

Scotland: Using political change to advance gender concerns

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Table 12: Selected Indicators for Scotland

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Number</i>
Population	2000	5,115,000
% of population which is female	2000	51.4
% of population which is urban	1999	90.8
Gross domestic product per (GDP) capita (US\$)		n/a
Human development index (HDI)		n/a
Gender development index (GDI)		n/a
% of total budget funded by donors	2002	0%
% of national parliamentarians who are women	2000	37

Introduction

The Scottish experience of promoting gender-sensitive budgeting occurs against a background of significant institutional and policy changes. The key change has been the establishment of the devolved Scottish Parliament in May 1999. The Scottish Parliament is made up of 129 elected members (MSPs) and operates as a self-contained and full parliament in its own right. Thus it both passes legislation and scrutinises the work of the Scottish Executive, which was established in 1999 following the first parliamentary elections. It is responsible for most of the issues of day-to-day concern to the people of Scotland, including health, education, justice, rural affairs and transport, and manages an annual budget of around £20 billion. It is led by a First Minister who in turn appoints the other ministers.

⁴ All authors are members of the Engender Women's Budget Group (EWBG). Further information about Engender and its activities can be found on their website – <http://www.engender.org.uk/index.html>

This chapter outlines how the collective efforts of a group of active campaigners led to the promotion of the issue of gender-sensitive budgeting in Scottish political debate. In addition, it outlines the steps that have been taken to embark on a gender budget initiative within the newly devolved administration. The Scottish story does not provide concrete examples of gender-sensitive budgeting in practice in terms of shifts in policy priorities. It does, however, provide insights into how a changing political environment has been used to advance concerns relating to gender inequalities in general and how new partnerships have been forged in the process, both within government and externally. Further, there is now a publicly stated commitment to “assess the equality impact of spending plans and decisions as part of the mainstreaming agenda” (Scottish Executive, 2000:17).

The chapter tells the story of the Engender Women’s Budget Group (EWBG). The first section outlines the nature of political change in Scotland and describes how EWBG came about. The second section details key developments that have taken place since devolution, in relation to adopting a gender-sensitive approach to budgeting. The final section identifies planned future activities and assesses both the strengths and weaknesses of the Scottish experience to date.

Embracing Change: Devolution in Scotland and the Evolution of the EWBG

Scotland has a total population of just over 5 million. In terms of gender inequalities, women are poorer than men, live longer than men, disproportionately share the burden of caring work, both paid and unpaid, and are under-represented in positions of power. It follows that women in Scotland are in a disadvantaged socio-economic position when compared with their male counterparts.

Although the progress made in Scotland in respect of gender-sensitive budgeting can be clearly linked with the favourable political framework that predated devolution, the influence of external forces at both UK and international level should not be discounted. The beginning of the new millennium marked a period of significant political and economic change in Scotland, which served to present women activists in the country with an opportunity to work together and make a difference.

The new Scottish Parliament and Executive

The May 1997 UK general election represented a significant milestone for Scotland in that devolution – the transfer of power to a Scottish parliament and executive for a number of policy areas – now seemed likely to become a political reality. Following their election victory the New Labour government arranged for a referendum to be held on 11 September 1997 on its proposals for a Scottish parliament, and the Scottish electorate produced a clear majority in favour. The first Parliament took up its full legislative powers in July 1999. Today, it has responsibility for some functions, while non-devolved functions remain the responsibility of the UK Parliament at Westminster. Equal opportunities in employment is among the non-devolved functions.

The Scottish budget

The Scottish budget process involves three main stages: the setting of priorities and expenditure strategy; the presentation of detailed expenditure proposals in the publication of the draft budget; and the enactment of the budget bill.

The Scottish Parliament has the power to vary the standard rate of income tax, but the current administration has chosen not to use this power. The current emphasis is therefore on the public spending allocation process. The budget process of the newly devolved administration was designed in such a way as to promote open annual budgeting and accommodate the enhanced scrutiny role of the Parliament. As a result, public consultation has become a key feature of the way the Executive determines its spending priorities.

Women embrace change: The Equality Agenda and structures of the new institutions

The planned establishment of the Scottish Parliament in May 1999 brought with it increased opportunities to influence the policy-making process, because of the commitment to consultation and transparency. Women's groups across Scotland embraced this opportunity. The women's movement became more positive about the opportunities for women and gender equality that devolved government offered, and became closely involved in the pro-devolution campaigns in the period May 1997 to 1999. Many of the women involved were well placed to access senior politicians and decision makers because of their

positions in public bodies, universities, trade unions and other aspects of public life. Formal and informal networks were facilitated by the fact that Scotland is a relatively small country with a dense urban population.

The subsequent establishment of the Parliament and Executive represented a window of opportunity for the women's lobby. The absence of a stated political commitment to gender in election manifestos suggests that the promotion of gender balance and gender mainstreaming in Scotland can be directly attributed to the lobbying and participation of women's groups throughout the process towards devolution.

As noted above, equal opportunities in employment is a non-devolved function. However, the promotion of equal opportunities for all is one of the key stated principles guiding the work of the new Executive and Parliament. The work of the Consultative Steering Group (CSG) was key in reaching this situation. The CSG was appointed by the Secretary of State for Scotland in November 1997 to bring together a range of views and to develop proposals for the practical operation of the new Parliament. Its membership was representative of the major political parties in Scotland and of other civic groups and interests. The report of the CSG recommended a model of governance where the concepts of sharing power, accountability, access, participation and equal opportunities would be paramount. Annex H of the Report endorsed the evidence submitted by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), Scotland and clearly states that "the aim must be to embed into the process of policy formulation and the way in which the Parliament works, the principles and commitment to promote equal opportunities for all and to eliminate the effects of past discrimination" (Consultative Steering Group, 1998:146).

In addition to the favourable framework provided by endorsing a mainstreaming approach to policy, the actual operation of the new Parliament is key in understanding the progress made to date in promoting gender-sensitive budgeting in Scotland. Much of the Parliament's work is conducted through a committee system. A number of key committees are required by the standing orders, including the Finance Committee and the Equal Opportunities Committee. Further committees can be established to deal with a particular subject or area of public policy. Adopting a committee structure was intended to enhance accountability, access and participation. The committees play a central role in ensuring that

there is wide consultation on proposed legislation, in encouraging public involvement in the Parliament's activities, and in holding the Scottish Executive to account. The emphasis on consultation and scrutiny has provided interested parties with an important access point for the purpose of influencing policy debates.

The Equal Opportunities Committee of the Parliament and the Equality Unit of the Executive have provided foci to promote a mainstreaming approach to policy. The committee acts as a catalyst to ensure that equality plans and targets are outlined for all the committees, and that effective monitoring systems are put in place. The Equality Unit outlined its plan for achieving equality in its *Equality Strategy: Working together for Equality*, published in November 2000 following a period of widespread consultation. The strategy provides a new context for the search for equality in Scotland. A generic approach has been adopted in that equal opportunities is understood in its broadest sense with reference to race, disability and gender. In addition, issues around age discrimination, sexual orientation, religion and travelling people are specifically included in the definition of equal opportunities in the Scotland Act of 1998. The *Equality Strategy* commits the Scottish Executive to mainstreaming equality in policy making by setting out a number of key actions and target completion dates for initiatives. One such initiative is to develop mechanisms for assessing the equality impact of budgets and spending plans. The inclusion of this specific action plan can be directly linked to the campaigning efforts of the EWBG.

The evolution of a Scottish Women's Budget Group

As previously noted, the establishment of the devolved Parliament brought with it increased opportunities to engage with the political agenda. In recognition of this, the women's organisation Engender organised a seminar to consult with as many interested groups and individuals as possible on the setting up of a women's budget group.

Engender is an information, research and networking organisation for women in Scotland. It works with other groups locally and internationally to improve women's lives and increase their power and influence. The organisation campaigns to ensure that women and their concerns have greater visibility and equal representation at all levels of Scottish society. The organisation is 10 years old and has over 300 women members from across Scotland and from a diverse range of backgrounds.

The seminar took place in Edinburgh in November 1999. There was representation from a range of women's organisations, from the Equality Unit and from the office of the Parliament's Finance Committee convenor. The seminar was addressed by a member of the England-based UK Women's Budget Group (WBG). There was a useful exchange of information regarding how best to proceed in Scotland with promoting the issue of gender-sensitive budgeting within the new political framework.

The main issue raised at the seminar was that, although there was a growing body of literature relating to gender budget initiatives, the situation in Scotland was unique. Firstly, the political institutions were at a very early stage of development and there was uncertainty as to how procedures and operating structures would evolve over time. Secondly, as the new administration had opted not to use its tax varying powers, issues of revenue raising were irrelevant for the time being. Thus the annual budget statement would essentially be an expenditure statement. The focus on expenditure, although not unusual in international terms, means that the Scottish budget process and statement are different from those at a UK national level. The seminar participants recognised the importance of the exchange of information, practice and tools. However, it was apparent that there was great deal to be done in building capacity regarding the nature of our own new political environment.

Soon after this initial seminar, the Finance Department of the Executive produced a consultation document containing proposals for the first round of spending allocation for 2000/1 and 2001/2. The consultation exercise presented the nascent EWBG with an immediate focus. Although the group was not formally constituted, a number of interested individuals collectively prepared a response commenting on the gender impact of specific proposals and calling for the establishment of a framework incorporating gender impact analysis within the budget process. The purpose of the response was not to conduct a full gender audit of the spending proposals, given that the group did not have the resources to engage in such an exercise. Instead, we set out the rationale for gender-responsive budgeting practices and pointed out how such a strategy would conform with the overall objective of mainstreaming equality.

Since EWBG did not yet formally exist, we decided to submit the response from Engender, which was already well established as a

credible women's organisation. Engender explicitly offered its own services, as follows:

We propose that the Scottish Executive set in place a mechanism which would allow for a more detailed assessment of particular spending plans with reference to the impact such have on women. On our part we are prepared to convene a group of Scottish experts who can comment on the gendered nature of the Scottish spending proposals. We would welcome the opportunity to get involved in regular dialogue with the Scottish Executive on this issue, with a view to establishing a formal process of ensuring that future spending proposals take account of gender differences. (Engender, 1999)

The submission was received with interest and referred to by the Minister for Finance in his opening statement presenting the first budget bill to parliament:

...Our consultation has also given us new ideas and ways in which to improve the budget processes. For example, the group Engender – which, as its name implies, is concerned with gender issues – suggested that we needed to conduct a gender audit across our spending programmes, to assess their overall impact on women. I have told it that I intend to develop that idea for the future (Minister for Finance, 26 January 2000).

Representatives of Engender were subsequently invited to give evidence before different parliamentary committees and to meet with the Minister for Finance to discuss proposals for ensuring that gender impact analysis becomes an integral feature of the spending allocation process. The invitation to present evidence to the Local Government Committee was largely due to the influence of the then convenor of the Finance Committee. Two factors were at work here. Firstly, his parliamentary researcher had attended the Edinburgh seminar and is a key player in both accessing and informing senior politicians. Secondly, the then convenor was identified as one of our 'champions' in that he was very supportive of the case for gender-sensitive budgeting. Subsequently, during his time as convenor he encouraged the Finance Committee to account for gender in its scrutiny role. This approach filtered out to the other committees. An additional reason for our invitation to present to committees was the activity of a supportive female MSP who at the time was a member of both the Local Government and Equal Opportunities Committees.

During discussions in the committee meetings, continual reference was

made to the international experience and how Scotland could benefit from examining how other countries had approached this administratively difficult area. Representatives of Engender responded by noting that the Scottish situation was unique and caution should be exercised in trying to mimic another country's approach. Rather, the focus should be on developing an understanding of the Scottish policy process and tailoring any existing approaches.

In making this point, members of Engender drew on relevant Scottish-based research. In particular they drew on a report on equality proofing legislation which had been commissioned by the Scottish Executive and carried out by Governance of Scotland Forum (Mackay & Bilton, 2001). Gender proofing can be defined as a process of checking a policy proposal to ensure that potential gender discriminatory effects have been avoided and that gender equality is promoted. Engender argued that, although there is now a growing body of literature supporting the case for gender-sensitive budgeting and identifying a range of generic tools, relevant examples of gender proofing in action are limited.

Furthermore, with reference to existing international literature Engender pointed out that, whilst the emerging tendency in Scotland appeared to be a focus on a broad-based equality approach, more work has been done on gender impact assessment models than on generic equality issues. Drawing from international experience, it would therefore seem that adopting a gender-sensitive approach to the budget process would be a useful starting point. In making this argument, the point was stressed that the focus on generic equality issues is worthwhile and should be retained for the long run.

The Scottish Executive have taken as their focus equal opportunities in the broadest sense – including race, disability and gender. The concern among women's groups like Engender is that this broad focus downplays the importance of gender. The groups maintain that gender as a lens can help identify other inequalities relating to race, religion, disability and age. Addressing gender in the first instance would provide insights into the social construction of inequality and how discriminatory practices can sustain and even promote inequity. This would aid in the process of developing an understanding of the nature of a whole range of inequalities. Efforts on behalf of Engender to promote gender as a starting point have been sustained but tension around this issue is yet to be resolved.

A meeting with the Minister for Finance was arranged. The meeting was facilitated by the then Director of the EOC, reflecting the greater access to senior politicians in the new Scotland. This meeting proved invaluable in securing the support and commitment of the Minister to the concept of gender budgets. Further, one of the key outcomes of this meeting was a stated commitment to establish a Scottish Executive advisory group with a focus on promoting this agenda.

In addition to the support evidenced from within government, these early meetings with parliamentarians indicated positive cross-party political interest in ensuring that future policy debates incorporate a gender impact analysis, particularly with reference to the budget statement. There is a strong commitment in the founding principles of the Scottish Parliament to cross-party consensus rather than conflict politics. Further, the cross-party nature of the parliamentary committees provides a framework for the building of political alliances. Such a framework is enhanced by the structures of the new Parliament that allow for topic-specific cross-party groups. One such group, the Scottish Parliament's Cross Party Group on Women was established by the EOC Scotland to act as a networking group for women MSPs. The group has been particularly supportive of the work of Engender. Many of the women MSPs were personally known to women activists, and in particular members of EWBG, in that they themselves had a history in the women's movement in Scotland. The Cross-Party Group gave these newly elected politicians a chance to remain in contact with external groups and provided a valuable access point for groups like Engender.

Given this apparent political interest and stated political will, members of Engender, together with a number of additional interested women, began establishing networks of contacts, gathering relevant literature and developing expertise on gender impact analysis and the budget process. The range and concentration of this activity gave rise to the need to formalise the Scottish group and to develop a working strategy. Subsequently the Engender Women's Budget Group (EWBG) was formally constituted in May 2000. We decided to link the group explicitly with Engender in order create continuity with our early written evidence, and also to utilise the existing credibility of Engender.

EWBG is an autonomous sub-group of Engender with members from statutory organisations, trade unions, the voluntary sector and higher education. EWBG's work was not originally funded and members

contribute on a voluntary basis. Funding has, however, recently been secured from Oxfam to employ a part-time parliamentary liaison worker. This person was appointed in March 2002 for a period of 12 months.

EWBG held a half-day seminar in October 2000 for the purpose of developing a strategic approach in future activities. The meeting came up with the following strategy:

- ◆ To build on existing expertise within the group of the budgetary and mainstreaming process.
- ◆ To develop new political relationships within Scotland and to keep a watching brief on parliamentary bills.
- ◆ To support the establishment of the Scottish Executive Equality Proofing Budgets Advisory Group (EPBAG) and ensure EWBG's active participation in it.
- ◆ To develop mechanisms for consulting with different types of women's groups to ensure statements about policy impacts were rooted in the experience of women in the community.
- ◆ To focus on the areas of housing, childcare, enterprise and lifelong learning with a view to highlighting the relationship between policy, the budget statement and actual impact.
- ◆ To liaise with the England-based UK Women's Budget Group (WBG) on the gender impact of tax and benefit policies.

EWBG Engages with the New Institutions

Building a knowledge base: EWBG learns from others

In the first twelve months following the establishment of EWBG, its activities have been mainly reactive. Because most members contribute to the group in a voluntary capacity when their other commitments allow, activities have been limited to keeping up with current budget debates, responding to relevant consultation documents and invitations to meetings with officials and ministers, and giving evidence at committees. Further, the period has been used to build capacity within EWBG by holding internal workshops on gender impact analysis and how this methodology can be applied to national budgeting practices. With initial support from the EOC, Scotland, EWBG has regularly been able to send a representative to meetings of

the WBG. As an infant organisation, expertise within EWBG has still to grow whereas the England-based group is well established. Thus the main purpose of attending the London meetings was to build capacity within EWBG and to establish lines of communication between the two groups.

In practice, our presence at the London meetings has proved invaluable in terms of a two-way exchange of experience. One example of this was when a member of EWBG was invited to attend a meeting with officials at the UK's Treasury Department, along with members of the WBG. The meeting drew on the Scottish experience as an example of how effective the consultation process could be in promoting the issue of gender-sensitive budgeting and drawing attention to the gender-blind nature of many budget proposals.

Despite the reactive nature of most activities, a number of significant developments have occurred which can be attributed to the proactive efforts of members of EWBG, either representing the group or acting in their work-related capacities. These include:

- ◆ Establishing a network of contacts on an international level. Thus two academic members of the group are currently working with the Basque government in preparing a manual and series of training days on gender-sensitive budgets; two representatives of the group attended the OECD/UNIFEM conference in Brussels in October 2001 on gender-responsive budgeting; one member of EWBG is also a member of the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE) and, in attending various IAFFE conferences, has established contact with a number of international experts in the field of gender budgeting; and representatives of EWBG initiated and assisted in the organisation of a two-day seminar featuring international speakers hosted by the Executive's Equality Unit on gender-responsive budgeting practices.
- ◆ Arranging the programme for a seminar addressed by representatives of the Canadian government and the convener of the Scottish Parliament's Finance Committee, examining the long Canadian experience of gender impact analysis across the public policy process.
- ◆ An EWBG member securing funding from Glasgow Caledonian University to investigate methods of gender proofing budgets with a view to establishing a framework applicable in the Scottish context.

- ◆ Submitting a successful proposal to the Equality Unit to investigate the budgetary process in operation within the new Scottish administration.

The most significant development has been the securing of funding for a part-time worker. The availability of a paid worker will ease some of the burden on existing members and allow a more proactive approach in campaigning efforts. In particular, it will enable a more coordinated approach to responding to the Parliament, based on consensus about the issues involved. It will also provide a degree of continuity that will enable us to return to previous debates and statements of intent.

All of the above activities constitute progress towards building capacity within EWBG. In the period from May 2000 a great deal of learning and knowledge sharing has occurred via comparative research and talking to others. The way the group has operated to date is representative of a long tradition in the women's movement in Scotland of consulting widely, using case studies and generally learning and sharing.

Gaining access to government

One of the main successes of EWBG has been the group's access to senior politicians and government officials and the establishment of working relationships with key players in the Scottish policy-making community. Much of what we have achieved in this area is directly attributable to informal contacts and the increased accessibility brought about by the devolution settlement. The devolved administration has embraced a more open and inclusive approach to governance, and politicians are now closer both geographically and to the issues. EWBG has capitalised on this new political environment.

In some cases the political support that we have achieved has been the result of circumstances beyond our control. We have benefited, in particular, from personal contacts at senior level in the newly created Equality Unit. The head of the unit has facilitated access to senior officials in the Finance Department of the Executive and a working relationship with some of the officials has evolved. We thus continue to operate on two levels with reference to accessing government. Firstly, we engage with the Parliament through MSPs, ministers and the parliamentary committees. Secondly, we have forged working relationships with senior civil servants within the Equality Unit and in the Finance Department.

In forging these links, EWBG has identified 'champions'. These are politicians who expressed support at an early stage for our proposals. They have included the convenor of the Finance Committee and the Minister for Finance. The support of these two men has undeniably contributed to the speed with which progress has been made. Although support has been voiced by a number of women MSPs, the fact that EWBG was able to influence such senior men is key.

Despite the relatively young age of the devolved government, there has been a great deal of change at a political level. The unfortunate death of the First Minister in October 2000, and the resignation of his successor the following year, resulted in ministerial reshuffles and shifts in committee membership. EWBG has had to keep up with such changes and re-establish relationships with new players. The current situation has worked in our favour in that key positions are now filled by identified 'champions'. For example, the incumbent First Minister in his previous post as Minister for Finance was one of our early supporters. Further, the previous convenor of the Finance Committee has been promoted to a ministerial position and has transferred his support for gender-sensitive budgeting to issues relating to his ministerial portfolio. The new convenor of the Finance Committee is known to members of EWBG and has expressed his eagerness to continue with progress made by his predecessor.

Although access is crucial, EWBG is aware of the pitfalls of informal arrangements and has experienced both the negative and positive effects of political change. A more formal approach to our working relationships with the new institutions has been established through the Equality Proofing Budgets Advisory Group.

The Equality Proofing Budgets Advisory Group (EPBAG)

Best value is for all.... Equality proofing will be embedded in the detailed processes of departmental spending and the secondment of research help. The advisory group that we will announce soon will take that forward (Scottish Executive Minister for Finance, 20 September 2000)

The creation of an advisory group to further an equality proofing budgets agenda was raised by the Minister for Finance at one of the early meetings with EWBG. Subsequently the Equality Proofing Budgets Advisory Group (EPBAG) was set up by the Executive in November 2000 to support the development of a programme of work promoting

equality proofing of the Scottish budget. The group comprises representatives from the EOC, the Commission for Racial Equality, the Disability Rights Commission, the Equality Network, the Finance Department, the Equality Unit and EWBG.

EWBG's experience of involvement in this group has to date been generally positive. However, tensions have arisen around the equality vs. gender debate referred to above and much of the discussion at meetings has focused on this. Although sometimes frustrating, these discussions have proved useful in building capacity within the Executive on gender concerns in general and on methods of gender impact assessment.

Two main developments are directly attributable to the activities of EPBAG. Firstly, the Equality Unit hosted a two-day seminar aimed at raising awareness and exchanging information on engendering budgets. Secondly, EPBAG commissioned research to investigate the nature of the budgetary process in Scotland with a view to identifying next steps in developing a gender-sensitive approach in the allocation of public resources. This research was considered necessary because the budget process in Scotland is unique, given the new political environment. The published proceedings from the seminar and the publication of the research report will prove valuable resources for a range of individuals and organisations across Scotland.

Among the issues identified in the report (Fitzgerald & McKay, 2002) are the following:

- ◆ The newly devolved administration in Scotland provides an opportunity for innovative approaches to the equitable allocation of public resources.
- ◆ Strategies for enhancing the role of the budget in mainstreaming equalities include increased recognition of the Spending Review in the budget process; a commitment to outcome-based budgeting; the addition of advisory and scrutiny roles for the Finance Department and Committee; and the appointment of a specialist advisor to comment on equality impacts of policy.
- ◆ International examples of good practice in the integration of gender mainstreaming and the public policy process could inform the coordination of longer term inter-departmental initiatives in Scotland.

The establishment of EPBAG is representative of the new politics in

Scotland in that ad-hoc advisory groups which draw on specific expertise are part of the Executive's commitment to consultation and participation. EWBG welcomes the opportunity to engage with the executive via EPBAG. Furthermore our involvement in this group has strengthened our working relationship with the Equality Unit.

Scrutinising the annual expenditure report (AER)

I want to continue to improve it [the AER] both in terms of its content and presentation and in shifting the emphasis more towards what we achieve with expenditure rather than the amount we spend ... we can learn from the experience of other countries in the dealing with both equality in budgeting and budgeting for outcomes....We should see incremental improvement in next year's aer in terms of its dealing with equality matters... I am very keen that this becomes embedded in our policy process and that the policy flows through into Finance. (Minister for Finance and Local Government, letter to Finance Committee, August 2001).

The start of the 2003/4 budget round commenced with the publication of the annual expenditure report (AER) at the end of March 2002. EWBG set about preparing its response. We were generally disappointed with the lack of gender-related information contained within the AER documents, particularly given that we were aware of guidance, issued by the Finance Department, asking departments to demonstrate the progress made in taking forward the mainstreaming equality agenda.

However, what is pleasing about this round as opposed to our past experience is how our response has made an impact on the scrutiny role of the committees. We have been called to give evidence at the Equal Opportunities Committee, who have quoted from our oral evidence and included the full text of our submission as an appendix to their report to the Finance Committee. In addition we have been consulted by the newly appointed advisor to the Finance Committee for the purpose of clarifying issues we raised in our response. We subsequently prepared a series of written answers to his questions and remain in regular dialogue with him and thus with the Finance Committee.

EWBG's collective efforts in responding to the 2003/4 AER have been enhanced by the activities of the newly-appointed development worker. A series of meetings have been arranged with MSPs who are committee members to investigate how best to proceed within the

committee structures. An issue identified at the first meeting was the desire for guidance about questions to assist with the scrutiny process. Subsequent questions raised by MSPs were based on some loosely drafted questions prepared at their request by EWBG members.

An analysis of the scrutiny debate for the 2003/4 spending round indicates a considerable amount of debate on gender impact assessment, much of it arising as a direct result of EWBG's activities. The Finance Committee has subsequently stated they would like to see "meaningful progress with the equality strategy as it is one of the fundamental principles underpinning the Parliament" (Finance Committee, 2002).

It is unlikely that there will be any significant changes to the budget for 2003/4 as a result of that debate, but it does lay the ground for higher expectations in the future. A crucial feature of EWBG's activities will thus involve exploring ways in which committees can be better informed about the gender impact of particular spending allocations in advance of the next budget round.

The Future for EWBG: A Long-term Strategy

Understanding the budgetary process

Given the relative 'newness' of the Scottish administration, an essential first step in the process of working towards gender-responsive budgeting is to make the nature of the budget process explicit. Although the highly political nature of the budget process is understood, developing an understanding of key stages and players in the process is vital to the agenda of promoting transparency in the resource allocation process.

Research carried out for EPBAG has increased knowledge of the budget process in Scotland and how it relates to the UK budget statement among EWBG members and decision-makers within the Executive and Parliament. This promotes the dual objectives of ensuring transparency and accountability in the budget process. The intention is to ensure that this research is disseminated to as wide an audience as possible for the purpose of building capacity, both internally and on an external level.

Widening participation and building capacity

An early priority in future work plans is the development of mechanisms for consulting with different types of women's groups in order to ensure that statements about policy impacts become rooted in the experience of women in the community. Within EWBG there is already a great deal of knowledge, skill and expertise. It would be in keeping with the ethos of the group to share that knowledge in order to build a collective understanding of the issues rather than to look to outside 'experts' for their analysis. The group has identified the need to produce leaflets and other information as part of a wider strategy on awareness raising involving outreach work, briefing materials and media work.

Scrutinising the AER

The scrutinising role of the committees of the new parliament has been an important and developing area of engagement for EWBG. Although the capacity of committees to fulfil the role of scrutinising legislation and budgets with regard to gender impact was limited in the early stages, increased knowledge and experience have combined with greater engagement with EWBG to ensure that more robust scrutiny develops. EWBG has developed strong informal links with MSPs and has submitted oral and written evidence to several committees. In the current budget round, some committees have asked questions that have ensured that issues around equality mainstreaming in general, and gender-sensitive budgeting in particular, remain important concerns for the Parliament. The questions have elicited information from departments about their progress in developing gender-sensitive or gender-specific targets in their budget plans. These lay the ground for mapping future progress and will assist committees in seeking to hold the Executive to account for progress made.

Sustainable relationships

Much of EWBG's contact with politicians and civil servants has been informal. Although this has been helpful in breaking down barriers, there is a need to build more formal links through EPBAG and formal meetings with ministers and advisers over the next year. EWBG's limited resources have meant that engagement with groups of women in communities across Scotland has been restricted. We recognise that building support amongst women in Scotland is an important part of future policy development.

Conclusion

Identifying an appropriate gender budget initiative in Scotland at this point in time is not only desirable but also entirely in keeping with the current overarching principles of the newly devolved administration. The political context in Scotland provides the opportunity for embracing new and innovative approaches to governance. The change in the political climate is accompanied by a stated commitment to advance an agenda of anti-discriminatory principles in all walks of private and public life. The opportunity exists for effective collaboration between researchers, NGOs, parliamentarians and government officials to ensure a more fair and equitable allocation of public resources.

The experience in Scotland during the first few years of the newly devolved administration has demonstrated a strong desire to engage in participative and consultative governance. EWBG has capitalised on this new political environment and has seized the opportunity to engage with both the Scottish Executive and the Parliament in an attempt to ensure that gender concerns are embedded within the Scottish policy process. Results to date have been positive and it seems that gender concerns are now considered a priority with reference to budget choices. Although the immediate focus has been on the budget, significant developments are ongoing with regard to the general agenda of mainstreaming. EWBG feels that the Scottish story is worth telling in that it provides evidence of women's groups creating change in the way public policy-making is approached.

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