

Ideas for Union Budget 2021-22 collated by Feminist Policy Collective

The Feminist Policy Collective (FPC) was formally set up in February 2019, following a national consultation co-organized by NFI (National Foundation for India), OXFAM, UN Women, IWWAGE-LEAD at Krea University (Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy), and SAHAJ (Society for Health Alternatives) with the support of a core group of feminists.

On 23rd and 24th November 2020, the FPC held a stakeholder consultation on “*Moving from Commitment to Practice in a COVID 19 Context*”. Its purpose was to inform Gender Transformative Financing and Budgeting in the context of the Union Budget for 2021-2022 in the wake of COVID 19. Core ideas discussed were as below:

Key priorities and concerns

Women’s Work & Livelihoods

- Strengthening and expanding the MGNREGS entitlements with adequate budgeting for current increases in demand for work post COVID to 200 days with Rs. 350 as daily wage
- Secure a demand-driven Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme.
- Ensure budgetary allocations to improve access to digital trainings, banking, skill development for leadership and managerial abilities, for all women.
- Reducing the loan burdens of SHGs and women’s collectives through a moratorium on SHG loans, interest subvention scheme for SHGs, and liquidity easing through emergency transfers by expansion of the Jan Dhan scheme.
- Enhanced allocations of the Maternity Entitlement Benefits scheme to cover all women with amounts equivalent to wages foregone, and without disqualifying criteria – especially any criteria regarding number of children, since women have been deprived of access to contraception especially in the context of the pandemic.
- Access to credit, markets at the farm gate, storage for farm produce and related infrastructure, for all women farmers.
- Direct cash transfer schemes like the PM Kisan to be in the name of women, irrespective of land ownership.
- Widows of victims of farm suicides need to be supported with income transfers and other related support.
- State investments in low rent urban housing for migrant workers in the urban areas and ensuring allocation from SMART CITY budget for human development investment of the urban informal sector workers.

Ending Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

- Increasing allocations for elimination of VAWG, including effective utilisation and extension of the Nirbhaya Fund, and universalisation of all VAWG services to the district level. Specifically, this would mean an increase in the overall allocations for women specific VAWG programmes and schemes to INR 11,000 crores annually, in an incremental manner, while also removing bottlenecks that prevent effective utilisation.
- All districts should have for example, a One Stop Crisis Centre (OSCs) attached to Hospitals, Swadhar Greh - Shelters, dedicated Protection Officers for PWDA. and empanelled

specialists such as psychiatrists, mental health experts and others including in sign language for reaching out to survivors including women with disabilities, trans and LGBTQI persons and those unable to access services, etc. The unit costs per resident in the shelter, including for single women and widows needs revision.

(See: <http://ncwapps.nic.in/PDFFiles/VrindavanCommitteeReport02022018.pdf>)

- It is crucial to see VAW as a public health issue and build synergies with the Health and Social Justice and other Ministries.
- National Awareness Campaigns on Ending VAWG, that ensure messages to enhance women's equal status, voice, choice and agency and addresses misogyny and impunity.
- Gender sensitization and sustained training of police, judicial officers, legal aid agencies, health agencies and others are needed. There is utmost need to revise the Standard operating procedures (SOPs) for ensure access to justice for all survivors/victims. National and state level training institutions should be partnered with for conducting these trainings.
- Effective implementation of the POSH Act and implementation of ICs and LCs to be ensured, especially for women workers in the informal sector.

Social protection and recognition of women's unpaid care and domestic work

- Invest into expansion of jobs in the care sector with provisions for adequate social security and social protection coverage. For example, regularising ASHA workers, Mid-Day Meal Workers and others. The National Social Protection Strategy should be introduced with a wide consultation.
- For unorganised sector workers, insurance and pensions need to be augmented and separately budgeted for, utilizing the unspent funds lying with the Social Welfare Boards.
- The Union Budget 2021-22 needs to accord high priority to social protection for women from marginalised communities (SC, ST, single women, others) and transgender persons, and public provisioning of basic services (given the higher dependence of women and girl children on public sector provisioning). Union Budget 2021-22 needs to provide support for affordable housing and transport for migrant workers and transgender persons.
- Infrastructure support to enable diverse women and facilitate their workforce participation – investments to improve water supply, fuel and energy requirements, electricity provisions, housing, better roads and transport for safer mobility, gender sensitive infrastructure to promote occupational safety at workplaces, and strengthening safety of women from domestic violence and sexual harassment at the workplace.
- Infrastructure to improve women's care needs – universalising creches and expansion of the National Creche program, universalization of neighbourhood and/or worksite facilities (as appropriate) for ECD facilities and childcare centres (especially targeted towards informal economy workers); resources to be mapped and converged across ICDS + MHRD (under NEP 2020) + NREGA (worksite child care provision) + provisions under various labour laws (e.g. BOCW).

Health & Nutrition

- Increase Per Capita Health Expenditure to at least Rs. 3800 as proposed in National Health Policy from an average of Rs 1100/- to include more women into the fold of health service delivery.
- Universal health coverage – through social health insurance, expansion of ESIS to cover informal sector - with awareness and integration of gender sensitivity, as 95% of working women are in informal sector with lowest per capita investment.
- Maintaining a healthy workforce in the sector by regularising scheme workers/jobs for women in government schemes such as NHM, ICDS, sanitation, etc.
- Strengthen Primary Healthcare by having Health and Wellness Centres (HWC) with full, well trained and competent staff (VNR 2020 states that health service providers need to be doubled). HWCs to including health literacy and basic SRH services – normal childbirth, primary treatment for RTIs, cancer screening, contraceptive supplies and medical abortion pills.
- Health and Wellness Centres with appointment of trained Nurse Midwives/Women’s Health/Practitioners for better community access to skilled reproductive health care.
- For complications in pregnancy, abortion and childbirth, including C-sections, ensure free and cashless services for women in private hospitals (since public hospitals in many districts are usually unable to provide skilled services). Guarantee free medicines (including blood as essential med), ensure availability of sufficient medicines in remote areas.
- Invest (through capacity building) in developing gender transformative health programmes – NCDS and CDs Mental health services.
- For transgender persons. Reassignment Surgery should be provided in Public Hospitals and covered under PMJAY; hospital rooms/beds/toilets for transgenders.
- Under ICDS, moving Anganwadi centre to being full day creches/ and after school care
- Provide seed/financial grants to women's groups and ensure income for women collective to locally cook food at Anganwadis for community feeding.
- Universalise PDS, and increase budgetary support for Midday Meal, ICDS and SAG to ensure women do not suffer from food insecurities for the households. Grains, Pulses and Edible Oils: 10kg of grains, 1.5 kg pulses/dal and 800gms of cooking oil must be provided per person per month, through the PDS, at subsidised prices. Eggs, milk and fruits must be provided in all schools and anganwadis. For children who do not eat eggs additional provision of fruits or milk can be made.

Education

- Allocate funds to the Gender Inclusion Fund in NEP 2020.
- Ensure that the gender disparity in access to digital technology is bridged.
- Gendering of Skill Development programmes that should also include auditing of skill India programmes at the state/UT level to understand gaps in existing skilling programmes/trainings available for women and girls so that they are geared to women re-entering the workforce especially post maternity/familial breaks.

Water and Sanitation

- Ensure that women and girls have access to products for Menstrual Hygiene Management and disposal in an environmentally sustainable manner.
- Ensure universal doorstep access of water for drinking and household purposes to reduce women's unpaid work burden.
- Sufficient toilets in public places which are friendly for women, men, disability and trans-persons with full maintenance.
- Full social protection and non-discrimination to workers in the sanitation sector.

Institutionalization of GRB

While appreciating the formation of the GRB committee in 2019 and the Budget circular for 2020-21 in order to strengthen and institutionalize Gender Responsive Budgeting the FPC would strongly urge Ministry of Finance to:

- Monitor that all Ministries and departments comply with the Budget Circular systematically and that the impact of their budgets on women and girls is reflected in the GBS.
 - Revisit the Gender Budget Statement and the process through which it is prepared and reported. Planning and budgeting for women and girls must be based on an understanding of the critical practical and strategic needs and priorities of women and girls and identifying ways in which these can be met.
 - Direct that data of all schemes/programmes / utilization of services is collected in a gender disaggregated format.
 - During the year, monitor the implementation of GRB along with MWCD in Ministries/ Departments starting with a few identified key Ministries. This could be by the creation of teams which include gender experts.
 - While Capacity building of officials on GRB is being led by MWCD, leading the process for orientation of officers of JS level and above would create ownership of the process and increase accountability and sustainability of GRB.
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 - While Capacity building of officials on GRB is being led by MWCD, this will create ownership and a buy in to the process and increase accountability and sustainability of GRB.
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