

## **Whither the programmes for aspirational Indians?**

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Union Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitaraman in her budget speech for 2020-21 stated:

"For today's youth born at the turn of the century, for every member of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes who seeks a better life, for every woman wishing to stand up and be counted, for every individual from the minority sections of our society - this Budget aims to have your aspirations and hopes addressed," (p.1)

Given that SC-ST people make up 25 per cent of India's population, it's vital to understand how the Union Budget has been oriented towards their deprivations, aspirations and entitlements. This issue assumes especially when the FM outlined a blueprint for inclusive development for aspirational India.

### **Aspirational India: A pillar**

The budget proposals for the years 2021-2022 are based on six pillars; 1) health and well-being 2) physical and financial capital, and infrastructure 3) inclusive development for aspirational India 4) reinvigorating human capital 5) innovation and R&D, and 6) minimum government and maximum governance. It is assumed that under the pillar of inclusive development the aspirations of SC/STs and others for a better life will be protected. The major programmes under this pillar include agriculture and associated industries, farmers' welfare and rural India, migrant workers and labour, and financial inclusion. The budget announced specific schemes to facilitate credit flow under the Stand Up India scheme for SCs, STs, and women. This included a reduction in the margin money requirement from 25 per cent to 15 per cent and a scheme to provide loans for agriculture-related industries. The increased allocation for Ekalavya Model Residential Schools for Tribals and the revamping

of the Post Matric Scholarship Scheme for the Scheduled Castes are the other notable announcements. For the above Rs. 35,219 crore have been set aside which is expected to benefit 4 crore SC students.

### **Allocation and distribution**

Statements 10A and 10B of the expenditure budget detail the scheme-by-scheme allocations for the SCs and STs. As is evident from Table 1, the allocation for the SC for the current year is Rs.126259 crore, or 3.6 per cent of the total budget. (Rs. 3483236 crore). This accounts for 8.8 per cent of the total scheme allocation (Rs. 1433008 crore) that includes Rs.1051703 crore for Central Sector Schemes and Rs.381305 Crore for Centrally Sponsored Schemes. The allocation for the welfare of ST is Rs. 79949.62 crore which constitutes 2.3 per cent of the total budget size and 5.6 per cent of the total scheme allocation. 330 schemes for SCs and 326 schemes for STs have been allocated under AWSC (Allocation for Welfare of Scheduled Castes) & AWST (Allocation for Welfare of Scheduled Tribes

For ease of understanding, the scheme-wise allocation for SC-ST can be divided into three categories; targeted schemes, non-targeted schemes, and obsolete schemes. Targeted initiatives have designated funds for a specific number of SC and ST beneficiaries who will directly benefit. Scholarships, for example. Non-targeted schemes, on the other hand, include 'General Schemes' that are not specifically designed to benefit the needs of SCs and STs (such as ICDS, PM Kisan Yojana, etc.) and 'Obsolete Schemes' that are notional allocations (such as the National Rural Health Mission Infrastructure Maintenance Scheme) based on erroneous/ambiguous assumptions of benefiting any community. Out of the total allocation to SC, Rs. 48,397 crore (38 per cent) and Rs. 77, 862 crore (62 per cent) are for targeted and non-targeted schemes respectively. For ST, the distinction of allocation for targeted and non-targeted schemes is Rs. 27, 830 crore (35 per cent) and 52,112 crore (65 per cent) respectively.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1.** Allocation of fund for the welfare of SC/ST in union budgets during 2017-22

| Year    | Allocation(crore) |            |            |     |     |
|---------|-------------------|------------|------------|-----|-----|
|         | Scheme Total      | SC Welfare | ST Welfare | SC% | ST% |
| 2017-18 | 945077            | 52392.6    | 31919.5    | 5.5 | 3.4 |
| 2018-19 | 1014451           | 56618.5    | 39134.7    | 5.6 | 3.9 |
| 2019-20 | 1202404           | 81340.7    | 52884.8    | 6.8 | 4.4 |
| 2020-21 | 1171719           | 83256.6    | 53652.9    | 7.1 | 4.6 |
| 2021-22 | 1433008           | 126259.0   | 79949.6    | 8.8 | 5.6 |
|         | 5766659           | 399867.41  | 257541.54  | 6.9 | 4.5 |

Source: Compiled from union budgets

### Top funded schemes

Six departments have received 72.4 percent of the total allotment (Rs. 91393.49 crore) among the 38 departments/ministries for SC welfare. Similarly, six departments receive 68.9 percent (Rs.55049.1 crore) of the entire allocation for tribal development among the 44 departments/ministries for ST welfare. Similarly, six departments. The issue of relevance, however, is whether these massive allocations will result in outcomes that help to improve the plight of SCs and STs? For example, the Jal Jeevan Mission has a total budget of Rs. 50,000 crore under the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation which includes Rs. 11,002.42 crore for SC and Rs. 5001 crore for ST. Despite the enormous budget, this initiative does not provide direct benefits to the community. Similarly, the entire allocation under the Department of Higher Education both specified in 10A (Rs.3843 Crore for SC) and 10B (Rs. 1963.45 Cores for ST) is notional and almost paper allocation that they do not directly benefit the SC-ST students because of the general nature of the sub schemes formulated within this allocation such as improvement in salary scale of university and college teachers, national digital library, support to directorate of Hindi etc

### Mismatches in the schemes

Unrealistic allocation is evident in top-funded systems, resulting in grey regions in the scheme's effectiveness. The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation, and Farmers' Welfare, for example, has set aside Rs. 20874.8 crore for SCs. According to NSSO statistics (70th round, Household Ownership and Operational Holdings in India, Statement 4.4), Scheduled Tribe has the lowest percentage (11.9 %) of estimated households, while Scheduled Caste

had the lowest proportion (9.2 %) of land owned. The average area owned per household was the highest for others (0.816 ha) and the lowest for Schedules Caste (0.272 ha). This shows SCs are mostly a non-cultivating class so that the allocated amount will not go for the welfare of SC and this huge allocation will not make any significant changes in their life.

Of the total SC households in India, only 0.7 per cent and 0.2 per cent have jobs in the government and public sector respectively whereas 5 per cent and 1.1 per cent of the total households have government and Public sector jobs respectively (Socio-economic Caste Census 2011) and the number of SCs who are registered in employment exchanges has increased from 63,89,600 in 2001 to 71,66,300 in 2012 (Employment Exchange Statistics, 2014). Hence providing employment is the most important requirement of the SC/ST communities and requires immediate intervention of the government.

Regarding the economic growth through employment generating schemes, the budget announced Production Linked Incentive schemes (PLI) as the part of Atma Nirbhar Bharat, which have been announced for 13 sectors, which are expected to generate lakhs of job opportunities for Indian youth. But as far as the economic development of SC/ST is concerned, the allocations under Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) for SC and ST are only Rs. 412.6 and Rs. 210.1 crore respectively. It is worth noting that the "Credit Guarantee Fund for SCs" received no funding in this year's Budget, while the "Credit Support Scheme for STs" received only one lakh rupees. The allocation of Rs.100 crore for the 'Self Employment Programme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers' scheme among SC, nevertheless, deserves to be noted.

The Venture Capital Fund for Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes received Rs. 40 crore the previous year, but there is no funding for this scheme in this budget. Furthermore, under the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, the allocation for entrepreneurship development for SC/STs is just Rs. 7.5 crore and Rs. 3.9 crore which, needless to say, is grossly inadequate to given the objectives of the scheme.

The National Family Health Survey-4, 2015-16 observed that the under-five mortality rate for SCs (56 deaths per 1,000 live births) and STs (57 deaths per 1,000 live births) are considerably higher than other communities. (p.187). This is inter alia on account of their lack of nutrition and anemia is considerably higher in rural areas, among children of women with no education, among scheduled castes and tribes, and children in households in the

lower wealth quintiles. (xxxiv and ix | Summary of Findings). Unfortunately, however, the budget hardly recognizes this hard reality and that no special allocation is provided for SC/ST under National Nutrition Mission.

### **Miles and miles to go**

Although the budget 2021-22 was presented midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is regrettable that the budget has not announced any special packages for SC-ST people who have been the hardest hit by the pandemic crisis in terms of health, employment, income, and so on, and has completely ignored them in the announced Rs. 20 lakh crore economic stimulus package as an immediate relief measure and economic revival. In the face of the pandemic, however, some of the states have begun to dilute state labour regulations and introduce revisions in sync with federal legislation. It has a significant detrimental influence on the livelihood and survival of a vast number of poor and marginalized people, the majority of whom are low-wage earners. There are miles and miles to go to realise the dreams of aspirational Indians, as one would say.

### **Reference:**

Dalit Adivasi Budget Analysis 2021-22, NCDHR, New Delhi