

DOES THE COMMUNITY BUDGET ADDRESS WOMEN'S NEEDS?

Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Armenia: a qualitative study in Amasia unified community

Prepared by: Sona Mkrtchyan, Samvel Grigoryan, Nina Hayrapetyan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the Republic of Armenia, gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) has not been introduced on any level, either local or national. The research aimed to investigate women's needs and perceptions in terms of GRB on a local level and identify the level of gender-responsiveness of community budget and related strategic documents in the Amasia community of the Shirak region of Armenia.

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, Armenia adopted the law on “Ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men”. In 2019, the Strategy on gender policy 2019-2023 was approved by the Government. According to these legal acts, the state took the obligation to ensure gender equality in the fields of public life, legal protection of women and men against gender discrimination, support the development of civil society, as well as the establishment of democratic relations in society. Key components of the 2019-2023 Strategy were the implementation and promotion of gender-disaggregated data and gender-responsive budgeting. However, Armenia has not gone very far in terms of integrating gender in national statistical systems, let alone the fact that gender-responsive budgeting has not been introduced on any level, either local or national, so far. The latter results in the negligence of women or men-specific needs, and it slows down the progress toward gender equality in Armenia.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW and PURPOSE

The research aimed to explore women's perception and current status of GRB on a local level, and generate changes by creating scientific evidence for policy formulation and transferring essential knowledge and skills (on GRB) to young grassroots leaders. Additionally, it aimed to generate recommendations for local and national authorities to revise their approaches to designing community development documents in the future, and promote an improvement in gender equality for women by increasing their participation in creating local, regional, and national budgets and policies in Armenia.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are women's needs and perceptions in terms of GRB on a local level? Do the community budget and related strategic documents of the Amasia
- Do the community budget and related strategic documents of the Amasia community incorporate gender-sensitive approaches?

The overall research involved two key phases: desk research (content analysis of strategic documents) and field investigation (semi-structured interviews). Within the first phase, the research team analyzed secondary data: the community development 5-year strategy plan and two budget documents. The second phase involved data collection from local residents, utilizing 10 local young volunteers' capacity.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Analysis of strategic documents revealed that information on the gender composition of the population of the Amasia unified community is very general. Hence, data cannot be used for the development of evidence-based and targeted programs for each settlement in terms of GRB. Additionally, the five-year community development plan lacked any highlights or references to the national gender policies.

Interviews provided an inner perspective on GRB from the perspective of local women. Interestingly, adult women were more conservative, and they were not expecting promising changes in their community life. They stated that they are more reluctant in approaching the community council or the head of the community.

Young women were more informed and open to sharing their critical feedback on the delivery of public services and engagement of women in decision-making, in particular in designing community budgets. However, peer pressure in small communities prevents them from active participation in community life. The overall impression is that if they knew their needs would be addressed, they would be more open and willing to take action.

However, there were informants for whom addressing their needs was not essential. They were reluctant to give detailed answers as their common belief is that nothing is going to change. They put their hope on the government, as well as feel a low motivation to provide a more explicit view on the matter. Some of the respondents explained their issues with the political situation. In other words, they hear promises during the pre-election time, but in general, those political powers are interested in their own future and have nothing to offer in terms of community development. Moreover, they believe that nothing will change in the community regardless of their effort and motivation, as everything depends on political powers in Armenia.

On the other hand, there were cases when women did not have the opportunity or were blocked from raising their voices in public discussion about their needs in the community, and they believed it was related to their gender. Given the small size of their community, most of the interviewees were hesitant to answer sensitive questions. They were fearful of peer pressure and also did not want to spoil their relations with the community leaders. Most of the interviewees were quite skeptical about the investigation, as they rarely saw a follow-up intervention after similar surveys in their communities. In some instances, the interview itself was a trigger for the residents to start thinking about their issues, as they

never took gender-related responsiveness in community budgeting and decision-making seriously before.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We suggest the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure to:

- Introduce and execute a system for gender-disaggregated data collection and ensure gender-equitable distribution of resources by contributing to equal opportunities for all.
- Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework using specific gender monitoring tools (baseline and target information) with clear gender-responsive indicators.
- Introduce gender auditing of big projects to strengthen the GRB initiative.
- Train public servants in the development and usage of gender-disaggregated data in budget and project design.
- Collect the necessary gender-disaggregated data during the implementation of state programs to properly evaluate the needs of beneficiaries and plan the next budget process.

We suggest the Ministry of Finance to:

- Allocate specific funds to GRB in the national budget that will address GRB issues in Armenia.
- Change the standard budget guidelines (such as the annual budget call, circular and reporting forms) in a way that includes gender aspects so that the gender responsiveness of public finance will become part of the normal budget routine and, thus, become sustainable.
- Reduce gender inequalities that leave women in a less favorable situation. Targeted women-specific policies should be implemented in addition to general gender mainstreaming, until a level playing field has been established. These policies must be conducive to empowering women and overcoming gender stereotypes, and sufficient funds should be allocated to them.

We give these recommendations to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure to:

- Implement awareness programs that will primarily target men, thus breaking men's stereotypes about the role of women in the community, and encouraging women to be involved in decision-making. Develop a systematic plan and institutionalize GRB mainly in education, health, and agriculture, as the above-mentioned fields were the main areas demanding the most expenses at a local level.
- Support women's engagement in a budget
- development process by raising their awareness on the following topics: budget preparation, approval, execution, and evaluation.
- Raise the gender sensitivity of society with the help of state educational programs and promote gender-disaggregated data collection among state agencies.
- Increase gender sensitization and practical training for technical personnel of municipalities to create a positive change in terms of GRB.

We give these recommendations to the civil society in regard to capacity building and awareness-raising needs in order to:

- Implement projects aiming to build women's capacity, so they can participate in the decision-making process.
- Normalize the participation of women living in rural areas in community life through public campaigns, training, and leadership training for girls and women that are gender sensitive.

REFERENCES

Asian Development Bank (2019) "Armenia: Country Gender Assessment." Available at: <https://doi.org/10.22617/tcs190601-2>.

World Bank (2017) Armenia: Country Gender Assessment 2016, Open Knowledge Repository. World Bank, Washington, DC. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/26431?show=full&locale-attribute=es> (Accessed: March 6, 2023).

The views, conclusions and recommendations expressed in this policy brief belong solely to the authors and do not necessarily reflect or represent the opinions and beliefs of Raoul Wallenberg Institute.

Supported by:



