

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT—AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE'S REPORT ON GENDER BUDGETING

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After attaining Independence, the Government incorporated the concept of women empowerment and development in the planning process. The Parliament of India passed a legislation for setting up of National Commission for Women and also set up Parliamentary Committee for Women Empowerment. The concept of Gender Budgeting refers to the process aimed at capturing/highlighting gender sensitivities of budgetary allocations. It also involves carrying out an impact analysis of government programmes and its budgetary allocations on the overall macro-economic status of women in the country. The findings of the study bring to focus the importance and effectiveness of the Committee's work.

INTRODUCTION

THE DICTIONARY meaning of empowerment is “to give somebody the power or authority to do something” and also “to give somebody more control over their own life or the situation they are in”. In the context of women empowerment, it means to give them control of their own lives. If we interpret it further, the women empowerment means—self-decision-making, having decision-making power of their own, and how the right decision can be made. The right decision can be made when they have access to information and resources and proper education. The real empowerment takes place through education only. It also involves the availability of options out of which she can choose. She should also be having the power to make decision regarding her own education, participation, mobility, economic independence, public speaking, exercise of her rights, participation in political process, etc. Moreover, a woman should also have the ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision-making.

Other than decision-making, self-empowerment also comes by enhancing the abilities by learning skills, developing mental power through

knowledge and education, and also by involving in growth process and changes which is never ending and self-initiated and also by enhancing positive self-image and overcoming the stigma. In short, the women empowerment is about breaking the personal limitations and work in positive way.

The Status of Women In India

India can take legitimate pride in its cultural heritage wherein the women are accorded a very high pedestal. Mythologically, in Hinduism, all the important portfolios are assigned to women (goddesses). Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth (Finance Department & Planning Department). The lady of the house is called the Lakshmi, why? Because it is the lady of the house who makes or mars the financial management of the household. Saraswati, the goddess of all forms of learning (Education and Cultural Department). The goddess Kali or Durga symbolizes the powers (shakti). The women may not be powerful physically but instinctively, they are very powerful. Even Shakespeare has said, “the hell hath no fury” which can surpass the wrath of a woman. Women in ancient India enjoyed equal status and rights with men in all fields of life. Rigvedic verses suggest that the women married at a mature age and were probably free to select their husbands. There are examples of women sages and seers like Gargi and Maitreyi.

Though the condition and status of women deteriorated in the middle ages still many women excelled in the fields of politics, literature, education and religion even during that era. To name the few powerful women is; Rajiya Sultana, Rani Durgawati, Chand Bibi and Noorjehan, wife of Mughul Emperor Jehangir, Jahanara, the mughul princess was a well-known poet and Mirabai was a poet of bhakti movement.

During the freedom struggle also, many women came forward to fight against the British. The heroes of 1857 include the names of many women like Rani of Jhansi, Laxmibai, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Rani Awanti Bai and many more whose names are not well documented. Later on, the other women like Aruna Asaf Ali, Sarojini Naidu, Kamla Nehru and Vijaya Laxmi Pandit also took active part in freedom struggle.

The issues of deprivation of women including violence, atrocities, dowry deaths, female foeticide, rape and molestation have become so insurmountable not because of any dearth of legal or constitutional measures but because of social attitude and mentality of male chauvinism and more importance accorded to male child.

After attaining Independence ‘the founding fathers of our Constitution saw to it that the principle of gender equality is enshrined in Indian Constitution in its Preamble, in Fundamental Rights, in Directive Principles

and Fundamental Duties. The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Constitution of India guarantees equality (Article 14), no discrimination by state (Article 15(1), equality of opportunity (Article 16), equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)). The special provisions for women and children are to be made by the state in favour of women and children (Article 15 (3)). The government is committed and bound by constitutional provisions. The National legislatures and judiciary, all are working in tandem so far as women empowerment is concerned.

The government adopted the National Policy for Empowerment of Women-2001 with the goal of bringing about the 'advancement, development and empowerment of women'. Over the years, the planning strategies for women have evolved from welfare to development to empowerment. The 10th Five Year Plan reinforced the commitment to gender budgeting. In the 11th Five Year Plan, for the first time, women are recognised not just an equal citizen but as agents of economic and social growth.

National Commission of Women Act-1990, was enacted to set up a statutory body. The National Women Commission is mandated to:

- Review the constitutional and legal safeguards for women;
- Recommend remedial legislative measures;
- Facilitate redressal of grievances and
- Advise the Government on all policy matters affecting women.
- Look into the complaints and take *suo moto* action on matters related to deprivation of women's right, non-implementation of laws related to women, non-compliance of policies, guidelines or instructions.
- Undertake the promotional and educational research so as to suggest ways of ensuing due representation of women in all spheres and identifying factors responsible for impeding their advancement, etc.¹

On the same lines most of the State Legislative Assemblies enacted for the establishment of State Women Commissions in their respective states.

Another important parliamentary initiative was taken by setting up the Joint Parliamentary Committee for Empowerment of Women exclusively, consisting of 20 members from Lok Sabha and 10 from Rajya Sabha, which

¹Section 10 of the National Commission for Women Act, 1990.

came into existence in 1997. The Committee is mandated to:

(a) Consider the reports submitted by the National Commission for Women and to report on the measures that should be taken by the Union Government for improving the status/ conditions of women in respect of matters within the purview of the Union Government including the Administrations of the Union Territories; (b) examine the measures taken by the Union Governments to secure for women equality, status and dignity in all matters; (c) examine the measures taken by the Union Government for comprehensive education and adequate representation of women in Legislative bodies/ services and other fields; (d) report on the working of the welfare programmes for the women; (e) report on the action taken by the Union Government and Administrations of the Union Territories on the measures proposed by the Committee; and (f) examine such other matters as may seem fit to the Committee or are specially referred to it by the House or Speaker and the Rajya Sabha.²

Gender Budgeting

The concept of gender budgeting refers to the process aimed at capturing/highlighting gender sensitivities of budgetary allocations and also to help identify gaps in access to and distribution of resources on gender basis.

Gender Budgeting also involves carrying out an impact analysis of government programmes and its budgetary allocation on the overall macro-economic status of women in the country.

Gender Budgeting is a powerful tool for achieving gender mainstreaming so as to ensure that benefits of development reach women as much as men. It is not an accounting exercise but an ongoing process of keeping a gender perspective in policy/programme/budgets to establish its gender differential impacts and to ensure that gender commitments are translated into budgetary commitments.

The rationale for gender budgeting arises from recognition of the fact that national budgets impact men and women differently through the pattern of resource allocation. Women constitute 48 per cent of India's population, but they lag behind men on many social indicators like health, education, economic opportunities, etc. Hence they warrant special attention due to their vulnerability and lack of access to resources. The way government budgets allocate resources, has the potential to transform these gender inequalities. In view of this, Gender Budgeting, as a tool for achieving gender mainstreaming has been propagated.

²Rule 331(c) and (p) of Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha—Twelfth Edition.

The concept of Gender Budgeting gained increased acceptance after the Fourth World Conference of Women in 1995 in Beijing. U.N. General Assembly Special Session on Women in 2002 and Sixth Conference of Commonwealth Ministers of Women Affairs held in New Delhi in 2002 highlighted the need for engendering the macro-economic policy-making.³

In India, efforts have specially been made to remove the disparity between genders from the very beginning after Independence. The Eighth Five Year Plan marked the paradigm shift from development to empowerment of women and highlighted the need to ensure “a definite flow of funds from the general development sectors to the area of women development”. The IX Five Year Plan (1997-2002) adopted ‘Women Component Plan’ and directed both the Central and state government to ensure that not less than 30 per cent of the funds/benefits are earmarked in all the women related sectors.

The National Policy for Empowerment of Women 2001 envisaged introduction of a gender perspective in the budgeting process.

Analysis of Select Reports, Departmentally Related Subject Committee on Gender Budgeting

This is very important that Departmentally Related Subject Committee (DRSC) on HRD selected the subject of budget analysis with a specific aim of analysing the budget on engendering parameters. Over the years, during the course of examination of various women and girl child related programmes and schemes, the committee observed that inspite of well-conceived programmes and the funds allocated, there has been no noticeable improvement in the status of women. The Committee decided to make a study on work done in this emerging area. The original 153rd Report of the Committee presented to the House on December 24, 2004 contains the recommendations/observations of the Committee and 166th Report on Action Taken by the government on these recommendations presented to the House after eight months on August 24, 2005.⁴

The Department of Women and Child Development which comes under the purview of the Committee on Human Resource Development is not only the nodal agency for women’s programmes but has also been assigned the task of gender budgeting. The committee therefore, decided to make a study of the work done in this area.

The Committee held total eight meetings to examine the subject of gender budgeting and took oral evidence of the officers of Department of

³Introduction to the 153rd Report of DRSC on Human Resource Development.

⁴The 153rd and 166th Reports of the Committee on Human Resource Development for detailed recommendations.

Women and Child Development and also heard the witnesses from the Ministry of Rural Development and Department of Economic Affairs on micro-credit facilities to Women Self-Help Groups and the income generating schemes being implemented by the Women Self-Help Groups in rural areas as also the problems faced by them.

The representatives of Centre for Development Studies and Action, SIDBI and NABARD also appeared before the Committee.

After detailed examination and deliberations on the subject, the Committee observed “that in spite of well-conceived programmes and funds allocated there has been no noticeable improvement in the status of women/girls”.⁵

Data related to the Committee’s Reports for Content Analysis at a Glance

The committee made total 24 recommendations/observations in their original 153rd report which covered the issues for gender budgeting, role of Department of Women and Child Development, gender budgeting in other Ministries/Departments, lack of inter-ministerial coordination, developing suitable methodology, need for training/capacity building, need for impact assessment, gender budgeting in states, gender budgeting in local bodies, gender budgeting in private sector and strengthening statutory support for women.⁶

The quantitative analysis of these recommendations reveal that out of 24 only one recommendation was accepted by the government, 14 recommendations/observations were such which the committee did not desire to pursue in view of the government’s replies and in case of nine recommendations/observations the committee did not accept the replies of the government and made further comments/ recommendations.⁷

Now, on the face of it, one can conclude that only four per cent of the recommendations of the committee have been accepted.

One of the recommendations accepted by the committee was to emphase the need of impact assessment of gender allocation. The committee observed that “the impact assessment should not be restricted to women specific and pro-women programmes but should also extend to the impact of mainstream expenditure on women... to explore the possibility of including a comparative gender impact statement as a separate part in the Annual Budget of the Government”.⁸ The government accepted the suggestions of the committee for compliance.

⁵Page 3 of the 153rd Report of DRSC on HRD.

⁶The 153rd Report of the Committee on HRD.

⁷Page 1 of the 166th Report of DRSC on HRD.

⁸Page 7, 8 of the 153rd Report of DRSC.

*1 NO. OF MEETINGS AND ATTENDANCE OF THE MEMBERS

Sl. No.	Details of the Reports	No. of Meetings and duration	No. of Members on the committee	No. of Members present	Percentage of attendance
1.	153 rd Report on Gender Budget Analysis.	Ist meeting - 1:00 hrs. IInd meeting - 0:30 hrs. IIIrd meeting - 0:30 hrs. IVth meeting - 1:00 hrs. Vth meeting - 1:30 hrs. VIth meeting - 1:00 hrs. VIIth meeting - 4:00 hrs. VIIIth meeting- 1:00 hrs.	31	16	51.61
			-	14	45.16
			-	16	51.16
			-	16	51.16
			-	17	54.83
			-	15	48.38
			-	28	90.38
			-	15	48.38
2.	166 th Report on Action Taken Report on the 153 rd Report	Ist meeting - 0:30 hrs.	31	15	48.38

*1 The data has been quelled from the Minutes of the Committee meetings appended to the 153rd and 166th reports of the Committee on Human Resource Development.

*2 GLANCE AT THE RECOMMENDATION/OBSERVATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

Sl. No.	Details of the Reports	No. of recommendations/ observations made	Accepted by the government	% of acceptance	Replies not accepted	Not to be Pursued
1.	153 rd Report on Gender Budget analysis	24	1	4.16	9	14
2.	166 th Report on Action Taken on 153 rd Report	-	-	-	-	-

*2 Data is quelled from the 153rd and 166th Reports of the Committee on Human Resource Development.

In case of the 14 recommendations/observations which the committee did not desire to pursue, the committee found the action taken by the government satisfactory and in a way these recommendations can also be construed to be as accepted or complied with as the action has been taken subsequent to the committee's recommendations. In recommendation No.4.1, the committee observed that, 'The aim of gender budgeting is to generate/capture the gender based data/information which will be relevant input for assessing the gender specific impact of budgetary allocation... and recommended that the process of gender budgeting should necessarily contain not only the segregation of gender based data but also aspects like quantification of contribution of women in the economy, impact of government budget on women and policy alternatives for evolving a gender sensitive social order.

Subsequent to this recommendation of the committee, the Department of Women & Child Development adopted a slogan as a mission statement 'Budgeting for Gender Equity' and also prepared a broad framework of activities which comprised of -

- (i) Quantification of allocation of resources for women in the Union, states and local administration budgets and expenditure thereon.
- (ii) Gender audit of the policies of the government—monetary, fiscal trade, etc. at the Centre and state levels.
- (iii) Impact assessment of various schemes in the Union and states budget.
- (iv) Analysing programmes, strategies, interventions and policy initiatives from the perspective of their impact on the status of women.
- (v) Institutionalising the generation and collection of gender disaggregated data.
- (vi) Consultations and capacity building.
- (vii) Review of decision-making processes to establish gender equity in participation.
- (viii) Formulation and reflection of satellite accounts to capture the contribution of women to the economy.

This broad framework was prepared and communicated to all the Ministries of the Government of India to guide their further actions in terms of allocation of resources and review the policy.

This action taken by the Government was reported to the Committee. As can be evidently observed that it took care of all the concerns of the committee, this recommendation is practically accepted and complied with by the government.

Further, the committee in their observations/recommendations No. 6.4 & 6.5 on the need for gender budgeting in other Ministries/Departments, observed that “the gender based analysis of allocations should be done for the entire budget of the Government of India... not only by the departments identified for this purpose”. The committee recommended “to have specific guidelines laid down regarding gender budgeting to be followed by all the Ministries/ Departments”.⁹

The Department of Women and Child Development informed the Committee that the issues contained in the above recommendations of the committee were deliberated in the inter-departmental committee set up by the Ministry of Finance. The Department of Women & Child Development “pressed for setting up of gender budget cells in all the Ministries and departments so that there is a point of focus for coordinating gender friendly initiatives”. Specific guidelines regarding gender sensitive budgeting have been prepared and issued by the department to all the Ministries/departments. These instructions were also enclosed with the letter issued by the Ministry of Finance to select departments for initiating gender budgeting. In this letter, the reference of DRSC on HRD’s recommendation was made and the tentative check list of action was appended.¹⁰

The committee made two observations/recommendations regarding need for impact assessment, 10.1, 10.2 and another one 10.3 for integration of gender in budgeting policies. The committee observed that need for impact assessment of gender allocation assumes important. This impact assessment should not only be restricted to women specific and pro-women programmes but should also extend to the impact of mainstream expenditure on women. “Integration of gender in budgeting policies, would not only ensure better transparency and accountability in the allocations meant for women. It would at the same time help evaluate the effectiveness of resources utilized in delivering the intended results...”

As per action taken on these recommendations, the department informed the committee about the series of meetings they held with the specific departments and also the areas identified for the impact assessment.

Regarding integration of gender in budgeting, “the Finance Minister had included in the budget documents a separate statement highlighting the gender sensitivities of the budgetary allocations under ten demands for grants. Although this is another first in budget making in India, it is only a

⁹Page 5 of the 166th report of DRSC on HRD.

¹⁰The letter containing these instructions can be seen at Page 47 of 166th Report on Action Taken as Annexure ‘C’.

beginning and in course of time all the departments will be required to present gender budget as well as make benefit incidence analysis.¹¹

The Committee was satisfied with the action taken reply and this can be construed to as accepted/implemented. The recommendations No. 11.1, 11.2, 11.3 and 12.1 made by the committee on gender budgeting in states and in local bodies are also in this category where the committee was satisfied with the action taken by the Government.

The committee observed that both the state budgets and the local bodies budgets “accounts for bulk of expenditure on social sector which relate to welfare/empowerment of women”.

As a follow up action “the department had commissioned a research proposal for analysing trend of allocation for women in all 35 States/UTs... The preliminary analysis of State budgets based on the trend for 1993-94 to 2002-03 is being included in the Annual Report of 2004-05...”

Regarding the gender based analysis for local bodies, the departments reply “efforts will be made in this direction” was also accepted by the committee.”

With regard to recommendations No.14.1 on strengthening statutory support for women the committee observed that “the Task Force had reviewed the whole gamut of legislations concerning women had recommended amendments to 22 laws with a view to making them more effective”. The committee asked for a status report on those 22 laws.”

The department submitted the details regarding the status of these laws. The committee did not pursue this any further.

By above discussion, it can be safely concluded that the 14 recommendations which the committee did not pursue are almost accepted, thus the percentage of acceptance goes up drastically. Out of total 24 recommendations, 15 recommendations can be construed as accepted that comes to above 67 per cent.

The work of content analysis will not be complete if the content of the observations/recommendations of the committee in respect of which replies of government were not accepted by the committee is also not analysed. In case of each such recommendation, the committee not only rejected the reply of the government but made further observations/recommendations.

In the present case study of recommendations/observations contained in 153rd original report of the committee and Action Taken Report (166th) there are nine such recommendations. The analysis of the content of these recommendations is as follows:

- In their observations No. 3.5, the committee observed that “it is

¹¹Page 8 of Action Taken Report (166th) of the Committee.

high time that the budget of the government provides a clear indication of how much amount is earmarked specifically for the benefit of women so as to ensure effective implementation of women/girl related programme.

- The Department of Women and Child Development in their Action Taken reply submitted that ‘the exercise of quantifying resources earmarked for women are entrusted to the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP) and they have developed a model for gender analysis of the Union Budgets’.

The committee was not satisfied and further commented in their Action Taken Report (166th) “Model... needs to be refined with a view to making it more precise and wider in scope... not able to provide adequate insight in the case of mainstream budget... steps to be taken to examine the same and a methodology evolved on this aspect at the earliest.¹²

In their recommendations/observations No. 6.1 and 6.3 about gender budgeting in other Ministries/Departments, the committee observed that “the department should make all out efforts to persuade the other Ministries/Departments to include a chapter on gender budgeting in their Annual Reports highlighting new initiatives/policies on gender related issues, resources available and their utilization and gender disaggregated statistics for promoting gender awareness within and outside government.

In recommendation No. 6.3, the committee while appreciating “the idea of identifying some Ministries/Departments for impressing upon them to undertake the process of gender budgeting on a wider scale”, feels “that they have apparently not been able to take up the exercise..... which should be done from next year”. The department in their Action Taken reply submitted that.... the following instructions have been issued by the Ministry of Finance:

- 1) All Departments/Ministries to establish a ‘Gender Budgeting Cell’ by January 1, 2005.
- 2) Eighteen selected Departments/Ministries to bring out scheme-wise provisions and physical targets benefitting women in their Annual Reports/Performance budgets for 2004-05 along with their detailed demands for grants for 2005-06. All departments to prepare incidence analysis from the next financial year for inclusion in their Annual Report/Performance budget...”

The committee made further comments on this aspect in their Action Taken Report (166th) specially regarding the instruction to 18 Departments.

¹²Page 10 of 166th Report of the DRSC on HRD.

The committee made a check on some of these 18 departments. The committee observed that Annual Report (2004-05) of Ministries/ Department like, Elementary Education and Literacy, Secondary and Higher Education... do not have any chapter on Gender Budget Analysis. The committee further recommended that ‘Department must ensure that all the instructions related to gender budgeting... were carried out in time bound manner.’¹³

In their observations/recommendations No. 8.1 and 8.2 on Developing Suitable Methodology, the committee emphasized “the need for developing/refining methodologies and gender tools like gender audit, gender impact assessment, gender analysis and gender budgeting to monitor implementation and impact of gender policies.... need for undertaking research activities, etc.

The department in their Action Taken reply repeatedly submitted that “the instructions on conducting impact assessment, etc. have been issued”.

The committee while taking note of the efforts made by the Department reiterated that ‘the aspect of developing methodologies, gender tools and research activities... still much to be desired. The committee further recommended in their Action Taken Report that “the department should frame guidelines for the purpose within a stipulated time frame. The guidelines should be uniform and the procedure should facilitate proper assessment of the impact of the gender budgeting.’¹⁴

In case of committee’s recommendations on need for Training/Capacity Building and Gender Budgeting in private sector, the committee appreciated “the efforts made by the department to sensitize/involve the private sector in the exercise of gender budgeting”, but further commented that “the time bound action plan is the need of the hour”. The committee further recommended “that the Ministry should take up the matter with all the major industry organisations... Involvement of industry federations/organisations through national level seminars/conferences would also provide the opportunities for regular interactions on gender sensitization in private sector.

CONCLUSION

The economic empowerment is key to all other development of women. The Parliamentary Committee selected the aspect of assessing the impact of budget allocation on economic empowerment of women.

¹³Page 12 of 166th Report on Action Taken by the Government on 153rd Report of DRSC on HRD.

¹⁴Page 12 of the Action Taken Report (166th) Report of the Committee.

While analysing the contents of the Reports of the Committee on Gender Budget Analysis, i.e. 153rd Report and 166th Report on Action Taken by the Government on the recommendations/observations contained in the 153rd Report, it has been observed that the committee took interest in the development and empowerment of women and selected this subject for examination so that the issues related to allocation of resources, their utilisation and its impact are brought to the proper focus in governmental budgets.

The committee's recommendations resulted in spurring the government to take action: (i) to make budgeting for gender equity and prepare a broad framework for assessing the aspects like quantification of contribution of women in the economy, impact of government budget on women, policy alternatives for evolving a gender sensitive social order, in addition to the segregation of gender based data, (ii) setting up of gender budget cells in all the ministries and departments (iii) preparation and issuance of specific guidelines regarding gender sensitive budgeting (iv) introducing the concept of gender perspective in states budgets as the states and UTs account for bulk of expenditure on social sectors relating to the welfare/empowerment of women. Committee's recommendations also helped in activating the department to develop the tools and methodologies for gender budgeting impact assessment and contemplating the activities for improving upon the private sector for the success of gender budgeting.

The recommendation of including a comparative gender impact statement comprising Part A and Part B as a separate part in Annual Budget was accepted. Part 'A' reflects women specific schemes, i.e. those which have 100 per cent allocation for women and Part 'B' reflects pro-women schemes, i.e. those where at least 30 per cent of the allocation is for women.

Even from the discussion on the recommendations/observations in respect of which the replies of the government have not been accepted by the committee, three things emerge:

- (i) The committee followed the action taken on the recommendations through successive reports. Despite the recommendations of the committee not being mandatory for the department to accept or implement, the committee has been at their persuasive best to get their view enlisted in the policy formulation and programme implementation.
- (ii) The percentage of acceptance of the recommendations of the committee cannot be the only indicator, the real worth of the committees work can be judged only through their content analysis. We have seen in the above analysis that all the 14 recommendations which the committee did not desire to pursue

are as good as accepted. If we take the number of accepted recommendations plus the number of recommendations which the committee does not desire to pursue further, the percentage of the recommendations accepted/ complied with becomes much higher. In case of present study of reports on gender budgeting, the number rose to 15 from one and percentage has touched above 62 per cent mark.

- (iii) Even in respect of the recommendations in whose case the replies of the government have not been accepted, the action taken by the government has been taken note of and in some cases appreciated by the committee. This indicates that even these recommendations/observations of the committee are not ignored or rejected and they rather activate the government to quite an extent.

Woman must not accept; she must challenge. She must not be awed by that which has been built up around her; she must reverence that woman in her which struggles for expression

— *Margaret Sanger*