

## Bridging the Gender Gap Through Budgeting in the Indian Scenario

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### ABSTRACT

Gender budgeting is an essential public financial management (PFM) tool that seeks to integrate gender perspectives into all stages of the budgetary process, aiming to translate gender equality commitments into concrete fiscal policies. In India, the concept has evolved since the 1974 Committee on the Status of Women's report, gradually gaining traction through institutional reforms and initiatives such as the establishment of the National Commission for Women and reservation for women in local governance. Gender budgeting in India reflects the socio-economic and policy priorities of various Five-Year Plans, transitioning from a welfare approach to one focused on development, empowerment, and mainstreaming of women. Despite these efforts, significant gaps persist in implementation, monitoring, and accountability, particularly at the federal level. International experiences, including those from OECD countries, highlight the importance of legal backing, systematic gender impact assessments, and coordinated approaches between ministries. However, evidence of transformative impact remains limited, underscoring the need for comprehensive needs assessments, capacity building, and participatory processes that involve civil society and gender advocacy groups. In the agricultural sector, gender-responsive extension services are critical yet underdeveloped, with women farmers often having disproportionately low access to advisory services. Gender budgeting offers a vital nexus for aligning public expenditure with gender equality objectives, ensuring that policies and programmes address the distinct needs of women and men. A strategic, data-driven, and inclusive approach is necessary to ensure that gender budgeting becomes an effective instrument for achieving equitable and sustainable development outcomes.

**Keywords:** Accountability, Capacity building, Empowerment, Socio-economic, Sustainable development

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of "gender budgeting" involves assessing budgets from a gender perspective, which entails reorganising income and expenses to support gender parity and incorporating a gender perspective throughout the entire budgeting process. In India, the emphasis on gender concerns in public spending has grown since the publication of the Committee on the Status of Women's report in 1974. Gender budgeting is a strategy used in public financial management

(PFM) to translate gender pledges into tangible budgetary commitments. The four stages of this fiscal innovation, referred to as gender-responsive public financial management (PFM), are knowledge building, institutional structure creation, capacity improvement, and accountability mechanism implementation (Chakraborty, 2024). The goal of gender budgeting is to help the government include a gender perspective in the budget as a crucial national strategy for spending public funds. A national gender equality policy that lays out broad gender goals must

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serve as the strategic foundation for gender budgeting (Ahn, 2024).

The following are a few steps the Indian government has taken to empower women:

- Establishment of the National Commission for Women (1992)
- Reservation for women in local self-government (1992)
- The National Plan of Action for Girl Child (1991-2000)
- National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001)

The number of male farm labourers fell precipitously. Between 1961 and 1999-2000, the proportion of women employed in agriculture decreased marginally to 74.9% from 85.7% in 1961. In rural regions, there are 55.4% more males and 75.7% more women working in agriculture in 2019-20, according to statistics provided to the Lok Sabha by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare. Over 70 percent of women in rural areas work in agriculture (Mamgain & Khan, 2022).

## **2. GENDER BUDGETING THROUGH INDIA'S FIVE-YEAR PLANS**

### **2.1. First Five-Year Plan (1951- 1956)**

The Central Government created a Central Social Welfare Board during the First Five-Year Plan (1951-1956) with the main goal of helping nonprofit organisations plan welfare programs for women, children, and people with disabilities. In 1954, the Board then worked with state governments to establish state social welfare boards around the nation. Initiated in 1951, the National Family Planning Program subsequently evolved into the National Family Welfare Program. In 1952, the Community Development Program got underway. (Saha et al., 2025).

### **2.2. Third Five-Year Plan (1966-67 to 1968-69)**

The Planning Commission was advised to create the required program to quickly and successfully implement national prohibition, as it was considered an essential component of the Second Five-Year Plan. With the primary goal of resettling families of East Pakistani displaced people who were still living in "camps" in West Bengal, the Dandakaranya project was developed under the Second Plan. Additionally, the project aimed to improve the welfare of the local populace, particularly the Adivasis. The Third Plan only addresses the remaining needs for housing schemes and support for health and education services for displaced people from West Pakistan.

### **2.3. Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-1978)**

In order to coordinate policies, programs, and undertake measures for women's development, the Ministry of Social Welfare established the Women's Welfare and Development Bureau in 1976. To address a number of issues pertaining to the family and women's roles, the Fifth Plan changed the strategy for women's advancement from welfare to development, intending to integrate welfare and development services. Before the creation of the National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000) in 1988, the National Plan of Action for Women (1976) acted as a roadmap for women's advancement.

### **2.4. Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980 - 1985)**

Women's focus shifted from "welfare" to "development" during the 6th Five-Year Plan period. For women's progress, the Sixth Five-Year Plan was considered a turning point. By using the family as a unit of development and a multidisciplinary approach with a three-pronged emphasis on three major sectors—health, education, and employment (of women)—the plan featured a chapter named "Women and Development" (Chapter 27) for the first time. The Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) was established in September 1982 to give rural women who are below the poverty line appropriate options for self-employment.

### **2.5. Seventh Five-Year Plan (1985-1990)**

The Ministry of Human Resource Development established the Department of Women and Child Development in 1985 to provide a much-needed boost to women's and children's holistic development. The Department has been promoted to a Ministry as of 30.01.86. The goal of the seventh-year plan was to include women in the primary stream of national development. A key component of the 7th plan was the identification (or promotion) of 27 Beneficiary Oriented Schemes (BOS) (1986) that directly benefited women across several Ministries and Departments. The GOI published the National Perspective Plan for Women (NPPW) (1988-2000) in 1988. This document's goals are to evaluate how well women have been incorporated into India's growth and offer suggestions for social justice and equity for all women. In some disciplines, the NPPW places a high priority on reservations for women.

### **2.6. Eight Five-Year Plan (1992- 1997)**

The Women's Development Programme of India's Five-Year Plan did not benefit women; rather, it excluded them from the advantages. According to a UN survey conducted during the Women's Decade,

development further marginalised women rather than helping them. Under the guise of liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation, the New Economic Policy hurt both men and women in rural poverty while benefiting the wealthy in cities.

### 2.7. Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002)

Two important modifications to the traditional approach to planning for women were implemented by the Ninth Plan (1997-2002). "Women's empowerment" was one of the nine main goals of the Ninth Plan. Women were seen as empowered to be the change and development agents in society. To "converge existing services," the strategy included both women-specific (Konwar, 2019). Part B of gender budgeting, which is at least 30% women-specific, has always had a larger proportion than Part A, which is 100% female allocation. The maximum fund, Part B, is not intended exclusively for women. According to the Gender Budgeting statement, the

average allocation share for Part A and Part B is 27.89 percent and 72.09 percent, respectively, from 2005–06 to 2017–18. Although the overall sex ratio increased by 10 points between 2001 and 2011, indicating a positive trend for women's empowerment, the child sex ratio fell by 8 points over the same period, which will undoubtedly have an impact on the sex ratio going forward. Compared to men, women have a higher life expectancy at birth (69.9 years). It demonstrates how gender budgeting improves women's lives. Female infant mortality dropped from 58 in 2004 to 40 in 2013. The maternal mortality rate (MMR) decreased from 301 in 2001–03 to 167 in 2011–13. This suggests that gender budgeting has a major effect on MMR. In addition, the overall fertility rate decreased from 2.7% in 2005 to 2.3% in 2013. It demonstrates how spending under the gender budgeting statement has a good effect. In terms of educational attainment, female literacy rose from 53.71 percent in 2011 to 64.63 percent in 2011 (Alam et al., 2017).

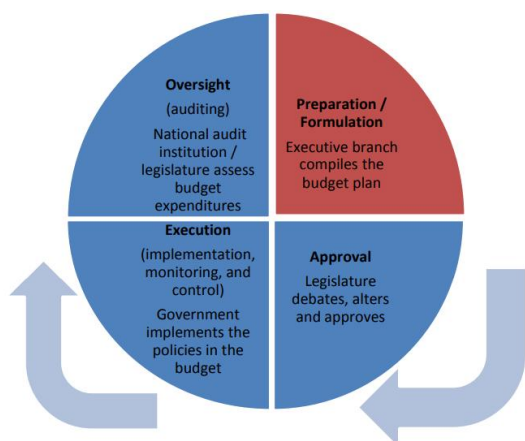
**Table 1.** Evolution of Gender-Responsive Strategies in India's Five-Year Plans

Plan No.	Plan Period	Key Initiatives	Gender Budgeting Focus
First	1951-1956	Central Social Welfare Board, National Family Planning, Community Development Program	Initial welfare approach for women and children
Third	1966-1969	Resettlement of displaced persons, Dandakaranya project	Minimal gender-specific focus
Fifth	1974-1978	Women's Welfare and Development Bureau, National Plan of Action for Women	Shift from welfare to development for women
Sixth	1980-1985	Chapter on 'Women and Development', DWCRA program for rural self-employment	Integrated development approach with the family as a unit
Seventh	1985-1990	Department of Women and Child Development, Beneficiary Oriented Schemes (BOS), NPPW	Mainstreaming women in development via schemes and planning
Eighth	1992-1997	Economic liberalisation impacts, critique of marginalisation	Lack of benefits and gender consideration
Ninth	1997-2002	Women's empowerment declared goal, Gender Budgeting with Part A & B classifications	Structured gender budgeting and impact monitoring

### 3. PROCESS OF GENDER BUDGETING

When a department or ministry prepares a gender budget, it is required to acknowledge the needs, issues, and experiences of both men and women. This is followed by the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of programs. Moreover, the subsequent phase involves developing the objective from a gender viewpoint, taking into account the participation of both men and women as well as their distinct requirements, goals, experiences, issues, and limitations. (Input, Output, and Outcome) Indicator Programs come next. The following chart explains the gender budgeting process. (Alam et al., 2017).

For the women's movement in India, the yearly national budget's inclusion of a gender budget statement has been a significant victory. Women's groups have made women's issues a priority and have informed the Ministry of Finance of any mistakes in the gender budget statement. As a result, the document has significantly improved. Nevertheless, gender-budgeting measures have only been implemented by a small number of federal governments nationwide. It draws attention to the necessity of providing federal government personnel and lawmakers with gender budgeting training and education. (Nakray, 2009).



**Figure 1.** Stages of the Budget Process (UNICEF, 2016)

Gender concerns in agricultural extension should be addressed for some strong reasons. These range from development arguments that emphasize the significance of honouring international and national policy commitments, eradicating discrimination against women, and upholding gender equality to business case arguments that connect reductions in gender disparities in agricultural production and extension services with enhanced institutional efficiency and development outcomes (Manfre et al., 2013). Although the suggestion is frequently made, few studies have looked at how hiring women as extension agents affects the involvement of female farmers in extension initiatives over time. Relatively little interaction occurs between farmers and extension agents, according to recent data on men's and women's access to advising services (Prusty et al., 2021), with women's access levels being disproportionately lower. According to a 2010 analysis of a few places in Ethiopia, India, and Ghana, women's access to agricultural extension was consistently lower than men's, but levels of access varied by region and by kind of crop or cattle. In Ghana, only 2% of women-headed households and 12% of men-headed households reported receiving extension advice; in Ethiopia, women's access was 20% compared to 27% for men; in India, 8% of women-headed households and 29% of men-headed households reported receiving extension advice (World Bank, 2010). Two-thirds of male government agents in Tanzania in the 1990s visited women farmers less often than male farmers, and women-headed families were seldom visited at all, according to studies. An agricultural census conducted in Tanzania in 2003 supported these findings. As stated in the Ministry of Women and Child Development's Annual Report 2006–07, the Indian government, along with the Indian Institute of Public Administration, conducted seminars to increase the capabilities of Gender Budgeting Cells established in different ministries (Sodani & Sharma, 2008).

Bringing together the many facets of public policy research, budgeting is a special "nexus" that decides how much money is spent. This nexus must be receptive to a wide variety of inputs and perspectives, particularly critical ones. Recent years have seen OECD nations step up their efforts to educate the public about and encourage participation in the budget process (Sai et al., 2024). The budget proposal's policies and programs may be made to address citizens' concerns about gender equality and maintain gender budgeting's connection to its feminist roots and critical viewpoints by using an open government approach. People and civil society organisations who advocate for gender equality frequently have the greatest firsthand knowledge of how budget decisions may affect disadvantaged populations (Das et al., 2025). This means that including these perspectives in the budget and policy formulation processes might potentially improve the quality of policymaking. Also, since many female advocacy groups have previously thought about these issues extensively, it keeps the government from having to "reinvent the wheel" when creating gender equality policy. Departmental performance frameworks' gender indicators should be upstream linked to the broader gender equality policy to guarantee consistency and coordination of approach (Downes & Nicol, 2020).

The OECD has taken a distinct approach to gender budgeting, examining each stage of the budgeting process and the many institutional players involved as many avenues for developing gender-responsive policies. Key findings from this investigation include the following:

- Gender budgeting is legally supported: The majority of OECD countries that implement gender budgeting have a legal basis for their practice, albeit the type and intent of the legal provisions vary.
- Wide range of gender budgeting approaches: There is no standard model of gender budgeting in OECD countries.
- Evidence of systematic gender-proofing throughout the budget cycle: Ex ante and ex post gender impact evaluations are two of the most popular instruments for gender budgeting, indicating a systematic continuum of gender-focused policy assessment across the budget cycle. However, the rigour and impact of these approaches appear variable.
- Gender views are widely applied, as evidenced by the fact that half of the nations that use gender budgeting do so in terms of performance evaluation and resource allocation. However, the expenditure assessment only applies a gender viewpoint in a restricted way.

- Use of complete ex ante needs assessment is limited: Few OECD nations presently conduct a thorough needs assessment for gender equality in order to understand the top gender concerns resulting from the way public policies and resources are currently allocated.
- Limited evidence of beneficial impact: Of the 12 nations that use gender budgeting in some capacity, half were able to provide specific instances in which the tool has significantly altered the design of policies and/or their results.
- The implementation of gender budgeting usually necessitates collaboration between many government agencies, including the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Equality (Downes et al., 2017).

## 5. CONCLUSION

India's implementation of gender budgeting is a major step in coordinating fiscal policies with the nation's pledges to inclusive growth and gender equality. Initiatives from different sectoral programs, regulatory frameworks, and Five-Year Plans have progressively moved the emphasis from welfare to empowerment throughout the decades in an effort to include women in the mainstream of development. The potential for gender-responsive budgeting to promote social change is demonstrated by positive outcomes, including increases in life expectancy, female literacy, and maternal mortality rates. Nonetheless, enduring obstacles continue to exist, such as restricted coverage across sectors, feeble accountability systems, insufficient capability in gender budgeting cells, and deficiencies in attending to the particular requirements of women in rural and agricultural economies. Going forward, a more thorough and formalised approach to gender budgeting is required. Building strong gender-disaggregated data systems, conducting thorough needs evaluations to guide policy decisions, and conducting systematic ex-ante and ex-post gender impact assessments should be the top priorities of future initiatives. Enhancing the involvement of women's organisations and civil society, fortifying capacity-building initiatives for policymakers at all levels, and guaranteeing improved cooperation between the Ministry of Finance and gender equality organisations will be essential. Additionally, gender budgeting will continue to be applicable and successful in tackling the changing issues of the twenty-first century if gender considerations are integrated into new policy domains, including digital transformation, social protection systems, and climate action. For India and other countries to achieve real gender parity, gender budgeting must be viewed as a transformative process rather than just a tool as they work towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

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