

Gender budgeting in India: A women empowerment process

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Abstract

Gender budgeting is one of the most important and pertinent concept in the present environment. The governments have slowly understood the importance of this concept. The current paper draws an evolutionary methodology of the various policies which government of India has drawn and implemented towards the gender equality and spending budget equally. The paper also highlights the role of Budgetary Policy of the government and discusses how "by providing adequate resources to women to the government achieves various objectives of gender equality.

Keywords: gender budgeting, India, equality, economy

Introduction

The concept of gender budgeting is very important today. Yet several countries across the globe have adopted gender budgeting indicatives but the pioneering work was done in Australia and South Africa. The Australian approach of the gender budgeting is the "Three-way Categorization", such as- 1. Gender-specific expenditure 2. Equal opportunity expenditure for civil servants, and 3. General expenditure (the rest) considered in terms of its gender impact. In South Africa Gender Budgeting is "Five Step Approach", the five steps are: 1. Analyzing the situation of women, men, girls and boys, 2. Assessing the gender responsiveness of policies 3. Assessing budget allocations, 4. Monitoring spending and service delivery, 5. Assessing outcomes.

Theoretical Background

In India by definition "Gender budget initiatives analyze how governments raise and spend public money with the aim of securing gender equality in decision making about public resource allocation and gender equality in the distribution of the impact of government budgets, both in their benefits and in their burdens. The impact of government budgets on the most disadvantaged groups of women is a focus of special attention."

Recently, In India Gender budgeting means an exercise to translate stated gender commitments of the Government into budgetary commitments. In this Strategy for ensuring Gender Sensitive Resource Allocation and a tool for engendering macroeconomic policy has been made. It entails affirmative action for empowering women. It covers assessment of gender differential impact of Government Budgets and policies (Revenue and Expenditure). Which enables tracking and allocating resources for women empowerment and opportunity to determine real value of resources allocated to women.

In fact, in India the strategic framework for gender sensitivity in resource allocation has been marking a specified minimum quantum of funds and benefits for women in all women

related sectors, supplemented by targeted interventions for women in various sectors like health, education, employment, training and micro-credit.

Besides this in India Gender Budgeting may be defined as the process of "conceiving, planning, approving, executing, monitoring, analyzing and auditing budgets in a gender sensitive way". It involves analysis of actual expenditure and revenue (usually of the Government) on women and girls. Further, it helps Governments to decide how policies need to be made, adjusted and reprioritized to attain gender equality. It is a tool for effective policy implementation where one can check if the allocation is in line with policy commitments and is having the desired impact on status and economic entitlement of women in society. It is important to note that Gender budgets are not separate budgets for men and women nor Gender budgeting is not about dividing the budget, say by 50 per cent for women and 50 per cent for men. Moreover, Gender Budgeting does not always imply an increase in the allocation for women-it is about prioritising as well. Therefore, it is not only accounting exercise and it aims at women and her empowerment resulting in gender responsive budget.

In this era of women empowerment and gender equity the need of Gender Budgeting is being increasingly felt. The Importance of Gender Budgeting arises from the fact the national budgets influence various sections of society differently by pattern of resource allocation and priority accorded to competing sectors. Women stand apart as one part of the population that needs special attention due to their vulnerability and lack of access to resources. Thus Budgetary Policy of the government has a major role to play "by providing adequate resources to women to achieve objectives of gender equality and growth through content and direction of fiscal policy and monetary policy, measures for resource mobilization and affirmative action for under privilege section including women". In this way the purpose of gender budgeting is to access quantum and adequacy of allocation of resource for women empowering and establish the extent to

which gender commitments are translated into budgetary commitments. Nakray, K. (2009)^[16].

Government Interventions and Policy

"Gender Equality in Law and Policy" is enshrined in the constitution of India. Realizing that women have unequal status to men in India, special laws have been enacted for the protection of women in society. The Important Constitutional Provisions are: I-Legal Framework i.e. (a) Women Specific Laws and (b) Laws affecting Women 2- Policies (a) Public Expenditure Programmes 3. Women and Legal Frame work: It engulfs Women specific Legislations, Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956. The Maternity Benefit Act 1961, The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961. Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986. The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, another instrument for attaining gender equality and women empowerment is the Five Year Plans. Gender budgeting was introduced in economic planning in the Seventh Five Year Plan and it continues since then. First time, the Seventh Plan introduced the concept of monitoring of 27 beneficiary oriented schemes for women by the Department of Women and Child Development. The Eighth Plan (1992-97) highlighted for the first time a gender perspective and ensured a definite flow of funds from the general developmental sectors to women and her empowerment. The Plan document made an express statement that "the benefits to development from different sectors should not by pass women and special programmes on women should complement the general development programmes. The latter, in turn, should reflect great gender Sensitivity". The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) adopted 'Women Component Plan' as one of the major Strategies and directed both the Central and State Government to ensure "not less than 30 per cent of the funds benefits are earmarked in all the women's related sectors". The National Policy for Empowerment of Women 2001 envisaged introduction of a Gender perspective in the budgeting process as an operational strategy. Tenth Plan reinforces commitment to gender budgeting to establish its gender differential impact and to translate gender commitments into budgetary commitments. The Approach Paper to the Eleventh Plan clearly states "Gender Equity requires adequate provisions to be made in policies and schemes across ministries and departments. It also entails strict adherence to gender budgeting across the board."

The provisions in the different five year plans reveals that efforts have been made to attain the objective of gender equity and women empowerment through Gender Budgeting, yet the desired result is still a far cry. Lahiri, A., Chakraborty, L., & Bhattacharya, P. N. (2001)^[13].

Now I would like to evaluate the gender budgeting in India As women empowering process. The tenth five year plan (2002-2007) elaborate that the success of empowering women depends upon the holistic impact of various sectorial achievements. In this Direction efforts will be initiated/intensified during the Tenth Plan to coverage the existing services, resources infrastructure and manpower available both in the women specific and women related sectors with an ultimate objective of optimizing the benefits with greater cost effectiveness. To this effect, efforts will be

made to coverage the services of health care, nutrition supplementation, safe drinking water, adult functional/legal literacy, gainful employment both wage and self employment, sanitation, health and nutrition awareness, knowledge and information about management of diseases, counseling towards safe motherhood practice, nutrition, welfare services etc. The integrated approach adopted by the two on-going programmes of women's empowerment viz. Swa Shakti and Swayamsidha will be further strengthened and expanded during the Tenth Plan with an ultimate objective of universalizing the same through the already available grass root level networking of Self Help Groups." While the Self help Group groups and collective power of women is critical in the empowerment process, in the absence of an institutional mechanism for convergence, it would prove difficult to have universal success, given the involvement of a multitude of departments and schemes, at the functional level.

Conclusion

Success stories rest on individual efforts rather than institutionalized 13 mechanisms. Central sector schemes and centrally sponsored schemes have limited flexibility and may require a re-look at the design and implementation of the schemes. Further the Self Help Group movement is not uniform in its success spread across the country. Summing up it is submitted that while all the above approaches have merit and benefits, but perhaps in isolation, these approaches are not complete in themselves to achieve women's empowerment. In a nutshell the efforts undertaken in regard of women empowerment is commendable but much is yet to be done by both public and private sector. Only then the objective of women empowerment and the constitution obligation of 'Gender equality in law and policy ' will be met.

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