FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR INEQUALITY REDUCTION: EVEN IT UP!

Oxfam in Kenya:
Fiscal Justice for women and girls
INTRODUCTION
Through its work on the Fiscal Accountability for Inequality Reduction (FAIR) programme, Oxfam in Kenya aims to influence decision makers to take action on progressive taxation and budgeting processes to equip citizens and civil society organizations with the knowledge and skills to feed into public finance management processes, including monitoring of spending and the delivery of public services. A focus on women and girls is at the centre of Oxfam in Kenya’s programming. This case study shows how three closely interlinked Oxfam projects – Wezesha Jamii, WE-Care and Gender-Responsive Budgeting – benefited women at the economic, political and social levels. This holistic approach encompassed many different areas, including economic empowerment, social protection, social norms, unpaid care, political participation and budgeting.

CONTEXT
From 2014 until 2018 Kenya experienced steady economic growth, with its gross domestic product (GDP) reaching $87.8bn in 2018, compared to $61.4bn in 2014.1 Despite this positive economic trend, inequality within the country remains high, with a large gap between the poorest and the richest people. Fewer than 0.1% of the population own more wealth than the bottom 99.9% combined (more than 44 million people).2 The richest 10% of people in Kenya control 32% of total income.3

Women and girls are hit hardest by the growing inequality gap. Gender inequality is widespread: women have less access to education than men and have limited ability to own and control land and property, despite the existence of progressive laws.4 A large percentage of women work in the informal sector, with minimal support from national or local government. Women also spend a disproportionate amount of time on unpaid care and domestic work compared with men.5 This hinders access for women and girls to decent work, education and health services.

Although public participation is enshrined in the constitution, most citizens have been unable to effectively engage in processes of planning, budgeting, allocation and spending of national and county-level resources. Women living in marginalized counties and informal settlements, who are the primary users of basic social services and therefore the most affected, struggle to access quality healthcare, education and water supplies. Only 58% of Kenyans have access to clean drinking water, and even fewer (30%) have access to proper sanitation.6 The representation of women in decision-making positions and their participation in budget, monitoring and revenue mobilization processes are key to ensuring that adequate resources are allocated to basic public services, and in particular to services responding to the needs of women and girls.

Quality provision of public services is also urgently needed to relieve the burden of unpaid care and domestic work that falls disproportionately on the
shoulders of women and girls and prevents them from meaningfully participating in political, economic and social activities. Unpaid care and domestic work entails all household work that is non-remunerated, including cooking, cleaning, collecting water and taking care of children.

A household survey undertaken by Oxfam in multiple informal settlements in Nairobi County in 2019 showed that women spent the most time on unpaid care and domestic work, by far. Women spent on average five hours a day on primary care work, compared with an average of just one hour a day for men.

**EMPOWERING HOUSEHOLDS**

In 2015, the Wezesha Jamii project – whose name in Swahili means ‘Empowering Communities’ – was implemented in five informal settlements in Nairobi by Oxfam in Kenya together with local partners SITE Enterprise Promotion, Youth Alive! Kenya (YAK) and the National Organization of Peer Educators (NOPE). Oxfam and YAK worked together to empower women domestic workers and small-scale traders in Nairobi County to enhance their life skills and business management skills and to increase their participation in decision-making processes such as public planning and budgeting. In total, the project targeted 30,516 women (10,242 domestic workers and 20,274 small-scale traders) in five informal settlements in Nairobi County – Kibera, Korogocho, Mathare, Mukuru and Kawangware.

Women in these areas face challenges such as limited livelihood opportunities and low levels of income. They also have limited access to basic services such as quality pre-primary education facilities, health centres and clean water, and limited security.
Awareness of social protection policies

The Nairobi County government has put in place social protection policies that are applicable to people working in the informal sector, as well as in the formal sector; these include the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) and the National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF). However, most women in the target group were not aware that they were entitled to these social protection benefits or were hesitant to access them due to high premium rates and restrictions on accessing their savings, among other reasons. The approach taken by Oxfam and YAK was two-pronged: conversations were held with senior management of the two social security institutions to develop schemes that would be more suitable for people in informal settlements. This meant increased flexibility for members to access their savings, lower premium payments for those working in the informal sector, greater levels of enrolment and more hospitals offering services under NHIF coverage. Secondly, awareness was raised among women about these schemes and how they could claim their benefits. Whereas previously funds from women’s personal businesses would often be used to pay for health needs or for education (for instance, taking care of a sick relative or paying school fees), the benefits from social security meant that women were more cushioned and had more financial stability.

In this case, information was power. The government had introduced reforms that benefited people working in the informal economy and living in informal settlements, yet few people were claiming the benefits that these reforms offered, due to a lack of awareness and a lack of information. By the end of the Wezesha Jamii programme in 2018, sensitization had led to an increase in enrolment in the five settlements from 14% to 35.5% for the NHIF and from 5% to 34% for the NSSF, and a national growth spike in the number of registrations was also observed.

Assessing gendered needs

To further tackle the challenges of low incomes and high levels of insecurity, the women domestic workers and small-scale traders taking part in the programme were trained in business and vocational skills and in financial management. The project was tailored to the different needs and experiences of the women, with different types of engagement for domestic workers and small-scale traders. Traders had shorter trainings close to the market, with sessions of one or two hours before they had to get back to work. Interaction with domestic workers, on the other hand, was scheduled at weekends when these groups had some time off from their places of work.

Wezesha Jamii also supported women to define priority areas that had the potential to improve their livelihoods. Different approaches were used to inform and mobilize participants, including the use of social media, theatre performances, bulk SMS messaging, WhatsApp groups and the mobilization of groups by peer champions. Six priority areas were identified: water and sanitation, electrification, early childhood development centres, improved roads, access to sustainable and regulated markets and trading spaces, and public health facilities. Unpaid care and domestic work was an important component that was also addressed by these priority areas. The women were supported to develop petitions and memoranda that reflected these priorities and to present them to their local governments in sub-county and ward forum meetings.

Working together with local government

The project not only focused on the capacity of the women but also worked together with local government officials through trainings that covered the legal provisions of public participation in decision-making processes, the need for the public to have timely access to information, and the consequences of failing to involve members of public in decision-making processes. At the national level, the partners engaged with relevant stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, trade unions and the Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotels, Education Institutions and Hospital Workers (KUDHEIHA), to support the ratification process of the International Labour Organization (ILO)’s Convention concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers.10 Important steps have been taken as part of this process, including multiple consultation sessions with stakeholders and the launch of a technical paper in 2018 to further the adoption and ratification of the convention in Kenya, which have informed lobbying and advocacy interventions with the government to ratify the convention.11
In 2018, Kenya began enacting a new round of five-year County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs). These county-level plans provide a framework that guides development activities in each county over the next five years. The plans need to be approved by county assemblies before counties can allocate and spend their funds. Before the CIDPs were finalized, women were mobilized to participate in sub-county meetings and presented memoranda that reflected their own priorities. Capacity training lay at the root of this work: women were empowered and confident enough to speak in public and to take up active roles in decision-making spaces. As a result, the six priority areas defined by the women were reflected in the 2018–22 CIDPs.

**REDUCING THE BURDEN OF UNPAID CARE AND DOMESTIC WORK**

The Women’s Economic Empowerment and Care (WE-Care) project, which started in Kenya in 2018, complemented the Wezesha Jamii project by focusing on unpaid care work. This Oxfam project aimed to increase the time and choice available to women and girls to participate in social, political and economic life by transforming how unpaid care and domestic work is valued, shared and invested in, using the ‘4Rs’ approach:

- **Recognition**: increase recognition of care as valuable work and make care roles more visible;

**PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF UNPAID DOMESTIC AND CARE WORK – REBECCA AND SHADRACK**

Rebecca Ndeto, her husband Shadrack and their three children live in Nairobi County. Within her household, Rebecca was responsible for cooking, caring for the children and doing other household chores. There was little time left for her to attend Women’s Group meetings or to work. Taking part in one of the Wezesha Jamii trainings, Rebecca and Shadrack learned that care work within the household was a shared responsibility for both of them. Shadrack began preparing dinner and taking the children to school. This freed up time for Rebecca and she was able to attend the Women’s Group meetings and pursue paid employment.  

Source: Oxfam (2020).12
Reduction: reduce the burden and time spent on unpaid care work;
Redistribution: divide the responsibility for care work equitably between women and men and between households and employers/the state;
Representation: increase the participation of care workers in decision-making processes in order to put unpaid care and domestic work on the political agenda.

Leveraging the connections built by YAK with women in the five informal settlements, monthly meetings were organized with the same groups of women to discuss and raise awareness of unpaid care work. Social norms are at the root of the 4Rs, as these need to be addressed in order to redistribute unpaid care work equitably. However, changing social norms is a slow and challenging process. Through social media campaigns, radio talk shows and media engagement, Oxfam and YAK disseminated information on unpaid care and domestic work in the five settlements.

Local advocacy forums were conducted with the help of the Master’s House Tool, which categorizes the perceptions of different people within a community of unpaid care work and initiates discussions on how to change perceptions and attitudes. Village elders, opinion leaders, county officials and women and men from the five informal settlements participated in these forums. Social norms in the household were further tackled via counselling sessions with couples. Fifty women who were part of the Wezesha Jamii and WE-Care projects attended couple sessions with their husbands. During these sessions, couples were sensitized on sharing unpaid care and domestic work in the home. After the sessions, these couples led conversations on the subject of unpaid care and domestic work in their communities.

One of the challenges that civil society faces when working on the intersection of gender and fiscal justice is the lack of gender-disaggregated data. There was little information available in Kenya on the division of unpaid care and domestic work between men and women and the time spent on it by each. Therefore, the WE-Care programme conducted a Household Care Survey (HCS) in the five informal settlements to understand the gendered patterns of such work across these communities. The survey also explored the perceptions and attitudes of women and men towards such work and made several (policy) recommendations based on the 4R principles. The publication and dissemination of a report on the HCS was an important step in advancing the work on unpaid care and domestic duties, as it provided an evidence-based foundation to help influence government at national and county levels to introduce reforms and policies to provide time- and labour-saving infrastructure, such as accessible and well equipped health facilities and clean and accessible water points.

GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING

In 2016, Oxfam in Kenya, YAK, the National Taxpayers Association (NTA), the Institute of Public Finance Kenya (IPF-Kenya) and other partners launched the Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) project, which built upon the work that the Wezesha Jamii and WE-Care projects had started by incorporating gender-responsive budgeting (GRB).

As part of the Wezesha Jamii project, women in the informal settlements defined six priority areas that needed investment in order to improve their livelihoods. These priorities were reflected in the 2018–22 CIDPs, but their inclusion did not automatically mean that they would be implemented via budgetary allocations. To

GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING

What is gender-responsive budgeting? Women, men, girls and boys often have very different practical and strategic needs and priorities. A gender-responsive budget is a budget that works for everyone by taking these different needs and priorities into account and ensuring a gender-equitable distribution of resources. Gender-responsive budget initiatives are not ‘budgets for women’, although they can examine spending on services specifically aimed at women to see if they are sufficient to meet their needs. Nor does GRB aim at dividing government expenditure 50:50 between women and men. Rather, it involves analyzing government budgets in terms of their effect on different genders and the norms and roles associated with them, and transforming these budgets to ensure that commitments to gender equality are realized.
address this, NTA and IPF-Kenya trained women on budget-setting processes, on what to anticipate in the different stages of the budget cycle and on social accountability tools. As well as training the women, they also trained ward and sub-county administrators in Nairobi County on the principles of GRB. Budget-setting at the county government level is a continuous process with a fixed timeline, and the partners worked closely with the women to ensure their participation in different stages of this process. Women were supported to access budget information and to analyze budget documents. In all, over 800 women attended budget-setting meetings in Nairobi County to advocate for allocations for essential services. To reduce the number of hours spent by women on care work, for example, these representatives advocated for the government to invest in early childhood development centres to cut the time spent on child care and to direct funds into roads to reduce travel times and enhance access to markets. Women also organized themselves in social auditing groups to monitor the allocation and implementation of the budgets. These voluntary groups have also monitored the development and quality of service delivery.

Connecting local work to national work
The partners conducted analyses of national budget documents, engaged with the National Assembly of Kenya for budget data to be disaggregated by gender and also advocated for the adoption of GRB principles at national level, thereby connecting local work to national work. The national budget process determines aggregate allocations for county governments and often prioritizes (through special grants) additional revenue for counties. Advocacy at the national level can therefore influence the resources available at county level. The reverse process is just as important: for example, county-level advocacy by women on agriculture has seen the work escalate upwards to national-level advocacy for increased budget allocations in sectors that build the agriculture value chain in order to benefit women, who are predominantly employed in this sector.

Twelve key politicians in the National Assembly, who vote on the national budget and influence budget allocations to counties, took part in a GRB training session and were identified as ‘gender champions’ – women and men who publicly advance the cause of gender equality and inclusion.
The GRB project used an approach that leveraged the strengths of different partners in Kenya. A tripartite model saw NTA (with expertise on tax), IPF-Kenya (expertise on budgeting) and YAK (expertise in community mobilization) work in concert to ensure that the women targeted by the GRB project were supported by information experts who could assist in drafting memoranda, train them on GRB processes and engage with them throughout the budget process. This saw IPF-Kenya develop country-specific budget training documents, which NTA used to train women who had been mobilized by YAK.

Youth engagement
To raise awareness among young people on the impact of budgets, training sessions were organized for youth groups. By asking questions such as ‘Did you take a taxi to get to the training?’, ‘Did you buy a drink or snack today?’, young people were made aware that doing these tangible things meant that they paid taxes and so they had a right to hold the government accountable on how these tax revenues were spent.

To get young people more involved with challenges in their communities, creative ways of engagement were used. The partners worked together with universities across Nairobi to reach youth and to appeal to young people in fun ways. This was done through collaborations with artists, by showcasing different forms of art, organizing a concert where young attendees had to answer questions related to budgets in order to request songs, and many more activities, including a GRB-themed event that sought to accentuate youth skills and talents as part of the Mukuru Youth Festival. Young people attending this event submitted a memorandum to the Nairobi County government, drawing attention to underspending on youth.

WHAT WAS THE STRENGTH OF THIS WORK?
The three different projects built strongly on and complemented one another’s work. This integrated approach amplified the impact of each project, and priority areas identified by women as needing investment were addressed at the domestic, county and national levels from economic, political, social and technical perspectives.

Wezesha Jamii, WE-Care and the GRB project took a two-pronged approach to tackling gender inequality, working both with women in the community and with government officials who set the policies that affect them. They also worked at county, national and international levels, for example by supporting the ratification of the ILO convention on domestic workers and advocating for GRB at both county and national levels. By collaborating with different partners who work both locally and at the national level, local issues could be connected to national solutions, such as when information was disseminated among women in informal settlements about the social protection schemes they were entitled to enroll in.

With relatively few organizations in Kenya working on unpaid care work and on the intersection of gender and fiscal justice, the technical expertise that Oxfam and its partners brought to the project provided credibility for their influencing and advocacy work. The HCS was a great example of this, providing evidence-based findings to back up advocacy on unpaid care work in the five informal settlements.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT OF WEZESHA JAMII, WE-CARE AND GRB
New businesses, such as soap making and hairdressing, were established and existing ones were expanded, resulting in increased incomes for women. A slight change in social norms was observed in the five settlements where the projects were implemented, with men and women increasingly sharing household tasks.
Priority areas for action were included in the CIDPs, and the local government has budgeted for and started construction of early childhood development centres in various wards, has invested in health clinics and has allocated funds for the maintenance of roads. Public participation and political pledges by the county government saw levies on small-scale traders revoked in 2017. Traders used to pay a levy of KES 30 ($0.28) and kiosk operators KES 250 (€2.32) per day. This change in policy has increased incomes for small-scale traders and paved the way for more income-generating opportunities.

The work by Oxfam and its partners on unpaid care and domestic work and the HCS has contributed to a new collaboration with the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS). Oxfam sits on a technical committee with KNBS and introduced a 24-hour recall time use methodology that was also used for the HCS. In February 2020, Oxfam signed a memorandum of understanding with the Kenyan government to provide support to KNBS to use this methodology to carry out the first national survey on time use. The availability of data from such a survey will be significant for policy making and influencing on unpaid care work.

WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM THIS WORK?

- **Information is key.** The increase in registration for social security schemes indicated the importance of awareness raising and of ensuring that people know their rights. This was also important when engaging with youth. Budgeting can seem like a very technical topic, but when the right information is given, youth are aware and claim their rights as taxpayers. Information can also open doors: the women who were trained on budgeting are now sometimes asked by ward administrators to join public participation sessions, because the administrators have seen that their presentations are informed and that they bring substance.

- **Adopt gender and inclusion approaches based on who you are engaging with.** Meeting times and locations were tailored to suit small-scale traders and domestic workers, each of whom had different needs. To involve youth, trainings on their own may not be the best way to appeal. Creative involvement through art and cultural events can help in making complicated topics such as tax and budgets accessible and to get young people thinking about them.

- **Address social and cultural norms.** Policy influencing is important, but the willingness (or otherwise) of decision makers and stakeholders to change policy or behavior is often rooted in prevailing social norms. To change social and cultural norms, not only women should be targeted but also men, as they have a great say on decisions at both the household and the community levels.

- **Combine strengths and avoid working in ‘silos’.** The GRB project successfully combined the expertise of IPF-Kenya, NTA and YAK to achieve outcomes that might not have been realized without the partners making use of each other’s knowledge. The integrated approach of the three projects – Wezesha Jamii, WE-Care, and GRB – also exemplifies the strength of working collaboratively across different programmes.

- **Identify policy and legislative measures that support the work you are doing.** In the case of Kenya, these were policies such as access to information and the right to public participation, both of which are enshrined in the country’s constitution. It is quite common for key budget documents not to be shared on government websites in a timely manner, or not at all. By appealing to policies that grant citizens the right to access such information, people are able to access data and participate in a substantive way in budget-making processes to influence budgetary allocations that address their practical needs. Being aware of key policy measures and making use of these is a first step to achieving fair and gender-responsive budgets and promoting active citizenship.
About this case study
This case study is part of Oxfam’s Fiscal Justice Track Record. This series is a continuation of Oxfam’s Global Track Record on Fiscal Justice (2016) and provides an in-depth update on Oxfam and partners’ fiscal justice and inequality work in selected countries.

Oxfam’s F.A.I.R.-EiU program aims to ensure that citizens are empowered to redress inequality of power and influence, so fiscal systems are more progressive and governments implement tax and spending policies that benefit the many not the few. The F.A.I.R.-EiU program unites the work of Oxfam and partners in over 40 countries.

In Kenya this work is supported by Sida, the European Union and the Hewlett Foundation.

Photos:
Page 1: A small-scale trader from Kibera who participated in the Wezesha Jamii programme.
Photo: Benson Guantai/Oxfam

Page 3: Susan, a small-scale trader, in her banana wholesale shop in the informal settlement of Kibra.
Photo: Benson Guantai/Oxfam

Page 5: Rebecca and Shadrack sharing household chores.
Photo: Mark Njoroge/Eyeris Communications

Page 7: Oxfam’s partner IPF-Kenya facilitated a training session on GRB that targeted ward and sub-county administrators in Nairobi County.
Photo: Kimani Nyoike/Inuka Kenya

Page 8: Young people participating in an activity at the Mukuru Youth Festival.
Photo: Mukuru Youth Initiative

Notes
15. See: https://www.facebook.com/mukurufest/