

Preface

Since 2004 there have been several Treasury call circulars from the Ministry of Finance, Malaysia, obliging government agencies at all levels to implement gender responsive budgeting (GRB). Penang is the first and only state in Malaysia to respond to this important call. While the idea to implement GRB was mooted in 2010, it was only in 2012 that a GRB pilot, with a participatory focus, was initiated by the newly established Penang Women's Development Corporation (PWDC), a state-linked women's agency. This project was implemented in smart partnership with the two local councils, the Penang Island Municipal Council¹ and the Seberang Jaya Municipal Council. Three years down the road, PWDC was keen to share and learn from the experiences of other countries, particularly on synergizing GRB and participatory budgeting (PB)—two approaches which have existed since the 1980s and have been practised all over the world. PWDC has since renamed this as a gender responsive and participatory project (GRPB).

Subsequently, a conference was organized in Penang, Malaysia during 24–25 February 2014. This Asian Regional Conference entitled 'Gender Responsive Budgeting Narratives: Transforming Institutions, Empowering Communities' was organized by PWDC in collaboration with the Penang State Government, the Penang Island Municipal Council, the Seberang Perai Municipal Council and United Nations Women (UN Women).

The conference brought together GRB and PB practitioners and experts within the Asian region and beyond to share and review experiences, reflect on successes and challenges and chart future paths that can best support the potential of both GRB and PB to strengthen each other in the budgeting process. For GRB, the question was the effectiveness of the approach in transforming institutions and to what extent it is moving processes to become more participatory. For PB, it was about the importance of integrating gender concerns into their work. As noted by Roberta Clarke, the Regional Director of the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in her opening address, what would be the role of GRB in opening

¹Now Penang Island City Council.

up more democratic spaces in society? How can both GRB and PB shift our goal from mainstreaming gender in budgeting to mainstreaming gender and social justice, especially for the disadvantaged and marginalized in our midst?

Selected papers from this conference form the three themes of the book viz, the ‘hybridization’ of GRB and PB, the use of GRB tools for gender equality and social justice and the institutionalization of GRB and/or PB for better accountability and good governance.

I sincerely hope that this humble contribution will provide much food for thought to those of us involved in policy formulation, financial planning and better governance at all levels in society.

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