

Economic survey 2020-21 and budget 2021: A gender analysis

Nirmala Padmanabhan

Associate Professor, St.Terasas College, Ernakulam

Analysis of the economic survey 2020-2021 from a gender angle revealed positives as well as negatives. Volume one has a basic necessities index, which is estimated using 26 indicators, that includes housing, water, sanitation, electricity, clean cooking fuel and even micro environment that talks about whether your surroundings are free from mosquitoes. Thus an attempt has been made to calculate whether basic necessities are being met or not. Some of these have very important gender implications, particularly water. If tap water is made available within the house, it saves up to one hour of walking for women to access the same. The survey also reports that basic necessities index have improved disproportionately for the lower economic strata and for the less developed states in turn narrowing down such disparity in the country. The emphasis on water and sanitation in the budget is something that is favorable for the nation as a whole and in particular for women considering the fact that the world over is heading towards water shortage.

But what is upsetting is that while volume two chapter 10 on social infrastructure and unemployment etc mentions HDI, there is no mention of Gender Development Index (GDI) at all. It is although the GDI is not very significant as such. That chapter also discusses labor force participation and highlights that female labor force participation is around 26 percentage - very much lower compared to men. It discusses results of gender based time use survey which highlights that the time spent by women in productive age group on paid activity is only 1/5th of that by men while time spent on unpaid non- SNA activity - is eight times that of men. Subsequently the survey discusses reasons for women's low participation in the Labor force-primarily being their engagement in unpaid work and highlights the need for measures to increase female LFPR such as need for affordable and quality child care,

health, elderly care, family-friendly work environment etc. However, when you compare the provisions for women in the budget, they do not reflect such pre requisites needed for addressing the root cause of low female workforce participation. Thus there is an apparent discord between identified issues in the economic survey and provisions in the budget to address them.

Union budget since 2005 has included gender responsive budgeting statement with its two parts, Part A, and Part B. Part A includes those schemes which have hundred percent funds allotted for women while Part B includes those schemes where at least 30% allocation is for women. If you analyze the total resources in the GRB statement 2021- 22 as a percentage of total expenditure or total budget outlay, you will find a clear decrease as compared to our expectations that there will be an increase in allocation due to the very obvious fact that Covid pandemic has had lots of gender implications including increasing gender violence, child violence etc. The budget estimate for GRB in 2021-22 was 4.4% which is significantly lower than the revised estimates for 2020-21 i.e. 6.0% and is even lower than the actual of 2019-20 i.e., 4.6 %. Thus, total resources being earmarked for women is clearly on the decrease.

Another worry is that allocation for MGNREGS - the umbrella, which provided a lot of comfort to rural people during the pandemic- is much less this year. Apart from the absolute decline in the quantum what is also alarming is that share of women in MGNREGS has dropped to a lowest in the last five to six years i.e., around 53%. That means not only has the absolute size of the cake or the pie declined, the share of women in the pie has also declined. Anganwadi workers and ASHA workers who actually played a very important role during this pandemic time, are not included in new code of social security 2020. Amidst this depressing scenario on labor front, one positive aspect is that allotment to the national rural livelihood mission, which offers a lot of hope for women has been increased quite substantially in 2020-21.

If you analyze some of the welfare measures such as National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) where 59 percentage of the beneficiaries are women and transgender people, you find the allocation has remained stagnant over the years. The widow pension is just Rs. 300 and old age pension is Rs. 200 to 500 which is very low compared to Kerala.

Another concern is that total allotment for Ministry of women and child development also shows a decrease. Many schemes under this Ministry have been subsumed into 2 main projects that is SAMBAL and SAMARTYA which together has been termed as mission Shakti. SAMBAL subsumes a number of projects that is one stop centres which give protection to women in need who face abuse, mahila police volunteers, women's helpline, Swadhar Greh which offers temporary protection to women , Ujjwala scheme, widow homes, working women's hostels etc. All these together which had a budget estimate of Rs 655 cr in 2020 -21 has now a revised estimate of Rs 254.9 cr in 2020-21 which reveals that even allotted amount was not utilized despite reports of increasing violence faced by women during the pandemic. While many other expenditure heads increased in revised estimates as compared to allotment, here not even allotted funds were fully utilized. Schemes which offer protection to the women literally got squeezed and in the current budget provision all these schemes together are subsumed in this one scheme for which the allotment is Rs. 587 cr which is less than the allotment in 2020 -21. Same pattern is reflected in case of SAMARTYA another scheme for women. again, what we find is that the budget estimate in 2020-21 was Rs. 2828 cr, whereas the revised estimates are Rs.1,418 cr and, if you take this year it is around Rs. 2500 cr which is less than what was estimated in previous year.

Resources set apart for children reveals a similar pattern. While share in total budget in 2019-20 was 2.9 percentage, budget estimate for 20-21 was 3.15%, revised estimate for same period was only 2.33 percentage which again shows that, these were the critical segments that actually have faced a cut in expenditure during the pandemic and this year it's only 2.46 percentage. Funds for protection of children, which was Rs 1500 cr in 2020-2021 budget estimate declined to Rs 821 cr in the revised estimate. The entire Anganwadi services have been subsumed into another program called SAKSHAM Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0. Here also you find that budget estimate 2021-22 is only Rs 20,105 cr, which is much less than the budget estimate of 2020- 21.

Summarizing, despite the gender consequences of this pandemic year, many of the revised estimates for projects favoring women and children were actually much less compared to the budget estimates and the budget provisions this year are also much less compared to previous years.