

## ➔ **SOUTH AFRICA: WOMEN ANALYSE THE BUDGET, AND PARLIAMENT HEEDS THE GAPS**

### **In a Nutshell**

The South African Women's Budget Initiative analyses budgetary allocations across sectors of the South African economy and assesses whether these are adequate to meet specific policy commitments. A collaborative venture involving Parliament and civil society organizations, the initiative has a strong advocacy component, particularly around gender.

Besides demonstrating how this kind of partnership can increase accountability and transparency in public expenditure planning and monitoring, this case also shows how civil society expertise can complement a government's own capacities, in the process strengthening policy formulation overall.

### **The Story**

The South African Women's Budget Initiative began in 1995 during the immediate aftermath of the apartheid regime. It was meant to provide quality analysis of the budget for use by both Parliament and civil society. Two independent think-tanks – the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) and the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE) – joined forces to set up the initiative with the National Parliamentary Committee for the Status and Quality of Life of Women.

Their premise from the start was that widespread poverty in South Africa is not always related to lack of spending: South Africa's development budget compares well with similar countries. Rather, it is the distribution of allocations between departments that is the problem. The budget initiative therefore began to examine budgets within specific departments and looked at how they may be re-allocated.

As is true in most developing countries, limitations on the availability of data mean that it is not possible to analyse each line item of every budget for its impact on women. Instead, Women's Budget Initiative experts prepare a series of policy briefs that touch on four themes: the gender issues facing the sector; how the state is involved in remedial measures; whether budget allocations meet policy commitments; and alternative measures to correct budgetary shortfalls.

Using these documents as a base, advocacy takes off through submissions to Parliamentary committees, national newspapers and the Internet. On the day the budget is actually announced, the initiative runs its own campaign on radio, especially community radio, which is heard widely by local interest groups. Additionally, analytical pieces are sent to the editorial and op-ed pages of newspapers. Throughout the year, researchers write articles on their findings, workshops are conducted, and technical assistance is provided to government departments and committees to

help them understand the analysis and incorporate it in their operational plans. Crucial baseline research features regularly in Parliamentary submissions, and is used by many organizations working on sectoral policy.

Over the years, more and more organizations and individuals have coalesced around the initiative. Gradually, a loose coalition of sorts has formed that has considerable expertise on issues confronting women and related responses, along with a strong grounding in knowledge about budgetary affairs. Today, the Women's Budget Initiative produces in-depth research on about 30 government departments.

### **Results and Critical Factors**

- It is not common to see a partnership of mutual gain between a Parliament and civil society. In this case, civil society has brought a level of research capacity that the Parliament itself lacks. And the legislature, in turn, provides a level of access to the upper echelons of government that civil society normally does not enjoy.
- Government involvement has meant that the initiative does not lack detailed data and information. Civil society participation ensures a healthy critique of gap areas and suggestions for remedial action.
- The initiative is grooming budget analysis experts; many of these "alumni" have gone on to initiate budget work within their own organizations and form a strong referral team for the original initiative.
- Due to the scope of advocacy, the government has, since 1997, committed itself to systematically monitoring women's quality of life, with the initiative working in this direction in close association with the Department of Finance and Central Statistical Services.

### **Further information**

D. Cohen, R. de la Vega and G. Watson, eds. 2001. *Advocacy for Social Justice*. A publication of the Advocacy Institute and Oxfam. Bloomfield, Connecticut: Kumarian Press.

Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex  
([www.ids.ac.uk/ids/govern/citizenvoice/annexcs.html](http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/govern/citizenvoice/annexcs.html)).

World Bank Public Expenditure Review Group/Participation Group  
([www.worldbank.org/participation/tools&methods/casestudies](http://www.worldbank.org/participation/tools&methods/casestudies)).