

## Gender inequality in Russia: the perspective of participatory gender budgeting

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*"[Russian woman] can stop a runaway horse and will go into a burning house."*  
(from: N.Nekrasov poem, Death of a peasant 1862–1863)

**Abstract:** *Gender-based discrimination is found in all economies in the world. Women's unpaid work accounts for about half of the world GDP, yet women remain under-valued and under-represented in national policies worldwide. The question of gender budgeting and citizens' participation in budgeting and governance processes has gained attention in recent years, but Russia is far from implementing these. Instead, blindness to gender issues dominates in national strategies and budgets. This paper explores these issues and looks in-depth at them in the decentralisation process in Bashkortostan, a central Russian republic. Civil society institutions whose role is to strengthen the links between government, civil society and the community in Bashkortostan, such as Public Chambers and Municipalities, lack the capacity to introduce participatory gender budgeting. As a result, no systematic participatory planning, let alone planning that is gender-sensitive, has taken place there.* © 2014 Reproductive Health Matters

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Gender-based discrimination is found in all countries and all economies in the world. No country has managed to eliminate the gender gap, and in every country, women find it more difficult than men to participate equally in economic and political life. Russia has ratified all the international legally binding and non-binding documents regarding gender equality and human rights, including the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Millennium Development Goals. In spite of these commitments, however, the Russian Government has carried out no systematic work on equal access of women to a place in political institutions. As a result, gender gaps persist in all spheres of people's lives and are seen in many areas of socio-political life, from women's lack of political representation to the experience of unprecedentedly high rates of domestic violence.

At the same time, gender discrimination leads to significant losses in potential economic output. Were the gender gaps in the labour market to be reduced and equal access to resources in agricul-

ture production achieved, food production could be raised by 30%,<sup>1,2</sup> and the income of women could be increased, contributing to national income.

Globally, women's unpaid work accounts for about 50% of the world's GDP.<sup>3</sup> Yet women remain under-valued and under-represented in national policies and political participation. In Russia, researchers calculate the loss to the annual budget due to gender segregation to be roughly 40–50%.<sup>4</sup>

There is growing understanding that international treaties and constitutional provisions are insufficient to achieve gender equality. As one way to move forward in this regard, gender-responsive budgeting and participatory approaches may contribute to reducing gender inequality. First applied in the 1980s in Australia, this is increasingly being adopted in planning in many parts of the world. Gender-responsive budgeting does not mean having a separate budget for women, as it is very often wrongly understood; it is an approach where a gender perspective is incorporated into all levels of the budgetary process.<sup>5</sup>

A participatory approach is acknowledged to be a cost-effective tool to apply in gender budgeting,

so that the community's needs, including both women's and men's needs, are identified and acknowledged and taken account of. The value of citizen participation in local governance has gained increased attention in recent decentralization processes for delivering on government responsibilities at the local level. The two concepts differ in that gender-responsive budgeting specifically seeks to mainstream a gender perspective into planning and budget-making, while participatory approaches focus on bringing in the community's voices – while not necessarily emphasising equitable participation of men and women. The potential of using both is to increase efficiency, transparency and accountability in local governance. But the lack of government commitment, along with lack of knowledge and capacity, creates complex challenges. Nevertheless, the decentralization process, which is actually in progress in Russia, as well as the emergence of civil society institutions such as Public Chamber and Municipalities, has created incentives for introducing gender-responsive budgeting in local planning.

### *Gender inequality in Russia*

In the post-Soviet countries, women's status has continued to decline. Gender issues in most national and state documents tend to be stated in highly general terms, and there are no gender-specific lines in the budgets. In 2012, only three of 19 ministers and only 11 percent of deputies were women<sup>6</sup>. In the private sector, women comprised only 3% of personnel at the decision-making level, and only 8% of executives on corporate boards.<sup>7</sup> In 2013, Russia held the 96th place below Turkmenistan (83), Gabon (87) and Somalia (95) in the world classification of the share of women in national parliaments.<sup>8</sup> Income disparity still remains wide. In 2011, the same as in 2006, a woman earned 30–33% less salary than a man doing an equivalent job.<sup>9</sup>

According to the World Economic Forum report on global gender gaps, which examines the gap between men and women in four key categories – economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment – Russia ranked 59th among 135 countries, below Kazakhstan (31), Malawi (36), Mongolia (44), and the Kyrgyz Republic (54). Russia had slipped down to this position due to declines in women's economic participation (39) and political empowerment (90).<sup>10</sup>

So, why are the gender gaps still so wide? One major reason is that the stereotype that women's place is in the home and “where the man is the main breadwinner, while the woman combines the tasks of earning money for the family with household duties and raising children”<sup>11</sup> has got a new boost in post-Soviet times and is strongly supported by the state leadership.<sup>12,\*</sup> As a UNDP report says, there is “a shift away from the aim, declared in the 1990s... of establishing a society based on gender equality”.<sup>13</sup> This backward shift is accompanied by a gender perspective in which:

*“...all the problems of women as a social group can be summarized as problems of women with young children.”<sup>13</sup>*

The feminist movement remains weak and unpopular in Russia, which partially explains the widening of gender gaps. The political party “Women of Russia” received 8% of the vote in the 1993 State Duma elections, but by the end of that decade had lost its support, and since then has never regained its seats. Low representation of women is conditioned by a double glass ceiling, as one expert argues: “One is external but the other is low self-esteem...only 40% of Russian women in management positions want to be CEOs.”<sup>14</sup> While the vast majority of Russian women work outside the home, their situation in the workplace has worsened since market reforms. It now takes a lot more for a woman to get into a male-dominated business area. The owners are unwilling to hire women, let alone to promote them to a high position. Women with small children, single mothers, single women with ageing parents, and middle-aged professionals are especially vulnerable to being displaced from their jobs.

In a society without any coherent mechanism for protecting family members who need protection, domestic violence against women, children, and other weaker family members remains at an incredibly high level in Russia. It is estimated that 14,000–15,000 women are killed annually, while about 26,000 children are victims of parental abuse and about 2,000 children commit suicide.<sup>15–17</sup> The situation is further complicated by the fact that law enforcement officers and people themselves perceive domestic violence as a private conflict between spouses but not as a crime against the person.

\*e.g. Mikhael Gorbachev, former USSR President, repeatedly expressed this opinion in high level political forums.<sup>12</sup>

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