

Budget beyond gender

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Women are not considered farmers despite their active participation in farming in rural India. A gender responsive budget and its implementation are essential to support and empower women farmers.



It's her field too: Policies and budgets for women are a good beginning towards gender parity in agriculture.

Sneh Bhati, a 52-year-old farmer from Madanpur Khadar in Delhi's fringes finds the change in the landscape of her 100-year-old village in the last two decades remarkable. Yet it has not taken away the rural charm. Men still sit for hours at the village chaupal (a common meeting spot) chatting over a game of cards. Sneha, a Gujar by caste, says that most of the work in the household as well as in the farm is done by women. "Most women here work in agricultural activities ranging from sowing, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, seed selection, seed treatment and in caring for farm animals. Men here get more time for leisure as their role in agriculture, though strenuous, is limited to ploughing, applying pesticides and marketing the produce. This leaves them time for working as daily wagers in nearby industrial areas," says Sneha.

"Even ploughing is done using tractors nowadays and bullocks are uncommon here. Of course, agricultural machinery like tractors and harvesters are handled by men," says Sneha. Gender-friendly machinery and technology that can reduce drudgery are unheard of and women are not trained to handle the existing machinery. "The government and some tractor companies like Mahindra are running courses for women on agricultural technologies, but that is only in a few pockets. It is not available in our village," she says.

Sneha's husband and her two sons also work at the nearby Mohan Cooperative Industrial area leaving the main load of farm work on Sneha. "I grow two crops of wheat and pulses. In this day and age, women like me are into the business side of farming also. But that is rare still," says Sneha. Yet, she concedes that though women are active in farm operations, the decision making still rests with men.

Sita Gahlawat, a widow who heads a household of four concurs. "Despite women being so central to agriculture, we are not considered farmers," she says. **Official records** normally treat them as "farm labourers" engaged in "unskilled labour" but they are, in effect, unpaid workers on family farms.

Women are not real farmers

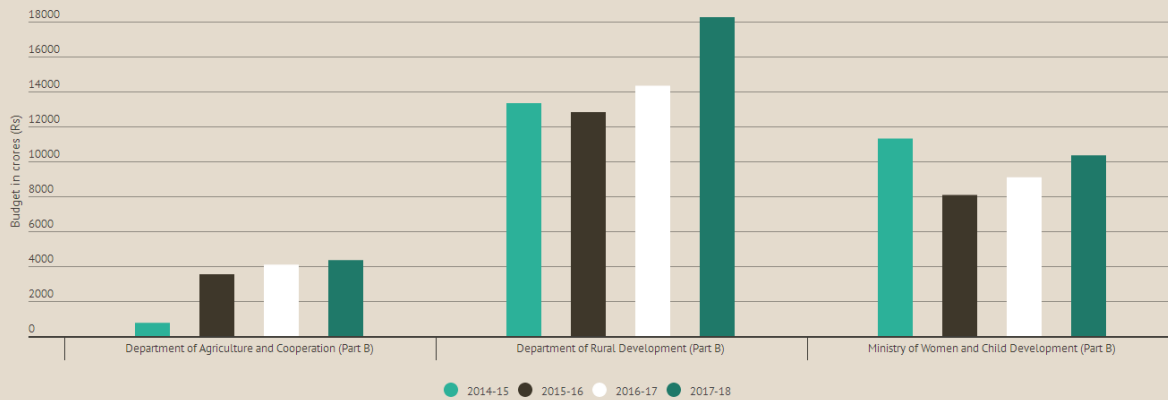
In the absence of land rights, women's prime role in agriculture does not get recognised. "The land tilled by my late husband is in his father's name and I am yet to receive it. Banks don't give me loans because of it. I tried acquiring a kisan credit card but was turned away as I could not show farmland and house in my name as collateral. Though farmers at large are benefitting through kisan credit cards, if you are a woman, you will not be issued one even if you have a joint patta (landholding) with a man," she adds.

"The relief and compensation benefits go to men even during land acquisition which is rampant due to urbanisation. Women are allocated (by the government) only self-help groups that do little to make them self-reliant," she adds.

Sita, who is also conversant with Jatana, the traditional Haryanavi women's folk song, says that the government has to do much more to pull women out of their subordinate position in a patriarchal system. "Free cooking gas connection to the poor is a women-friendly initiative by the government but women need much more than that," says Sita.

Going by the [Census of 2011](#), women in India have a low work participation rate and constitute only 12.8 percent of the total workers. Sixty-five percent of India's female workers are engaged in agriculture. Training, demonstration and financial assistance for encouraging women's engagement in agriculture call for a committed budget. If we look at the agriculture sector, there are several programmes for gender mainstreaming and empowering women farmers. As per the directives of the Women Component Plan in the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2000), the Centre has directed the state governments to ensure the flow of funds to the tune of 30 percent for assisting women farmers. At present, women beneficiaries are also provided 10 percent additional financial assistance for the purchase of various agricultural machines and equipment.

GENDER BUDGET



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India was **ranked 87** in the annual Global Gender Gap index compiled by the Geneva-based World Economic Forum in October 2016. The index measures gender equality across the four pillars--economy, education, health and political representation. Of the four pillars, India ranks a lowly 136 in the economic sphere out of 144 countries. India has the second lowest **rate** of female labour force participation in South Asia. India's gender wage gap is as high as 30 percent as per a recent International Labour Organization **report**.

To address these poor social indicators and to improve women's access to resources, the Centre and the states have taken certain measures. The gender budget i.e., the budget on women specific schemes, is one such. Introduced in the year 2005-06, gender budget is a tool to mitigate gender-based disadvantages and is used as a marker to assess the gender responsiveness of the budget.

The gender budget statement declares two types of funding--one, where the entire provision is for women (Part A) and second, where the allocation for women is at least 30 percent of the entire funds (Part B). The Centre has been adhering to this concept for over a decade and 17 states have adopted it so far. This year's central budget allocated five percent of the overall budget to women. Recently, Kerala [announced](#) that it will allocate more than 10 percent of its budget for gender-based schemes.

Sita feels gender budgeting can go a long way in mainstreaming women's concerns in the agriculture sector and improving her access to public resources. "The core issues of women's safety, security and dignity in all spheres of their lives need to be addressed while formulating the gender budget," says Rajeshri Mandloi who has worked with the Sanket Centre for Budget Studies (SCBS), an initiative anchored by Sanket Development Group (SDG), Bhopal. "This requires appropriate budget allocation to raise awareness on the above-mentioned issues and some tangible changes in policy programmes as well as in the public administration set up. The government should earmark a budget for women to access school, college and higher institutions without having to face any kind of violence. Women's economic security must be given priority in plans. If there is political will for gender budgeting, larger gender issues can be addressed through the budget," adds Mandloi.

How do budgets respond to gender issues in agriculture sector?

The allocations for women in major programmes and schemes across the agriculture and allied sectors in the last few years indicate that there has been a clear boost in funds. The issue is how much of this is spent effectively on the empowerment of women.

The funds directed to women-only schemes in various ministries of the government have increased from Rs 11,388.41 crore in 2015-16 to Rs 17,412.01 crore in 2016-17 to Rs 31390.74 crore in 2017-18. Is the increase in share for women mere optics? This year's (2017-18) budget has allocated 500 crores for setting up Mahila Shakti Kendras at village levels in rural India's anganwadi centres. The budgetary allocation per anganwadi comes to a measly sum of Rs 3571 given that we have 14 lakh centres. With this amount, it is a task to create support centres for empowering rural women on skill development, employment, digital literacy, health and nutrition as promised in the budget.

While allocations show commitment on the part of ministries and departments, there is a need to use the budget allocations to redesign the schemes so as to address specific gender-based challenges. Kavita Suresh, a journalist and activist, who has worked with Madhya Pradesh Mahila Manch, a Bhopal-based women's group says, "Schemes under the gender budget usually go unspent and whatever is spent is not of much help to women. The programmes meant for women are so poorly designed and badly implemented that they merely perpetuate the gender imbalances that persist."

Kerala had initiated the process of gender budgeting at the local government level back in 1998. As a part of this, local bodies had to allocate at least 10 percent of the plan funds devolved by the state specifically for women. Kudumbashree is a huge achievement that the state can boast about. As a part of gender responsive budgeting, there was a mandatory allocation for this programme which led to the economic empowerment of women through self-help groups. These groups were then involved in income generation programmes under the poverty eradication mission of the Kerala government.

Water and sanitation left out

Many important sectors like water and sanitation always get left out of the gender budget statement despite the fact that managing drinking and domestic water, which includes fetching it from distant sources, is mostly done by women. At the central level, the two departments responsible for water and sanitation--Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS) and Department of Urban Development (DoUD)--are gender blind and do not prepare

gender-based statements.

Gender-neutral budgets in water and sanitation are bound to benefit men more than women. "While in most programmes for women, there has been a marked shift in the approach from welfare to development, most schemes at village level are on health and within that, on maternal health. The issue of domestic and drinking water are not given due importance," says Kavita. "Gender allocations from the top are not enough and there is a need to involve women in panchayat level planning and to ensure that their priorities get reflected in the plan. Active participation of women is needed in gram sabhas. More than anything else, the people who are involved in administering the programmes need to be gender sensitised," says Kavita.

*Merely reporting allocations for women in the gender budget statement for these sectors without any real intent for action is not enough. "While it is true that several steps have been taken in India towards gender responsive budgeting, the need of the hour is effective implementation of these existing schemes. Of course, increased budgetary allocations are vital for upholding gender equality and this year's budget has shown an increase on this front," says Mandloi. What is really needed is a shift from mere gender budget reporting to planning. "Women should be actively involved in the decision-making committees," she adds. First published by **India Water Portal***