

Public Investment  
Towards Promoting  
Women's Livelihoods:  
An Assessment

2014



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# Public Investment Towards Promoting Women's Livelihoods: An Assessment<sup>1</sup>

Creation of employment and livelihood opportunities has been recognised in national policies and programmes as an important instrument to promote gender equality. Consequently, efforts towards strengthening women's participation in the economy have focused on ensuring equal remuneration for women, creation of livelihood opportunities through wage employment programmes, ensuring conducive working conditions, and promoting entrepreneurship development. However, despite these efforts women's participation in the sphere of livelihoods is marked by sharp gender based inequities, reflected in gaps in male and female labour force participation and economic participation rates in the country. Additionally, gender based disparities in employment are also reflected in the wage differentials; female wages constitute only 61 percent and 69 percent of male wages, in urban and rural areas respectively, for casual employment (Mitra 2014). Moreover, over 90 percent of women are engaged in informal sector activities that pay poorly, are not protected by labour laws, often have dismal working conditions and are vulnerable to insecurity of employment.

An important dimension of women's labour is also the invisibilisation of the unpaid work of women, which includes both subsistence activities, as well as care work. This labour of women, which does not receive any monetary rewards, is not accounted for in statistics on income and labour force. Despite most women being engaged in some kind of productive or reproductive work, it is possible that women could be fully employed and yet be poor in absolute terms. Hence, it is not simply creating access to employment or livelihoods but also the quality, recognition, remuneration of women's work as well as the conditions facilitating it that determine the economic circumstances of women; these, in turn, are influenced by broader economic policies and government interventions (Ghosh 2007).

It follows then that a gender neutral macro-economic framework, and the resultant monetary and fiscal policies, would fail to account for their differential impact on gender relations in society. In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyse the gender responsiveness of fiscal

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented by the authors at an International Conference on 'Labouring Women: Some Major Concerns at the Current Juncture' organised by Jawaharlal Nehru University in association with Indian Council for Social Science Research- Northern Regional Centre, Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability and UN Women on 31 July – 1 August, 2014

policy and the manner in which the fiscal policy has impacted government interventions in sectors and programmes that have a bearing on women's livelihoods and employment. More specifically, it analyses the implementation of the strategy of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) in some of the programmes in this domain. An important dimension of women's employment pertains to their engagement as service providers in government schemes. Accordingly, the paper also outlines key concerns with women's engagement as service providers in some flagship programmes of the Government of India.

The paper is structured in three sections. It begins with a discussion on the magnitude of overall public spending in India, arguing that the fiscal policy in the country has been rather constrained, owing primarily to a low tax-GDP ratio. It argues that in view of women's higher dependence on public provisioning of essential services, limited government spending, especially on social sectors, is likely to have a disproportionately adverse impact on them. This also has implications for the employment opportunities and unpaid care work performed by women. The second section discusses the need for gender responsive budgeting and highlights the efforts at GRB by the Union Government in two important sectors pertaining to women's livelihoods, i.e., agriculture and public works (i.e. MGNREGA). The third section briefly outlines key concerns with women's engagement as service providers in some flagship programmes of the Government of India. It highlights the excessive reliance on under-paid labour of women, for implementation of these programmes.

# I. Public Spending on Social Sectors and Implications for Women's Livelihoods

A discussion on the fiscal policy of the country is necessary as the fiscal space available to the government determines the scope of its interventions both, directly for women's livelihoods as well as in critical social sectors, such as education and health, which have a bearing on women's engagement in productive work as well as the unpaid work of women. The following section argues that women's dependence on public provisioning of essential services is higher than that of men. Hence, the low magnitudes of public investment in these sectors, an outcome of the low tax- GDP ratio, has implications not only for the overall well-being of women, but also specifically for their livelihood and employment.

**Greater dependence of women on public provisioning of essential services:** Women's dependence on publically provided essential services, especially in social sectors, tends to be higher than that of men. Accordingly, deficiencies in these services, as a result of inadequate public spending are likely to have a disproportionately adverse impact on women's labour. For instance, Agarwal (2001) observes that "access to public health facilities, sanitation, safe drinking water are not only general issues they also have a gender specificity in that women are affected not only by their own ill-health but also, as the principal care givers, by that of their families." This becomes clearer on a closer examination of women's reliance on public provisioning of other services.

It is observed that the dependence of women on public provisioning of healthcare services is high. An under-funded, weak public health system has both direct and indirect implications for women. For instance, CES (2009) data shows that even now, women depend more on government hospitals for deliveries. A weak public healthcare system also increases the dependence of households on private medical health facilities. Given the patriarchal nature of familial relations in most households, the higher costs associated with private healthcare are likely to restrict women's access to healthcare facilities. Moreover, women also have to bear the additional burden of care-giving in situations where a family member falls unwell and requires additional care.

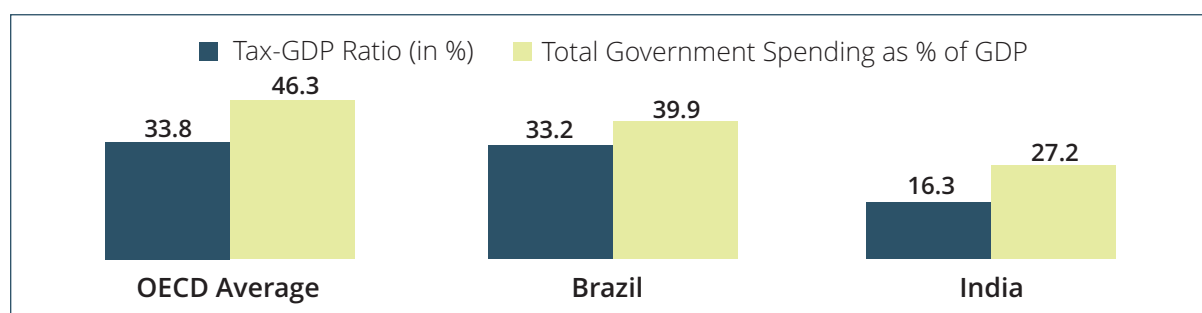


Similarly, in education, an important pre-condition to employment opportunities, especially, in the formal sector, it has been observed that the girls depend more on government institutions as compared to boys. This is reflected in the higher enrolment rates of girl children in government schools, as compared to boys. This, in part, is attributable to the preference by the families to send the boys to private schools, as they are perceived to be providing better education than government schools. According to PROBE Revisited (2006), many parents are still unwilling to invest in girls' education due to patriarchal beliefs. Generally, parents prefer to send their sons to private schools whereas the girl child is sent to government schools (Prasad et al, 2013 and Dubochet, 2013). Noting that, "If a choice has to be made between sending a boy or a girl to school, the boy will usually be given precedence", UNICEF emphasises that "most vulnerable children and girls are first to be affected when education budgets shrink."

Even in the domain of livelihoods, it has been witnessed that the participation of women in government's employment generation schemes has been higher than men. Two of the biggest flagship schemes of the Government of India: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) (for providing wage employment in rural areas) and *Ajeevika* (for promoting self-employment through Self-Help Groups) have seen high rates of participation by women. During 2013-14, a total of 2.90 crore households were provided employment under MGNREGA, with women making up 56 percent of the beneficiaries (up to September, 2013). The person-days employment for women is well above the stipulation of one-third as per the Act. Similarly under *Ajeevika*, women constitute more than 50 percent of beneficiaries.

As noted previously, social sectors like health and education are intricately linked with women's livelihoods and labour, both directly and indirectly. Not only do these sectors have a strong bearing on factors such as human capital and employment avenues, which enhance livelihood opportunities available to women, women's high dependence on them, also calls for an analysis of the adequacy of public spending on social sectors. A close look at the quantum of government expenditure on these sectors reflects that the restricted fiscal policy followed in India over the last few decades, has had an adverse effect on public investment in critical social sectors. The overall public investment in India has been low, both in absolute terms as well as in comparison to some other countries, owing mainly to the low tax-GDP ratio in India (See chart 1 and tables 1 and 2). This has resulted in low magnitude of resources available with the government for expenditure. Government expenditure in India, as a proportion of GDP has remained almost stagnant at around 27 percent, from 2001 till 2012 (see table 1). This is much lower than the ratio for most BRICSAM countries; i.e. 40 percent for Brazil, 33 percent for South Africa and 38 percent for Russia during the same period. This, in turn, has resulted in low public investment in social sectors, adversely impacting both the quality and coverage of publicly provided essential services in the country.

**Chart 1: Tax-GDP Ratio and Total Government Spending to GDP Ratio in 2010: India, Brazil and OECD Average**



Note: Figures as of 2010

Source: Compiled by CBGA from (i) IMF (2014), "World Economic Outlook - Recovery Strengthens, Remains Uneven", April 2014 (ii) OECD (2014), OECD Factbook 2014: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics, OECD Publishing (iii) Government of India (2013), "Indian Public Finance Statistics 2012-13", Ministry of Finance.

**Table 1: Total Government Expenditure to GDP Ratio for BRICSAM Countries**

Country / Year	2001	2006	2011	2012
Brazil	36.1	38.0	39.2	40.4
Russia	33.7	31.1	35.9	37.5
India	26.8	26.5	26.7	26.9
China	17.9	18.9	23.9	24.8
South Africa	25.9	28.2	31.9	32.6
Mexico	21.2	22.6	26.3	27.2

Source: Compiled by Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA) from International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, April 2014

**Table 2: Per Capita Government Expenditure: India, Other BRICS Countries and OECD Average**

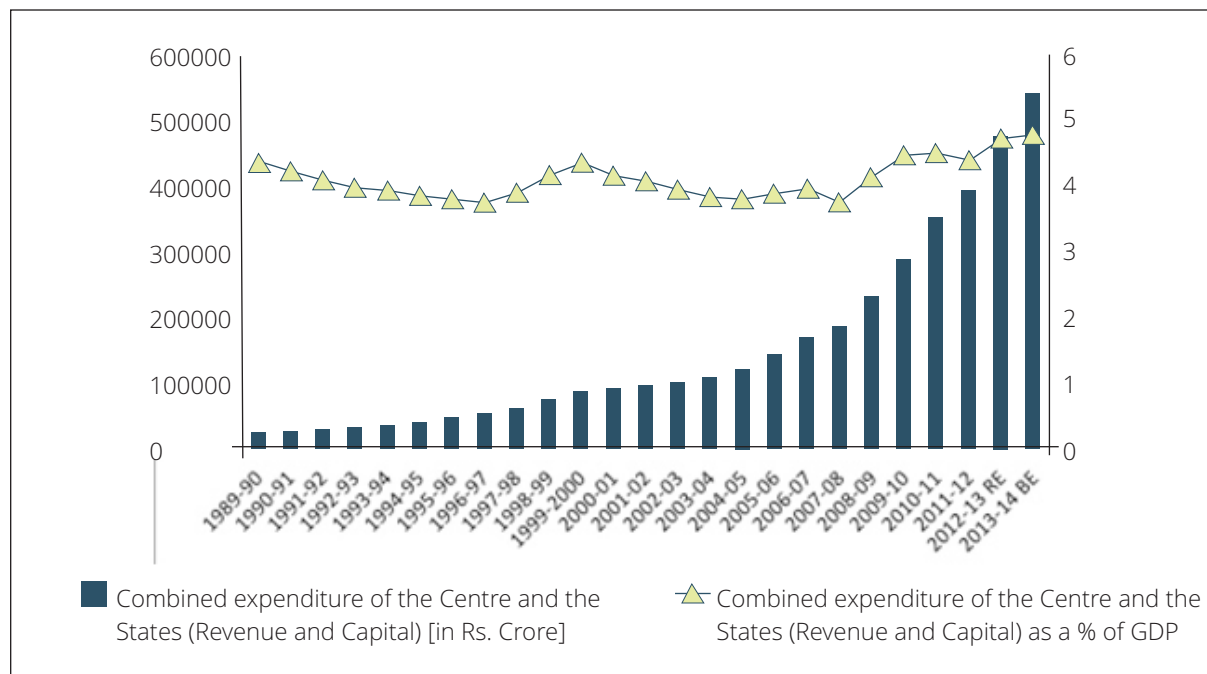
	General Govt. Expenditure Per Capita (in US dollars, at current prices and PPPs)	
	2001	2011
OECD Average	10716	16548
Russia	3395	7917
Brazil	2638	4564
South Africa	1784	3537
China	469	2004
India	422	997

Source: Compiled by Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA) from OECD (2014), "General government expenditures and revenues per capita", in OECD Fact book 2014: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics



**Low Public Spending on Social Sectors:** Both the Union Government and state governments spend on social sectors, with states making up a major part of the public spending on these sectors. Union Government's spending on social services was merely 1.9 percent of GDP in 2012-13 (BE) and has not crossed 2 percent of the GDP in any year since 2004-05. However, spending by states on social sectors has also not been very substantial. Chart 2 shows the combined expenditure by the Centre and states on some of the critical social sectors both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the GDP. Though in absolute terms there has been a consistent increase in government spending on these critical sectors, as a proportion of GDP, there has not been a significant increase. From 1989 to 2013-14 (BE), the combined expenditure by Centre and states on these has consistently remained below 5 percent of GDP (see Chart 2).

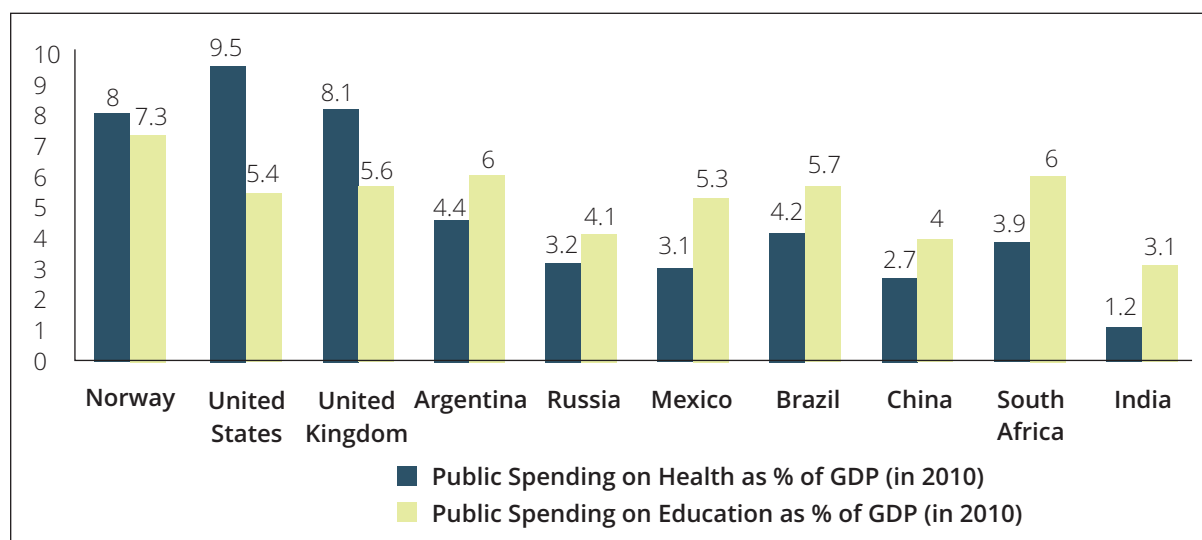
**Chart 2: Combined Expenditure of the Centre and States on Education, Family Welfare, Medical & Public Health, and Water Supply & Sanitation**



Note: Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is at Current Prices and Market Prices, with base year 2004-05.  
 Source: Compiled by Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA) from the Indian Public Finance Statistics, various years; Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Government of India & Central Statistical Organisation, Ministry of Statistical Planning and Implementation, Government of India

Looking specifically at education and health sectors, analysis reveals India's public spending on both health and education as a proportion of GDP is way below that of several developed and developing countries (in 2010) (see chart 3).

**Chart 3: Comparison of Public Spending on Health and Education as a proportion of the GDP for select countries**



Note: \* This figure for China is based on UNESCO Data and not the source cited below.

Source: Compiled by Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA) from UNDP (2013), "Human Development Report 2013"

Inadequate public spending on social sectors has constrained the effectiveness of government interventions in these sectors. This is reflected in both the quality and coverage of services in these sectors (Khan and Das 2013, CBGA 2012, 12th Five Year Plan, Srinivasan 2013, CBGA 2013). When viewed from the perspective of women, this becomes even more critical. For example, cuts in public spending on education, restrict access of women to quality education, in turn limiting their access to employment opportunities, particularly in the formal sector. As noted above, a cut in government's investment on health, not only increases the out of pocket expenditure of the family, resulting in shrinking of resources available within the household for women's needs, it also substantially increases the care burden of women in tending to the ill. Similarly, any cuts in budgets for improving water supply, increases the labour of women in traveling long distances to fetch water for family's needs, as fetching water for household needs is typically the responsibility of the women. Moreover, if the government were to scale down or withdraw the major livelihood programmes like MGNREGA or the National Rural Livelihood Mission, a large number of women, who are dependent on these programmes, would lose their livelihoods.

## II. Gender Responsive Budgeting in Sectors Pertaining to Livelihoods of Women

While an analysis of the fiscal policy being pursued in the country over the last decade or so reflects that it has not been very conducive to promoting social inclusion, particularly from a gender perspective, an analysis of the gender responsiveness of public policies and programmes also requires an examination of the implementation of Gender Responsive Budgeting – as an important policy strategy to address gender imbalances through government interventions.

Budgets are an important fiscal policy instrument for translating government's priorities into outcomes. Though budgets are perceived to affect everyone in a uniform way, the manner in which governments raise and spend resources have marked gender implications. It is this recognition that has led to the adoption of GRB in the country in 2005-06. Though, even after a decade of its introduction, this policy strategy has not had a substantive impact, owing to a narrow interpretation of the strategy and its limited adoption, its proper implementation could lead to a substantive improvement in the outcomes of government schemes and programmes for women.

Against this backdrop, the following section analyses the implementation of Gender Responsive Budgeting in two areas crucial to promoting livelihoods of women i.e. public works (MGNREGA) and agriculture.

### **II. A. Gender Responsive Budgeting in Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act**

Public works programmes in India have traditionally offered a unique opportunity for women to earn cash incomes in a context where, too often, their ability to work outside the home is severely constrained by social norms (Narayan and Das, 2014). Research in this field has also highlighted the potential of public employment programmes in promoting women's access to labour markets. In this context, the introduction of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in 2006 (renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2009) is an important development from a gender perspective. Though the primary objective of the

programme is to guarantee hundred days of wage employment per year to rural households, it also has a number of provisions that seek to encourage women's participation in the programme.

The labour market in India is characterised by gender disparities in wages and participation. Not only are the market wages earned by women usually lower than the minimum wages, there is also a significant gender wage gap in unskilled labour. While the average casual daily wage rate (in 2004-05), for men stood at Rs. 101.5, the same for females was Rs. 68.9 per day. Apart from wage disparities, women's work participation rates have also been low and declining. Data from National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) indicates a negative trend in women's work participation ratio in rural areas from 25 percent in 2004-05 to 17 percent in 2011-12.

A number of provisions under MGNREGA aim to address disadvantages faced by women in wage employment. This is reflected both in the earmarking of budgetary provisions for women under the scheme as well in the design of the scheme itself. The scheme guidelines mandate that a minimum of one third of the beneficiaries under the programme, who have registered and requested for work, must be women. Accordingly, 33.3 percent of the scheme's total allocations are reported in the Gender Budget Statement (GBS)<sup>2</sup>. Though this stipulated benchmark has not been met in several states including Nagaland, Assam, Mizoram, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh, the participation of women in the programme, for the country as a whole, has been well above the mandated one third, ranging from 40 percent in 2006-07 to 53 percent in 2013-14.

Besides the provision of one-third reservation for women, MGNREGA has several other wage and non-wage provisions that seek to strengthen women's participation in the programme. An important provision in this regard is the entitlement of equal wages to women and men under the programme. The Act also provides that work should be provided within five kilometres of the residence of the workers, a provision which makes the scheme particularly attractive to women, who face a high burden of domestic responsibilities and restricted mobility. MGNREGA guidelines also provide child care facilities at work sites, though reports from the field indicate that this provision is often not implemented. Equally important is the recognition of pregnant and lactating mothers as a special category for whom special works, which require less effort and are close to their house, are required to be identified.

MGNREGA guidelines also pay attention to women in special circumstances; widowed, deserted and destitute women are required to be identified by Gram Panchayats and covered under the programme. Besides this, several other sections of the population, in which women face double burden of discrimination, are identified as vulnerable. These include persons with

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<sup>2</sup> A Gender Budget Statement is presented as part of the Union Budget each year since the adoption of Gender Budgeting in 2005-06. This Statement, presents information in two parts. Part A reports those schemes where the entire allocation is for women. Part B includes schemes where at least 30% allocations, but not entire funds, are earmarked for women

disabilities, Primitive Tribal Groups, Nomadic Tribal Groups, De-notified Tribes, Senior citizens above 65 years of age, HIV positive persons and internally displaced persons. The scheme guidelines require state governments to formulate specific plans to include these special categories in MGNREGA. This could entail specific works identified for these groups and provision within the MIS for tracking their coverage.

Several observers have attempted to examine the outcome of the programme for women. Kelkar (2011) argues that relevant literature reveals only some anecdotal evidence on the impact of employment creation under MGNREGA on gender relations. However, credible evidence is available on women's participation in MGNREGA generated employment. It has also been pointed that the design and implementation of MGNREGA should be strengthened to avoid exacerbating gender inequalities. In this regard, flexible working hours and broadening the scope of work to include such public works as to reduce women's time poverty have been discussed (Holmes et al 2011).

Azam (2012) argues that there is a strong gender dimension to the impact of MGNREGA. Using NSSO data and analysing phase-wise implementation of the programme, the study found that the decline in labour force participation rate has been slower in MGNREGA districts than in districts where the programme was not implemented. This effect is more pronounced in the case of female labour participation. The implementation of the programme has also had a positive impact on the wages of casual workers; with the real wages for female casual workers increasing 8 percent more in MGNREGA districts compared to other districts, as opposed to just 1 percent for men (even though there is a marginal gender gap in wage rates for casual labour in MGNREGA).

On the issue of women's participation in MGNREGA, using data from 2004-05 NSSO survey, Dasgupta and Sudershan (2011) note that "state-wise participation in the programme is positively correlated with women's participation in rural areas, though women's participation in NREGA is often higher than women's participation in other forms of recorded work". They also find a negative correlation between women's participation in MGNREGA and the existing gender wage gap in unskilled agricultural labour. Wherever women's actual wages as a share of men's are lower in the private sector, women are turning to MGNREGA. This, they highlight, will increase women's bargaining power and could potentially contribute to reduced gender disparities in the labour market.

Despite evidence of the potential that MGNREGA holds to reduce poverty and inequality in rural areas in general, and for women in particular, budgetary outlays for the scheme have been well below the estimated requirements. For the period of the 12th Five Year Plan (2012-

17) alone, the Ministry of Rural Development had proposed an amount of Rs. 3.6 lakh crore for the scheme. Against this, the amount approved was less than half, i.e. of Rs. 1.65 lakh crore. The allocations in the same period have not witnessed significant increases. Patnaik (2014) points that MGNREGA being demand driven, the allocations to the scheme should be flexible, subject to the demand for the programme. Though this is acknowledged in principle, in practice, allocations to the scheme do not get revised even when demand for work increases, resulting in delayed payments, and wage arrears. Consequently, there has been a rationing of wages which discourages workers from applying for work, leading to weakening of the programme. Given the demonstrated benefits of MGNREGA for women, the brunt of a weakening of the programme, which results from insufficient resources, is likely to be borne by women to a greater extent, impacting both, the livelihoods and overall wellbeing of women.

## **II B. Gender Responsive Budgeting by the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation**

Agriculture in India is an important source of livelihood for women, with the country witnessing a growing trend of 'feminisation' of agriculture in recent years. Women constitute around 40 percent of agricultural workforce, working in a variety of roles; from agricultural labourers, to cultivators and land managers (Ramakrishnan and Nagar 2011). Kelkar (2009) points out that this increasing participation of women in agriculture is mainly due to increasing rural-urban migration by men, rise of women-headed households and growth in the production of cash crops which are labour intensive in nature. Women perform significant tasks, both, in farm as well as non-farm activities and their participation in the sector is increasing.

Women engaged in agricultural activities are confronted with a number of challenges. They face difficulties in using agricultural tools and technologies whose design is not women friendly. Also these are often more suited for larger irrigated land, whose ownership largely lies with men; women being poorer, often work on smaller pieces of land. Moreover, in absence of ownership of productive assets, women's access to credit or government subsidies and schemes is restricted. Since, in most cases, women do not have ownership over land and other productive assets, they are unable to benefit from the programmes of the government, most of which are tied to ownership of these productive assets. Ramakrishnan and Nagar (2011) observe that "Among women-headed rural households, a lack of land titles reduces access to credit, inputs and information on new technologies." In the period 2004-06, men received 94 percent of the direct agricultural credit while they comprised around 67 percent of the total cultivators. "Women received on an average only 6 percent of the total direct agricultural credit" in the same period" (Chavan 2008).



Moreover, there are also social taboos against women's participation in performing certain agricultural activities, which are considered inappropriate for women. Within the sector, women are engaged in more labour intensive tasks such as weeding, sowing etc. A more fundamental problem is also linked with the fact that women's work on own family farms is treated as an extension of their household work, and adds a dual burden of domestic responsibilities.

A large proportion of women in agriculture are engaged as agricultural labourers. However, there is a marked difference in the wages being paid to men and women for same activities. Labour statistics (Gol, 2015) show that for any given activity (see table 3) within the agriculture sector, wages being paid to women are lower than wages for men. Kelkar (2009) observes that "Employers and contractors offer simply lower wages to women, regardless of their performance on the job," implying that the wage differential is built on a pre-assumed gender character.

**Table 3 Differential Wage Rates for Men and Women for Agricultural Occupations**

Average Daily Wage Rates for Agricultural Occupations in Rural India during February, 2015 (Rs.)			
Activity	Male	Female	Difference
Ploughing/Tilling workers	272.4	187.3	85
Sowing (including planting / transplanting / weeding) workers	237.5	192.6	45
Harvesting / Winnowing / Threshing workers	238.3	201.4	37
Picking workers (including tea, cotton, tobacco & other commercial crops)	200.3	165.5	35
Horticulture workers (including nursery growers)	226.4	165.1	61

Source: Labour Statistics, February 2015, Labour Bureau, Government of India. Available at: <http://labourbureau.gov.in/schemes.html>

Given the multiple challenges that women face in agriculture sector, Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (DAC) under the Ministry of Agriculture, has initiated several measures to mainstream the gender concerns in its programmes.

#### **Encouraging Efforts by the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation:**

The department has been working to improve women's access to requisite inputs, technology and other resources, in addition to building their capacities and knowledge base through

'gender mainstreaming'. To pursue this, a National Gender Resource Centre for Agriculture (NGRCA) was set up in the department in 2004-05 for identifying and integrating gender concerns in the department's policies and programmes. Subsequently a Gender Budget Cell was formed in 2009-10, with the objective of mainstreaming gender concerns in the policies of the department, engendering the design of programmes, and earmarking of funds for women farmers.

The department was reporting around eight schemes in the GBS till 2013-14 (BE). However, from the year 2014-15 (BE), the department is reporting only two programmes: the National Food Security Mission and National Mission on Oilseeds and Oil Palm (NMOOP), which are Centrally Sponsored Schemes<sup>3</sup>. This change has primarily been due to restructuring of some schemes within the department into larger mission-mode programmes.

The department's efforts at addressing gender concerns through its schemes focus on both, earmarking of specific proportions of funds under some schemes as well as introducing specific measures for women. The department mandates that at least 30 percent funds should be earmarked for women farmers under most beneficiary oriented schemes of the department. Correspondingly, the department has been reporting 30 percent of the total allocations under these schemes, in Part-B of the GBS.

In addition, there are other schemes where, though specific earmarking of benefits for women is not done, certain other provisions have been instituted. One such example is the Integrated Oilseeds, Oilpalm, Pulses and Maize Development (ISOPOM) scheme which provides a higher subsidy component for women and other disadvantaged groups. Similarly, the scheme on Support for Extension Services stipulates involvement of women as 'Farmer Friends' and their representation in Farmers Advisory Committees set up at block/district and state levels. (Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, 2013)

The department has also been working to develop gender friendly tools and implements with India Council of Agricultural Research, in order to reduce the drudgery of women. Also, MIS of all beneficiary oriented schemes are being revised to generate sex disaggregated data, to enable an accurate assessment of benefits accruing to women farmers through the department's schemes. Such sex-disaggregated data would also help the department plan its policies better and carry out requisite revisions to make its schemes more accessible to women. The department has also taken steps for gender sensitisation of extension functionaries at all levels within the department.

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<sup>3</sup> Centrally Sponsored Schemes are the schemes and programmes which are operationalized by the Central Ministries, but implemented by the State governments or their designated agencies. The schemes have specific guidelines decided by the Central Ministries and the budgetary outlays for these schemes are shared between the Central ministry and the States in a pre-decided, fixed proportion. This sharing ratio varies across schemes.

**Are the interventions adequate?:**

Despite the significant efforts by the DAC to address some of the gender concerns in agriculture sector, there are some additional factors that continue to restrict women's access to the department's schemes and programmes. As has been pointed out previously, one major factor is the lack of ownership of productive assets, especially land. Women carry out substantial activities both in cultivation as well as non-farm activities; yet, "women continue to have limited access to productive resources and services, markets and marketing facilities" (Ramakrishnan and Nagar 2011), which hinders their effective participation in the sector. At the same time, the differential wage rates prevalent in the labour market in the agriculture sector are also an issue. At another level, the approach of treating women's labour in own farms as an extension of domestic household chore, is also a problem.

While these are some issues that can't be addressed by DAC alone and require some changes in overall socio-cultural norms and also the larger policy framework, the department can try and bring in some flexibility in the norms of its own schemes and programmes. One such step could be to de-link the schemes with the ownership of the productive assets and give recognition to 'user rights'. Nevertheless, the efforts by DAC are encouraging and need to be expanded and replicated by other departments as well.

Women's restricted access and under-valuation of women's labour is not confined to specific sectors. The way women's work outside the home is being conceptualised, has largely been marred by pre-conceived notions with regard to 'care-giving' role of women and underlying assumptions that their labour is worth less than that of men; this is the case even in the government. The following section discusses the role of women as service providers in government schemes and brings to fore some issues in women's engagement as service providers in some flagship schemes of the Government of India.

### III. Women as Service Providers in Government Schemes

An important dimension of women in public employment pertains to their engagement as frontline service providers in various flagship schemes of the Union Government. Public employment is often thought of as a better option for women as it provides better wages, working conditions and other benefits such as paid maternity leave, often, not provided by private employers and almost never in the informal sector (Ghosh 2009). However, an analysis of the nature of employment, the work-load, the outcomes that this cadre of workers are expected to deliver and the compensation in lieu of the services rendered raises some serious concerns.

The implementation of important flagship schemes of Government of India including Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and National Health Mission (NHM) relies upon the underpaid labour of a large cadre of women serving as grass root level functionaries. Over 20 lakh women in the country are engaged as *Anganwadi Workers (AWWs)* and *Anganwadi Helpers (AWHs)*; while over 8 lakh women serve as Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers under NHM in rural areas alone (Annual Report, MoHFW, 2013-14). Women front line service providers under both programmes, work on contractual employment, with no job and little income security.

ICDS is one of the world's largest community based programme aimed at addressing nutritional, health, and other development needs of young children, and pregnant and lactating women implemented through 12.4 lakh *Anganwadi Centres (AWC)* across the country. Each AWC is managed by an *Anganwadi worker* and *Anganwadi helper*. Each AWC is responsible for an extensive range of activities including providing supplementary nutrition to children below six years, pregnant and lactating mothers, immunisation, nutrition and health education, basic health check-up, and non-formal pre-school education to children of three to five years. The roles and responsibilities envisaged for AWWs under ICDS include an extensive list of 21 functions. Additionally, AWWs and AWHs are also routinely assigned tasks such as duties during election and census surveys. Besides this, several other schemes (currently in pilot phase), such as *Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana* and *Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for*

Empowerment of Adolescent Girls are also being implemented from the ICDS platform, the implementation of which adds to the existing work load of these functionaries.

Despite the responsibilities expected to be performed by these functionaries, the scheme treats the AWWs and AWHs as honorary workers rendering their services for 4-5 hours a day. Notwithstanding the fact that in practice, they have to work longer hours, women workers under ICDS are not recognised as government employees. It is, in fact, worth noting that a Supreme Court ruling in 2006 held that AWWs do not hold civil positions, and the Minimum Wages Act is not applicable to them. Accordingly, they are paid an honorarium instead of wages, and are out of the ambit of the Minimum Wages Act. For the services rendered by them, the honorarium paid to AWWs was revised from Rs. 1500/- to Rs.3,000/- per month and that of AWHs from Rs.750 to Rs. 1500 per month in 2011. It is also a concern that though the honorarium paid to these workers has been revised periodically, there is no mechanism in place for such a revision to take place on a regular basis.

The compensation paid to AWWs and AWHs does get supplemented by additional honorarium provided by some states, though this amount varies significantly from state to state. For instance, while Bihar does not provide any additional honorarium to AWWs and AWHs, the additional honorarium paid by Goa to AWWs varies between Rs. 2,752 to Rs. 4,200/- for AWWs and Rs. 1,700/- to Rs. 2,300/- for AWHs (based on qualifications and experience) per month, respectively. It is interesting to note, however, that in the case of Goa, even with the additional honorarium, the amounts paid to an AWW and AWH at the starting level (i.e. Rs. 5,752/- and Rs. 3200/- respectively) is below the State minimum wages of Rs. 6450/- per month (Indian Staffing Industry Research, 2014). Annexure I presents the additional honorarium provided to AWWs and AWHs across States.

Additional benefits extended to them include insurance cover under *Anganwadi Karyakartri Bima Yojana* and paid maternity leave for 180 days. AWWs and AWHs are however, not entitled to pension; with the exception of some states like Karnataka Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. A few states have also introduced welfare schemes for the benefit for AWWs and AWHs. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Empowerment of Women in a report on 'Working Conditions of *Anganwadi Workers*' (2010-11) has made several recommendations to improve the working conditions of these functionaries. The Committee has pointed the need to assess the workload of AWWs and the adequacy of incentives stipulated for their services, stating that it is "humanly impossible to perform the expected jobs within the stipulated time of 4-5 hours a day". The Committee has also recommended a mechanism for a periodical review and revision of the honoraria, benefits like yearly increments and dearness allowance. On the issue of insurance coverage, a doubling of the coverage and extending of some health insurance

scheme or ESI benefits to AWWs/AWHs is recommended.

As is the case with ICDS, the implementation of NHM hinges upon the unpaid labour of ASHA workers, who are expected to be the first port of call for any health related demand. Each ASHA is expected to serve a population of 1,000. Their responsibilities include a wide array of activities including, universal immunisation, referral and escort services for RCH, construction of household toilets and other healthcare delivery programmes. They facilitate preparation of Village Health Plan along with AWWs, ANMs, functionaries of other departments and Self Help Group members. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in addition to the already existing workload, ASHAs are also expected to carry out activities assigned to them by states. The responsibilities of ASHAs may require them to often work odd hours, travel long distances, without the necessary infrastructure and facilities such as transport and overnight stay at hospitals while escorting pregnant women.

As envisaged under NHM, the work of ASHAs is to be tailored in such a manner that it does not interfere with her normal livelihood. Consequently, ASHA workers too, are not recognized as full time workers but as honorary workers. They are not entitled to wages or honorarium; instead they receive performance-based compensation which varies from state to state. ASHAs have been ascribed different roles in different contexts; however, irrespective of the roles they perform, it deprives them from any other source of livelihood. In doing so, it treats women as supplementary earners, which is a highly gendered issue (Eapen 2012).

Being honorary workers, ASHAs, are not provided social security benefits such as maternity benefits and pension by the Union Government. Though a few States have a fixed honorarium to supplement performance based incentives, the overall payment to them is poor. It is reported that if an ASHA works according to expected standards, she would earn approx. Rs. 1,067/- and Rs. 1,300/- per month in Rajasthan and West Bengal respectively, in addition to performance based incentives, which is lower than the State minimum wages (Indian Staffing Industry Research, 2014)

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Empowerment of Women has also taken cognisance of the need to improve the working conditions of ASHAs and has accordingly made important recommendations. It has been suggested that several functions of the ASHAs be removed and a systematic survey be conducted to assess the workload and incentives stipulated for their services. The Committee strongly favours ASHAs receiving a fixed remuneration in addition to the usual incentives received by them. The Committee has also highlighted concerns pertaining to the security of ASHAs, who often escort pregnant women at odd hours, and recommended construction of rest rooms at hospitals by states to ensure their safety.



The practice of relying on the underpaid labour of women for implementation of such critical programmes raises gender concerns in more ways than one. Not recognising this cadre of women functionaries as workers and withholding their basic entitlements raises obvious questions of justice for these functionaries. Moreover, such a human resource policy for some of the largest and most critical programmes also raises concerns about the quality of services delivered through these programmes, on which a majority of the population, especially women and girl children, depend to meet their basic health and nutritional requirements.

## Conclusion

As has been argued in the paper, women's economic circumstances and the government's ability to institute substantive interventions to strengthen women's participation in the economy is heavily contingent upon the broader macro-economic framework. It is important to recognise that macro-economic policy formulation, often regarded as a technocratic process, has marked gender implications. Fiscal policy, an important element of the macro-economic policy, is crucial in shaping the development framework adopted in a country. The total quantum of resources available for expenditure, which in turn determines the robustness of interventions in social sectors in general, and interventions for women's livelihood specifically, are determined by the country's fiscal policy.

The low level of government expenditure in the country, particularly on social sectors, is primarily a consequence of the constrained fiscal policy being pursued for the last one and a half decades. It is important to recognise the differential gender impact of such a policy, especially from the perspective of marginalised and vulnerable women, whose dependence on public provisioning of essential services is higher than the rest of the population.

Against this backdrop, the adoption of gender responsive budgeting is imperative to ensure that gender based challenges are recognised and addressed through adequate budgetary outlays. However, if the overall public spending is inadequate to effectively implement the government programmes, Gender Responsive Budgeting is bound to be limited in its ability to bridge the stark developmental deficits confronting women. It is important to recognise that Gender Budgeting cannot be seen as a 'public policy plug' that can address these development deficits, when the overall fiscal policy itself is not conducive to promoting their inclusion.

In the domain of women's livelihoods, the implementation of gender budgeting in some of the key Union Government interventions, i.e. MGNREGA and programmes of the Department of Agriculture, has recognised and addressed important gender concerns in the policy and design of these programmes. However, while inadequate outlays have constrained the implementation of MGNREGA, women's access to the schemes of DAC has been restricted

owing to various socio-cultural and economic factors (such as lack of ownership of productive assets, gender biases in labour markets etc.).

Additionally, excessive reliance on women's underpaid labour in some of the flagship schemes of the Union Government is a disquieting trend that has aggravated over the last few years. The responsibilities of at least some of these functionaries are proposed to increase even further with new schemes being launched from the platform of ICDS. In such a scenario, there is an urgent need to ensure minimum wages and review the working conditions of women workers engaged under ICDS and NHM.

In sum, a progressive fiscal policy made possible by a higher tax-GDP ratio and re-prioritization of policies, budgets and the institutional framework to implement these in favour of women, is essential to ensure better outcomes for women.

# Annexure - I

## Statement Indicating Monthly Additional Honorarium Paid to AWWs/AWHs by States/UTs (as on 03.03.2011)

States/UTs	Additional Honorarium		Remarks
	AWW	AWH	
Uttarakhand	Rs. 1500	Rs. 750	
Goa	Rs. 2752 to Rs. 4200 * Based on qualification & experience	Rs. 1700 to Rs. 2300 * Based on experience	* Revised the amount based on information received from the State Govt. vide letter dated 13.10.2010
Daman & Diu	Rs. 500	Rs. 300	
Chandigarh Admn. Haryana	Rs. 400 Rs. 1438-1563 * based on qualification & experience	Rs. 300 Rs. 750 * (also for AWWs in Mini-AWCs)	* Revised the amount based on information received from the State Govt. vide letter dated 6.10.2010
Sikkim	Rs. 1500	Rs. 1000	
Kerala	Rs. 550	Rs. 550	
Maharashtra	Rs. 800	Rs. 400	
Uttar Pradesh	Rs. 200	Rs. 100	
Delhi	Rs. 1000	Rs. 500	
West Bengal	Rs. 850	Rs. 850	
Tripura	Rs.1568 *	Rs.1124 *	* Revised the amount based on information received from the State Govt. vide letter dated 30.9.2010
Andaman & Nicobar Admn.	Rs.1000	Rs. 750	
Karnataka	Rs. 1000	Rs. 500	
Chhattisgarh	Rs. 500	Rs. 250 (also for AWWs in Mini- AWCs)	
Tamil Nadu	Rs. 2771	Rs. 1420 & Rs. 2208 (for AWWs in Mini-AWCs)	* Revised the amount based on information received from the State Govt. vide letter dated 13.1.2011
Andhra Pradesh	Rs. 700	Rs. 450	
Meghalaya	Rs. 50	Nil	

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Rajasthan	Rs. 300	Rs. 150	
Nagaland	Nil	Nil	
Himachal Pradesh	Rs. 300	Rs. 200	
Punjab	Rs.800	Rs.400	* Revised the amount based on information received from State Govt. vide letter dated 29.12.2010
Manipur	Rs. 100	Rs. 50	
Madhya Pradesh	Rs. 1000	Rs. 500	
Jharkhand	Rs. 700	Rs. 350	* Revised the amount based on information received from State Govt. vide letter dated 11.11.10
Assam	Rs. 500	Rs. 250	
Orissa	Rs. 650	Rs. 250	* Revised the amount based on information received from State Govt. vide letter dated 14.7.10
Arunachal Pradesh	Nil	Nil	
Bihar	Nil	Nil	
Jammu & Kashmir	Rs. 562 to Rs. 637 Based on qualification & Experience	Rs. 340	* Revised the amount based on information received from State Govt. vide letter dated 30.11.10
Gujarat	Rs. 1000	Rs. 500	
Puducherry	* Rs. 200 to Rs. 600 * Issue of Ration Card -Pulse Polio & Immunisation-Old age Pension-Physically Handicapped-	*Rs.125 to Rs. 300 *AWW AWH Rs. 200 Rs. 125 Rs. 200 Rs. 200 Rs. 600 Rs. 300 Rs. 300 Rs. 150	
Mizoram	NIL	NIL	
Dadar & Nagar Haveli			
Lakshadweep	Rs.800	Rs.500	

Source: 'Working Conditions of Anganwadi Workers', Committee on Empowerment of Women, Parliament of India, Lok Sabha (2010-11)

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