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Submission to the Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to your Committee's Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting. My name is Jennifer Curtin and I am a Professor of Politics and Public Policy at the University of Auckland. I am also the inaugural Director the University of Auckland's Public Policy Institute. I have been researching issues related to gender and public policy in New Zealand and cross nationally since the 1990s.

In late 2018 I was awarded a New Zealand Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment Smart Ideas Research Grant for three years to co-design with input from government and community stakeholders, a gender responsive budgeting strategy for New Zealand. It is worth noting that as this is a research grant, the adoption of a gender responsive budgeting strategy by government is not a given. As such, the insights I provide here are based on my research to date on this project, as well as my prior research into the mainstreaming of gender analysis in the New Zealand public sector (through the dedicated Ministry for Women, previously known of the Ministry of Women's Affairs).

Gender analysis in New Zealand

There has been limited investment in gender analysis of policy across government in New Zealand (known as gender mainstreaming in Europe) over the past 10-15 years. This is unfortunate given embedding gender analysis capability and capacity is critical to good governance and developing new mechanisms for achieving gender equality outcomes such as gender responsive budgeting (Curtin, 2014).

There has been a form of generational "amnesia" of the foundational work undertaken by the former Ministry of Women's Affairs in the 1980s and 1990s in regards to gender analysis and stakeholder engagement. However, the new "Bringing Gender In" tool developed by the Ministry for Women represents an excellent first step at rebuilding capability across agencies, in recognising women as a diverse group, and in reminding agencies that gendered impacts may result in what appear to be "gender neutral" policy domains and programmes (<https://women.govt.nz/gender-tool>).

The Ministry for Women's tool will need to be supplemented with training across agencies, endorsed and supported by managers, and formal requirements for more than "tick box" attention is required if gender analysis is to become systematically applied by analysts and advisers in a way that is "business as usual".

Best practices internationally apply gender analysis at all stages of the policy making process, from the setting of (budget) priorities, proposal design and decisions through to implementation and evaluation. However, incorporating intersectional perspectives, without

appearing “additive” remains a challenge. This is particularly important for the New Zealand case given the Crown’s commitments as a partner with Māori under the Treaty of Waitangi.

As noted below, actors beyond government (including parliament and civil society) are critical to holding government to account for the gendered, indigenous and other potentially differential impacts of all policy proposals.

Gender analysis and the wellbeing budget

The development of the Treasury’s Living Standards Framework and the Labour-led Coalition Government’s Wellbeing Budget in New Zealand represents a window of opportunity to advance gender analysis in the policy work of government agencies.

Ideally, gender analysis would inform the setting of the Budget Priorities as well as feeding into the newly required current and future wellbeing analysis, and the associated guidelines (CBAX and others) and information sessions led by our finance ministry as part of this process.

The Living Standards Dashboard has significant potential as a tool to assist a gendered analysis of the wellbeing domains by agencies and civil society (The NZ Treasury, nd). However, at this stage it is only possible to disaggregate the data by either sex or age or ethnicity for example. Expanding the Dashboard to allow for multi-level disaggregation would be a necessary next step. Good indicators and detailed data are important and necessary elements for gender responsive budgeting.

Gender budgeting

There is no single, best practice model for gender budgeting internationally. The Canadian example is developing into a useful comparator for New Zealand, and the OECD has collated a range of cross national examples representative of diverse rules and guidelines (OECD, 2019).

Good practice overseas indicates that effective gender analysis within agencies, and with respect to the Budget allocations, is enhanced when results are connected to a National Strategy on Gender Equality and its associated goals.

To be most effective, a national or state level strategy should be tied to a framework of indicators or results, to enable the tracking of progress towards gender outcomes over the medium term. A results framework provides the requisite evidence for future government investment and has the potential to support a focus on both current and intergenerational gender equality and wellbeing.

Rather than creating numerous layers to the budget process, it appears logical in the case of New Zealand, to build a gender equality lens into the Wellbeing Budget and Living Standards Framework. This would prevent a proliferation of separate “budgeting initiatives”, would build on existing implementation tools, and deepen the wellbeing analysis already underway (Curtin and Morrissey, 2019).

The OECD also argues that effective gender responsive budgeting requires a strong and supporting “enabling environment”. This includes the production of gender disaggregated data, training and capacity building for staff beyond Ministries for Women or gender equality agencies, structured engagement with civil society organisations and, parliamentary / auditor general oversight which ensures transparency and holds government agencies to account (OECD, 2019).

In the New Zealand context, our Gender Budgeting Research team is in the process of designing training modules to support good gender analysis, which in our view is necessary

to support gender responsive budgeting. We have yet to design parliamentary or other institutional accountability frameworks, but one of our project's goals is to also build up the gender audit capabilities of civil society organisations beyond the CEDAW reporting cycle. Specifically we hope to emulate the work already undertaken by the National Foundation of Australian Women after each federal budget, and the similar approach taken by the UK Women's Budget Group. A network of gender analysts in civil society and the academy, auditing a government's annual budget, is necessary to hold government to account when political will on gender responsive budgeting is not legalised or if public service practices are not institutionalised.

In conclusion, international evidence on gender responsive budgeting demonstrates that those countries with advanced systems have at least three of the following four components: a overarching strategic framework committed to gender equality with clear targets; tools for implementation that inform all stages of the policy making process (including engaging with external stakeholders and communities); an enabling public service environment with institutionalised accountability mechanisms; and, strong parliamentary and civic engagement with the budget process generally, and specifically with regard to gender equality commitments. In the case of New Zealand, we are still at an early stage of building such a system.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me.



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