

Women's Empowerment Through Gender Budgeting in India

Mita Ashish Shah¹

Abstract: The concept of women empowerment has emerged as a crucial factor in India's holistic development over the past two decades. The achievement of human development is heavily dependent on the development and empowerment of the girls and women of our country who form an important part of our population. These women and girls not only constitute a large part of the valuable human resources of the country but their socio-economic development also sets the foundation for the sustainable growth of the society as a whole.

Gender is not synonymous to women, nor is it a zero-sum game implying loss for men and to their status. Real development process can only happen when there is a balance between men and women. However in developing countries, the balance is missing. The most famous way to bridge the gap is through Gender Budget initiatives. First step towards this approach was taken by Australia then, South Africa and Philippines followed by other developed and less developed countries. India took this initiative from Eight Plan onwards.

Over a short period of time, Gender Budgeting has become a powerful tool for Gender mainstreaming. This paper is a modest attempt to measure the effectiveness of Gender Budgeting as a tool for women empowerment.

Keywords: 1. Gender Development, Gender Sensitization, Gender Budgeting, Gender responsive Budgeting, Gender Mainstreaming.

1. INTRODUCTION

The word "Women Empowerment" essentially means that the women have the power or capacity to regulate their day-to-day lives in the social, political and economic terms – a power which enables them to move from the periphery to the centre stage.

Gender empowerment is the new phenomenon of gender development. It is the process of enabling women force to realize their full potential as individuals. Through it women becomes a catalyst, participant and recipient in the process of development. For this there is greater need of convergence of objectives of gender development and emphasizing the core area of health, education, employment as well as gender sensitization of society at large.

The gender budget initiative is a policy framework to assist government towards the integration of gender perspective into the Indian National Budget for public expenditure. It aims

for women's development through alteration of budgetary funds for women's social, economic and personal growth.

The term "Gender Budgeting" describes various government initiatives that seek to address gender issues in the domain of public expenditure and policy.

Gender Budgeting also analyzes how government raises and spends public money, with the aim of securing gender equality in division making about public resource allocation and gender equality in the distribution of the import of government budgets, both in their benefits and in their burdens. The purpose of Gender Budgeting is to assess quantum and adequacy of allocation of resources for women and establish gender commitments to budgetary commitments.

Awareness and stress on Gender Budgeting increased in India since 1991 because of the concern of activities about its likely impact on women. Gender Budgeting in India evoked a mixed response. It has gained momentum in the event years.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature is available on gender budgeting. Gender budgeting has influenced the status of women in India. Some of the studies reveal the import of gender budgeting and suggest the future roadmap.

It is of interest to study the work done on various aspects related to the problem by different institutions and the researchers. These studies threw useful light on the subject and help to get a clear perspective in respect of concept, methodology, analysis and interpretation.

This paper gives a broad overview of the gender budgeting initiatives in India, highlighting certain related issues that need to be addressed for making gender budgeting an effective tool for women's empowerment, in the Indian context. It explores the query – how effective has gender budgeting been as a tool for women's empowerment, in its present form, in the Indian context. While no direct solutions are offered, an attempt has been made to bring certain pertinent issue into focus along with suggestions on alternative strategies.

Gender Budget- A case study of India.

By Vibhuti Patel

University of Mumbai

Department of Economics

Centre of Advance study in Economics- March (2003)

Budgets garner resources through the taxation policies and allocate it to different sections of the economy. The budget is an important tool in the hands of state for affirmative action for improvement of gender relations through reduction of gender gap in the development process. It can help to reduce economic inequalities, between men and women as well as between the rich and the poor. Hence, the budgetary policies need to

keep into consideration the gender dynamics operating in the economy and the civil society. There is a need to highlight participatory approaches to pro-poor budgeting, green budgeting, local and global implications of women budgeting and inter linkages between gender-sensitive budgeting and women's empowerment. Serious examining of budgets calls for greater transparency at the level of international economics to local process of empowerment. There is a need to provide training and capacity building workshops for decision-makers in the government structures, gram sabhas, parliamentarians and audio-visual media.

An Introduction to Gender Budgeting Initiatives:

Presented to Macroeconomists and other Stakeholders involved in Bosnia and Herzegovina's (BiH's) Poverty Reduction Strategy Process. September (2005).

Every government budget is a statement about the government's real values and priorities. Analysis of government spending reveals government priorities such as social spending, defense, women's empowerment and human rights.

Gender Budget Initiatives use gender analysis to evaluate government budget impacts on females and males. GBIs pinpoint how budgets are discriminatory in gender and other social dimensions. Their analysis is essential to understand to what extent a budget addresses gender and other issues. A full analysis of budget priorities would combine using a gender lens with class, age, race-ethnicity and regional perspectives. They highlight a citizen's right to participate in decisions that affect their lives and their equal right to access public resources.

Gender Budget initiatives impacts and challenges, Budlander, Debbie 2005-

Budlander concludes that "Overall however, the more than fifty GRB (Gender Responsive Budget) initiatives around the world would have probably, produced relatively few budget changes." He believes that the main success of GBIs to date has been in raising awareness about gender issues. This is an important first step in moving towards changing policy priorities and budgets. Awareness rising can be followed by helping government officials to produce gender budget statements and promoting engendered budgets.

3. SITUATION OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The situation of women empowerment is well summarised by the following words:

"The most persistent of these disparities has been gender disparity, despite a relentless struggle to equalize opportunities between women and men. The unfinished agenda for change is still considerable. Women still constitute 70% of the world's poor and two-thirds of the world's illiterate. They occupy only 14% of managerial and administrative jobs, 10% of parliamentary seats and 6% of Cabinet positions. In many legal systems, they are still unequal. They often work longer senses than man, but much of their work remains unvalued, unrecognized and unappreciated. And the threat of violence stalls their lives from cradle to grave".

4. GENDER BUDGETING AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL TO EMPOWER WOMEN

Gender responsive budgeting is a tool or means to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender responsive budgeting helps in the following key functions:

- Monitoring of the achievement of the policy goals.
- Achieving gender equality
- Advancement towards the realization of women's rights.
- Alleviating poverty more effectively
- Enhancing economic efficiency
- Achieving good governance
- Enhancing accountability and transparency
- Improving the allocation of resources to women
- Supporting gender mainstreaming in macroeconomic
- Strengthening civil society participation in economic policy making.
- Enhancing the linkages between economic and social policy outcomes.
- Tracking public expenditure against gender and development policy commitments.
- Contributing to the attainment of the millennium development goals (MDGs).
- The budget is the most important policy of government because, without money, government cannot implement any other policy successfully.
- A Gender Responsive Budget ensures that the needs and interests of individuals from different social groups are covered in the government budget. In particular, it ensures that the needs and interests of women, men, girls and boys are covered.
- Looking at budgets through a gender lens shows clearly where the collection and distribution of public money is unequal and inefficient. It also shows how discrimination affects national development.
- Budget analysis and advocacy by citizens brings together technical knowledge for effective and equitable policy-making with political and organizing tools for engaging with powerful interests and institutions.
- Gender responsive citizen budget initiatives compliment anti-corruption strategies.

Gender is culturally and socially constructed roles, responsibilities, privileges, relations and expectations of women and men, boys and girls. In the Indian society, discrimination faced by girls and women through their life cycle.

Source: UNICEF, based on Moser, in ICECD (undated) Making Development Gender Sensitive, a Guide for Trainers, Ahmedabad, ICECD

8. CONCLUSION

Gender Budgeting can be rightly marked as a “tool” for women's empowerment. The starting point would logically be looking at the constituents of “WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT”. These are quoted below:-

Social Empowerment:- to create an enabling environment through various affirmative developmental policies and programmes for development of women besides providing them easy and equal access to all the basic minimum services so as to enable them to realize their full potential.

Economic Empowerment:- to ensure provision of training, employment and income generation activities with both 'forward' and 'backward' linkages with the ultimate objective of making all potential women economically independent and self-reliant.

Gender Justice:- to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination and thus, allow women to enjoy not only the de-jure but also the de-facto rights and fundamental freedom on par with men in all spheres, viz. Political, economic, social, civil, cultural, etc.

While planning for women's empowerment, the outlook has been one of looking at women as a beneficiary segment rather than as equal participants in the development process. As a consequence, the gender budgeting exercise has mostly focused on provision of resources and programmes for women in the social sector. Sectors like Education, Health, Nutrition, Employment etc. Are no doubt critical in the empowering paradigm, but it is necessary that we look beyond. Women must be recognized as equal players in the economy whether they participate directly as workers or indirectly as members of the care economy. It has to be accepted that every policy of the government fiscal, monetary or trade, has an impact on the well being of women and that in many cases there would be a gender differential in the impact. Thus it is not adequate to restrict the gender budgeting exercise to a few sectors of the economy which are traditionally considered as women related. The analysis has to cover every rupee of public expenditure. It has to cover the way schemes are conceptualized and how women friendly they are in implementation and targeting of beneficiaries. It has to embrace a gender sensitive analysis of Monetary Policies, covering impact of indicators like inflation, interest rates etc. Thus, gender budgeting analysis has to go hand in hand with gender mainstreaming for meaningful empowerment of women. A direct spin off of this would be immediate expansion in access of women to public resources and would help strengthen their economic identity.

If certain planning and implementation issues are not addressed, the gender budgeting initiatives may meet the fate of several other development initiatives and remain more of a paper exercise with limited outcomes. More so given the limited bargaining power of women. These issues would include:

- Synergy in resources for women in various budgets national, state and local.
- Weeding out overlapping interventions that obfuscate status of actual beneficiaries.
- Scheme design and implantation from gender perspective to consciously address

socio-economic barriers faced by women in accessing services.

Any successful strategy for women's empowerment will have to account for the fact that:-

1. Empowerment cannot be successfully achieved till all aspects social, economic and political are addressed.
2. Empowerment should cover women in all region of the country.
3. Gender concerned has to be mainstreamed in all aspects of public expenditure and policy as women are equal citizens in the country.
4. Participation of women in decision making is necessary given their specific needs and to recognize them all equal members of society.
5. Societal attitudes have to be re-engineered.

However, this investment itself could contribute to gender empowerment if utilized in an efficient outcome oriented manner with more involvement of women in decision making and implementation. Further this would lay the foundation for other women specific interventions to be effectively implemented. Lastly, meaningful empowerment of women in India would have to rest on a shift in societal attitudes. This has been very well documented in the following extract:-

“It is more important to create a general awareness and understanding of the problems of women's employment in all the top policy and decision making and executive personnel. There is also the special problem facing women like the preference for male children for social and cultural reasons. This will require awareness, understanding, and action. The best way to do so is to educate the children, orient the teachers, examine the text books and teaching- aids and ensure that the next generation grows up with new thinking”.

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*¹Assistant Professor Deptt. of Commerce, Mata Gujri Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Jabalpur,
mitashah 1976 @ yahoo.in*