

## REPORTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD: AMERICAS

### RECIFE, BRAZIL: GENDER AND THE PARTICIPATORY BUDGET

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"A new strategy for the participatory budget has been developed through discussions between state and civil society partners. The main aim is to increase popular consultation and women's participation in the budget process.

In 1995, the municipal government of Recife, Brazil introduced a system of popular consultation on the budget. In its early stages, participation in the budget process was limited - it was restricted to members of particular organisations and largely failed to address issues of gender inequality.

**Recife is an area with a high level of poverty and social exclusion on the basis of gender and race.**

In 2001 the Frente de Izquierda de Recife was elected to the municipal government and sought to address issues of social exclusion and gender inequality in the city.

The new municipal government set up **Coordenadoria da Mulher (Women's Coordinating Group)** to coordinate the state's gender policies. This group works alongside a civil society body, the Municipal Council of Women, to advance gender issues in the municipality.

The administration of the Frente de Izquierda de Recife has also developed a new strategy for the participatory budget through discussions between state and civil society partners.

**The main aim is to increase popular consultation and women's participation in the budget process, and in both areas Coordenadoria da Mulher has played an instrumental role.**

The new participatory budget has two main strategies. Firstly, area meetings are held in different neighbourhoods of the city to discuss problems and budgetary needs. Each region of the city forms a regional forum of representatives from the area meetings.

Secondly, **thematic fora** have been set up to address problems such as education and health. In the first year (2001), 18 area meetings and six thematic fora were held.

In 2002, this was increased to 54 area meetings and eight thematic fora. Two representatives from each forum (regional and thematic) take part in General Council of the Participatory Budget.

**Coordenadoria da Mulher** also introduced an initiative to increase women's participation in the participatory budget which involves three main activities:

#### ● Participatory play areas

Mobile recreation spaces for children were created which are installed where the budget meetings are held. These are intended to facilitate participation by women with childcare responsibilities.

#### ● Campaign for Women Delegates / Advisers

Pamphlets outlining the importance of women's participation in budgetary processes have been distributed at the area meetings. This measure was aimed not only at increasing women's participation in the area meetings, but also at ensuring a greater representation of women in each forum.

#### ● The Women's Meeting

These meetings were organised with government officials, members of the women's movement, and activists dealing with race issues, to find ways to achieve broader mobilisation around women's participation in the budget. Activities included producing pamphlets and composing music for community radio stations. In 2002, the Women's Meeting was successfully established as a new thematic forum of the participatory budget, becoming the Thematic Forum on Women.

**The creation of the Thematic Forum on Women** gave the initiative a voice in the official structure of the budget-making process, and therefore in defining priorities to be implemented by the **General Council of the Participatory Budget**. It also meant involvement in the elections of the members of the General Council's co-ordinating body. Thanks to the efforts of the campaign, a candidate from the Black women's movement was elected to the co-ordinating body.

A next phase will be to foster links between the new **Thematic Forum on Women** and the activities of the **Municipal Council of Women, Coordenadoria da Mulher** believes that the meeting of women who have long been involved in the struggle for women's equality and those more recently awakened to ideas of social transformation, has great potential to improve the lives, participation and representation of women

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