



**COMMUNITY  
SOCIAL PLANNING  
COUNCIL OF TORONTO**

[www.socialplanningtoronto.org](http://www.socialplanningtoronto.org)

## **Submission to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women Regarding the Role and Purpose of Gender Budgets – December 5, 2007**

**Armine Yalnizyan**

**Director of Research, Community Social Planning of Toronto and  
Research Associate, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives**

The **Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (CSPC-T)** is a non-profit agency engaged in research, policy analysis, community development and capacity building work, funded by the United Way of Greater Toronto and the City of Toronto. CSPC-T works to improve the lives of Toronto residents through close partnerships with agencies from Toronto's extensive community service sector. The sector includes 1,342 community-based human service organizations directly serving hundreds of thousands of Toronto residents, and touching the lives of all who live here. According to the most recent Census results, Toronto has the highest concentration of foreign-born residents in the world (Statistics Canada, December 4, 2007). The Council's work with diverse communities provides daily reinforcement of the centrality of women's equality to the social development and quality of life of all Toronto's residents.

### **We applaud serious discussion of gender budgeting**

It is important to discuss both the tool – which permits analysis of the differential impact of spending and tax policies on women and men – as well as the objectives that are being sought by applying gender budget tools.

**It is widely acknowledged that gender equality is a vital precursor for achieving social development, economic progress, and political stability. This is, in part, the rationale Canadians are given as to why our soldiers are fighting in Afghanistan.**

A federal commitment to improving the quality of life of Canadians cannot be met without a corresponding commitment to women's equality. To date, there has been no publicly available governmental analysis of how policies such as tax cuts, cuts to unemployment insurance, housing and supports for legal assistance play out for women as compared to men. Nor has there been any assessment of the impact on women, and on the economy, of public investments that expand the stock and affordability of housing, or child care, or offset the costs of skills training and post-secondary education for those who cannot save enough for RESPs.

**Today's discussion about gender budgeting is a simple acknowledgement that men and women are different in fundamental ways. So it's not difficult to imagine that budget and policy decisions made by governments will impact men and women differently.** Women are most likely to be the caregivers in our nation. They are most likely to earn less money than men, even today. They are most likely to seek a post-secondary education in our nation. They are most likely to fall below the

poverty line, especially in the event of a marriage breakdown. We have lots of facts and figures to back this up. Knowing this, **isn't it a minimal expectation that responsible governments who are committed to accountability and transparency and fairness track the impacts of their budget and policy decisions on both genders?** How we do this varies, as there are various models.

## Gender Budgeting – What is it and why do it?

Gender budgeting tools are generally used in one of two ways:

**1) a process to allocate public resources for programs that redress substantive inequalities faced by women** (measured by differences between men and women in safety and security, material deprivation and/or pathways to opportunity and fundamental justice) by finding ways to supply or regulate access to those things; or

**2) an accountability mechanism that identifies who benefits from fiscal policies** (both tax and spending related).

Tax incidence studies are the easiest forms of this second type of gender budget analysis, or gender budget audit tool. It simply follows the money – showing who pays, or stopped paying, how much in tax. Even this basic analysis does not occur in Canadian budgetary processes.

Benefits accruing to society from public spending are harder to calculate<sup>i</sup>, perhaps one of the reasons it has been relatively easier to advance the agenda for tax cuts than for sustaining or improving public expenditures.

Gender budgeting tools can be used to develop and support a plan to make progress on access to the vital supports and rules that can make material difference to women's lives and life chances, thereby also affecting the lives of those around them.

Irrespective of the methodology or process, **gender budget or gender audit tools are only useful inasmuch as they contribute to reducing systematic inequities in the economic and social barriers faced by women.** It is a common (even a feminine) wisdom that it's not just how you use a tool, it's the purpose to which you apply it. In the case of gender budgeting, it's not just the tool; it's the plan that is missing in action. Though we already have a clear plan on how to make progress in this direction – the Canadian *Federal Plan*, drafted in 1995 to lay out a road-map of how Canada would meet the commitments it signed on to in Beijing in the 1995 *Platform for Action for Equality, Development and Peace* – over the past decade we have moved backwards rather than advanced this agenda, based on even the most simple types of gender audit measures.<sup>ii</sup>

**Federal programs that provide or support spending that can enhance economic and social security have been cut back since 1995.** Cuts to unemployment insurance, social assistance, affordable housing, training and education, legal aid, and supports for the care of children, the disabled and the frail have set back women's progress towards greater economic and social security, which are fundamental to achieving the goals of enhancing the development of women's potential and political participation. Had gender budgeting been a fact of life in 1995, it is unlikely these measures would have passed the test of gender neutrality, let alone advancing equality-enhancing objectives.

**Despite more than a decade of large annual surpluses at the federal level, these programs have yet to be restored, though they are vital to the well-being and development of citizens, particularly women.** At the same time hundreds of billions have been spent on other initiatives. **However unintended, these gender-biased blunders from the past need to be redressed in**

**order to make much-needed, and long-awaited, progress for the women of Canada.** Despite having paid the lion's share of the costs of getting our fiscal house in order, women have been told to wait for help, in good times and bad. Perhaps **gender-budgeting tools will help make the case that this is a patently unjust policy stance for our governments to adopt, and counter-productive to advancing economic and social progress for men and women, children and adults alike.**

## **Canada Needs to Move Forward on its Beijing Commitments, Getting In Step with the Global Community**

The United Nations is strengthening its gender equality architecture by establishing an independent women-specific body to ensure a voice for women at the United Nations decision-making tables. The goal is, of course, to make the concerns and issues of half the world's population heard at these tables.

By undertaking gender budget analysis, or gender audits, the federal government would finally be living up to the **key commitments made in 1995** after signing on to the Beijing Platform; that is, **implementing policies that would reduce systematic barriers faced by women in their pursuit of freedom from violence, access to the basics in life, the opportunity to develop their potential, and equal voice in public life.**

Back in 1995, the federal government said this about how it was going to honour the commitments it signed on to in Beijing. **"The cornerstone of the *Federal Plan* is a policy requiring federal departments and agencies to conduct gender-based analysis of future policies and legislation."** - *Canada's National Response to the UN Questionnaire on Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, p.5*  
**We are still waiting** for this to become a reality. In part, it would facilitate us to move on the other commitments made to women in 1995.

**Given the actions taken last year to silence women's NGOs advocating for greater and substantive gender equity (not just equal treatment), it is heartening to see that the federal government is examining ways to take these objectives "in-house", to ensure that policies are not gender-biased towards men, and do not have the perverse impact of further advantaging those already most advantaged in society.** NGOs have always said that the task is greater than the resources available to our sector, and that – indeed – this is the proper and appropriate responsibility of government.

## **What is the world trying to achieve through promoting gender equity?**

"We, the Governments participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women, gathered here in Beijing, in September 1995, the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, determined to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity ... dedicate ourselves unreservedly to addressing these constraints and obstacles and thus enhancing further the advancement and empowerment of women all over the world, and agree that this requires urgent action in the spirit of determination, hope, cooperation and solidarity, now and to carry us forward into the next century."

*Beijing Declaration, 1995*

So said 189 nations who signed on to this Declaration in 1995, including Canada. Canada also signed on to the UN Declaration of Universal Human Rights in 1948 and the Millennium Development Goals in 2000.

Most recently, at least four province and two federal parties have made commitments to move on comprehensive poverty reduction strategies. These initiatives have many elements in common.

A short list of initiatives they all endorse (which are also endorsed by the vast majority of Canadians, irrespective of political affiliation, as effective means of redressing inequalities according to Environics polling<sup>iii</sup> include improving access to **affordable housing, affordable post-secondary education, affordable child care, and improved minimum wages.** The federal government has a role to play in all these things.

You will note **these are not gender specific policies.** However they have a **disproportionately beneficial impact on women.**

## **From economic insecurity to economic security**

**While women in Canada are more economically independent than any previous generation of women, this independence has not assured them greater economic security.** Women are more likely than men to live in insecure or precarious forms of housing, with fewer alternative options. Despite the enormous improvements in women's educational attainment, labour force participation and number of working hours, women's incomes are such that they are still less able to save money than men. The struggle to save for our own or our children's post-secondary education or our own retirement has become more difficult over the past decade, even as the economy has improved. **Financial insecurity is the rule of the day.**

Nationally we have gone from a nation of savers to a nation of nail-biters. As tax files show, more women are in bottom and middle of the economic spectrum, and we know from labour force surveys that they are more likely to populate the "non-standard" job market (part-time, seasonal, piece-work and contract work).

Always a nation of immigrants, over the past decade this phenomenon has accelerated to levels not seen since the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as Statistics Canada showed us yesterday. Statistics Canada and others have also noted that over the past decade our nation is becoming a portrait of **stark economic contrasts between the affluent and a growing swath of working poor, despite an unparalleled period of economic expansion.** This is not consistent with our economic history. Today, immigrants and people of colour feature disproportionately in the lower half of the income spectrum, and in the part of the labour market that is marked by precarious employment.

Growing income inequality is destructive to our basic social fabric, especially when those at the bottom are groups that are disproportionately represented by groups such as recent immigrants and First Nations peoples, the very people upon whom we will be relying on in order to maintain our standard of living as the generation of baby boomers retires in huge numbers from the labour market over the coming decade. Women will likely continue to increase their role in the labour market in this period. One can only hope that it will not mean staying in the precarious job ghettos that have emerged in the past decade. **While women have made some economic progress over the past decade, it has been largely on their own steam. Governments not only have not assisted in this progress. They have actually stripped supports that existed in the past.**

**In study after study, women's full participation has been found to be profoundly intertwined with economic growth (which women associate with the potential for material progress and economic security for all), human development (which women identify as the key marker of prosperity), and political stability (or "peace", which women define primarily as freedom from violence, fear and abuse). If we can fight for this in Afghanistan, why can't we do it here?**

While it is true that women in Afghanistan have systematically been denied freedoms that women in Canada have long enjoyed, the signs of progress in that country are disarmingly like those in Canada: freedom from fear and abuse; adequate shelter, heat, water and food; opportunities to learn; and access to health care. Sadly, we cannot say that all Canadians have access to these basics of human existence. Women, in particular, struggle disproportionately to ensure access to them. The awkward truth is that there is no reason for things to be this way, in the Canada of 2007.

## **Time for investment, not tax cuts**

**Federal policies have long relied on immigration as a pillar of economic growth and advancement.** This is unlikely to diminish as we move towards the era of retirements, perhaps the largest labour market sea change in our economic history – though we should be clear that immigration cannot, by itself, resolve this problem.

**It is incongruous that we should welcome more people to the growth poles of our country, where uniformly there are crises in affordable housing and systems of public infrastructure (both hard and soft) are already stretched to the limit.**

The fiscal tools for meeting these goals are at the senior levels of government, but it is cities and municipalities that are increasingly charged with the process of making things work. **The real fiscal imbalance in this nation is between the senior levels of government and where people actually live, cities and municipalities of all sizes.**

**This has occurred because the pre-eminent public policy priority for the past 12 years or more, at both senior levels of government, and irrespective of political party, has been downloading or offloading programmatic supports and cutting taxes.**

**Between 1996 and 2004 both senior levels of government “spent” \$250 billion in tax cuts.** Health care, which was the number one priority of Canadians in election after election during that period, was infused with \$108 billion in new spending. **The current federal government scheduled another \$191 billion in tax cuts in the first 21 months of its administration.**

Surely governments can think of something more forward-looking than simply give us back our money. We are in a prolonged period of economic expansion, the likes of which have not been seen since the post-war period. We are the ninth largest economy on the planet, and the only advanced industrialized nation with 10 back-to-back fiscal surpluses at the federal level, and surpluses as far as the eye can see. **We have the economic and fiscal capacity to do anything we want. In this context, no one should be struggling to achieve the basics for human existence – freedom from fear and abuse; adequate shelter, heat, water and food; opportunities to learn; and access to health care – or be denied fundamental justice.**

## **So what can you do?**

As women, and as politicians attempting to steward the nation towards its future, you can **oppose further tax cuts.**

You can strongly **endorse investments in housing, child care, post-secondary education and raising the minimum wage, a risk-free strategy** for you as these four policies enjoy the backing of over 80% of Canadians of every political persuasion.

You can **support a process** – the **gender budget tool** – that can **specify the costs and benefits of tax cuts/expenditures as well as initiatives related to greater spending**. This process could clarify arenas of public investments that could most benefit Canadians as a whole, as well as identify if different measures disproportionately benefit men or women, the already affluent or the less affluent.

And you can **make the case** that supporting a **“women’s agenda” is in fact the way to support an agenda that promotes economic security, human development, and political stability for all**.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to the important next steps in your discussions, and the fruits of these conversations.

---

<sup>i</sup> There are tracking studies that show how much is spent on health care, by gender and age in any given year, sometimes linked with income levels. Administrative data bases can also document annual expenditures on pensions, unemployment insurance benefits, or social assistance by age and gender. Regarding “yield curves” on public investments, there is a vast literature calculating the return on investments for education (primarily post-secondary, but sometimes for early childhood development), but these are primarily calculated on an individual cost-benefit metric. There are also methodologies for assessing the macro-economic impact of investments in public infrastructure on productivity growth and on cost structures for business. But this leads to the legitimate question: If the government spends a dollar on health care, public transit, clean water or housing, who benefits more – a woman or a man? Moreover, who benefits today? Who are the beneficiaries tomorrow?

<sup>ii</sup> See Armine Yalnizyan, *Canada’s Commitment to Equality: A Gender Analysis of the Last Ten Federal Budgets (1995 – 2004)*, Ottawa: Feminist Alliance for International Action, 2005; and Armine Yalnizyan, *Assessing the Federal Budget 2005: What’s in it for women?* Ottawa, Feminist Alliance for International Action, 2005.

<sup>iii</sup> Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, *What Can Governments Do About Canada’s Growing Gap? Canadian Attitudes Toward Income Inequality*, Ottawa: March 2007.