

Reimagining Resource Justice for rights and gender equality in the current crossroads

Sixth Pre-Budget Consultation of the Feminist Policy Collective

Recommendations towards Union Budget 2026-27

As the government of India is preparing its **Union Budget for the fiscal year 2026-2027** and the preparations for budgetary suggestions are being invited from a range of stakeholders, we as the Feminist Policy Collective, propose the following recommendations that are crucially important to take forward the agenda of 'women-led development' towards a **Viksit Bharat 2047**. The **Feminist Policy Collective** is a voluntary group working towards transformative financing for gender justice in India. Over the last seven years, the Feminist Policy Collective has contributed feminist analysis to policy and practice, especially on transformative financing for gender justice that is not limited to gender budgeting, but extends to tax justice and resource mobilisation.

The recommendations below reflect voices of over 115 participants of the pre-budget consultation held by the Collective on 21-22 November 2025. The recommendations were provided by several gender experts, individual researchers, practitioners, and representatives of 42 academic and research institutions as well as Central and State government. The objective of this year's consultation has been about rethinking the fiscal space and approach while using an intersectional perspective, towards building a holistic and a 'whole-of-government' approach to financing for gender equality.

The Government of India has emphasised the notion of '**Nari Shakti**' as an integral component of its inclusive development agenda with 49 women-focused schemes, that show how women's contribution to a developed India would require a comprehensive process of empowerment and integrating gender equality across social, economic, and political spheres. We propose recommendations related to **four major areas of gender justice and equality, in the following priority areas: Social protection, Care and Livelihoods, Structural violence and Gender Based violence and Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB)**

Our first and overarching concern is with the **fiscal and federal autonomy of states**. We recommend that the **Union Government ensure adequate financial devolution under the 16th Finance Commission**. To be truly responsive to gender concerns, the autonomy of States in administering and conducting social programmes must be strengthened. Budgetary allocations between the Centre and States must be focused on meeting the intended outcomes and not shifting the fiscal burden. Additionally, the fiscal responsibility between the States and the Centre should be timely and responsive during any crisis.

In terms of the thematic recommendations, we propose the following for the forthcoming Union budget 2026-27.

I. Social protection

While the Union government has been supporting multiple schemes for supporting the most vulnerable women, children and the elderly, we observe the need for strengthening and expanding social protection networks and coverage. Almost all service delivery mechanisms are linked with the digital identity of individuals, that often end up increasing the transaction costs for citizens, or becoming exclusionary. We therefore recommend the following:

1. **Allocations for various welfare schemes need to be overhauled** in the Union Budget, especially those targeted at women and children, moving beyond nominal increases after a thorough review and revision for providing adequate quality.
 - a. Allocations must be increased to reflect the true cost of living; all cost norms for allocating resources to the programmes (e.g. supplementary nutrition, pensions, maternity entitlements) must be, at the very least, **inflation-indexed**
 - b. Mandate the periodic updating of beneficiary databases based on the latest population projections. Adequate allocations must be explicitly **linked to demographic expansion**
 - c. The overhaul should also ensure **just and adequate salaries for the frontline workers**, who are mostly women and are primarily responsible and accountable for most of the service delivery tasks.
 - d. Provide disaggregated data on allocations and expenditures within umbrella schemes– for e.g. Mission Shakti includes multiple schemes, **scheme-wise data should be provided**, allowing for an analysis of actual allocations and of the trends in the same. Data on the main components of spending within each scheme must also be publicly available.
2. **Development of a digital rights and inclusion framework** to ensure that the various digital interventions in welfare programmes do not end up excluding vulnerable and gender-marginalised groups, reinforcing inequities
 - a. **Review the current DPDP Act** with the principal intent of protecting people's access to entitlements, right to transparency and accountability, along with their right to privacy and data protection. This would require a consultative process, which could be announced during the budget presentation.
 - b. Issue an immediate **moratorium on the use of Facial Recognition Systems (FRT)** in social protection and welfare delivery due to risks of exclusion, privacy violation, mass surveillance, and inherent bias.
 - c. Make provisions for **greater decentralisation** in the operation and modification of MIS data and other digital portals. The APIs should be shared with state governments and below.
 - d. Transform the **E-Shram portal** from a registration database to a gateway for entitlements and integrate E-Shram with all existing schemes.
3. Amend the **Social Security Code 2020**, to explicitly and comprehensively include **domestic workers** and make provisions for expanding all the social security benefits to all informal workers.

II. Care and livelihoods

It is clear that under the leadership of the PMO, several ministries have undertaken the task of enabling women's participation in the economy via multiple strategies applying a whole-of-government

approach to tackle the challenges of women's livelihoods and their participation in the care economy. The start has been positive in terms of prioritising childcare, the care workers in health and other care services, which are the most important agendas in the 'women-led development' trajectory, as envisioned under the Viksit Bharat 2047.

1. There is an immediate need to frame a **comprehensive National Care Policy** that approaches the solution to women's increasing role in the care economy by adopting a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.
 - a. The national policy needs to identify the direct and indirect **components of care** and the complex challenges that women confront in negotiating care in their daily lives.
 - b. It must be integrated with the **continuum of paid, unpaid and underpaid care work** that defines women's existence.
 - c. This forward-looking, holistic policy guideline should be a **consultative process** and can be announced as part of the Union Budget presentation. There could also be a parliamentary committee formed to discuss the care economy and women's empowerment
2. Formulate a **care labour policy** using the ILO C-190 as a guideline.
 - a. Develop a labour structure that includes paid, underpaid, and unpaid care work, and lays down definitions of worker, employer, and workplace.
 - b. The policy should comprehensively and holistically cover all aspects of employment and decent work, including recognition of care workers and minimum wages for them, norms for care provisioning, and measures to address workplace violence, which can be announced through an ordinance or as part of the Union Budget.
3. **Invest in the Care Infrastructure** by developing integrated care and livelihood clusters with adequate facilities that take into account the spatial reality of working women and the significance of reducing the care burdens on women
 - a. Move all **Anganwadi Centres to Government buildings** which will then enable the use of the unutilized funds under JJM to ensure clean drinking water and functional toilets for the use of the children and the AWC workers, which are essential to achieve the health outcomes.
 - b. Create **Common care Clusters** that combines care services for very young children (through PALNA), Aanganwadis, space for after school care, care for the elderly, care of the disabled (physical and intellectual), provision for common laundry services and e for the bed-ridden.
 - c. **Expand care worker training and skilling** in geriatric and palliative care, as well as regular and high-quality skilling for frontline and domestic workers, is critical
 - d. Draw and **converge funding under various schemes**, including Anganwadi centres, SAKSHAM, NHM, and provisions under the Panchayati Raj and Nagarpalika Acts. Examples like *Kosinamane* under NREGA show how panchayat offices can function as central hubs for providing care. Extending operational hours (e.g., 12-hour models) with reduced worker numbers, referencing models like Bogotá (Colombia), will be immensely beneficial.
 - e. The unit costs should distinctly reflect allocations for nutrition, staff, infrastructure and not be clubbed together within the "per Anganwadi" as the norm.

4. **Strengthen data system for women's work:** Ensuring Labour Force surveys adequately capture women's unpaid and care activities, and Time Use Surveys are conducted regularly, ensures better responsiveness
5. Budget allocations need to prioritise viable **livelihoods and employment for women** through the following targeted actions -
 - a. **Redirect subsidies to MSMEs**, especially while developing Public-Private Models, by developing guidelines to include MSMEs and offer subsidies to them, similar to those being offered to large corporations. There can be synergies between the large-scale women's mobilisation under the NRLM and MSMEs to provide for various services required in rural and semi-rural areas.
 - b. **Strengthen MGNREGA** and rural livelihood programmes with gender-responsive provisions and skilling
 - c. **Strengthen women-led groups/FPOs** with credit, training, and institutional support, including access to formal low-interest credit and regulation on exploitative micro-finance practices
 - d. Invest in education, agency and leadership building of women in agriculture and ensure **women's meaningful participation in local resource governance** (Water Users Associations, Forest Rights Committees, Watershed Committees)

III. Structural and Gender Based Violence

It is encouraging to note that many Ministries/Departments including MoRD, MHA, MoWCD, MoSJE, Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and Department of Justice have all collaborated on the campaign against gender-based violence *Nayi Chetna 3.0 – Pahal Badlaav Ki*. We welcome the campaign message that calls for collective action with the message '*Ek Saath Ek Awaaz - Hinsa Ke Khilaf*,' aiming to create safe, inclusive spaces through convergent efforts, adopting a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach. In the light of this we recommend addressing some aspects of diversity and effectiveness of these interventions –

1. Budget allocations should **prioritise gender-sensitive survivor-centric services** in the Gender Resource Centres across the states
 - a. Allocations under targeted schemes like the Nirbhaya Fund should be based on realistic estimates of demand and service requirements on the ground, focusing on the core interventions such as the **establishment and effective functioning** of One Stop Centres, strengthening the 24*7 helplines, and ensuring adequate and timely victim compensation.
 - b. In the case of PWDVA, dedicated budget lines at national and state levels and adequate allocations for core components and survivor-centric services, including **full-time appointment of Protection Officers, running shelters**, improving one-stop centres, counselling services and legal aid are required.
 - c. Such special funds (Nirbhaya) **should not be utilised for infrastructural and service costs related to general law enforcement** and crime-prevention under any circumstances, such as setting up surveillance systems, for police training, and safe cities' control centres, which should be sourced from the Ministries' own funds

- d. Prevention of gender-based violence in women's workplace by **extending PoSH protections to agriculture and allied workplaces** and establishing local support and redressal systems; investments into prevention and education of agricultural and other informal sector workers;
 - e. Robust monitoring and **public sharing of information on allocations and utilisation of funds for GBV** would enable evidence-based planning and improve transparency, effectiveness of interventions and accountability (through annual reports, public dashboards, etc).
 - f. Budgetary allocations must focus on strengthening institutional mechanisms and coordination with a survivor-centric approach that allows **ring-fenced resources for GBV services** and prioritises timely and easy access of survivors to available provisions through faster case processing, localised follow-up models, centralised GBV data systems to track status, reformed rehabilitation policy, and immediate support for survivor expenses and well-being
2. Ensure adequate resource allocation for **prevention of atrocities against Dalit and Adivasi women and girls**
 - a. Increase investment towards strengthening infrastructure, financial resources and implementation of redress mechanisms to address caste-based atrocities against Dalit women and girls, including adequate funding for dedicated helplines,
 - b. Ensure **publicly available records** on the number of Dalit and Adivasi women survivors receiving compensation and relief
 - c. Establish the missing **district-wise special courts** for addressing such cases, with prompt judicial process, survivor relief and rehabilitation measures, including land allotment, pensions and employment support.
 3. Allocate resources to end **violence against diverse women from marginalised gender-sexual identities**
 - a. Targeted allocations for a Task Force to develop guiding norms, standard operating procedures, institutional mechanisms
 - b. Develop a national database on the impacts of structural violence against women and girls from diverse gender-sexual identities through gender and caste-disaggregated data gathering and institutionalising monitoring to ensure the effectiveness of policy interventions.
 - c. Invest in training of service providers to sensitise them to cover end-to-end support for survivors of violence, including outreach for the last mile connectivity.
 4. Invest in creating a strong institutional response to **gender-based violence in digital spaces**
 - a. Invest in strengthening gender responsive **laws and regulations** related to AI and digital spaces
 - b. Develop statistical frameworks for data and produce statistics to **facilitate targeted resource allocations** for its prevention and redressal.
 - c. Build the capacities of law enforcers and the judiciary in identifying and addressing the **impact of online violence** from a gender perspective.
 - d. Urgently develop **institutional guidelines** on gender-based violence in digital spaces

IV. Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB)

Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) has been recognised at national and state levels for nearly twenty years since 2005-06, as a tool through which the governments can use their fiscal policy to promote gender equality. Although significant efforts have already been made, coverage and impact remained limited, with only partial implementation. Only 38 out of 62 Union ministries have functional Gender Budget Cells, and despite 75% of Centrally Sponsored Schemes incorporating gender components, only half are reflected in the Gender Budget Statement (GBS). The lack of accountability and outcome measurement remains a challenge. In order to further strengthen GRB as an effective tool, we recommend:

1. Based on effective needs assessment exercises, Gender Responsive Budgeting must begin with a **focus on responding to the needs of the most marginalised**, particularly Dalit and Adivasi women, OBC women, and gender-diverse workers in hazardous and informal sectors, in order to make it inclusive and intersectional.
2. A shift in GRB from being mainly about reporting on allocation-focused Gender Budgeting to **outcome-focused monitoring, that ensure budgets translate into measurable gender impacts** on the ground. Mechanisms must be introduced to ensure realistic cost estimations, effective utilisation of allocated funds, alongside assessments of the impact of major investments on gender equality and women's empowerment.
3. Complete **clarity on inclusion and exclusion of schemes under different parts of GRB**, shifting the focus of GRB from a tracking exercise to a strong accountability mechanism, with public transparency on allocations and results. Officials and people's representatives should be assigned clear responsibility and accountability with relation to specific GRB objectives and outcomes, to ensure proper utilisation of funds and achievement of intended outcomes.
4. Strengthening an **intersectional and gender-disaggregated data ecosystem** should become a core priority, to enable accurate output reporting, measurement, monitoring, and outcome assessment. All ministries and departments should establish robust MIS systems to collect beneficiary data, ensuring that this information is systematically reflected in the Gender Budget Statement.
5. Establishing **Gender Budget Cells that remain fully functional** across all departments of central and state governments. There is a need to expand and mandate GRB in the local government budgets as well, both in rural and urban areas. Defining clear outcomes, compliance and reporting on the Gender Budget Statement must be mandated for all departments, rather than remaining optional.
6. **Institutionalisation of GRB** in order to strengthen GRB processes further, with
 - a. clear institutional responsibilities for preparing, implementing, and monitoring GRB in every department
 - b. enforcement mechanisms with defined penalties for non-compliance with GRB commitments
 - c. mandatory outcome reporting, with periodic assessments and public disclosure
 - d. full budget lifecycle implementation of GRB
 - e. provision of adequate resource allocation for institutional supportive processes for GRB, such as capacity building, social auditing, GBS preparation and M&E processes.