

GENDER BUDGETING- A TOOL FOR ACHIEVING EQUALITY

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ABSTRACT:

Today, the entire world is thinking about sustainable and inclusive development which is based on human development. Gender equality is the heart of the human development. Women are constituted nearly 50% of the global population and without gender equality human development and sustainable development become myth. There are many efforts at the global and national levels to address gender inequality problem which is prevailing in all fields. Gender budgeting is one of such efforts to combat gender inequality and it has become a powerful tool to achieve women empowerment which is the crux of any development. In this context, this paper attempts to study various issues in gender budgeting from Indian context. It focuses on gender budgeting in India for the period 2005-06 to 2022-23

Key words: Gender budgeting, gender equality, women development schemes

Introduction:

“Gender budgeting is an approach to budgeting that can improve it, when fiscal policies and administrative procedures are structured to address gender inequality ... When properly done, one can say that gender budgeting is good budgeting” Stotsky (2016)¹

“Gender budgeting is a gender based assessment of budgets incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality” - The Council of Europe²

“Gender budgeting is a tool to achieve gender mainstreaming and ensure benefits of development reach women as much as men” - Ministry of Women and Child Development.³

Today, women are constituted more than half of the global population. Any development process without gender equality becomes a myth. Achieving gender equality is inevitable for sustainable development too. If human development is considered as core of any development, gender equality is considered as a fundamental human right without which human development becomes impossible. It brings tremendous benefits in the social and economic development of any nation. Reducing gender inequality increases the production, national income and overall welfare of the nation. It has positive effect on achieving higher economic and social growth rates.

Since ages, women are considered as subordinated group in the patriarchal and stereo type societies. Their position is degraded compared to men. Women are considered as only birth giving machines and mere family care takers. They are not enjoying more autonomy compared to men in all walks of life. They are the victims of many kinds of violation. In this regard, many efforts are been taken to improve the economic and social status of women internationally. Since 1960 (1st development decade as declared by UNO), many international

¹ <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2006/wp06232.pdf>

² https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/tools-methods/gender-budgeting?language_content_entity=en#toc-definition-and-purpose

³ <https://wcd.nic.in/schemes/gender-budgeting-scheme>

organizations like UNO, national and state governments, and NGOs are working towards achieving gender equality.

Though, there are many efforts in bringing gender equality, still the world has to go long way to reach it. Efforts by public or any organization to some extent can only bring awareness among people on the importance of gender equality. But laws and rules which are implemented by the Government towards equality will certainly have legal background, so will have more effect on gender equality. In this context, Gender Budgeting or gender responsive budget has become a powerful tool in the achievement of gender equality. It helps in improving the welfare of the people in terms of sustainable and inclusive growth. At its core, **gender budgeting** is a government policy which aims in allocating public resources to achieve gender equality and securing women empowerment.

Modern governments are welfare governments. All government policies and programs aim at achieving the overall welfare of its citizens. No doubt if women are involved in decision-making at every walk of life, their empowerment is possible. Gender budgeting at its core, is a government policy with a primary objective of allocating public resources towards advocating women empowerment. Gender budgeting refers to preparing or assessing the budgets from gender point of view. It aims in bringing equality in the distribution of resources between men and women. Gender budgeting is related to gender-sensitive laws and programs, re-orienting public resources towards bringing gender equality and execution of government schemes to alleviate gender inequalities.

Gender budgeting makes the statesmen and politicians to think in terms of promoting gender equality in their public policies and resource allocation processes. As gender budgeting is a gender-based assessment of budgets, it helps the government to address inequalities prevailing at every stage. It is an effective tool to ensure that development benefits reach both men and women equally. Usually public budgets only consider monetary economy and neglect the welfare of the care economy. Gender budgeting is a powerful tool to correct this gap.

Gender budgeting gives importance to gender equality in all three stages of budget i.e. policy formulation, its implementation and review. It requires political leadership with gender commitments. It makes sure that gender commitments are translated into budgetary or financial commitments. In 1984, Australia was the first country to prepare the budget which is women-centric. The UN Women in the UN Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing (1995) also recommended that governments should review public expenditures from point of view of gender equality and adjust their budgets accordingly. Since then, gender budgeting has become internationally recognized strategy for women empowerment.

Now, more than 80 countries have adopted gender-sensitive budgeting. In India, gender budgeting is applied at both central government and at local government levels.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Roli Misra and Vishnu Kumar (2023) study the budget allocations in Indian budget 2023-24 to various ministries. They also compared the allocations in present budget with previous budgets particularly with regard to gender budgeting. Their study evaluates the usefulness of gender budgets and their shortcomings also. The study suggested diversifying public resources to various schemes to successfully achieve gender equality.

Ria Kasliwal (2023) in her blog studies the status of gender budgeting in India. Gender budgets apply gender lens to union budgets to achieve women empowerment. Gender budgeting is inevitable to achieve gender equality. However, still gender budgets are far away

in realizing their aim of eliminating gender inequality. The allocations to gender budgeting in India still remain constant between 3 to 6 percent of union budget. The allocations to gender budgets are not sufficient.

Stotsky (2006) in his study shows how women are disadvantaged compared to men in many areas. According to him to overcome gender inequality, gender budgeting should be integrated with all government budgets and policies. The author also suggested institutions like IMF should take care of women empowerment issues with much importance and priority.

OBJECTIVES OF GENDER BUDGETING:

The gender budgeting requires political leadership with strong will towards gender equality. The main objectives of gender budgeting are:

- To promote transparency in budgets.
- To enhance accountability in fiscal policies.
- To merge monetary economy with care economy along with increased gender responsive participation in the budget process.
- To undertake steps to involve both men and women equally in the preparations of the budget.
- To protect women's rights and to achieve gender equality.

The Council of Europe (2005) gives five objectives of gender budgeting⁴

- 1) Gender equality.
- 2) Accountability.
- 3) Transparency and participation
- 4) Efficiency
- 5) Good governance

There are specific processes of gender budgeting in each country. However, in all countries budgets will be analyzed and monitored based on gender equality principle. Here, the main doctrine of public budget is to consider human capital as investment more than as expenditure.

Methodology: This study uses secondary data which was collected from magazines, newspapers, social media and various internet sources. This study is descriptive in nature.

IMPORTANCE OF GENDER BUDGETING:

Women are constituted nearly 50% of world population. However, since ages we find gender inequality in economic, social and even political spheres. This inequality hinders the overall growth of any nation. The typical stereotyped patriarchal society has degraded women's status in all fields. Elson (1999) rightly said, "If women are economically empowered, it would be possible for each country to have some combination of more output, more development of people capacities, more leisure and higher levels of wellbeing"⁵. In this context, gender-based budgeting is crucial and inevitable to eliminate gender disparities. It is

⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/>

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09540962.2021.1971862?scroll=top&needAccess=true&role=tab>

helpful in improving the social, educational, health and economic development of a nation. Gender budgeting influences the channelization of public resources towards the achievement of gender equality. Financial support through government budgets is proven as a good initiative towards this. These days gender budgeting has become an important tool to achieve sustainable and inclusive development through proper resource allocation. Governments must ensure that public policies are developed and implemented to improve inclusiveness of all marginalized sectors in such a way that development fruits should percolate equally to the bottom of the society. Gender budgeting is an effective tool in this matter as it recognizes women as important contributors to any development process.

There is a general criticism by feminist activists that public sector budget ignores the role of care economy in the development of monetary economy. Hence, gender budgeting plays a crucial role in visualizing women's unpaid social reproduction work and household management skills for the wellbeing of the society.

Gender based budgeting raises awareness among community on the importance of the role of gender parity. It is useful in addressing gender disparities in education, income earning, security, health and hygiene, political representation, entrepreneurship, economic welfare, labor participation and social status and so on and improves the usage of fiscal tools to improve the status of women in society. It provides equal access to resources and opportunities to both men and women in education, employment, health and leadership.

STEPS INVOLVED IN GENDER BUDGETING:

The main purpose of gender budgeting is to merge the gender equality issues into the mainstream budgets. It deals with public finance management in such a way that gender equality is taken care utmost. Gender budgeting involves the following steps:

Analysis: Understand the relationship between gender equality and development. Modern governments are aware that without gender equality any development becomes a myth.

Understanding gender gaps: Governments assess the gender gaps pertaining in all the fields. Hence, public policies are to be framed keeping in mind the negative consequences of gender inequality on nation's overall growth.

Identifying gender-sensitive programs and policies: Governments here identify the suitable programs and policies to address the issues of prevailing gender inequality.

Program structure/Planning: Here, the government makes proper arrangements for preparing programs and policies and their implementation.

Budgetary allocation: The governments assess the adequacy of budget allocations in terms of available financial resources and further financial needs for the proper implementation of gender-sensitive policies and programs.

Fiscal management and monitoring: Once the money is spent, Government monitors whether the money is spent as per plans. Concerned departments track and manage the programs' execution and monitor their implementation.

Evaluation of the effects of revenue and expenditures: Evaluation is done on the effects of the government spending on the welfare of women and girls. Also, revenue generation can be evaluated based on the elimination of tax burden on women and tax benefits to them.

Outcome or Impact Assessment: Governments here assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the program that whether the implemented program or policy has reached

the targeted goal. Government tracks the result of the programs and their success or failure rates.

If all these steps are properly taken care of, gender budgeting definitely will be an effective tool in achieving gender equality. Here, one can notice the words of Stotsky (2016) that “when properly done, one can say that gender budgeting is good budgeting”. An IMF working paper published in 2021 shows that while calculating Gender Budgeting Index (GBI), 23 assessment questions related to development of gender budgeting tools considering 19 countries and the European Union, shows advanced economies have better GBI than emerging economies.

STATUS OF GENDER BUDGETING IN INDIA:

In India, according to 2011 census, women account for 48% of the overall population of the nation. This shows the importance of women empowerment in India's overall development. However, considering the history of India, one can undoubtedly say that since ages, women subjected to exploitation and violation. From Vedic period till date Indian society has witnessed discrimination against women in all walks of life in the patriarchal society. In India women are the marginalized group identified with inadequate and inefficient human capital investments from the governments. According to the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) 2021 of World Economic Forum, India scored 140th rank compared to 112th rank in 2020. This shows the huge gender gap in India.

However, one can also notice that since independence, Government of India through its constitution and various laws made several efforts to address this issue. On July 9th 1993, India ratified the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) treaty and thereby obliges to take positive steps to end discrimination against women in all fields. Also, government has taken necessary steps to bring awareness among women about the importance of the laws and programs and also human rights available to them. In India, gender responsive budgets are among such efforts taken by the government to achieve gender equality, human development and thereby economic efficiency. In 2001 Union Budget, Gender Based Budgeting was first introduced to address gender inequality issues. However, it was adopted in 2005-06 budget. Since then, every year, the government releases a Gender Budget Statement with its Union Budget. Gender Budgeting was defined by Government of India as “a gender-responsive budget acknowledges the gender patterns in society and allocates money to make policies and programs gender-equitable”. Gender Budgeting gives new structure to government budgets with its gendered-lens regarding allocation and tracking of public funds.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) is the nodal agency to take care of the implementation of gender budgeting in India and also developed a Manual and Handbook for Gender Budgeting for Central Ministries and Departments which are responsible for gender budget implementation. Along with this, Ministry of Finance in coordination with the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP) monitors the implementation of gender budgeting. In view of achieving gender equality, Government of India has introduced many programs like MGNREGS, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Ujjwala Yojana, Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana and many other programs with a focus on socio-economic improvements in the status of women and girls. It is made mandated to set up Gender Budgeting Cells (GBC) as an institutional framework in all Ministries or Departments. These Cells survey the need for special women beneficial schemes and programs and also evaluate these schemes from cost-benefit analysis. Majority of gender budget concentrates on five ministries i.e.

Rural Development, Women and Child Development, Agriculture, Health and Family Welfare, and Education.

In India, Gender Budgeting includes two parts. They are:

Part A: Here the budget includes schemes with 100% allocation for women. Example: Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Ujjawala Yojana, Mahila Shakti Kendra etc.

Part B: This includes schemes with at least 30% of funds for women. Example: Mid-day meals program, PM POSHAN etc. In 2005-06, gender budgeting share was around 4.8% in the total budget. In the consecutive years the share is been maintaining constantly around 5%. During 2021-22, gender budget's share was around Rs. 1, 53,326 crores which was accounted for 4.4%. However, during Covid period the amount of gender budgets was increased to Rs. 2, 07,261 crores. During 2022-23Union Budget, women's programs received Rs. 1.71 lakh crore which was around 5% of the total budget. In India at least 16 states have implemented gender-responsive budgets and programs that help women empowerment.⁶

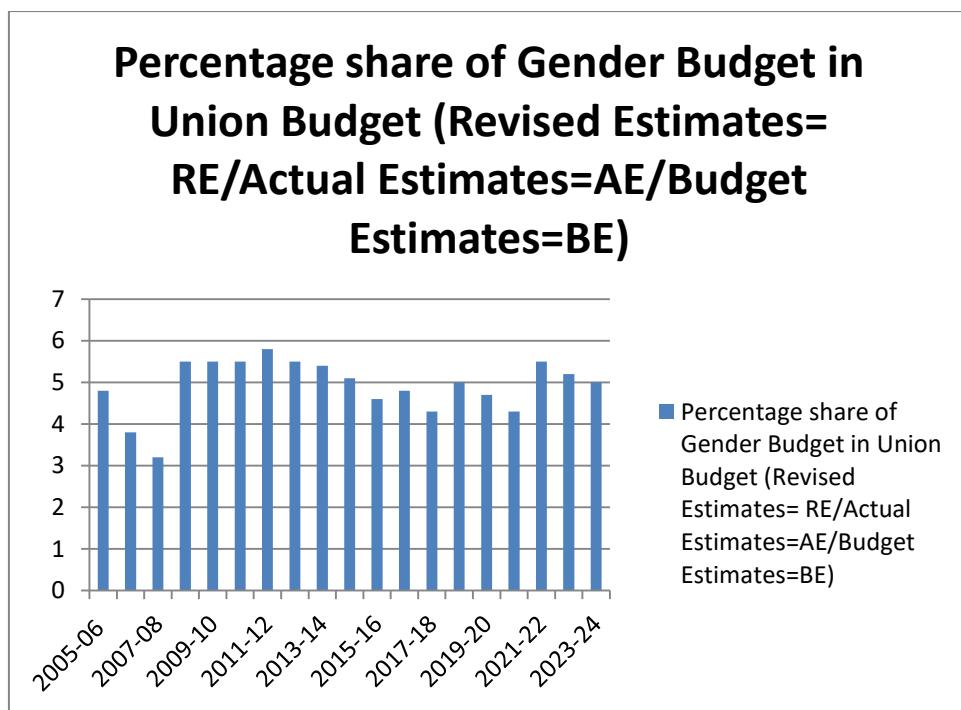
Table 1: Gender Budget share in the Union Budget from 2005-06 to 2022-23

Budget Year	Percentage share of Gender Budget in Union Budget (Revised Estimates= RE/Actual Estimates=AE/Budget Estimates=BE)
2005-06	4.8 (RE)
2006-07	3.8 (RE)
2007-08	3.2 (RE)
2008-09	5.5 (RE)
2009-10	5.5 (RE)
2010-11	5.5 (RE)
2011-12	5.8 (RE)
2012-13	5.5 (RE)
2013-14	5.4 (RE)
2014-15	5.1 (RE)
2015-16	4.6 (RE)
2016-17	4.8 (RE)
2017-18	4.3 (AE)
2018-19	5 (AE)
2019-20	4.7 (AE)
2020-21	4.3 (AE)
2021-22	5.5 (AE)
2022-23	5.2 (RE)
2023-24	5 (BE)

Source: <https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/>

⁶ www.wikipedia.org

Graph 1: Gender Budget share in the Union Budget from 2005-06 to 2022-23



Source: Table 1

The table 1 and graph 1 show the allocation to Gender Budget as a Proportion of the Union Budget. On an average the percentage share of gender budget falls between 3 to 6 percentage of the Union Budget. We can notice the fall in the share of gender budget from 5.2% in 2022-23 to 5% in 2023-24.

Gender Budgeting in India has two parts as discussed earlier. Part A includes 100% financial support to women development schemes and Part B includes 30% financial support.

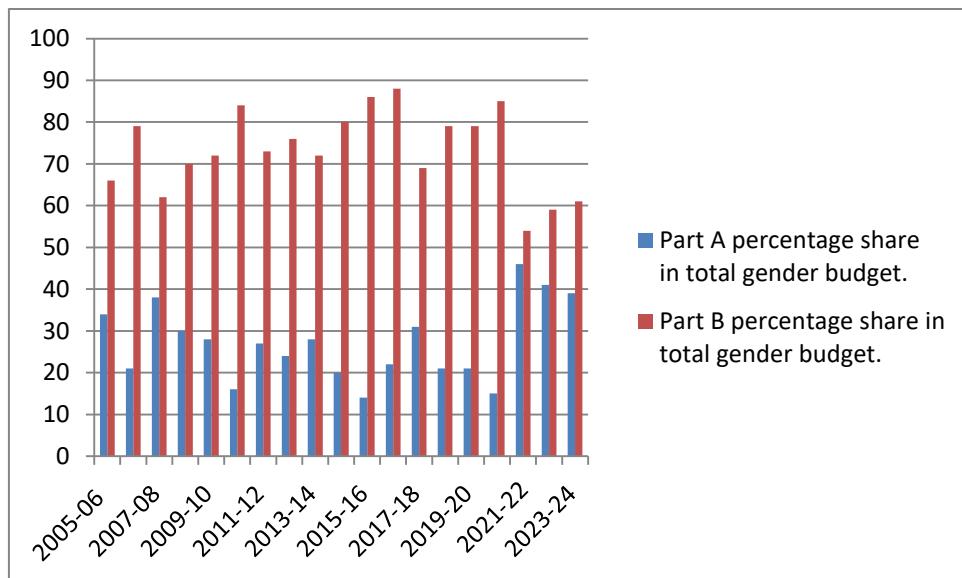
Table 2: Allocations to Part A and Part B as a Proportion of Gender Budget

Year of Budget (Revised Estimates=RE/Actual Estimates=AE/Budget Estimates=BE)	Part A percentage share in total gender budget.	Part B percentage share in total gender budget.
2005-06 (RE)	34	66
2006-07 (RE)	21	79
2007-08 (RE)	38	62
2008-09 (RE)	30	70
2009-10 (RE)	28	72
2010-11 (RE)	16	84
2011-12 (RE)	27	73
2012-13 (RE)	24	76
2013-14 (RE)	28	72
2014-15 (RE)	20	80
2015-16 (RE)	14	86
2016-17 (RE)	22	88
2017-18 (AE)	31	69
2018-19 (AE)	21	79

2019-20 (AE)	21	79
2020-21 (AE)	15	85
2021-22 (AE)	46	54
2022-23 (RE)	41	59
2023-24 (BE)	39	61

Source: <https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/>

Graph 2: Allocations to Part A and Part B as a Proportion of Gender Budget



Source: Table 2

We can notice from Table 2 and Graph 2 that Part A and Part B accounted for over 34 per cent and 65 per cent in 2005-06 of the Gender Budget since its introduction. Part B allocations (30% of the share to women development schemes) show skewed distribution. Part B share is high compared to Part A share.

However, in 2021-22, the share of Part A in the total Gender Budget was at its height i.e. 46%. This shows complete women specific schemes (100% share) do not form the major part of the gender budget in India.

LIMITATIONS OF THE GENDER BUDGETING IN INDIA:

Though, gender budgeting in India is helpful in the women empowerment and in the achievement of gender equality, still it has some limitations. Since the inception of gender budgeting in India, the fund allocation remains almost constant between 3 to 6 percent. This shows the share of funds to gender budgeting in Union Budget is growing at a slow rate.

Some of the schemes which help women empowerment are not included in Part A like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). Here, women are constituted around 55% of total workers, but the scheme is included in Part B (only 27% of the funds are allotted in 2023-24 budget). Proper weightage is not given to priority schemes. Even important infrastructure facilities like transportation, water, security are neglected in gender budgeting. Some schemes are included in gender budget which do not benefit only women i.e. they are not exclusively formulated for the benefit of women. Ex: Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana- a rural housing scheme. This benefits both men and women, but included in gender budget.

India's performance at global level shows a slow progress towards women empowerment compared to other developed countries. India has secured 131st place out of 148 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2025 which shows a slow progress towards women empowerment⁷.

There are only few big budget schemes like Nirbhaya Fund and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao which are implemented exclusively for women. However, these schemes also face the challenge of non-utilization of the funds. It is witnessed that the ratio of gender budget to India's GDP is less than 1% always, which is very low compared to the requirements.

The public departments and Gender Based Cells face the challenge of lack of dedicated and skilled human resources in the effective implementation of the government schemes of women empowerment. Since its inception of gender budgeting till now, the progress towards gender equality is very slow.

There is no effective and designated monitoring mechanism for gender budgeting at the national level. Some experts opine that there is no clear methodology to implement different women development schemes on different weightage levels. Departments which are responsible to practice gender budgeting usually follow the prescribed formats provided by the Ministry of Finance, which sometimes will not be suitable to all the schemes.

Despite women is constituted 50% of India's population, still gender equality is not achieved completely. Data shows that only 14% women representation in Lok Sabha (17th Loksabha) and 10.5% in Rajya Sabha (2021). Only 13% central government employees are women as on 2020. Only 14% women are there in all Secretaries in the Indian Administrative Service. These data shows inequality and underrepresentation of women in decision making and top positions.⁸

CONCLUSION:

Though women constituted half of the world's population, still their position is degraded since ages. India is not an exception to this. Since independence many efforts are being taken to address gender inequality challenges. Gender budgeting is one among such efforts. India is following gender budgets which focus on the public funds management from gender equality lens. Government is managing its public financial resources to implement many women development schemes under its budget. Gender budgeting has two parts A and B which are 100% women specific and 30% women specific respectively. Since its inception in 2005-06, Gender Budgeting has average 3 to 6 percent share in Union Budgets.

Many programs are implemented to attain gender equality through gender budgeting. However, still India has to go long way to achieve complete gender equality. India is lacking the required financial funds to achieve the target and also many managerial & technical problems are there in the effective implementation of gender budgets. If properly managed with transparency and accountability, gender budgeting would definitely bring miraculous changes in women empowerment process.

⁷ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-gender-gap-rank-global-gender-gap-index-2025-world-economic-forum/article69685804.ece>

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