



# GENDER BUDGETING: A STUDY ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASSAM

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*Abstract:* Gender Budgeting has become an essential tool for mainstreaming women in development. This research paper tries to explore how the process of women empowerment can be made possible through gender budgeting. This study examines different government policies and programme in India with special reference to Assam state government's initiatives on gender budgeting. This paper analyses the effect of gender budgeting on achieving gender equality in society.

*Keywords:* Gender Budgeting, Gender Equality, Women Empowerment.

## INTRODUCTION

There have been many studies and discussions with different theories over the time about the meaning and concept of development and a unique way to achieve it. Development takes different meanings that vary according to agencies involved, areas of focus, environments etc (Simon, 1997). Gender becomes add on to the existing planning traditions without any fundamental changes to the conceptual framework in terms of their aims and agendas, methodology and institutional arrangements (Moser, 1993). The Fourth Nation's World Conference on Women in 1995 and its adoption of The Beijing Platform for Action introduced gender mainstreaming as a strategy to achieve gender equality. Gender mainstreaming is all about more women participation in sustainable development agenda as well as getting their ideas on the development arena. Gender Budgeting is an important application of gender mainstreaming in the budgetary process by using budget as an entry point to put gender perspective on the entire policy process. It demands mainstreaming a gender perspective at different phases of a budget like program & policy formulation, assessing the need of the target groups, allocation of resources, implementation of programs, impact assessment, review of existing policies, reprioritization of resources etc.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this research paper is to examine different initiatives of gender budgeting as a tool for narrowing gender gap in development process and bringing gender equality in society. This paper tries to examine the existing policies and programs of the Assam State Government as well as Indian central government in empowering women through gender budgeting.

## METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This research paper is based on Secondary data. Data are collected from the publication of state and union government, website and publications of International agencies, census report, Assam govt. budget documents and annual plan documents, Gender budget statement of Assam and Indian government, etc. Various books, journals, articles, newspapers relevant to the subject are used to collect the information.

## DISCUSSION

Naila Kabeer (2015) says “Human societies are organized along gendered lines, giving gender inequality a specific economic, social and political primacy. Women’s location at the intersection between production and reproduction, between making a living and caring for families, makes the organization of gender relations central to the nexus between economic growth and human development and hence central to the development agenda.” The Gender and Development (GAD) discourse has a groundbreaking influence on mainstreaming gender in all development interventions. The early approaches under Women in Development(WID) of ‘welfare’, ‘equity’, ‘anti-poverty’ (Buvinic,1983) , ‘efficiency’ and ‘empowerment’(Moser,1993), for economic growth and modernization did not sustainably change women’s social positions due to their reliance on the market and the perpetuation of individualism as a means of reducing gender inequalities and devaluing reproductive work (Kabeer,1994). The Women and Development (WAD) approach talked about women’s distinctiveness and differences, in terms of knowledge, experiences, work and responsibilities and urged to value and recognize women in development process. GAD viewed women as central agents in development process, in creating social and political conditions to end gender inequality (Moser, 1993).

According to United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Gender equality requires equal enjoyment by men and women of socially valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. Gender equality was listed as an essential development goal by the World Bank in its 2001 study ‘Engendering Development.’ These objectives are interconnected with Millennium Development Goals which aims to “promote gender equality and empower women.” Agencies of development have been adopting methods to eradicate gender disparities. To create good programs & policies and to implement them successfully, they must use specific indicators to find out the needs people from different categories of society and they have to evaluate those programs by including all the actors/community for whom the program will be designed for.

The Budget is a central policy document of government, showing how annual and multi-annual objectives will be prioritized and achieved (OECD, 2015). It is an annual financial statement presenting a government’s proposed revenues and spending for a financial year. Budget represent a nation’s, state’s or local communities economic, social and political decisions, such as what is essential and what is not, and who is recognized and who is not (Sharp and Dev,2004). Government efforts to gender mainstreaming and women empowerment migrate from written commitments to tangible policy through the budget (Elson and Sharp, 2010). A gender neutral assumption in budget can ignore the fact that budgetary impacts are often different and unequal between women and men since they occupy different socio-economic positions, play different roles and undertake different responsibilities in the paid and unpaid economy( UNIFEM,2000). Women empowerment can be achieved through gender responsive budgeting, which ensure gender equality

in policy creation, research, legislation, resource allocation, implementation of planning and monitoring etc. Women have a special contribution in the sphere of productive work. Gender budgeting is helpful for women to acquire more control over resources. Gender budgeting initiatives don't seek to create a separate budget for women but it seeks for affirmative action to address specific needs of women in society. Australia was the first ever government to lead initiatives for gender budgeting in 1984. Gender budgeting has now introduced in different countries of the world in varying forms. Feminist practical politics have been playing a crucial role in the emergence of gender budgeting throughout the globe. Gender budgeting is very much effective in maintaining gender issues within government policies by promoting gender accountability for government's commitments to gender equality.

The achievement of human development and economic growth of India is massively depend on the empowerment of India's 586 million women and girls who according to 2011 census, account for 48.9% of total population of the country. In reality, women in India continue to face disparities in access to and control over the resources at both household and administrative level. According to Global Gender Gap Index, India was rated 114<sup>th</sup> out of 142 nations in 2015. Women and girls in India are being denied the opportunity to share in the benefit of growth and development, which would harm the country's long term development. In 1974, 'Towards Equality' report was published on the status of women in India. After that the government introduced several measures to advance women's socio-economic status. The 8<sup>th</sup> five year plan (1992-97) of India highlighted for the first time a gender perspective and need for enabling a specific flow of funds from developmental sectors to women. Formal earmarking of funds for women introduced in the 'Women Component Plan' in 1997-98 under 9<sup>th</sup> five year plan and not less than 30% of funds are earmarked in all women related sectors. The finance Minister in his budget for 2004-05, mandated the setting up of Gender Budgeting Cells (GBCs) in all the ministries of government. Gender Budgeting Statement (GBS) was first introduced in Indian Budget in 2005-06. It comprises two parts: Part A reflects woman specific scheme that is those which have 100% allocation for women, And Part B reflects Pro Women schemes that is those where at least 30% of the allocation is for women. Chakraborty (2019) analyses gender budgeting in Asia pacific regions having success in improving gender equality. The case of missing women in India and China affects the success rate of implementing gender budgeting in those regions. Gender budgeting takes form of fiscal innovations where budget acts as a tool for achieving gender related goals and hereby continuing towards SDGs. In India, Several state governments have implemented gender budgeting with significant success. Karnataka, Kerala, Gujarat, Rajasthan and many others have taken steps to institutionalized gender budgeting to address gender gaps. So far, Gender budgeting have been adopted in 16 states and 2 Union Territories within India. Total 56 ministry departments of Indian Government have set up a GBC for each till now. Plan and programs of Indian government like MGNREGA, The Indira Gandhi Matritra Sahyog Yojana (a maternity benefit scheme launched in 2010), DISHA (a scholarship scheme of Department of Science and Technology for women scientists), Adult literacy centers (Sankshar Bharat) focusing women literacy etc are noteworthy schemes for women empowerment. Janani Surkhya Jogana (JSY) aims at reduction of maternal deaths in our country. Bharatiya Mahila Bank Limited and The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana promote financial inclusion of women. The National Rural Drinking Water Programme at state level allocated 47% of funds is necessary step to relieve women and girls especially from many obstacles and diseases. Revenue generation is another aspect of gender budgeting. Government has launched the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana in 2015, as a part of 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' campaign, is a small deposit scheme for girl child. In the Dept. of Higher Education, UDAAN is an initiative of the CBSE to enable disadvantaged girls' students in schooling. UGC runs many schemes like Swami Vivekananda Single Girl Child scholarship for research in social sciences, Post Graduate Indira Gandhi scholarship for single girl child, Post Doctoral fellowship to the unemployed women candidates holding PhD degree in their respective subject areas etc. UGC has been providing financial support for a cent percent basis for construction of hostels for women and other related infrastructural facilities in college. AICTE scheme 'PRAGATI' benefits girls in technical education. The Cooperative Education Programme for women is being implemented through State cooperative unions in

different states of India including Assam. Women Self Help Groups are funded by NABARD for women empowerment. Nirbhaya Project of Ministry of Road and Transport & Highway was an initiative of 2014 budget with fund of Rs 1000 crore.

Assam is a state of North East India which is a home to 2.5% of total female population of India according to 2011 census. The Niti Aayog introduced the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) India Index in December, 2018 to track the progress of all the states. With the vision document “ASSAM 2030: OUR DREAMS. OUR COMMITMENTS” of 2016, the state is committed to achieve Goal 5 of Gender Equality. Assam formally adopted the SDGs on January 1, 2016 and SDGs outcomes budget have been prepared and published annually since 2018-19. Assam is the one of the first Indian states to set up an inclusive budget cell to strengthen the state’s effort in budgeting for women to fulfill ‘Assam Vision 2030’. Gender budgeting in Assam is a new concept. Assam adopted the GBS in financial year 2017-18. Women found special favor in the year 2008-09 budget presented by the Assam government, which introduced for the first time gender budget covered stamp duty of registration of immovable property in their names and a new scheme for their upliftment. Assam state budget introduced gender budgeting for 2008-09 financial year in 12 departments having scheme with 100% funds earmarked for benefit of women. The highest percentage of beneficiaries was under education department (Elementary and Secondary) over 21000 girls awarded merit scholarship. Cent percent of women beneficiary’s schemes included women studies centre for Cultural Affairs Department, ANM nurse under Health Department, strengthening of Mahila Mandal under Panchayat and Rural Department. The social welfare Department and The Handloom and Textile Department have also received much importance with women as beneficiaries under gender budgeting.

Schemes for empowerment of Women such as ‘Mukhya Mantir Mahila Samridhi Achari’ launched in Assam. The Assam Government started ‘Orunodoi’ scheme on 2020 with an aim to empower the women of state. This mega scheme for women’s financial empowerment would provide Rs 830 per month each to almost 19 Lakh poor families. It is the biggest scheme in Assam with Rs 280 crore of funds which increased to total allocation of Rs 2400 crore in 2020-21. In 2024, the amount has increased to Rs 1000 per month. The Assam government’s ‘Mamoni’ scheme which was introduced under the National Rural Health Mission, aims to reduce maternal mortality ratio and provide financial support to pregnant women in the state. ‘MAJONI’ scheme was launched under Health and Family welfare Department in 2020 which has inspired the parents to have female child. Assam govt. launched the ‘Arundhati Gold scheme’ for brides from weaker section which started in the financial year 2019-2020. It urged the newlywed couples to get their marriages registered along with the goal of securing future of girls in their married life. The objective of this scheme is to facilitate the parents of girl child who are economically poor, by providing Rs 40,000 for gold purchasing during the time of their daughters’ marriage. ‘Na-Bowari’ scheme of Assam govt. grants one time financial assistance of Rs 10,000 to married women of poor families. Under ‘Pragyan Bharati Scooty scheme’ of Assam, Govt. distributed hero pleasure to meritorious girls’ students from 2020 to help them with higher studies as a token of appreciation for their academic excellence. Distribution of bicycles to girl students in schools, Minority Girls Scholarship scheme etc aim to promote education among deprived section of students.

Assam has been recording a significant rise in allocation towards gender specific scheme since 2018-19 financial year. It increased from Rs 3552 crore in 2017-18 to Rs 13,031 crore in 2018-19. Allocations were made to 18 departments for implementation of schemes to the benefit of women to the extent of 100% of allocation to some schemes and to extent of 30% of allocation to some other scheme. The Controller and Auditor General in its ‘State Finance Audit Report’ of Govt. of Assam in 2019 highlighted the need to bring out performance report from all the respective departments to look into the effectiveness of outcome of gender budgeting. There was a huge improvements made in Assam’s GBS since 2017-18. In 2018-19, there was 18 departments reported allocation under GBS and in 2022-23 it’s increased into 25 departments.

Assam under 'Assam State Rural livelihood Mission' has 3, 31,507 Self Help Groups (SHGs) with 36, 96,048 Women members in 219 blocks of 35 districts of Assam (Gender Budget, 2023-24). Women's awareness about micro credit program and formation of these SHGs indicate more economic participation and employment of women. The Assam government has initiated funds for gender sensitive schemes like Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), POSHAN Abhiyan, scheme for Adolescent girls (SAG), Indira Miri Widow Pension, Old Age Pension Scheme, Micro entrepreneurs support Fund, Anganwadi Employee Welfare fund etc. Under Dept. of Education (Higher), the govt. has taken initiatives for women like establishment of Women College, mobility grant for PG students studying in state universities, scholarship scheme for minorities Girls students, free text books up to degree and PG level in the budget of 2023-24. All these schemes for women in Assam have benefited them in receiving proper education & healthcare and to get employment opportunity so that they can be economically independent.

Indian central government's spending on gender budgeting is going to be the highest on record in the financial year 2024-25. Rs 3.1 trillion has been announced in 2024-25 Union budget for schemes and programs that address issues involving women, which accounts for 6.5 percent of the total expenditure by the centre in this financial year. The annual budget for 2024-25 in Assam supports different initiatives for women's empowerment. The Assam government introduced the "Mukhya Mantri Nijut Moina" initiative by aiming to empower one million girls with financial grants to support their education up to higher secondary, graduation, and post-graduation levels. This scheme has its mission to eliminate child marriage and to provide opportunity for girls' education in the state with an allocation of Rs.240 crore. Under this scheme, each girl student who joins class XI will receive 10,000 rupees and those who enrolling in the first year of graduation will receive 12,500 rupees. Rs. 15,000 will be given to those girls students who will enroll in the first year of a post-graduate course. 'Mukhya Mantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyaan' is another scheme of Assam government which is launched under gender budget, 2024-25. A minimum amount of Rs. 47,500 will be provided to each member of SHGs in rural and urban areas. In the gender budget 2024-25, Assam government has highlighted some practices across departments promoting gender-mainstreaming in their schemes such as establishment of a Women Cell 'Nari Surakhya Kokh', financial inclusion of women in the tea gardens of Assam, provisions of Sanitary napkins under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Jal Jeevan Mission, 'Lakhpati baideo' scheme to incentivize entrepreneurship among rural women etc.

In present day world, Gender budgeting has seen as an important technique for socio-economic empowerment of women. Women empowerment is a vital factor for a nation's sustainable development. Gender budgeting tries to bring gender justice by eliminating all forms of gender discrimination and allow women to enjoy their fundamental rights. Gender budget focuses on its dual dimensions of equity and efficiency to uplift women's economic, social and political status. Assam's gender budgeting focuses on allocating funds for women's empowerment, promoting women-lead welfare interventions, skill training, entrepreneurship etc. There are still many shortcomings when it comes to implementation of gender budgeting in our country. There are major challenges such as lack of regular monitoring, limited resources, limited participation of women, lack of capacity building, inadequate funding, limited accountability, presence of socio-economic barriers etc.

## CONCLUSION

The goal of development is to build a world in which all people can enjoy their potential to be fully human, irrespective of their sex, gender, caste, class etc. There have been drastic changes in the status of women all over the world in recent years. However, Gender equality is still continuing to exist as a distant dream in country like India. Women are still deprived and discriminated in different spheres of social-economic life. It is therefore important to ensure that all policy initiatives of government must take women into consideration from all section of society.

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