

BUDGET FAILS TO SUPPORT WOMEN FARMERS' INTERESTS: The primary food producers and processors in the country.

Even as the Economic Survey 2017-18 talks about feminisation of agriculture, the Budget 2018-19 of Government of India failed to address the many pending issues of women farmers, stated Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM). "We feel highly disappointed that in the end, the issue of women farmers has only become a box item in the Economic Survey, used as a publicity tool by the Government to make it appear that they are sensitive to women farmers", said Soma Parthasarthy of MAKAAM. As per the Census 2011, more than 40% of all female workers are agricultural labourers, and constitute close to 65% of all agricultural workers..

The Finance Minister absence to recognise of the role of women in this sector-& the extreme distress in agriculture with continuing feminization of agriculture & spate of farmer suicides occurring across the country is reflected in the fact that the budget makes no provisions for any actions/investment to support women farmers and single women widowed due to farmer suicide or struggling alone .

The Finance Minister reiterates the commitment towards doubling farmer incomes, by viewing the agricultural sector as an 'enterprise' . This would mean agriculture growth jumping to unprecedented levels which the current budget does not support, the pathways to achieving income increases are ambiguous or absent.

The continuing large gender gaps in land ownership and independent access to land, lack of recognition of the "unpaid work" that women farmers perform or the systemic barriers women farmers face will effectively not reduce the vulnerability of women farmers even after investments in productivity or price increase. For instance, provisions for its strengthening through budgets ENAM structures- KPMC, APMC with an allocation of 2000 crores as mechanisms for direct marketing for farm produce will have little impact since women farmers or their collectives have almost negligible presence in the APMC's .

The Economic Survey also highlighted the measures being taken by the Government for mainstreaming women in agriculture sector, like earmarking at least 30% of the budget allocation for women beneficiaries in all ongoing schemes/programmes and development activities, or initiating women-centric activities to ensure benefits of various beneficiary-oriented programmes/schemes reach them. The budget however lays out no road map for how this is to be achieved without recognizing the reasons why these allocations remain on paper year after year . "We find that on the ground, that Direct Benefit Transfers have further reduced access to agricultural inputs, compensation and incomes for women farmers as they are not primary land owners on the land they till." said Sejal Dand of MAKAAM.

The measures provided for in the budget such as increased MSP (although not provided at the levels AIKSCC has sought) and for coverage of larger number of crops can work for women farmers if there are direct procurement processes set up at the village/ panchayat level. Small and marginal women farmers are already engaged in organic agriculture in large tracts of tribal areas, but require investments in supporting labour costs through MGNREGS and such other measures for promoting food security and investments in drudgery reduction tools which find no mention in the Finance Ministers speech.

We find the extension of the Kisan credit card for animal husbandry and fisheries has the potential to benefit women farmers since these sectors are dominated by women- however credit needs to be accompanied by investments on which women farmers have a decisive voice and role.

In the absence of recognition of women as farmers in data systems and the absence of gender disaggregated data, the level of benefit that any of these measures will provide to women is difficult to assess now or in the future.

“For a long time now, we have been asking for gender-disaggregated land records so that we can check on the progress of implementation of laws like Hindu Succession Amendment Act and also intervene more specifically with land distribution and land purchase schemes for dalit and other marginalised women. However, this has not happened. In this budget, we had hoped for separate/dedicated allocations for at least pilot projects for collection, updating and analysis of gender disaggregated data under the Digital India Land Records Modernisation Programme (DILRMP) but did not find any mention of the same”, said Usha Seethalakshmi, a researcher and activist.

“Irrigation budgets once again seem to focus on infrastructure rather than equitable allocation of water and it is doubtful if food crops will receive any prioritization in water allocations. This is evident from the many pronouncements in the budget that reflect a reduction in budgets from the previous years, even in such significant areas such as irrigation” says Seema Kulkarni working on gender and irrigation.

A cluster based approach to address increasing gains and services for farmers will need to be accompanied with greater strengthening of decentralized governance processes with greater focus on women's participation and leadership in farming decision making institutions, rather than the current tokenistic representation of women that we find currently. “A focus on Organic farming with promotion of 1000 clusters, and SHGs support envisaged through allocations for aromatic plants, food processing (Krishi sampada yojana) however all point to Agri export promotion, with measures for further liberalization of exports, which may not benefit the food security needs of millions in these SHGs and those who fall outside their purview, the ultra poor, and their need of food security.” Said Rukmini Rao of MAKAAAM and Gramya, Hyderabad.

“The Budget utilizations for SC ST populations remains much lower than required, and the commercial interests take away the benefits from the forests. The National bamboo mission allocation (1290 crores) must ensure that community rights are strengthened rather than traders and middle men usurping these benefits in the re-modelled Bamboo mission. Similarly, the resource allocations for infrastructure development must not cause destruction of natural resources and rights of the forest dependent populations, as is the experience so far” said Sanghmitra from MAKAAAM Odisha .

What do we seek?

Makaam calls for a recognition of the work and worth of women farmers and seeks specific measures to address the status of women farmers, given the crisis of rural distress, food insecurity and feminization of agriculture without recognition of women's labour and resource rights:

Recognition, incentives and priority in access are the key issues that we wish to raise from MAKAAAM as necessary for women farmers in the context of the budget.

We seek recognition of our entitlements and allocations of at least 30% of all schemes under DAC to women, rather than the present limited focus on women in about a dozen schemes. All agriculture schemes must allocate a 30% to women as part of gender budgets. The related task is for monitoring of expenditure to ensure that the 30% has indeed been spent!

- Waivers for women SHGs / women's collectives in disaster situations such as drought, floods etc need to be ensured, as they are primary risk takers in their borrowings to support their household livelihoods
- We seek the assurance of maternity entitlements for women farmers as per earlier guidelines, as a right (and not a holiday!)

We seek a comprehensive focussed strategy with adequate budget allocations to address the issues of debt and provide support for women in Farmer suicide families including debt waiver and support to build their lives again

Budgets for extension of credit cards to Bhoomi heen Kisan Credit cards, that could include women farmers and tenant farmers in order to improve access to credit for marginalised, landless and leasee women farmers and their collectives.

As producers we call for

- Land purchase schemes for dalit landless women
- Long term land leases for women farmers groups at panchayat level.
- Budget outlays for MSP and for MFP working capital requirements for adivasi women
- Investments in organizing and supporting women FPO's so that minimum 30% targets are met.
- Enhanced resource allocations in Small irrigation schemes in rain fed and semi arid regions - drip, sprinkler, ground water access to schemes is imperative for rural womens wellbeing
- Incentives for traditional farming for women farmers and allocations with MGNREGS and other agriculture schemes for labour support to women farmers
- Within schemes such as the sub-mission on agricultural mechanisation (SMAM) under NMAET, the ask must be on higher allocations for drudgery reducing tools for women.

Stringent monitoring mechanisms

- Gender disaggregated data for all schemes and provisions for farmers are required to ensure that benefits accrue to women farmers
- Improvements in monitoring of allocations and utilisation of resources especially for women
- Priority and inclusion of single women, women farmers from suicide households in allocation of resources of all schemes and in access to resources

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