

# The Budget: A Quick Look through a 'Gender Lens'

*This paper examines the union budget 2001-2002 with a focus on its implications for women's empowerment. Changes in patterns of allocations to various women-specific schemes as well as to schemes of indirect benefit to women have been analysed. This preliminary analysis suggests that the standard perception of women's roles continues to be as mothers and caregivers, and has undergone little change. Investment priorities seem to reinforce this image, and do not reflect a commitment to women's empowerment.*

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## **I** **The Context**

The issue of women's unequal access to economic resources was one of the earliest rallying points for the global women's movement. Organised struggles and determined advocacy by women's groups ensured that this issue came up at the Third International Conference on Women at Nairobi in 1985. However, efforts to pressurise governments to make unambiguous and specific commitments on the issue of providing adequate resources for advancement of women were far less successful. Generous resolutions made at each UN conference remained unfulfilled and forgotten until the next such occasion, when 'lack of resources' was trotted out as an acceptable excuse for inaction. The regularity of this experience led to a demand at Beijing in 1995 for the UN to take a non-negotiable stand on the issue. Paragraph 345 of the Beijing Platform for Action responds to this concern:

Financial and human resources have generally been insufficient for the advancement of women. This has contributed to the slow progress to date in implementing the Nairobi forward-looking strategies for the advancement of women. Full and effective implementation of the Platform for Action, including the relevant commitments made at previous United Nations' summits and conferences, will require a political commitment to make available human and financial resources for the empowerment of women. This will require the integration of a gender perspective

in budgetary decisions on policies and programmes, as well as the adequate financing of specific programmes for securing equality between women and men.<sup>1</sup>

Five years later, reporting on the progress of implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action, the government of India earned the appreciation of the committee on the status of women for making specific resource commitments in critical areas where many other countries were speaking in vague generalities. Consider the issue of allocation of national resources for women's empowerment. Where China would not go further than saying that "resources would be gradually increased" and the government of Bangladesh stated its intention to "make resources available for women in all sectors", the government of India made some strong statements:

Additional resources for expanding and strengthening existing institutions and mechanisms for women's development and empowerment will be provided. The budgets for the department of women and child development will be enhanced. Funds will be earmarked in the budgets of ministries/departments for implementing women's development programmes in different sectors like education, health, welfare, rural development, urban development, labour, agriculture, industry, science and technology, etc. A synergic modality of resource mobilisation will ensure flow of funds and related services from banking/financial institutions, corporate bodies and community organisations at the grass roots levels.<sup>2</sup>

Women's organisations and NGOs participating in the meeting differed with the government of India report on many issues, but were unanimous in welcoming

and supporting the commitment to mainstreaming women's concerns across sectors by earmarking resources for women in the budgets of all the key ministries. This has been a long-standing demand of the women's movement, and even sceptics were of the opinion that this was a significant step forward.

Earlier last year, in March 2000, the finance minister had announced in his budget speech that the year 2001 would be observed as 'Women's Empowerment Year' and announced the setting up of a Task Force to chalk out specific programmes to be taken up during the year. To quote the website of the department of women and child development, "the announcement has been made in the context of an urgent need for improving the access of women to national resources and for ensuring their rightful place in the mainstream of economic development".

This year's budget was therefore keenly awaited. No one really expected the finance minister to make any radical departures from set patterns of allocations, but it was certainly expected that women's issues would emerge from the confines of the department of women and child development, and make a modest debut in some of the 'hard' ministries.

Hopes were raised still further when the *Economic Survey 1999-2000* – a document where women's issues have so far had only a minimal presence, a mere one-page listing of "women development schemes" – included an entire section on gender inequality. This section began with a reminder of the commitment, made in the Ninth Plan document, of allocating 30 per cent of development resources for women's development schemes through 'Women's Component Plans'. This section also contained a strong plea for investing in women's equality on the grounds that this made good economic sense, and spoke of "the social rate of return on investment in women" being greater than the corresponding rate for men. The point was made that investments in public goods and services had differential impacts on women and men, and safe drinking water was particularly mentioned as an example of an investment with high returns for women.

These trends together appeared to signal the presentation of a women-friendly budget, with a substantial increase in allocations to women-specific schemes. Furthermore, in keeping with the commit-

ments made in the Ninth Plan document, increased allocations to sectors like drinking water and primary health care, which are of critical importance to women's lives, also appeared imminent.

Indications that women's expectations might be belied came in the budget speech, where women's issues found only a brief mention:

The year 2001 is being observed as Women's Empowerment Year. My colleague, the deputy chairman of the Planning Commission is heading a Task Force to review the programmes for women. Meanwhile I propose to strengthen the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh for providing micro credit to poor assetless women through NGOs; launch an integrated scheme for women's empowerment in 650 blocks through women's self-help groups, and start a new scheme for women in difficult circumstances like widows of Vrindavan, Kashi and other places, destitute women and other disadvantaged women groups.<sup>3</sup>

In the euphoria over an investor-friendly budget and the upsurge in stock prices, the popular press and the visual media completely failed to register the gaps between promises of women's empowerment and the reality of the budget. This brief comment seeks to highlight some of the critical implications for women of the union budget 2001-2002.

## I Scope and Constraints

At the outset, it must be recognised that only a very preliminary gender analysis of the budget is possible at this stage. The *Expenditure Budget*, the main document from which the expenditure pattern of the government can be discerned, contains information only under broad heads. While it is possible to identify certain schemes that are exclusively meant for women, or would primarily benefit women, one cannot accurately track resources earmarked for women within different schemes of each ministry. Quantifying such 'mainstreamed' resources will only be possible when the details of sub-heads of expenditure under each scheme become available as part of the detailed demands for grants of each ministry.

For instance, while it is possible at this stage to identify the schemes for women's and girls' education in the demand made by the department of education, it is not possible to say what proportion of the resources of, say, the District Primary

Education Programme, is directed towards girls' education. Similarly, even within the women-specific schemes, details of the break-up between the different heads of expenditure are not available, thus making it difficult to estimate a precise quantification of resources flowing to women.

However, even a crude preliminary analysis of the union budget from a gender perspective is valuable in terms of providing an indication of broad policy trends, and assessing the strength of the national commitment to providing adequate resources for the advancement of women. Such a preliminary scan can also provide clues into the next level of analysis, which can be undertaken when more disaggregated data becomes available.

The budget document has no major head under which all programmes intended to benefit women are grouped together. This first-level scan of the budget has focused on two categories of programmes – those primarily or exclusively for women, as well as programmes where women are not identified as exclusive beneficiaries but which have positive implications for women. In the absence of detailed data, the extent of increase or decrease in allocations to each scheme have been compared to allocations for 2000-2001.

## I Targeted Schemes

In looking through a 'gender lens' at the budget demands of various ministries, we were able to identify 35 schemes that can be classified as women-specific (Table 1). Of these, 23 are located in the department of women and child development. Critical sectors like agriculture, rural development, urban development, science and technology and industry – to name only those mentioned in the Beijing +5 document – do not have any explicitly women-specific schemes. Our preliminary scan of the budget documents, to compare allocations made to the same set of 35 schemes in 2000-2001 and 2001-2002, throws up very little that women can celebrate.

While overall allocations for these 35 schemes have increased from Rs 2,691.68 crore in 2000-2001 to Rs 3,186.94 crore in 2001-2002, an increase of 18.4 per cent, this was a consequence of a substantial increase in allocations to schemes within the department of women and child development, the traditional home of women's programmes. The allocations for this department increased by 25 per cent, from

Rs 1,349.5 crore to Rs 1,685.9 crore. On the other hand, the total allocations to the 14 women-specific schemes located in other ministries and departments, had increased by only 11.8 per cent. If it is borne in mind that the average rate of inflation was about 8 per cent, the 'real' increase in allocations to schemes in other departments has been negligible.

Within the department of women and child development, we may identify three types of schemes.

- (1) Schemes for women's empowerment through financial and technical support. These include the Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY), Mahila Samridhhi Yojana (MSY), Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) and Swashakti.
- (2) Socio-economic programmes for special categories of women.
- (3) Schemes for children's welfare.

### *Schemes for Economic Empowerment*

- Despite the emphasis in the *Economic Survey* on the necessity for increased allocations to some flagship programmes for women's empowerment, allocations to IMY, RMK, MSY and Swashakti have either been reduced or have increased only marginally. Allocations to RMK and Mahila Samridhhi Yojana have gone down by 67 per cent and 47 per cent respectively, while the increase in funding to IMY is a mere 8 per cent. According to the *Economic Survey*, apart from expanding its support to women's self-help groups through loans to NGOs, RMK will also be providing credit services to self-help groups formed under the Indira Mahila Yojana. In these circumstances, the 67 per cent cut in the allocation to RMK is difficult to understand.
- The "integrated scheme for women's empowerment in 650 blocks through women's self-help groups" announced by the finance minister is presumably the Swashakti scheme, an experiment that succeeded in Tamil Nadu and is now being extended to six states. However, central funding to the Swashakti scheme has not been increased, and continues at Rs 15 crore. In tune with recent trends, the states concerned will presumably be negotiating directly with financial institutions like IDA and IFAD to find funds for this programme.
- One set of schemes that has experienced a substantial increase in funding is programmes for support to women entrepreneurs. Funds earmarked for technical support programmes have gone up by

38 per cent. The allocation for the scheme of setting up training-cum-production centres has also gone up by 38 per cent. The combined allocation for these two programmes, which was Rs 26 crore in 2000-01, has now gone up to Rs 36 crore.

#### *Schemes for Women in Special Circumstances*

- The budget allocation for 'socio-economic programmes' is a token Rs 1 crore. This budget head will hopefully be augmented through reappropriation and supplementary grants to finance the scheme for "widows of Vrindavan, Kashi and other places, destitute women and other disadvantaged women groups" which was announced in the budget speech.
- There are some encouraging signs of recognition of the needs and problems of working women. Funds allotted to hostels for working women have been increased by 28 per cent, and funding to day-care centres for their children has been enhanced by 19 per cent. The combined allocation for these two programmes has gone up from Rs 25.52 crore in 2000-01, to Rs 30.95 crore in the present budget.
- In counterpoint to these increases, the government's response to the issue of violence against women continues to be lackadaisical. Funds for short-stay homes for women victims of domestic violence have been cut by 12 per cent. This, notwithstanding the fact that there are far fewer such facilities than are needed, and they do not have the wherewithal to provide anything more than minimal levels of shelter and subsistence.

#### *Schemes for Children's Welfare*

- The Balika Samridhhi Yojana, a scheme that comes in for special mention in the *Economic Survey*, was launched with great fanfare in 1997. The scheme aims to improve the status of girl children by providing scholarships to girls from below poverty line families. Allocations to this scheme have been cut by 7 per cent.
- The budget document shows an increase of 27 per cent in funding to child welfare programmes. The bulk of this increase goes to the ICDS programme, which gets Rs 1198 crore from the government of India's own funds and Rs 220 crore from the World Bank.
- The increased funding to ICDS and the commitment to extend its coverage appear to be linked with the withdrawal of support to NGOs who have been active

in this sector. There is a cut of 25 per cent in funding to the Balwadi Nutrition Programme and grants to NGOs for running early childhood care and education centres have been reduced by 34 per cent. The combined allocations for these two programmes is Rs 3 crore.

- The undifferentiated category of 'other schemes' for child welfare has received a 135 per cent boost in funding, from Rs 3.21 crore to Rs 7.54 crore. However, without any further information in the budget document about the nature and focus of these schemes, it is not possible to say how much this increase will actually benefit children.

Overall therefore, even within the department of women and child development, the emphasis in women's programmes is not so much on schemes for overall empowerment, as on traditional schemes for child welfare.

#### *Schemes in the Education Sector*

- Mahila Samakhya, the much-lauded programme of women's education for empowerment, has been given a marginal increase in funding of 10 per cent. The allocation for this programme, Rs 11 crore, comes entirely from external sources, and comes to an end with the Ninth Plan. It can be argued that the

**Table 1: Union Budget 2001-2002 - Allocations to Programmes for Women**  
(Rs in crore)

Demand Number	Demand Name	Budget 2000-01	Revised 2000-01	Budget 2001-02	Per Cent Increase over 2000-01 Allocation
<b>46 Education</b>	Mahila Samakhya	10.00	9.00	11.00	10
	Assistance for boarding/hostel facilities for girl students of secondary/higher secondary schools	5.00	2.50	4.30	-14
	National programme for women education	160.00	10.00	10.00	-94
<b>40 Health and family welfare</b>	Lady Hardinge Medical College and Sucheta Kripalani Hospital	44.88	42.05	43.74	-3
	Reproductive and child health project	951.00	801.00	1,126.95	19
	Maternal benefit scheme			72.00	
	Post-partum programme	111.00	111.00	135.00	22
	Sterilisation beds	1.70	1.70	1.35	-21
<b>48 Women and child development</b>	ICDS	935.00	935.00	1,198.00	28
	WB assisted ICDS projects	180.00	140.00	220.00	22
	Training programme under ICDS	35.00	20.00	40.00	14
	Day care centres	18.50	18.30	21.95	19
	Balwadi nutrition programme	2.00	1.64	1.51	-25
	ECCE grants to NGOs	2.30	1.90	1.51	-34
	Other schemes	3.21	2.97	7.54	135
	Condensed courses for women	1.50	1.50	2.00	33
	Balika Samridhhi Yojana	27.00	21.00	25.00	-7
	Hostels for working women	7.02	7.02	9.00	28
	Support to Technology Entrepreneurship programme	13.00	13.00	18.00	38
	Mahila Samridhhi Yojana	15.00	15.00	8.00	-47
	Socio-economic programmes	1.00	1.00	1.00	0
	C S W B	25.00	24.70	27.00	8
	Training-cum-production centres	13.00	11.00	18.00	38
	Short-stay homes	14.51	9.77	12.84	-12
	Awareness generation programme	1.80	1.80	4.00	122
	N C W	3.50	3.50	5.00	43
	Swashakti project	15.00	8.00	15.00	0
	R M K	3.00	1.51	1.00	-67
	IMY	18.00	2.21	19.50	8
	Other programmes	6.11	3.61	19.89	226
	Nutrition awareness programmes	9.05	8.47	10.15	12
<b>85 Social justice and empowerment</b>	Girls' hostels	8.40	9.10	19.00	126
	Special education programme for girls from SC and low literacy level groups	2.00	0.70	0.01	-100
<b>53 Labour and employment</b>	Improvement in working conditions of child and women labour	36.20	35.80	67.20	86
<b>79 Tribal affairs</b>	Girls' hostels	12.00	7.00	10.50	-13
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,691.68</b>	<b>2,282.75</b>	<b>3,186.94</b>	<b>18.40</b>

Source: *Expenditure Budget 2001-2002*, Ministry of Finance, Government of India.

increase in allocation reflects a mopping-up of the last of project funds rather than any increased commitment to women's empowerment.

- There are no specific schemes to facilitate secondary education for girls, except for the scheme of assistance to boarding/hostel facilities for girl students of secondary and higher secondary schools. The allocation to this scheme has been cut by 14 per cent, and now stands at Rs 4.3 crore.
- The concern repeatedly raised by women's groups regarding the reduced emphasis on education for adult women, is reinforced by the fact that funds to the National Programme for Women's Education have been cut by 94 per cent. This programme will now receive a meagre Rs 10 crore, instead of the Rs 160 crore that were allocated in 2000-2001.
- There are cuts in women-specific education schemes of other ministries as well. As already mentioned, funds to the Balika Samridhhi Yojana of the department of women and child development, that provides for financial incentives for girls' education, have been reduced. The ministry of social justice and empowerment implements a 'Special Education Programme' for girls from scheduled caste and 'low literacy level' groups. The allocation to this scheme, which was Rs 2 crore in 2000-2001, has been reduced to a token Rs 0.01 crore. Even by the kindest possible estimate, there would be at least 100,000 out-of-school girls in the country who meet these criteria. The government of India is supporting these girls with a princely sum of Rs 1 each.
- Apparently, the creation of a separate ministry of tribal affairs has not benefited adivasi girls who do not have a school in their own village, but who nevertheless want to study. Allocations to the scheme of support to girls' hostels implemented by this ministry have been cut by 13 per cent.
- The only bright spot is the substantial increase in allocation of funds to the scheme of girls' hostels implemented by the ministry of social justice and empowerment, from Rs 8.4 crore to Rs 19 crore. The fact that the amount under this head has gone up by 126 per cent must be welcomed.<sup>4</sup>

The insensitivity to women's education in this budget is disheartening. It is quite evident that the government's concern is limited purely to providing basic primary

education for girls. The budget ignores the need for a focused thrust on secondary and higher education, which could have created opportunities for women to take advantage of the increased support for women entrepreneurs. The educational needs of adult women have also been totally ignored.

#### *Schemes in the Health Sector*

- Funding to the reproductive and child health project of the ministry of health and family welfare has been increased by 19 per cent, and stands at Rs 1,126.95 crore. Funding to the post-partum programme has also been increased by 18 per cent and a new scheme of maternal benefits has been launched, with an allocation of Rs 72 crore.
- Funding for the provision of sterilisation beds in primary health centres has come down by 21 per cent. Presumably, the gap will be filled by the increase in allocation to the reproductive and child health programme.

- Funding to the Lady Hardinge Medical College has been reduced by 3 per cent, although it is still substantial at Rs 43.74 crore.

In an accurate reflection of the situation in larger society, this ministry continues to slot women as primarily wives and mothers. One can only hope that the reduction in funding to the country's largest women's medical college is not the thin end of the wedge, heralding more cuts in the future in resources for professional education for women.

## **IV Non-Targeted Schemes**

Some schemes, even though not overtly women-specific, have overwhelming benefits for women. The example of drinking water has been cited in the *Economic Survey*. By cutting down on the time women have to spend in accessing basic survival resources and reducing women's drudgery,

**Table 2: Union Budget 2001-2002 - Allocations to Programmes with Indirect Benefits for Women**  
(Rs crore)

Demand Number	Demand Name	Budget 2000-01	Revised 2000-01	Budget 2001-02	Per Cent Increase over 2000-01 Allocation
<b>1: Agriculture</b>	National watershed programme for development of rainfed agriculture	55.50	114.85	-	-100
	Alkali land reclamation and development programme	20.00	20.00	1.50	-93
<b>21: Environment and Forests</b>	Fuelwood and fodder project	31.00	18.80	22.00	-29
<b>25: Finance</b>	NABARD	28.76	28.76	29.00	1
<b>38: Health</b>	Development of nursing services	17.30	16.00	21.50	24
	Assistance towards hospitalisation of the poor	6.00	3.50	4.00	-33
<b>40: Family Welfare</b>	Free distribution of conventional contraceptives	108.71	95.71	117.00	8
	Health guide scheme	4.75	4.75	4.50	-5
<b>53: Labour</b>	Beedi workers welfare fund	-	0.98	0.15	100
	Compensation to families of drivers of heavy-duty interstate vehicles killed in accidents	0.30	0.30	0.35	17
<b>59: Non-Conventional Energy</b>	Biogas programme	66.50	62.50	54.95	-17
	Integrated rural energy programme	8.00	5.00	6.65	-17
	Biomass programme	37.70	18.50	18.80	-50
	Improved chullahs	19.00	16.05	16.05	-16
<b>65: Rural Development</b>	Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana	900.00	370.00	450.00	-50
	Employment Assurance Scheme	1,170.00	1,453.00	1,440.00	23
	Jawahar Gram Samridhhi Yojana	1,485.00	1,345.00	1,485.00	0
<b>66: Land Resources</b>	Integrated wastelands development projects scheme	398.80	365.12	351.00	-12
<b>67: Drinking Water Supply</b>	Accelerated rural water supply programme	1,764.07	1,764.07	1,809.08	3
	Rural sanitation	126.00	126.00	135.00	7
<b>80: Urban Development</b>	Special scheme for water supply	2.00	0.02	0.02	-99
<b>83: Urban Employment and Poverty Alleviation</b>	Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana	168.00	95.03	168.00	0
<b>Total</b>		6,417.39	5,923.94	6,134.55	-4

Source: *Expenditure Budget 2001-2002*, Ministry of Finance, Government of India

investments in assuring supplies of drinking water, fuel and fodder at the village level are of direct benefit to women. Similarly, schemes for poverty alleviation, particularly those that include components to be implemented by women's collectives or self-help groups, can benefit women both directly, through providing work opportunities, or indirectly through the development of infrastructure and assets of benefit to women. Table 2 gives details of 19 such schemes from the budget demands of various ministries. The total allocation to these schemes has seen a reduction of 4 per cent from the level of last year

#### *Poverty Alleviation Programmes*

- Allocations to the country's major rural poverty alleviation programme, the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana, where 40 per cent of funds will be channelised through women's groups, have been cut by half – from Rs 900 crore to Rs 450 crore. If this gap is not covered with funding from other sources, the impact on women will be immediate and devastating, particularly given the simultaneous cuts in allocations to IMY, RMK and Mahila Samridhhi Yojana. Funding to the corresponding programme for urban areas, the Swarnajayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana, has remained at Rs 168 crore. Similarly, funds to the Jawahar Gram Samridhhi Yojana, an employment assurance scheme where 30 per cent of employment is reserved for women, have not been increased and remain at Rs 1485 crore.
- The increase of 23 per cent to the Employment Assurance Scheme, which includes Food for Work programmes, is welcome in itself. However, this scheme does not mandate any specific quota for women.
- Funds allocated to NABARD, under the demand of the ministry of finance, have been increased only marginally from Rs 28.76 crore to Rs 29 crore. Given the proposal to increase the funding to women's groups from mainstream credit institutions like NABARD, one would have expected to see a significant increase under this head.

#### *Water Supply and Sanitation Programmes*

- Allocations to programmes for rural water supply and rural sanitation have been increased by a token 3 per cent and 7 per cent respectively. Support to the special scheme for urban water

supply has been slashed drastically and now stands at Rs 0.02 crore. Given that a substantial section of the rural population still does not have access to safe drinking water or toilets, these increases can hardly be called evidence of a commitment to women. It remains to be seen to what extent this amount is supplemented with resources from bilateral and multilateral donors mobilised by individual states.

#### *Programmes for Development of Natural Resources*

- The National Watershed Programme for the development of rainfed agriculture focuses on increasing the productivity of uncultivated wastelands. This scheme has a component of funding to women's self-help groups and is being implemented by women's groups in many states. By providing work to women in agriculture, and by enhancing the local availability of fodder and cheaper foodgrains like sorghum and millet (often the only crops suitable for growing on wastelands), this scheme could have major benefits for women. Against last year's allocation of Rs 55 crore, there is no funding to this scheme in the current budget. Perhaps it is expected that the Integrated Wastelands Development Project under the department of land resources will take up the slack, but if this is indeed the case, the marginal increase in allocation to this scheme, is far from sufficient.
- Similarly, allocations to the Fuelwood and Fodder Development Project under the ministry of environment and forests have been cut by 29 per cent, from Rs 31 crore to Rs 22 crore. There have also been drastic cuts in allocations to a cluster of programmes for integrated rural energy, biogas, biomass and improved chullahs under the ministry of non-conventional energy, from a total of Rs 131.2 crore in 2000-2001, to Rs 96.45 crore this year. Since all these programmes incorporate direct benefits for women in terms of reductions in drudgery and improvements in health, these cuts are not encouraging.

#### *Health and Family Welfare Programmes*

- The scheme for Assistance to Hospitalisation of the Poor, also under the ministry of health, has experienced a 33 per cent cut, from Rs 6 crore to Rs 4 crore. There is now ample evidence to show that medical expenses are a prime

cause of indebtedness among poor families, and it is most often women who bear the brunt. In such a situation, the cut must be interpreted as an indication of the government's determination to reduce 'wasteful subsidies' in the health sector, regardless of the implications for women.

- The allocation to the scheme of free distribution of conventional contraceptives, under the department of family welfare has been marginally enhanced. In spite of the many reported irregularities in the implementation of this scheme, it provides perhaps the only safe option for rural women who do not want to go in for sterilisation, usually the only choice offered to them by doctors in the public health system.
- Given that nursing is a women-dominated profession, the 24 per cent increase in allocation to the scheme for Development of Nursing Services under the department of health of the ministry of health and family welfare, is very welcome. Unfortunately, the Health Guide scheme under the department of family welfare in the same ministry has not been similarly supported. Under this scheme, women selected by the community are trained to be primary health care providers at the village level. Although the 'honorarium' paid to these village health guides is unbelievably low – Rs 50 a month! – they provide a valuable service in areas beyond the reach of the average PHC. In areas where they receive adequate training and support from NGOs or the Primary Health System, the work of these women has been extremely effective in reducing child morbidity, ensuring immunisation coverage and promoting safe motherhood. In many instances, these women have gained the respect and appreciation of their communities. An increase in funding to this scheme – with an increase in the honorarium – would be justified not only on the grounds that it has the potential for promoting women's empowerment, but also because it can have a significant positive impact on women's and children's health. Sadly, the allocation to this scheme is a meagre Rs 4.5 crore.

#### *Programmes for Workers' Welfare*

- There is a minimal net increase of Rs 0.15 crore in the allocations to the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund under the ministry of labour. Payments into the

fund have gone up from Rs 42 crore to Rs 78 crore. The deficit after payments from the fund has increased from Rs 38.31 crore to Rs 66.82 crore. Since most beedi workers are women, the increase in government support to their welfare is a positive signal. This increase reflects the strength of the beedi workers long-drawn out struggle for their rights, which has been able to claim and ensure payments into the fund from both employers and the government.

- Less organised sectors of the workforce, like transport workers, have been unable to claim similar benefits. The scheme, also under the labour ministry, of payment of compensation to the families of drivers of heavy-duty interstate vehicles who are killed in accidents, has seen only a token increase, from Rs 0.3 crore to Rs 0.35 crore. Since this is not a sector where the death of a husband can be compensated with employment for the wife, the compensation amount is often the only protection against destitution for the family.

## V Conclusions

Going by this preliminary analysis, the rhetoric of women's empowerment appears to have had very little impact on priorities for resource allocation at the centre. Far from being mainstreamed, gender equality concerns continue to be the responsibility of the department of women and child development. The absence of earmarked allocations for women in the budget demands of the ministries of agriculture, science and technology, environment and forests, information technology and small-scale industry are depressing indicators of 'business as usual'.

What is more, women continue to be identified primarily as mothers. While there is a policy commitment to making them economically self-sufficient, investing in building their capacities – as workers, as farmers, as professionals – comes low on the list of priorities. It is significant that the importance of the nursing profession – most emblematic of women's 'caring' role – has been recognised with an enhanced allocation for nursing training. However, there is no corresponding effort to facilitate the entry of women into other professions where they are under represented, like law, engineering or computer software.

The overall trend is definitely towards reduction of subsidies in critical sectors like health, and replacing them with 'cash-and-carry' services which, it is claimed, will be of a better quality. In such a situation, where women's ability to pay is a critical determinant of their well being, the steady trend of declining investment in education for women has serious implications. On the one hand, women are expected to become self-employed entrepreneurs – to engage with markets, middlemen and financial institutions and squeeze profits out of micro-investments. On the other, the abilities of women to cope with these processes are being steadily undermined. Like earlier budgets, this one too ignores women's needs for the kind of education that can give them access to the information and technologies that can enable them to become serious competitors in an economic environment dominated by global players.

This depressing scenario is repeated in the case of some critical projects where women stand to benefit from improvements in their material conditions, if not in their social position. Cuts to allocations for poverty alleviation programmes and programmes that can potentially alleviate women's burden of unpaid domestic work, reflect a basic insensitivity to women's priorities and problems that is all the more surprising in view of the publicity around the Women's Empowerment Year.

How is one to interpret the fact that allocations to poverty alleviation programmes that incorporate targeting for women, like the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana and the Jawahar Gram Samridhhi Yojana, have either been cut or have remained static, while programmes with no earmarking of resources for women have been favoured? If planners and policy-makers are sincere in their expressions of commitment to women's empowerment, such trends can only be an indication of a lack of basic skills in gender-sensitive planning.<sup>5</sup>

Even in the few cases where there has been an increase in allocation, as for instance in the ICDS programme and the Employment Assurance Scheme, there are serious concerns related to implementation that can undermine their likely positive impact. The public hearings organised by people's movements against corruption in various states have focused particularly on employment programmes. The hearings have thrown up enough evidence to show that even where women manage to get employment under these programmes,

the wages they are paid are not only below the minimum wage, they are also less than what is paid to men. Similarly, the implementation of the ICDS has been widely critiqued by several review committees. The benefits in terms of improvements to children's health and school enrolment, may not be commensurate with the increased allocations to this programme, unless there is a radical overhaul of implementation mechanisms.

It may be argued that it is foolish to expect any substantial increases in allocations to any sector during periods of fiscal stringency. However, the present budget does not seem to be under such compulsions as far as certain items of 'non-essential' expenditure are concerned.<sup>6</sup> In the final analysis, political commitment to women's empowerment seems to be the missing ingredient of the budget in this Year of Women's Empowerment! **EWY**

## Notes

[This paper reflects the personal views of the authors, and does not represent the official position of the organisation to which they are affiliated. We would like to thank Pradeep Sharma for useful comments and Shashi Sudhir for assistance with the tables.]

- 1 Fourth World Conference on Women 1995, Platform for Action.
- 2 UNIFEM, 'WomenWatch': Summary of National Action Plans and Strategies for Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, 2000.
- 3 Budget 2001-2002. Paragraph 67 of the finance minister's budget speech, ministry of finance, government of India.
- 4 It is noteworthy that this amount is considerably less than the amount allotted by the same ministry for welfare of animals (Rs 83 crore).
- 5 There is a strong case for a substantial allocation towards gender training of bureaucrats. Unfortunately, the department of personnel has not asked for funds to continue this activity, which was taken up in earlier years with support from international donors.
- 6 A look at some of the budget heads that have witnessed fairly substantial hikes, in contrast to cuts in allocations to women's programmes, proved illuminating. A few examples, randomly selected, will serve to make the point. The budget for entertainment of the ministry of external affairs has gone up from Rs 19 crore to Rs 23 crore – an increase of 21 per cent. The allocation for 'Special Diplomatic Expenditure', again under the ministry of external affairs, has been enhanced by over 38 per cent, and has gone up from Rs 515 crore to Rs 711.85 crore. The allocation to the Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan – an institution dedicated to the promotion of traditional learning in Sanskrit – has gone up from Rs 16.5 crore to Rs 24.57 crore, an increase of 49 per cent.