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## **Overall gender budget poor**

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Finance minister Pranab Mukherjee's announcement in Budget 2011 hiking the monthly remuneration of 'anganwadi' workers and helpers to Rs 3,000 and Rs 1,500, respectively, in response to the long-standing demand for minimum wages, gave many women's groups a reason to cheer but the overall allocation when viewed through the gender lens appears grim.

An increase in the monthly remuneration of anganwadi workers and helpers would at least ensure minimum wages to the front-line service providers of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government's largest nutritional programme. However, there are more negatives than positives. While there has been an increase in the remuneration of 'anganwadi' workers and helpers, health workers under the Centre's flagship National Rural Health Mission and cooks-cum-helpers under the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, who are predominantly women, continue to suffer.

The Budget has also fallen short in terms of allocations for women's development. The assessment of the gender budgeting statement brought out by the government shows that the total quantum of Union budget allocations earmarked for women as a proportion of the total Union budget outlay has gone up marginally from 6.1% in 2010-11 (budget estimate or BE) to 6.2% in 2011-12 (BE). This by no means can be considered adequate for women who constitute half the population. Furthermore, sectoral analysis shows that as of last year, education and health accounted for half the total resources earmarked for women. Crucial issues such as institutional mechanisms, support services for women and their political participation have not received attention. The share of allocations meant for promoting women's economic participation reflects an increase from 0.5% to 20% mainly on account of more schemes of a few ministries reporting in this year's gender budgeting statement. No new interventions have been introduced for women from the most marginalized sections, as reflected in the proportion of schemes targeting the most marginalized women (3.5%) vis-à-vis women in general (96.5%). Many critical schemes meant for women such as hostels for working women, support to training and employment programme, Swadhar, gender budgeting and Priyadarshini have all registered a decline in allocations from last year. This is despite almost 70% of utilization of funds in the case of Swadhar as reflected in the summary of expenditure of the ministry of women and child development.

It is also imperative to compare the funds allocated from 2007-08 to 2011-12 with the outlay proposed in the 11th Five-Year Plan since the year 2011-12 marks the end of the

Plan period. The comparison reveals that the proportion of funds allocated in the five years is less than 50% in the case of gender budgeting and conditional cash transfer for the girl child with insurance cover. This proportion is lowest for Swayamsidha (15%), which was supposed to be the main vehicle for women's empowerment in the 11th Plan. Moreover, there were hopes for a scheme to implement the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act which has not received any Central funding since its enactment in 2005.

In addition to the low allocations that persist, the methodology of the gender budgeting statement has also not seen any change over the past four years. Except for rectification of a reporting error by the ministry of youth affairs and sports till last year, assumptions behind reporting allocations under Part B of the gender budgeting statement remain questionable. For instance, all schemes of the ministry of minority affairs under part B of the statement report 100% of their allocations. This is incorrect, since Part B of the statement enlists schemes with 30–99% provisions meant for women and girls. Similarly, Improvement in Working Conditions of Child/Women Labour— a scheme of the ministry of labour and employment— is also reporting 100% of its provisions under part B of the statement. The fact that the number of ministries/departments reporting in the gender budgeting statement remains stagnant at 33 for the fifth consecutive year is a matter of serious concern. This reflects the larger perspective of not recognizing the gender-based disadvantages that prevail in all sectors and calls for concerted efforts on the part of all ministries and departments towards making their interventions more gender sensitive.

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