

# Improving the Gender-Sensitivity of the Palestinian National Budget



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PALESTINE ECONOMIC POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE



Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute

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**2005**

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This study was prepared by Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute-MAS research team, particularly by the following researchers:

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## Foreword

The empowerment of women and their increased participation in economic, social and political activities represents a key developmental objective for most developing countries. There is no doubt that a strong positive correlation exists between the achievement of gender equality and the participation of women in various activities. Therefore, attention has been given to national budgets as a tool to improve gender equality, increase women's participation and optimise the overall development process. Owing to the increasing role played by national budgets in the redistribution of national income, budget analysis and the examination of distributional effects have become vital procedures. In this study, we are drawing on the experiences of more than 40 countries that have applied some kind of gender analysis to their budgets.

This study aims to evaluate the gender-sensitivity of the Palestinian National Budget and recommend ways to increase gender considerations in the budgetary process. We hope that this research will help raise the awareness of the Palestinian National Authority, local interest groups and international organisations regarding gender-sensitive budgeting concepts and best practices.

This study, carried out by MAS for the benefit of policy and decision makers in the Palestinian National Authority, represents an important contribution to the ongoing efforts of increasing the role of women in the Palestinian economy and society, tackling gender inequality as a major obstacle to sustainable development and economic growth. Equal treatment of men and women is increasingly seen as a priority issue by the Palestinian National Authority, civil society and the donor community, and this research study is one of many activities implemented to encourage gender-aware development policies.

The research was carried out in close cooperation with the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), one of the study's main public-sector beneficiaries. Minister Zahira Kamal provided guidance in designing the methodology and the research team included two MoWA researchers. This partnership increased the relevance and quality of the research and should facilitate the implementation of the proposed recommendations. MAS highly appreciates the role of the Ministry throughout the implementation of this project.

I would like to thank the research team, including Senior Researcher Dr. Nasr Abdelkarim and Research Assistants Riyadh Al-Halees and Mai Abu-Moghli from MAS, for their dedicated work in carrying out this study. My thanks also go to Research Assistants Razan Baida and Nidal Ka'kaban from MoWA, who made a valuable contribution to the project, and Nadia Hajal, who provided expert assistance on gender issues and indicators. I also want to emphasise the role of all those who took part in the workshop discussion and thereby helped enrich and improve the study.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada, and the Ford Foundation for their generous support of this valuable research.

Dr. Samir Abdullah  
Director General

## Executive Summary

This study investigates the concept of gender-sensitive government budgeting and the extent of its implementation by the Palestinian National Authority. It provides training and education material on gender-budgeting tools, principles and outcomes, and raises awareness of those stakeholders who seek to advance gender equality in Palestinian society. It ends with a set of recommendations that help mobilise efforts directed towards incorporating gender considerations into the budgetary process.

A national or local budget reflects a government's social and economic priorities more than any other instrument. It is a technical tool by which policies and programs are defined and translated into resource allocations in monetary terms. The formulation of a budget using traditional macro-economic practices may appear to be a gender-neutral process, but budgetary allocations can and do transmit and reproduce gender biases throughout a society. Examining them through a gender lens can help identify gaps in access to and distribution of public resources. Gender-sensitive budgets promote both equity and efficiency. Furthermore, budget analysis by independent bodies is critical in fostering a more open, democratic and participatory society, where government processes are transparent and leaders accountable to the people.

Gender-sensitive budget initiatives break down the government's budget in order to see how it impacts on and responds to the differing needs of women, men, girls and boys. Such initiatives do not call for formulating budgets separately for men and women or for allocating more resources to specific programs in support of women. Rather, the overreaching objective of bringing gender-analysis to budgets is to redefine priorities and reallocate resources that respond to the needs of the entire population but take explicit account of women's disadvantaged position. Cagatay et al. (2000) concluded that the ultimate goal of gender budget initiatives *'is to come up with reprioritisation of both expenditures and revenue-raising methods in order to promote social justice'*.

Governments worldwide made a commitment in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action to *'incorporate a gender perspective into the design, development, adoption and execution of all budgetary processes as appropriate in order to promote equitable, effective and appropriate resource allocation to support gender equality and development programs*



*that enhance women's empowerment.*' To date, more than 40 countries have conducted some kind of gender-budgeting initiative. Nevertheless, unequal gender relations that leave women in a subordinated position to men have continued to be the norm rather than the exception.

This demonstrates a lack of strong political will, and this contention is even more evident in the Arab World. The UNDP's Arab Human Development Report identified '*gender inequality*' as one of the key impediments to development in the region. It highlighted the fact that maternal mortality rate is double that of Latin America, women's literacy still stands at a regional average of 50 percent and their participation in political and economic life is the lowest among all the regions of the world. Although gender indicators vary from one country to another, gender inequality remains a big and urgent challenge in all Arab countries, with the Palestinian National Authority no exception. However, despite this persistent level of gender inequality, the only country in the Arab world that has taken substantial steps in integrating gender analysis of budgets into its policy processes, with the participation of NGOs, parliament, government and donor agencies, is Morocco.

Making the process of budgeting more gender-sensitive requires the development and application of various tools and their translation into forms easily accessible by civil society representatives. Although no blueprint exists for conducting gender analyses of budgets, many of the tools that are commonly recognised as pivotal in this process were outlined in the past few years by economists (see for example Budlender et al. 1998, and Elson 1999 and 2001). Examples of most common include gender-aware policy appraisal, gender-disaggregated beneficiary assessment, and public expenditure incidence analysis.

In-depth analysis of PNA budget data from a gender perspective for a number of selected years in the period 1995-2005 was carried out on two complementary sets of data: aggregate and gender-disaggregated. The first level of analysis was to assess the overall sensitivity of the PNA budget to gender considerations, with particular emphasis on basic social sectors (education, health, social welfare and labour), while the second level of analysis provided a closer look at the issue of gender mainstreaming in the government budgetary process, focusing on the case of the Emergency Employment Fund that was established in the post-Intifada era. These analyses revealed that gender did not appear to be a fundamental factor in the social and economic policies of the PNA as reflected in its annual budgets. Neither the aggregate budget data nor the gender-disaggregated

data provides evidence that the PNA has had a deliberate policy of factoring gender into the budgeting process. However, public expenditure incidence analysis shows some gender-sensitivity as evidenced in government employment as well as in the immediate beneficiaries of government programs and services.

The paper concludes with a number of proposals that could help raise the awareness of PNA-related agencies, local interest groups and international organisations regarding gender-sensitive budgeting concepts and best practices. It would be important to start by creating a platform of policy dialogue, and debate with interested parties such as parliamentary bodies, research organisations, NGOs, and government agencies. These discussions should produce gender-sensitive budgeting initiatives at the national level. The real challenge will be to move from the phase of gender analysis of the budget to gender budget formulation.

