

ENVISIONING A FEMINIST POLICY RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
A Stakeholder Consultation for Informing Gender Transformative Financing and Budgeting
(Inputs for Union Budget 2022-23)

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Priorities for the gender budget	3
1. Keynote	4
A. Session summary	4
B. Detailed minutes	6
C. Key recommendations for Budget 2022-2023	14
2. Session 1: Overall Fiscal Policy Scenario Post-Covid.....	15
A. Session summary	15
B. Detailed minutes	15
C. Key recommendations for Budget 2022-2023	19
3. Session 2-Issues and Concerns of Vulnerable Groups.....	19
A. Session Summary	20
B. Detailed minutes	20
C. Key recommendations for Budget 2022-2023	24
4. Session 3: Social Sector: Challenges and Contributions.....	25
A. Session summary:	25

B. Detailed minutes.....	26
C. Key recommendations for Budget 2022-2023.....	30
5. Session 4: State Responses and Promising Practices.....	30
A. Session summary	31
B. Detailed minutes.....	31
C. Key recommendations for Budget 2022-2022.....	34
6. Session name: Session 5 - Status of GRB processes at Union and State level	35
A. Session summary	35
B. Detailed minutes.....	35
C. Key recommendations for Budget 2022-2023.....	40
7. Session 6: Networks' Recommendations for the Union Budget.....	41
A. Session summary:.....	41
B. Detailed minutes:.....	44
C. Recommendations -.....	47
ANNEXURE 1: Schedule of the Consultation.....	49
ANNEXURE 2: Concept Note	53
ANNEXURE 3: Photographs.....	55

Introduction

FPC works on Transformative Policy and Financing for Gender Equality. It is run by an independent network of feminist organisations, individual researchers, academicians and policy advocates who are committed to strengthening gender transformative policies, plans, and budgets in India. For more check our website

<http://www.feministpolicyindia.org/>

In FPC's 2021-22 pre-budget consultation, the sessions centered around the state of India's women and girls in a post-Covid-19 world and their diminished access to resources, opportunities, and secured livelihoods.

The planned stakeholder consultation with practitioners, civil society, academia, policy makers and the government aimed at deriving insights from current research and the experiences of relief measures launched over the past two years. These discussions highlighted what Union Budget 2022-23 could do to better fill in the gaps in existing policy responses and continue to alleviate the adverse impacts of COVID-19 and the lockdown measures on women and girls. These insights were shared along with relevant data with concerned the Statistical Advisor of Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India.

Priorities for the gender budget

While India faces additional fiscal challenges of reduced revenue collection and the declining tax-GDP ratio, allocating resources have assumed challenges of much greater proportions. The results of these challenges have culminated in declining social sector expenditures and gender budget allocations. This would have direct implications on expenditures and financing of women-related and women-specific programmes. In the current situation, the insufficient expenditure across sectors that disproportionately affect women are continuing to exacerbate the adverse effects of the pandemic on women and girls. This year, therefore, calls for greater action and remarkable shifts from the usual approach to GRB and a deeper commitment to action for advancing Gender Transformative Financing.

The Consultation brought together various women's organizations, campaigns for socio-economic rights and academicians in order to -

- Enhance understanding of the effectiveness of previous year's Covid response policies
- Propose changes/steps towards a transformative financing framework
- Share positive case studies on the preparedness of states vis-à-vis education, health, nutrition, livelihood (employment guarantee) and issues of migrant labourers
- Develop feasible recommendations for the Union Budget

A Report of the Consultation Sessions

1. Keynote

Moderator: Dr. Sona Mitra

Speaker Names: Dr. Jayati Ghosh

A. Session summary

The pre-budget session of Feminist Policy Collect looks at the feminist recovery process and avenues through which some changes can be made in the budgetary process, to make the union budget more gender sensitive. Prof Jayati Ghosh covered mainly 4 aspects in her keynote speech: Macroeconomic context, Political Economy context, Expenditure and Revenue Generation Strategies and the important points of focus in the Union Budget. Despite all talks of a V shaped recovery, the Indian economy is in a collapse.

India has been in an exceptionally bad situation compared to other developing countries during the Covid crisis. India had one of the most stringent pandemic induced lockdowns in the initial months and the lockdown was imposed without any warning and without giving any compensation for the incomes that were lost during this period. This led to a collapse in livelihoods, which had a strong association with the fiscal response or rather, the lack of fiscal response. An additional spending of 10-30% was done globally but there were lots of divides in it. Between Jan 2020 and July 2021, there was an additional fiscal expenditure of \$11 trillion, 80% of which was done by advanced countries. The USA spent \$25000-30000 more than usual per capita while low income countries spent only an excess \$2 per capita. Among the G20 economies, India and Mexico spent the least to combat the pandemic. Although Mexico was fiscally very disciplined, a lot of other expenditures in the Mexican economy were diverted towards the social sector. But India spent 8% more than usual even amidst the pandemic with 6% inflation, which is only 2% more than the usual spending. There was no social protection other than the relatively small amount that was going to food and the Jan Dhan amount was only Rs 500, which is an embarrassingly small amount. The spending has been abysmally low in India even amidst the greatest crisis faced by the world since the World War. The government did not spend more even when private spending was collapsing; this led to a decline in both consumption and investment. Such incidents happened in no other G20 economies.

The claims of 8-9% rates of recovery of the Indian economy are based on the formal sector performance and are highly debatable. These rates rely on company reports and the informal sector is not accounted for, in it. We know that the informal sector had been hit by demonetisation and

then the GST and was already in a bad shape. The pandemic has led to a dramatic collapse of the informal sector. National Income Accounts do not take into consideration the informal sector. The last CSO survey was done in 2004-05 where the informal sector accounted for 40% of the income. The informal sector has been battered down since then and the official statistical survey process needs to take into conduct surveys to collect data on the informal sector and informal workers.

The formal economy has grown in terms of income but not in terms of employment. The aggregate economic performance is worse than what is depicted by the data. There are private handles that collect data on unemployment, but they are insufficient. The Centre for Monitoring of the Indian Economy (CMIE), for example, is biased towards urban male formal sector employment. The pandemic has been brutal on women's participation in the labour force in India, which was already among one of the lowest globally, especially the young women. Women are not being able to find employment on terms they used to work earlier, which were already very poor. There has been a reduction in expenditure on education and whenever there is a lack of spending in education, it is usually the women that suffer.

Fewer girls are going into secondary and higher secondary education. Children have not been attending school for nearly two years and there is a real fear of a lost generation. Children have even forgotten what they learnt in school before the pandemic and individual level attention is required to make up for this loss of learning, like "private tuitions", but provided by the public education system. This requires massive funding as well as re-training of the teachers to deal with the additional pressure of making up for the backlog in children's education. There has been a severe decline in nutrition, which cannot be made up for by just providing foodgrains because there has been a massive decline in other parts of the diet. The mid-day meals were stopped in the initial months of the lockdown and very few states compensated the families for it; even the compensation provided was in the form of foodgrains. The ICDS and the anganwadis were closed during the lockdown and are closed till now in most of the states. Very few states provided the compensations for the closure of ICDS and anganwadis. India faces a nutritional catastrophe with high rates of starvation and massive declines in BMI, while the food stocks have been increasing to more than pre-pandemic levels. A diversification is required in the PDS to include a greater range of food items and not just foodgrains, to make up for the nutritional imbalance. Systems that provide food to the young children, like mid-day meals and ICDS, need to be stepped up immediately and need to start providing them with cooked food as soon as possible.

India relies heavily on regressive taxation and our dependence on it has been increasing, the fuel tax being one of the foremost examples of regressive taxation. While other revenues are falling in India, the fuel tax is way out of whack with what it should be. The extent to which microfinance has been affected by the pandemic remains relatively understudied. Microfinance provided some cushion and added a bit to household incomes earlier, but even microfinance institutions have collapsed due to the pandemic. Moreover, the loan moratorium period is now coming to an end,

but people still have no income and they now have to repay loans along with the accumulated interest. Microfinance being in deep crisis implies great hardships for women. The regressive element of taxes has to be reduced and it can be done by raising wealth tax on a very small group of the very rich (\$ billionaires). Wealth tax and taxation of MNCs, who get away by paying negligible to no taxes, are low-hanging fruits that can be used to reduce regressive taxes such as the fuel tax without having any adverse impact on revenue collection.

The Centre has to provide the states with funding for NREGA by law since NREGA is a demand driven scheme. Education, both primary and higher secondary have suffered massively due to the pandemic. To ensure an online or hybrid model of learning, people at least need to be provided with access to internet facilities and devices. To pretend to have “online classes” and not give people access is an absolute crime and that is exactly what is happening in India. A massive funding is required in education to make up for the backlog created due to the pandemic. There needs to be a significant increase in hiring and all vacancies need to be filled up at the centre and state levels. The National Disaster Management Act was used to ensure the centralized stringent lockdown and no support was provided to the states for it. We need more centralized systems and funds for climate adaptation since climate change is no longer in the future and is happening in real time. Climate disasters such as floods and cyclones are now expected to be common calamities and we need more funding to combat weather shocks. Moreover, like every other crisis, the climate crisis also disproportionately affects women. The National Disaster Management system needs to adopt a people-centric, feminist approach to make disaster management more inclusive.

B. Detailed minutes

Prof. Jayati Ghosh has discussed the macroeconomic and the political economy context, the expenditure and revenue generation strategies and what should be highlighted before and after the release of the Union budget.

Context:

- *Collapse of livelihoods:*

It is no secret that the economy is in collapse, despite all talks of a V-shaped recovery. India has been exceptional in terms of how bad things are. In fact, India has been one of the worst performing economies when it comes to livelihood rebound because livelihoods in India have, simply, not rebounded. India had experienced a larger than usual collapse in livelihoods due to the way in which the lockdown was first imposed and then implemented. In India, the lockdown induced by the pandemic was probably one of the most stringent ones in the world (if not the most stringent) and was implemented like a military curfew. The lockdown was imposed without any prior warning so people had no time to prepare and it was followed up by very little to no compensation for the incomes lost during that period. The various schemes and packages that were announced

by the government as relief measures, were insufficient to make up for the dramatic loss of income during the 4 to 6 months lockdown. In many surveys it was observed that 30-40% of the interviewed workers had no income from the end of March 2020 to late July 2020 and even those who got incomes after that period got 50-70% of the money returns they used to get before the pandemic. Most recent surveys have found that many workers are not getting even 80% of what they got before in the form of wage incomes or incomes from self-employment. This collapse of livelihood had a very strong association with the fiscal response or rather, the lack of it.

- *Fiscal austerity:*

The advanced economies forgot all their talk of fiscal discipline and had fiscal expansions from 10 to 30% of GDP; this was the additional spending incurred by the rich countries during the pandemic and it was bigger than any expenditure incurred by countries ever since the World Wars. As per IMF estimates between January 2020 and July 2021, there was an additional government spending of nearly \$11 trillion globally. Unsurprisingly, 80% of it came from the 10 richest countries and 55% of it came from the US alone. The US spent an additional \$ 25,000-30,000 per capita over and above their usual spending, while the low-income countries spent an additional \$ 2 per capita. Among the G20 countries, India and Mexico did the least additional spending, but in Mexico much of the spending was redirected towards the social sector. So while Mexico remained very fiscally disciplined over this period, they redirected much of the other spendings towards social protection, health, nutrition, etc. But in India we did not even do that, we spent 8% additionally in monetary terms with inflation at 6%, so basically India spent 2% more than usual, which is unimaginably low in a year of such a massive devastation. No other countries showed this extreme stringency in fiscal spending as shown by India combined with a complete lack of social protection. There was a relatively small amount of expenditure going towards food (5Kg per capita per month) and an extremely small amount of Rs.500 going into Jan Dhan accounts. Even declarations made in certain packages did not fructify. If we go through the CGA (Comptroller General of Accounts) Database to see how much has actually been spent over the period of the pandemic, both in the current and previous financial year, the numbers are terrifying in terms of the abysmally low spending. Not only does it have an impact on human welfare, especially that of women, but also a macroeconomic impact on the entire economy.

- *Fallacy of National Income Accounts:*

That the government did not spend more at a time when private spending was necessarily collapsing, led to a major collapse in consumption and eventually, investment. This is not surprising as when consumption collapses, the market collapses and this leads to a decline in investment. How will private investment occur when the market has collapsed? In that situation, the government is the only agency that can shore up the economy. That is why a lot of the fiscal spending in the advanced countries as well as G20 countries, such as Brazil or South Africa, was done to prevent the broader macroeconomic collapse. This lack of government spending in the

largest crisis seen by the world since the World War has led to the massive economic collapse in India. Although we are claiming that the Indian economy is recovering by 8-9.5%, this estimate is highly debatable since it is based mainly on formal sector performance. We know that the methodology of calculating National Income Accounts have changed due to changes in the base year and different weights. So for the manufacturing sector or formal services, the estimates rely on self-declared company reports that are advanced estimates of their own performance. The corporate sector has done really well even when the rest of the economy is going down the tube. This means that we are pretending what is happening in the corporate sector is translating to the rest of the economy.

- *Collapse of the informal sector:*

The informal sector, which was earlier hit by demonetisation, the GST and eventually the pandemic got no assistance; what they got was only the permission to borrow more. This disrupted the microenterprises and the livelihoods of the self-employed people who were a part of the informal sector. Moreover, their loan repayments were not foregone, but only postponed. Thus the informal sector collapsed dramatically and the collapse has not even been captured by the national income accounts. The CSO is not doing the surveys required for data collection. One of the foremost demands from women and feminists is to collect data on the informal economy and what is the proportion of the formal and informal economies. The last survey was done in 2004-05 and we know that since then the informal sector has been disproportionately battered. To rely on national income data that still assumes that the informal economy still accounts for 40% of GDP and 85% of the employment, based on the previous data is absurd since we know that the informal economy has faced many blows and been battered. If we can actually account for the informal economy of India, we will arrive at a very different GDP. We need to demand that the statistical system does the kind of survey that would enable it to estimate the size of the informal economy and the number of people dependent on it. This also implies that the formal economy has not grown in terms of employment over this period, it has only grown in terms of GDP. These are the statistical issues which are making it all the more difficult for us to rely on secondary data in the Indian economy to actually be able to get a sense of what is actually happening in the country. Thus, we can infer that the economy is in a way worse shape than is actually told by the data. We are in a deep crisis, especially in terms of livelihood and employment issues.

- *Data deficiencies:*

The real time data that we have such as the PLFS are not quite as real time as we would like them to be. Many of us have been relying on the CMIE, the private Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy database, but it has a number of issues, one of them being an excessive bias towards urban formal sector male employment which is not really good at capturing women's participation rates in quite the same way. Although we do not have enough handles, the ones that we have indicate a massive collapse of livelihoods as well as money wages. The situation is dire and even

in this dire situation women are much worse off. Women faced a disproportionate loss of jobs during this period when India already has one of the lowest recognized female labour force participation rates in the world. The pandemic has been brutal in terms of women's ability to access paid work, especially the younger women. In India we already have a very high rate of open unemployment of women in particular, there has been a decline in the labour force participation as well. The discouraged worker effect has been very strong among female workers and women are not in a position to access paid employment on even the conditions that existed before the pandemic, which were already terrible. It will take us years to recover from this setback.

- *Collapse of education:*

The pandemic has also had a significantly adverse impact on education and whenever there are inadequacies and budgetary gaps or a lack of spending in education, it is the girls who typically suffer more in both households as well as schools. Less girls are going into secondary and higher secondary education; girls have disproportionately suffered in the "online teaching" method. Many surveys have discovered that not only the children in poorer families, less privileged communities and remote areas have suffered more, there have also been gendered inequalities in the distribution of available resources within homes. In families with one mobile phone and two children, if the mobile phone could be used for some hours for schooling it is much less likely that the girl child would get access to the phone. There is a real fear of a lost generation. Two years of no schooling for children who are first generation learners or whose parents have low levels of literacy means that the children have also forgotten what they had learnt before their schools closed. There has been a collapse of learning. Other governments across the world are setting aside significant money to make up for the loss in education. This crisis requires individual attention; it requires 'private tuitions' not given privately but delivered by the public school system to individual students because regular classes cannot make up for this sort of a loss in learning. It requires a massive expenditure as well as retraining of teachers and additional hiring to make up for the backlog in learning created over the past two years.

- *Hunger and Nutritional deficiencies:*

Survey results on nutritional attainment and food availability to people over the period of the pandemic show us horrifying results. In some of our states nutritional indicators are so poor that if those states were countries, we would be in the bottom 10 of the world, that is 4 of our states would be the worst performing in the world along with some of the most famine stricken and nutritionally deprived countries in Africa. The severe decline in nutrition can only partly be compensated for by a distribution of basic food grains because a lot of the nutritional decline occurs due to a decline in other parts of the diet that are essential for a well-balanced diet. We need to rethink our food distribution system and do what some states are doing. Tamil Nadu and Kerala and to a lesser extent Andhra Pradesh and Telangana provide a larger range of items through the PDS. This needs to be done by the rest of the country as well; we need to provide a greater range of food items at a

lower cost or for free. Midday meals had been stopped in the initial phases of the lockdown and schools did not open even when the rest of the economy opened. Very few compensated the families for stopping the midday meal and even when they did, in most cases it was grey. The aim of midday meals is to provide a rounded and balanced diet to at least some school going children, but even that was lost during this period. The ICDS and Anganwadis were closed during the lockdown and have not opened even now in most states. Very few states compensated for this by providing dry ration in the form of foodgrains. We need to rethink the entire food basket because we not only face a crisis, but a nutritional catastrophe. We have evidence showing us that India has had the highest stunting rates, BMI decline during the pandemic; these are incidents that happen over the long period of time, but such sharp decline occurred in India over the period of the pandemic because the Indian economy faced a major economic shock without adequate compensation and without adequate provisioning of basics. It is a massive shock that has to be dealt with through significantly increased public expenditure and since we did not compensate in the past year and a half (April 2020 onwards), the required expenditure now is even larger.

- *Increasing reliance on regressive taxation:*

India is rare in the world for relying so much on regressive taxation and increasing our reliance on taxes that increasingly hit the poor and the disadvantaged. An obvious example of it is the fuel tax which has increased by 550% in the last 4 years. This massive reliance on fuel taxes falls mostly on the poor. Moreover, this regressive taxation is combined with the fact that spending has not been directed towards the poor. Before the pandemic, a huge tax relief was presented to the corporate sector which was not justified by any increased investment. To make up for it and also for the other revenues which were collapsing because the economy had collapsed, there has been a huge increase in fuel taxes. There is now some political attempt to bring it down for the upcoming state assembly elections. Even with this minor decline, the fuel tax is way out of whack with what it should be and with how revenues should be raised.

This is the broad context in which we have to ask for things. So what do we ask for?

Demands

- *Demand for reliable data:*

We ask for more reliable data and not in a general way. We need to at least bring back the reliability of data to what it was 10 years ago. At the moment even our National Income data is not reliable and it is critical. Despite knowing the GDP is not a great indicator of human progress, so much else depends on how we interpret the GDP. The fact that the informal economy has been badly battered in the past, especially since 2016 that we need a proper survey done by the CSO to indicate the actual size of the informal sector and the proportion of people employed by the informal sector. We cannot try to dress it up by claiming that anybody with an EPFO account is a formal sector worker since that is definitely not true. We know workers have an EPFO account

lying dormant since they think it is another tax on their wages, they do not realize they have a right to it or when they move from one job to another they do not realize the portability of it or the employers do not enable the portability of it. This is evident everywhere. A survey in the NCR showed that all of the people with EPFOs were informal sector workers and none of them got any benefits from the EPFOs. So we need proper data and this is one of our foremost demands. We need much more data on the specific sectors that women are employed and where women's employment has become more unreliable.

- *Microfinance institutions in crisis:*

The macroeconomic and monetary policy response to the pandemic is very important. The extent to which microfinance institutions were hit, has been relatively understudied and it has not been given the wider prominence that it deserves. The NABARD microfinance SBI linkage had some impact in some livelihood arrangements for self-employed women. In some states like Kerala where they had the Kutumbshree, it was quite crucial in enabling women to function. In a bunch of other states microfinance institutions and the loans they provided through the whole SBI lens were critical in at least providing some cushion or buffer of small productive activities which were minor but nevertheless were adding a bit to household incomes or providing a consumption buffer. Microfinance institutions have been under great stress and we are realizing that now since the whole loan moratorium phase is over; neither the loans nor the interests have been foregone, it can only be paid at a later time. What has essentially changed now? The amounts have to be paid with an accumulated interest now while people have had no earnings or their earnings have been limping back to a fraction of what they were. We are going to see many more such things going bust in the near future. The microfinance sector is in deep crisis which is being papered over by NABARD and other organisations who have an interest in saying that it is not as severe as it actually is, but it only makes things difficult for women's organisations and self help groups that were trying to engage in productive activities in this period.

- *Revenue generation:*

We demand a massive reduction in the regressive element of the taxation and that can be done without any adverse revenue implications if we simply drew a few basic measures that some economists like Dr. Jayati Ghosh has been arguing for, for a very long time. The most obvious of it is a wealth tax. There are various debates on at which level wealth taxes should be imposed. We can go for a tax on the richest individuals whose income is above a very very high bar. We already have a property tax which is a form of wealth tax and nobody really objects to it. Dr. Ghosh suggests a tax on the known wealth on a relatively small number of very high networth individuals. Dr. Subramaniam, a former MIDS professor, did a calculation before the pandemic, in early 2019, of what would happen if they put a 4% tax on the wealth of just the Forbes richest billionaires, which is just 965 families. In 2019 he estimated that a 4% tax on them would generate 1% of GDP, which is the equivalent to the aggregate health spending of centre and states together. We could

double our health spending by just imposing a 4% tax on the richest of the rich. A 4% tax on the wealth of a billionaire means that the billionaire would not even notice it; such income reductions happen due to merely stock market fluctuations. Many countries in fact have a higher wealth tax on a higher range of the wealthy. Since 2019 when Subramaniam had done this calculation, we know that the wealth of the richest in India have doubled or more than doubled. The Adani fortune has gone up by 5 times while Ambani fortune has doubled over the last two years. If India had the political will, this wealth tax on the dollar billionaires could be used to finance greater public expenditures. The wealth tax is thus a low hanging fruit for us to avail of at the moment; another is the taxing of multinational corporations. The Indian government has been slightly better in the latter than some other governments, but is still susceptible to external pressure quite easily on this matter. MNCs end up paying lower taxes than MNCs or at times, no tax at all. They shift all their profits to low tax jurisdictions through base erosion and profit shifting. The Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation as well the G24 have put forward solutions to this problem and even into the OECD tax negotiations that have unfortunately ended in a whimper. The solution provided by them is that MNCs such as Apple, Google or Facebook, should be treated as one global company which has one set of global profits (which is how shareholders see them) and countries will demand our share of their global profits to be taxable according to a formula based on sales, employment and assets. We need to include employment and assets in our calculation since a lot of developing countries are producers rather than consumers since developing countries are poorer and hence have smaller markets. So the countries can at least tax the MNCs at rates at which they tax domestic countries and the BEPS can be avoided eventually. It would result in a significant increase in tax revenues and although it is difficult for a single developing country to do it alone, a group of developing countries could do it together. However, India is large enough to do it on its own if it wanted to and India could also mobilise countries in getting to move this forward. So in terms of revenue raising, we need to shift from regressive to progressive taxation. We need a reduction in fuel taxes with a rise in wealth tax and taxes on MNCs that pay less taxes than domestic companies.

- *Expenditure on food:*

We need an increase in expenditure on food and we need to diversify the kinds of food provided in the PDS. We already have surplus food stocks which grew obscenely during the pandemic. India should be distributing a lot more free food and should also be adding more elements to the PDS to enable a more rounded and balanced diet, which has really taken a battering during this period. We need to ensure that the systems that enable young people to get nutrition such as midday meals, the ICDS, etc are up and running as soon as possible and providing cooked meals. Although it is the state's responsibility, it needs central government support which it did not get so far.

- *Expenditure on NREGA:*

We need an increase in the rural employment programme. The NREGA is massively underfunded. The People's Action for Employment Guarantee, of which Dr.Ghosh is a member, conducted a study that shows that almost 90% of the money for the whole financial year has already been spent and more has to be spent to just keep the programme running. 23 states are already in deficit and they don't have any more money to spend so they have basically stopped the programme since they face the risk of not being repaid by the centre if they put their own money in it. NREGA needs immediate budgetary allocations and it can be done through supplementary grants as it has been done before. We need to ensure that NREGA is not left in arrears every year. Every year 25% of the spending goes towards making up for the arrears of the previous year. We need to make sure centre does what the law ensures that it provides the money as per demand. 7 Chief Ministers, including some from BJP ruled states have written to the government for more money for NREGA funding. This is not a question of being nice or generous; the NREGA is a demand driven scheme by law and the government is duty bound to provide the resources and when it does not it is actually going against the law. The Supreme Court has previously hauled up governments for leaving states in arrears. We need a dramatic increase in spending for NREGA. NREGA disproportionately employs women, that is, it employs more than the 30% reserved for women and in some states it has even gone up above 50%. This is one of the few places where the gender gap is significantly lower.

- *Expenditure on ICDS and education:*

We need a dramatic increase in the ICDS, not only to just make it up and running. We also need a significant increase in the school education expenditure, especially primary school education and on an emergency basis. Without this spending we will have a generation of children with massive learning deficiency for several years. In higher education, if we want to ensure a hybrid mode of learning, we need to ensure that every student has access. To pretend that you are having online classes and not providing people with access, is an absolute crime and that is exactly what has been happening in India. Even providing everyone with minimal access requires a massive scale up of expenditure in education. It also needs hiring of new people along with filling up vacancies at both the centre and state levels and all of it requires huge funding.

- *Flexible and Sensitive Disaster Management funding:*

We need to be more prepared for disasters and shocks. That is where our response to disasters has been appalling. The National Disaster Management Act was used to impose a centralized lockdown across the country. PM Cares has been a scandal where money was collected and now we are being told it is a private fund and we have no knowledge of where that money has gone and what it is being used for. State governments that are desperate for funds have been denied this. Relief for disasters have been provided on very politically motivated grounds; it has been delayed, denied and reduced for major weather disasters such as the floods in Kerala and cyclones in West Bengal, that is states run by opposition parties. We need a more flexible and generous approach to

disaster management because climate change is now upon us and is no longer in the future. We need more funds for climate adaptations as these disasters are not going away; they are happening as we speak and even right now, there are massive floods in Tamil Nadu. We need more flexibility in disaster management expenditure. In disaster relief there are many gender issues that come up. Our funds for disaster management till now have not been very gender sensitive and have relied mainly on land titles or the head of the households or the male breadwinners. We need to adopt a more people-centred, feminist approach to disaster management. So we need more sensitivity and flexibility in funding and much more loan based funding that does not depend on political proclivities of central and state governments.

C. Key recommendations for Budget 2022-2023

1. We need more reliable data, at least as reliable as they were 10 years ago. The CSO needs to conduct surveys to estimate the actual size of the informal sector and the number of people employed in the informal economy in India.
2. We need a massive reduction in fuel taxes and a shift from regressive to progressive taxation systems. This can be done without adversely affecting revenue collection by imposing a wealth tax on a very small percentage of the richest population.
3. We need to tax MNCs at least at rates at which we tax our domestic companies. Most of the MNCs get away paying a very small tax to no tax at all. It can be prevented by preventing base erosion and profit shifting by MNCs through which they avoid taxes.
4. We need a greater expenditure in NREGA and we also need to make sure that there are no arrears in NREGA spending. The NREGA is a demand driven scheme by law and the government is duty bound to provide the resources.
5. We need a massive hike in expenditure on food distribution so make up for the nutritional imbalance. We demand the distribution of a greater range of items through the PDS since only foodgrains cannot make up for the nutritional deficiencies.
6. We need to scale up ICDS and midday meal systems so that they can start providing cooked meals again that can make up for the loss in nutrition that children dependent on midday meals have been facing ever since the closure of schools.
7. We need to raise expenditure on education quite significantly at all levels from primary to higher education. We need investment to ensure connectivity across all areas in the country so that children from remote areas do not bear the brunt of the digital divide created due to online education.
8. Climate change is happening in real time and is no longer in the future so we need more funds for disaster management. Disaster management funds have mainly depended on political proclivities of central and state governments. We need more flexibility and gender sensitivity in disaster management funds. Since disasters affect women disproportionately like every other crisis and funds till now have mainly been directed towards male members of the households, we demand a more people-centric, feminist approach in disaster management.

2. Session 1: Overall Fiscal Policy Scenario Post-Covid

Moderator: Dr Ritu Dewan

Speaker Names: Dr Ritu Dewan, Malini Chakravarty & Ravi Duggal

Session objectives:

- The overarching economic context that would influence the budget such as the macroeconomic indicators of employment and unemployment, GDP, inflation and the status of tax revenues.
- The session would focus on the importance of these indicators for fiscal policy and planning and hence how significant it is for the entire budgetary process.
- Focus Areas - employment/livelihoods crisis, informal especially migrant workers, inflation and unemployment, governance and public finance

A. Session summary

The session dealt with some of the current fiscal policy's critical concepts that directly impacts gender budgeting, including the revenue generation strategy of the central government and its implications for gender inequality. Critical aspects related to fiscal transparency and data availability were also discussed. The government's poor policy measures in response to covid-19 have led to an even further fall in the growth rate and caused a burden to marginalised sections, especially women. In this context, several recommendations were made by the speakers, including alternate ways of revenue generation through direct tax and the importance of having service delivery budgets as the benchmarks.

B. Detailed minutes

1. **Name of the speaker:** Dr Ritu Dewan, Founding member of Feminist Policy Collective and Vice-President of Indian Society for Labor Economics and the Vice-President of Indian Society for Agricultural Economics

Ritu Dewan spoke about the policy response post-covid-19 and highlighted the government's shortcomings on the gender budget, and shed light on the issues of transparency, reduction in subsidies, universal basic income, various public programs, among other issues about macroeconomics and public financing. The speaker highlighted the need of moving away from supply-oriented budget and instead move towards a demand-oriented budget. The fall in the GDP, along with the fall in growth rate and decrease in workforce participation even before the pandemic struck, indicates the inefficiency of macroeconomic policies as well as the budget. This was confirmed during the pandemic when the country witnessed a sharp decline in the employment rate and a fall in the Global Hunger Index. The speaker highlights the unethical nature of the budget and argues that there was a total disconnect between what people need and what they were given, terming it as a "Never

again budget”. The increase in the gender wage gap, further fall in employment, rise in under-nutrition, increase in negative impacts of climate change, and digital divide in education were crucial problems the country faced during the pandemic. The speaker highlights that, gender budget was reduced by 26%, and there was no mention of an urban employment program. The MSME sector and SHGs were not given any support. The speaker strongly argues that demand for data needs to be made. In recent times, the government has been unwilling to share the data in the public domain. The speaker also highlights the reduction of subsidies across public services, especially the reduction in food subsidies. Other problems highlighted include the rise in domestic violence cases in India and the rise in child marriages. Withdrawal of funds, attack on common property resources, changes in farm acts and forest acts and encouraging privatisation are some of the critical measures imposed by the government under the camouflage of Covid. Additionally, GST allocation to the states is not done as per constitutional norms. The speaker emphasises that at the macroeconomic level, the nature of demand in the context of the nature of the state becomes very important. The speaker also mentions the considerable decline in various public programs, which is a cause of worry.

Recommendations

Some of the essential recommendations highlighted by the speaker include the need for a migrant portal. The speaker introduces the term “card culture”. To access even the basic amenities like 5kg of rice, the government demanded identity cards and other documents from the people in times of crisis. The speaker argues that card conditionality has to be removed, and no such conditions must be imposed, especially in times of crisis. The speaker also argues that separate budgets for children and women have to be brought forth. Similarly, separate audits for women and children should be developed. Minimum income needs to be provided for all, especially transgender and sex worker communities.

2. Name of the speaker: Malini Chakravarty, Thematic Lead – Tax Equity at Center for Budget Governance and Accountability (CBGA), Delhi

Malini Chakravarty spoke about the “Revenue Generation Strategy of the Union govt during COVID-19 Pandemic and Gender inequality”. The speaker brought out some key points regarding the government’s revenue collection strategy in the context of the pre covid and post covid era. The speaker discussed vital factors that affect revenue generation and how these, in turn, affect women and marginalised sections alike.

Gaps and Challenges in policy design

The speaker argues that India’s fiscal policy is in a bind. The pandemic and the lockdowns have induced economic crisis, high unemployment and poverty, leaving women the worst affected; hence, a bold fiscal policy was needed. However, India continues to have a conservative fiscal policy. The government’s unwillingness to enlarge the fiscal deficit means its revenue generation strategy largely determines its expenditure. In such a scenario, the speaker notes that the composition of tax revenue generated becomes essential. It has implications on the amount generated and inequality. Over the years, many tax policy measures have resulted in loss of autonomy in setting tax rates post-GST as well as loss of revenue following the cut in corporate tax rates in September 2019. The trend in the centre’s tax collection shows that while revenue collected has been increasing until 2018-19, it witnessed a nominal fall in tax collection next year. In terms of the GDP, it translated to a significant fall. Even before the pandemic struck, the nominal fall in tax collection can be attributed to the sharp cut in corporate tax rates. However,

interestingly, evidence suggests that in the first wave of COVID-19, tax revenue generated during the pandemic was higher than that was generated in the previous FY. The speaker noted that a rise in revenue collection during the pandemic was possible due to the sharp increase in taxes on petrol and diesel. It was as high as 66% in petrol and 101% in diesel. As a result, during the lockdown, tax revenue collected from excise duty actually increased. During the first wave of the pandemic, corporation tax fell at the highest rate (49%), and excise duty witnessed a positive increase (31.4%). This has changed the composition of how much is collected from direct and indirect taxes, which has significant implications for gender equality and economic equality as the centre collects most of the direct tax revenue and 60% of the total taxes of the entire country.

In 2019-20, even with a cut in corporate tax rates on profits, the share of revenue collection from direct taxes in total taxes of the Centre was higher than the revenue generated from indirect taxes. That is, even with the cut in corporate taxes, the share of direct taxes continued to be higher than that of indirect taxes in the total taxes collected by the Centre. However, in the pandemic year, the share of direct taxes went below the indirect taxes, implying that there has been a shift from “profits” to “people’s pockets”. The speaker pointed out that in 2020-21, corporate tax only provided about 22.6% of the total revenue generated by the central govt, while only petro-products generated almost a similar proportion of taxes (19.2%). So, the corporate sector which witnessed a rise in profits during the pandemic did not contribute and petro products have become the major source of revenue generation. This is necessarily inequalising.

Financing of programs

The speaker argues that changes in the tax policy have occurred in close quarters of the time. The govt is not interested in increasing the fiscal deficit and is unable to increase the taxes on corporates and hence has chosen to finance larger government expenditure by increasing indirect taxation and raising revenue by imposing indirect taxes on fuel (petrol and diesel). The speaker emphasises that GST has some part to play in this. GST leaves the state and central govt with very little flexibility to change their tax rates on goods and services independently. For indirect taxes, even on luxury products, like washing machines, AC, dishwashers etc., the government does not have the flexibility to change the tax rate and needs the permission of the GST council. The government had already increased the personal income tax rate on the super-rich. This leaves the govt with limited options but to impose a tax on fuel. In short, the speaker argued that poor tax policy measures are the reason behind such a situation and strongly argues that taxes on petro products are the worst measure that could have taken place as it directly impacts economic and gender inequality.

High taxes on petro products can have an inflationary impact. Petro products are “universal intermediaries” used for public transport, carrying goods, and agricultural production. The hike in petro products leads to an all-around increase in prices, which hurts the poor the most and women even more. Moreover, despite the huge burden it imposes on the people, the revenue generated from this single source is insufficient to enlarge the government expenditure to the requisite extent. In budget 2021-22, total nominal govt expenditure is supposed to increase by less than 1% over 2020-21 (RE), which means a fall in real terms; given the inflation, the speaker notes that no real increase in expenditure can be expected for most sectors. Instead, we see a fall in the nominal expenditure in sectors that matter for reducing gender inequality. In short, because of the revenue generation strategy, the poor and women especially are facing a double burden. Public provisioning of goods and services financed through such ways implies that people are financing from their own pockets that the government is supposed to do. The speaker notes that this is no different from privatisation.

Recommendations

The speaker highlights some transformational measures that can make Budget 2022-23 more gender responsive. The speaker stresses that alternative, progressive financing is the only way forward. The speaker makes a case for wealth inheritance tax and long-term capital gains tax. There is a long-term capital gains

tax in India, but it is taxed at a much lower rate than income tax. The speaker concludes that alternate progressive financing would entail bringing wealth inheritance tax back and making long term capital gains tax more progressive.

3. Name of the speaker: Ravi Duggal, Independent Researcher involved in health services, health economics, health policy and budgets. Ravi Duggal's talk mainly focused on transparency in public spending and data. The main themes explored in this talk were reductions in data transparency, inadequate resources and tampering of financial data.

Gaps and Challenges in policy design

The speaker begins the session by discussing transparency in the context of integrity. The speaker opens the session with the quote- "public spending is vulnerable not only to waste and misuse but also to fraud. Transparency is the best policy for preventing corruption and maintaining high standards of integrity in using public funds". The speaker cautions that these are dangerous times as data manipulation and tampering happen on a large scale. Most recently, with the employment data. Even in budgets, the speaker notes that we have seen vast reductions in data transparency, in terms of what we used to get earlier and how we no longer get it, or we get it in a form where the story is less. The speaker introduces a term called "Reverse transparency", wherein the govt wants more and more of our data, but they do not want to share the data of the public system back with us. For instance, the E-Shram portal was introduced to register unorganised sector workforce, but is just registering them enough? Will the workers be guaranteed social security benefits? Similarly, in the case of digital health portals where the govt wants people's health data but are they going to guarantee access to healthcare for everybody? The speaker stresses that people receive more and more identity cards but do not get back what they should in terms of public services as taxpayers. For the social sector budget, access to data has been reduced completely. For instance, until 2016, regular financial management reports that included details of expenditures of various programs and benefits that could be availed under the National Health Mission scheme were available in public domain. However, post-2016, the reports are no longer available, and apparently, all such reports have to be approved by the PMO. The speaker emphasises that in recent times, data is used only by Niti Ayog, which comes out with biased reports. The govt likely wants to use the data to come out with its reports and not leave it in the public domain for the academics, civil society, who can use that data to come out with critical reports.

Financing of programs

The speaker notes that NIRBHAYA funds, domestic violence program funds, do not have significant reporting happening except through parliament questions. So many of these schemes do not get adequate resources and are not proportionate to expected demand. The speaker makes a vital point on how budgets need to be built. The speaker explained this with the example of maternity benefit, which is a part of NFSA. In the case of maternity benefit, if 2crores births take place each year and per woman gets Rs.6000, the budget allocation for the scheme should be Rs.12,000Cr. However, the government's present allocation for maternity benefits is not even Rs.2000Cr. six times less than required as per legal mandate. On the contrary, Tamil Nadu has an allocation of Rs.18000 Cr for maternity benefits. The speaker stresses that we need to create such benchmarks for all public services and then allocate budgets accordingly. A glance at the overall budget would tell us how less information is being shared regarding the government's revenue expenditure. We no longer see outcome and performance budgets being produced, which would actually tell us how financial data converges with benefits and who benefits, and so on. The speaker elaborates on the issue of tampering with financial data. In recent times, during the pandemic, the govt announced a ₹1,40,000 Cr budget for health. However, this amount was clubbed with water and other services, and in reality, the actual allocation for the Health Ministry stood at only about ₹70,000Cr. A misleading compilation is increasingly seen in the budgets.

Recommendations

The speaker highlights some crucial recommendations to make the upcoming budget more gender-responsive. The speaker argues that gender budgeting does not mean spending on women-specific programs but instead using a gender lens for the entire budget. The speaker explains this using the example of TB and Malaria among women and argues that unless we get gendered data and link it to healthcare in terms of gender and look at the resources spent on TB and malaria, we will not be able to resolve the issue. The speaker also encourages the need for gender audits to go hand in hand with the budget. CAG needs to be involved and has to become an important stakeholder in enhancing fiscal transparency. Some other key asks from the budget would include, service delivery budget should be benchmarked and CAG should be involved and it could indicate gender differentials in its reports.

C. Key recommendations for Budget 2022-2023

The speakers collectively agree that there is a need for data transparency and availability on the public forum. The increasing cases of data fudging and manipulation is alarming. Some of the vital recommendations made during the session include bringing back the wealth and inheritance tax and long-term capital gains tax to enlarge revenue generation for the government. For gender budgeting, gendered data need to be collected, and detailed financial management reports need to be made available for every major program and activity to understand how much was allocated and how many people benefited. Service delivery budgets should be made in accordance with accepted benchmarks.

A separate budget for women and children should be drafted. CAG should be seen as an important stakeholder in fiscal transparency. CAG could indicate gender differentials in its reports. More authentic, timely and accurate data and data which is not fudged is necessary.

3. Session 2-Issues and Concerns of Vulnerable Groups

Moderator: Nesar Ahmad

Speaker Names:

1. Dr. Santosh Giri (trans persons group)
2. Elina Horo (Adivasi group)
3. Deepthi Sukumar (Dalit & manual scavenging issues)
4. Ayesha Rai (Sex workers network)
5. Sabah Khan (Minority women)
6. Shampa Sengupta (Disability rights)
7. Pallavi Renke (DNT community- *could not attend due to a medical emergency*)

Session objectives:

- The focus of this session is on the impacts of Covid-19 on women of marginalised groups like Adivasi, Dalits, minorities, DNT communities, persons with disabilities, widows,

orphans, the elderly and homeless as well as people of the transgender community and sex workers.

- The focus of this session is on policies, budgetary allocations, schemes and programmes for these communities and how the gender responsive budgeting process can be made more inclusive.

A. Session Summary

This session has focused on the vulnerable groups in India and how they have been impacted by the pandemic. We have 5 eminent personalities representing 5 vulnerable backgrounds. The discussion has been divided into two parts where each of our speakers have shared their opinions on the questions put forward by our moderator, Nesar Ahmad.

All our speakers have spoken about the inaccessibility of the entire system to the people from vulnerable sections and minority communities. There is a massive lack of data which can only be made for through household level data collection. There needs to be a massive investment in education for the children from vulnerable communities so as not to leave them behind in adopting an online or hybrid mode of education. Social stigma against transgender people or sex-workers has made their access to healthcare systems even more difficult. A sensitization of society is required. There has been tremendous hatred and ghettoisation against the Muslim community. Children from vulnerable sections of society have higher dropout rates from schools than usual due to bullying and discrimination; this problem needs to be tackled. The process of accessing government schemes or public health or education or women's protection facilities needs to be made accessible to the disabled people. An expansion of public healthcare services as well as delivery of public assistance for mental health has also come up as a significant demand in this session.

The forest areas need to be protected from external intervention for environmental reasons as well as the protection of Adivasi communities. The government allowances available to disabled people or sex workers is horribly insufficient and needs to be increased significantly to derive any sort of benefit from it. There needs to be an expansion of government policies for protection of sex-workers who have been invisibilized in society through the criminalization of their work. The loan-based system of assistance for vulnerable sections needs to be changed to a grant based system of protection.

B. Detailed minutes

1. *How can Civil Society Organisations engage with the government on issues of budget transparency?*

- **Dr. Santosh Giri** spoke about the experiences of the transgender community during the pandemic. The HIV positive patients in transgender communities had faced extreme difficulties in accessing education services and medicines. Many transgender workers are mainly engaged in sex work or begging, which they had to discontinue due to the pandemic and this pushed them into poverty, hunger and starvation. Even well-known agencies that had promised to help them financially or in kind withdrew later on; they had no ambulance or hospital support. HIV positive transgender Covid patients were denied access to ambulance facilities. There have been instances where members of the transgender community ended up paying Rs.3500 for travelling distances as short as 2-2.5 Km simply because ambulances denied them access. In hospitals transwomen, who had transitioned from males to females, were admitted in the men's ward and some of them have experienced sexual violence as a result of it.

- **Elina Horo** spoke about the impact of the pandemic on the Adivasi community which makes up for 8% of India's total population. Adivasis face historical inequities and structural violence; they are denied basic rights. Migrant Adivasi workers were stranded in urban areas during the lockdown. Many Adivasi workers faced acute starvation and lost money due to extortion, most of the workers had lost their incomes over this period and many had even lost their lives. Some communities with traditional knowledge institutions were able to get through the pandemic, but the members with comorbidities such as cancer, blood pressure or diabetes were the most-affected since OPDs were closed. Many children were left unimmunized since ICDS was non-functional over this period. Most of the Adivasi children live in remote rural areas and have one or no devices and weak internet connectivity and had to bear the brunt of the digital divide created due to online education. The women in the Adivasi community, who already face threats of violence, have been disproportionately affected by the Covid crisis. There has been an unprecedented attack on the natural resources during this period and policies for commercial mining of coal were passed during this time, along with the farm laws, UAPA arrests, etc. This has had direct and adverse implications for the Adivasi community, which is quite dependent on the forests.

- **Deepthi Sukumar** spoke about the plight of Safai Karamcharis during the pandemic. Government identifies Safai Karamcharis as manual scavengers and sanitation workers. Majority of the manual scavengers are Dalits and among them most of the workers are women. So manual scavenging is an issue of persisting casteism and patriarchy. The laws and policies that already exist are hardly implemented. In 2018-19, the spending on livelihood schemes by the government for Safai Karamcharis was the highest and it has declined after that. Despite being the frontline workers, cleaning up medical waste and being exposed to the coronavirus, the Safai Karamcharis have been overlooked throughout the period of the pandemic. The pandemic has also acted towards formalizing and normalizing untouchability under the guise of social distancing. The children of Safai

Karamcharis have been affected by the digital divide created due to online education, their families have faced loss of lives and livelihoods. There has been a massive decline in nutritional intake for them, which has adversely affected their immunity and made them more susceptible to the virus. The education budget for Safai Karamchari families has been totally removed and there is no allocation done for the education of their children. There is a massive gap in data that has made the formalization of schemes even more difficult.

- **Sampa Sengupta** spoke about the people with disabilities and their experience during the pandemic. Disability is a cross-cutting issue and not an isolated one. There are people with disabilities across all castes, religion and gender. Even if they come from financially affluent backgrounds online education by its very nature tends to be very exclusionary for the disabled people. The already meagre central government pension of Rs.300 per month for disabled people, had been discontinued during the pandemic. People with psychosocial disabilities have suffered due to closure of OPDs and worsening of mental health has led to high rates of suicide among people with disabilities. Women with disabilities face unusually severe violence at homes but although NCW has provided a helpline number, calling might not even be an option for people with hearing impairment or certain other forms of disabilities. Social distancing has made people with disabilities difficult to move around since they require assistance for it. Hospitals denied admission to Covid patients if they had cerebral palsy or autism.

- **Sabah Khan** shared that Muslims usually tend to be employed in the informal sector and many were impoverished since this sector collapsed during the lockdown. CSOs report high rates of starvation among Muslims. Online education created difficulties for children who had no access to devices or internet thus resulting in high drop-out rates. Moreover, the pandemic was used to villainize the Muslim community citing incidents such as the Tablighi Jamat. There was an economic and social boycott of Muslims, that affected their access to hospitals by creating an atmosphere of fear and they were denied access to certain basic rights.

- **Ayesha Rai** highlighted the plight of sex-workers who already live in an unsafe environment due to the hidden nature of their work. Sex workers have been invisibilised in the society by criminalization of sex-work. Sex workers have to hide their identities and thus are mainly undocumented if they migrate; many migrants sex-workers also face language barriers since they work in areas that are far away from their homes. Moreover, they face violence on the streets, by customers, politicians or even at homes. The pandemic has disrupted their livelihoods. Moreover, brothels where sex workers live are not safe places since they are disrupted at any point of the day by the intervention of rescuers, police or goons. The access of sex-workers to health facilities has been limited even before the Covid crisis struck; the only social protection allocated for them is the unimaginably meagre amount of yearly transfer for sex-workers who are HIV positive. The sex-workers

have no access to sexual or reproductive health facilities even to the small extent that they had before the pandemic. The brothel areas had been sealed due to the pandemic and social distancing norms so they also lost their livelihoods. Their situation has been worsening amidst the pandemic, resulting in high rates of suicide among sex-workers.

2. *What are your requirements and demands from the budget?*

- **Dr.Santosh Giri:** The mental health of transgender people is at a threat since a very early age. Mental health of transgendered people needs to be focused on formally. Community engagement with transgender people is required at the grassroot level before formulating policies for the transgender community; a mere representation of transgender people is meaningless if the direct stakeholders are not consulted while formulating policies. There is no budget allocated for transgender people's access to sexual and reproductive health facilities or for sex reassignment surgeries, so greater expenditure for both physical and mental healthcare is required for this community.

- **Elina Horo:** The indigenous people need to be consulted while formulating policies. Policies need to be gender sensitized, public healthcare needs to be strengthened and expanded along with social security expenditure, school education budgets for Adivasi children need to be expanded, ration cards must be distributed to all Adivasi households and nutritional support must be provided to them. The Forest Rights Act needs to be implemented to keep Adivasi inhabited areas free from external intervention.

- **Deepthi Sukumar:** Proper data at the household level needs to be collected for families of Safai Karamcharis. These workers are usually forced into manual scavenging by forces of caste and patriarchy; to abolish manual scavenging a human rights based approach needs to be adopted. Most of the schemes of minority communities are loan based and inaccessible to women since it is unlikely that Dalit women would go to banks and ask for loans; schemes need to be grant based and not loan based.

- **Sabah Khan:** National data banks must be formed and financial institutions must be created for religious minorities. There is much hatred spread through ghettoisation and it needs to be combated through incentives to promote diversity in educational institutions and societies. Citizenship education is required for children to understand the functioning of law and education and teachers need to be trained to tackle bullying of children from the Muslim community due to which many children drop out of schools. District level health policies are required with a focus on minority communities. Sensitization of the healthcare sector is important so as to not exclude any community from accessing it.

- **Shampa Sengupta:** We are in dire need of robust data collection. The Right of People with Disabilities Act (RPDA) needs to be implemented. Accessible India is a flagship programme but has no allocation; it needs to be funded. Mental health of people with

disabilities needs to be focused on. The disability pension must be raised from Rs 300 to at least Rs 3000 and the process of accessing it should be made less tedious and accessible to people with disabilities. The NHFC gives loans to pwds but disabled people face a lack of access to financial systems. The entire system of pwd support in India needs to be changed and sensitized, its processes and procedures need to be made accessible to the disabled people.

- **Ayesha Rai:** Data on sex workers is lacking. Even getting basic IDs such as Adhar Card or PAN Card involves extreme harassment for the sex workers. Sex workers hardly get any information regarding government schemes and this information gap needs to be bridged. Sex workers are invisibilized in society; HIV positive sex workers get a meagre sum of Rs. 600 every year as pension and even the process of acquiring it is time-taking and exhausting for them. The attitude of government officials towards sex-workers needs to be helpful so that the existing policies are accessible to them and less time-consuming and there is a dire need for expansion of social security, especially health facilities, available to sex-workers.

C. Key recommendations for Budget 2022-2023

1. Collection of data on the vulnerable communities at the household level is required since policies cannot be formulated with such a severe paucity of data.
2. People from vulnerable and underprivileged sections of the society work mostly in the informal sector and the collapse of the informal sector has meant a loss of livelihoods for them. Employment of vulnerable communities needs to be one of the focus points of the upcoming budget.
3. Access to better healthcare facilities as well as access to mental health support is one of the most significant demands from the vulnerable sections of society and it is one possible through a wide expansion of public health expenditure and strengthening of public health systems.
4. Children from vulnerable sections do not have enough access to devices or internet facilities and have borne the brunt of the digital divide created due to online education. To make up for this a massive hike in education expenditure is required.
5. The immunization of infants and children has stopped due to the closure of ICDS and it needs to be restarted as soon as possible.
6. The social security allowances for vulnerable and minority communities is extremely low. For example, the Rs. 300 per month allowance for people with disabilities and Rs. 50 per month for HIV positive sex-workers, are extremely insufficient amounts and these allowances needs to be increased significantly.
7. A loan-based system is not going to be helpful for women or the vulnerable sections of the society since they do not have stable incomes and repaying loans with interests is difficult for them, so they are unlikely to go and ask for loans to set up microenterprises, but the

government has only focused on a loan based system till now. This system needs to be changed to a grants-based system.

8. The entire financial or healthcare or official system through vulnerable sections can avail government schemes need to be made more accessible to them and the attitude of officials towards them needs to become more helpful and sensitive.

4. Session 3: Social Sector: Challenges and Contributions

Moderator: Renu Khanna, SAHAJ

Speaker Names:

- Dipa Sinha, Right to Food Campaign
- Sulakshana Nandi, Jan Swasthya Abhiyan
- Comrade Sindhu, frontline workers union
- Dr. Protiva Kundu- CBGA

Session objectives: Examine the budgetary allocations on health, nutrition and social security in the light of the requirements emerging from the COVID 19 crisis of 2021.

A. Session summary:

The focus areas of Session 3 were Health, Nutrition and Food Security, Social Security and Education, Women Scheme-based Workers. The speakers mentioned that the pandemic budget followed historic trends and did not accommodate the needs of the social sector. Huge budget cuts were made at a time when they should have increased financial allocations, or at the very least retained the earlier allocations. Surveys even at the end of 2020 reveal that food insecurity and hunger have increased. Ironically despite record high food grain availability, food was not available through the PDS system. Nutritional schemes like the Mid-Day Meal Scheme and the ICDS faced budget cuts in real terms. The Health budget too faced similar issues. The budget purports to show a significant increase but much of it is allocated to the PMJAY which diverts money into the private insurance sector and helps fatten the for-profit private health sector. Only 3 percent of the increase went into the Health and Wellness Centres which would actually strengthen primary health care. Marginalised groups especially Dalits, adivasis and women have suffered disproportionately. Their access to healthcare services was hampered because of identity and entitlement documentation processes, as well as the weakening of public sector. While frontline workers including ASHA and anganwadi workers worked overtime during the pandemic, and at great personal risk, they were rewarded with delayed and poor salary compensation, no social security, and appalling working conditions.

In the education sector too a lot of fault lines have been exposed in the wake of the pandemic. Statistics reveal a greater number of girls are dependent on public provisioning of education than boys and a

greater proportion of girls are likely to complete secondary schooling if given an opportunity compared to their counterparts. With the pandemic and transition to remote learning, the number of dropouts is increasing. Teachers in government schools are also inadequately trained to deal with online pedagogy. Given the status quo, the panellists' have emphasised the dire need to retain and improve budgetary allocations for the social sector while preparing the budget for the upcoming financial year, keeping in mind women, Dalits, Adivasis and marginalised communities. It is also recommended to involve social activists as a part of the budget planning process.

B. Detailed minutes

Dipa Sinha, Right to Food Campaign

PDS

- The end of 2020 showed impact of pandemic has become very severe with respect to food insecurity and hunger despite not enough data being available.
- Many surveys conducted at the end of 2020 including Right to Food campaign by Hunger Watch showed many people are consuming lesser food compared pre-pandemic.
- During COVID, the coverage of PDS has been reasonable. Those who have PDS card are getting regular ration and free supplement but those who did not have cards were facing problems. Last year lentils as well as some other provisions provided to migrant workers are also not provided this year. So, since PDS reached people to some extent, there is need to strengthen it and expand it.
- This is possible now, because of record high stocks of grain in the FCI godowns.
- Only 1% of the GDP has been allocated to food subsidy over the last 10/12 years. Given the economic crisis for the unorganized sector during the pandemic, surely this allocation deserves an increase.
- There is a need to universalize PDS and make provision for non-ration card holders.
- In addition to expanding the coverage, the food basket too should be expanded. At least until the end of pandemic apart from food grains, lentils and edible oil should be added.

Nutrition

- Direct nutrition programmes for women and children such as mid-day meal, ICDS are in worse situation than PDS.
- Last year's ICDS budget came down. The Saksham Anganwadi budget head, added three more schemes to the ICDS programme. It appeared as though the budget had increased but in real terms the ICDS budget declined by 36 percent between 2014-15 and 2021.
- The available NFHS 5 data also shows that the nutritional status has worsened.
- There was a 38 percent budget decrease in real terms in the Mid Day Meal Scheme since 2014-15. The National Education Policy states that breakfast should be provided in schools. Finance Ministry rejected the proposal to introduce breakfast in school due to 'resource constraints'. The MDM Scheme requires enhanced budgets to provide breakfast (including eggs three times a week) and not the fortification of rice.

Recommendations

- There is a need to make up for the decline in allocation and have additional allocations in the budget to compensate for the losses due to the pandemic.
- There is a need to enhance allocation for maternity benefits.
- We need greater transparency in data and information on the budgets especially in these periods of distress.

Sulakshana Nandi, Jan Swasthya Abhiyan

- The 2021-22 budget claimed that the budget outlay for health had increased by 137%. However this figure includes the outlay for other department such as nutrition, sanitation etc.
- Union budget is still only 0.34% of GDP against the promised 2.5 % which was declared in the National Health policy 2017.
- Public sector response to the pandemic has been very inadequate. But even so, the COVID 19 period showed how tertiary public hospitals provided better service than private hospitals, who actually denied health care or ended up exploiting people.
- The Ayushman Bharat has 2 components - PMJAY and Health and Wellness Centers as a part of the National Health Mission. Budget heads are nested one within another resulting in low transparency.
- Last year the PMJAY component saw a 41% increase in allocation and NHM (Health and Wellness Centres component) 3% only. This 3 % does not even match the rates of inflation.
- PMJAY was prioritized over HWCs. However during COVID some studies in Maharashtra show that PMJAY was of no use. Many hospitals have not registered themselves under PMJAY and the percentage of those who have PMJAY cards who actually benefitted from the PMJAY, was very low.
- PMJAY was aimed to reduce out of pocket expenses through insurance but this has actually increased when people are forced to access private sector. But the right to health cannot be fulfilled by the private for profit
- Over 75% PMJAY funds go to the for profit private sector which is largely in urban areas. This has resulted in syphoning of public resources to benefit for-profit private sector which pre dominantly caters to urban population. The public health sector is actually becoming weaker - people from marginalized and vulnerable groups actually rely on public services.
- Health governance is another issue – the National Health Authority that governs the PMJAY is dominated by corporate and private sector interests.
- A DAWN study done by Sulakshana's group, shows that women face many barriers in accessing health care services, and the requirement of id cards, BPL and other eligibility documentation further hampers their access, and even more so for marginalized groups, like adivasi women and Dalits.

Recommendations

- Increase health budget and put it in the public sector, do not give money for private sector insurance. sector. There is a need to strengthen district hospitals, especially in

conflict areas as we saw from the COVID experience. So public health system needs to be strengthened from the primary to secondary and tertiary levels.

- The allocations for Health and Wellness Centers and frontline workers should be increased. Contractual workers should be regularized.
- Women specific schemes should be strengthened.

Comrade Sindhu, frontline workers union

- Projection shows almost 50% of population could go to poverty. We are giving space for Human survival and entitlement.
- As a result of the COVID pandemic, NHM including the ASHA workers was completely diverted to managing the pandemic, at the cost of routine services, like immunization, ante natal care. Maternity Health services were practically non existent for 5/6 months during pandemic.
- ICDS services are still in that situation – non resumption of routine services through the anganwadi centres. UNICEF has warned that additional 3 lakh children will die in India because of hunger.
- Despite the alarming projections of hunger deaths, we see a cut in ICDS Budget.
- Similarly, the Mid Day Meal Scheme provides 15 percent of the total rural calorie intake in school children. Since schools were closed for an extended period of time, and the MDM Scheme are asked not to report for work or deliver children’s meals at home also, this affected the nutritional intake of 12 crore children.
- Even in Kerala, despite many multistakeholder efforts THR are not reaching the most vulnerable. There is an urgent need for provision of more food grains. But still the required financial allocation for nutrition is not achieved. Last year Rs. 4000 crores were supposed to have been allocated, but only cuts in budget were seen.
- Data projected by the government is suspect - it appears to be fabricated data as mid-day meals have not been delivered at all during the pandemic.
- Names of schemes keep changing in the budget statements, but there is no difference in the financial allocations.
- The ICDS and NHM are pushing for digitization government through the Poshan Tracker. But during COVID when centers were closed, and food was not delivered what was the point of pushing the Poshan Tracker?
- Working condition is appalling, poor salary and no social security for workers.
- The front line workers, ASHA and anganwadi workers worked almost 24 hours a day under immense family and social pressure - that they were putting themselves and family members at risk. Sindhu cited how when one ASHA’s husband died because of COVID, her children stopped speaking with her.
- The FLWs are not given due recognition. Government has announced Rs.1000 extra for ASHA workers which is very low, no risk allowance or safety measures were provided. In UP 15 ASHAs died, but did not receive any compensation, even though an insurance of Rs. 50 lakhs was announced.

Recommendations

- There should be enhanced financial allocations for nutrition-related schemes in ICDS and NHM.

- Recognition and regularization as ‘workers’ for frontline workers with provisioning for regular salaries and social security benefits.
- Low women’s work participation in India is due to lack of child care facilities. We need to demand that anganwadis be expanded to anganwadi cum creche for working class.
- The MNREGA wages unpaid for last 6 months and budget cut of up to 40% should be rectified especially considering the large number of women employed in MNREGA.
- The budget calculations should be shared with activists and they should be invited to join the planning process.

Dr. Protiva Kundu- Education and Digital Divide

- Girls are more dependent on public provisioning for education as most of them are enrolled in government and aided schools. When given opportunity girls are more likely to complete secondary education.
- The COVID pandemic exposed the fault lines in public provisioning. With school closure we transitioned to remote learning. The impact of school closure and shift to online education is multi-pronged.
- The online education has created a digital divide. Around 10 million more secondary school age girl could be out of school and the number higher in developing countries like India. In Tamil Nadu it is estimated that there will be 28 to 80% increase in child labour during pandemic.
- There is a gender divide in digital infrastructure. The ratio of Female to Male internet users is 33 F:67 M. Amongst 5 to 14 years children, the ability to operate the computer is 9.9 % male and 8.2 % female. And in age group 15 to 29 years the ratio becomes 39% male and 27.6 % female.
- There is also a language barrier in accessing online material and thus more material should be available in vernacular languages.
- There is also a shortage of qualified teachers. Only 17% of government school teachers were trained to conduct online classes against 43.8% in private schools.

Recommendations.

- Policy Ask 1- Adequate budgetary allocation for retaining children in education system.
 - Free secondary education for girls and exemption from board exam fee and tuition fees
 - Scholarships with revisions to compensate for inflation
 - Budget for surveys for identification of out of school children including to identify child labour.
 - Budgetary intervention to mainstream out of school children in 15 to 18 age group under SMSA.
 - Generate employment/livelihoods programmes for parents
- Policy Ask II- Budgetary allocation for strengthening digital infrastructure.
 - Need access to low tech and no tech solutions. Good devices and internet subsidy to be provided.

- Production of more online resource material
- Need to increase unit cost for regular teacher training skills. Current cost is Rs. 300 per teacher per annum.
- Need for gender sensitization in online curriculum. And also social and emotional support.
- Policy Ask III- Substantial investment in school infrastructure for an enabling environment when the schools reopen.
 - Maintenance of infrastructure and WASH facilities in schools and Anganwadi centers should form important part of education budget.
 - Vacant posts should be filled.
 - Budget for curriculum revision and remedial teaching.

C. Key recommendations for Budget 2022-2023

- Additional allocation for the social sector – both to make up for the decline in allocation and also additional and increased allocation to circumvent the economic losses of families due to the pandemic.
- Specifically increase allocations for Nutrition related schemes – ICDS, MDM, PDS. Expand both coverage and make these schemes universal, as well as expand basket of food items to ensure better nutritive values.
- To increase women’s work participation in India expand anganwadis and make them anganwadi cum creche.
- Pay arrears of MNREGA wages, expand number of days employment through MNREGA.
- Enhance allocation for maternity benefits.
- Increase budgets for education. We need adequate budgetary allocation for retaining children in education system, for strengthening digital infrastructure, and substantial investment in school infrastructure for an enabling environment.
- Increase health budgets to 2.5 % of GDP immediately. Ensure strengthening of public sector through this increased funding. Expend HWCs and improve their efficiency. Strengthen district and tertiary hospitals.
- The right to health cannot be fulfilled by the private for profit sector. Need to regularize private health sector by capping prices and strengthening public sector to serve all sections of society. No public funding for private health insurance.
- Regularise frontline and contractual workers with salaries and not honorarium. Expand public employment. Increase their social security.
- Make budget processes transparent and clear – do not obfuscate calculations. Include activists in planning processes and explain all calculations.

5. Session 4: State Responses and Promising Practices

Moderator: Dr. Nilangi Sardeshpande, SAHAJ

Speaker Names: Nesar Ahmed, Dr. Ekbal, Hemraj Patil & Shakuntala Savita and Nabanita Das

Session objectives

- This session focused on the various initiatives undertaken by the state governments and the effectiveness of these actions in ensuring the services related to health, education, nutrition and livelihood.
- The discussions highlighted the lessons for the state towards preparedness vis-à-vis education, health, nutrition and livelihood.

A. Session summary

The session focused on the practices and responses of the state governments to covid-19. As a response to COVID-19 pandemic, states like Kerala, Maharashtra and Odisha introduced schemes to address the concerns related to food security, income security, employment, migrant workers and healthcare to tackle the pandemic. The session discussed the effectiveness of such measures and sheds light on the key takeaways and learnings for the central government. Important issues such as access to healthcare, privatisation of health care, dissemination of information, urban employment schemes were addressed during the session. Some key recommendations include decentralising health care, data availability, and building a robust public health system.

B. Detailed minutes

1. **Name of the speaker:** Nesar Ahmed, member of Feminist Policy Collective and founder & director of Budget Analysis and Research Centre.

Nesar Ahmed and his team conducted an overview study of selected states in the country and their response to the first wave of Covid-19. The study looked into the Covid-19 relief measures of the various states and focused mainly on five aspects, namely- food security, nutritional security for women and children, social security, income security and relief for migrant workers. The study was conducted before the second wave of Covid-19.

The study revealed that concerning food security and nutrition, for MDM and ICDS services, most states announced dry ration and take-home ration. Punjab govt empowered gram panchayats to spend Rs. 50,000/month and Rs. 5000/ day for providing food and livelihood. Chattisgarh announced that two quintals of rice would be allocated to every Gram Panchayat for distribution to individuals without ration cards. The state govt also announced to provide 1kg of Gram for free for all beneficiaries of PDS. Concerning income security, Rajasthan provided ex gratia payment of Rs. 2500 to construction workers, and Odisha provided Rs 1000 to NFSA beneficiaries and Rs. 3000 to registered street vendors. In Assam, the govt announced a one-time payment of Rs. 1000 to construction workers and Gratuitous Relief for urban people for a period of 7 days to all wage earners, rickshaw pullers etc was provided. Additionally, one-time financial assistance of USD 2000 to the residents of Assam who were stranded in foreign countries was announced. Mr Nesar emphasised that MGNREGA and NFSA have helped people a lot during the pandemic. For urban areas, some states came out with initiatives such as Urban Wage Employment Initiative (Odisha), Chief Minister's Urban Livelihood Program (HP), Ayyankali Urban Employment Guarantee

Scheme (Kerala), and Mukhyamantri Sharmik Yojana (Jharkhand). For social security, most states announced advance payment for the various social security pensions. To deal with the migrant crisis, Kerala set up more than 4000 relief camps for 1.44 lakhs ?? not clear and 35 camps were opened for 1545 homeless and destitute people along with creating WhatsApp groups for dissemination of information and stopping the spread of false rumours. They also connected ‘guest workers’ with their home state nodal officers. Chattisgarh sanctioned Rs.3.8Cr funds under the Building and Other Construction Workers Board (GoC) to provide food, shelter, medical support, transport and other facilities to registered labourers. Mr Nesar concluded by sharing that UP also set up Migrant Commission” however, not much data was available regarding it.

2. **Name of the speaker:** Dr Ekbal, Kerala COVID-19 Expert Committee Chairman

Dr Ekbal spoke about “**Combating COVID-19 Kerala Experience**”; the experiences of Kerala in handling the pandemic and discussed the relief measures brought by the govt.

Policy design and measures

Dr Ekbal began the session by mentioning the different challenges Kerala was facing when the pandemic began early in the year 2020. Some major challenges included flattening the curve, availability and accessibility of health care, keeping the death rate low and social responsibility of the private sector. he also described it as an “inequality virus” wherein, this is not just a medical problem but a socio-economic and cultural problem. Another challenge faced by Kerala was the issue of genome sequencing and dr. Ekbal highlighted the need to detect any new variant early on. Kerala also has a set of advantages in terms of a robust health care system supported by the Aardram (meaning compassion) scheme. During the pandemic, the state converted PHC to family care centres and as of today, almost 70% of the state’s population is covered under the public health system with better medical facilities and Human Resources as compared to the private hospitals. Another noteworthy aspect that favoured Kerala’ management during covid was the decentralisation of the health system that ensured community participation. However, the state also has certain disadvantages including a high density of population, rural-urban continuum, and high elderly population which constitutes 17-20% of the total state population. In addition to high morbidity rates, the state also has high numbers of diabetic patients. The state also has a sizeable migrant population (guest workers) and constituted around 3 million-plus during the pandemic.

Programs and implementation

Early preparedness was the key along with setting up of state rapid response, state medical and state expert groups. Testing, treatment and tracing were other key aspects that worked for the state. Dr. Ekbal highlighted the importance of evidence-based treatment protocol and urged that we need to follow standard treatment guidelines across the country. Additionally, he shared that in Kerala, reverse quarantine was managed along with the ‘break the chain’ campaign and community level surveillance. With regard to Private-public cooperation, the private sector set up 10% of the ICU beds. In private hospitals, treatment for covid-19 charges was fixed by the govt and in private labs, test charges were fixed by the govt. The govt also provided free ration to all including those who did not have ration cards and guest workers and ₹1000 was provided to those who are not under the pension scheme. Community kitchens were set up and 8651627 individuals were served food as of 17 May 2020. Additionally, the average pay for women in Kerala under MGNREGA was

more than the national average during the pandemic. Sannadha Sena a group of social volunteers provided several services including psychosocial support for women. Dr Eqbal talked about the reasons why Kerala suffered less in the second wave of covid-19. Low Sero prevalence during the second wave of Kerala was due to the effective management in the first wave. Even vaccination statistics are high, with single-dose being 95.07 % and the double dose being given to 58.1% of the population. It was observed that women were more accepting of vaccines than men. The death rate is 0.69% in Kerala and it was observed that only the elderly with co-morbidity are dying. Among those who died, 90.15% were unvaccinated. The state govt has identified which of the groups have been most vulnerable during the pandemic.

Recommendations

Dr Eqbal stressed the importance of building and strengthening public institutions. An increase in fund allocation under PM-JAY, ABHIM schemes have to be under focus. We have to reduce morbidity. Additionally, decentralisation of health care is essential and the need of the hour. Social control of the private sector is to be done instead of following the PPP vs PPC model. An open-source approach to medical research is vital. The speaker concludes the session by stating that the world is not only interconnected but interdependent and so we have to have more international solidarity.

3. Name of the speakers: Hemraj Patil and Shakuntala Savita from SATHI, Maharashtra

Hemraj Patil and Shakuntala from SATHI have worked extensively on information gaps and the setting up of helplines through community-level intervention in the villages of Maharashtra. The team worked with the state government as well as communities during the pandemic to ensure proper dissemination of information.

Measures

Hemraj Patil: The team focused extensively on public health-related community actions like IEC, module development etc. Help desk and helpline were set up to disseminate information at the block level. In addition to this, correct information regarding schemes was provided. Some other measures were setting up of covid response activity, providing direct assistance to health staff, and providing updated information related to covid and non-covid services. The team also conducted block wise and district wise workshops regarding covid related information. NHM and SATHI team started 18 helpline desks initially in 9 districts and planned an outreach program. Further, reporting, review, data collection was done. In three days, WhatsApp groups (>3200 members) involving ASHA, Anganwadi workers and PRI members in each block was formed to disseminate information. Capacity building and training workshops at the block level were conducted to help the health staff.

Shakuntala focused on how privatisation of healthcare has abjectly failed. She highlighted the success of the statewide campaign by Jan Arogya Abhiyan in Maharashtra towards Right to Healthcare and stressed the need to strengthen the public systems. Arogya Hakk Parishads were also set up at the district level.

Recommendations

Working with govt and community level is important to resolve issues such as shortage of hospital beds, shortage of staff etc. The speakers highlighted that there is a great need for help desk and outreach work to give feedback to health institutions for further improvement in the services and facilities. And urged that, govt needs to intervene regarding the issue of overcharging in private hospitals and demand refund from private hospitals.

4. **Name of the speaker:** Nabanita Das, Doctoral Research Fellow at the National Institute of Technology, Rourkela.

Nabanita Das spoke about the Urban Wage Employment initiative (UWEI) in Odisha, which is still at a nascent stage. The speaker highlighted the important aspects of the scheme in the context of Covid-19 and its limitations.

The Urban Wage Employment initiative (UWEI) in Odisha was started to support livelihood options for 4.5 lakhs people residing in urban regions of the state. Specific works under the scheme include stormwater drainage, rainwater harvesting, increase in green cover and beautification, sanitation activities and community centre and open space development (work centres for SHG at micro-level). A total of ₹100cr has been allocated for the implementation of the scheme by the state government. At the ward level, the ward-level committee will be there to decide, finalise and estimation of the projects along with the support of SHG, SDA, and AE/JE.

The unique feature of this scheme is that SHG/SDA will be the implementing partners. To ensure transparency of all information related to work undertaken and number of beneficiaries, the data will be put into the public domain. The execution scheme is entrusted to rural and urban SHG. Under the initiative, work orders for projects less than ₹1 lac will be given to SHG/ SDA. The wage for the workers will be given through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) every week. The labour charge is set at ₹250 per day. In Bhubaneswar, ward-level committees have been set up in all 64 wards to ensure the implementation of the scheme.

However, the scheme has its drawbacks. Only 22.5% of the urban poor are going to be benefitted from this initiative. An appropriate capacity building plan is not in place to orient SHGs, SDA, and Area level federations. No proper data is available regarding the size of the population working in the informal sector in urban areas. Within the urban poor, the information regarding the scheme is not disseminated correctly.

C. Key recommendations for Budget 2022-2022

Some of the critical recommendations highlighted in the session include the need to strengthen the public health systems and ensure community-level participation. Sufficient funds have to be directed towards health-related schemes. Decentralisation of health care is essential. Additionally, data regarding the size of the informal sector needs to be in place. The govt has to aid help desk and outreach work to ensure improvement in services and facilities of the public health system.

6. Session name: Session 5 - Status of GRB processes at Union and State level

Moderator: Sona Mitra

- Kerala- Dr. Mridul Eapen
- Andhra Pradesh- Hilda Grace Coelho- Centre for Rural Studies and Development
- Assam- Nilanju Dutta- North East Network
- Issue of VAW & GRB – Suneeta Dhar- Jagori and Amita Pitre- Oxfam India
- GRB Overview- Shruti Ambast- CBGA

Session objectives: To discuss the need to bring the conversation back to transformative financing. Going beyond production of Gender Budget statements and ex-post analysis of budgets.

A. Session summary

The focus areas of the session concentrated on the loopholes in planning budgeting implementing and monitoring the Gender Responsive Budget. While there were high expectations that with a greater number of women out of the workforce, quarantined at home rendering day long household chores have a high probability of facing domestic violence there were hopes that there would be a greater allocation for fulfilling women's needs. However, the current budget seems to have huge cuts for several schemes/funds that are relevant to women such as the Nirbhaya Fund. Adopting a binary approach to gender budgeting and treating women as a homogenous category not disaggregated by social identifications seem to be major drawbacks. We see that Kerala has historical learnings when it comes to gender budgeting and it takes a more expansive view on women's lives not only in terms of potential paid workers but also in terms of invisibilised unpaid work. Kerala's approach has remained in terms of improving human well-being than bringing about economic growth, technical efficiency. When it comes to Andhra Pradesh there are few schemes like the Navratna and YSR Sunna Vaddi that cater to the need of women, marginalised sections etc and these ideas can be implemented in other states also designing it to their own demands. When it comes to Assam, we see that while the share of gender budget declined marginally in the Union Budget of 2020-21, Assam has been recording a rise in gender specific allocations since 2018-19. There is lop sided distribution of funds, late release of funds and under utilisation leading to unproductivity and no benefit arising out of the intended disbursement. Thus, there is a pending need for the Union and State governments to bring back transformative financing and strengthen the GBS.

B. Detailed minutes

Shruti Ambast- CBGA

- Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) should address women's needs across sectors and schemes, to ensure all programmes are gender mainstreamed.
- Fair amount of total public funding needs to be allocated towards women.
- Need to create accountability by enabling regular tracking of funds for women.
- The Union budget of 2021-22 has major implications for many social sectors.
- In terms of employment, there has been a great reduction in the allocation for MNREGA .
- The focus has shifted to self-employment with rise in allocation for NRLM, MUDRA.
- Not enough investment in supporting facilities such as child care creches, safe transport etc.
- Under Social Protection too there is no change in pensions amount under NSAP and employee status not granted to frontline workers.
- Whilst violence against women has increased there is a reduction in allocation for the Nirbhaya Fund.
- Share of GBS to total union budget has stagnated at 4-5% for the past 10 years.
- GBS also does not capture all it entails to with many schemes missing, inaccurate reporting.
- Even when beneficiary data is available accurate proportions are not reported and no rationale present for the inclusion of many schemes.
- The GBS Seems to be limited in design and process- there is a binary approach with transgenders not accounted for.
- Women are treated as homogenous category and allocations are not disaggregated by social identity.
- Preparation of GBS itself is an ex-post exercise and there is no audit mechanism present.

Recommendations

- Need to strengthen GBS Reporting and build more capacity.
- Expand scope of GRB to key sectors/ ministries.
- Reassess rationalisation of Central Sector Schemes from a gender lens.

Dr. Mridul Eapen

- Kerala's development trajectory has been shaped by historical legacy of public action.
- Power of public action can improve wellbeing of people to transform social, political and cultural conditions of Kerala.
- Social reform movements in which women played an important role in fighting for their rights and policy action of government has been important constituents of public action.
- Kerala's approach remained in terms of improving human well-being than bringing about economic growth, technical efficiency.
- The state's immediate response to a crisis is how it affects people and what can be done to prevent it.
- The whole state machinery, all department and planning board get into action.
- GRB in Kerala takes a more expansive view on women's lives not only in terms of potential paid workers but also in terms of invisibilised unpaid work.
- Often when we talk of GRB at the state level there is a need to integrate gender into each phase of the process of local level planning by understanding the unequal gender relations.
- Women Component Plan (WCP) mandated the LSGI's to set apart 10% of plan grant in aid for projects that directly benefit women.

- Two main weakness at implementing GB methodology on real budgets are – achieve even the technical objective of estimating flow of budgetary resources to women due to unavailability of gender disaggregated data.
- Absence of broader vision of including women in development planning process.
- Need to look at women as growth agents in the state’s political economy.
- Need to redirect public expenditure to a lot of Part A schemes that fully benefit women.
- In the 13th 5-year plan Kerela included schemes relevant for women in every department that can be integrated with the planning process.
- Advantages of ongoing GRB- fit women’s needs into budgeting process.
- Planning Board with departments to reprioritize schemes so that some resources are made available within the budget.
- More allocations for NREGA, AUEGS, SHGs , Kudumbashree and Labour department’s Saranya scheme.
- Community kitchens and care of migrant workers undertaken.
- POSCO Courts and Psycho social counselling made available as interventions for gender-based violence against women.
- Encouraging husbands to partake in household chores to support women was announced by CM regularly in his evening talks.

Recommendations

- Engendering higher education given its criticality in post COVID situation and to overcome digital divide.
- Intersectionality should be emphasised.

Hilda Grace Coelho

- After bifurcation in 2014, the total percentage of women is 49.7% .
- Women constitute 21.6% of the labour force participation which is a little higher than the national average.
- Women having bank and account and saving that they can use themselves is 81.8% and 86.8% are women in urban cities and 79.6 in rural settings.
- Digital empowerment has increased from 36.8% to 48.9%.
- Violence against women according to NITI Aayog Index of 2021 indicates that 30.42 women for 1 lakh women in state face domestic violence which is nearly double the country’s figures.
- The rape crimes against women is 67.9 exceeding national average of 62.4 for 1 lakh population.
- Gender representation in politics and decision making is mere a 8% to legislative assembly.
- Panchayati Raj 50% represented for women.
- Autonomous bodies, State reserve centres and state women’s co-operative finance corporation work with the government department.
- Work for gender responsive mechanisms started in 2013 but after bifurcation it took some time to mainstream GRB.
- There is a need for political and bureaucratic will and active civil society.
- In 2020 the MWCD started implementing a technical assistance programme with UN Women’s assistance. It was one among 4 states taking up the programme.
- In 2021 the Finance department passed the gender budget circular.

- The GBS was presented in May 2021 without much discussions during the budget session as the pandemic and elections were ongoing.
- The total outlay is Rs.47000 crores and proportion of gender budget to state budget is 20.58%.
- The totally outlay on Part A schemes is 23463 crores and in Part B is 23820 crores.
- Totally 24 schemes reported in Part A and 29 schemes in Part B.
- In Padh Yathra the present Chief Minister took he promised the people he interacted that he would take up their issues and came up with a manifesto with a scheme covering 9 areas called Navratna. This shows the political will.
- Women are key agents of change and when women and men are treated equally economy grows faster said the finance minister.
- Harnessing women's potential as economic actors and consumers result in higher levels of industrialisation and sustained growth.
- In response to growing gender based violence the AP Disha bill to ensure the completion of trial in 21 days, the government has set up 18 police station units and upgraded existing mahila police station units .
- The social pensions cover widows, toddy tapers, vulnerable single women, traditional cobblers etc receive 2250 per month.
- Transgender and disabled people receive 3000 per month. Chronic kidney patients receive 10000 per month for dialysis.
- Women welfare centres are about 31 and receive 6.8 crores.
- The YSR Sunna Vaddi scheme gives interest free loans with an allocation of 865 crores.

Nilanju Dutta

- While the share of gender budget declined marginally in the Union Budget of 2020-21, Assam has been recording a rise in gender specific allocations since 2018-19.
- 25 departments have highlighted coverage of women under their department schemes.
- 18 flagship schemes declared
- Special focus on agriculture and allied activities including animal husbandry and dairy.
- Orunodoi is biggest gender-specific scheme for which budgetary allocation of Rs.1800 crore has been set aside for women of marginalised families.
- Monthly assistance increased from Rs.830 to Rs.1000 this year.
- Swanirbhar Nari scheme implemented.
- Rs.40 crore allocated for financial assistance to families who have lost a member to COVID 19
- Rs.3500 per month will be given to COVID orphans below 15 years of age.
- Welfare of tea garden workers undertaken. Rs. 3 lakh to every SHG given for opening grocery shops in each of the state's 1100 tea gardens.
- To help those distressed women borrowers of microfinance loans, Government will provide assistance to waive off outstanding microfinance loans.
- No gender audits done to review actual physical and financial targets to beneficiary-oriented schemes.
- Lack of political will.
- No specific initiatives to improve women's access to services.
- Inadequate ill-directed policies with huge focus on cash transfer.

Recommendations

- Scope for reporting GBS should be expanded to all departments and systematic methods need to be put in place for timely reporting.
- Departments need to be sensitised on identifying gender gaps and ensure requisite funds are made available and spent well.
- Bottlenecks impending fund utilisation need to be identified to ensure smooth fund flow.
- Mechanisms to monitor physical targets of schemes which are beneficiary oriented need to be institutionalised.
- Adopt rights based approach to implement schemes and policies for women.

Amita Pitre

- 30% of all women aged 15 to 49 have experienced physical violence.
- During COVID crisis there is an increase in violence cases seen by counsellors and case workers
- The Domestic Violence Act came to a standstill with Courts closed.
- There was no active facilitation of violence services and COVID related protocols created further hindrance.
- There is a lack of transparency about the utilisation of budgets meant for services and women's safety.
- Need to understand advocacy priorities in this regard.
- There is a need to analyse the current budgetary trends for women specific VAWG response services.
- There is a need to review the ability of these response services based on secondary data.
- Need to increase scope of women specific schemes addressing violence against women and their safety.
- In 2012 the Nirbhaya budget was allocated 1000crores and in 2019-20 it was allocated 4357 crores.
- Now Nirbhaya fund accounts for 62% of the total women-specific allocations on VAWG in 2018-19, 75% in 2019-20 and 92% in 2020-21. Most of the VAWG cases come under Nirbhaya though it was not meant to be so.
- The expenditure is very low for example, of the total funds approved for the Nirbhaya fund only 24% was utilized.
- The Swadhar Greh (Shelter Homes) and Ujjwala have least utilisation of 25% and 10% respectively.
- This has led to a closure of many shelter homes.
- Only 100 women per lakh women population in the country have access to free legal aid services.
- There is lop sided distribution of funds with certain departments need to be encouraged to put up innovative proposals for women specific schemes.
- Later release of funds also results in under-utilisation of services.
- Important schemes like SAMBAL have a 10% reduction in allocation and Child Protection Budget cut majorly.
- Fast Track courts have shown zero utilisation.

Recommendations

- Sexual and Gender based violence services should be included as Essential Services under NDMA and resourced accordingly.
- Data Transparency is needed in allocation expenditure and distribution of budgets.
- Active facilitation of services and laws needed- PWDA, protocols for COVID test.
- Need to use population parameters to set benchmarks for services
- Need to replenish Nirbhaya corpus for next 4 to 5 years and review.
- Services need to go to sub-district level.

Suneeta Dhar- Jagori

- Need to develop a framework of how to address issues of prevention, services, violence etc then will be on path of transformative financing.
- Violence against women in marginalised come under both ministry of women and child development as well as tribal development and thus there is a need for intersectionality.
- There is need for data transparency and government accountability.
- There needs to be a framework where all women's organisations that are providing civil services can formulate common indicators and start building national level data.
- With COVID there is a greater increase in all forms of violence and we need to respond to this with adequate resource allocations, adequate framework, adequate intersectionality.
- Govt data shows so many one stop centres, special helplines etc yet there is so much gender based violence.
- The documentation of Niti Aayog on the SDG talk of how inadequately the issue of gender has been addressed.
- Last year's Oxfam study says India is spending Rs.30 per women to prevent gender based violence.
- For prevention in the last 5 years approximately 2.042 billion which is less than 0.002% of total spending is what is expended for Gender Based Violence.

C. Key recommendations for Budget 2022-2023

- Need to strengthen GBS Reporting and build more capacity.
- Expand scope of GRB to key sectors/ ministries.
- Reassess rationalisation of Central Sector Schemes from a gender lens.
- Engendering higher education given its criticality in post COVID situation and to overcome digital divide.
- Intersectionality should be emphasised.
- Scope for reporting GBS should be expanded to all departments and systematic methods need to be put in place for timely reporting.
- Departments need to be sensitised on identifying gender gaps and ensure requisite funds are made available and spent well.
- Bottlenecks impending fund utilisation need to be identified to ensure smooth fund flow.
- Mechanisms to monitor physical targets of schemes which are beneficiary oriented need to be institutionalised.
- Adopt rights-based approach to implement schemes and policies for women.

- Sexual and Gender based violence services should be included as Essential Services under NDMA and resourced accordingly.
- Data Transparency is needed in allocation expenditure and distribution of budgets.
- Active facilitation of services and laws needed- PWDA, protocols for COVID test.
- Need to use population parameters to set benchmarks for services
- Need to replenish Nirbhaya corpus for next 4 to 5 years and review.
- Services need to go to sub-district level.

7. Session 6: Networks' Recommendations for the Union Budget

Moderator: Jashodhara Dasgupta

Speaker Names:

1. Migrant workers –Vaishnavi, Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN)
2. Informal sector workers – Paromita Sen, SEWA
3. Urban poor and homeless- Ashok Pandey, Housing and Land Rights Network
4. Children under 6 and childcare -Sumitra Mishra, Mobile Creches
5. Single women – Nirmal Chandel, Ekal Nari Sngathan
6. Women farmers –Sejal Dand, MAKAAM

Session objectives: Representatives from different networks to share their suggestions for the budget.

A. Session summary:

All the speakers focused on the recommendations for the 2022-2023 Union Budget of India. The groups covered in the session included networks of migrant workers, informal sector workers, urban poor and the homeless especially women, single women and women farmers as well as those working with childcare issues. All the speakers took into consideration the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these specific constituencies and presented their recommendations in that light. This year, a deeper commitment to action for advancing Gender Transformative Financing is needed and through our consultation, feasible recommendations are proposed.

Livelihood related recommendations:

- Crisis Cash Transfer for a minimum of Rs. 3000 per month for six months, these cash transfers would account for 1.4 per cent of the GDP, much lesser than the government's declaration for these workers.
- Number of days within MNREGA to be increased at least to 150, given high demand in the context of job losses and wage losses

- Cash compensation for those who are ready to work but not getting work under any employment guarantee scheme.
- Urban Employment Guarantee scheme needs to be operational with immediate effect; model already available in some states
- Skill training with employment linkages for women, especially for women who are single, women who are homeless and other vulnerable categories
- Recognize AAA (ASHA, Anganwadi and ANM) workers as essential workers, provided with minimum wage. Full vaccination for them as well as their families as well as covered under the PMJAY

Social Protection related recommendations:

- Investing in social protection to buffer an economic crisis, including health coverage, expansion of the PMJAY to entire population with required design corrections
- PDS coverage is essential specifically for migrant workers- irrespective of whether someone has a ration card, universal PDS must be expanded to reach out to everyone, including those homeless persons who are not staying in Shelters
- Social protection schemes and pension schemes to be expanded to cover all women need to be more accessible with easy-to-access help centres; including the homeless, single women, those in informal employment or working as farm labour and all frontline workers in the community (ASHA, AWW and MDM workers).
- Immediate registration of informal workers on the e-SHRAM portal; ensuring and strengthening digital processes with the construction workers, improving the implementation of construction worker fund
- PM-KISAN should recognize women as farmers and include them in the assistance. Women need to be identified as workers under e-Shram and Kisan Credit Cards
- Shelter should be considered as a right for homeness population especially women because of the issues of privacy and security. In case, shelters are not available, rental vouchers or hostels should be present.
- Special budget needs to be allocated for single women with adequate amounts of pensions (currently a measly Rs 1000) which should be standardised across states, Ex gratia payment to COVID widows to be streamlined, with least harassment for the family

Common Property Resources

- Full and effective implementation of FRA to be expedited
- Land and water redistribution is needed; land reforms for marginalized communities

Agriculture and forestry related recommendations:

- Capacity building of women to have access to technology and digital modes, to communication assets etc. Digital infrastructure needs to be developed especially for rural areas.
- Land ownership remains the major challenge for women to be recognized as farmers. Issue even more difficult with single women

- Women must be included within agriculture assistance schemes such as PM-KISAN; access to credit, support prices, decentralised markets and procurement. Women need to be identified as workers under Kisan Credit Cards
- Women's traditional knowledge and skills regarding the agricultural practices should be acknowledged and incorporated for food sovereignty and seed sovereignty
- Agriculture related funding needs to be diverted to agro-ecological practices used by the small and medium farmers
- Redistribution of land, water and common property use is needed. Water use policy needs to consider the farming activities, livestock related activities along with the domestic use
- Full and effective implementation of FRA and PESA to be expedited for both individual forest rights for women as well as community rights. Violence against women forest dwellers has increased which has to be addressed immediately.

Entrepreneurship related recommendations

- Preferential access to financial and capital resources for women. Government should support financial institutions that work directly with the women in the informal sector. Financial processing should be streamlined.
- Supporting the women entrepreneurs with financial and credit access; grants and subsidies for the women entrepreneurs
- Capital support for women led enterprises: these women should get access to working capital as well as payroll subsidies. Women should be proactively enrolled in schemes such as Start-Up India.
- Women should have continuous access to markets, including the biggest market: the Government should prioritise women entrepreneurs and women in the private sector

Recommendations focusing on children:

- A minimum of 5 per cent GDP allocation in the budget for children
- Independent allocations for schemes for children and women rather than an umbrella scheme
- Investing in infrastructure such as child care which will enable women to return to the paid workforce. Increased allocation to ICDS and National Creche scheme programme
- Improve the malnutrition levels and stop the growth faltering that has happened during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a need to add eggs and energy dense foods, additional hot cooked meal such as breakfast in the provisions under the ICDS for the children as well as pregnant and lactating women.
- Children of migrants and homeless persons are unable to get admission in schools owing to lack of documents; this needs to be streamlined

B. Detailed minutes:

The session was titled 'Recommendations for the Union Budget' and it dealt with recommendations from various thematic networks working across the country with different vulnerable communities and groups with special needs.

Speaker-1: Vaishnavi, Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN)

Recommendations for the migrant worker population-

- Social security schemes specifically for migrant workers- irrespective of whether someone has a ration card, PDS should be expanded to reach out to everyone
- Cash transfer of Rs. 3000 per month should be done for all the migrant workers. This should be in addition to the PM KISAN scheme related assistance and other social security assistance programmes and schemes. These cash transfers would account for 1.4 per cent of the GDP, much lesser than the government's declaration for these workers.
- In urban context, livelihoods are in a precarious position during such crises. There is a need for Urban Employment Guarantee scheme on similar lines as the MGNREGA. Tamil Nadu and Kerala have started their own Urban Employment Schemes and it should be expanded to other states. NREGA work entitlements should be expanded to 150 days.
- Accessibility to schools especially for the migrant children should be included in the plan.
- Hostels for young women who travel for work to other states
- Migrant workers have issues with access to labour registration although government has come up with a portal such as e-Shram Portal. Easy and accessible help centres are recommended. In case of non-payment of wages, they would like the labour centres to hold the employers accountable.
- Instead of talking only about welfare, the long standing land reforms should become a reality. Most of the migrant workers belong to landless, oppressed social groups. These reform would help them. Justice should also be about responsibility, accountability and dignity of these workers.

Speaker-2: Paromita Sen, SEWA Bharat

Recommendations for the informal sector women workers-

SEWA has taken an approach of building up the resilience of women workers and helping them grow beyond the COVID- 19 pandemic as a response to this suddenly emerged crisis over the past two years.

Their recommendations are divided into three main approaches:

- a) Immediate measures;
 - b) Cross cutting social and labour protection related measures; and
 - c) Trade and policy specific measures
-
- a) The **immediate measures** include-
 - Expansion of the current cash transfer programmes as a short-term response to the COVID-19 pandemic to respond to any such crisis situations in the future.

- Extending the Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme, and making sure it stays active. There have been examples where women have much harder time accessing the MGNREGA scheme. Also, there needs to be some provisions for short term employment guarantee.
- b) **Cross cutting measures** include-
- Preferential access to financial and capital resources for women. Government should support financial institutions that work directly with the women in the informal sector.
 - Financial processing should be streamlined.
 - Supporting the women entrepreneurs with financial and credit access. SEWA experience has shown that it is very much possible. This will be a big push for the women entrepreneurs to start their businesses once again.
 - Capital support for women led enterprises: these women should get access to working capital as well as payroll subsidies.
 - Some form of reservation for women in Government programmes and schemes, specifically for the informal sector. Women should be proactively enrolled in schemes such as start-up India.
 - Women should have continuous access to markets, including the biggest market: the Government should prioritise women entrepreneurs and women in the private sector
 - Investing in skill-based training, capacity building and bringing women on board in access to technology and digital access for women to continue being the agents of change. Access to technology and digital assets would reduce the gender gap. Supporting women for improved access to communication assets as well as improving digital infrastructure especially in rural parts of India.
 - Investing in social protection to buffer an economic crisis, investing in infrastructure such as child care etc. expanding the social security benefits to all the informal sector workers, providing them with access to pensions, old age schemes etc.
 - Grants and subsidies for the women entrepreneurs
- c) **Trade and policy** related measures include
- Extension and expansion of Sunidhi scheme
 - Ensuring and strengthening digital processes with the construction workers, improving the implementation of construction worker fund

Speaker-3- Ashok Pandey, Housing and Land Rights Network: issue of homeless women, especially in urban areas

Right to shelter and their own homes is a long-standing demand for the homeless population. But, until it is fulfilled, there is a need for a shelter facility for them with privacy, safety and security. Homeless women especially face issues related to privacy and security. In New Delhi itself, only one per cent of the homeless women have access to shelters, some with families and some single women. There are only 17 shelters for these women. The women who are not staying in the shelters are also not covered under any social security schemes. They do not have ration cards. They are not covered in any food related schemes either.

Recommendations for the homeless women-

- During COVID-19 pandemic, the homeless people outside the shelters did not get any food related benefits from the government. These people should be included in PDS and other social security

schemes. Food security and social security benefits should also be prepared and implemented for them

- The shelters should operate according to the NULM guidelines with facilities such as employment-based training, which will help them get jobs.
- Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme should be implemented. The homeless population should get guaranteed employment under the scheme; if not they should get compensation for lack of work- Cash compensation for those who are ready to work but not getting work under employment guarantee scheme
- Wherever women have their children staying with them, Anganwadi centres/ Creches should be available.
- A lot of documentation based on address proof is required for the children to get enrolled in the schools. Due to the unavailability of such documentation, the children of homeless people cannot attend schools. These requirements should be relaxed in order to get these children to the schools.
- Working women and single women should have a hostel facility or a rental voucher should be made available and single-family women should have rental housing facilities to whom the government is unable to provide shelter.
- Guarantee to livelihood and Voting rights and documents should be provided to them; Voter ID card should be made available for the homeless population
- Forced eviction and rehabilitation of communities like Muslim women should be prevented.

Speaker-4- Sumitra Mishra, Mobile Creches: issues of children under 6 years and childcare

Children have remained an invisible victim of the COVID-19 pandemic. Children's health, development, learning and safety have all been compromised and faltered because of the impact of COVID-19. We have seen families spend increasingly on healthcare, with additional work burden of unpaid care work on women. With continued closure of day care, creches and AWC, women have had to shoulder roles that also affect their ability to enter wage work. Policies remain silent in terms of migrant child protection and in budgets there is a decreasing trend in social security expenditure, especially child security.

Recommendations for children-

- A minimum of 5 per cent GDP needs to be allocated for children.
- Schemes and programmes related to children have all been consolidated and put together in comprehensive umbrella programmes. For example- Umbrella Anganwadi Scheme- Saksham Anganwadi. This makes it difficult to track the real budget allocation for schemes, programmes and services and the actual expenditure for each of these. Independent allocations for all the different schemes for children and women is recommended.
- Child care is an important aspect of getting women back into the workforce. Child care and school closure is one of the biggest reasons for women being pushed out of employment from the informal sectors. The National Creche Scheme, the only child care scheme in the country has seen a reduced allocation over the years. It should be increased with distinct allocation in the budget
- Increased allocations for the ICDS is required in order to improve the malnutrition levels and stop the growth faltering that has happened during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a need to add eggs and energy dense foods, additional hot cooked meal such as breakfast in the provisions under the

ICDS for the children as well as pregnant and lactating women. The additional meal is already provided for in the NEP for the children in the schools. The expansion of the ICDS budget should also consider the learning loss that has occurred during the pandemic.

- Recognize AAA (ASHA, Anganwadi and ANM) workers as essential workers and full social security benefits need to be provided to all these frontline workers. Full vaccination for them as well as their families need to be guaranteed and they should be covered under the PMJAY; they also need to be provided with minimum wage and health coverage.

Speaker-5- Nirmal Chandel, Ekal Nari Sangathan: issues of single women

- Single women who do not have land in their name, face issues in accessing the government housing scheme. The scheme has a mandate for a piece of land in the beneficiary name in order to allocate money for building the house.
- Single women get a pension of Rs. 1000 per month which is totally inadequate. The amount varies from state to state which needs to be according to a minimum standard. Special budget needs to be allocated for single women.
- The women who are either widowed or separated and who stay with their parents, do not get any of the benefits available for single women.
- Health services do not address the needs of single women, especially since it is assumed they do not have any reproductive or sexual health requirements. There is also lack of information about the health schemes and other social security benefits among the single women.
- No allocations for women who have lost their husbands (only earning members of the families) during the COVID-19 pandemic are available. The Government promised a sum of Rs. 4-5 lacs for these women. But, these amounts have not reached the ground. This should be prioritized in the budget.

Speaker-6- Sejal Dand, MAKAAM: issues of women farmers

Women farmers are the major working group of the country. During recent times, with loss of jobs, even younger women have been pushed in the agriculture sector, as a survey by MAKAAM showed. The percentage of women farmers has increased over the years. Most of this increase is in the unpaid family labour. The distress in the sector especially for the women is also increased. During the COVID-19 pandemic, with the return of male migrant workers to their villages, the type of paid work for the women farmers has reduced. Corporate control on the agriculture sector is being encouraged by state policies.

C. Recommendations -

- COVID-19 pandemic, increased unpaid work and the climate change have all impacted women farmers. Long term reimagined agricultural policy is needed.
- The major issue is of land ownership which still lies with only the men, no matter that women do most of the farm work

- Women's traditional farming knowledge and skills, their agro-ecological practices that would lead to sustainable agricultural practices need to be acknowledged. Alternate practices should be promoted with promotion of seed and food sovereignty
- Agricultural funding needs to be diverted to agro-ecological practices of the small and medium farmers
- Redistribution of land, water and common property use is needed. Water use policy needs to consider the farming activities, livestock related activities along with the domestic use.
- Both short and long term investment needs to be made in order to protect the food crops from the attacks of the animals and improve the productivity. Reforming of the schemes and demanding for 50 per cent allocations for women farmers is needed.
- Decentralised procurement and markets need to be present in all the states which will help women do the transactions at the local level on their own. Need to secure procurement targets and minimum support for women farmers.
- Women need to be identified as workers under e-Shram and Kisan Credit Cards. The e-Shram registration is currently not linked with any of the benefits but in future all the social protection schemes would be linked with this. The land ownership issue for women farmers would also become important in that case.
- Full and effective implementation of FRA and PESA to be expedited for both individual forest rights for women as well as community rights. Violence against women forest dwellers has increased which has to be addressed immediately.

ANNEXURE 1: Schedule of the Consultation

DAY 1: 12TH NOVEMBER 2021 (FRIDAY)			
SESSION	SESSION OUTLINE	TIME	SPEAKERS
Tea and setting up	Technical checks for Hybrid Format	10:30 am to 10:45 am	
Introduction	Opening Remarks and Welcome Note	10:45 am to 11:00 am	Sona Mitra, IWWAGE
Keynote Address	Keynote Address (including Q&A/discussions for 15 mins)	11:00 am to 12:00 pm	Dr. Jayati Ghosh
Session 1: Overall Fiscal Policy Scenario Post-Covid Anchor person – SONA MITRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The overarching economic context that would influence the budget such as the macroeconomic indicators of employment and unemployment, GDP, inflation and the status of tax revenues. The session would focus on the importance of these indicators for fiscal policy and planning and hence how significant it is for the entire budgetary process. Focus Areas - employment/livelihoods crisis, informal especially migrant workers, inflation and unemployment, governance and public finance 	12:00 pm to 1:00 pm	Dr. Ritu Dewan & Malini Chakravarty (CBGA) & Ravi Duggal
LUNCH		1:00 pm to 2:00 pm	

<p>Session 2: Issues and Concerns of Vulnerable Groups</p> <p>Anchor person – NESAR AHMAD</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The session will focus on the impacts of Covid-19 on women of marginalised groups like Adivasi, Dalits, minorities, DNT communities, persons with disabilities, widows, orphans, the elderly and homeless as well as people of the transgender community and sex workers • The session will also focus on policies, budgetary allocations, schemes and programmes for these communities and how the GRB process can be made more inclusive 	<p>2:00 pm to 3:15 pm</p>	<p>Moderator: Nesar Ahmad</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elina Horo (Adivasi issue) • Deepthi Sukumar (Dalit & manual scavenging issues) • Dr. Santosh Giri (trans persons group) • Pallavi Renke (DNT community) • Ayesha Rai (Sex workers network) • Sabah Khan (Minority women); • Shampa Sengupta (Disability rights)
<p>TEA BREAK</p>		<p>3:15 pm to 3:30 pm</p>	
<p>Session 3: Social Sector: Challenges and Contributions</p> <p>Anchor Person - JASHODHARA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This session will examine the budgetary allocations on health, nutrition and social security in the light of the requirements emerging from the COVID 19 crisis of 2021. • The gendered issues around education in the digital format will be brought out in terms of budget implications. • The session will also highlight the situation of frontline workers who are largely women and have been employed in health and nutrition schemes as ‘volunteers’ for decades. • Focus Areas Health, nutrition and food security, social security and education, women scheme-based workers 	<p>3:30 pm to 4:45 pm</p>	<p>Moderator- Renu Khanna SAHAJ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dipa Sinha, Right to Food Campaign • Sulakshana Nandi, Jan Swasthya Abhiyan • Comrade Sindhu, frontline workers union, • Dr. Protiva Kundu- education and digital divide
<p>Wrap Up</p>	<p>Summary of Day 1 discussions</p>	<p>4:45 pm to 5:00 pm</p>	<p>Nilangi Naren</p>

DAY 2: 13th NOVEMBER 2021 (SATURDAY)			
Recap of Day 1	Brief Summary of Day 1	10:00 am to 10:15 am	Sruthi Kutty- FPC Coordinator
Session 4: State Responses & Promising Practices Anchor Person – NILANGI NAREN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session will focus on the various initiatives undertaken by the state governments and the effectiveness of these actions in terms of ensuring the services related to education, health, nutrition, livelihood (employment guarantee) • The discussions would highlight lessons for the state in towards preparedness vis-à-vis education, health, nutrition, livelihood (employment guarantee) and issues of migrant labourers. • Focus Areas: Health, nutrition and food security, social security and education, women scheme-based workers 	10:15 to 11:30 am	Moderator- Nilangi Naren <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kerala: Dr Ekbal- Expert Committee on Covid 19; • Rajasthan: Nesar Ahmad • Odisha: Nabanita Das • Maharashtra: Hemraj Patil and Shakuntala- Sathi
TEA BREAK		11:30 am to 11:45 am	
Session 5: Status of GRB processes at Union and State level Anchor Person – SONA MITRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FPC Panel- GRB has become a procedural exercise. There is a need to bring the conversation back to transformative financing. Going beyond production of Gender Budget statements and ex-post analysis of budgets. 	11:45 am to 1:00 pm	Moderator: Sona Mitra; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kerala- Dr. Mridul Eapen • Andhra Pradesh- Hilda Grace Coelho; • Assam- Nilanju Dutta • Issue of VAW & GRB – Amita Pitre- Oxfam, India • Shruti Ambast- CBGA
LUNCH		1:00 pm to 2:00 pm	

<p>Session 6: Recommendations for the Union Budget</p> <p>Anchor Persons – JASHODHARA & NESAR AHMAD</p>	<p>Representatives from different networks will share their suggestions for the budget.</p>	<p>2:00 pm to 3:30 pm</p>	<p>Moderator: Jashodhara Dasgupta</p> <p>Networks:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Migrant workers – Vaishnavi C Nathan- Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN) 2. Domestic Workers Union- Geetha Ramakrishnan 3. Women farmers –Sejal Dand - MAKAAAM 4. Urban Poor & Homeless- Ashok Pandey – Housing and Land Rights Network 5. Single Women’s Group – Nirmal Chandel - Ekal Nari Sngathan 6. Childcare -Sumitra Mishra - Mobile Creches- 7. Informal sector workers – Paromita Sen - SEWA
<p>Vote of Thanks</p>	<p>Wrap of Day 2 and Concluding Remarks</p>	<p>3:30 pm to 3:45 pm</p>	<p>Ritu Dewan</p>

ANNEXURE 2: Concept Note

Introduction

FPC works on Transformative Policy and Financing for Gender Equality. It is run by an independent network of feminist organisations, individual researchers, academicians and policy advocates who are committed to strengthening gender transformative policies, plans, and budgets in India. For more check our website

<http://www.feministpolicyindia.org/>

At this time when the Government of India has begun preparing the Annual Union Budget (2022-23), it is imperative that all policies and relief measures be designed using a gender lens and account for the intersectionalities and other vulnerabilities faced by women and girls in the current context to build forward better. In this regard, the FPC organized a wide-ranging stakeholder consultation to inform and influence policy priorities for the upcoming Budget 2022-23, from a transformative financing and gender equality perspective.

In FPC's 2021-22 pre-budget consultation, the sessions centered around the state of India's women and girls in a post-Covid-19 world and their diminished access to resources, opportunities, and secured livelihoods.

The second year of the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to reap catastrophic impacts on the Indian economy and society. In addition to a mutating virus and brutal second wave spreading rapidly to now over 30 million cases across the country, citizens have continued to struggle with not only access to basic healthcare facilities but also all other public services. The states managed the crisis by imposing curfews and 'modified lockdowns', and the poorest and most vulnerable faced another grim year without livelihoods or social protection – particularly the women and girls. Now when the opening up is slow and cautious, it is important to acknowledge the vulnerabilities faced by specific cohorts of the population and accordingly devise a better build-back.

Despite the number of policy measures launched in this regard over the past two years to protect vulnerable populations from the impacts of the pandemic, the benefits have not accrued to generate greater resilience and economic security. There is an urgent need for governments at all levels, from local elected bodies to state governments and the Union government, to recognize the continued devastation on livelihoods and put transformational measures and structural reforms in place to address the gaps that remain.

The planned stakeholder consultation with practitioners, civil society, academia, policy makers and the government aims to derive insights from current research and the experiences of relief measures launched over the past two years. These discussions will highlight what the next year's budget might do to better fill in the gaps in existing policy responses and continue to alleviate the adverse impacts of COVID-19 and the lockdown measures on women and girls. These insights will be shared along with relevant data with concerned Ministries, to inform priorities for the upcoming budget for 2022-23.

Gaps in policy response

The FY21-22 gender budget contracted 26% from the previous year – a reduction of 600 billion rupees, leaving the final gender budget accounting for only 4.4% of total government expenditure ([Diplomat](#)). In addition to a reduced budget, the outlays largely followed historical trends of majority allocation to a select number of ministries. Only 2% of the total budget was given to key issues highlighted by the UN and other international organizations as vital areas of investment to protect against the gendered dimensions of the pandemic, areas such as social protection, domestic violence, skilling and training, transportation, women's digital literacy, and the unpaid and domestic care burdens ([IndiaSpend](#)).

The policies and initiatives announced in the first year of the pandemic have not been conducive to ameliorating the impacts on livelihoods and well-being for millions of women and girls. Following the first wave of cases, the health care system was not sufficiently strengthened to prevent the depletion of critical health equipment and barriers to accessing non-COVID-19-related care that were witnessed during the second wave. According to the preliminary NFHS-5 results released early this year, key nutritional indicators have actually declined since the previous 2015-16 assessment ([Hindustan Times](#)), and policies such as the much-discussed One Nation, One Ration Card that could ameliorate these setbacks remain pending.

In addition to worse health outcomes, the government's own CoWIN dashboard has shown that the COVID-19 vaccine rollout have also disproportionately vaccinated more men than women, despite the fact that more women occupy frontline worker roles ([Hindustan Times](#)). And for those frontline workers who have spent another year battling the pandemic, shortages of PPE persist and wages have yet to match the burden of responsibilities faced by most workers ([Women's Media Center](#)).

For working women overall, the State of Working India 2021 report found that by the end of 2020, 47% of working women that suffered permanent job losses during the lockdown and had not returned to work, compared to only 7% of working men ([APU](#)). For those in the informal and unorganized sectors, these losses came with little to no protections which would have eased the burden, including unemployment insurance or skilling and training support. With more women at home, the burdens of unpaid care and domestic work also increased as more moved into full-time home-makers and care-givers.

Priorities for the gender budget

While India faces additional fiscal challenges of reduced revenue collection and the declining tax-GDP ratio, allocating resources have assumed challenges of much greater proportions. The results of these challenges have culminated in declining social sector expenditures and gender budget allocations. This would have direct implications on expenditures and financing of women-related and women-specific programmes. In the current situation, the insufficient expenditure across sectors that disproportionately affect women are continuing to exacerbate the adverse effects of the pandemic on women and girls. This year, therefore, calls for greater action and remarkable shifts from the usual approach to GRB and a deeper commitment to action for advancing Gender Transformative Financing.

Our Consultation intends to bring together various women’s organizations, campaigns for socio-economic rights and academicians in order to -

- Enhance understanding of the effectiveness of previous year’s Covid response policies
- Propose changes/steps towards a transformative financing framework
- Share positive case studies on the preparedness of states vis-à-vis education, health, nutrition, livelihood (employment guarantee) and issues of migrant labourers
- Develop feasible recommendations for the Union Budget

ANNEXURE 3: Photographs

