



FEMINIST POLICY INDIA
Transformative Policy and
Financing for Gender Equality

@policyfeminist 
feministpolicy.india@gmail.com 
<http://www.feministpolicyindia.org/> 

Reflections on the Union Budget of India 2024-25 from a gender lens August 13, 2024

Abstract

The institutionalization of the gender budget since 2004-2005 by the Government of India has been a laudable effort, especially the welcome announcement in the Union Budget 2024-2025 (UB) of the total allocation to the gender budget (GB) at INR 3,27,158.44 crore, which is a share of over 6 per cent to the total expenditure, an increase from the previous year. The Statements in the Economic Survey 2023-2024 about India transitioning from women's development to 'women-led development' with the vision of a new India, where women are equal partners in the story of growth and national progress" raises hopes further. Given this promising scenario, as part of the Feminist Policy Collective, the authors examine the Union Budget from a gender lens and share some key observations. Tackling gender inequalities in India requires a focus on GRB in a way that considers the multiple deprivations faced by women, men, non-binary persons and children across various social positions and identities. Unfortunately, our analysis finds this has not been reflected in the Union Budget and there is skepticism about the extent to which this is actually reflected in the Gender Budget Statement.

This FPC Reflection has been written by Sona Mitra, Nesar Ahmed and Jashodhara Dasgupta, with contributions from Suneeta Dhar, Jahnavi Andharia and comments by V R Raman and Aasha Kapur Mehta

GRB is not about creating separate budgets for women, it is rather meant to be a holistic approach to budgeting and taxation, wherein expenditure and revenue are both revamped to address gender-based differentials in opportunities and outcomes, including for women, men and those beyond the gender binary.

Social sector no longer a priority

There is concern that the nine priorities of the UB 2024-25 follows the philosophy of 'Viksit Bharat' and shows signs of retreating massively from the social sectors. Although Inclusive Development is mentioned, the allocations for several programmes that are aimed at inclusive growth for the economy do not show the financial commitments for achieving the targets. The UB 2024-25 tilts heavily towards the capital expenditure increases: following the trend over the last decade, the capex allocations have crossed INR 1100,000/- crore mark which includes investments in infrastructure.

Meanwhile, there is a status quo on budget allocations towards the social sectors – such as health, education, social security and very minimal increments for the annual budgets of Ministries and Departments catering to the needs of various marginalized sections of society. For example, the total health budget, despite nominal increase, has declined as a proportion of the total government expenditure from 2.3% in 2021-22 BE (budget estimates) to 2.00% in 2024-25 BE (see Chart 1 below); in

fact, even the ‘increase’ is actually a decrease of 0.67 percent if adjusted for inflation (Mukhopadhyay, 2024). As a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP), the Centre’s expenditure on health continues the trajectory of hovering around 0.3%. Instead of strengthening the public health system that serves marginalized populations, it continues to emphasize private sector partnerships and insurance-based models of healthcare delivery such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), and that continues to get a fairly substantial amount of budget each year (Chintan, 2024).

Chart 1: Share of the Health Budget (Rs crore) in the Total Union Budget (%) and GDP (%)

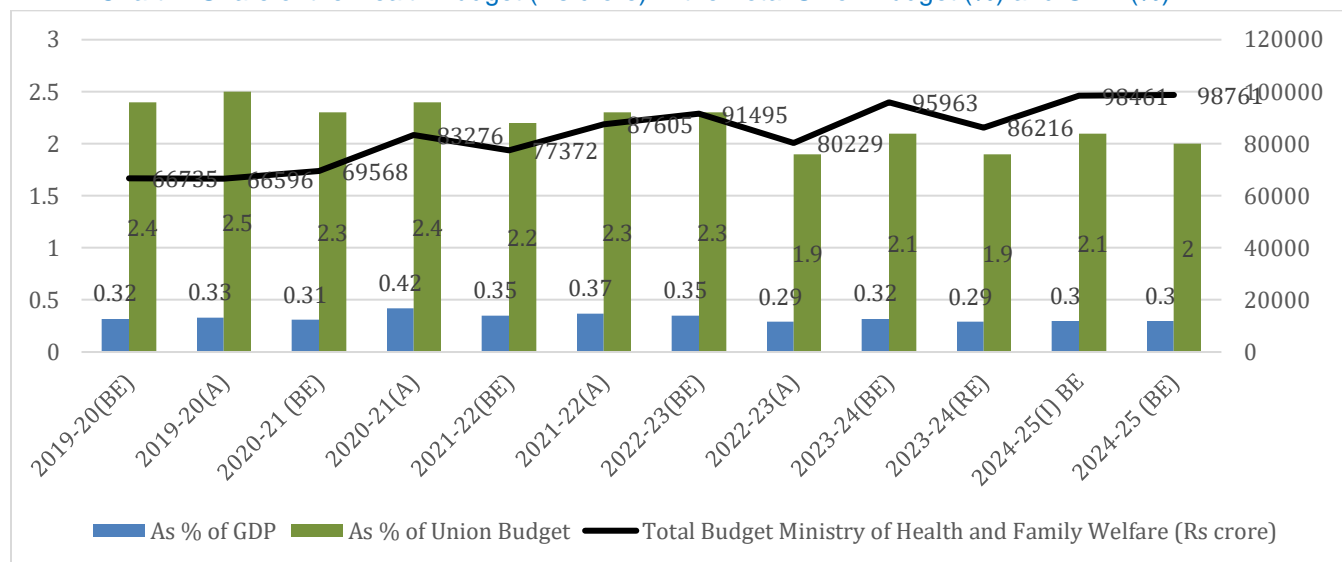


Chart 2: Union Budget Documents, various years

The budget for the Ministry of Education has indeed declined from Rs. 129718 crores in previous years RE to Rs. 120628 crores in 2024-25 BE, and the Department of Higher Education is facing a major budget cut from Rs. 57244 crores to Rs. 47620 crores as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Union Government Spending on Education (Rs crore)

	2021-22 (A)	2022-23 (A)	2023-24 BE	2023-24 RE	2024-25(I) BE	2024-25 BE
Dept. of School Education and Literacy (Rs crore)	46822	58640	68805	72474	73008	73008
Dept. of Higher Education (Rs crore)	33531	38557	44095	57244	47620	47620
Ministry of Education (Rs crore)	80352	97196	112899	129718	120628	120628

Spending on education as proportion to total budget allocation and GDP has remained stagnant for years. In fact, it has declined as a percentage of the total budget from last years’ RE to this year’s BE - from 2.9% of the total budget to 2.5% - and from 0.44% of GDP to 0.37% of GDP, as shown in Chart 2 below.

Chart 2: Trends in Education Spending by Ministry of Education

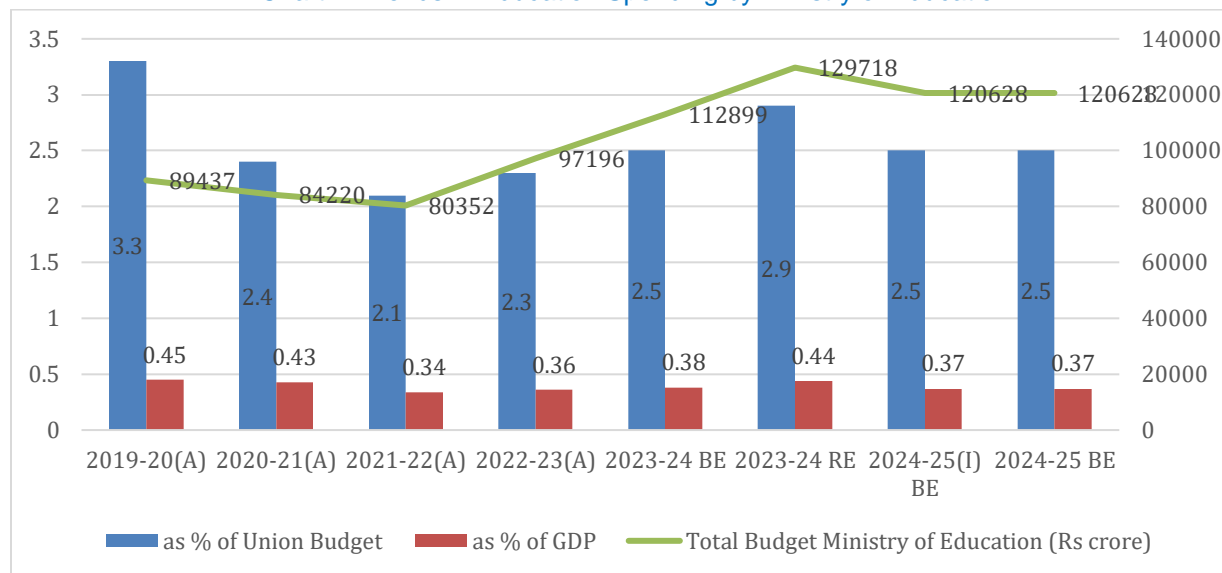


Chart 2: Union Budget Documents, various years

The major centrally sponsored schemes of the Ministry of Education like Samagra Shiksha, Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM Poshan), and Uchatar Shiksha Abhiyan have remained stagnant or seen a nominal increase in their allocations (Annexure Table).

Budgetary stagnation for social inclusion

The Union Budget has ignored the livelihood struggles of the poor, for example, the allocations for MGNREGS has consistently declined from 2022-23 actual expenditure and remained same as last year's RE (Annexure Table), even though it is critical for rural livelihoods especially for women who comprise more than half the participants availing employment through this scheme. The budget of the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment has increased by only 1.2 percent from last year, while the budget of the Department of Empowerment of People with Disabilities is the same as last year. The budget of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has increased by 4.3 percent, and the budget of the Ministry of Minority Affairs has increased by 1.3 percent. (See: Table 2)

Table 2: Budget for Ministries/Departments for the marginalized sections (Rs. Crores)

Ministry/Dept.	2021-22 (BE)	2021-22 (AE)	2022-23 (BE)	2022-23 (AE)	2023-24 (BE)	2023-24 (RE)	2024-25 (BE)	2024-25 BE incr. over 2023-24 BE (%)
Dept. of Soc. Justice and Empowerment (MSJE)	10517.62	7435.22	11922.51	7413.76	12847.02	9853.32	13000.2	1.19

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Dept. of Empowerment of People With Disabilities (MSJE)	1171.77	1007.14	1212.42	985.58	1225.15	1225.01	1225.27	0.01
Ministry of Tribal Affairs	7524.87	6173.97	8451.92	7273.53	12461.88	7605	13000	4.32
Ministry of Minority Affairs	4810.77	4323.63	5020.5	802.69	3097.6	2608.93	3138.24	1.31
Ministry of Women and Child Development	24435	21654.57	25172.28	23994.05	25448.75	25448.68	26092.19	2.53

Source: Union Budget, various years

The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment focusing on the most marginalized communities, has seen a meager increase of only around INR 100 crores for the central sector schemes of the Department. The budget for the Umbrella Scheme for Development of Scheduled Castes and Umbrella Scheme for Development of other vulnerable groups as well as for the Scheme for Economic Empowerment of Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities (SEED) remained almost the same as the previous year (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, n.d.). Schemes like Pradhan Mantri Jan Jatiya Vikas Mission and Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojna (earlier Special Central Assistance to tribal sub scheme) faced budget cuts as compared to last year's budget (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, n.d.).

The budget for the National Fellowship and Scholarship for Higher Education of ST students has declined from last year's revised estimate (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, n.d.); similarly the overall budget for educational empowerment by the Ministry of Minority Affairs has declined from INR 1689 crores to INR 1575 crores. The total budget for the central sector schemes of the Ministry of Minority Affairs too declined, while the budget for centrally sponsored schemes of the Ministry remained almost the same as in previous years (Ministry of Minority Affairs, n.d.). Thus, the budget provides limited or no relief to communities facing multiple deprivations with inevitable adverse impacts on women from these communities. Perhaps the only positive news is that the total budget for the Comprehensive Rehabilitation for Welfare of Transgender Persons which was INR 52 crores in 2023-24, has been enhanced to INR 68 crores, which gives hope to empowerment of the community that remains on the margins of society.

Ministry of Women and Child Development: Lower down in Priority

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) is responsible for crucial schemes around nutrition, maternal entitlements, childcare provisioning, women's safety, and so on. Quite contrary to the claims about women-led development, the proportion of allocations for MWCD in 2024-25 has been the lowest in recent years, which is absolutely alarming and there is an urgent need as well to assess reasons for underutilization of funds, and the implementation challenges faced, as well as the financing constraints that have resulted in this declining trend. There has been a steady decline in the total allocations to MWCD over the last five years, and given 'women-led development', it is surprising that the budget of MWCD has increased by a mere 2.5 percent only.

Due to subsuming of schemes under SAMBAL and SAMARTHYA, tracking allocations to individual schemes has been difficult. The combined allocations to both have hovered around INR 3000 crore or less over the past few years. There also has been a considerable underutilization of funds especially under SAMBAL, which includes One Stop Centres, Women’s Helpline and Mahila Police Volunteer (CBGA, 2024). A similar story is seen in the context of the Nirbhaya Fund. The budgetary allocation to the Nirbhaya Fund has been doubled, from 100 crore in FY24 to 200 crore in FY25; the budgetary allocation for all schemes for the safety of women is 1,105 crore. This is for combating violence against women and for implementing measures that provide protection and support. However, according to MWCD (2023), only 70% of the INR 7,212 crore allocated to the Nirbhaya Fund has been utilized with a major chunk being allocated for surveillance- related projects, such as the emergency response system (112), and for central victim compensation, safe city projects, and fast track courts. Multi-sector services for diverse women survivors of gender based violence where the demand is high needs urgent attention. As does intensive efforts to prevent gender based violence and ensure effective implementation of the Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Act for all women workers - including informal sector and agricultural workers. Creating safe work spaces free of harassment, micro-aggression and bullying are crucial for women workers to work with dignity. Structural barriers that prevent them from participating meaningfully in the economy on an equal footing, needs to be addressed on an immediate basis. (See: Chart 3)

Chart 3: Allocations to MWCD and its share in total expenditure

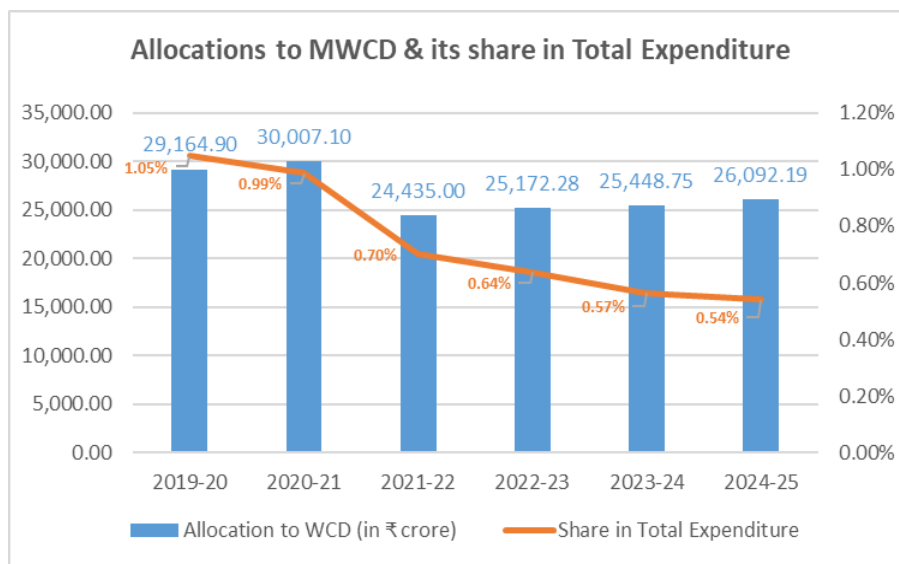


Chart 3: Trends in total allocations to the MWCD & its share in the total expenditure (Calculations done using Budget Estimates provided in Union Budget documents)

The allocation to the other key schemes under MWCD- Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0 - is INR 21523 crore, lower than the 2023-24 revised estimates. This further indicates a very low likelihood of revision in the honorariums for Anganwadi workers (AWWs), which have not changed since 2018 (Sinha, 2024). Despite nationwide protests by workers, the Union Government seems to have shifted the onus of enhancing the wages onto the state governments, leaving workers of resource-starved states with very little hope in sight. The government however, has extended the health insurance under Ayushman Bharat to AWWs, helpers and ASHA workers. The effective implementation and actual benefits flowing to the workers under this extended coverage remains to be seen.

Incidentally, the umbrella program SAMARTHYA, which includes maternity benefits under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), Working Women’s Hostels, PALNA (National Creche Scheme) has seen a dip in allocations from INR 2582 crore to INR 2517 crore. Given that SAMARTHYA comprises key schemes including maternity entitlements and provisioning of childcare facilities, the budgetary allocations do not seem to adequately reflect the government’s intent to effectively facilitate women’s economic participation. The Finance Minister’s speech though mentioned the intent to: “facilitate higher participation of women in the workforce through setting up of working women hostels in collaboration with industry, and establishing creches. In addition, the partnership will seek to organize women-specific skilling programmes, and promotion of market access for women SHG enterprises.”

Gender Budget 2024-25

This year in a welcome step, the GB statement has included a part C that adds allocations for pro-women programmes that are less than 30% of the total allocations. This makes the GB statement a three-part statement – a practice emulated from states that are in the advanced stages of using and implementing GB as a tool for achieving gender equality. In its current format the GB statement comprises three parts - A, B and C. Part A includes schemes with 100% provision for women, Part B comprises schemes between 30% to 99% allocations for women, and Part C allocations for women up to 30%. There has also been an inclusion of more Ministries and Departments reporting in the GBS. The share of GB to total expenditure stands at 6.79%¹ which is a welcome increase from last year’s 5.3%, when compared between BE 2023-24 and BE 2024-25. (See: Chart 4)

Chart 4: Total Gender Budget and its Share in Union Budget

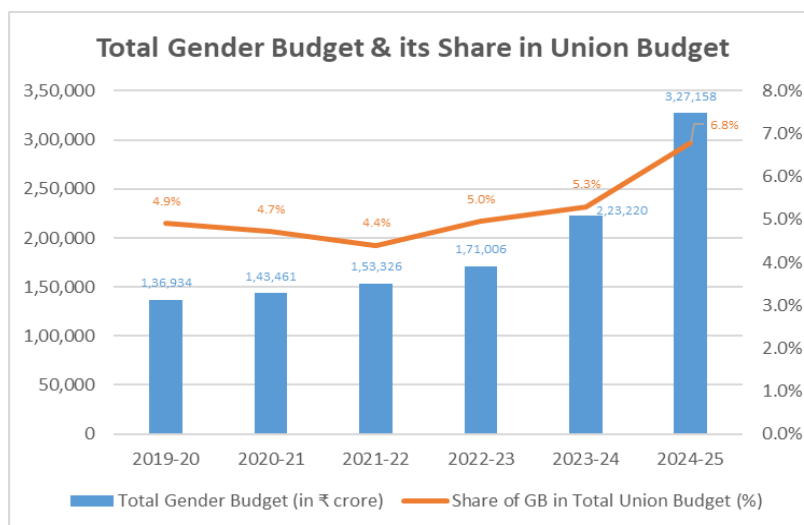


Chart 4: Trends in total allocations to Gender Budget and its share in the Total Expenditure over last six fiscal years (Calculations done using Budget Estimates provided in Union Budget documents)

The increases in Part A are initially puzzling, as the allocations to MWCD that implements schemes with 100% provision for women, has seen the lowest proportion of increase in budget allocations since the last few years. In fact, the GB statement also becomes difficult to compare across the years, as important programmes of MWCD - SAMARTHYA and SAMBAL have changes in their composition and number of programmes that are included within the broad umbrellas associated directly with women’s empowerment. However, upon closer examination, what emerges is that the increase in this year’s GB comes from an increase in the allocations reported in Part A of the GB statement. This is a trend that has

continued from last year, and the increase in allocations are driven largely by increased allocations for the PM Awas Yojana (PMAY) - both rural and urban.

Additionally, this year the government has introduced Part C of the gender budget, in which schemes with less than 30% allocation for women have been listed. Part C this year has mentioned just one scheme: Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) in which, Rs. 15,000 crores (25% of the total allocation for the scheme) is reported to be for women. As we know the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) is an ownership-linked scheme and only land-owning farmers can access its benefits. Since only 14% women farmers own land, the 25% allocation to gender budget under the scheme is therefore a welcome development.

However, despite having a Part C, the demand for having in place a rationale (explanations) for allocations reported in all three parts in the GB statement continues to be absent. This gives rise to certain discrepancies in allocations reported under the GB statement in both Part A and B which has been explained in the following section. (See: Chart 5)

Reporting of allocations in GB statement needs clear explanations

Chart 5: Trends in total allocations under Part A and its share in the Total Gender Budget

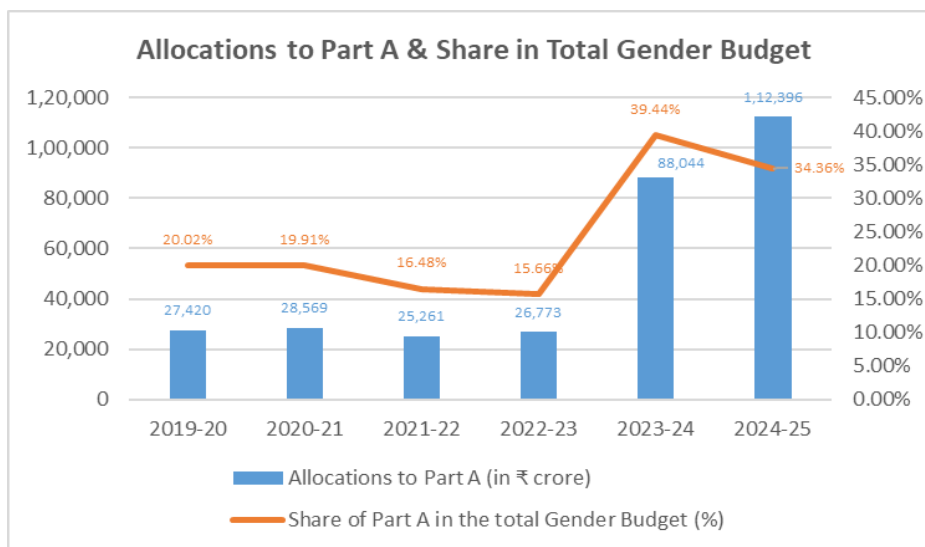


Chart 5: Trends in total allocations under Part A and its share in the Total Gender Budget over last six fiscal years (Calculations done using Budget Estimates provided in Union Budget documents)

Over the years, allocations under Part A have remained below 20% until FY24. Part A allocations have risen from INR 88,044.21 crore in 2023-24 to INR 112,396.15 crore this fiscal year – an increase of 27.6 per cent. However, majority of the Part A allocation comes from the rural and urban housing schemes, that accounts for INR 80,670 crore of the gender budget: this reporting of PMAY entirely in part A raises questions. While the rural housing scheme was always categorized under Part A, the urban housing scheme was accounted for in Part B until FY23. In the 2023-24 gender budget, the urban housing scheme was also reported under Part A, which explains the sharp jump in Part A share to 39%. Experts have long argued that classification of housing schemes under Part A is inaccurate, as the benefits of the scheme are not only borne by women. Moreover, as per government data, only 69.1% of the houses

under PMAY-G were in the name of women - solely or jointly. Yet it shows up and drives the increments in Part A.

Similarly, while the DAY-National Rural Livelihood Mission - Aajeevika of the Ministry of Rural Development was under Part-B of the gender budget in previous years, this year it has been reported under Part-A. As DAY-NRLM Aajeevika is a scheme that does not only target women, the reporting of the entire quantum allocated to the scheme (INR 15,047 crore) in the Gender Budget Statement is misleading and erroneously bumps up the gender budget. Therefore, it is important to note that while the share of Part A and the total size of it might have increased over the last two years, it does not necessarily indicate an increase in allocations to women, but rather a change in the computation process.

Unexplained allocations in Part B of GB statement

The inclusion of the Jal Jeevan Mission in the GBS under Part B is a welcome addition as provisioning of tapped water has a direct link to women's unpaid work. Of the total budget for the scheme, INR 34,162 crore has been reported in the GBS which is nearly half of the total scheme budget. However, since there are no explanatory notes detailing how these figures were arrived at, there is no way to ascertain how this spending benefits women. In the same vein, the Ministry of Power has reported INR 4000 crore under Part B, primarily due to the Reform Linked Distribution Scheme and the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy has reported INR 6598 crores in Part B - without providing an explanation on which part of it is spent on pro-women programmes. Thus, the gender budget appears to be made up of schemes wherein the extent of their benefits to women are unclear.

Again, the anomalies have also been observed in non-reporting. As per the allocations by the Ministry of Finance, 69% of the loans under PM MUDRA Yojana have been sanctioned for women, and 84% of the total loans sanctioned under Stand-Up India have also been given to women. However, these schemes have not been reported in the GBS.

Conclusion

Experts have maintained that the Gender Budget Statement is only one part of the Gender Responsive Budgeting exercise. The primary intent of such a policy tool is to mainstream gender concerns across Ministries and Departments and not treat it as the sole mandate of the MWCD. GRB must be based on data and evidence – there is a need to promote the collection, aggregation, and transparent dissemination of disaggregated data on beneficiaries to obtain insights into gender disparities across sectors, so as to guide targeted interventions and policy formulation.

While the inclusion of Part C in the GBS this year, along with inclusion of newer Ministries is a positive sign, a lot needs to be done to deepen the GRB exercise in India. For instance, there are lacunae within the GBS itself, with limited information on the rationale for reporting of certain schemes. Adding explanatory notes as done by the GBS of some of the state governments will add more transparency to the reported numbers. Similarly, reporting of allocations for transgender persons is also key to making the process more inclusive.

Given the promise of women-led development, policy initiatives that truly facilitate women's participation must be encouraged and provided necessary budgetary provisions. In this context, valuing the care economy as promised in the G20 commitments needs to translate into policies and actions on ground. Budgetary allocations should target and alleviate work conditions of women across various sectors and work categories, including women in agriculture, informal workers and women in small enterprises. The

focus should also be on addressing violence against women and creating gender sensitive infrastructure to reduce the care burden on women. This would include providing publicly funded childcare facilities, reducing the drudgery of unpaid work through clean fuel, piped water and uninterrupted electricity supply, as well as valuing the paid care workers - ASHA, Anganwadi workers & helpers - supporting them with social security and decent work conditions including fair wages. Without a clear plan to address some of these critical priority areas that are integral for gender-transformative growth, the promise of women-led development would continue to remain an elusive idea.

Note

1 This includes Part C where there is a reported allocation of INR 15,000 crores under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) scheme of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare. If we exclude the new part allocations from the GB, the share stands at 6.45%

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Annexure Table:

Allocation to Selected Centrally Sponsored Schemes and Central Sector Schemes (Rs. Crores)

		2022-23 AE	2023-24 BE	2023-24 RE	2024-25 BE
1	Rashtriya Krish Vikas Yojana (RKVY)	5247	7150	6150	7553
2	Krishionnati Yojana	4716	7066	6378	7447
3	Samagra Shiksha	32515	37453	3f3000	37500
4	Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN) (MDM)	12681	11600	10000	12467
5	Pradhan Mantri Uchcharat Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA) (Earlier name-RUSA up to RE 2023-24)	361	1500	500	1815
6	Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)	1168	2000	1500	2352
7	Flexible Pool for RCH & Health System Strengthening, National Health Programme and National Urban Health Mission	24176	22095	23331	28783
8	Infrastructure Maintenance (Department of Health and Family Welfare)	6928	6798	7980	7000
9	Ayushman Bharat- Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY)	6186	7200	6800	7300
10	Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PMABHIM)	1228	4200	2100	3200
12	Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) – Urban	28653	25103	22103	30171
13	AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation)	6500	8000	5200	8000
14	Smart Cities Mission	8653	8000	8000	2400
15	National Urban Digital Mission (NUDM)	0	0	0	1150
16	Sawachh Bharat Mission (SBM)- Urban	1926	5000	2550	5000
17	Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojna	5637	8587	7031	9339
18	Jal Jeevan Mission (KKM/National Rural Drinking Water Mission)	54700	70000	70000	70163
19	Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin)	4925	7192	70000	7192
20	Nation Social Assistance programme	9651	9636	9652	9652
21	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme	90806	60000	86000	86000
22	Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna	18783	19000	17000	19000

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23	Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihood Mission- Ajeevika	11536	14129	14129	15047
24	Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojan (PMAY) – Rural	44962	54487	32000	54500
25	Post Matric Scholarship for SCs	4393	6359	5400	6360
26	Pradhan Mantri Anusuchit Jaati Abhyuday Yojana (PM AJAY)	164	2050	450	2140
27	Programme for Development of Scheduled Tribes (PM Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojna)	3830	4295	3286	4300
28	Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0 (Umbrella ICDS- Anganwadi Services)	19876	20554	21523	21200
29	Mission VATSALYA (Child Protection Services and Child Welfare Services)	1043	1472	1272	1472
30	Mission Sakti (Mission for Protection and Empowerment for Women)	2340	3144	2326	3146
31	Crop Insurance Scheme	10296	13625	15000	14600
32	Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan)	58254	60000	60000	60000
33	Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNT/NT/SNTs (SEED)	2.82	40.40	15.00	39.40