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CANADIAN CENTRE
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
NOVA SCOTIA OFFICE

Nova Scotia Budget Watch 2015

Through a Gender Lens

*In partnership with the Women's Action
Alliance for Change Nova Scotia¹*

THE NOVA SCOTIA government is set to release its budget. This is a critical time for Nova Scotians to be watching and asking questions about how government budgets affect people differently. What impact will this budget have on gender equality? Will it reduce gender inequality, increase it or leave it unchanged?

The effect a budget has on women's lives is difficult to discern because women are rarely mentioned in the budgeting process. No Nova Scotia Minister of Finance has published a gender-analysis of their budget. What would such an analysis look like? What needs to be taken into account? What kinds of budget decisions would advance the status of women? Which decisions will have a disproportionately negative impact on women?

Using a Gender Lens

Many people might assume that budgets are gender-neutral: that the budget is a set of numbers that impartially affect women and men. However, we know that this is not the case. Budgets have a different impact on women than they do on men, because men and women generally occupy unequal social and economic positions, and have different needs and priorities. Women face gender barriers and discrimination, and experience inequities in employment, income, the family, and health. Therefore, government budgets need to be explicitly designed as part of a government's commitment to achieve gender equality and advance the status of women. If they are not, the implicit gender inequalities as well as other inequalities that stem from race, class, and ability, are often exacerbated. Consider

the unequal position of men and women when it comes to economic security and employment, then consider the impact of an austerity agenda on women.

Gender Lens Must Be Intersectional:

A key question for this analysis is how ‘race’, ethnicity, class, sexuality and other social locations and systems of inequality (racism, colonialism, classism, heterosexism) interact. How do our budgetary decisions impact different women because of their social locations and the systems of inequality that exist?

Economic Security and Employment Through a Gender Lens

Women’s poverty and economic insecurity is rooted in systemic issues, including the devaluation of work traditionally done by women at home and in the labour market, the wage disparity between women and men doing similar work, occupational segregation, inadequate access to child care, and insufficient social assistance rates. Consider the following data about women in Nova Scotia (which should be used when applying a gender lens) and keep in mind that 51% of Nova Scotia’s population are women and girls.

Women in Nova Scotia:

- are the majority of workers in six of the ten lowest paying jobs;
- make up 61% of employees that earn minimum wage or less;
- represent 100% of those employed in 6 of the 10 lowest paying occupations: there are no women in 5 of the top 10 highest paid occupations.²
- fill only 32% of senior management positions;³
- experience a 33% pay equity gap, which means that for every dollar a man earns in a full-time, full year work, a woman earns 67 cents;⁴
- earn on average \$15,000 less per year than a man because of the pay equity gap;⁵
- since 2000, make up on average only 2% of the registered apprenticeship and trade qualifiers in Nova Scotia;^{6 7}
- with disabilities, visible minorities and those of Aboriginal and First Nations status fare worse in rates of employment, in educational attainment, and in earnings, than able-bodied, white women and than their male counterparts, however there is a lack of recent data to provide up to date numbers.⁸

What to Look For In the Budget:

Job creation proposals must aim to redress historic and ongoing under-representation, unemployment and under-employment of specific groups of women including women with disabilities, Aboriginal women, and African Nova Scotian women.

The Public Sector Through a Gender Lens

Our current provincial government's budget will likely contain further public sector spending cuts (even if it only freezes spending, this will result in cuts in practice). Any cuts will have a disproportionately negative impact on women because *public sector cuts hurt women more than they hurt men*.

Public services play an essential role in the redistribution of wealth, and help us to move towards an equal society for women, who are the primary providers of unpaid caregiving and access public services more than men.

Women also make up the majority of public sector workers.

In Nova Scotia:

- Women compose 66 percent and 84 percent of workers in education and health employment, respectively; and hold 66 percent of all public sector jobs.⁹ These public sector jobs:
 - represent quality jobs, where pay is on average higher than private sector jobs, with smaller pay equity gaps;
 - are unionized and provide good benefits to women often including extended health and maternity benefits. In addition, more women in the public sector have pensions (two thirds, as opposed to only one third in the private sector);¹⁰ and,
 - make valuable contributions to the common good.

The provincial government's austerity agenda will have an adverse negative effect on everyone – but women will suffer disproportionately.

In addition to the loss of good jobs, these cuts also represent the loss of services. We know that when services are cut, many people seek out community-based services that are often offered by women in under-resourced non-governmental organizations. We also know that gaps in services are more often filled without pay by women.

Women do a majority of unpaid care in this province, whether that is child care or elder care.¹¹

In Nova Scotia, there is a regulated child care space for 11% of children aged 0–2 yrs and a regulated full or part-time centre-based space for 39% of children aged 2–4 (2014).¹²

Juxtapose those numbers to how women workers have a need for child care: 74.1% with children 0–1 and 79.7% for 2–4 year olds.¹³ We need to develop and adequately fund an *early learning and child care (ELCC) system*. Building an ELCC is simply smart public policy – the years we are talking about are critical years for children. Child care is a women’s issue because making it affordable is one way to break at least part of the vicious cycle where families have no choice but to have the lowest income earner be the one that does more of the unpaid work, the parent who takes time off when they can’t find a child care spot or when the cost of child care makes it not worth even going back to work. Women who take time off are then penalized: such a woman will face an 8% decrease in her lifetime earnings, which then also affects her retirement income.¹⁴ In addition, the very educators we rely on to provide quality education for our early learners are those who cannot afford child care: if you are a child care worker in Nova Scotia (2/3 of whom are certified Early Childhood Educators, and most of whom are women), your gross median hourly wage is \$12.84 per hour;¹⁵ a child care spot for a baby up to 17 months will cost that worker 54% of her gross wages. At minimum wage (\$10.40) working full year full time she will spend 81% of her wages on child care before taxes and deductions.

Nova Scotia also has long waiting lists for long-term care and insufficient support to deal with the need for *elder care*, which is currently being provided 24/7 by unpaid caregivers in the home, many of whom are overburdened.

Budgets that focus on the needs and priorities of women in order to advance gender equality must also take into consideration that *women, especially lone mothers and Aboriginal women, are more likely to struggle to find affordable housing*. “Women’s homelessness and housing needs are related to their disproportional experience of poverty, systemic discrimination, inequality based on gender or other factors, and violence against women”.¹⁶ It is critical that governments invest in creating new affordable housing stock of good quality. Women need good, permanent homes in accessible neighbourhoods (with public transit, schools and other amenities).

In Summary:

Our government must acknowledge the importance of women’s well-being when budgeting. In the end, these social investments benefit everyone, from access to quality and affordable child care, to additional income assistance, to adequately funded shelters, to more affordable housing, to more accessible post-secondary education.

What to Look For In the Budget:

1. Government should act in the public interest and seek to protect public sector employment and increase support for public services; the budget should ensure that

the government is able to provide quality services that will benefit everyone, but will specifically benefit women and those who need them the most.

2. Government must provide adequate funding to address the ongoing exploitation of women's unpaid work, and undervaluing of this work when it is paid. This should include a substantial investment in an early learning and child care system, as well as funding for elder care. Our government should also invest in affordable housing, as well as provide adequate funding for housing/homelessness supports including core funding for shelters, transition houses and second stage housing.

Taxation Through a Gender Lens

Taxation decisions must take into account that:

- The traditional family unit (with the one male breadwinner) still forms the basis for many tax credits and benefits, which discriminates against families headed by lone females and other non-traditional families, and perpetuates a female dependency-model.
- It is also true that more women have lower incomes, pay less tax and, and are more likely to pay no tax, so women gain less from directed income tax relief than men.

What to Look For In the Budget:

1. It is critical that any income tax cuts be confined to refundable tax credits only. Moreover, decisions about the income tax system must ensure that it is a progressive system based on ability to pay. Any tax cuts should be considered an expenditure, and should be weighed against other needs and priorities for public spending.
2. The tax system should not be used as the primary vehicle to deliver social programs. Social programs such as a public, non-profit early learning and child care system, should be directly funded. What can families do with additional child care support if child care isn't available, let alone affordable?

Conclusion

Applying a gender lens to a budget is not just a technical exercise; it is “a more long-term process that requires government officials to think about the economy in new ways that include the unpaid sector where much of women's time and efforts are concentrated.”¹⁷

In order to do a comprehensive gender analysis of budgets, governments need to involve the real experts — we need more women in leadership, and more women must be consulted in a meaningful way, including women in community-based organizations who work on these issues every day.

Notes

- 1** The Women's Action Alliance for Change Nova Scotia is non-partisan alliance of women's groups and committees, social justice organizations and individuals concerned with women's equality.
- 2** Nova Scotia Advisory Council on Status of Women, Economic security fact sheets (NSACSW, 2014). http://women.gov.ns.ca/sites/default/files/documents/factsheets/EconomicSecurity_2014/EconomicSecurity_ALL_2014.pdf According to Statistics Canada, there are no female petroleum engineers, no female contractors and supervisors in oil and gas drilling services, no broadcast technicians, no physicists or astronomers, and no women occupy professional occupations in the physical sciences., in Nova Scotia Women make up 100% of these low paying occupations: home child care provider; Tailors, dressmakers, furriers and milliners; Fabric, fur and leather cutters; Estheticians, electrologists and related occupations; Harvesting labourers; Photographic and film processors and 83% of Food and Beverage Servers.
- 3** NSACSW, Ibid.
- 4** This is the female to male earnings ratio for full time full year work for 2011; Statistics Canada Table 202-0102 average female and male earnings, by work activity, 2011 constant dollars, annual.
- 5** NSACSW, Ibid.
- 6** The WEE Society. *Women Unlimited: A Report on the Program Review and Expansion Strategy* (Wee Society, 2009).
- 7** NSACSW, Ibid. For a discussion, see <http://www.hypatiaassociation.ca/publications/WorkingItOut.pdf>
- 8** The Census 2006 provided the most recent reliable data, but it is nearing 10 years out of date. See for example, Aboriginal Women in Nova Scotia by the NSACSW <http://women.gov.ns.ca/sites/default/files/documents/factsheets/AboriginalWomen2006.pdf>
- 9** Data for 2014, Statistics Canada Table 282-0012.
- 10** Ontario Nurses Association, Gender sensitive budgeting (unpublished) 2012.
- 11** Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Paid and Unpaid Work: Women in Nova Scotia, (Halifax, Government of NS, 2009).
- 12** Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development, Early Childhood Education Report 2014 http://timeforpreschool.ca/media/uploads/profiles-eng/ns_v2.pdf
- 13** Atkinson, Ibid.
- 14** Budig, Michelle et al. (2012). "The Motherhood Penalty in Cross-National Perspective: The Importance of Work-Family Policies and Cultural Attitudes." *Social Politics*, Volume 19.2.
- 15** <http://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/StateofECEC2012.pdf> Note that this is the lowest median hourly wage in the country and that the highest is in Quebec (\$19.13), where child care is the least expensive for families.
- 16** Women's Housing Equality Network, *Women's Housing Facts*. (Ottawa: WHEN, 2009). <http://www.equalityrights.org/when/whf.html>

17 Isabella Bakker, *Gender Budget Initiatives and Why They Matter in Canada* (Ottawa: CCPA, 2006). http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National_Office_Pubs/2005/afb2006_techpaper1_gender_budget_initiatives.pdf



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