



Transformative Financing for Women and Girls: Recommendations for Union Budget 2023-24

As nations across the world look ahead to what comes next after two years of pandemic-wrought upheaval, it is evident that sustainable, transformative, and gender-just growth is the need of the hour. At the helm of the G20 this year¹ India is uniquely poised to set the global agenda on women-led development.² This leadership role can help highlight learnings from India's experience with gender responsive budgeting and financing, and also herald a landmark year for the nation to provide an example that other countries may emulate. The following measures can bolster this undertaking:

1) Strengthening the GRB Process:

India adopted the practice of gender budgeting in 2005, and since then, the gender budget has remained below 5% of the total expenditure, except the revised estimates of 2020-21, where this figure reached 6%. There are two primary concerns around this: first, that allocations to programmes supporting half the nation's population are crucial, and therefore increased expenditure on programmes for women is necessary.

There is also a need to relook at the reporting in the Gender Budget Statement (GBS). There are several Ministries that report a fixed share of their allocations to the programmes as part of their reporting exercise to the GBS. Such an approach of fixed share allocations merely to fulfil needs of reporting may not achieve the intended outcomes of the programmes. Second, and perhaps more vital, is the fact that gender responsive budgeting (GRB) is not only about allocations. GRB must be mainstreamed across all stages of policy, with Ministries using data to identify

¹ <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaselframePage.aspx?PRID=1874511>

² <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2022/oct/doc2022103113501.pdf>

their needs, challenges, and priorities, and how these can translate into better outcomes for women. Additionally, there are a number of tools that can be deployed in this regard — from checklists to spatial mapping — and it is important to invest in training for government departments and officials to utilize them fully.

Recommendations:

- This year's action plan, budget and gender budget should outline the specific plans and activities that will be undertaken during the year to reduce gender gaps and address challenges faced by women who are in vulnerable situations and especially from rural, tribal and urban locations. This could then be reported in the GBS.
- All Ministries and departments could consider using the checklists in the MWCD Handbook on GRB launched in 2015³.
- The NITI Aayog is in the process of developing a National Gender Index⁴ index which will serve as a tool to map the progress of different states and Union Territories (UTs) on defined gender metrics. In addition, the government should prepare a Gender Based Profile of Public Expenditure
- Use Participatory Planning and Budgeting that includes the priorities of women at all levels of government e.g. holding a Mahila Sabha before the Gram Sabha to ensure that women's priorities are included in plans in places where there are cultural barriers faced by women.
- The GBS is only one tool of many tools that can be used for Gender Responsive Budgeting. Gender Appraisal of Policies, the Five Step Framework, Gender Budget Statement, Gender based Profile of Public Expenditure and Spatial Mapping must be used.

2) Investment in Collection of Gender Disaggregated Data:

Data collection is undertaken across Departments and Ministries in order to understand the uptake of schemes and programmes. However, often, this data is not disaggregated by gender, age, or other markers. This can negatively impact planning and budgeting, particularly when designing and implementing policy interventions for women's empowerment and development.

Gender disaggregated data is needed to identify gendered needs and challenges, and to assess the differential impact of government schemes on women. Data

³ <https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/GB%20-%20Handbook%20October%202015.pdf>

⁴ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/niti-aayog-developing-national-gender-index/articleshow/89920138.cms>

alone is not enough. In order to utilize this data to its full potential, it is crucial to link it to concomitant policy measures and envisioned outcomes.

Recommendations:

- Enhance budgetary allocation and capacity building support to collect gender disaggregated data across Ministries, through specific allocations in the Gender Budget Statement (GBS). Regular training on disaggregated data collection can provide greater context for policymakers, and ensure that targeted measures are being developed.
- Support initiatives like interoperable dashboards (for example: the NITI Aayog's NDAP) that can help academics and policymakers use data for better outcomes. Ensuring that data in these dashboards is disaggregated by gender, caste etc. can further the benefits accrued from them.

3) Key Areas for Increased/ New Allocations

Ahead of the Union Budget 2023-24, there are certain key areas that the government can prioritize to ensure that women and girls are adequately supported through policy measures:

2A. Education (Ministry of Education)

Fiscal measures that promote girls and women's access to quality education, and more importantly supportive measures for completion of education can improve gender equality outcomes. Research also suggests that increased public spending on education positively impacts women's participation in the labour force.⁵ India's National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 also recognises this reality, making provisions for the constitution of a "Gender Inclusion Fund" to enable access as well as support community-level interventions to support the participation for girls and transgender students⁶. While allocations to cover some aspects under this fund are being made, addressing community-level barriers need more attention. Further, research suggests that while the net enrolment ratio for girls at elementary school level is high, it declines at secondary and higher secondary level. COVID has also increased the number of out of school children, of which a considerable number is likely to be girls who are at the risk of never returning into the education

⁵ <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Staff-Discussion-Notes/Issues/2020/02/11/Women-in-the-Labor-Force-The-Role-of-Fiscal-Policies-46237>

⁶ https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

fold. This challenge must be addressed through appropriate budgetary measures to ensure a supportive environment for girls' education.⁷

Recommendations:

- Increase allocations for tracking and enrolling 'out of school' children, esp. girls.
- Increase allocations towards scholarships for girls. Furthermore, it would be essential to re-introduce budgetary allocations and expenditure for Pre-Matric Scholarships for children from minority as well as marginalised communities such as children of those engaged in unclean occupations and prone to health hazards.
- Allocate funds for identification and upscaling of community-level interventions to support education of girls (and those across the gender spectrum) as per the mandate of the Gender-Inclusion Fund
- Increase allocations for enhancing digital infrastructure in schools from foundational to secondary levels as envisaged in the NEP 2020.
- Enhance allocations for capacity building of teachers especially keeping in mind the online and blended models of teaching-learning proposed under the NEP 2020
- Increase allocations for secondary education since that has a direct bearing on girls' ability to complete school education. Ensuring twelve years of publicly funded, free quality education is essential to realising India's gender equality goals as well as its vision of economic growth.

2B. Employment, Entrepreneurship & Skilling (Ministry of Labour & Employment, Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare)

It is vital to prepare diverse women and transgender persons for a rapidly changing future of work, particularly when it comes to accessing opportunities for entrepreneurship and non-traditional livelihoods (NTL). In addition to keeping pace with the digital economy, it is also important to widen opportunities and access to support for women in the informal sector in order to level the playing field. Similarly, a policy imperative to consider is ensuring visibility for women's work in sectors where their labour is often invisibilised, such as agriculture, home based work, domestic work and so on. These measures can ensure that women's work is recognised, counted, and supported.

Recommendations:

⁷ <https://www.cbqaindia.org/blog/gendered-impact-covid-19-school-education/>

- Provide government-sponsored maternity benefits for the informal sector and domestic workers.
- Establish an institution to map out alternative livelihoods and provide skill training for women safai karamcharis.
- Increase budget under PMKVY for NTL to enhance opportunities that women and transgender persons can avail of.
- Relax rules for lending to MSMEs, to allow a wider section of women and transgender-owned micro enterprises access to credit.
- Incentivise Public sector banks to implement targeted loans to women and transgender-led enterprises.
- Relax norms around land ownership for identification of women farmers, to expand opportunities for collective farming and access to schemes like PM-KISAN.
- Allocate financial resources towards enumeration and pilot registration for visibility and identity of women farmers, and maintain gender disaggregated data on land records.

2C: Health and Nutrition (Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Ministry of Women & Child Development, Ministry of Law & Justice)

The COVID-19 pandemic deeply exacerbated issues around women's nutritional needs,⁸ disrupting household-level food access as well as worsening the burden of care on women. Not only was this reflected inside homes, but also among ASHA and AWC workers who supported families.⁹ In light of these issues, budgetary support to bolster women's and transgender person's access to healthcare and nutrition is the need of the hour.

Recommendations:

- Increase budgetary support to schemes such as POSHAN, Saksham Anganwadis, Creches, Scheme for Adolescents Girls to address the specific nutritional and developmental needs of women and children.
- Focus on planned expenditure allocation for sectoral interventions in education and health under the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme as suggested by the Parliamentary Committee on the Empowerment of Women¹⁰
- Increase the remuneration to ASHA & Anganwadi Workers along with health coverage and social security benefits
- Enhance budgetary allocations for elderly care requirements.

⁸ https://poshancovid19.in/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Gupta2021_Article_COVID-19AndWomenSNutritionSecu.pdf

⁹ <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1739461>

¹⁰ https://164.100.47.193/lsscommittee/Empowerment%20of%20Women/17_Empowerment_of_Women_5.pdf

- Increase awareness to promote more healthcare proposals by hospitals under Nirbhaya fund to increase access to services for VAW survivors. Lessons and best practices from the Maharashtra National Health Mission's Dilasa Centres can be used to create a supportive environment for survivors of VAW.
- Increase medical research budget for ICMR, and expenditure on research into mental health concerns beyond tertiary care, so that primary healthcare options for mental health are more freely available.
- Develop infrastructure through increased allocations to Health & Wellness Centres (HWCs).

2D. Safety (Ministry of Women & Child Development, Ministry of Law & Justice, Ministry of Home Affairs)

Women and girls in India suffer from various forms of gender-based violence, including but not limited to intimate-partner violence, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation. This can cause severe physical and psychological harm. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the problem of gender-based violence in India, leading to reports¹¹ of increased domestic violence during the lockdown phases and increased impact on mental health¹² for young and transgender people. This highlights the need for increased public spending on supportive infrastructure to ensure their safety.

In light of these issues, budgetary support to ensure the safety of women's and transgender person's in India is imperative.

Recommendations:

- Include a dedicated fund under Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 for training and supporting service providers in order to fulfil the legal mandate of the act and ensure access to justice for all survivors.
- In addition to expanding One Stop Centres, include a fund under Mission Shakti for gender sensitisation of all personnel who provide first-responder services. Strengthen linkages with the Gender Justice Centres at the cluster levels being supported by NRLM.

¹¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/india-womens-r-network.pdf>

¹² <https://www.unicef.org/india/press-releases/unicef-report-spotlights-mental-health-impact-covid-19-children-and-young-people>

- Increase allocation of funds for coordination between hospitals and OSCs in order to provide options for longer-term care and ensure public health services for survivors of GBV as well as focus on prevention.

2D. Vulnerable groups (Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs, Ministry of Rural Development)

In addition to looking at the concerns of women as a group, it is essential to consider their intersectional identities that reflect in their experiences. With this in mind, the differential requirements of different groups of marginalised women can be addressed through budgetary allocations. For example, rights groups have suggested that under the Gender Budget Statement 2022-23, allocations for **SC** and **ST women** remained low, accounting for 0.97% and 0.46% of the total statement.¹³ Similarly, allocations towards **persons with disabilities** in 2022-23, while increased from the previous year, were still lower than 2020-21 budget estimates. For the MoSJE's SMILE Umbrella scheme for **transgender persons**, despite a small corpus fund of INR 365 crore over five years and an original allocation of INR 70 crore in 2020-21, expenditure remained low at INR 35 crore. The 2022-23 budgetary estimates also remain low at INR 45 crore.^{14,15}

- Increase expenditure on education, skilling and livelihood support, housing, and healthcare services for transgender persons.
- Introduce budgetary allocations to promote awareness of government schemes among vulnerable women.
- Allocate funds for identification and upscaling of community-level interventions to support education, skill development and employment of the transgender community.
- Increase proportion of allocation of funds towards schemes for the welfare of SC/ST women. Further, at least one scheme by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment's DoSJE and DoPWD, and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs should be made exclusively for women, and reflected in Part A of the Gender Budget Statement of these Ministries.
- Increase allocation of funds towards skilling and the disability pension for persons with disabilities to provide livelihood and subsistence support.
- Increase reach of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U) to more states, to ensure that the target for completion is achieved by 2024. Further, relax

¹³ Page 12, http://www.ncdhr.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/NCDHR-Budget-DABA_2022_English.pdf

¹⁴ <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2022/jun/doc202263068801.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/doc/eb/sbe93.pdf>

identification norms for single women, widows, homeless women, and transgender persons.

- Introduce budgetary allocations for access to healthcare and water for urban poor in informal settlements.

Summary: Recommendations for Union Budget 2022-23

The priorities and recommendations from the Feminist Policy Collective for Union Budget 2022-23 focused on Economic Empowerment, Social Protection, Enhancing Social Capital, and Gender-based violence.

Apart from these areas, the recommendations included strengthening the GRB process from an intersectional perspective by applying it across the entire policy spectrum at all levels of government and capacity building, accountability, financial resources and regular monitoring of implementation and reporting.

Under economic empowerment, the FPC recommended providing social security coverage for contractual/casual workers and implementing the National Policy on Safety, Health and Environment at Work (2009) to ensure women workers' protection and safety at workplaces.

Under social protection, the FPC recommendations included Universal Social Protection Coverage for all marginalized sections prioritizing the socially and economically poorer sections from Socio-Economic Caste Census, providing budgetary support for the creation of an Equal Opportunity Commission and formulation of the Diversity Index.

Under social capital, the FPC stated that the budgetary allocation for education must be 6% of GDP, increasing the expenditures on Frontline Health Workers, and universalising Access to Comprehensive Healthcare.

Under addressing gender-based violence, the FPC recommended ensuring that the One Stop Centers (OSCs) approved by the MWCD are functional, undertaking large-scale legal literacy and rights campaigns for diverse women/girls, and effective monitoring of fund for Ujjawala in the border, rural and remote areas.