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**Participatory Budget
“Genre-Based Participatory Budget”
The Experience in Rosario – Argentina**

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Genre-based Participatory Budget. The experience in the Municipality of Rosario, Argentina.

Participatory Budget

In 1996 the local authorities began an administrative decentralization and modernization process that resulted in a city organized in six districts (Centre, North, Northwest, West, Southwest, South).¹

It was in this context that the General Secretariat implemented the Participatory Budget in 2002 by Municipal Order number 7326/2002.

The Participatory Budget is a tool that allows men and women residing in Rosario to decide the allocation of a fraction of the overall municipal budget. A specific fraction of the budget is equally allocated to the six (6) city districts.

Citizens participate both in the consultation and in the decision-making process. This participation creates a common ground for dialogue and debate that contributes to a better management of local affairs. The Participatory Budget is therefore a tool that facilitates the collective learning of local management and democracy.

The participatory budget combines:

- Direct participation. Election of men and women delegates.
- The local government is made accountable to neighbours.
- Government commitment to process and execute the priority projects selected.

The participatory budget logical schedule develops as follows:

- First Round, district-based assemblies
- District Participatory Councils
- Second Round, project selection.
- Closing Assembly.

The First Round involves district-based assemblies and develops along March and April. Every district includes several neighbourhoods; meetings are organized by neighbourhood to discuss their needs and problems and to elect men and women delegates that will be members of the District Participatory Council.

The assembly agenda is as follows:

First, there is a plenary session where the District Director presents the participatory budget approach.

Then, neighbours are separated in groups. Each group becomes a workshop helped by a trained coordinator with experience in public management and group work.

This process stage is inclusive of the largest number of ideas. The number of issues that can be discussed is not limited but limiting factors such as regulations and practices are explained, for instance, municipal jurisdiction, execution terms, etc.

Each group has to respond to the following instruction: **“Proposals for our neighbourhood”**.

Attending neighbours record their ideas in a specially prepared form.

1 The population of the city of Rosario is one million; it is located in the province of Santa Fe.

Once all ideas are in the form, a spokesperson will explain the conclusions or proposals made to the other group.

This is a very important moment; it recovers dialogue and debate thanks to the exchange of ideas, proposals and insights into the neighbourhood reality.

Then, the workshop coordinator explains how to nominate men and women Councillors and invites the attendants that would like to be Councillors to fill in a nomination form.

The plenary session is reconvened and the workshop coordinator hands out ballots to the attendants.

Next, the District Director conducts an assembly where by direct, secret and individual vote neighbours elect men and women councillors. Attendants are reminded that they should vote for a man and a woman.

The number of councillors to be elected is stated based on the number of assembly attendants entitled to vote.

Once the election process is complete, the men and women councillors are announced and the assembly is adjourned.

The **District Participatory Councils** meet weekly for a year, starting in April.

Once the First Round assemblies are complete, elected councillors meet in the District Participatory Council. This Council is coordinated by the District Director and by the Technical Secretary of the District Participatory Budget.

Councillors meet in plenary sessions and set up work commissions.

Below, a detail of existing commissions:

- Commission of Social Projects: it includes issues relative to the Secretaries of Culture, Social Advancement, Public Health and Government.
- Commission of Urban Projects: it includes issues relative to the Secretaries of Public Services, Public Works, Planning, Secretary-General.
- Commission of Citizen Participation: it deals with issues not linked to the municipal budget; it discusses the operation of the Council and the process approach.

Commissions are set up to work in an organized fashion; the plenary sessions are when exchange and debate on the work done occur.

Debate is based on the proposals made by neighbours in the First Round assemblies.

These proposals are discussed by Councillors who include them in *projects*. Municipal technical teams help to determine the technical feasibility of any such project.

Why *projects*?

There are no rigid practices to formulate a project, only a number of guidelines to organize ideas, define objectives, set courses of action, specify activities and set forth evaluation criteria.

The design and the outline of projects formulated by Councils result from citizen's participation. The idea is to have a collective construction, trying to respond to the issues raised by neighbours. Men and women councillors develop each project by auditing the current situation, by describing the project and defining its beneficiaries.

Technical teams are responsible of determining the projects' technical feasibility, design and costs.

Project-based logics lead to an exchange of knowledge. The knowledge that men and women have about their life conditions, about the things they want to change and the technical knowledge contributed by management teams. This consensus leads to projects that are possible to implement and that respond to citizen's needs.

Besides, co-management practices facilitate monitoring the execution of the project. This process materializes in a list of projects that is discussed by neighbours who live in the district in the second round.

On the other hand, District Participatory Councils become discussion forums where information concerning municipal management can be found.

Men and women councillors are also in charge of the follow-up of works voted for in the previous year Participatory Budget.

The **Second Round** is in September. It is a single activity, simultaneous in all districts where neighbours decide which projects to prioritize among those drawn by the District Participatory Council.

Following the projects' fair logics, neighbours residing in the district are once again convened to a Projects Selection Day where they will have the chance to know all the projects drawn by councillors and to vote for those they consider should be included in the following year municipal budget.

Each project benefits are reported, costs are estimated and then, neighbours can select the ones they consider more significant.

After voting, votes are counted, projects are ranked from the most to the least voted and those ranked the highest are selected until already allocated amount of the overall municipal budget is covered.

The projects selected in each District are therefore included in the Expense Budgeting and Resource Estimate Project that the Municipal Council should adopt and include in the Municipal Budget to be in force the following year.

The **Third Round** is a single meeting attended by all men and women councillors from all six districts. Selected projects are presented and attendants make a balance of the work done along the year.

In 2006, for the first time, projects were selected by electronic vote. This technological tool provides flexibility and transparency to the process while at the same time raises expectations in people who come to vote for projects for their districts.

Compared to previous years, participation in the Second Round tripled.

Genre Perspective in the Participatory Budget

The political commitment of Rosario local authorities to genre equality was present in the Participatory Budget from the very beginning.

This commitment translates in the daily work of the Participatory Budget and was finally included in General Secretariat Resolution 006/2003, in its article 6, paragraph "d" that states *"Assembly attendants with the capacity to choose councillors will vote a maximum of three (3) candidates,*

and will respect genre proportionality of one (1) third".

The commitment of municipal technical staff and officers in the promotion of equality through initiatives built and assessed in the Participatory Budget allowed to progress to the implementation of genre-based standards.

The 2005/2009 Second Municipal Plan for Equal Opportunities and Treatment for Men and Women derived from Municipal Council decree 15322. This Plan incentivates and fosters specific actions to strengthen women's presence in the different stages of the Participatory Budget process while, at the same time, encourages the inclusion of women's demands and genre perspective in the projects drawn.

Below, a detail of the actions raised by the Plan:

*1) **Parity in the District Participatory Council.** To confirm equal integration of men and women in the Councils when councillors are elected in the First Round Assemblies; neighbours vote for a man and a woman.*

*2) **Playrooms** to increase women attendance to the First Round assemblies. Trained staff is commissioned to look after the children in the playrooms.*

*3) **The Participatory Budget and Women Active Citizenship Programme,** implemented by the Women's Area of the Secretary of Social Advancement uses different actions to incentivate women participation in public decision settings and to strengthen their presence. It also trains them to have a bearing on budget items prioritisation and on municipal resources allocation.*

*4) **Inclusive, non discriminatory language** and non stereotyped images are used for the Programme official communications.*

Including genre perspective in every act of democracy strengthens and develops an egalitarian culture that allows women inclusion in political life.

Participatory Budget and Women Active Citizenship Programme

It is implemented by the Women's Area of the Secretary of Social Advancement. Since 2004, this Programme promotes and strengthens a social and public participation instance for Rosario citizens, the Participatory Budget.

The purpose of the Programme is to foster women's participation in public decision realms and to strengthen women's presence in public life. Such purpose is achieved through several actions.

Women attending the Participatory Budget were trained to identify genre needs in their districts as well as genre-based public policies with female leadership. Women councillors can negotiate and reach consensus on projects. By doing so, they enhance the living conditions of people, specially of the most vulnerable and excluded.

That is why the programme actions are built around the participation of the socially deprived: **women in the public realm**, and promotes the creation of spaces where the different actors of the civil society may be part of the decision-making processes that affect all spheres of social life. Active citizenship is a concept that supposes an active involvement of men and women in public life.

The programme continues to implement different institutional and strategic mechanisms to involve

women in citizen participation instances, thus strengthening their expression and considering their opinions in the decision making. The most benefits were for those who lack personal experiences that may identify them as citizens and discourse tools to address and put forth issues and needs proper to their genre in public projects. Besides, training strategies as well as other strategies to raise awareness are broken down as a genre strategy.

The six municipal districts (Centre, North, Northwest, West, Southwest and South) work to achieve good attendance and inclusion into the Programme. These districts have a significant geo-referential impact on city neighbours and on women social organizations located in each area. Decentralised distribution favours women's access to the programme.

Genre-based actions in the Participatory Budget were planned to and continue to implement training instances for elected councillors.

Work dynamics focuses on workshops, each developing one of the following topics.

Theme	Contents
Female identity	Genre-sex system
	Discrimination
	Stereotypes
	Subjectivity
Women social participation	Obstacles to social participation (stereotypes)
	Positive discrimination
	Active citizenship
Social issues affecting women	Family violence
	Use of public space (institutional and urban violence)
	Sexual and reproductive rights
Formulation of projects	Exercises to formulate Participatory Budget projects.
	Presentation, agreements, consensus, alliances.

Training is delivered by professionals member of non governmental organizations of the city of Rosario that work on genre perspective applied to citizen's and women's participation.

Actions Impact

The following is a detail of the genre-based proposals presented in the Participatory Budget from

2003 to 2007.

2003 Participatory Budget

No genre-based proposals.

2004 Participatory Budget

Three out of the six districts presented genre-based proposals. They were not selected.

West District: The proposal was to extend family violence actions and to arrange for a physical space in the West District Municipal Centre for the programme.

Southwest District Creation of a family violence team working from the *Creecer* Centres.

South District massive campaigns focused on prevention and responsible procreation, sexual health, AIDS, drug abuse and rights promotion.

2005 Participatory Budget

The Participatory Budget approach changes and starts to be project-based.

Five districts presented genre-based projects. They were all selected.

DISTRICTS	PROJECTS	AMOUNTS
North	<i>Genre-based training of women in non traditional trades</i>	\$ 40.000
Northwest	<i>Solidarity Health for the Northwest District</i>	\$ 20.000
West	<i>Training, raising awareness and strengthening of groups of women that act as popular educators and multipliers</i>	\$ 20.000
	<i>Seminars, training sessions and campaigns to raise awareness on family violence and sexual education.</i>	\$ 20.000
	<i>Workshops for the young and the teens: on sexual and reproductive health. Psychological care.</i>	\$ 5.000
South	<i>Dissemination campaigns on social issues.</i> Campaign to disseminate, train and raise awareness on family violence with a genre perspective (in all neighbourhoods).	\$ 20.000
TOTAL		\$ 125.000

2006 Participatory Budget

All districts presented and selected genre-based projects.

Besides, the number of such projects almost tripled in all six districts, which shows deeper awareness to genre-based issues.

DISTRICTS	PROJECTS	AMOUNT
Centre	<i>Teenagers comprehensive care programme.</i>	\$ 60.000
	<i>Genre –based training Workshops for pregnant mothers.</i>	\$ 50.000
	<i>Genre-based training of women in non traditional trades</i>	\$ 22.500
North	<i>Strengthening of homes for women victims of family violence</i>	\$ 30.000
	<i>Genre-based training of women in non traditional trades</i>	\$ 30.000
Northwest	<i>Procurement of an echo sound equipment for the San Martin Health Centre.</i>	\$150.000
West	<i>Violence – Preventing family conflicts</i>	\$ 20.000
	<i>Training women in genre-based issues</i>	\$ 20.000
	<i>Genre-based training of women in non traditional trades</i>	\$ 37.500
	<i>Training in breastfeeding techniques, sexual and reproductive health, promotion of healthy habits</i>	\$ 5.700
Southwest	<i>Campaign to raise awareness and to train on family violence</i>	\$ 20.000
	<i>Genre-based training of women in non traditional trades</i>	\$ 30.000
	<i>Genre-based prevention and assistance on family violence training, information and activities relative to women’s rights</i>	\$ 20.000
South	<i>Dissemination campaigns on social issues.</i>	\$ 20.000
	<i>Campaign to disseminate, train and raise awareness on family violence with a genre perspective (in all neighbourhoods).</i>	
	<i>Genre-based training of women in non traditional trades</i>	
		\$ 29.910
TOTAL		\$ 545.610

2007 Participatory Budget

The experience was similar to that of the previous year, all districts presented genre-based projects which were selected in all districts.

Even though there is not an increase in the number of projects, the amount allocated is larger, as well as the quality of projects.

DISTRICTS	PROJECTS	AMOUNT
Centre	<i>Sexual Education and Reproductive Health Workshops.</i>	\$ 70.000
	<i>Comprehensive programme for teenage mothers.</i>	\$ 90.000
North	<i>Women training in trades</i>	\$ 100.000
	<i>Workshops for the prevention of family violence.</i>	\$ 30.000
Northwest	<i>Workshops for the prevention of family violence.</i>	\$ 29.448
West	<i>Training women in genre-based issues</i>	\$ 30.000
	<i>Recreational workshops for children whose mothers attend the workshops and meetings in the district.</i>	\$ 2.000
	<i>Training and information course on human rights, authority abuse, ill-treatment, violence, genre, legal issues.</i>	\$ 20.000
	<i>Training in traditional and non traditional trades for women.</i>	
	<i>Knowing and looking after our body. Workshop for children older than 12 on issues to help them get to know their bodies.</i>	\$ 81.000
		\$ 40.000
Southwest	<i>Campaign to raise awareness and to train on family violence, sexuality, prevention of child abuse.</i>	\$ 20.000
	<i>Women in action: training in different trades</i>	\$ 100.000
South	<i>Training in traditional and non traditional trades for women.</i>	\$ 100.000
	<i>Workshops for the prevention of family violence.</i>	\$ 30.000
TOTAL		\$ 742.448

The Participatory Budget development from 2003 to 2007 shows how the genre perspective was included in the projects.

In the very beginning, there were no genre-based proposals; then, some were presented but not selected and, in the last three years, every genre-based proposal presented was selected. Besides, the amounts allocated and proposal quality was on the increase.

Genre-Sensitive Budgets - Unifem

Since 2006, the Municipality of Rosario, together with Unifem and in the context of the “Including Genre Perspective in Budgets Programme” values and strengthens genre strategies already existing in the Participatory Budget.

By means of a written agreement, the programme is currently implementing the following initiatives:

- 1) Training of municipal technical teams on genre-based Participatory Budgets.
- 2) Training of technical teams on genre-sensitive budgets.
- 3) Raising awareness on men member of technical teams on the genre perspective and on positive actions towards the promotion of equality.
- 4) Reflecting on the social and public positioning of women councillors in public budgets.
- 5) Strengthening of the transversalisation of genre in the Participatory Budget programme.
- 6) Strengthening of the articulation and coordination spaces between the Women’s Area and the Participatory Budget.
- 7) Strengthening of initiatives included in the 2005-2009 PIO relative to “Women Participation in the Public Realm”.

To wind up...

We can point out several actions resulting in the inclusion of the genre perspective in the Participatory Budget projects. These actions also express the political willingness of the local government to implement initiatives towards equality:

- The observance of the guidelines relative to women participation in the public realm set forth in the Second Plan for Equal Opportunities,
- Women and men equal participation in district councils,
- Raising awareness, training and developing the commitment of the Participatory Budget technical team to guarantee women participation and involvement in the Participatory Budget process;
- Training women councillors so that they can identify genre needs in their neighbourhoods and that they can value their participation as political subjects, in the context of the Participatory Budget and the Women Active Citizenship Programme.

There is clear progress of women in terms of their ability to identify claims and to demand that their requests and needs be responded, thus enhancing their quality of life.

These data and considerations highlight the fact that joint actions carried out by the Participatory Budget Programme, the Women’s Area, the Municipality and the Municipal Council clearly express the political willingness to build citizen participation, which allows women involved in the process:

- *Have ample knowledge and understand how to take part in budgeting processes while, at the same time, have a better informed and more efficient intervention;*
- *Increase their negotiation skills and influence in the allocation of public resources;*
- *Consolidate networks of women leaders that may politically influence equal allocation of public resources between men and women;*
- *Outline their roles in the redistribution and supervision of public resources;*

- *Multiply and incentivate other women participation in the public realm.*

Finally, our experience leads us to some thoughts that accompany the genre-based initiatives:

- **Women participation by itself does not guarantee genre equality**
- **The genre perspective should not be used just to develop projects but to introduce a substantial change in the relationship between men and women councillors in debates and discussions.**
- **The political willingness to conduct the process, to train and to constantly reflect on the matter are pre-requisites to develop innovative tools aimed at empowering women and at achieving genre equality.**