

GENDER BUDGETING IN INDIA: CONCEPT, INITIATIVES AND CONCERNS

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Abstract

Gender Budgeting has become an internationally acclaimed tool for supporting constitutional commitments towards achieving gender equality, women empowerment and the realization of women's rights. Since 1995 Beijing Platform of Action, gender mainstreaming has been adopted almost universally as the strategy for achieving gender parity. In the past ten years India has earnestly pursued the goal of achieving gender equality and women empowerment through Gender Budgeting. The objective of this research paper is to demystify the concept of and framework for Gender Budgeting and to highlight various Gender Budgeting initiatives undertaken in India and also the issues that need to be addressed in order to engender the budget making process. It brings to light the issue of gender based discrimination prevalent in Indian society and argues the need to engage women at each stage of a macroeconomic and fiscal policy or a budget cycle – from its preparation and enactment to its monitoring and impact assessment. The success of gender budgeting initiatives depends on general awareness of the issue and a strong political will. Gender budgeting needs strong alliances of its key stakeholders, such as Parliament, NGOs, civil society, government officials, corporate sector, public sector, academics and media.

Keywords –Gender, Budget, Women

Introduction

India is a patriarchal society in which almost all the institutions-family, social, religious, cultural, political and economic-are largely controlled by men. Women and girls continue to face disparities in access to and control over resources throughout their life cycle. They may face discrimination before or after birth; violence, harassment or abuse; neglect due to dependence and lack of access to resources; social prejudice; and exploitation – whether economic, political, social or religious. They are vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination regardless of where they are positioned on the economic and social spectrum. Additionally, their vulnerability increases significantly if they are poor, socially disadvantaged or live in a backward or remote area. Gender Budgeting is a tool that can be used to address these vulnerabilities. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women. However, wide gaps exist between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes, and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of women and girls, on the other. Achieving gender equality requires recognition of different needs, preferences and interests which affect the way men and women benefit from policies and budgetary allocations (Gender Budgeting Handbook, 2015).

The rationale for gender budgeting arises from recognition of the fact that national budgets impact men and women differently through the pattern of resource allocation and priority accorded to competing sectors. Women constitute forty eight percent of India's population, but they lag behind men on many important indicators like health, nutrition, education, skill levels, livelihood choices, economic opportunities, occupational status, etc. Hence, they warrant special attention due to their vulnerability and lack of access to resources. The way government budgets allocate resources has the potential to transform gender inequalities. Looking to the huge potential of government budgets to make positive changes in gender dimensions of society, in recent years, Gender Budgeting has been propagated at national and international levels as a tool to promote gender equality.

Gender Budgeting: Concept and Framework

Gender Budgeting is a tool for gender mainstreaming. It uses the budget as an entry point to apply a gender lens to the entire policy spectrum. Gender Budgeting is not confined to the budget document but includes a series of processes that precede the preparation of the budget as well as that follow it. Gender Budgeting is concerned with gender sensitive formulation of legislation, policies, plans, programmes and schemes; allocation and collection of resources; implementation and execution; monitoring, review, audit and impact assessment of programmes and schemes; and follow-up corrective action to address gender disparities. Clearly then, it is not only about the Budget and it is not just a one-time activity. It is a continuous process that must be applied to all levels and stages of the policy process. However, it recognizes that the Budget is a powerful tool that can reduce the vulnerability of women and girls and transform their situation. Gender Budgeting also recognizes that if gender disparities are to be addressed, it is not enough to formulate gender sensitive legislations, programmes and schemes; adequate monetary allocations are equally important for the achievement of desired outcomes.

Gender Mainstreaming is a strategy that makes it imperative on the State (amongst other actors) to assess the differential implications on men and women of any public policy action and intervention (including legislations and programmes) in all areas, at all levels, so that it brings about an equitable focus on women's empowerment and development needs. A Gender Responsive Budget is a strategy for changing budgetary processes and policies so that expenditures and revenues reflect the differences and inequalities between women and men in incomes, assets, decision making power, service needs and social responsibilities for care.

Gender Budgeting can be applied to the entire national budget or to the budget of a state or local body. It can be applied to a selected department or just one programme, which may be an existing programme or a new programme. It can be applied on the expenditure side or the revenue side. It can be applied to new or existing legislation. Researchers in India have applied Gender Budgeting to each of these aspects.

The five-step framework for Gender Budgeting involves an analysis of the situation for women and men and girls and boys (and the different sub-groups) in a given sector; an assessment of the

extent to which the sector's policy addresses the gender issues and gaps described in the first step; an assessment of the adequacy of budget allocations to implement the gender-sensitive policies and programmes identified in step 2; monitoring whether the money was spent as planned, what was delivered and to whom; an assessment of the impact of the policy/programme/scheme and the extent to which the situation described in step 1 has changed (Budlender, 2003).

In India, special focus on gender based resource allocation is seen from 1990s onwards. The Eighth Plan (1992-97) highlighted for the first time a gender perspective and the need to ensure a definite flow of funds from the general developmental sectors to women. The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) adopted 'Women Component Plan' as one of the major strategies and directed both the Central and State Governments to ensure "not less than 30 per cent of the funds/benefits are earmarked in all the women's related sectors. The Tenth Plan (2002-07) continued the process of dissecting the government budget to establish its gender-differential impact and to translate gender commitments into budgetary commitments. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), Government of India (GoI), adopted "Budgeting for Gender Equity" as a mission statement in 2004-05. This was followed shortly by the production of the first Gender Budget Statement (GBS) in 2005-06, an effort that has since garnered immense attention the world over. This not only helped put Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) work "out" in the public domain but in a way, situated the gender agenda in the serious business of budget making.

Gender Budgeting Initiatives in India

Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) or Gender Budgeting has been endorsed in many countries now as an important tool for advancing gender equity. The latest count shows that around 90 countries have integrated GRB practices and processes to varying extents. Gender Budgeting has been adopted in 16 States and 2 Union Territory Administrations within India. At present 57 ministries and departments at the central government level have established gender budget cells (GBCs), with the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance (MoF), being the latest entrant in 2014. Union and State governments have used a range of mechanisms to implement Gender

Budgeting. These include the identification of a nodal department for Gender Budgeting; constitution of Gender Budgeting Cells; formulation of a union/state policy for gender; setting up committees for oversight; creating a gender data bank; making checklists; including a Gender Budget Statement in the union/state budget; capacity building; preparation of a brochure and handbook; and conducting performance audit and linkages with the result framework document.

During the last few years, many Ministries including those in the gender neutral sector have come out with excellent gender mainstreaming schemes and policies. Initiatives taken by the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (DAC), Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Department of Science and Technology (DST), Department of Telecommunications (DOT), and Department of Posts are especially noteworthy.

A National Gender Resource Centre in Agriculture (NGRCA) was set up in the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, MoA, in 2004–05 under the scheme “Extension Support to Central Institutes.” Since its establishment, the GBC located in the NGRCA of the Directorate of Extension, has undertaken several key initiatives to ensure engendering of the ministry’s schemes and programmes: at least 30 percent funds earmarked for women farmers across all beneficiary-oriented schemes; gender coordinators/nodal officers identified in every division; women’s representation to be ensured in decision-making committees; various research studies underway to assess existing schemes from a gender perspective (women friendly tools, study on existing policies and their impact on women’s access to land, etc.); gender sensitization modules prepared for programme implementers at different levels; review of the financial allocations of schemes that are reporting in the Gender Budget Statement; review of financial sanction of all beneficiary-oriented schemes of DAC so as to ensure integration of gender at the planning stage; review of MIS formats to include sex disaggregated data (the annual report mentions sex disaggregated across several schemes); a list of about 30 identified gender friendly tools and equipment developed by the Research and Development Organization for use in different farm operations has been sent to all states and UTs for popularizing them.

The Gender Budget Cell of the DoT and the Universal Service Obligation Fund of DoT launched a programme of pilot projects aimed at facilitating SHGs' access to ICT-enabled services in 2011. Named Sanchar Shakti, the initiative envisages four major project categories aimed at rural women: provision of mobile VAS subscription to SHGs with a service validity/warranty of at least one year; setting up of SHG run mobile repair centers in rural areas; setting up of SHG run modem repair centers in rural areas; setting up of SHG run solar-based mobile/CDMA FWT charging centers in rural areas; with SHGs as the core of the initiative, the key stakeholders of the initiative include NABARD, non-governmental organizations, mobile service providers, handset/ modem manufacturers and application service providers. Several projects have been initiated under category 1. The VANI project, for instance, aims at empowering women entrepreneurs in the handicrafts sector by providing end-to-end market linkage data through mobile value added services.

Since its inception in 2013, the GBC of the Ministry of Rural Development has undertaken several initiatives and has proactively provided information in the public domain on the actions taken with respect to the measures discussed in previous meetings. One of the areas which has received continued focus is engendering the flagship schemes of the ministry. The ministry, in its various publications, including the Outcome Budget and even as a separate note, provides detailed information on the actions taken by it to make existing schemes more gender responsive. For instance, documents provide information on schemes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Indira Awaas Yojana, Indira Gandhi Widow Pension Scheme, National Rural Livelihoods Mission and Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana citing the specific policy measures, physical and financial data. The ministry continues to place emphasis on revisiting the schemes and making them more responsive to the specific needs and concerns of women.

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) has been a pioneer in adopting and institutionalizing GRB given the fact that several of its important initiatives predate the setting up of the GBC. DISHA is the flagship programme of DST to address all the challenges that

women face in holistic manner. The objectives of DISHA are to retain women in science and help reentry of women scientist after a break into career paths within S&T sector; enhance the representation of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM); to implement programmes under different categories keeping in view the individual capability, competency and aptitude in the context of basic research, societal development, and self-employment; to provide avenues for capacity building, knowledge and skill enhancement both at national and global level and to provide career sustenance through mobility initiative especially to overcome the issues and challenges on account of relocation faced by employed women scientists. The three components of DISHA are (i) Women Scientists Scheme (WOS-A) aimed to provide opportunities to women scientists and technologists for pursuing research in basic or applied sciences in frontier areas of science and engineering, (ii) the Women Scientist Scheme WOS-B specially focused on women scientists who would like to contribute to nation building through lab to land transfer, technology adaptation and scaling of location-specific interventions and (iii) Women Scientist Scheme (WOS-C) which is mainly focused to provide an opportunity to women scientists for self-employment by utilizing their specialized domain knowledge in areas such as patenting, proof reading, science journalism, technical translation, clinical pathology labs, medical transcription etc.

The Department of Posts is committed to the gender equality and has set up a Gender Budgeting Cell to mainstream gender concerns at all levels. As an effort to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment for good governance, 52 Post Offices with all-women employees are functioning in major cities throughout the country as on 31st December, 2014. The Department has introduced welfare measures exclusively for the benefit of its women employees like providing financial assistance to Crèches, to Central Postal Ladies Organization (CPLO) and its subordinate organizations in the Circles, to tailoring centers and providing a separate 'Ladies Retiring Room' and crèches in Departmental buildings. Gender sensitization themes have been incorporated in every training module to inculcate the element of social responsibility in men and women towards creating an equitable, enabling and gender-sensitized work place. The

Department has also started construction of ladies hostels within the training centers. Rural Postal Life Insurance is helping thousands of rural women workers.

Gender Budgeting: Issues to be addressed

In order to mainstream gender in legislations, policies and programmes, Government of India has adopted Gender Budgeting as a budgetary strategy since 2004-05 and since then it has been institutionalized in our annual budgets. Central Ministries and Departments have been mandated to set up Gender Budgeting Cells to initiate and take forward this budgetary strategy.

India's efforts to institutionalize gender budgeting have met only partial success in the last ten years. Over time, figures depicted in the GBS have been challenged and resurrected. Although it is difficult to indicate the exact number of states that have initiated GRB, as per the records of the MWCD, nine states have officially adopted GRB in some form or the other. However, unofficial estimates point to a much higher number. Further, at present only 57 ministries and departments at the central government level have established gender budget cells (GBCs), with the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance (MoF), being the latest entrant in 2014. A review of the last ten years shows that there have been no significant improvements in the overall allocations flowing to women. In fact, the last two budgets (2015-16 and 2016-17) show a steep decline. The magnitude of gender budget, that is, the allocations for women (as mentioned in the GBS) as a proportion of the total government budget were almost stagnant at 5.5% until 2013-14. However, not only has the proportion of allocations for women as a percentage of the total budget declined from 5.5% to 4.5% this year, there is also a significant decline in absolute numbers. As per the latest GBS, there is a sharp fall from the budget estimate figure of Rs 98,030 crore for 2014-15 to Rs 79,258 crore in 2015-16. This points to a serious paradox which is that while on the one hand, there have been a slew of the GRB initiatives across the country, on the other hand, there appears to be a stagnant or even declining trend in allocations for women as demonstrated by the GBS (Jhamb, Mishra and Sinha, 2013).

It is relatively easy to identify specifically targeted programmes for women from the budgets. However, these form less than one per cent of total budget. Therefore the real challenge of the

gender budgeting exercise lies in the analysis of the remaining ninety nine per cent budget through a gender lens. Gender disaggregated benefit incidence analysis can be a useful tool for analyzing the distributional impacts of public expenditure across gender. Another area of policy concern is the use of time budgets and integrating the unpaid care economy into fiscal policies. Equally important is integrating gender into monetary policy making. The analysis of the revenue side of gender responsive budgeting is at the embryonic stage due to lack of gender disaggregated tax data, namely direct tax, and indirect tax user charges (Chakraborty, 2014).

Union Budget 2015-16 failed to provide for the needs of the women in the country, with budgetary allocation for most women's development schemes facing a steep reduction. Allocations for mid-day meals, integrated child development schemes, girl child education, and women's safety, among others were critically under-funded in the last year's budget. Women's organizations have been demanding universal social security coverage for all women workers. But there was no special focus on the needs of working women, especially in the unorganized sector, in the said budget. In the Union Budget 2015-16, there has been nearly 50 per cent decrease in the allocation of the Ministry of Women and Child Development over the revised budget of 2014-15. Even if we add the Rs. 1000 crore for the Nirbhaya Fund and Rs. 100 crore for the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Fund to the ministry's allocation, there is still a decrease of more than one third allocation in the total amount allocated for women and child development. But let us not forget that last two budgets, 2013-14 and 2014-15, allocations under Nirbhaya fund were not utilized as the government has no concrete plan of action to create structures, channels and mechanisms to use this fund. The Gender Budget was drastically slashed by 20 per cent (less by Rs. 20,000 crore). A major chunk of the gender budget was cornered by Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) with an aim of population stabilization and to meet the targets of 'two-child norm' (Patel, 2015).

Taking tiny steps towards integrating women in India's growth story, the government proposed to increase spending on women-specific schemes across ministries by 55% in 2016-17. But the allocation to the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the nodal agency for women, has

barely budgeted. The funds directed to women-only schemes in various ministries of the government together have increased from Rs.11,388.41 crore in 2015-16 to Rs.17,412.01 crore in 2016-17. The government had cut down its expenditure by Rs.5,000 crore from what it had planned for women-specific schemes last year. (The estimate for 2015-16 was Rs.16,657.11 crore, which was later revised to Rs.11,388.41 crore). Allocation to schemes such as the National Mission for Empowerment of Women, aimed at social and economic empowerment of women, has been doubled, while the Nirbhaya schemes, which include women's helplines and one-stop crisis centers, have also seen an additional allocation of Rs.470 crore. Allocation for Women Training Programmes for women police officers increased from Rs.12 lakh in 2015-16 to Rs.16 crore this year. However, there are some schemes which haven't received adequate or any attention at all. While some schemes have seen improvement in allocation, which is commendable, it is a matter of concern that several others like the one for the protection of domestic violence victims has not seen any allocation. In response to India's gender challenges, the government adopted gender-responsive budgeting in 2005 which details out the schemes in which 100% provision is for women (Part A) and schemes where the allocations for women constitute at least 30% of the provision (Part B). The overall budget for women is generally calculated as a combination of Part A and Part B, which in 2016-17 budget stands at Rs.90,624.76 crore in 2016-17 as against Rs.81,249.12 crore in 2015-2016. However, there is no way to find how much money is actually allocated to women in Part B of the gender budget. The government was criticized in the last budget for slashing the money allocated to the social sector, especially women, following which it added certain supplementary funds. But the allocation for the Ministry of Women and Child Development is almost the same as what it was in 2015-16, drawing criticism from activists yet again. The ministry, which received Rs.17,352 crore in 2015-16 (according to the revised estimates) has been allocated Rs.17,408 crore in 2016-17—an increase of Rs.56 crore. The budget also announced Rs.2,000 crore for liquefied petroleum gas connections in the name of women in rural households and allocation of Rs.500 crore for scheduled caste/scheduled tribe and women entrepreneurs under the Stand Up India scheme.

However, the Priyadarshini scheme for women entrepreneurs, which was given Rs.7.8 crore last year, has not been allocated any money in this year's budget (Mishra, 2016).

Conclusion

There are a number of gender-specific barriers which prevent women and girls (48 percent of our valuable human resources) from gaining access to their rightful share in the flow of public resources. Unless these barriers are addressed in the planning and formulation of budgetary policies, it is not possible to move towards a gender equal society. A gender responsive budget is a budget that acknowledges the gender patterns in society and allocates money to implement policies and programmes that will change these patterns in a way that moves towards a more gender equal society. The overall aim is to ensure that every part of the government's macroeconomic budget takes gender differences into account and concrete steps are taken to address these gender specific needs. After more than a decade of Gender Budgeting at the national level, our women and girls continue to face various forms of vulnerabilities through their life cycle. The total magnitude of the GBS for this year remains at 4.5% of the total budget, seeing no change from the previous budget. Given that we have completed more than ten years of Gender Budgeting, the important question to pose at this juncture is: what outcomes (if any) have been achieved after so many years of engaging in GRB, and at what levels? Has gender mainstreaming helped in reducing the various kinds of discrimination that women face in our society? We have already created general awareness on the issue by highlighting some of the worst discrimination that our women face almost at all levels and taken steps towards gender mainstreaming by establishing Gender Budgeting Cells across Ministries and Departments, it is now time to strengthen these cells through capacity building for achieving positive and robust outcomes of Gender budgeting. The strategy of Gender Budgeting would get implemented properly only if the Ministries / Departments identify gender-specific challenges confronting women and girls in their concerned sectors and formulate special measures targeted at such disadvantaged lot during the process of budget formulation and implementation. Further it is only when all Ministries / Departments maintain sex-disaggregated databases that enables benefit

incidence analysis can the budget be thoroughly audited through a gender lens. The success of gender budgeting initiatives depends on a strong political commitment towards women empowerment. Gender budgeting needs strong alliances of its key stakeholders, such as Parliament, government officials, NGOs, civil society, corporate sector, public sector, academics and media. Unless policy commitments to gender equality are backed by a thorough gender auditing of budgets and robust gender-specific outcomes, gender equality and women empowerment will continue to remain a distant dream.

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