



# Feminist Policy Manifesto

*The following **Manifesto** was developed around a **National Consultation on Transformative Financing for Gender Equality** (11-12 February 2019) which was attended by over 70 participants from 15 states in addition to Delhi, including representatives of government, UN, research and academic institutions, lawyers and civil society organizations. The Manifesto has been drafted by a group of concerned feminists towards promoting transformative financing to ensure gender equality.*

The persistence of gender inequalities in all socio-economic indicators and the alarming incidence of exploitation, oppression and discrimination faced by women in India through their lifecycle highlights an urgent need for substantive measures by national and state governments as well as all political parties of all hues. This '**Feminist Policy Collective**' is therefore putting forward the following demands based on substantial and undisputed evidence of gender inequalities across all sectors.

## I. Strengthen the institutional architecture to support gender equality and advance women's rights

- a. **Separate Ministries and Departments of Women and Children:** The existing institutional set up for addressing issues related to women and children within the same administrative umbrella actually results in invisibility of the differential resources allocated within these agencies to women and children. The overall resources for delivering women-specific schemes are often limited in scale and scope. To address this, separate departments/ ministries to deliver and monitor programs for women may more effectively address women's needs, interests and priority concerns. At the same time, the draft National Policy on Women (2016) needs to ensure convergence and collaboration with other development sectors and ministries such as transport, education, urban development, finance, health, agriculture, environment, human resource development, labour and skill and information and broadcasting. Future schemes for women need to envision futurist goals and move towards empowering women and transgender rights within the constitutional framework. The role of the Commissions for Women also needs to be revisited.
- b. **Create and legitimize platforms to include feminist voices in planning processes at all levels of governance:** Institutional processes for planning, budgeting and implementation for governance can be strengthened by the participation of women and gender rights groups. Mainstreaming of gender in budgeting and for planning, legislation, policies and programs across sectors will lead to gender sensitive needs-based planning, monitoring and bridge gaps in the implementation of programmes for women.
- c. **Strengthen Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) and re-design the Gender Budget Statement (GBS):** To a large extent, the impact and implementation of the GRB has generally been limited due to over emphasis on the quantification of resources allocated to women through gender budget statements rather than a focus on outcomes and what impacts the lives of women and men. The GRB efforts have been weak due to inadequate allocations, underutilization of funds, and lack of evidence and data due to insufficient monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Reporting of GBS to include both quantitative and qualitative information on allocations and interventions can enable an informed

understanding of gaps and challenges. There is an urgent need to improve transparency in budgetary allocations and introduce mechanisms for evaluation. The methodology for resource distribution can also be made more robust by the inclusion of indicators like the Gender Equality Attainment Scale. In each Union Ministry, processes for GRB could be strengthened by focusing on:

- Strengthening Gender Budget Cells (the mandate for GRB Cells has remained unfunded);
- Commissioning a situational analysis from a gender and rights lens in the sector or sub sector being focused upon; and,
- Facilitating the generation of gender (and other social groups) disaggregated data on beneficiaries or a benefit incidence analysis from a gender lens.

## II. End violence against women

Violence against women, both in the public and private sphere, has been a long-standing and increasing challenge. Government programmes such as, helplines, one stop centres, shelter homes and compensation for survivors of violence are woefully inadequate and have not reached every district/community. There is an urgent need to review and support mechanisms under the Nirbhaya Fund. None of the existing programmes challenge the systemic causes of violence against women, especially against the most marginalized.

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**Our demand:** The approach must move beyond strengthening law and order and focus on prevention, education (from school onwards), strengthening community-based services, skill development, employment and support women's agency and dignity.

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## III. Address barriers to women's economic rights and empowerment

Declining rates of women's labour force participation, currently as low as 27%, have concerned policymakers. Over 90% of all work is in informal economy and women have the largest share, with low wages and lack of social protection. Women earn about 50-75% of what men earn. Time poverty and drudgery of work for women, however, does not seem to be getting any less. Moreover, women's access to and control over economic resources, be it technology, land, or finance, remains marginal. In short, norms that exist within families, communities and social institutions, such as gendered division of labor, women's lack of voice, experience of violence and control over their mobility, permeate into markets and public policy, and remain unaddressed due to the absence of gender-responsive voices in economic policymaking accompanied by inadequate financing.

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**Our demand:** Revisiting the design, investments and outcomes from policies and programs on women's economic empowerment, should be an urgent priority for the government.

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## IV. Enable representation of women in political processes

Women's agency and leadership can be strengthened by ensuring representation of women in all political decision-making and in all matters of governance. Even as the 73rd and 74th amendments facilitated participation of women in rural and urban local bodies, women continue to be marginalized in the political sphere, especially within the legislative bodies at state and national levels.

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**Our demand:** Passing the Women's Reservation Bill is an urgent and immediate demand from women's groups and represents a commitment towards women's empowerment and increasing their influencing on policies and decision-making.

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## V. Strengthen health and nutrition interventions for women

The National Health Mission's (NHM) Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) program has been an important step towards ensuring women's health. However, it has reduced women's health issues to reproductive health, with little recognition of other health concerns that affect women, such as mental health issues, cervical and breast cancer, to name a few. A significant proportion of women continue to be undernourished and anemic, which affects their overall health, maternal health outcomes and their productivity. Government interventions that focus on improving the nutritional status of only pregnant and lactating mothers and children, fail to adopt a lifecycle approach. Growing focus on social insurance, rather than on universal health coverage, will continue to damage the access and rights of the most marginalized. India's changing demographics and longer life spans, including increasing numbers of older women and categories of single women need to be factored into health policy making.

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**Our demand:** Budgetary outlays for the health sector have been chronically low and urgent increases to at least 2.5% of the GDP are needed, especially on revamping and uplifting the public health infrastructure.

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## VI. Ensure rights and gender equality in agriculture and climate change

'Feminization' of agriculture and of the non-farm rural sector is growing, yet women remain invisible in the discourses on the agrarian crisis. Women rarely own land or assets and as a result, their access to credit, government subsidies and schemes is restricted. Wage differences between women and men for agricultural labor show marked differences, and women most often are not even recognized as farmers, and their work in the fields seen as an extension of the household work. Increasing evidence on the disproportionate impacts of climate change for women and a direct bearing on responsibilities carried out by women needs recognition.

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### Our demand:

- a) Concrete measures need to be taken to mainstream gender in all programs such as recognition and incentives for their labor, universal social protection, access to and control over land, water and forest resources, as well as finance and technology.
  - b) Regions with high rates of farmer suicides need urgent investments in counseling and supportive services for women farmers.
  - c) Finally, gender concerns must be mainstreamed in the climate discourse with specific policy efforts to enhance the adaptive capacities of poor and marginalized sections of women to cope with the uncertain climate vulnerabilities, including support for traditional ecologically sustainable practices.
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## VII. Ensuring gender inclusive and gender responsive urbanization

Women's aspirations have largely been excluded from the processes of urbanization, even as it is well-acknowledged that rapid urbanization has impacted women's lives in many ways. Female citizens face a larger share of urban challenges, particularly related to poverty, inadequate housing, water and sanitation and safety and violence. Lack of a gender lens in infrastructure development in housing, transport and public spaces leads to structural inequalities and violence against women. The recently launched Smart Cities Mission proposals have not adopted a gender sensitive or responsive approach; few proposals mention women's rights as equal citizens, and fewer still seek to understand the diverse needs of women.

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**Our demand:** Creating avenues for participation of women's rights groups in the planning, execution and evaluation of urban development programs and budgets can ensure that physical and social infrastructure is gender responsive and allows women to benefit from the opportunities of the Indian urban futures.

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## VIII. Engendering the macroeconomic and financial architecture

Patriarchy is a macroeconomic construct, and unless this is recognized, no intervention to enhance gender equality can succeed.

- a. **Increasing public provisioning of services for women and reducing barriers such as user fee in sectors of transport, energy, health, nutrition, sanitation and education:** Public provisioning of social sectors has been declining, and combined with falling subsidies and rising user fees has led to exclusion of women from almost all avenues of development, e.g. employment, schooling, public transport, mobility, nutrition, clean energy, health access, etc. Shrinking public provisioning of services and increasing out of pocket costs not only impedes women's labour force participation but also infringes on their right to full participation as citizens.
- b. **Improving gender sensitivity in fiscal policies, particularly in the design and implementation of taxation policies:** The design of the Goods & Services Tax as well as its introduction and manner of implementation has been gender-insensitive, especially in its choice of commodities and the rates applicable of particularly those that poor households are dependent upon. Also, women's economic empowerment in the formal economy will be boosted by the re-introduction of the Standard Tax Exemption for women, and that too at an amount higher than the erstwhile Rs.10,000.
- c. **Redefining the category of 'single' women in administrative and data systems, and addressing discriminations faced by 'single' women and female headed households:** Greater recognition to the changing demographic landscape with increasing lifespans and gender transformative conceptualisation of 'single women' and 'female headed households' is urgently needed to be amalgamated in administrative and public data systems which can then be used for resource allocations. Identifying instruments of exclusion as well as conditionalities that disadvantage these populations from social services or lead to discriminations in matters of law and policy need to be urgently addressed.