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## Report: E-discussion on Gender-Responsive and Socially Inclusive Budgeting

Institute of Development Studies  
and  
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

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### *Introduction*

As the development field has focused on themes including good governance, practitioners have increasingly focused on the power of annual budgets to advance equitable social and economic policy and development. Gender-responsive budgeting and socially inclusive budgeting (in various forms) have become common development initiatives in countries around the world, led by governments, donors, and civil society groups. These initiatives explore how various processes related to budgeting can target marginalised and traditionally excluded groups, how these groups can participate in budget making processes, and also what may be the possible benefit for these excluded groups. However, there are large gaps in evidence of the effectiveness of programmes and best practices. Therefore, this e-discussion drew on the lived experiences of SDC and Helvetas staff in countries around the world to try to focus on what works and if it is replicable.

The e-discussion took place over three days (April 16-18, 2018) as a part of the learning journey that explored current practices of SDC and key international development actors regarding Gender Responsive and Socially Inclusive Budgeting in order to design a programming framework, guidelines and support tools. The discussion included members of SDC's Democratisation, Decentralisation and Local Governance Network (DDLGN), SDC's Gender Equality Network, and HELVETAS Cooperation from around the world. It was facilitated by colleagues from the Institute of Development Studies. The participants brought in a range of experiences. For some participants, GRB/SIB were new to them and they used the e-discussion as a way to learn about it for their contexts. Other participants had experience in related issues, such as advancing women in parliament. Finally, another group had direct experience and knowledge of GRB/SIB.

There were 73 members of the e-discussion from 28 countries. One in three members<sup>3</sup> contributed to the discussion, representing 22 countries. There were 54 contributions spread across the three days: day one had 20 contributions; day two had 19 contributions; and day three had 15 contributions. Due to new data protection laws in the EU and the sensitivity of some of the discussions had, we will not be identifying participants by name and location in this report (will be attached separately).

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<sup>3</sup> From experience, contribution rates are generally around 10 percent. At 32 percent, this e-discussion is well above the average.

The discussion centred on participants' experiences, insights, and recommendations related to engaging communities, CSOs and governments in SIB/GRB processes and enabling dialogue on these issues between the state and its citizens. While many questions were shared, raised, and answered over the three-day period, the main questions we aimed to address were:

- Who are the key people that GRB and SIB programmes should focus on and why?
- What has been your experience in mobilizing communities to engage in budgeting processes/ monitoring and what works best?
- What kinds of capacity gap exists that hinder implementation of GRB/SIB? Who are the key targets for training? What learning approaches, tools, and materials have been effective in addressing these?
- Is there a conducive environment for State-citizen collaboration or is space for civil society shrinking? What are the main challenges for state –citizen engagement on issues related to budgeting?
- How can we, in each of our current positions, help advance GRB/SIB in our locations?

This report will detail the main points of the e-discussion. The next section will highlight the major issues discussed: the actors involved in GRB/SIB; experiences of community mobilisation; capacity gaps for implementation of GRB/SIB; and issues of political will. We will then look at some of the recommendations that came out of the reflection period of discussion. Finally, attached are appendices of data related to the e-discussion and further reading.

### *Who is Included in GRB/SIB Programmes?*

There are two ways to look at who is included: who are the people targeted for social inclusion; and who are the people tasked with implementing inclusive budgeting programmes. This section will look at both of these angles.

Groups that are targeted for social inclusion vary depending on the context. Women were the most commonly discussed in the e-discussion, as advancing gender equality is a priority in many countries. Children and youth are often also mentioned. Beyond these two groups, participants listed various groups, specific to their country contexts. They covered a broad spectrum including: marginalised ethnicities; pastoralists; diaspora; people with disabilities; internally displaced persons; elderly people; indigenous people; and LGBTI people. As one participant noted, the process of deciding on who needs to be included can be a complex one, but that it is most successful when identified groups are commonly agreed upon as excluded and there are favourable public and political discourses for including them. In her words, this requires momentum. Additionally, what level this is decided at and how it is institutionalised can be important for programming and coordination. According to one participant, this decision is taken at the national level with clear implementation policies for local levels.

Participants clearly stated at various points through out the e-discussion that many actors need to be involved in advancing and implementing GRB and SIB. See the list below of important actors.

- *Marginalised Groups* need to be engaged to understand their priorities and needs. Members of more advantaged groups should also play a role in advancing GRB and SIB.
- *Politicians* are crucial allies as they create, vote on, and implement budgets and having their support is necessary.
- *Staff in Ministries* are key for institutionalising GRB/SIB processes. Priority areas were: Ministries of Finance, women-focused ministries, sectoral ministries, and planning commissions.
- *Auditors and other Accountability Actors* are necessary actors who are part of GRB/ SIB processes.

- *Civil Society actors* including CSOs and NGOs are critical to help mobilise community and make contributions to budgeting processes.
- *Experts*, both academic and group specific, can be critical for providing guidance and analysis of budgets and related issues.
- *Media* can play a critical role in providing accessible information to the public related to budgets and how they do or don't meet citizens needs and priorities.
- It is essential to understand how influential *informal power holders*, including local elites, religious leaders, military, landlords are as these actors influence, advance, or undermine budgets and planning documents.
- *Donors and INGOs* often support governance initiatives including socially inclusive budgeting and provide frameworks, funding, and support for governance-related, budgetary, and Public Financial Management initiatives.

Participants noted that these actors often need to be brought together to collaborate for success, including across multiple levels to: empower communities in mobilisation efforts; mainstream GRB and SIB in PFM reforms; and work in service sectors.

### *Community Mobilization*

Cases of community mobilisation for budget allocations and accountability were reported as occurring in a variety of sectors including child care, forestry, health and agriculture. Some participants shared cases that were multi-sectoral. While it was challenging to nail down best practices, a few commonalities emerged from participants' experiences.

The first important point raised was that *before community mobilisation for GRB and SIB takes place, more basic information and awareness needs to be shared related to rights and inclusion policies*. This gives communities a method of analysis and comparison point for budgetary asks. Additionally, *early stages of mobilisation must examine how marginalised groups can participate in budget processes* and what barriers they may face. One participant shared that women in Ukraine identified lack of experience in leadership activities, burden of unpaid work on time, and lack of skills necessary for public debates as barriers to their participation. Other marginalised groups will also face other barriers to participation.

A second important factor for community and organizational mobilisation was *the ability to network and collaborate with other groups to pursue shared goals related to GRB and SIB*. These groups were other organizations, local councils and politicians, and donors – both SDC and Helvetas have provided support in organizing and planning activism related to GRB and SIB. This helps spread their reach and amplify efforts and messages. One participant shared an example from Tanzania CSOs came together and each took one sector of the budget and they worked together to compile policy briefs and to lobby ministries and parliamentary committees. This speaks to the *importance of collective action in moving GRB and SIB forward*.

A third *important factor in community mobilisation was capacity*. Many participants cited the lack of capacity at the community level to engage with analyzing budgets due to difficulties in understanding processes and tools. However, communities were not the only groups to struggle with capacity. Therefore, the next section will look at this across many different actors.

### *Capacity Building: What Kind and for Whom?*

Several participants highlighted lack of capacity – of community members, NGOs & CSOs, government officials, and politicians - as a major challenge in the implementation of GRB/SIB. However, it is also an area in which donors, including SDC and Helvetas, have put significant resources. This section will detail some of these discussions.

*Capacity building within state institutional structures has been highlighted as a common activity but also an area for further development.* Many participants have pointed to the necessity of understanding what GRB/SIB is, the technical methods of budgeting, the specific tools of GRB/SIB, and the creation of policies, strategic and legal frameworks for GRB/SIB. Additionally, *capacity building has also been targeted at local activists, women's groups, CSOs, politicians, and the media.* Tools used include awareness campaigns, manuals, peer-to-peer networking, curriculum building, and training sessions. In some contexts, community clubs have also been founded to support marginalised groups' participation in the budget process. A priority of capacity building is in making budgets and analysis tools, which can be highly technical, accessible for everyone. However, it is important to note that improving the accessibility of technical aspects of the budgetary process does not necessarily make them participatory. This is an important note for voice and inclusion.

*The priority groups for capacity building depend on the context.* While community members are frequently discussed, the training of civil society members, government officials, and politicians is dependent on the stability of governments and the amount of space for state-citizen interactions. As some participants noted, capacity building can be futile if there are high levels of turnover in governments and in civil service. In these cases but also generally, training local trainers should be a priority. Further, in places where the space for civil society is closing, different approaches may be needed, such as spreading awareness of budgetary issues through the media. Finally, *participants highlighted that analysis during budget preparation is not enough, and that GRB and SIB should cover the whole budget cycle, including monitoring, reporting, and enforcement.* This will also require other actors.

There are also additional issues related to capacity building. *First, given the variety of people and the various levels of government engaged in these issues, there are a lot of people to train. Secondly, even if people have capacity to participate in GRB and SIB, there may be systemic challenges related to information.* One that came up repeatedly was the lack of disaggregated data. And finally, even if capacity is built, the major question of resources continues to challenge implementation. At an individual level, there is the administrative burden on those trained: civil servants in particular are often understaffed and overloaded with work and often have other responsibilities which makes ability to focus on GRB or SIB alone challenging. At a more systemic level, countries may have plans for gender mainstreaming or social inclusion but limited development resources constrict their implementation. On this last point, distributions of resources are ultimately a political issue and decision. This takes us to our final discussion section, on political will.

#### *Political Will: Making the Case for GRB and SIB*

Many participants cited the lack of political buy-in as a key challenge in implementing GRB and SIB. *There are disconnects between government rhetoric on gender and inclusion issues and the current implementation of plans.* This can be caused by many things: lack of understanding as to the usefulness of GRB/SIB in national planning and budgeting; disinterest in issues of gender or social inclusion; and protection of interests of powerful elites who don't want to lose influence in closed spaces. Political buy-in is a challenging area to tackle and while there were no clear-cut answers, there were several discussions that provided some clues.

*A key reason why political will may not be there for GRB and SIB is that there is a general lack of representation by marginalised groups in spaces where budgets are decided, including local committees and municipalities. Programmes have tried to address this by creating broader plans for inclusion, that include empowerment of women's representation in parliament and more broad funding for gender programming. It has also occurred in participatory budgeting spaces. Some participants also called on NGOs and CSOs to 'walk the talk' of social inclusion, by promoting young women and members of discriminated groups into their workforce.*

A major topic of discussion was the institutionalisation of GRB and SIB. Many participants raised that this was something their countries' governments had committed to in policy, but not implemented. *Institutionalising and putting these policies into practice is extremely important for continuity of GRB and SIB and reduces the ability of specific people to undercut them.* Participants had various suggestions related to institutionalisation, summarised below:

- GRB and SIB processes may be relevant for tracking how gender and socially marginalised groups are targeted and benefit from policies such as the national development policies, poverty reduction strategies, gender strategies and mainstreaming efforts. However, these policies often require their own implementation budgets and resources can be scarce for conducting GRB or SIB analyses of these policies.
- Social accountability programmes at the local level can be used to promote the need for GRB and SIB, as social accountability programmes generally lead to the inclusion of women and marginalised groups in governance process and produces data on performance of the local government bodies on allocation and targeting and ensures transparency.
- Inclusion efforts need to be made in assessing public services as well, the focus should not only be on budgets allocated for provision of services, but including people in the planning of the services. Given that some services are more researched and better understood than others, specific efforts should be taken for knowledge generation. For example, educational services are often more sensitive to inclusion efforts and better studied compared to other services such as waste management where poor people can be highly affected, but are less studied from an inclusion angle.
- Lastly, continuity needs to be ensured for GRB and SIB efforts in decentralisation programmes.

### State –Citizen Interaction

*The space for state-citizen interactions, and whether the space is expanding or shrinking, depends on the context. We heard both promising stories about space opening up for citizen's engagement and experiences of shutting civil society and community voices out. The closing of civic space creates major challenges for ensuring accountability of the state. In addition the space for collaboration with the state is highly dependent on the specific issue where engagement is wanted. Some states are open to collaboration with CSOs to advance GRB and SIB, however other states may view these mechanisms as measures that makes the state more vulnerable to questioning and may want to regulate NGOs and CSOs activities on GRB/ SIB. Participants also pointed out that some politicians and local elites may have a vested interest in subverting the democratic potential of pro-poor and inclusive budgeting processes and public service provision as they would need to their change rent-seeking behaviour.* Many participants also pointed out the need for civic engagement in tracking budgets and implementation.

### Recommendations and Additional Areas for Consideration

The participants made the following recommendation about what SDC and its staff could do to take the agenda for GRB and SIB forward.

- Various participants mentioned the *importance of demonstrating gender responsiveness and social inclusion in their own organisations*. They stressed that representation of diverse group of people within the decision making process in their own organisation was important as they needed to 'walk the talk' and create space for diversity.
- Participants also raised the *importance of capacity building for SDC staff in implementing GRB/ SIB*. They also suggested that raising awareness about GRB and SIB among the SDC partners can create a critical mass within SDC who may be willing to implement GRB/ SIB projects. The increased capacity and awareness of the SDC staff may also help in the ways they work with partners of GRB/ SIB. These collaborations in return can create an appetite for GRB/SIB at the country level offices and lead to raise demand within communities.
- Some suggested that *gender analysis needs to be conducted of SDC's own budget and budgets of its country offices*.
- Participants also emphasised that *a gender specialist needed to be appointed for all SDC projects to ensure gender mainstreaming throughout project cycles*.
- Participants also called for *more exchanges of learning and networking among members in thematic networks to share lessons learned and best practices*.
- Throughout the three days *participants pointed out that GRB/SIB should not be seen as a budgeting process, but should be a part of a series of programmes and policy making initiatives aimed at social inclusion by SDC*. As one participant from Tajikistan noted, it should not be a one-off activity. Some also raised that GRB/SIB programmes could be linked to SDC's work on improving parliamentary representation and social accountability. Some also suggested that GRB/ SIB should be a part of SDC's work on participatory budgeting initiatives have special efforts on social inclusion.

*Resources from the E-Discussion*

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Swiss Foreign Ministry [EDA-DFAE-FDFA - Swiss Foreign Ministry]. (2015, 9 June). *Who Recycles is a Winner!* [video file]. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cld9HBFrcXk&list=PLRDYxm6rWd6sMcZjFpOQ8Q9KRiTHLAnjO&index=12>