

Planning and Budgeting for Women's Empowerment in India: A Historical Process

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Abstract

This article is an overview of the Indian planning exercise from the lens of women. It provides a historical examination of the overall plan process in India, beginning from the First Five Year Plan and how it journeyed through the several plans to finally integrate with the women's question in India and connect with the larger women's movement. The article traces the emergence of gender responsive budgeting as part of the process financing the development of women. It argues that while the Planning Commission has been abolished, yet the historical significance of planning for women still remains and the experiences can be used to adopt a more inclusive process of gender responsive budgeting, rather than having a narrow and targeted approach to financing for women's needs.

Keywords

Women, planning, gender responsive budgeting, government expenditure, India

Introduction

In the realm of public policy in post-independent India, initiatives to recognize the structural inequalities experienced by women under the traditional patriarchal systems began with the publication of the benchmark report, *Towards equality: Report of the committee on the status of women in India* (Government of India, 1974).¹ The report brought about one of the major changes in the paradigm of planning for women in India. It was a beginning for the Indian planning exercise, carried out every 5 years, to recognize women as an agency by itself in the form of an economic being, contributing proactively to the nation's welfare and growth. *Towards Equality*

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highlighted a number of concerns that hindered the overall development of women in India *per se* and also brought forward the 'disconnect' between the Indian planning exercise and the 'women's question in India', voiced by the different strands of women's movement in the country. This article argues that although there have been certain alterations in the discourse on 'women's empowerment' in India and the planning process has taken note of it, yet there exists wide gap between 'recognizing women's voices, planning for it and implementing the plan'.

This article attempts at providing an explanation for the existence of these gaps based on a detailed discussion of how women have been included in the Indian planning exercise since its inception. Although the Planning Commission (PC) of India ceased to exist after 2014, it is important to look at the issue of financing women's development from the lens of planning. Thus, it focuses on how the process of planning has evolved to recognize women's issues but has been restrained by the overall fiscal orthodoxy² that drives the current policy paradigm. The article begins by outlining some of the major challenges faced by women in the current context which is a direct consequence of such policies.

Incidence of Poverty and Inequality Among Sexes in India: A Brief Appraisal

Disparities in almost all of the socio-economic and political indicators for women are rampant across the world, albeit the extent and the quality of disparities vary across regions. In India some of the major aspects of inequalities faced by women are manifested in the socio-economic outcome indicators. National as well as international reports have reported high degrees of disparities between men and women in the education and health indicators in India. The Global Gender Gap report, 2017, ranks India at 108 among 136 countries (Table 1). It is a laggard among the South Asian economies despite having the largest economy. The four parameters usually used to measure gender inequality, namely, economic participation and opportunity, health and survival, educational attainment and political empowerment reveal that women in India do fare poorly in most indicators. It also shows that their access to basic services is lower than that of the others.

Inequality by sexes in India from the historical and socio-political aspect could also be identified from the stage of conception by a woman. The 'son preference' syndrome in India impacts women's lives significantly even before a girl child is born. The decline in child sex ratio and increases in the incidents of 'sex selective abortion' practised illegally in many parts of the country are evidence to the discrimination faced by women even before they are born. While the overall sex ratio in India has remained almost same since 1961, there has been an alarming decline in the child sex ratio, specifically after 1981. The child sex ratio declined from 934 in 1981 to 927 in 1991 and 2001. In 2011, it declined further to 914.

In India, while poverty data cannot establish the relatively poorer status of women, however, by other parameters of livelihood opportunities and access to resources, women fare worse than men. The female work participation rates in India have been declining secularly and the gap between male and female work participation rates are significant. There also exist gender wage disparities across

occupations and sectors of employment. Women workers get approximately 65 per cent of male wages. The incidence of informal employment among women is higher than the men workers thus resulting in higher livelihood insecurity for women workers. Women also have far less access to land and other livelihood resources compared to men, and thus the incidence of poverty among women is higher than that of men (Mitra, 2014a, 2014b).

Table 1. India's Rank in Gender Inequality, 2017

| | Rank |
|--|------|
| Economic participation and opportunity | 139 |
| Educational attainment | 112 |
| Health and survival | 141 |
| Political empowerment | 15 |
| Overall | 108 |

Source: Global Gender Gap Report, 2017.

Table 2. Educational Attainments for Men and Women in India (2009–2010)

| | Male (%) | Female (%) |
|---|----------|------------|
| Literacy rate (2011) | 82.1 | 65.5 |
| Gross attendance ratio in primary education | 101 | 98 |
| Gross attendance ratio in middle education | 90 | 88 |
| Gross attendance ratio in secondary education | 96 | 85 |
| Gross attendance ratio in higher education | 67 | 54 |

Source: Census of India, 2011; Status of Education and Vocational Training in India (July 2009–June 2010), Report number 551, NSSO, GOI.

Table 3. Sex Disaggregated Health Outcomes in India

| | Male | Female |
|--|------|--------|
| Life expectancy at birth (2011)* | 66.4 | 68.7 |
| Total fertility rate (number of births per woman) (2011)* | – | 2.59 |
| Child mortality rate (the number of deaths to children age 1–4 years per 1,000 children reaching age 1 year) | 14 | 23 |
| Percentage of fully immunized children | 42 | 45 |
| Incidence of anaemia (15–49) (%) | 24 | 56 |

Source: Key findings, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), 2005–2006, India, Indian Institute of Population Studies.

Note: *Country Statistics, World Health Report, 2013, WHO.

The manifestations often take the form of disparities in the education and health indicators of women in India. As per Census 2011, female literacy rates are lower than the male literacy rates by 12 percentage points. On an average, the school attendance rates and enrolment rates are better for boys compared to the girls at all levels of primary, secondary and higher levels of education, as reported by the NSS data (Table 2). In terms of health attainments, the percentage of fully immunized girl children are lower than boys, child mortality rates, as reported by the NFHS-3 is higher at 23 for girl children compared to 14 for boys.³ Incidence of Anaemia is more than double in women as compared to men. Apart from these the MMR and TFR for women in India have not yet been able to reach the global standards (Table 3).

Reducing and eventually eliminating these gaps, however, are intrinsically linked to the overall development and empowerment of women and hence should ideally form a core part of the policy and planning framework of India. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Planning for women's overall development, aimed at empowerment of women, therefore has a legal backing in the Indian Constitution. It is thus an imperative for the Government of India to ensure that policies and programmes aimed at empowering women are properly designed and adequately funded so as to serve its main purpose.

Several studies have shown that women depend more upon government provisioning for access to basic services which forms a core component towards women's empowerment. This is true for not only India but also countries across the world in both global South and the advanced capitalist countries. However, whether the government interventions have been met with success or otherwise, depend vastly in the way in which the government programmes have been conceived which depend completely on the process of planning for the programmes and the approach to planning.

The Indian Planning Exercise and Women's Empowerment

In the Indian context, the process of planning recognized the agency of women after the release of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) report. Although the PC of India ceased to exist after 2014, the history of incorporating women in the larger planning and policy paradigm needs to be contextualized within a historical planning framework that evolved in India post-independence. In fact, even before independence, a document by the name 'Women's Role in a Planned Economy' (WRPE) was drafted in 1939 by the National Planning Committee of the then Congress Party of India.

The WRPE as a document was based on principles and not evidence, as the latter were rarely available in the pre-independence days. However, the radicalism embedded in those principles were reflected in the way in which the members of

the committee³ articulated the need for ‘women’s empowerment’. The committee clearly laid out the difference between looking at women as part of a ‘family’ and need to treat them as individual units, recognizing the urgency to create a space for women’s development, not only at a broad level, but also improve it within the households. These were radical principles which recognized unpaid labour of women, the need for developing systems of community care for children and the elderly, not only for the working women, but also for those who remained outside the realm of paid work. It upheld the importance of social reproduction and women’s contribution to the maintenance of a steady flow of labour supply, and thus articulated that the concept of ‘transformation’ of the status of women required a radical restructuring of the economy and modernization of the society.

This document was finally published in 1947. Unfortunately the next most important document underlying the issue of exclusion and deprivation faced by women surfaced in 1974 through the comprehensive *Towards Equality* report mentioned earlier. Apart from what the report highlighted as the marginalization of women in the process of development and succinctly brought out the ‘disconnect’ between the planning exercise and the women’s movement, it actually laid out the stagnation in terms of the ‘development of women’ in India since the WRPE in 1947. In doing so it also exposed the unfortunate backward movement in the discourse on the status of women from the days of WRPE till the release of the CSWI report. Thus the importance of the CSWI report has been manifold. It was also an initiator in the process of inclusion of women in the planning exercise from the Fifth Five Year Plan (FYP) (1974–1979) which included a section on ‘minimum needs programme’ for women. However, focussed measures related to empowerment of women began from the Sixth FYP (1980–1985) onwards.

Over a long period, a major critique of the planning process vis-à-vis women’s empowerment in India has been the approach with which women have been perceived in the paradigm of public policies. A whole range of literature has critiqued the manner in which women have been looked upon only as the ‘beneficiaries of the process of development’ or as ‘targets of welfare’ (Hameed & Jain, 2009; Dewan, 2011; Planning Commission of India, 2010). Despite the fact that the planning process in India has undergone immense changes since the ‘mixed economy’ days to the current phase of greater emphasis on the market determined policy processes, the inclusion of women in the planning exercise has not undergone similar degree of transformation. There have been claims of changes in the planning approach towards inclusion of women from one of ‘welfare’ to that of ‘development’ and ‘empowerment’. This article is an attempt to look into those claims.

Indian Planning Exercise—Brief Introduction

The PC was constituted in March, 1950, by a resolution of the Government of India. The PC was never a legal entity and used to consult the Central Ministries and the State Governments while formulating FYPs and Annual Plans as also

oversee their implementation. The First FYP was launched in 1951 and was implemented over the period 1951–1956. The importance of the First FYP lays in the fact that it laid the foundation for planning in India. The framework and ideas of planning were heavily based on Nehru's vision of socialism, which continued till the Third FYP (1961–1966). From the Second FYP (1956–1961), which was famously known as the Mahalanobis Plan, the stress was on the development of heavy industries and a self-sufficient public sector. However, the Indian planning trajectory, from 1951 till the present can be categorized simply into four phases (Das Gupta, 2013).

The Fourth FYP (1969–1974) and the Fifth FYP (1974–1979) corresponded to policy regimes which focussed on creating employment and alleviation of poverty by state interventions. It has been termed in the literature by critiques as 'dirigiste and populist' policy regime (Patnaik, 2013). It was the Sixth FYP (1980–1985) that marked the beginning of adopting neoliberalism *via* outward oriented policies. However, it was only in the early 1990s, that is, since the Eighth FYP (1992–1997) that neoliberal policies aimed at privatization and liberalization were pursued aggressively by the state. It marked the end of Nehruvian-Mahalanobis principles and took the path prescribed by the Bretton Woods Institutions. This also marked a departure from the approach of universal provisioning for all poverty alleviation and social welfare programmes of the government to a targeted approach, the most important of them pertaining to the universalized public distribution system (PDS) ensuring a food safety net for the poor to a targeted PDS. The targeted approach always ran the risk of high exclusion of the genuine beneficiaries and exclusion of poor women was an obvious consequence given the weak agency and the vulnerabilities that they constantly faced.

This is also not to say that universal programmes of the government were benefitting women to realize their agency and/or were using women as an engine of growth. However, targeted approach to provisioning led to further weakening of welfare programmes directed at women. This is discussed in the following sections.

Tracing Women in Indian Planning—Four Phases

Phase I: Development through Welfare

As already mentioned, women have been included in the planning and policy framework in India even before independence. In the initial years during the First FYP, women were merely looked upon as the 'beneficiaries of the development planning' and the major task for the overall development of women was assigned mainly to the social welfare department. The Second FYP followed a similar welfarist approach towards women's issues, taking cognizance of the plight of women workers on account of the social prejudices and the need to provide and implement specific actions targeted at women to provide a conducive work environment. However, the framework for implementation was based on rural development and increased community participation of women. The concept of

Mahila Mandals developed around this plan period. It was assumed in the approach to planning in the first 10 years that social welfare programmes aimed at the vulnerable sections would also benefit women through participation and awareness generated by the *Mahila Mandals*. The Third and the Fourth FYP (1961–1971) continued with the same approach of women's welfare, however, recognized the importance of identifying specific needs of women which are qualitatively different from those of men, especially for women belonging to the vulnerable sections of the population. However, the focus remained on improving literacy and education outcomes for women, with an awareness generation component linked to women's health under the Family Planning Programme (FPP). It is also important to note that the approach to family planning, as mentioned in several studies, was linked more towards stabilizing the population growth with greater stress on women's participation in the programme rather than focussing on women's health issues.

Thus the approach to the development of women was restricted to public provisioning for education and generating awareness for improving literacy for women and including women in the FPPs. Apart from this all other rural welfare programmes of the government were assumed to benefit both men and women equally. A major problem of such a planning framework towards women's development rested on the fact that not only women's contributions to the economic growth and development of an economy were completely disregarded, it also did not take into account the existing social and cultural practices that resulted in qualitative differences for men and women to gain access to several government programmes. While this approach to planning necessarily relegated women to a status of a mere 'beneficiary' of the development programmes of the government and failed to recognize women as an agency by themselves, it also did not provide enough space to the women beneficiaries for gaining access to whatever was being made available.

Phase II: From Women's Welfare to Women's Development

This approach of planning, in which the status of women was merely reduced to 'beneficiaries', changed from the Fifth FYP (1974–1979). The period of the Fifth FYP coincided with the publishing of the report of the CSWI in 1974 (mentioned in the beginning) which brought out the poor conditions of women in terms of socio-economic indicators and the existing gender gaps on these accounts. It emphasized on the severe disconnect between the real needs of women and the planning exercise. The report made several recommendations to secure social justice for women, remove obstacles for their advancement and provide opportunities for them to realize their full potential. This report changed the paradigm of planning for women in India by emphasizing on the need to develop a holistic and inclusive planning framework in order to address the concerns for women's empowerment. It also provided the much needed figures and statistics as a backbone towards better planning.

This marked the beginning of the second phase of planning for women in India. The Sixth FYP (1980–1985) included a chapter on women and development and attributed the low status of women to the lack of income-generating opportunities. There was an apparent transition to look upon women as active partners in development rather than passive subjects for welfare. A lot of focus was on the aspect of reducing poverty of women through creation of livelihood opportunities and providing improved access to assets. It was in this period that a separate department for women and child development was formed under the ministry of HRD and a national committee on women under the chairmanship of the prime minister was also set up. Several legislative measures were also taken to provide protection to women against discrimination, exploitation, atrocities and violence as well as amendments were made to existing legislations to safeguard the interests of women and provide for their welfare.

The Seventh FYP (1985–1990) focussed on creating and strengthening women's participation in economic activities. Rural wage and self-employment programmes for women were launched by the government and a national commission for self-employed women and women in the informal sector was set up in 1988. The *Shramshakti* report submitted by the committee made a situational review of women in the informal sector and suggested introduction of protective measures which would ensure guarantee of employment and income generation, minimum wages, welfare and support services, training and upgradation of skills, etc. The Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) launched as a Central Sector Scheme in 1986–1987 was a direct fallout of the recommendations of this report. The ultimate mission of this programme was aimed at self-reliance and empowerment of women by enhancing their productivity and enabling them to take up income generation activities. However, the programme was criticized by the feminist economists as having a tendency of sliding into 'women-specific' sectors. The National Perspective Plan for women, 1988–2000 during this period was submitted which made 360 recommendations, including credit and land schemes and reservations in local governance institutions, and was circulated in all ministries and departments. It was during this period that there were attempts at bridging the gap between the Indian planning exercise and the 'women's question in India', voiced by the different strands of the Indian women's movement. The shift of approach towards women was apparent from that of mere welfare to development. (Refer to Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1986; Government of India, Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2001; and Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, 2001.)

Phase III: Women's Empowerment in a Neoliberal Planning Paradigm

The Eighth FYP (1992–1997) emerged as the one recovering from the balance of payment (BOP) crisis and was the phase of planning aimed at enhancing economic growth *via* a policy of reducing fiscal deficit and minimizing the role of the State. This plan was significant in the overall Indian planning exercise which marks the

end of the dirigiste period and embarks on the path of adopting the neoliberal policy prescriptions. In this phase, grounds were laid for future deregulation and disinvestment of several PSUs, financial sector and trade reforms, public expenditure on social welfare and development programmes were planned to be more efficient (read cost-effective) and hence a shift towards a 'targeted' approach to public provisioning was developed (Chapter 4, Policy Framework, Eighth FYP, Vol. 1). Thus policies were adopted to earmark specific percentage of allocations and numbers for targeted beneficiaries, based on the estimates of poverty in all anti-poverty schemes in rural and urban areas, including the PDS.

This plan period may be marked as third phase in the process of inclusion of women in planning. The overall shift in the policy paradigm and approach to planning had an impact on women's development. In fact, the strategy adopted in the Eighth FYP was one of 'women's empowerment'. This approach to planning has continued since then. Chapter 15, Social Welfare, Eighth FYP, Vol. 2, focuses on the development of women from the perspective of realizing women's full potential. It clearly states, 'Women must be enabled to function as equal partners and participants in development and not merely as beneficiaries of various schemes'.⁴ The plan adopted a multisectoral strategy to ensure that the benefits of development from different sectors do not bypass women and that special programmes meant to complement the general development programmes should reflect greater gender sensitivity.

The strategy resulted in the adoption of specific policies and programmes for the empowerment of women in the period of the Ninth and Tenth FYP (1997–2007). A major strategy for implementing the plan was to create an enabling environment for empowerment of women through setting up of self-reliant self-help groups (SHGs) and developing linkages with lending institutions to ensure women's access to credit facilities for income-generation activities (such as the *Swa-Shakti* Programme, initiated in 1998; and the *Swayamsiddha*, in 2001). Apart from this, several education, health, nutrition and housing programmes targeted at women were introduced in this period. The rural and urban wage and self-employment programmes, namely the SGRY, SJSRY, USEP, etc. with components of training and skill development, had a fixed target of reaching out to a certain percentage for women in terms of the number of beneficiaries in the programmes.

This period was also marked with certain important landmarks related to ensuring and safeguarding women's rights. The National Commission for Women Act (1990) was passed in parliament to act as a statutory ombudsperson for women reviewing laws and policies and intervening selectively in individual cases of violation and denial of women's rights. In 1993, the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments called for women's reservations of one-third of seats in local governance and in the posts of their chairpersons. In 1996, the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was drafted to set policy directives for securing gender justice and gender equality which was passed in 2001. The bill on prevention of Domestic Violence against Women to eliminate all forms of domestic violence against women and the girl child was also introduced in 2002. Eventually towards the end of the Tenth FYP, the department on women's welfare was made a separate Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2006.

While such an approach to include women within planning may apparently seem progressive with greater potential to realize the agency of women, it was also felt that such planning would also require adequate flow of funds directed at the programmes. Unfortunately, the planning strategy to empower women developed an inherent contradiction with the overall policy paradigm adopted in that period, which corresponded to an overwhelming fetishism for economic growth and an associated fiscal conservatism.⁵ Therefore planning also adopted a strategy for financing the empowerment programmes for women, which would ensure flow of funds for women-specific and women-related programmes but would not affect an increment of the overall public expenditure. The adoption of the Women's Component Plan (WCP) in the Ninth FYP, which assured that benefits from other developmental sectors do not by-pass women and not less than 30 per cent of funds/benefits flow to them from all the women-related sectors, was one such strategy for ensuring flow of funds to these programmes. It of course initiated a flow of fund directed towards the women-related departments/ministries (e.g., Health, Education, Rural Development, Labour and Employment and so on) from the existing envelope of expenditure allocated to these departments/ministries and thus did not necessarily indicate an increase in overall expenditure.

This strategy obviously solved both purposes of maintaining the fiscal prudence yet being able to ensure greater flow of funds for women-related programmes through a targeted disbursement of funds. This process continued in the Tenth FYP period. However, towards the preparation of the Eleventh FYP, the PC constituted an additional Working Group of Feminist Economists (WGFE) in addition to the usual process of consultation, which comprised noted feminist economists in India and engaged with the approach to the Eleventh FYP and chapters on inclusive growth and others such as infrastructure, industry, agriculture, education, environment and health from a perspective of gendering public policy in India. This marks the fourth phase in inclusion of women in the planning exercise.

Phase IV: Attempts at Integrating the 'Women's Question'

The emergence of WGFE did make substantial changes in terms of including women's issues in different sectors apart from the traditional sectors such as education, health, labour, etc. in the Eleventh FYP. The integration of women's question intersectorally imparted a matured and developed approach to planning for women's empowerment in a holistic manner which was an evident shift from the earlier approaches. The WGFE emphasized on the rights of women and engaged with the various sectoral steering committees in order to highlight the gender concerns in those sectors and submitted important recommendations related to the social status of women in India (Box A1). This approach was characteristically different from the approach followed in the previous plans.

The vision of the Eleventh FYP (2007–2012) focussed on eliminating the multifaceted exclusions and discriminations faced by women and children. It recognized the agency of women from a rights-based perspective, which were incorporated in the plan through extensive consultations with different stake-

holders, including the WGFE. The Eleventh FYP recognized the importance of a multipronged strategy for women's empowerment by (a) providing women with basic entitlements, (b) recognizing the inherent inequality associated with the process of globalization impacting women adversely, (c) ensuring a safe environment by eliminating all forms of violence against women (VAW), (d) ensuring participation and adequate representation of women at the highest policy levels, particularly in parliament, state assemblies and local bodies and (e) strengthening existing institutional and delivery mechanisms as well as creating new ones wherever required for providing the same.

The Twelfth FYP (2012–2017), which is the ongoing plan period, continues with the similar approach of integrating women across sectors. However, a major focus is on the empowerment of women through creating livelihood opportunities and enabling access to resources. The plan lays emphasis on identifying specific locations of women, such as women in agriculture and the unorganised sector and identifies inequalities associated with access to land, to homestead, to credits, employment, amenities for urban poor and so on. The livelihood and employment programmes, namely the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in the Eleventh FYP were envisaged to be strengthened in the Twelfth FYP to incorporate the issues of labour market discriminations faced by women workers. This was evident in the plan document where apart from a separate chapter on 'Women's Agency and Child Rights' the other chapters on agriculture, energy, transport, communications, rural and urban development also included a focussed discussion using the lens of women as part of the strategies to be adopted for inclusive growth and sustainable development. Concrete suggestions to improve women's conditions were forwarded in employment and livelihood sectors as well as in farm related work (agriculture and animal husbandry). However, the manifestations of the suggestions have been observed in creating space for women within existing programmes. For example, the *Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana* (MKSP), a subcomponent of NRLM, has been proposed to meet the specific needs of women farmers.

It is thus to be noted that in both Eleventh and Twelfth FYPs, the broader planning approach was that of inclusive growth. The overall focus was rapid acceleration in economic growth and sustainability of the process. The approach of empowerment through inclusiveness was envisaged as one of the key drivers of the sustainability of the strategy. The plan put women as a key player in achieving sustainability by accepting the contribution of women in the economy and realizing the role of women as equal partners in development. However, the success of such an exercise did not get reflected in the socio-economic outcome indicators for women. It is to be noted here specifically that the overall economy suffered from a problem of creating employment, more so for women, as the government figures in this period show a secular decline in women's work participation rates and the wage gap between men and women remained substantial. This obviously had its impact on women in the other sectors of the economy thus reiterating the issue of planning for women's empowerment and implementing the plan.

The approach to 'inclusiveness' of growth, inbuilt in the approaches to the Eleventh and Twelfth FYP, essentially appears as an exercise to fill up gaps in the development of the marginalized and vulnerable sections of the population, including women. While the overall plan provides projection to achieve a certain GDP growth over the period, the approach to inclusiveness is fraught with ad hocism in policy measures directed at plugging gaps in order to prevent the neediest sections from falling out of the growth process. The plan adopts specific interventions directed at specific sections of the population and recommends a temporary programme rather than developing a long-term policy to eliminate it completely. This holds true not only for the development and empowerment of women but also for all social sectors and marginalized sections of the population. The approach also often results in targeting improvements of specific indicators, namely, education enrolment ratios, maternal mortality rates (MMRs), infant mortality rates (IMRs), fertility rates, violence against women (VAW) and so on. The fiscal orthodoxy, which forms the overarching principle guiding the macroeconomic policy framework adopted for developing the plan strategies, thus result in approaches that work in silos.

This approach becomes apparent as we look at the manner in which the financing of the planning strategies has developed over the years. Within such financing patterns, the tool adopted for implementing the changed strategy and framework for women's empowerment was not restricted to gendering the planning process but also supporting adequate flow of funds. It became important to make the budgets responsive to gender-based requirements rather than having a gender-neutral approach within a framework of fiscal consolidation. Thus Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) was adopted to facilitate such a process. The emergence of GRB in India thus has its root in the process of fiscal consolidation and hence is fraught with multiple issues associated in the way GRB has been implemented in India.

Financing for Women's Empowerment in India

Financing the strategy for women's empowerment or allocation towards women-specific and women-related programmes is not an isolated affair but is an integral part of the overall budgetary process. Therefore adequacy of budgetary allocations for such programmes depends on the larger expenditure patterns of the government as determined by the fiscal policies. In the Indian context, demand restraining fiscal policies started getting implemented since 1991. Such a paradigm initiated a policy framework that ushered in a process of maintaining low fiscal deficit while simultaneously keeping taxes low, essentially by compressing its expenditures. The pressure to reduce fiscal deficits led to drastic initial declines followed by a stagnation of overall expenditure in India since 1990–1991 (Figure 1). Similar trends were observed in social sector expenditures (Figure 2).

In this backdrop, while overall public expenditure was on a decline, the Women's Component Plan (WCP) approach was adopted in the Ninth FYP as a strategy to finance women-specific and women-related programmes and was

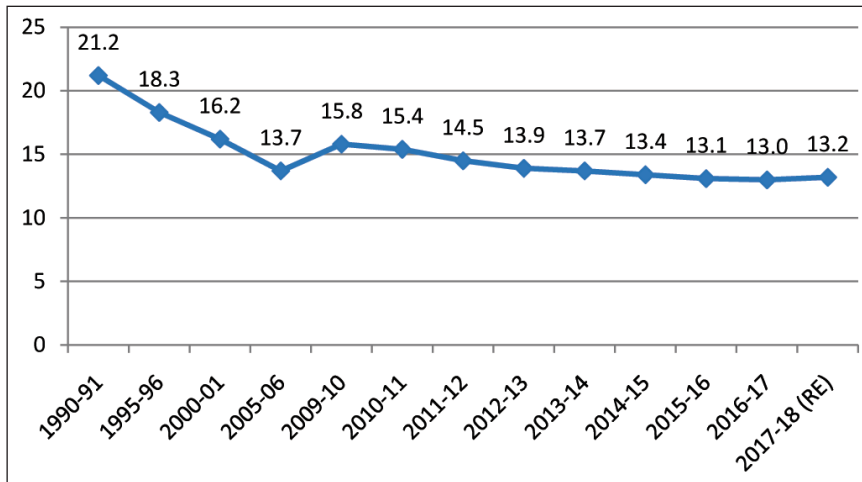


Figure 1. Expenditure as Proportion of GDP (%)

Source: Response to Union Budget, CBGA, various years.

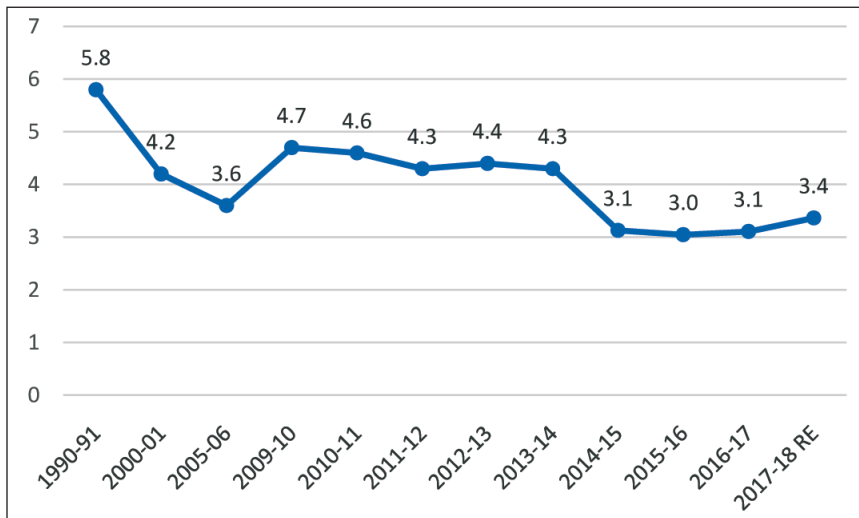


Figure 2. Public Expenditure on Social Sectors as Share of GDP (centre + states)

Source: Response to Union Budget, CBGA, various years (Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability [2009–10 to 2015–16]).

implemented both at the level of the union government and the states. A review of the progress of WCP during the Ninth FYP revealed that funds flowing from one of the women-related departments (viz. Family Welfare) was as high as 70 per cent of its gross budgetary support of the Ninth FYP. The total magnitude of plan allocations flowing to WCP from Department of Women and Child Development

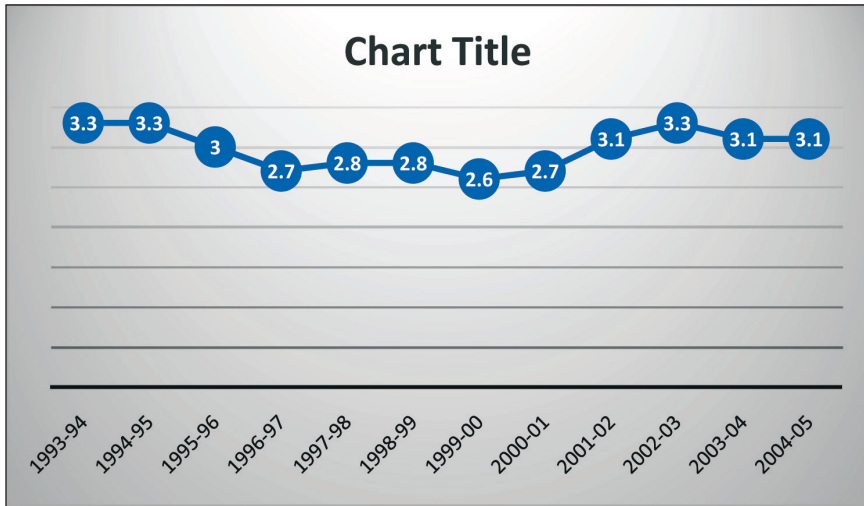


Figure 3. Gross Budgetary Support as Proportion of GDP (%)

Source: Response to Union Budget, CBGA, various years (Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability [2009–10 to 2015–16]).

(DWCD) and 15 other women-related ministries/departments of the central government constituted 25.5 per cent of the gross budgetary support of the central government. However, the methodology through which these figures were arrived at was not clear in terms of the quality and quantity of interventions. Also the introduction of the WCP did not lead to any increase in the overall gross budgetary support for the central plan over the period 2004–2005 (Figure 3). This implied that the expenditure for social sectors directed at women was a sub-component of an already allocated plan outlay and the amount for WCP was a strategy of reallocation rather than extra allocations for the women-related and women-specific programmes.

The narrow approach of the WCP that could not yield the desired outcomes, obviously called for a transition from the strategy. While planning developed a cross cutting understanding of women's issues across sectors, it was felt that budgetary strategies should also focus not only on the plan components but also across every sector (Das & Mishra, 2006; Mishra & Sinha, 2012). Thus GRB was principally adopted in India in 2000–2001, but it was formalized in 2005–2006 (Tenth FYP). The first Gender Budget Statement (GBS) was introduced in 2006–2007. However, while the GRB as a strategy aimed at influencing policies and budgetary processes to address gender concerns in all government interventions and was conceptualized as a tool to facilitate both planning and budgeting for women's empowerment, the introduction of GRB in India initially aimed to attain more effective targeting of public expenditure.

Thus the emergence of GRB in India from its very inception was looked upon as a tool to facilitate the implementation of women's empowerment programmes within a broader policy paradigm of fiscal orthodoxy. As a natural outcome GRB has

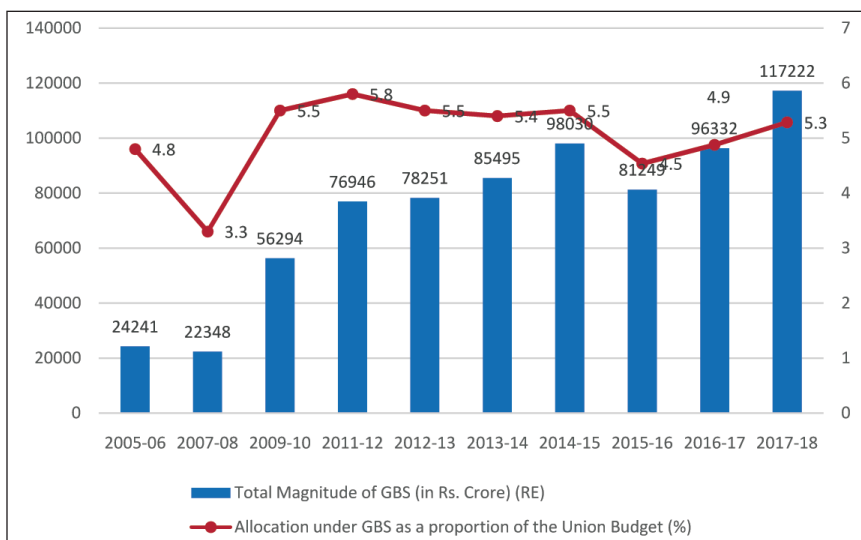


Figure 4. Trends of Allocations in Gender Budget Statement in India

Source: Gender Budget statements, Expenditure budget (Vol. I), Union Budget of India, various years, Government of India. See <http://www.indiabudget.gov.in> (accessed on 18 March 2019)

not been implemented in its true essence in India. It has emerged as a mere reporting tool for allocations towards such programmes to give a quantitative idea of the extent of public provisioning in the GBS placed every year along with the union budget. The strategy has been reduced to an ex-post analysis of budgetary outlays across ministries and departments through the lens of gender, although it was supposed to be used as a tool to facilitate both planning and designing of programmes so as to ensure integration of women's concerns at every stage of budgeting in order to ensure a holistic approach to allocation of resources. While this is not to say that the women's empowerment programmes lack adequate resources, but a look at the GBS from 2006 to 2007 shows that while initially allocations for gender budgets shows an increase, post 2008–2009 it shows stagnation. This was partly due to not only the fiscal cuts introduced post 2008–2009 but also a reduced number of departments/ministries which had to stop reporting because of a lack of capacity in meeting the technical requirements of the GBS.

Figure 4 shows a clear stagnation in total allocations for women as share of total public expenditure as reported in the GBS. Such trends suggest either (a) strategies for intervention in schemes directed at empowerment of women have stagnated or (b) strategies for interventions have increased in number but supporting budgetary allocations have declined. Any or both the reasons for such stagnation in allocations do reflect that in its existing form, GRB needs to be overhauled for achieving its desired objectives. Within less than a decade of adopting GRB in the union government and at the level of some state governments, a number of questions have been raised not only on the quality of efforts being carried out under this strategy but also on the potential of the strategy itself in

order to adequately finance for the empowerment of women. The strategy has been criticized for remaining confined to specific programmes directed towards women's welfare and also tweaking some of the existing programmes to accommodate certain requirements to become women-friendly. This has led to the framing of policies which have either been non-responsive to the challenges faced by women or have unwittingly reinforced patriarchal stereotypes in the name of public provisioning for the development of women. This is not to say that no government programme has been effective for meeting women's needs, but to draw attention to the fact that efforts at engendering the overall fiscal policy in order to address the 'women's question' have remained inadequate, despite having a multipronged intersectoral approach to planning for women's empowerment.

Concluding Remarks

The above discussion points to two important tendencies that could be ascertained by tracing women in the planning and budgeting process in India. The overall approach of integrating women into the policy paradigm therefore gets constrained by the following:

1. The shifts in approach to planning towards 'inclusive growth by better targeting'⁷ (that has led to not only targeting women but also subsequently targeting vulnerable groups among women, e.g., tribal women). This has led to the whole exercise of planning into a gap-filling exercise when it comes to public provisioning for the programmes recommended by the plan. Such an approach thus ceases to be holistic and tends to work in silos. Under such a situation, despite building an understanding on the overall issues of women within the rights-based framework, when the policies and programmes are designed and implemented, women are still looked upon as 'beneficiaries' of several schemes and programmes.
2. The GRB tool adopted to implement the plan strategies of empowering women is seen as an end in itself and not as a means to achieve improvement in the overall status of women. This is because GRB in India has been adopted in a regime where the broader budgetary strategies aim at fiscal consolidation through a reduction of public provisioning within the social sectors. The tool, although has managed to create general awareness about gendering the budgets based on evidence from the ground, has not been able to realize its potential of being able to ensure continuous and adequate flow of resources for programmes that directly or indirectly affect women.

Thus, it is important to strengthen efforts at engendering the macroeconomic framework of planning not only by identifying issues concerning women in various sectors of the economy, but also to include women at the stage of envisaging the overall growth process. This of course remains a serious challenge till the time fiscal orthodoxy rules the roost within the broader policy regime.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Annexure A

Box A1. Difference in Approach to Including Women in Planning After Tenth FYP

| Tenth Five Year Plan | Eleventh Five Year Plan | Twelfth Five Year Plan |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Contains no section on the unorganized sector or home-based workers. | 1. Includes a section on the unorganized sector and home-based workers and female concentrations in both. | 1. Includes separate section on women's role in the rural economy. Has sections on women in non-traditional sectors namely transport, communication, energy. |
| 2. Laid down a threefold strategy for empowering women. | 2. Uses a fivefold strategy to empower women: specific locations of women are identified, and specific issues highlighted. | 2. The multipronged approach to women's development continues. |
| 3. No reference to best practices. | 3. Inclusion of Best Practice boxes throughout the document. | 3. Same as above. |
| 4. Contains a specific chapter on women titled 'Women and Child'. | 4. Has renamed the chapter 'Women's Agency and Child Rights' and includes a gender perspective across sectors. | 4. Gender concerns highlighted in every chapter of the plan documents including the perspective chapter on inclusive growth and sustainable development apart from the separate chapter on 'Women's Agency and Child Rights'. |
| 5. Only includes data from the Census of India. | 5. Includes data from the Census, UN bodies, academics and well-known civil society organizations. | 5. Recommends building databases for identifying core issues of women for adopting better planning strategies. Uses governmental and non-governmental databases in order to devise strategies. |

Source: Compiled from Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth FYP; WGFE Report (Planning Commission of India, 2010).

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Notes

1. This article was first developed as part of the Conference *Transforming Global Relations for a Just World*, World Social Science Forum, ICC, Durban, South Africa,

- 13–16 September 2015 and has been finalized based on the talk delivered in the ‘Feminism Beyond Boundaries’ series in May 2018.
2. Fiscal orthodoxy is an economic term used by heterodox economists to counter the economic narratives of the World Bank and IMF in the late 1970s that propagated the fiscal stabilization and structural adjustment programmes. Roughly speaking it is the government’s drive to reduce public expenditure on ‘unimportant’ social sectors in order to become ‘efficient’.
 3. Child mortality rate is measured as the number of deaths to children age 1–4 years per 1,000 children reaching age 1 year.
 4. The committee comprised of thirty members, all of who were eminent women activists and professionals engaged with the women’s question. Mridula Sarabhai, Vijaylakshmi Pandit, Sarla Devi, Sarojini Naidu, Durgabai Joshi would be to name a few.
 5. Para 15.5.1, Retrieved from <http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/index1.html>
 6. The primary philosophy behind the GDP growth fetish mainly emerged from the ‘trickle down’ approach to development. While there has been ample evidence to suggest the failure of the ‘trickle down’ approach, fiscal conservatism has not ceased to exist and continues to emphasize the importance of reducing fiscal deficit that necessarily translate into expenditure compression in the much needed social sectors.
 7. This concept has not been discussed in this article. However, it is a contradiction of approach as targeting in government programmes necessarily result in exclusion of the needy rather than inclusion. Universal approaches to public programmes often perform better for inclusive growth purposes as they are often self-exclusionary. This argument is explained in detail in Cornia and Stewart (1993).

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