municipal/local level: initiative of OSCE, voluntary, different institutional solutions, highly dependent on political will and personal enthusiasm
- Political representation at time of project beginning: after quota in 2004, % of women local councilors 20% on average (diverse across municipalities)



CONTEXT FOR PILOT GRB INITIATIVES

- Slow and partial transfer of powers to the units of local government
- Volatile coalition politics
- Still predominant line budgets
- No obvious legal foundation for the mainstreaming of gender concerns into local decision-making processes.



WHAT UNIFEM SUPPORTED

○ Against the backdrop:

- pioneering civil society efforts to set up some of the preconditions for GRB

Focus:

- **raising awareness** about the connections between budgets and issues of women's condition and gender equality, advocacy + pressure
- **setting up a legal and policy background** that requires gender issues to be taken into account
- **learning about and training others on basic tools** for integrating a gender perspective into local decision-making processes and administrative practices



PROJECTS

- Women's Entrepreneurship Academy (WEA): (Kikinda/Novi Sad)
 - Municipality of Backi Petrovac in the period 2007-2008,
 - follow-up project in 2009 in Kovačica, Bački Petrovac, and Žitište
- Association of Business Women (PAŽ) (Novi Sad)
 - Worked in cities of Pančevo, Valjevo and Kragujevac in 2008
 - Follow-up project in Stara Pazova, Irig, and Pančevo in 2009.



CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

- No genuine political will or interest in supporting a gender-equality initiative (even when agreements made)
- Line item budgets and “traditional” budgetary process (weak links to priorities or policies, where they have been defined), coupled in 2008 with the crises in funding
- Weak institutional capacities for policy development; resistance to change
- Weak institutional legitimacy and internal capacity of gender equality mechanisms (GEM) (no clear mandate or weak mandate); or, no GEM at all (the case of Bački Petrovac municipality)
- Lack of gender-disaggregated data and other data needed to monitor gender; lack of capacity and knowledge on using data



RESPONSES (1)

- **Adjusting the scale, aims and tools based on context/environment**
 - Basic skills building and awareness raising for environments where talk of gender and gender equality is new;
 - Supporting GEMs and developing new, contextualized tools for those environments where previous gender equality-related work has been done;
 - Assessing data availability and conducting gender analysis and reviews of documents and policies, to define needs for data collecting and targeted research efforts;
 - Looking for gender in policy and strategic documents and for women in decision-making; budget scrutiny is, however, limited by the line item approach, and usually is done last, with recommendations on allocations likely to be general
 - Criticism of local government practices needs to be carefully presented as it may strain already weak partnerships between civil society and local government



RESPONSES (2)

- **Creating legal foundations for gender-based policy and budget interventions**
 - Statute interventions (local expertise, using existing documents)
 - Establishing GEM (longer process)
 - Local Act/Decision on Gender Equality
 - Cooperation with renowned constitutional law expert on drafting it
 - Engaging local stakeholders – GEM but also women’s groups if active in the community
 - Pressure to have it adopted – inside and outside
 - Once adopted – use as grounds for further capacity building to fulfill mandate, as well as funds for GEM and priority gender equality activities



RESPONSES (3)

- **Strategic alignments: ‘catching the moment’ of administrative, political or policy change, or addressing a specific local issue with a gender lens**
 - Stara Pazova Local development Strategy drafting process – supportive mayor and ongoing drafting process of a major development document
 - Zitiste new systematization of municipal jobs: first instance of gender equality as part of the official job description
 - Backi Petrovac donor support to program budgeting: gender becomes integrated in one segment in the template
 - ❖ Behind-the-scene lobbying and reliance on personal relationships, integrity or influence, or leverage of other outside actors often used to strengthen appeal
 - ❖ Balance between: potential for leading reforms with GRB vs. seen as challenging status quo



RESPONSES (4)

- **Conducting simple, practical and targeted research on issues of interest to inform recommendations for interventions and build arguments for gender equality (examples)**
 - Stara Pazova: Under the pilot initiative, three local experts work with the municipal GEM; conduct a survey and focus group discussions with men and women small business owners, in order to assess their needs and the problems they faced in their work
 - Recommendations, in the shape of proposed activities and objectives, integrated into the Sustainable Development Strategy adopted in late 2009
 - Strategy includes 2 programs and 8 subprograms targeting women, support to women's entrepreneurship, and to the local gender equality mechanism
 - Research on women's contribution to local economy – one set of recommendations focuses on needs for improved employability and economic activity of women (transport/mobility) (Backi Petrovac)
 - “Gender Barometers” in towns of Kragujevac and Valjevo – women's and men's skills, needs, expectations, willingness to engage in certain economic activity – important to feed into planning of subsidies, support mechanisms (conducted professionally, data can be used for a longer period of time and will be published by GEM in case of one town)



LESSONS LEARNT AND LOOKING BEYOND

- Enthusiasm and learning by doing: significant capacity development (civil society and independent consultants/researchers)
- Realistic: seeing building of capacity as PART of “watchdog” role
- Learned to employ GRB as a tool for tackling real-life problems of socio-economic development within the communities they worked in – seizing the moment
- Capacity of local GEM – crucial for sustainability, good partnerships developed (capacity for influencing policies/measures)
- Reaching out to non-traditional partners: working with local bureaucrats (even if women, gender blind), decisions makers (men)
- Institutional framework important – but since December 2009 GEL in place, can be used to boost work in 2010 and beyond
- Awareness raising: appealing and inclusive campaign by WEA in three municipalities (4 languages, members of the community speak about very practical needs of women and importance of gender equality)



LESSONS (2)

- Successes – depend on the political will of elected officials and the responsiveness of senior administrators, whose buy-in and role is crucial for further mainstreaming of gender into the budgetary process
- Civil society can advocate, motivate and provide support in form of expert guidance for analysis and tools development
- BUT it cannot replace the will, motivation, knowledgeable engagement and strength of mandate of those whose job is ultimately to ensure that men's and women's needs are taken into consideration in local development

