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BREAKING NEW GROUNDS FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY

Experiences and insights
in implementing the
GAD budget policy

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FOREWORD

The GAD budget policy is probably one of most controversial policies ever adopted by the Philippine government to promote the advancement of women. It is ignored or appreciated, depending on which side of the fence you stand. Some government agencies and local government units say it is cumbersome, meaningless, and runs contrary to planning principles. Women, on the other hand, say it is a very powerful and helpful instrument in their quest for social, economic and political empowerment.

Despite noted difficulties in implementing the GAD budget policy, the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) will continue to stand by our women in pushing for its retention and making it work as an instrument for institutional transformation and women's empowerment. We will not allow the demise of a policy that is recognized as a model of institutionalized approach to resource allocation for gender concerns, and has become part of the national budgeting system. The difficulties should serve as a challenge to innovate and make it work, not as a reason to give up and abolish it.

The GAD budget policy envisions to make government agencies more concerned and responsive to the needs of women. Everyone who is vested with the power to spend public funds is equally vested with the responsibility to ensure its positive effects on the lives of the people, half of whom are women. More importantly, the GAD budget policy rests on the bedrock of a sacred commitment to help protect and defend women's human rights, promote their economic empowerment, and attain gender responsive governance.

When a policy fails to deliver its intended results, it does not always mean that it is a failure. The experiences in this publication show a host of factors that hinder implementation. Fortunately, the stories also show that hindrances are not unbeatable. This compilation of case studies is an initial step to document the processes and benefits derived from implementing the GAD budget policy. The cases show the importance of the GAD budget and how they could be accessed and utilized.

To the case owners who unselfishly shared their experiences, we salute and thank you for illuminating a rather thorny and dim path to gender planning and budgeting. Reading your articles was like having a first hand experience of your excitement, boldness and optimism. We apologize that we had to cut your articles by 50 percent because we ran short of budget for publication.

To the readers, we hope that the cases will give you inspiration and ideas on how to access.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Since 1986, the Philippine government has been actively promoting gender equality, a policy that aims to eradicate gender based inequalities and enable women and men to equally contribute to and benefit from development.

The strategy for implementing gender equality is called gender mainstreaming. It is defined as a strategy to integrate women's concerns and experiences in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programs and projects in all political, economic and social agenda. It is an approach that situates gender equality issues at the center of broad policy decisions, institutional structures and resource allocations, and includes women's views and priorities in making decisions about development goals and processes. It is about making government work for the advancement of women. It is about enabling women and men to develop their human potentials and enjoy mutually fulfilling relations.

Gender mainstreaming largely depends upon sufficient and stable resources. It was for this reason that a companion policy, the Gender and Development (GAD) budget policy, was adopted under the term of former President Fidel V. Ramos. This policy provides that all instrumentalities of government shall allocate a minimum of five percent of their total budgets for the implementation of policies, programs, projects and activities that will improve the status of women in accordance with the Women in Development and Nation Building Act (RA 7192).

The GAD budget policy started as a Presidential Memorandum addressed to the Department of Budget and Management. It subsequently developed into a regular provision under the Annual General Appropriations Act, an effort that was championed by then Senator Leticia Ramos Shahani. This policy is now part of the Local Budget Memorandum which the Department of Budget and Management issues annually to Local Government Units (LGUs).

There have been failures, but there have also been learnings. More importantly, there are significant breakthroughs which now constitute a rich source of inspiration and ideas for others. This publication is an initial effort to put some of these experiences together.

Over the years, the GAD budget policy has become the focus of intense lobbying of women's organizations, many of which actively work for its implementation. It has been serving as a powerful instrument for women to negotiate with government agencies and LGUs for better programs, projects and services.

The implementation of the GAD budget policy has been beset by numerous political and technical difficulties. Yet, many agencies and LGUs continue to move on and confront the challenges. There have been failures, but there have also been learnings. More importantly, there are significant breakthroughs which now constitute a rich source of inspiration and ideas for others. This publication is an initial effort to put some of these experiences together.

Process

The preparation of this publication was seriously hindered by lack of time and budget. It was completed in less than three months and the contributors barely received a token for writing their own experiences.

NCRFW began by releasing an invitation for national and regional line agencies LGUs, colleges and universities and NGOs to nominate the experiences to be documented. The response was encouraging, particularly from LGUs. From the nominations, which briefly described each story, 11 were selected. The case of Balayan, Batangas, a Galing Pook Awardee, was also included with permission from the Galing Pook executive director. Then, the selected LGUs and agencies were asked to find their own case writers who know their experience enough to be able to write the case in two weeks. The drafts were validated by the agencies and organizations concerned before they were submitted to NCRFW.

NCRFW had to make a difficult decision of shortening each write up because of inadequate budget for printing. Copies of the shortened version were returned to the writer for revalidation.

This publication was almost like a whirlwind project. It has to be rushed in view of the escalating debate on whether the GAD budget policy is serving the purpose for which it was adopted or not. To those who say it does not, we invite you to read the cases, and perhaps, visit the areas and organizations personally before you make a judgement. To those who say it does, you can do the same and you will find another reason to continue supporting our stand to keep and strengthen the GAD budget policy.

Overview of the Case Studies

The compilation is made up of 12 experiences from a national agency, a regional line department, a women's organization, a state university; and LGUs.

The stories showed the struggles, difficulties and breakthroughs of GAD advocates in the field. They may not be phenomenal and could not be regarded as models. Yet, they share insights and lessons that would ignite the reader's inspiration and creativity.

Many of the stories show that the interests and needs being presented by women, mainly practical in nature, serve as the main determinant of the types of programs and projects implemented through the GAD budget. Some of them, however, tried to move beyond the practical level by introducing components that promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Women's participation in the promotion of their own well being is a showcase in itself.

Each case was made unique by the distinct setting and circumstances within which the implementation of the policy occurs. Yet, it was clear that the hindrances were almost the same - lack of information and clear guidelines, resistance from decision makers, absence of clear plans and purposes for expenditures, weak absorptive and technical capabilities of women, lack of knowledge and skills for participating in the regular planning and budgeting systems of government, and difficulty in dealing with political manipulations of public officials, among others. Any similar policy would probably experience the same implementation problems.

The facilitating factors were also strikingly similar. The cases showed that women themselves serve as the primary facilitating factor. When they are organized and active, their voices are being heard by decision makers. Women within the chambers of decision making also serve as powerful agents for championing the interests of women in policy debates. It should be noted likewise that a number of male decision makers helped significantly in facilitating women's access to the GAD budget.

The roles of top officials, particularly in making public pronouncements of support to the gender equality policy, is still one of the most important facilitating factors. Many of the cases showed this. One interesting case, however, demonstrated how they moved without top level support. Eventually, their indifferent officials were converted when they delivered accomplishments that boosted the image and public acceptance of the entire organization.

Continuing awareness raising is important, both in the public and domestic fronts. The women, the leaders, the men, the family members - all of them have to understand what the advocacy is for and how their lives would be affected by its outcomes. Self-help approaches to training and awareness raising works. This means that resources should be invested in building local capacities. Dependence to external consultants may soon become an anachronism.

Learnings and Insights

The insights offered by the experiences were so rich that it was not easy to synthesize all of them in this summary. However, we tried to capture at least 10 of the most helpful learnings that could be drawn from them.

1. **Purpose of the GAD Budget** - The GAD budget, as the experiences showed, is not just about "how much", more importantly, it is about "what happened." The benefits are more important than how much were actually spent. It is therefore essential to have a GAD plan (long term and annual) before securing the GAD budget.

Likewise, advocates should not forget that the GAD budget is an instrument to make the existing policies, programs, activities and services of government gender responsive. It should never be viewed as a "cookie jar" that may be disbursed without clear and planned purpose. Using GAD budget for separate or "special projects for women" should be done only in circumstances where there is a clear gap or need that could not be addressed by existing programs and projects. Along this line, care should be taken to ensure that the separate approach does not lead to further marginalization of women's concerns. Coming up with a "basic standard programs and services" for which the GAD budget would be spent in the medium term, is a step in the right direction.

2. **Content and form of the law or policy** - Policies and laws, such as the GAD budget, should be written (or re-written) in non-technical, understandable terms. It should be accompanied with clear guidelines that would enable women to map out their implementation strategy. A popular version of the law and policy, as well as its implementing rules and regulations, should be developed and disseminated. As much as possible, women should endeavor to draft the policy they need and submit the same to policy makers and legislators.

3. **Policy and legislative orientation** - Women should also be educated on the nuances of legislation and policy making. This should include orientation on the various forms and types of policy and their relative strength, particularly local policies. For example, while an executive order or a Sanggunian Resolution may instantly serve an interim purpose, it cannot take the place of an ordinance because the latter is more enduring and binding than the former. They should also be able to work effectively with the people who are in charge of legislation and policy making. A training on lobbying, assertiveness and advocacy for women leaders would be helpful.

4. **Mechanism for policy dissemination** - Gender advocates need to get hold of a hard copy of the policy because this is indispensable to effective lobbying. They need to get it at the right time, preferably before budgets are prepared and deliberated on. Relying on the existing dissemination mechanism of government may not always be the best option since there are officials who may not be supportive and may choose to withhold the information from their constituents. Along this line, government agencies that issue gender policies may forge tie-ups with women NGO networks to serve as alternative dissemination channels. Internets and the trimedia should also be increasingly used as a means of dissemination.

5. **Budget literacy** - A sound understanding of the principles and processes of budgeting, including its timing and procedures, are needed by women leaders in order that they could be more effective as advocates and champions. A module on this should be developed, piloted and disseminated to professionals and organizations who could conduct training at the field level. Likewise, posters or calendars containing information on the schedule of planning and budgeting may be produced and distributed to women NGOs.

6. **Accountability** - Heads of LGUs and agencies should render an annual gender and development report, preferably on March 8 (Women's Day) or in any similar occasion. This will help strengthen the public's awareness of how the GAD budget is being used. Periodic updates on the status of programs and projects on GAD should also be contained in regular reports, newsletters or in public statements of the agency or LGU heads. Women may think about developing a "report card" on GAD that they could use as a mechanism for assessing the performance of their agency or LGU. Recognition and fitting gestures of gratitude should be given to those who made significant contributions to the GAD agenda.

7. **Participatory mechanisms** - Mechanisms for expanding the support base on GAD should be built. The formulation of GAD plans should therefore involve as many sectors of the women population (such as girl children, poorest women, differently-abled, indigenous groups, etc.) and their concerns should be reflected in the identification of programs and projects to be considered for budget allocation. Other stakeholders such as NGOs, GOs, and academe should also be involved to share perspectives and coordinate their actions in support of the GAD plan.

8. **Representation** - In instances where representation of women in decision making bodies is weak, women should work toward: (a) forging alliances with potential supporters, (b) fielding and preparing their leaders for future assumption of a decision making post; and (c) putting persuasive pressures on decision makers. Remember: it is the right of women to be heard in the processes of making public decisions.

9. **Expanding the advocacy** - Helping other LGUs and agencies with their own gender agenda is a healthy and commendable approach to the expansion of the overall GAD campaign. This does not only multiply and strengthen the base of GAD advocacy. It also enables the one who is helping to think through and process the strategies that make her/his program work.

10. **Networking** - Knowing where and how to get support is important to the strengthening of gender programs and projects. You need to build your own data base about similar or related work of other agencies, LGUs, and organizations. It would be helpful to get a copy of their tools and build an information and resource corner about it. Conversely, active promotion of information about the work of your agency or LGU should be done on a continuing basis. Whenever possible, inexpensive "learning exchange missions" among agencies and LGUs should be explored.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that public policies, such as the gender equality and GAD budget policies, serve as potent vehicles for promoting healthy engagement between government and the civil society. The engagement allows women to freely navigate the fields of governance and politics, and eventually input their perspectives in its directions and outcomes. The benefits are manifold -- for government, the women and civil society. The experiences in this compilation show that the GAD policies are breaking new grounds - for women's empowerment, gender equality and good governance. It could be said, therefore, that gender responsiveness is key to good governance, an insight that justifies even more the continuity of GAD budget policy as instrument of social and institutional transformation.