Gendering the Social Sciences: a discussion panel cohosted by the Gender Institute and the Department of Geography & Environment

Gender and Poverty in the 21st Century

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Gender, Poverty, Budgets, Crises

Diane Elson, University of Essex
Presentation to seminar on
Gender and Poverty in 21st Century
LSE 11th March 2010
Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) and Women’s Poverty

- Chp 80 of *International Handbook of Gender and Poverty*
- Co-authored with Rhonda Sharp, University of South Australia
- GRB consists of the use of tools and adoption of procedures to ensure that government budgets support the achievement of gender equality
- Employed in a variety of ways by some governments around the world
- GRB can support reduction of women’s poverty
  - by focusing on how budgets impact on poor women in particular
  - by supporting women’s financial autonomy
- GRB has contributed in a number of countries by
  - enabling poor women in some countries to have more voice in budget decision-making
  - improving allocations of expenditure to services, infrastructure, income transfers and employment that benefit poor women
  - changing taxes and user fees in ways that benefit poor women
Economic crisis and government budgets:
phase 1, fiscal stimulus

- Widespread expansion of real public expenditure, comparing 2008/9 with 2007
- UNICEF reports this includes 85% of developing countries
- Big focus on roads and cars in high and middle income countries: public projects, tax breaks, renewing government car fleet
- Preserving male jobs given priority
- GRB approach not used
- Macho stimulus plan, claim feminist economists in USA
- Offer support to small and medium enterprises, argue feminist economists in India
Economic crisis and government budgets: phase 2, fiscal austerity

- Many economies in Asia and Latin America recovered quickly, especially middle income economies.
- European economies did not, and governments introduced fiscal austerity programmes.
- UNICEF reports many low-income countries also planning fiscal contraction.
- A few governments are using GRB to help manage deficit reduction:
  - Iceland, where the new government is committed to introducing GRB.
  - Andalucía, where the regional government has tried to protect expenditure important for gender equality.
Gender, Poverty, Fiscal Austerity in UK

• Analysed by UK Women's Budget Group, a network of about 200 academics, members of NGOs and trade unions, mainly women but also some men
• Has analysing gender dimensions of government budgets and expenditure reviews since 1989
• Sharing results with politicians, journalists, women’s organizations, poverty organizations
• Voluntary work, except for part-time co-ordinator
• Critique and dialogue with government
• Con/Lib coalition government not using GRB approach
• For more information see www.wbg.org.uk
Gender Analysis of Cutbacks in Expenditure on Public Services

- Key findings of analysis of November 2010 Public Expenditure Review, conducted in co-operation with Howard Reed, Landman Economics
- Examines the distributional effects of spending cuts by household type, according to their gender characteristics
- For methodology see: Tim Horton and Howard Reed Where the Money Goes: How we benefit from public services
Effects of spending cuts by income group: as % of net income, all services
Effects of spending cuts by family type:
as % of net income, all services
Women single pensioners hit hardest

IFS detailed household type

change in living standards (annual)

-14% -12% -10% -8% -6% -4% -2% 0%

couple pensioner male single pensioners female single pensioners

flat-rate other service-related transport housing social care education (HE/FE/skills) education (schools)
Households without a male wage hit hard

-20%  -18%  -16%  -14%  -12%  -10%  -8%  -6%  -4%  -2%  0%

- flat-rate
- other service-related
- transport
- housing
- social care
- education (HE/FE/skills)
- education (schools)
Expenditure cuts, gender and poverty

• As currently designed:
  – Likely to have worst impact on poor people, among whom women are disproportionately represented
  – Likely to undermine women’s financial autonomy
  – Likely to add to women’s care responsibilities

• Alternatives:
  – cut differently
  – cut less and later
  – tax financial sector and high income people more