

What is in store for women in Union Budget 2014-15?

Union budget 2014-15 offers up old and new schemes but fails to address macro-economic and social causes of exploitation and subordination of women.

Vibhuti Patel

The Union Budget 2014-15 will largely benefit neo-middle class, and offer comfort to middle and upper class women as consumers. The poor women will be crushed due to macro-economic policies that will fuel inflation, land alienation and user fees for education and health facilities. This time even women's groups have not raised their voice against gender non-inclusive aspects of the Union Budget.

After the terms Gender Budgeting and Gender Mainstreaming were officially introduced in 2004 by the UPA government, many State Governments like Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa, Kerala, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Tripura, Nagaland, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand has adopted Gender Budgeting. Gender Budget Cells were designed to serve as focal points for coordinating gender budgeting initiatives within their Ministries and across departments. 56 Ministries/Department have confirmed setting up of a cell/nominating a nodal person. This could materialize because the previous government's Ministry of Women and Child Development, in collaboration with UN Women, had developed a Manual and Handbook for Gender Budgeting for Gender Budget Cells for Central Ministries and Departments. The current Union Budget of 2014-15 has seen the Gender Budget Cells play a major role in budgetary allocations.

What is gender budgeting?

Gender Budgeting does not relate to a separate budget for women but involves comparative analysis and construction of general budgets from a gender perspective. It helps governments to decide how policies need to be made, adjusted and reprioritized. It is a tool for effective policy implementation where one can check if gender commitments are translated into financial commitments.

The Gender Budget Initiative is a policy framework, methodology and set of tools to assist governments to integrate a gender perspective into the budget as the main national plan of public expenditure. It also aims to facilitate attention to gender analysis in review of macroeconomic performance, ministerial budget preparations, parliamentary debate and mainstream media coverage. Budget impacts women's lives in several ways. It directly promotes women's development through allocation of budgetary funds for women's programmes or reduces opportunities for empowerment of women through budgetary cuts.

The Union Budget 2014-15 has retained all schemes for empowerment of women and girls of the last decade under the Women & Child Development with Rs 18691 crores allocated for Integrated Child Development Services, Rs. 715 crores for National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) and Rs. 400 crores for Integrated Child Protection Scheme. A new scheme was launched also – ‘Beti bachao Beti padhao’ with Rs 100 crore.

The schemes can be classified into 4 categories:

Protective Services:

These include allocations on women’s homes and care institutions, rehabilitation schemes for victims of atrocities, pensions for widows and destitute women etc. which are aimed at mitigating the consequences of women’s social and economic subordination, rather than addressing the root causes of this subordination.

For example Sabla, Swadhar-scheme for women in Difficult Circumstances, Ujjawala Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of Trafficking and. Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re-Integration of Victims of Trafficking for Commercial Sexual Exploitation, Scheme of Short Stay Homes for Women and Girls, Scheme for welfare of Working Children in need of Care and Protection.

Social Services:

These include schemes for education and health of women, support services like crèche and hostels and also water supply sanitation and schemes on fuel and fodder, which contribute significantly to women’s empowerment, either directly by building their capacities and ensuring their material well-being, or indirectly through reducing domestic drudgery.

For example, the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY), General Grant-in-aid (GIA) Scheme for Assistance to Voluntary Organisations in the field of Women and Child Development, General Grant-in-Aid Scheme in the field of Women and Child Development, Family Counseling Centre Scheme, Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme For the Children of Working Mothers, Nutrition Education and Training through Community Food & Nutrition Extension Units(CFNEUS), Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY), Nutrition Programme for Adolescent Girls (NPAG)

A sum of 100 crores is provided for “Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Yojana”, a focused scheme to generate awareness and help in improving the efficiency of delivery of welfare services meant for women. This is the first year of the scheme, if funds of Rs. 100 crore are utilized by the state, we can pressure the government to allocate more funds.

New small savings scheme: A special small savings instrument to cater to the requirements of educating and marriage of the girl child to be introduced. This would be in line with schemes like Kisan Vikas Patra or National Saving Certificate.

The budget promises drinking water and sanitation. Government would strive to provide toilets and drinking water in all the girls' school in first phase.

The budget also promises that School curriculum will have a separate chapter on gender mainstreaming. Gender Mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

Economic services:

These includes schemes for training and skill development, and provision for credit, infrastructure, marketing etc. which are critical to women's economic independence and autonomy.

For example, the STEP Support for Training and Empowerment of Girls, General Grant-in-Aid Scheme for innovative projects, working women's hostel.

The Union Budget 2014-15 has promised Easy Loan terms where the government will offer concessional loans to women in rural India at 4% in some districts and 7% in other for women self help groups under a scheme called Aajeevika.

Regulatory services:

These include institutional mechanisms for women's empowerment, such as State Commissions for Women, women's cells in Police Stations, awareness generation programme etc which provide institutional spaces and opportunities for women's empowerment.

For example International Women's Day - Stree Shakti Puraskar, Childline Services, Grant-in-Aid for Research, Publication and Monitoring.

An Outlay of **Rs. 50** crores has been allocated in the current budget for pilot testing a scheme on "Safety for Women on Public Road, Transport". The Union Budget 2014-15 also allocates a sum of Rs. 150 crores on a scheme to increase the safety of women in large cities. Budgetary provision is also made from Nirbhaya Fund for "Crisis Management Centres" in all the districts of NCT of Delhi in government and private hospitals.

After brutal gang rape of a young physiotherapist in Delhi in December, 2012 followed by nationwide outcry, safety of women gained prime importance in the public discourse. As a result, the previous government was forced to announce Nirbhaya Fund of Rs. 1000 crores in The Union Budget 2013-14.

However the track record of outcome is abysmally poor. Official admission of 500% rise in reporting of rape cases has also not galvanized the governance structure to ensure speedy justice to the victims of sexual violence.

The Nirbhaya fund is not used for preventive measures such as construction of night shelters for women, Information Desks for women at railway/bus stations and help-lines connected nation-wide, one-stop crisis centers in the public hospitals and half way homes for elderly women along with pension (Rs. 1000 from Central and Rs. 1000 from state government per single woman) safe public toilets for women, safe public transport, safety on roads, bus stations and railway platforms and trains.

Nor does it address public education campaigns about new laws such as Amendments in the Indian Evidence Act, Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act, 2013 and Protection of Children from Sexual Offense Act, 2012.

Women in Science and Technology

Budgetary allocation Rs. 53 crores under 'Disha Programme for Women in Science' is made to increase the representation of women and girls in Science & Technology fields through conferences, training programmes, networking platforms, etc and to enhance its activities with regard to education, training and empowerment of women.

Women entrepreneurs however had expected an offer of soft loans and subsidies with financial institutions providing more working capital assistance. They felt that the budget should look at policies that will make micro credit system and enterprise credit system available to women entrepreneurs at all levels and help organise training programmes to develop professional competencies in technical, managerial, leadership, marketing, financial, production process and other skills.

Tax Relief

The Union budget 2014-15 does not any relief to women tax payers. On the contrary, the Finance Minister's budget announcement had nothing specific for women.

Middle class will be happy with increase in personal income tax limit from 2 lakhs to 2.5 lakhs. For senior citizens Income tax exemption limit for senior citizen has now been raised from 2.5 lakhs to Rs 3 lakh. The Investment limit under Section 80C has also been hiked to Rs 1.5 lakh from the current Rs 1 lakh, while the FM increased housing loan interest rate deduction limit to Rs 2 Lakh and the PPF (Public Provident Fund) deposit ceiling is raised to Rs 1.5 lakh per annum from the existing Rs 1 lakh.

Right to Pee:

Women make crucial contribution to the Indian economy through their paid and unpaid care work. Massive allocation from budget on Sanitation must be earmarked for toilets in public places for women and girls in Indian cities as they travel long distance for work and education. Working women need functioning toilets at railway stations and Bus depots. Women Homemakers have to attend social functions, visit market places, take children to gardens and hospitals. Women from both, slums and non-slum background need public toilets.

India, Union and State Budgets

The Union Budget needs clear gender commitments for mass of toiling poor women, for then only will financial commitments bring gender responsive outcomes.

OTHER QUESTIONS

In Financial Year 2014-15, an allocation of Rs. 53,706 crore has been made for North Eastern Region is for overall economic development.

The government has made an allocation of Rs. 98,030 crore for women and Rs.81, 075 crore for child welfare. Please see the pdf file for break up of these allocations attached herewith.