



Gender-responsive budgeting to realize women's and girls' right to adequate food

"Legislative reform is a pre-requisite, but not the only condition for gender responsive governance, which involves taking deliberate measures to transform institutions through Gender Governance Systems including Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB)."

African Union Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2018–2028.



Visual design by Neil Moget. AI-filled food map.
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BACKGROUND

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) seeks to ensure that public resources are allocated in ways that contribute to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment by assessing the different needs, circumstances and challenges of women and men and addressing gender gaps (UN WOMEN, 2023). It is a government policy tool that applies a gender perspective at all stages of the budget process, from planning and drafting to implementation and evaluation. As such, it requires assessing government budgets to determine how they respond to women and men's needs, and adjusting and shaping budget policies to ensure that women and men benefit from government resources equally (UN WOMEN, 2022).

In the context of the right to adequate food, GRB can help ensure, for instance, that public

funds are set aside to improve women's access to agricultural inputs, training, finance and technology, or are used to finance nutrition programmes that address the specific needs of women and girls, such as maternal nutrition initiatives or school food programmes.

The transformation of agrifood systems towards more sustainability, resilience, equitability and inclusivity requires gender mainstreaming and specific measures towards women's de facto equality as well as gender-responsive planning, and budgeting.

This legal brief explores the relationship between GRB and the right to adequate food and provides actionable recommendations for parliamentarians to strengthen women's and girls' right to adequate food through GRB.

The right to adequate food entails the obligation of States Parties to relevant treaties to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the right for everyone, including women and girls. Legal and social norms often do not recognize women's contributions, and are historically skewed towards men. Because women play key roles in ensuring individual, household and larger-scale food security and nutrition, it is of particular importance to strengthen their rights in all fields related to food, from production to consumption. Implementation of the obligations related to the right to adequate food demands financing and investment and should particularly consider the different gender roles and rights of men and women to achieve maximum effect.

THE NEED FOR FINANCING WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHT TO ADEQUATE FOOD IN AFRICA

Africa is facing significant challenges with hunger, which affects 20.4 percent of the population (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2024). In Africa, women and girls can face great barriers in accessing adequate food due to gender-based inequalities and their more limited enjoyment of social, economic, civil and political rights. In many countries, women and girls continue to face higher risks of malnutrition and preventable childhood diseases, with recent data showing that the gap in food insecurity between women and men in Africa widened to 4.3 percent in 2021. In addition, women are more likely than men to suffer from malnutrition, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, where they face barriers to accessing adequate food and resources (FAO, 2023).

Increased and better public and private financing is necessary to achieve progress in the realization of the right

to adequate food of women and girls (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2024).

Women's and girls' right to adequate food may be defined as their right to have regular, permanent and unrestricted access – either directly or by means of financial purchases – to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which they belong, and which ensure a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free of fear, and with special regard for the nutritional needs of pubescent girls, and pregnant and breastfeeding women (adapted from OHCHR, 2020 and Article 12.2 of the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) [CEDAW]).

OBLIGATIONS OF AFRICAN COUNTRIES

African countries have undertaken various obligations on women's and girls' right to adequate food, and to allocate adequate resources to realize them.

Regional and continental provisions on the allocation of resources in a gender-responsive way

The [Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa \(Maputo Protocol\)](#) requires States Parties to adopt budgetary resources for the full and effective implementation of the rights recognized in the Protocol (Article 15, 26(2)).

The [Southern African Development Community \(SADC\) Protocol on Gender and Development](#) explicitly requires the use of GRB to ensure that States Parties allocate sufficient resources to achieve gender equality (Article 15(2)). States Parties must ensure gender sensitive and responsive budgets and planning, including designating the necessary resources towards initiatives aimed at empowering women and girls (Article 33(1)).

The [Supplementary Act Relating to Equality of Rights Between Women and Men for Sustainable Development in the ECOWAS Region](#) requires Member States to ensure that gender equality objectives are taken into account in all planning, programming and budgeting processes at all levels (Article 17(2)).

The [African Union Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2018–2028](#) calls on governments to ensure that the responsibility for the advancement of women is vested in the highest possible level of government and to ensure that there are sufficient resources in terms of budget and professional capacity.

The [African Union Gender Policy](#) requires AU Organs to implement the AU Gender Policy and Action Plan by allocating a minimum of 10 percent, of their budget to Women empowerment and gender equality programme goals, especially measures to enhance women's participation and empowerment in programmes (Part IV, p. 22).

African countries also adhere to the international legal frameworks that commit them to realizing the right to adequate food and to allocate the necessary resources.

Global provisions on the right to adequate food and adequate resource allocation

The [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#) recognizes the equal rights of men and women, the right to adequate food, and the fundamental right to be free from hunger, and requires State Parties to allocate the maximum of available resources to the progressive realization of the rights recognized.

The [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#) requires States Parties to ensure adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation and to take Temporary Special Measures to achieve de facto equality.

The [Voluntary Guidelines on Gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in the context of food security and nutrition \(VGGEWGE\)](#) encourage governments to set up GRB to ensure the realization of these measures (para. 32, 77, 111).

LINKAGES BETWEEN TEMPORARY SPECIAL MEASURES AND GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING

Temporary special measures (TSMs) mandated by Article 4 of the CEDAW are a legal tool to accelerate the achievement of substantive equality, or de facto equality. In areas where discriminatory practices or behaviours affect women's opportunity to enjoy and exercise their rights equally with men, States should take all necessary measures (including legal, policy, administrative, financial actions) that promote the rights and opportunities of women. Such measures should be implemented in all areas, including in the civil, cultural, political, economic, social, or any other field, where discriminatory practices or behaviours exist (CEDAW Committee, 2004).

In agrifood systems, TSMs can provide preferential treatment to women to address gender inequalities and contribute to women's and girls' food and nutrition security (Kenney and Vidar, 2023). Examples of such TSMs include measures to ensure equitable participation of women in decision-making institutions, strengthen

their access to land and natural resources, their access to finance to boost female agricultural entrepreneurship, or their access to training opportunities to enhance their skills in the agricultural sector. This will also strengthen implementation of CEDAW Article 14 on rural women.

To be effective and sustainable, these legal measures must be adequately budgeted for and GRB provides the financial and institutional foundations for the successful implementation of TSMs. By linking TSMs with GRB, governments can ensure that gender-responsive and gender-transformative legal measures adopted to accelerate the realization of gender equality goals are supported by adequate financial commitments that will ensure their effective implementation. In addition, linking the adoption of TSMs with GRB can ensure that they are monitored, evaluated and adjusted as necessary, as recommended by the CEDAW Committee in their General Recommendation No. 25, 2004.

PARLIAMENTARY ACTION IN AFRICA

African parliaments and parliamentarians are increasingly active in promoting the right to adequate food, gender equality and the allocation of resources for the realization of rights. They have established alliances for food security and nutrition at the national, subregional and regional levels to garner political support and promote legislative and other action.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Network of Parliamentarians on Gender Equality and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security, established in December 2018, aims to promote gender-equitable

agricultural investment to advance food security and poverty reduction in the ECOWAS region. It facilitates the exchange of best practices, fosters collaboration across national and regional levels, and promotes gender-sensitive approaches to agriculture and food systems policy, making it an ideal forum for discussions around GRB and its implementation.

Furthermore, parliamentarians from Africa and from around the world participated in the Second Global Parliamentary Summit Against Hunger and Malnutrition in 2023 and highlighted the crucial role that parliamentarians

play in promoting and protecting the human rights of women and girls, particularly their right to adequate food. The parliamentarians at the summit adopted the [Global Parliamentary Pact against Hunger and Malnutrition](#) and decided to hold its third summit in Africa.

In November 2022, the Pan African Parliament (PAP) introduced Africa's first-ever Model Law on Food and Nutrition Security, which has a strong focus on the rights of women and girls. This initiative emerged from a collaboration between the Pan African Parliamentarians' Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition (PAPA-FSN) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). In addition, the consultations with civil society and development partners in the development of a new PAP

Model Law on Gender Equality stress the need to include measures on budgeting for gender activities.

The Global Parliamentary Pact against Hunger and Malnutrition (2023)

This Pact commits parliamentarians to work for a transformation towards agrifood systems that are sustainable, inclusive, equitable, resilient and conducive to the realization of the right to adequate food of all people, including through gender equality actions (Section 1(f)).

It also commits parliamentarians to ensure a sufficient and adequate allocation of resources for the realization of these actions (Section 2(c)).

NATIONAL APPROACHES TO GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING

The GRB approach is being implemented in various forms across a number of countries worldwide, including all members of the G20 (IMF, 2021). Researchers in Africa have noted some progress in African countries, which have established framework for GRB, while implementation is uneven (Ojo (ed), 2024).

National GRB approaches, whether voluntary or compulsory, should be complemented with specific

requirements for GRB to be conducted at the subnational level to allow for more localized and context-specific gender budgeting practices. These can address specific local needs and priorities, encourage local community involvement and ownership, and allow regions to innovate and adapt based on local conditions (UN WOMEN, 2022).

Examples of national approaches to gender-responsive budgeting in Africa

Zambia – Gender Equity and Equality Act, 2015 (No. 22 of 2015)

The Act establishes specific obligations on the part of the government and other stakeholders to ensure that gender equality objectives are integral to national planning and budgeting processes. It requires the government to mainstream gender in all budgets (Section 4) and to ensure gender sensitive and responsive budgeting at the micro and macro levels, including through tracking, monitoring and evaluation (Section 5(2)(e)).

In addition, the Act requires all public bodies and private bodies to promote gender equity and equality by mainstreaming gender in all budgets to empower and benefit both sexes (Section 19(1)(b)).

Morocco

Morocco institutionalized GRB through various laws, including the Organic Law No. 130-13 related to the Finance Law, adopted in 2015, which mandates the inclusion of gender analysis in budget planning (Article 48(8)).

South Africa – The Framework on Gender Responsive Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring, Evaluation and Auditing Framework (GRPBMEA) of 2019

The implementation of GRB involves several key institutions:

The National Treasury: Plays a central role in integrating gender considerations into the national budgetary process, working to ensure that gender equality is mainstreamed across all sectors of public spending.

The Department of Women, Youth, and Persons with Disabilities (DWYPD): Monitors the government's performance on gender and ensures that policies and laws are aligned with the country's gender equality commitments. It also works with other government departments to ensure gender sensitivity in budget allocations.

Parliament and Provincial Legislatures: Oversee the budget process, ensuring that gender-responsive measures are included and effectively implemented at both national and provincial levels.

Examples of national approaches to gender-responsive budgeting in Africa (cont.)

Ethiopia

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development issued the 2nd version (2012) of the National Gender Responsive Budgeting Guidelines to provide budgetary actors such as planners, budget officers and gender experts with instruments for gender mainstreaming in the budget process.

In 2016, Ethiopia introduced a new sub-article (3) to Article 20 of the Financial Administration Proclamation No. 970/2016 to include gender considerations during public budget preparation.

Liberia

Liberia's [Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting Policy – Mainstreaming Gender Into Public Financial Management \(2019-2023\)](#) aimed to mainstream gender into public financial management.

South Africa (cont.)

In addition, the **Department of Justice and Constitutional Development** adopted the [Gender Responsive Budgeting Guidelines](#) to address gender gaps identified during a **Gender Responsive Budget Analysis**. These guidelines assist the department in integrating gender considerations into all aspects of its budget processes and programme planning, ensuring comprehensive implementation at every level.

Uganda

Uganda's [Public Finance Management Act of 2015](#) ensures that all government budgets are gender responsive (Sections 9 and 13(11)(e)(i)). As a result of this legal requirement, the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development completed and processed certificates of customary ownership and certificates of title that were delivered to women.

ENGAGEMENT OF PARLIAMENTARIANS WITH GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING AND THE REALIZATION OF THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE FOOD

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) is an important tool for ensuring that policies and legislation meet their intended gender equality goals by tracking allocations of government funds for gender activities. Parliamentarians are key actors in ensuring that budget allocations respect, protect and fulfil the right of women and girls to adequate food as their responsibilities include the development of legislation and the allocation of resources.

These are critical functions for addressing gender inequalities in agrifood systems and for realizing the right to adequate food.

1. Ensuring alignment with international commitments on resource allocation to gender equality and the right to adequate food

Budgetary processes should be aligned with governments' international obligations and commitments for gender equality and the right to adequate food. These include international legal instruments on the rights of diverse groups of women such as Indigenous women, rural women, peasants, girls, and women with disabilities.

It is the role of parliamentarians to ensure that governments comply with their international obligations and commitments. Integrating GRB into national development plans, strategies and legal frameworks can help ensure that the adoption of national measures for the implementation of these commitments are identified and adequately funded.

2. Law making

Parliamentarians play a critical role in incorporating GRB into national legal frameworks through legislative action. This may be done through the development of inter alia:

Budget laws or public finance management laws which can institutionalize GRB, ensuring that gender considerations are integrated into financial planning, execution, and auditing processes.

Gender equality legislation which can provide the necessary legal basis for GRB, outlining specific responsibilities for government departments, and establishing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Laws on the right to adequate food that should address the unique right to adequate food-related needs of women and girls and ensure funding. This could include funding for women's agricultural cooperatives, rural women's training programmes, and strengthening their access to finance, as well as entitlements related to nutrition for teenage girls, pregnant and breastfeeding women, including maternity leave and childcare.

Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) can create an enabling environment for the realization of women's and girls' right to adequate food. This requires the development and adoption of legal measures that recognize and address the specific challenges faced by women and girls in accessing food that is safe, adequate, and in a quantity

and quality sufficient to satisfy their dietary needs. These laws may address the fields of natural resource tenure, social protection and rights at work, and finance, as well as those directly addressing food and nutrition.

3. Disaggregated data

Require collection and use of sex-disaggregated data to better inform GRB, both for evidence-based policymaking and for evaluating the outcomes and progress towards gender equality goals.

4. Oversight and monitoring

Establishing parliamentary oversight committees with gender audits dedicated to reviewing budget proposals from a gender perspective can help monitor how funds are allocated for women's and girls' food and nutrition. Gender audits in particular, can help evaluate the effectiveness of measures in addressing the specific gender objectives that they aim to achieve (UN WOMEN, 2022).

5. Engagement with stakeholders and civil society

Organize public consultations and hearings on right to adequate food-related budget proposals. Such hearings can facilitate the participation of women and women's groups who can help shape and inform budgetary decisions.

6. Capacity development

Ensure that funding is available to support training programmes for government officials on GRB. These trainings can enhance their understanding of gender issues in relation to the right to adequate food and equip them with the skills necessary to integrate gender considerations into their planning, implementation, and evaluation of budgets.

CHECKLIST FOR PARLIAMENTARY ACTION

- ✓ Adopt legislation mandating GRB in national and subnational processes and consider fiscal incentives and disincentives.
- ✓ Require collection and use of sex-disaggregated data.
- ✓ Ensure that national budgets support the implementation of international commitments on gender equality and the right to adequate food.
- ✓ Adopt TSMs and ensure that they are adequately funded through GRB.
- ✓ Set up a parliamentary oversight and audit committee on GRB.
- ✓ Adopt laws to support the right to adequate food of women and girls and ensure funding of relevant programmes.
- ✓ Engage with stakeholders through hearings and participation in public events.
- ✓ Promote capacity development.

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