

**Asian Regional Conference
Gender Responsive Budgeting Narratives:
Transforming Institutions, Empowering Communities**

PAPER

**Gender Responsive Participatory Budgeting in Penang: The People
Oriented Model**

by

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**24-25 February 2014
Bayview Hotel Georgetown Penang**

Gender Responsive Participatory Budgeting (GRPB) in Penang: The People Oriented Model

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1. Introduction

People participation in deciding public budgets can enhance the benefits of the funds that is to be spent for the good of society according to their needs. It also reflects the government's willingness to apply the principles of good governance to ensure that equality and social justice is achieved for the people. The basic question is who are the target groups the government wish to serve? If it is the people, then should not the people be part of the process, or indeed become partners, in deciding how public funds are spent?

This paper examines the specific context of the Gender Responsive Participatory Budgeting (GRPB) pilot project in Penang. The conceptual framework adopted and the methodology employed dovetail key elements from both Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) and Participatory Budgeting (PB). GRB is a "responsive" process adopted and introduced by policy makers and government agencies as a planning instrument to ensure gender sensitive allocation of resources towards promoting equality. PB is a "participatory" platform that focuses on empowering communities as stakeholders and agents of change.

This paper focuses only on the component of the Penang GRPB pilot project related to the community-based projects at two low-cost flats – PPR Jalan Sungai and PPR Ampangan flats

¹The author would like to acknowledge Dr Cecilia Ng, the Advisor of GRB Pilot Project PWDC; Wong Hoy Cheong, Consultant for GRB Pilot Project year 2012; Tan PekLeng, the Chief Executive Officer of PWDC; Aloyah Bakar and Henry Loh, the Director and Manager of GRB Pilot Project PWDC; and James Lochhead, the GRB Consultant, for their inputs and technical assistance in the process of writing this paper.

are owned and managed by the Penang Island Municipal Council (MPPP); and the SeberangPerai Municipal Councils (MPSP) respectively.

In 2012, Penang sought to address the needs of its plural citizenry by amalgamating two models namely GRB and PB, as the model to influence public expenditure. The vehicle for doing this was the GRB Pilot Project, a flagship project under the Penang Women's Development Corporation (PWDC) implemented in collaboration with MPPP and MPSP which is now in its third and final year of implementation.

The paper documents the process of engaging communities through “dialogical action” – action and reflection – as introduced by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, which was employed in the two communities. Facilitators were trained to work with the residents of the two communities to appraise and identify their needs. The paper argues that all engagements with communities must develop critical frameworks that explore whether diverse and fractured communities can develop agency, organise and transform themselves. The paper concludes by examining the limitations of the GRPB model and what constitutes concrete outputs and sustainability within this context.

2. People's / Citizen Participation and the Penang GRPB Project

People's participation as a process through which stakeholders, including those from the community, influence and share control over priority setting, policy-making, resource allocation, and access to public goods and services is integral to the GRPB methodology adopted in Penang. It is therefore pertinent to examine the concepts of **participation**, **people's participation** and **citizen participation** and how they relate to the Penang GRPB “people-oriented model”.

The World Bank (1994) defines **participation** as “a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, and the decisions and resources which affect them.” From this perspective, participation would be seen in terms of consultation, even participatory decision making, in all phases of a project cycle: from needs assessment to appraisal, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Going further, Twyman (1998) argues for **interactive participation** as a model whereby the people participate in joint analysis, which leads to action plans and the formation of new local groups or the strengthening of existing ones. Interactive participation involves interdisciplinary methods that seek multiple perspectives and make use of systematic and structured learning processes to achieve the intended purpose. These groups take control over local decisions, so that people have a stake in ensuring the satisfactory delivery of outcomes.

For Wilcox (2003), the people’s commitment and ownership of ideas are crucial for **effective participation**: “People are committed when they want to achieve something, indifferent when they do not.” People are most likely to be committed to carrying something through if they have a stake in the idea. An effective tactic is to allow people to say “we thought of that”. In practice that means running brainstorming workshops, helping people think through the practicality of ideas, and negotiating with others to arrive at a result which is acceptable to as many people as possible.

The concept of participation may also be expanded to citizenship that link people in the political, community and social spheres, opening new opportunities for agency (Lister 1998). For Lister, “Citizenship as participation can be seen as representing an expression of human

agency in the political arena, broadly defined; citizenship as rights enables people to act as agents.”

Cunill (1997) refers to **citizen participation** as the intervention of private citizens with determined social interests in public activities: “Citizen participation refers to political participation but distances from it at least in two ways: it abstracts both participation mediated by political parties, as well as the one exercised by citizens when they elect political authorities. It expresses instead - although with multiple meanings - the direct intervention of social agents in public activities. Citizen participation in this sense involves direct ways in which citizens influence and exercise control in governance, not only through the more traditional forms of indirect representation.

This concept of participation means a redefinition of the concept of participation is needed where people are seen not just as beneficiaries but also as citizens who are involved in policy formulation and decision making in key arenas which affect their lives (Valderrama, June 1999). This is the concept of citizen participation that the Penang GRPB project is attempting to apply in its community pilots – as effectively as possible.

3. Gender Responsive Budgeting and Participatory Budgeting

GRB began in Australia in 1984 and was taken up by Canada and South Africa in 1993 and 1994 (Nancy, 2002). By 2001, nearly 20 Commonwealth countries had begun practising GRB in one way or another. GRB is actually a well-established approach to budgeting and policy making that is being practised in more than 100 countries around the world. It has been piloted in many more by UNIFEM and other UN agencies and has been taken up by national and local governments across the globe.

GRB is a practice that considers the various roles of women and men in society: as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and in carrying out various other paternal and maternal responsibilities (Elson, Budgeting for women's rights: monitoring government budgets with compliance for CEDAW, 2006). It is therefore able to correct some of the biases in public budgets that generally underestimate the role of women in the macroeconomy and in particular, the unpaid economy in which women are almost exclusively responsible for caring, maintaining and growing the labour force and indeed in keeping the fabric of society intact.

Just as women and men are biologically different, they also perceive and make use of their environment in different ways. A study carried out in Manchester found that although women and men equally felt that crime and disorder were their greatest concerns, men named the quality of local facilities and transport as important issues, whereas women picked the local environment and education quality as their greatest needs (Lavan, 2005). It is for this reason the GRB is perceived as a public budgeting model that will be able to take into consideration the varied concerns of the public at large.

By being responsive to gender roles in society, public authorities stand in good stead to carry out developmental projects that are targeted towards ensuring that citizens will be able to play a meaningful role in fulfilling their needs effectively. GRB is a process that looks into the fundamental differences between people and how these differences affect their needs. Gender is one of the intersectionalities, just like race, social class and income levels and it highlights the roles that people play in communities as mothers, fathers, housewives, house-husbands and even brothers and sisters. In considering such roles during the process of planning and

implementing public budgets, government authorities ensure that public resources play a pivotal part in assisting citizens to accomplish their gender roles for the good of society as a whole.

Ordinary citizens deserve to know and determine how public funds are utilised. However, in many countries budgeting policies are formulated with relative exclusivity, leaving the majority of ordinary citizens without a direct or sometimes even a representative voice to influence decisions. In some countries, even elected representatives have limited influence on decisions regarding the allocation of public resources. These decisions are the sole domain of a bureaucratic group of planners and people. PB is about how public funds are used after taking into consideration the individual opinion of each member of the community. Therefore, people-centred budgets are also about good governance (Cagatay, Keklik, Lal, & Lang, 2000).

PB originally started in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1990 and since then it has been practised in other countries in the world. PB is one of the most exciting innovations in the development of local democracy and it focuses on community empowerment where it recognises people as agents of change and promotes active citizenship (Yves, Rudolf, & Carsten, 2013). All people have the right to have a voice in their community and the community has the chance to collectively identify their needs and participate in the decision-making and allocation of public funds and budgets. Since every citizen has the right to be a part of PB, it favors marginalised communities especially the poor, children and women. It brings diverse people together, supporting community cohesion. It promotes dialogue, equal partnership and stakeholderhood between citizens and policy makers. It ensures accountability and

transparency as a check and balance on public spending. It directly improves socio-economic environments of communities in their areas/localities.

PB may have different interpretations in different countries and context. In general, PB definition can be understood as the method that allows the participation of non-elected citizens in the conception and/or allocation of public finances (Yves, Rudolf, & Carsten, 2013). It means that a method by which ordinary members of the public may have a say in how public authorities – generally referred to as local governments in Malaysia – spend public funds so that the expenditures reflect the collective priorities of such people (Institute of Civil Engineers, 2005).

The desire to make budgets more participatory and transparent is part of a larger agenda to 'democratize' the formulation of macroeconomic policy frameworks. The design of macroeconomic frameworks and policies which take into account the voices and interests of society members are critical in the fight against inequality and poverty. And it reflects the principles of good governance too. Policy-making and public planning often remains sheltered from broad public scrutiny and debate. This is due in part to the belief that macroeconomics is both a neutral subject, devoid of social content, and a technical subject best left to experts.

Generally, GRB and PB both are concerned with just and equitable allocations and focus on the interest of marginalised groups in society. Both of these models ultimately affect the types of public projects launched to create the best results as perceived for the community. It has been argued that homogeneous, one-size-fits-all gender budgeting, which tends to happen

in a top-down approach to GRB, cannot ensure gender equity in a heterogeneous nation (Chakraborty, 2010).

Both GRB and PB have overlapping concerns but are somewhat different in their impulses – the former is mainly implemented with government agencies and policy makers as key players in gender sensitive transformations; the latter is bottom-up, privileging people and communities as key players while government agencies provide enabling roles. Therefore, by synthesizing both approaches in Penang, it is hoped that an ideal model can be shown where the government and citizens come together as partners in deciding on state allocations and resource use and development activities of the state.

Therefore, the GRPB process emphasises the benefits of institutionalising participatory budgeting, with gender being an important but not the only lens where people in the community can become active citizens, and the government be more responsive to the different needs of the community. Both sides meet through dialogue and community-based work, which will strengthen local democracy.

During the implementation of GRB in Penang, it was discovered that engaging with the community was a highly effective way of not only institutionalising GRB but also in creating public awareness and confidence towards a gender-responsive government. It was found that the community approach and dialogical action of PB complemented the GRB process.

4. Working with People in the Community through Dialogical Action and Reflection

The theory of dialogical action states that human nature is dialogic, and communication has a leading role in our lives. Through a continuous dialogue with others, individuals create and

recreate themselves (Freire, 1970). According to Freire, a dialogue is the democratic choice of educators. Dialogue allows communication and that is how process of education happens.

Freire distinguishes between dialogical actions, the ones that promote understanding, cultural creation, and liberation; and non-dialogic actions, which deny dialogue, distort communication, and reproduce power. Members of a dialogical action will undergo a mutual series of actions and reflections, both sides acting and reflecting on what is said and done by the other and then enabling changes to happen as a result of which. Freire further stated one cannot exist without the other, because action without reflection is like action without thinking, and reflection without action there will be no change or transformation. Freire said that when people “focus their attention on the reality which mediates them and which – posed as problems – challenges them. The response to that challenge is the action of dialogical Subjects (people) upon reality in order to transform it” (Freire, 1998). And when talking in the context of sustainable change and transformation, people’s mind must change first.

The opposite of a dialogical action is a situation where one side regards the other as pitchers to be filled with water, the members of society being the figurative pitchers, while local government officials and urban planning experts determine how, when and what to fill the pitcher with.

The community-based component the GRPB pilot project described in this paper demonstrates how dialogic action processes through dialogues with focus groups were able to help community members focus their attention on reality and mediate their shared problems. The focus group discussions were designed so that community members could express their needs and concerns. They at the same time were asked to propose solutions for overcoming

the problems or challenges that they experience in common at their place of residence. This is the turning point where an individual in focus group discussion, as the subject through GRPB intervention, have begun to shift the way people in the community think and see their world. Therefore, community members begin to look beyond their individual needs and become agents of change and transformation. Hence, it is a practice of determining how public budgets are utilised by entering into dialogues with the public, allowing them to influence public decisions, and taking into account their needs and priorities and also solutions that they wanted to take or see in their place.

This will be discussed later in the section on the process of GRPB in Penang.

4. Gender Responsive Participatory Budgeting (GRPB) in Penang: The Merging of Two Worlds

Civil society, through non-governmental organisations, found a ‘political conjuncture’ in Penang when a new coalition of political parties took over the Penang state government in 2008. There was space for new innovation in public administration and a desire to do away with what had been the status quo. The new government of Penang extolled a position of upholding principles of good governance comprising competency, accountability and transparency in spending public funds.

The new Penang State Government set its sight on making Penang an International City, and among the criteria enunciated by the Chief Minister for attaining this status is the promise to be a people-oriented government which will enrich everyone by an equitable share in the economic cake, empower the people with rights, opportunities and freedom, and enable the people with skills and knowledge. The social cohesion and inclusion which results in a shared

society that allows democratic participation, respect for diversity and individual dignity, equal opportunity and prohibition of discrimination.

The expressed commitment to being a “people-centred government”, have certainly helped state politicians to become more amenable to GRB concepts and at the same time PB processes of the project were seen as a strategy to leverage on stakeholder interests for the advancement of good governance.

At the federal level, the Malaysian Government had launched a gender budget pilot project coordinated by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development in 2003. It involved five different pilot Ministries and was supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This resulted in three Treasury Call Circulars advocating the intergration of gender responsive budgeting into Ministry, department and local budgeting (GRB e-zine, 2012).

These pronouncements resonate strongly with the equality and participative principles of GRPB, although they are not stated in explicit gender terms. In later budget speeches, the State Government has made references to supporting the principles of gender equality and providing the allocations accordingly. A tangible demonstration of this commitment is the allocation of USD60,000 (RM200,000) for the GRB project and USD300,000 (RM1 million) for the establishment of the Penang Women and Development Corporation (PWDC) in 2012.

At the local authority level, favourable political conditions were found in both the municipal councils in Penang when the GRB initiative was mooted.

The MPSP Transformation Blueprint 2011-2015 addresses two issues that are central to GRPB: the mindset of the Council (its organisational culture) and the relationship sought between the Council and the residents of SeberangPrai. In terms of the former, the Blueprint calls for council staff to adopt a positive and responsive attitude and to serve the needs and aspirations of the people, the service users. Mainstreaming GRPB added the layer of understanding the different sorts of needs, and how these may be differentiated between women and men, girls and boys. In terms of the relationship between the Council and the residents of SeberangPrai, the Blueprint stresses the need to establish a relationship in which the people are not just bystanders but active participants in the transformation process. This provided an excellent context for this project to help forge a stronger relationship between MPSP and the communities, the women and men, it serves.

At MPPP, there was no comparable transformation exercise. Nonetheless, the Council's overall organisational goals and more specific departmental goals provided entry points for the introduction of GRPB. Provisions of quality service feature strongly in MPPP's vision, mission and commitments, and reference is made to community participation. These are foundations upon which the template for GRPB could be built to facilitate the transformation of the council's own budgeting process. In part due to a lower level of prior engagement, key officers in the MPPP started off with little understanding of what GRPB is and might offer. Some also expressed scepticism as to whether gender is the right lens with which to examine policy and budget planning. However, similar to the experience with MPSP, through discussions and conversations held and the positive impact of community pilots at the two PPRs flats as well as and other interactions, more council officers have begun to see the relevance of GRPB and a few have expressed enthusiasm for it.

One of the approaches identified for achieving justice for the people was through mainstreaming gender. The Gender Equality and Good Governance Society, Penang (3Gs) was a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that was set up by women's groups, activists and academics. It was fully funded by the State Executive Committee for Women, Family and Community Development. Its establishment was to carry out the task of promoting gender mainstreaming through education and creating public awareness on gender issues. One of the activities carried out was organising a conference on "*Gender Mainstreaming: Justice for All*" together with the Women's Development Research Centre (KANITA) of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) Penang in year 2010.

A significant result of the conference was the commitment made by the Penang State Government to adopt and implement GRB as a strategy to promote gender equality and good governance. More workshops were jointly organised by 3Gs and KANITA in 2011 to explore GRB in greater depth. The workshops targeted people from the state and local governments with the objectives of highlighting the understanding of GRB and the benefits of adopting GRB in their areas of work, and at the same time exposing them to GRB concepts, methodologies and experiences from other countries. A GRB Taskforce was subsequently formed to work towards realising GRB in Penang.

A scoping exercise was done in 2011 and the report highlighted that to mainstream GRB in the local governments, any budget planning must acknowledge the different needs of the people, and the importance of opening up to include the participation of women and men at all levels of society in budget planning and processes (Lochhead, 2011). With the scoping report, the GRB Taskforce produced the GRB Project Document that was presented in November 2011 to the State Government which laid out a proposal for a three-year GRB

Pilot Project at MPPP and MPSP. The project document outlined five outputs which are interlinked to each other but the overall goal is towards institutionalising GRB in the local governments². The second output was recognised as crucial because if proved successful, it meant that GRB could be implemented in all Penang state departments and processes. The GRB pilot project was then placed under PWDC.

Output Two in the GRB Pilot Project focused on GRB implementation of selected services within the two local governments. The initial plan had been to demonstrate the use of GRB tools to enhance service provisions and delivery with focus on gender needs. Since the issues of cleanliness and safety were the main concerns of the state government and the councils, and received the highest number of public complaints, it was proposed that these two areas be the focus of the GRB pilot project. Moreover, both areas were part of the Penang State Government's 3Cs (Congestion, Crime and Cleanliness) programme. The cleanliness pilot focused on MPSP's 3R (Recycle, Reuse and Reduce) programme under Local Agenda 21 (LA21), while the other pilot, which was on safety, was tied in with the Safe City Programme of both local governments under the National Key Results Area (KRA) of crime reduction.

The pilot project focused on two low-cost flats, each being owned and managed by MPSP and MPPP. PPR Jalan Sungai is a low-cost flat comprising two 22-storey blocks. There are 529 three-bedroom units, altogether, and the average rental is RM110 (USD35) a month. PPR Ampangan is a 10-storey block of low cost flat units, with a total of 250 three-bedroom units, also with an average rental of RM100 (USD35) a month.

There were four strategies planned under Output 2 and they are:

²See Paper at the GRB Conference 2014 on *Localising Gender and Participatory Budgeting: Challenges of Institutionalisation in Penang* by Aloyah Bakar, Dato' Hajjah Patahiyah Ismail, and Maimunah Mohd Sharif.

1. Employ GRB tools like gender-based user counts, needs analysis and gender-disaggregated beneficiary analysis to inform decision-making and budgeting priorities.
2. Engage the community in providing input on actions to be taken and mobilise them to participate in their implementation. The community should also be involved in the monitoring of activities being implemented and impact assessment.
3. Local government staff to work alongside the project team for both research and action for mutual transfer of knowledge and skill as well as building linkages with the community.
4. Selected services to be piloted based on the common priorities of the authorities and the communities.

In line with these strategies, a project methodology entitled, “Different People, Different Needs: Scoping and Planning to Engender Inclusivity and Ownership in Social Housing” was then developed to execute the pilot. It covered four phases: survey, focus group discussions, voting and project planning. This is where Penang GRB merged with PB for the first time through the four phases. As stated earlier, the scoping report highlighted the importance of opening up to and including input from women and men at all levels of society.

A year after of the implementation of GRB at the community level, the GRB team decided to merge the two, instead of the original segregation of cleanliness and safety projects, it was changed to selected community pilot projects. The reason of the merging was to widen the scope for working with the community and not to limit the team to only cleanliness and safety issues. The next section discusses the Four Phases Participatory Budgeting Methodology Framework.

5. The Four Phases Participatory Budgeting Methodology Framework³

The action started in January 2012 with a recce which was done at nine flats – seven owned by MPPP, one by MPSP and one by the Penang State Government. The reason for the recce was to decide on the locations of the GRB pilot project. The recce was done through observations by the external consultant and GRB director and conversations they had with residents and site management officers. However the final locations selected for the community pilot was decided by MPPP and MPSP, as the project was conducted in full collaboration with the two local councils.

The actual community project started in April 2012 and consisted of four phases. The objective was to understand the needs of the residents and how a fruitful dialogue could be initiated with the local governments. The goal was to strengthen local democracy within the low-cost flats and encourage the residents to participate in budget decisions and allocation of public funds. This process was also about empowering residents to understand the meaning of shared ownership and assuming responsibility for their own environment.

³ The Four Phases Participatory Budgeting Framework was introduced and designed by Wong Hoy Cheong, the external consultant for GRB from January – December 2012.

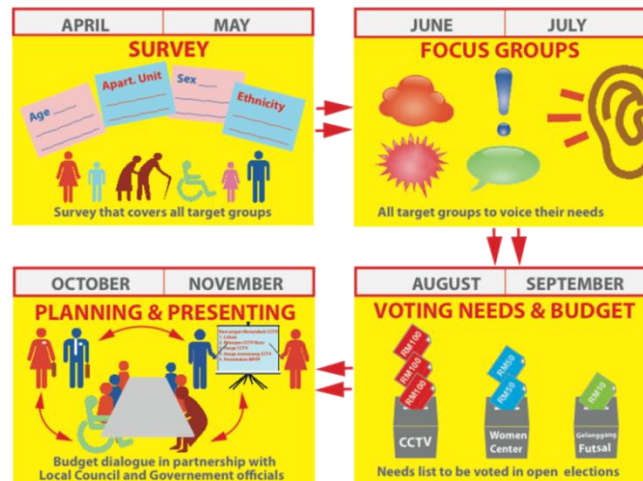


Figure 1.1: The Four Phases Participatory Budgeting Framework

The Four Phases of Participatory Budgeting methodology framework is as follows:

a. Phase 1: Survey

A basic household demographic survey of residents of the two PPRs. One member of each flat unit provided information on the people who stayed with her/him.

b. Phase 2 – Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions (FGD) were organised to understand the needs of both women and men of five major target groups: Children/Teenagers (aged 18 and below); Youths (aged 19-30); Adults (aged 31-55); Senior Citizens (aged 55 and above); and Disabled People. The numbers for FGDs were planned according to the information compiled in Phase 1 to ensure diversity in representation and sensitivity to gender differences. Ideally, there should at least be 10 people in a FGD. A set of questions for the FGD and the design of the answer sheet were jointly designed by the GRB external consultant and facilitators in the workshop. The FGD questions were as follows:

1. What are the issues / problems you experience / face in PPR?

2. Who / which group affected by the issues / problems?
3. Why the issues / problem happened / occurred? (Reasons)
4. What are the solutions you can take? / How to overcome the issues / problems?
5. What is the process in arriving at the solution(s)?
6. Who will benefit from this?

During the FGDs sessions, the questions were posed to the groups by the facilitator and the answers duly recorded.

Special care was taken during group discussions with young children aged 10 – 13 years old where the interactive sessions sought to create awareness and educate about gender issues in their home and surroundings. This included holding drawing sessions and asking the children to draw pictures entitled ‘My Family’ to identify different people in the family, and visiting existing sites and facilities within the flats and asking which them to identify which are ‘Best’ and ‘Not best’.

Through the FGDs, a list of the residents’ priority needs was compiled and classified according to themes / projects / programmes that the community could work on at their own flats.

c. Phase 3: Voting on Needs and Budget Allocation

This consisted of three days of voting by the residents based on the ‘priority needs list’ that had emerged from the FGDs. Each resident aged 10 years and above were given five ballots to vote and select items on the needs list which they considered priorities.

d. Phase 4: Planning, Presentation and Implementation of Project

This was the process where residents sat down with representatives from the local governments to discuss their needs and plan how to best meet them. Decisions were based on feasibility of the project and the availability of budget.

Human Resources

To work with the communities, the project hired four Research Assistants, three men and one woman, to assist the GRB team in the fieldwork at the two PPRs throughout the four phases.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the research assistants were trained as facilitators to work with the communities at the two PPRs to appraise and identify their needs. The workshop to train the research assistants included role-playing sessions on approaching the residents for the survey and also on conducting the focus group discussions with the residents. They were also required to write reports on their personal experiences on the ground. This process adopts Freire's Dialogical Action approach, where both parties – research assistants and residents – derived valuable lessons from participating in the journey. No one was superior to the other because everybody was affected by the interaction.

During the implementation of the phase or / and after it was completed, the facilitators and GRB team members did a reflection of that particular phase of 'action'. The reason for this is to enhance the team's proficiency within the fieldwork. Discussions were held from time to time, face to face or over emails on matters that needed feedback from the residents or other issues on the ground including personal experiences, or in the workshops preparing for the next phase.

The communities' representatives especially the residents' associations of the two PPRs, were involved in the implementation of the four phases assisting us in the survey and also mobilising people to come for FGDs, and to vote. While in the earlier phases local government staff were more involved in attending meetings as the representatives of the municipalities, they came to play bigger role in Phase Four by sharing and giving information on the technicality of the project implemented at both PPRs. This is because phase four related to the process of implementation of projects in both PPR Jalan Sungai and PPR Ampangan, wherein for the former it was the Community Contract on Cleanliness, and for the latter it was the upgrading of the existing Recreational Park. Both projects required many consultations meeting with residents and local council staff to discuss details and to ensure compliance with standard operating procedures. Hence, the local council staffs were invited to join GRB team to meet the community and discussed the process and procedure of the projects and programs.

Below is the Dialogical Action approach in GRPB.

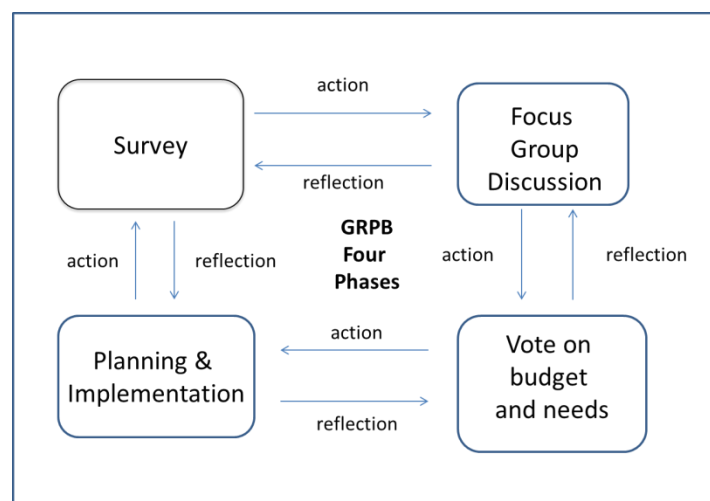


Figure 1.2: Dialogical Action in GRPB Community Pilot

6. Evaluation of the Four Phases of Participatory Budgeting

Phase 1: Survey

The information from the Phase 1 demographic survey provided useful data for the planning and designing of the subsequent phase.

The survey covered 75% of the units in PPR Sungai Pinang and 85% of those in PPR Ampangan. Those left out of the survey were residents who were not at their home, despite followed up visits by the research assistants or members of their resident association. Some did not cooperate because they were just busy while others were suspicious that the survey was done prior to the general election of 2013, there were yet others who perceived it as a veiled attempt to study their electoral inclinations.

Overall, however, the survey recorded a high response rate as stated earlier and some of the data collected is presented below.

In both locations, residents aged 18 and below formed the majority (32% at PPR Jalan Sungai and 41% at Ampangan), followed by the 31 – 55 age group (28% at PPR Jalan Sungai and 31% at Ampangan). The smaller age group comprised senior citizens aged 55 and above (14% at PPR Jalan Sungai and 8% at Ampangan).

Large proportions of the residents were not gainfully employed, either because they were still children, adolescents, have retired or were jobless at the time. At PPR Jalan Sungai, 33% were in this category, while there were 39.8% at Ampangan.

Housewives made up 12% of the residents at PPR Jalan Sungai and 4% at Ampangan. Women, overall, formed the majority of residents in both places, with 53.5% of residents at PPR Jalan Sungai and 53.4% at Ampangan.

Phase 2: Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

As mentioned earlier, the numbers for each FGD were planned according to the information compiled in Phase 1, to make sure diversity in representation of gender, age group and ethnicity in both PPRs. In general, each FGD must have at least 10 people. Based on the information in Phase 1, the FGDs were divided as follows: Children/Teenagers (aged 18 and below) and Adults (aged 31-55), total of 40 people in each target group; followed by Youths (aged 19-30) and Senior Citizens (aged 55 and above), total 20 people in each target group. The exception was the group for disabled which had 5 individuals. The invitation to join a FGD was done by the facilitators who visited every floor to ensure that there were representatives from every floor. However, the FGDs did not turned out as we planned. The first few FGDs failed to get residents involvement.

Our experience taught us that it is not easy to mobilise the community without the active participation of its residents. Through the residents association , we managed to get people to come for the focus group discussions. Overall, more female adults (aged 31 – 55) came for the focus group discussions compared with males and other age groups. The main reason was because they are housewives. Snacks were served at most of the discussion groups to encourage them to join the discussion and put the participants at ease, and many of the sessions involving senior citizens were conducted in the homely setting of the living rooms of one of the flat units.

Phase 3: Voting for needs and budget

An encouraging 69.5% from 1667 of the residents at PPR Jalan Sungai and 67.5% from 886 at Ampangan who were eligible voters had participated in the voting process. All residents aged 10 years old and above were eligible to vote. The balloting process was accompanied by fun-filled activities: games, karaoke, dancing and food. A variety of posters and banners were also used to decorate the balloting premises to raise awareness on the project among residents.

To instil upon the residents the realisation that they were voting for how funds would be spent, the ballots were marked with a Ringgit (Malaysian dollar) value. Each resident who showed up for the balloting was given five ballot papers which were symbolically marked to show a value of RM100 (USD32) each. The ballots were also colour-coded to indicate the age-group and gender of each resident to enable a subsequent analysis of their voting preferences.

During the three-day balloting process, the majority of PPR Jalan Sungai residents chose building maintenance as their top concern, while PPR Ampangan residents voted for a recreational park as the highest priority. Below is a tabulation of their choices according to need and sex:

Phase 3 – Voting on Needs and Budget
'Vote your Needs, Decide the Budget'

Ranking of Voting Results according to Needs & Sex

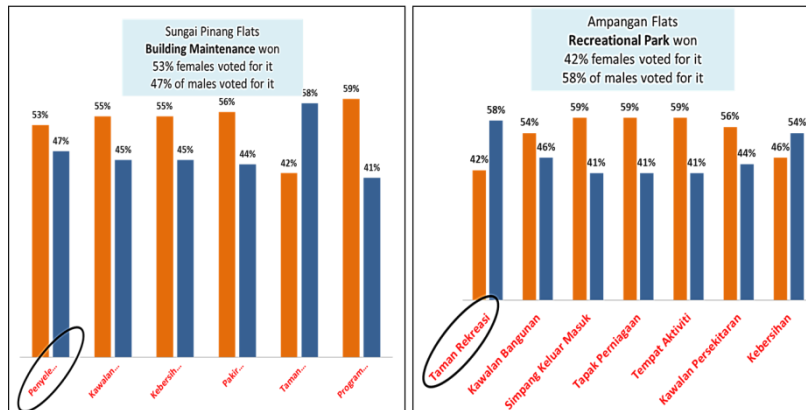


Figure 1.3: Ranking of Voting Results according to Need and Sex

Phase 4: Project Planning, Presentation and Implementation

While Phase 1 to Phase 3 took about eight months for completion, the final phase of implementing the community programmes had proven to be most challenging and stretched over 10 months. There were two main reasons of why Phase 4 took that long: one, the technicality and standard procedure of the implementation that need to be followed according to local councils standard; and second, the internal problems within the communities. Both reasons have led to many consultation meetings between local councils, residents and the GRB team. In PPR Jalan Sungai, the internal problem eventually led to the formation of a new residents association. As a plus point, however, the gender-responsive element of this project has helped the residents associations in Jalan Sungai to ensure that the committee members are equally comprised of men and women.

In PPR Ampangan, the construction of the recreational park was delayed because of the many consultation meetings and one focus discussion were held at the community level to discuss

the detailed features and plans of the recreational park. Both consultations meetings in the PPRs and FGDs in PPR Ampangan involved women and men at the communities.

At Phase Four of the project, PPR Jalan Sungai underwent a major cleaning-up and refurbishment exercise, made possible by a generous special budget allocation from MPPP. The budget had shot up by more than 300% compared to the previous year to a total of about USD261,000 (RM868,000), and the extra allocation was for the cleaning contract, repainting of the external wall of the flats, refurbishment of fire-fighting equipment, repair and upgrading of the flat's elevators, refurbishment of a rather dilapidated building for use by the community's social organisations and new equipment for the children's playground, plus the outdoor gym equipment for the adults.

The participatory spirit of the residents of PPR Jalan Sungai was carried further when a ballot was also held for residents to choose the colour schemes they wanted for the external walls of their flat. The priority was given to the good paymasters as a reward for their responsible attitude for paying the rental and also to create a feeling of ownerships and care about the residential area. This process and approaches was intended to encourage other residents to pay the rental so that they can be involved in other project in future.

In PPR Jalan Sungai, the most significant output of the community programme was the awarding of the cleaning contract to the new residents association. Previously the cleaning contract was awarded to external private contractors.

Through the voting process, "building maintenance" had scored the highest. But there was a need to be practical and realistic and as the sum involved for the entire building maintenance

contract was rather large MPPP decided we should focus on a contract that was more manageable. MPPP was of the view that handling a building maintenance project required experience and management skills which the newly formed committee have yet to acquire. However, MPPP was open to the idea for the Residents Association to take on the contract on cleanliness first.

After a series of consultation meetings with the local councils and residents, the cleaning contract was awarded to the new resident association in September 2013. The cleaning supervisor and a team of six cleaners were hired from amongst the residents themselves. The process of interviewing applicants for the work was done by a panel consisting of representatives of the new residents association, the Penang Island Municipal Council, and the Penang Women’s Development Corporation.

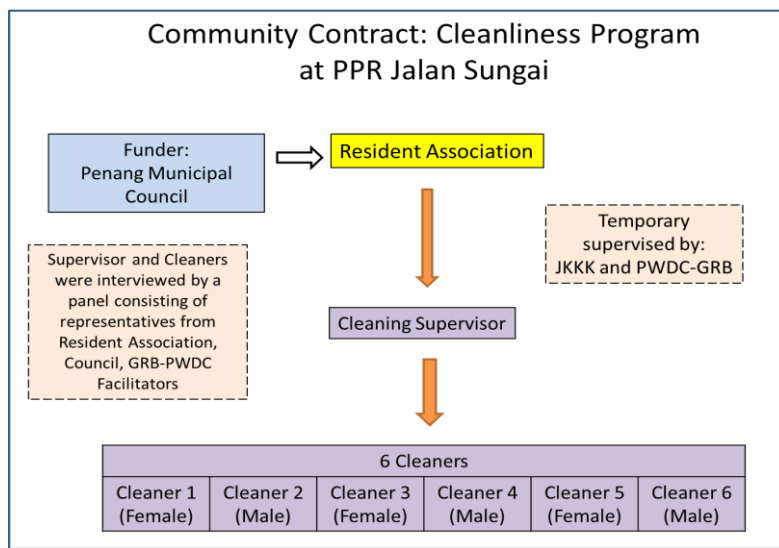


Figure 1.4: Community Contract on Cleanliness – Structure of work and employment

The rationale for adopting this community cleaning contract was to leverage on the stakeholder interests of the residents, to provide jobs for the community, and to instil a sense of ownership and accountability to their residential area. Through subsequent discussions

with the residents association, the budget for the contract was further increased from about USD20,000 (RM66,000) to about USD33,000 (RM108,000). The increment of the budget was to hire another three cleaners to add to current three that were hired at PPR Jalan Sungai.

Due to financial constraints, MPSP could not allocate additional funds for Ampangan. In keeping with priority need expressed through the voting process, a small recreational park comprising a children's playground, gazebos and a foot reflexology path was constructed for the residents. The funds for the construction of this park was extracted from the original fund of USD60,000 (RM200,000) allocated by the council for the GRB project.

It was not possible, however, to duplicate the GRPB processes at PPR Ampangan. The proposal for the residents to work together on a voluntary basis (bergotong-royong) to build the recreational park did not get a good response. The residents felt the concept of gotong-royong was not feasible, as there was insufficient unity and goodwill among the residents to work on the project.

At the local council level, the councillors and officers were more concerned to ensure compliance with procedures for open tender from the contractors and that the park met with safety requirements. The residents who were competent contractors and builders were encouraged to apply for the contract through that procedure. However, none of the residents applied for the contract and therefore the contract was awarded to the external company. As such, the final phase of GRPB could not leverage on the residents' stakeholder interest for the construction of the recreational park. It was, nevertheless, completed successfully.

7. Reflections and Discussion

The best of both worlds

The GRB methodology analyses decision-making on public expenditure in the context of their implications on gender equality, and tries to bring development and changes that will make budgets more gender-equal. The PB model, on the other hand, introduces processes in which citizens can have direct influence in some aspects of budget decision-making.

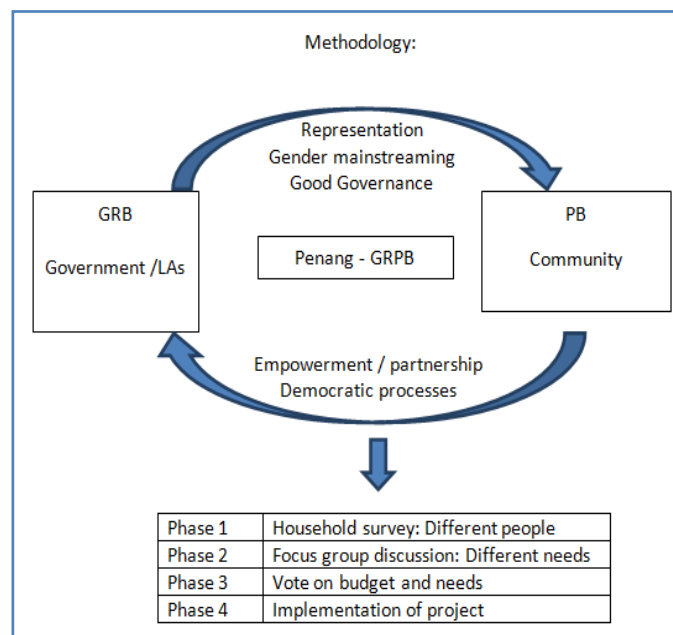


Figure 1.5: Methodology of GRPB in Penang

In most countries, public budgeting is traditionally considered the exclusive function of the public administration. It is only recently that the value of PB has been considered desirable in some countries. A common rationale for budgets being formulated in secret is to prevent fluctuation and volatility in financial and industrial markets. The opposing view is that, secrecy in budgeting may give rise to wild speculation while greater transparency may actually create more stable markets. Accessible and timely budget information can facilitate private sector planning and investment (Krafchik, 2002).

The transparency afforded by PB can augment GRB practices. Whilst gender issues are traditionally treated as secondary and women tend to fall through the cracks in development plans and programmes, the PB principles of empowerment can augment's women empowerment without sacrificing or side-lining male concerns.

GRPB – People-first framework on public spending

The marriage between PB and GRB in Penang had been borne out of a desire to engage with the community. In order for the principles of gender responsiveness to be institutionalised and internalised by the public administration, it was necessary to show that the people would embrace the process. Empowering communities for Penang's transformation is crucial.

An evaluation of this project was conducted in November 2013 by Dr Regina Frey, a German expert on Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Budgeting⁴. This evaluation report indicated that, the project's greatest strength was with the community pilots in PPR Jalan Sungai and Ampangan. Publicity work to spread GRB awareness amongst the public and to the local authorities were also noted as being successful (Frey, Evaluation Report: PWDC's Gender Responsive Budgeting Project in Penang, 2013).

Frey (2013) had noted that the PPR Jalan Sungai and Ampangan projects have made the benefits of GRB visible and created a clear, methodological framework at the community level. Frey (2013) stated that,

⁴This evaluation exercise was sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation.

“With the pilot projects the GRB team developed very useful showcases. A methodology was created on how communities can express priorities in a participatory, democratic and gender sensitive way. It sets four phases and ensures participation of various groups of women and men. The project proves that GRB is useful because the people start to organise themselves and take on more responsibility for their community. It also shows, that in the long run the local administration can save money, such as when people organised themselves in the low cost flats people cared more about maintenance and the removal of rubbish. Here the GRB project worked with an innovative approach, also serving as a bridge between the communities and the local administration.” (Frey, 2013, p. 8)

The GRB Project in Penang is therefore unique because of its approach in including the people as stakeholders. The combination of GRB and PB is a change from the usual models and processes of GRB.

Challenges and Limitations

There are several issues and challenges concerning implementing GRPB at community level.

The most obvious challenge was the inconsistent commitment and time availability both of the residents and local council representatives. GRPB processes can be time consuming because it includes many layers of planning and consultations meetings and sessions between the residents and local councils.

Secondly, the complexity of negotiating with various local personalities and conflicting interest groups in the communities. Both PPRs consisted of diverse and fractured communities, so it slowed the implementation process of Phase Four. It became a challenge

at several instances to get them to come together, and there were residents who did not like the members in their residents associations because of personal matters, etc. “These power relations follow ethnic lines but also social class, gender, age, disabilities are social categories that sometimes make it difficult to achieve a solid consensus which does not leave out weaker groups and leaves everyone satisfied with a certain decision or allocation of resources” (Frey, 2013, p. 8).”

The lack of readiness of the residents to take ownership of planning and proposing their needs in a more concrete manner is another area of concern. Phase 4 included capacity building where the residents could present a working paper together with the GRB team and local government at the budget dialogue session. However, this did not happen due to the time spent in completing the implementation of the programme and project.

The approach of the local government remains less than ideal. While the local government officers were deeply involved in the planning of the projects chosen by the residents and played their role to make sure the technical matters were attended to the GRB Project still tended to be treated as a project that was outsourced to PWDC. It is recognised that implementing GRPB requires mindset and institutional change within the local authorities and this is necessarily a long-term process

There is a need to manage the expectations of the people. Implementing GRPB with the public can stir up a lot of excitement and, invariably expectation. However, the harsh reality of financial limitations still holds true, and when the residents vote for projects that cannot be implemented as a result of such limitations, they may experience disenchantment and consider GRPB as an exercise in futility.

For example, in the case of PPR Ampangan where the futsal court was not included in the implementation due to lack of space around the flat area and also budget constraints. This has caused frustration to the residents especially the male youth. Therefore, it is vital to manage the expectation of the communities, especially at the earlier phases of implementation.

Positive Development in GRPB Pilot Project

A number of positive developments and observations had also stemmed from the GRPB project.

The local governments were more ready to make empathetic decisions for the sake of the community. When decision-makers in the MPPP observed that GRPB had increased community participation and voiced their needs and aspirations, they reciprocated by increasing budget allocations for improving their living condition. Councillors and officers in both MPPP and MPSP also reacted positively on seeing that the flat residents could organise themselves and express their needs in a democratic way.

The residents were clearly empowered by GRPB and developed a greater sense of ownership for their shared facilities and resources. The GRPB project in Penang also resulted in a synergy of other organisations. Various groups such as Penang Arts-Ed, Women's Centre for Change and The Soroptomists International also held a variety of workshops and community development projects at PPR Jalan Sungai. When the residents organised themselves, they were able to benefit from other programmes.

Women stand a good chance to become movers in GRPB projects. In PPR Jalan Sungai and Ampangan they mobilised the people and became the leaders in many of the activities. There were still instances of gender inequality, however. For example at the decision making level, many women still remain secondary because not many of them hold the positions as the office bearers, and many of them hold position as ordinary members in the committee. They tend to be quiet in the presence of men and most of the time leave it to men to make final decisions. In most of the programs organised at the PPR Jalan Sungai and Ampangan, women tended to handle all the chores involved, such as preparing food and serving the people, while the men merely sat with the guests.

By incorporating the “everybody” nature of PB, gender issues remain in the picture, but is no longer thought of in isolation from other social divisions. The GRPB model regards gender as part of the intersectionality of communities; it acknowledges gender as an integral issue but not without also viewing the other groupings.

8. Conclusion and The Way Forward Towards Sustainable People Oriented Model

Budgeting

This three-year project has culminated in a unique framework of empowering ordinary citizens to take part in public spending decisions affecting their community. They became agents of change and could put aside their differences and decide for themselves as a residential community. The experiences of accomplishing Output Two, which is the pilot projects at PPR Jalan Sungai and Ampangan, has shown that a diverse society can be guided to arrive at singular decisions that can be celebrated by the community as a whole.

The subsequent step is to focus on capacity building with a strong following of the implementation model, complete with guidelines and checklists. This capacity should be developed within the local municipal councils themselves rather than through a third party facilitator such as the Penang Women's Development Corporation. This is will be crucial to institutionalising GRPB within the Penang government.

GRPB allows people to witness and feel the change that they want within their physical locale. This will produce a string of highly beneficial impacts such as societies more committed to itself and communities with greater degrees of civic consciousness. The awarding contracts to the residents themselves had forestalled the ability of the project to fully empower the residents

However, if we want long and lasting change, the only way forward is to mainstream GRPB into local authorities and ultimately to institutionalise GRPB into the public administrative process in all state levels to ensure that the benefits will be permanent. Without this, the success of this pilot project will only be one-off.

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