

Women's Budget Group response to the HM Treasury Consultation 'Futurebuilders: An investment Fund for Voluntary and Community Sector Public Service Delivery', July 2003

The Women's Budget Group (WBG) is a network of experts which brings together academics and people from non-governmental organisations and trades unions to promote gender equality through appropriate economic policy. We work closely with policy makers within HM Treasury to encourage the government to use gender analysis to improve its policy making.

We strongly welcome the new *futurebuilders* fund and the extra money to support the voluntary and community sector which, alongside the public sector, is key to improving women's lives. Gender inequalities are persistent and hamper women's opportunities, particularly in the labour market, reduce their quality of life and force many to live in poverty. We urge HM Treasury to seize the opportunity presented by this extra funding for the voluntary sector to improve the lives of disadvantaged women across the UK. To ensure this happens, reducing gender inequalities should be one of the principles to guide the use of the fund.

The voluntary and community sector is important to women as employees as well as beneficiaries. *Futurebuilders* funding to support training within the sector should target programmes that meet the training needs of women returners to the sector, who have taken time out of the labour market for child or eldercare. Such programmes will attract women into or back into the voluntary and community sector and ensure that their valuable skills and experience are not lost or downgraded.

To ensure that the *futurebuilders* fund is being distributed and spent in support of both women's and men's needs, and that it reduces rather than inadvertently reinforces gender inequality, a gender budget analysis approach should be adopted. Gender budget analysis will reveal any inadvertent gender bias and so help reduce inequalities in service provision and improve the effectiveness of the programmes in meeting the needs of the target group.

HM Treasury has made a commitment to the use of a gender budgeting approach and as the Paymaster General stated at a HMT/WBG seminar: *'We need to work towards a position where we have an analysis of gender impact, and try to integrate that and put that at the heart of the Government's policy. It is vital that our decisions...are taken on a gender aware basis.'*

The *futurebuilders* team should draw upon the work of the HM Treasury Gender Analysis of Expenditure Project (GAP) launched this year by the

Chief Secretary to the Treasury to test out gender analysis of expenditure. It should also look to the government gender equality evaluation tools such as the Policy Appraisal for Equal Treatment guidelines and the Gender Impact Assessment framework.

If you have any questions or would like more information please contact the Project Officer, Kate Bellamy, either by email: kate@fawcettsociety.org.uk, or by telephone: 020 7628 4441.