

## Monitoring of the process of drafting 2011 gender budget statements

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Since the establishment of the National Finance Act first mandated the introduction of gender budgeting, a range of research has been conducted designed to support the incorporation of gender-conscious budgeting into the fiscal operation system of South Korea. To compliment this research, this paper focuses on monitoring the process of drafting 2011 gender budget statements. Focus group interviews were carried out with public servants charged with crafting a gender budget statement. Among some 300 public employees who were engaged in the task, focus groups were formed in units of seven to ten persons after selecting one finance manager and one project manager from each related ministry. The interviews were conducted for approximately one month from mid-July to mid-August. A total of 36 officials participated in the five-session interviews. As indicated in Table 1, questions were structured around five major areas related to the implementation of the gender budgeting system. Detailed results of the interviews are discussed below.

**Table 1. Five major areas and specifics of the questions of the focus group interviews**

Areas	Specifics
Internal and external conditions underlying the implementation of the gender budgeting system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Status of tasks related to gender budgeting within the ministry</li> <li>- Level of interest among senior officials</li> <li>- Perception among rank-and-file public servants</li> </ul>
Appropriateness of the target-project selection process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appropriateness of the selection criteria</li> <li>- Appropriateness of the selection process</li> </ul>
Difficulties faced in writing the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Difficulties in writing the gender budget statement</li> </ul>
Evaluation of the overall operation of the gender budgeting system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Target-project selection process</li> <li>- Timeline for submission of the gender budget statement</li> <li>- Training and consultation</li> </ul>
Impact of involvement in the writing of the gender budget statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Positive impact on daily tasks</li> </ul>

## 1. Internal and external conditions behind the implementation of the gender budgeting system

### A. Status of tasks related to gender budgeting within the ministry

In the majority of ministries, tasks related to gender budgeting were considered non-essential work. According to the finance managers who participated in the interviews, gender budgeting is regarded as a minor concern compared to other tasks assumed by the office of the director for planning and finance. Accordingly, other tasks perceived as more important are given priority.

In fact, the level of awareness of the importance of gender budgeting was so low that none of the relevant ministries deployed personnel or distributed responsibilities based on the quantitative and qualitative details of the gender budgeting tasks. One ministry considered placing the unit already addressing women's issues in charge of the general management of gender budget statement-related efforts. However, in the end it was handed over to the office of its director for planning and finance. The sole accomplishment of this office was to simply collect budget proposals for each project, since no personnel were assigned to gender budgeting related work.

### B. Level of interest among senior officials

The perception within ministries of gender budgeting as a marginal is not unrelated to a lack of interest and understanding on the part of senior officials. The bulk of gender budgeting managers believed that senior officials are only vaguely aware of the existence of the concept and that the situation is similar across all ministries.

### C. Perception among rank-and-file public servants

It appears that public servants in general lack a clear understanding of gender budgeting; thus it is likely that they do not support the necessity of the system. Interviewees confessed that they and their coworkers consider gender budgeting to be an extraneous, bothersome task of no practical use, only to be completed for the sake of formality.

### D. Summary of the background behind the implementation of the gender budgeting system

Such unfavorable conditions can be attributed to three areas. First is the general culture of public organizations in South Korea, in which not only gender budgeting, but also gender equality issues in general are not a priority. Despite a decade of execution of gender mainstreaming policy, gender sensitivity appears to remain unimproved.

Second, the gender budgeting system is still in its early stages. Unless a policy is implemented across the board by mobilizing considerable resources, it might inevitably face a certain degree of initial resistance due to a lack of understanding of the need for the initiative as well as to

anxiety over its unpredictable impact.

Third, there may be operational issues that relevant ministries can be expected to assuage over time. As pointed out by interviewees, the system is currently focused on procedural aspects, such as the writing and submission of the gender budget statements. Feedback on and the effects of the statements remain unclear. While most of the public employees in charge of gender budgeting expressed uncertainty due to its unfamiliar nature, appropriate feedback is not provided. Furthermore, because it is isolated and dealt with separately from other budgeting tasks (despite being a budgeting system), gender budgeting tasks are being pushed to the side and bureaucratized.

## 2. Target-project selection

Since the selection of target projects directly affects the workload of public servants, interviewees demonstrated a great deal of interest in the issue and offered a numerous opinions. These opinions can largely be summarized into three concepts. First, the selection criteria are unclear. Second, their personal projects are unsuitable for gender budgeting. Third, the aggressive expansion of the scope of gender budgeting is unreasonable. This third argument may not be particularly objective given that it is based on the belief that their own projects are inappropriate selections for gender budgeting. However, their concern that irrational selection criteria combined with the hasty expansion of the number of target projects may create an insubstantial system that exists in name only is worthy of note. A well-grounded rationale for the selection of target projects should be offered to the officials in charge.

## 3. Gender budget statement form

The main items in the gender budget statement are the gender ratios of project operators and of beneficiaries and performance goals. The format for gender-ratio data is a diagram that allows only numerical figures and prevents commentary or explanation; performance goals are also required to be indicated by numbers.

The interviewees perceived the insubstantial nature of the statement to be one of the major obstacles they faced. The current gender budget statement, which simply denotes the numbers of women and men involved in projects, fails to offer solid grounds for requests for budget allotment and attracts little attention.

In addition, some interviewees pointed out that the distinctive aspects of a project cannot be reflected because only a single standardized format is allowed. This standard format fails to accommodate the uniqueness of those projects unable to specify gender (for example, projects tar-

getting organizations rather than individuals), those that have a diverse range of beneficiaries, and those for which it is difficult to quantify performance goals. It is assumed that there are additional officials who have faced similar issues but have “managed” to fill out the form “somehow” rather than raising objections.

While issues related to the target project selection process and the conditions under which the system has been implemented are operational matters, the format of the statement appears to simply be a technical issue subject to relatively facile resolution. Given the variable nature and types of different projects, guidelines and/or manuals on writing a gender budget statement deserve to be revised to reflect the needs of the officials in charge of target projects. This issue can also be improved over time as the system matures.

## 4. Writing the gender budget statement

### A. Gender statistics on project operators and beneficiaries

It is essential to construct statistics on the gender of project operators and beneficiaries when drawing up a gender budget statement. However, one of the major challenges identified by gender budgeting officials was a dearth of statistical data. While the 2011 gender budget statement requires the submission of gender statistics for project operators and their beneficiaries falling into the period between 2008 and 2010, the interviewees reported difficulty producing statistics for projects finalized in 2008 and 2009, since they were not required to compile performance data by gender upon completion. According to the interviewees, it is inevitable that the accuracy of data will be compromised when a new set of gender-based performance data must somehow be created long after the completion of projects. While they complained of the challenges in creating novel data, some serious efforts had been made to produce gender-based statistical data.

### B. Setting performance indicators and targets

Depending on the nature of the project involved, the beneficiaries may be concentrated within a single sex. The interviewees believed that increasing the proportion of women in those projects where the beneficiaries are already predominantly female is at odds with the spirit of gender equality. The majority of the officials opined that if the proportion of female beneficiaries surpasses 50 percent, efforts need to be taken to lower the number of women in order to deliver gender equality.

Considering projects in which the majority of the beneficiaries are male, however, they said that it is effectively impossible to raise the proportion of female beneficiaries. In the case of training and employment-support projects related to industries traditionally favored by men, such as construction, engineering, and aviation, they argue that it is unrealistic to expect an increase

in the number of women since women dislike such jobs (or the industries do not seek women). Nearly 99 percent of the beneficiaries of those projects are men.

Using a gender ratio as the sole performance indicator is based on a belief that gender equality is a type of zero-sum game. It places men and women in competition against one another over limited resources. There is a critical error in such a belief: gender equality is not about competition between men and women over limited public resources or a matter of who will receive more. Nor does it indicate that since men hold more resources, funds should be withdrawn from men and provided to women. Gender equality is intended to discover and amend any tacit practices that exclude women from resource allocation; in essence, it is a matter of social justice. Understanding equality simply as the proportionate allocation of public resources will result in the issue of justice being reduced to a zero-sum game and a “war between the sexes” over material interests. This problem will persist unless a proper understanding of gender equality is ensured.

### **C. Stressors related to performance goals**

Due to the ambiguous nature of the criteria used for defining performance indicators and target numbers, the interviewees reported difficulty in setting performance goals. They also confessed that they felt considerable stress stemming from the lack of available strategies to achieve the goals set out in the statement and from the statement’s potential impact on budgeting and policy evaluations.

In fact, the officials tasked with the gender budget statement were experiencing intense stress because they are unsure as to how the performance goals described in the statement would be used: they are concerned about possible repercussions from failing to achieve the goals (budget cuts, low policy evaluation scores, etc.) while techniques to accomplish the goals are unclear.

The performance goals indicated in the gender budget statement may end up being nominal targets if no financial and systemic assistance is provided to help correct gender inequality issues in the projects in question. Plausible measures to achieve the goals should first be devised if realistic goals are to be put in place.

## **5. Overall operation of the system**

### **A. Target-project selection process**

The interviewees expressed a rash of complaints regarding heavy-handedness in the approach for selecting target projects for gender budgeting: they were simply handed down without prior consultation with the relevant ministry or officials in charge. While many officials considered the project selection criteria to be unclear and the projects to be inappropriate for gender bud-

getting, they were not offered channels for voicing their concerns. Some officials raised a suspicion about a possible power game taking place in project selection, claiming that a ministry that delivered negative opinions about a selection through a partner organization could be excluded from the target projects list.

### **B. Timeline for submission of gender budget statements**

According to the interviewees, the deadline for gender budget statements overlapped with deadlines for other budget proposals. The guidelines on writing the gender budget statement were delivered in April together with general budgeting guidelines. Budget proposals from each ministry are required to be submitted to the Ministry of Strategy and Finance by June 30th. Furthermore, training and consultation programs on how to write a gender budget statement and the actual writing process fell between late May and June. The interviewees reported that the schedule for training and consultation on writing the gender budget statement was extremely tight amidst a mounting budgeting workload related to other projects; as the training program began in late May, they simply did not have sufficient time to digest the full process from receiving consultation to writing the statement in the middle of a busy budgeting period. The interviewees suggested that education and consultation on gender budgeting be rescheduled to an earlier time so as not to overlap with the deadlines for other budget proposals.

### **C. Training and consultation**

This issue was not discussed as actively as some others, since few interviewees had participated in the relevant programs. According to those who had participated, the programs were focused more on the technical aspects of writing the statement and less on the implications of the system.

As to training, some public servants complained of the relatively smaller proportion of information on the rationale and meaning of the introduction of the gender budgeting system. That is, they may have taken the task more seriously had they learned more about the significance of the system.

Regarding the consulting session, some of the participants reported not having received the desired advice on how to improve projects in substance, as the session was primarily focused on technical matter such as how to fill out a statement form and how to produce supporting materials. They had hoped to receive guidance on how to improve the quality of the content rather than on how to manipulate the gender ratio in accordance with the statement form.

In addition, a number of interviewees pointed to the limited roles played by the consultants: with the responsible officials having more detailed knowledge of their tasks and the relevant data, there was little for the consultants to contribute. The consultants are unable to produce statistical data and gender budgeting public employees hold greater awareness of the projects in question. On the other hand, some positive feedback was evident regarding the consulta-

tion: the consultants were reported to have attempted to improve the quality of projects rather than simply increasing the gender ratio and to have helped identify avenues for improvement. Considering that the complaints about target project selection are closely related to disagreement with the selection criteria, such protests may subside if a clearer connection can be drawn between selected projects and gender inequality. Whatever the case, however, a transparent and open system for discussion concerning project selection is desirable. It also appears reasonable for the training and consultation programs to be scheduled around the budgeting period. In addition, the training and consultation programs may need to be augmented with increased substance in order to heighten the understanding of the system, enhance the capability of gender budgeting officials, and address problems from the perspective of gender equality.

#### **D. Functions of the gender budget statement**

A number of the finance managers interviewed pointed out that the gender budget statement is simply an enumeration of the gender-relation status in the target projects and has little impact on actual budget allotment. Through “the toilet case”, which is widely used as an example to promote understanding of the gender budgeting system, the gender budget statement appears to be a system designed to integrate gender sensitivity into the execution of budgets. According to the interviewees, however, the current gender budget statement is irrelevant to budget execution. They report that in the absence of financial incentives, the system will remain in name only.

While most ministries seemed to view the gender budget statement purely as an obligation met for the sake of formality, in one case a request for a budgetary increase was approved through the intra-ministerial deliberation process. What is notable is that the gender budgeting official involved was well aware of the value of the system and provided persuasive grounds for the need for an increase in the budget based on the performance goals presented in the gender budget statement. However, the budget was then reduced as part of the deliberations of the Ministry of the Strategy and Finance, which reviews projects with increased budgets.

The function of the gender budget statement is among the most contentious issues in the operation of the gender budgeting system. As is well-understood by relevant officials, the current gender budget statement serves as a reference after the budgeting process has been completed. Although it is created and submitted alongside other budget proposals, it has no influence over the allocation of funds since it has not been integrated into the budgeting system. Gender budgeting should be able to operate within the system, rather than relying on the personal interest of individuals. When such a system is emplaced, it can stoke interest among the individuals involved.

## 6. Positive effects of the gender budget statement

Although the bulk of the opinions offered by interviewees addressed difficulties and problems faced throughout the process, some positive experiences were reported as well.

Several officials stated that it offered them a chance to discover and gain new perspectives on the gender gap in benefits from public resources, an issue of which they had rarely been aware. Some confessed that they became “enlightened” and that in the end it did not turn out to be just a bothersome task.

One subject reported that based on the experience of producing statistics on the gender ratios of beneficiaries, the interviewee is now planning to request project operators to submit gender-conscious performance data. Moreover, some suggested that general budget statements should also include gender-conscious statistics. Statistical data compiled over years, they assert, will facilitate identifying areas with issues of gender discrimination and therefore, with a need for a gender budget statement.

Another interviewee replied that consultation provided an opportunity to reflect upon ways to narrow the gap between the sexes although these reflections were not included in the statement.

It is a general tendency that the results of the implementation of the obligatory gender budget statements are evaluated based on the number and coverage of target projects, participating ministries, and the scale of budgets. While this may be appropriate at times, such a method is unable to reflect the evolving perceptions among the individuals involved. Changes in the level of awareness are so gradual that they will not be readily noticed or measurable; however, they should not be ignored. Tangible achievements matter. Excessive emphasis, however, can bureaucratize the system and induce resistance in a way that undermines the spirit of the initiative by restricting the actions of related officials. Therefore, it is important to note the value of the intangible but positively changing elements.

## 7. Conclusions

This paper has reviewed the challenges being faced as part of the implementation of the gender budgeting system, based on the experiences of public servants responsible for gender budget statements. While the issues raised by the interviewees were reviewed in the order of procedure from the background to target project selection, the statement format, and the writing process, the nature of the problems that seemingly call for improvements and/or discussions can largely be assigned to three levels. The first is ambiguities in the direction or character of the current gender budgeting system. This can be further divided into two aspects: the ambiguity in the functions of the gender budget statement and the ambiguity of the concept of gender equality itself targeted by the gender budgeting system.



The obscurity of the role of the gender budget statement was made clear by the questions raised by interviewees as to the effects of the performance goals. As described above, gender budgeting officials are feeling in the dark and anxious due to a lack of information regarding precisely how the performance goals denoted in the statement will be used in the deliberation and/or evaluation process. The inclusion of performance goals in official documents submitted to the National Assembly means that they may later be evaluated in any fashion. Since it is unforeseeable how they will be probed, however, the officials relate that it is difficult to determine goals. There were similar concerns expressed over the selection of target projects. Once projects were identified as targets for gender budgeting and the gender budget statement was submitted, there would be calls for improvement, whether from the Ministry of the Strategy and Finance, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, or the National Assembly. While the officials interviewed were feeling burdened by the actual effect of the creation of the gender budget statement and offering performance goals, they were rather critical of the situation in which the effectiveness of the statement is limited by the bureaucratic nature of its operation. While it amplifies their workload by overlapping with the deadlines of other general budget proposals, it has no practical impact on budget allocations. The interviewees stated that the gender budget statement tends to be considered a formality, as few officials within their ministry minus the person in charge are interested. Even in the budget deliberations of the corresponding ministry and the Ministry of Strategy and Finance, it goes ignored.

The obscure nature of the concept of gender equality becomes apparent during the process of setting performance goals. A number of officials who participated in the interview believed that the goal to be achieved through gender equality is to set the ratio of male and female beneficiaries at 50:50. For example, if the number of female beneficiaries of a project reaches 70 percent, the goal is to reduce that proportion. In fact, a number of gender budget statements submitted indicated a lowering of the number of female beneficiaries. In the discussions surrounding the appropriateness of the selection of target projects, the officials presented a particular view of the concept of gender equality, albeit a different one than the quantitative equality mentioned above. They believed that gender equality is about applying the same standards to both men and women: equal opportunity is gender equality. For example, they perceived it to be an achievement of gender equality if standards of academic performance, ability, or income level are applied in a balanced manner to both sexes. Such an understanding of gender equality among public officials would further marginalize women in society (in the former case) or discourage them from embracing the need for a relevant system (in the latter case).

The reason that gender equality is interpreted in such a way by public employees responsible for gender budget statements is because the direction and content of gender equality have failed to be presented in concrete terms by the government, or even by the ministry in charge of the system. Gender budgeting is intended by means of redistribution of public resources to resolve structural issues that perpetuate the marginalization of women. However, directions for reso-

lutions of structured gender in equality were never presented at any stage of the process of implementation of the system and officials were required to submit diagrams that demonstrate the ratio of male and female beneficiaries together with performance goals delineated in numerical terms. In the absence of appropriate awareness of gender inequality issues, it would be natural for the officials to interpret gender equality as quantitative equality or equality of opportunity.

The second problem, which is closely related to the first, is a lack of will on the part of the related offices for a more effective execution of the system. This seems obvious based on the lack of interest and understanding among the public servants involved in the process. Most of the officials hoped that their projects would not be selected as target projects for gender budgeting and believed they were inappropriate for its application. They tend to believe that there is no incentive involved, but rather purely disadvantages, and that the nature of their projects makes them irrelevant to gender budgeting. Public officials in most countries hold similar positions toward gender mainstreaming policy in general, including gender budgeting. Gender mainstreaming policy is intended to sensitize public servants to gender equality issues, especially in relation to their own work; however, it does not require them to become feminists. What is more important is a system-based approach that can lead them to integrate their interest in gender equality into their efforts.

One of the means of achieving this is through consultation and education. As identified by the interviewees, however, that education and consultation must be designed to promote a deeper understanding of the need for and the implications of the system, as well as offer practical assistance for its improvement beyond mere technical aspects.

In addition, tasks related to gender equality issues should be prioritized and supported through increased financial and human resources. The significance of the gender budget statements needs to become recognized within each ministry and the awareness and interest of senior officials should be heightened. The office responsible for gender budgeting will be required to make greater efforts in making available additional systems and elements beyond education and consultation that will assist officials in growing more actively engaged in gender budgeting.

Third, there is a technical and procedural aspect. The current gender budget statement should be adjusted to accommodate the diverse characteristics of different projects. The tight deadline for submission of the statement may need to be eased to take into account the time required to compile statistical data and the existing workload from other budgeting efforts. Issues stemming from a lack of gender-conscious statistics should be improved as the scope of target projects of gender budgeting expands.