

Book Review:
GENDER BUDGET TRAIL:
THE PHILIPPINE EXPERIENCE

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Gender Budget Trail: The Philippine Experience was edited by Debbie Bundlender, Maribel Buenaobra, Steven Rood, and Marie Sol Sadorra. It was published by the Asia Foundation in 2001 in Manila with the support of the United States International Development Agency (USAID).

This collection of four research reports put together by the Asia Foundation, was produced after a year-long process of meetings, local key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and primary/secondary material review and analysis. The first study report (Caharian et al: 21-46) is an overview of gender budgeting by LGUs across the country while the rest document GAD mainstreaming pioneering efforts in three local government units (LGUs), namely, Angeles City, Bacolod City and Surrallah, South Cotabato.

Pioneering Gender-responsive Local Governance

The book is a must reading for LGU GAD Focal Points and advocates because it describes concrete GAD mainstreaming experiences of LGUs as initiated by local civil society organizations. The articles offer a detailed account of how these LGUs

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translated GAD national mandates into local ordinances or executive orders, budget allocations, and policies/programs/activities (PPAs). The case studies document the process of education, organizing, and lobbying by the women with the local council; conducting training in gender sensitivity and gender-responsive planning for various city department personnel and officials in pilot barangays, and budgeting.

GAD practitioners learn by experience that unless the specific amount of money is assigned and spent for particular GAD PPAs, GAD mainstreaming will remain a dream. Focusing on GAD budgeting is timely because it provides basics in the intricate work of budget policy formulation, enactment and disbursement. Particularly instructive for newly genderized LGUs are the review of Angeles' and Bacolod's respective 5% GAD budget allocation and dissection of the rest of the 95% of Bacolod's city budget in 1999 and 2000. Another important feat was Bacolod's experience in negotiating with the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to require the city's 61 barangays to allocate 5% of their respective annual and supplemental budgets for their approval by DILG, DBM and the City Council.

Learning from Insiders

Gender mainstreaming is not new but engaging local governments for GAD is. This book shines because two of the case study documentors are themselves local government officials. Angeles City Councilor Susan T. Pineda and Bacolod City Councilor Celia Matea R. Flor sponsored the resolutions in their respective city councils to implement the GAD policy. Doubly significant is that both are also the executive director of their

respective locally-based women's NGOs. The former heads the women's advocacy group *Ing Makababaying Aksyon* Foundation (IMA) while the latter leads the Development for Active Women Networking Foundation (DAWN). Holding two hats, so to speak, one NGO and another for government, is certainly a most refreshing experience to share. They exemplify the increasing windows and possibilities open to civil society in local governance. In Surallah, South Cotabato, underrepresented community women have been empowered to learn about their capacities and potentials when provided the opportunity only men had access to in the past.

Being new, it is to be expected that variances will emerge in the viewing of GAD mainstreaming concepts, in the interpretation of the GAD policy, and level of expectations of different stakeholders and in the approach and speed the processes are carried out. Take the entry points used. The Angeles City council was able to enact a city ordinance in 1998 that paved the way for, among others, the 5% budget allocation for GAD activities, the establishment of the city GAD Council in which 1/3 of the members consists of NGO representatives, and the establishment of Barangay GAD councils. In Bacolod, the city council could not agree on a GAD Ordinance but GAD proponents succeeded in lobbying for the passage of three Council resolutions in 1997, 1998, and 1999 setting aside 5% GAD budget for every city department, and the issuance of an executive budget memorandum in 2001.

Facilitating and Hindering Factors in Gender Mainstreaming

Armed with national mandates, relentless pressure from local women's coalitions, presence of GAD champions in the city

council, and the cooperation of the city mayor were key factors that paved the way for the passing of local GAD mandates for both Angeles and Bacolod cities in 1998.

As in most advocacies, organized groups play a major role in pushing local government reforms. And this was the highlight of the book. The fourth report traces the opening up to gender mainstreaming process and the openness to new ideas by Surallah's local officials to NGO interventions and the change to a more dynamic and progressive political leadership in 1998. Gender-responsive budgeting in this first class municipality, was introduced through a training in participatory local development planning conducted by development NGOs BARRIOS (Building Alternative Rural Resource Institutions and Organizing Services) and BATMAN (Barangay-Bayan Consortium Program). NGOs introduced the concepts and practice of participatory resource mobilization, monitoring and evaluation through the *barangayan* program. This included drawing the community's awareness, especially of women, of GAD policies and budget and gender issues. Surallah, is located within the special zone of peace and development (SZOPAD) where the population, composed of a mixture of Ilonggo settlers, Muslim Maguindanaoans, and indigenous tribes like the T'bolis, have experienced war between government troops and the MNLFF separatists in the late 1980's to the early 1990's. Prior to 1998, it was ruled by political warlords.

But reality bites. Political partisanship, lack of appreciation for GAD by key local officials, and a wide-array of competing budget demands and interests over scarce resources slowed down the implementation of the projected GAD programs and activities and paring down of intended budgets. Up to the present, Angeles and Bacolod have yet to come up with a GAD Plan. Yet, one of the biggest lesson is only when an LGU comes up

with a GAD plan and allocates money for specific gender concerns then use them for those intended purposes that Gender Mainstreaming could be said to have truly “arrived” or succeeded in that locality.

In both cases, their GAD budgets were not utilized for the GAD PPAs these were intended for, instead were diverted for regular program expenses resulting in “token compliance” of the law. To illustrate this, the GAD-related programs and projects identified by the Bacolod City budget office for 1999 and 2000, showed regular budget items being listed under the GAD funds, such as programs for student summer internship, aid to the Boy and Girl Scouts, price monitoring, traffic management and security, and veteran’s welfare.

Reflecting on women’s reflections

The book is a program monitoring evaluation for GAD mainstreaming on a largely ongoing task, gender being one of Asia Foundation’s main themes of interest. Thus, its significance lies in the surfacing of positive and negative program developments and recommendations for correcting as the work progresses. The case studies show there are limitless possibilities for redirection and improvement.

Most LGU GAD mandates were passed only in 1998. It takes time for LGUs to accept, “digest” or internalize the idea, and even slower to apply and implement. Two years after, as the first study reveals, there exists a wide gap between policy and output such that the over-all GAD budget only comprised 0.6% of government’s general appropriations in 2000. But stakeholders continue to forge cooperation, learn the skills and negotiate with other concerned players. The book findings do remind field practitioners what actions could work and what

will not, given the particular economic, political and social circumstances in a locality.

No doubt so much have been accomplished to boost mainstreaming capacities in such a short time. The Philippines is admired for its gender mainstreaming efforts in the Asia and Pacific region. Yet, the majority of Filipino women remain poor, marginalized, and their basic needs unmet. As government faces a huge budget deficit, the LGU budget shares through the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA), is being cut. This means the further shrinking of resources that should be channeled to meeting basic needs (food, jobs, home and health) that could have been accessed by more women and their families. We need to emphasize all the more the necessity of making over-all government programs gender-responsive.

The book presents only a slice of the picture but could inspire GAD mainstreaming champions in every LGU and slowly bring about good governance and social responsibility, increased productivity, livelihood opportunities, and an empowered people, and therefore, a better life for all men and women.

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