Role of Gender Budgeting in Women Empowerment in India: A Sociological Discourse

Dr Amar Nath
Assistant Professor
Dept. of Sociology
Baba Barua Das P.G. College
Paruiya Ashram, Ambedkernagar, U.P.
Email: amarsocio@gmail.com

Abstract

The status of women in Indian society has historically been influenced by social, economic, and political inequalities. The limited participation of women in education, healthcare, employment, property rights, and decision-making processes clearly highlights gender disparity. Under such circumstances, Gender Budgeting has emerged as an effective public policy tool, aiming to analyse government budgets and schemes through a gender lens to ensure an equitable and inclusive distribution of resources. Gender Budgeting is not a separate budget for women; rather, it is a strategic process of mainstreaming gender sensitivity into budgetary policies, schemes, and programs. In India, gender budgeting has played a vital role in enhancing women's empowerment by ensuring that financial allocations address gender gaps across various sectors such as health, education, and employment. Gender Responsive Budgeting was institutionalized in India from the fiscal year 2005–06, thereby prioritizing women's needs in policy-making and financial allocations. This research paper analyses the role of gender budgeting in women's empowerment from a sociological perspective. It examines how budgetary allocations impact women's socio-economic status, education, healthcare, and political participation. Furthermore, this study reviews the challenges encountered in implementing gender-responsive budgeting in India and offers suggestions to strengthen its effectiveness. The study concludes that gender budgeting is a crucial instrument for promoting the inclusive development of women and gender equality. However, ensuring its ultimate effectiveness requires greater transparency, accountability, and public participation in policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation processes.

Keywords: *Gender Budgeting, Women Empowerment, Gender Equality, gender disparity, Socio-Economic Development, Social Inclusion.*

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:
Received: 23.05.26
Approved: 13.06.26

Dr Amar Nath

Role of Gender Budgeting in Women Empowerment in India: A Sociological Discourse

Vol. XVII, No.1
Article No. 09,
Pg. 072-084

Similarity Check: 02%

Online available at
https://anubooks.com/journal-volume/jgv-vol-xvii-no1-jan-june-2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.31995/jgv.2026.v17i01.009

**This article has been peer-reviewed by the Review Committee of JGV.*

Introduction

Women's empowerment is the critical cornerstone for the holistic development of any society. In Indian society, women have long faced inequalities and discrimination in domains such as education, healthcare, employment, property rights, and political participation. Due to the patriarchal social structure, the socio-economic status of women remained relatively weak. To alleviate this inequality and integrate women into the mainstream of development, the government implemented various policies and schemes, among which Gender Budgeting stands out as a landmark initiative. Gender Budgeting does not imply drafting a separate budget for women; rather, it means evaluating government budgets and formulations through a gender perspective to ensure a just and inclusive distribution of resources. Its objective is to evaluate how public policies and fiscal allocations impact women and men differently, and to what extent women's specific needs are being prioritized. Gender Budgeting was formally introduced in India's Union Budget in the fiscal year 2005–06. Through this mechanism, increased significance was accorded to schemes related to women's education, health, nutrition, employment, and social security. This is not merely an economic policy, but a profound medium for advancing social justice and gender equality. From a sociological standpoint, gender budgeting plays a crucial role in strengthening the socio-economic status of women, enhancing their agency, and fostering self-reliance. This research paper analyzes the role of gender budgeting in women's empowerment, its operational effectiveness, and the systemic challenges associated with its implementation.

Research Gap

Available literature reveals that most studies have predominantly emphasized the economic and policy-oriented aspects of gender budgeting. In contrast, its social outcomes—such as its impact on social structure, gender relations, decision-making capacity, and broader social transformation—have been relatively understudied from a sociological perspective. This research endeavors to bridge this specific gap and provides a sociological analysis of the role of gender budgeting in women's empowerment.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the relationship between gender budgeting and women's empowerment.
2. To understand its structural impacts across various socio-economic sectors.
3. To evaluate the core challenges and the overall effectiveness of its execution.

Research Questions

1. Does gender budgeting actively accelerate women's empowerment?

2. Are budgetary policies genuinely effective in establishing institutional gender equality?

Review of Literature

Several global and national studies concerning women's empowerment and gender budgeting have presented vital conclusions, which can be analyzed under the following thematic categories:

1. Theoretical Framework and Women's Empowerment

Amartya Sen (1999): In his seminal book "Development as Freedom", Sen defined development not merely as economic growth, but as the expansion of human capabilities. His "Capability Approach" emphasizes providing women with equal access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. This approach offers a robust theoretical foundation to gender budgeting, as the ultimate goal of such budgeting is to expand women's substantive capabilities and freedoms of choice.

Diane Elson (2002): According to Elson, a government budget is not merely a financial or economic document; it is a vital instrument for social justice and the equitable redistribution of resources. She highlighted that traditional budgetary processes routinely ignore the specific needs of women and overlook their Unpaid Care Work. Therefore, integrating a gender perspective into budget formulation is imperative. She also developed various practical tools for analyzing gender-responsive budgeting.

Naila Kabeer (2005): Kabeer correlated women's empowerment with equal access to resources, opportunities, and parity in decision-making. According to her, true empowerment provides women with the capacity for independent choice and action (Agency) over their own lives. She argued that structural and institutional transformations are mandatory prerequisites for achieving long-term gender equality.

Bina Agarwal (2010): Agarwal identified women's economic participation, legal rights over property (especially land), and their active role in community decision-making as the core foundations of empowerment. In her view, gender budgeting fosters inclusive development by accelerating the availability and ownership of productive assets for women.

2. Institutional Framework and Policy Initiatives in India

Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD, 2015): According to the Ministry's report, gender budgeting was given an official and institutional shape in India starting from the fiscal year 2005–06. Under this mandate, "Gender Budget Cells" were established across various ministries and departments to conduct gender analyses of policies and public schemes. While the report notes enhanced financial allocations for women's health, education, nutrition, and self-employment schemes, it acknowledges that administrative and monitoring challenges persist.

Chakraborty (2016): This study presented a comparative analysis of gender budgeting across various Indian states. The findings indicated that the mechanism was highly effective and outcome-oriented in states like Kerala, Karnataka, and Delhi, whereas in several other states, it remained restricted to a mere formal paper exercise. The researcher identified bureaucratic apathy, lack of political will, and an absence of gender sensitivity as the primary structural barriers.

3. Practical Impacts and Challenges of Gender Budgeting

Sharma & Gupta (2018): Their study revealed that awareness regarding gender budgeting and women-centric schemes remains comparatively low in rural parts of India. Despite adequate budgetary provisions within the schemes, their reach to the targeted beneficiaries remains severely restricted. The study notes that deeply entrenched social stereotypes, illiteracy, and complex administrative bottlenecks act as major impediments.

Lahiri & Ghosh (2018): The authors clarified that the enforcement of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) has successfully led to a noteworthy escalation in policy-level financial allocations for women-centric schemes. It has assisted policy-makers in recognizing the gendered impacts of fiscal allocations. However, an objective, data-driven "Impact Assessment" of these schemes on actual socio-economic realities remains largely absent.

Goyal & Madan (2019): According to this study, gender budgeting has played a positive role in improving women's access to education, primary healthcare, and employment. Financial resources have expanded for girl-child education (e.g., Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana, bicycle distribution schemes), maternal health, and women's self-employment. Nonetheless, structural fragmentation, a lack of inter-departmental coordination, a shortage of trained human resources, and weak monitoring mechanisms limit its optimum efficacy.

4. Global Perspective and Sustainable Development

UN Women (2020): According to this global report, gender-responsive budgeting has proven to be an effective policy tool worldwide for narrowing gender gaps and reinforcing women's rights. The report stresses that its absolute success rests upon high-level political commitment, robust institutional collaboration, and a transparent, accountable oversight system.

UN Women (2021): This report specifically highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted women's economic and social security compared to men, thereby intensifying the urgent need for gender-sensitive fiscal interventions. The document demonstrates that gender-responsive budgeting not only stabilizes women's economic participation and social protection but also plays a central role in achieving "Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5: Gender Equality)".

Theoretical Framework

(i) Feminist Perspective

The feminist perspective asserts that societal structures are fundamentally patriarchal, systematically rendering fewer opportunities and resources to women than to men. State policies and budgetary processes are often not gender-neutral and can inadvertently perpetuate existing inequalities. In this scenario, gender budgeting serves as a vital transformative tool that reallocates resources equitably based on women's distinct structural vulnerabilities, ensuring equal opportunities in education, health, employment, and social security.

(ii) Social Constructionism

Social constructionism argues that gender roles are not natural or biological layouts but are socially constructed realities. Social institutions such as the family, education, culture, and media define and enforce traditional roles for men and women. Gender budgeting acts as a mechanism to reconstruct these unequal social architectures by making targeted allocations for women's education, healthcare, skill training, and employment, thereby mainstreaming them into development and redefining gender equity.

(iii) Capability Approach

The Capability Approach, conceptualized by Amartya Sen, establishes that the objective of development should not be restricted to gross economic indicators but must focus on expanding individual capabilities and freedoms. In the context of women, this approach is highly relevant because gender budgeting channels public investments directly into women's education, health, nutrition, and employment, thereby expanding their internal capabilities and transforming them into self-reliant, empowered agents.

Methodology

This study utilizes a mixed-methods research design to evaluate the role of gender budgeting in women's empowerment in India from 2005–06 to 2025–26. Based on a secondary data analysis with a purposive sampling strategy, the research combines a quantitative longitudinal trend analysis of Union Budget allocations with a qualitative thematic synthesis of official government reports, peer reviewed

https://doi.org/10.31995/jgv.2026.v17i01.009

academic journals and literature. By examining these fiscal trends through structural-functional, social constructionist, and feminist sociological lenses (including Amartya Sen's Capability Approach), this dual framework evaluates how macro-level resource distribution actively impacts deeply entrenched patriarchal structures, institutional gender hierarchies, and grassroots socio-economic inequalities.

Relevance of the Study

Gender inequality in Indian society continuously depresses women's educational attainment, health status, economic participation, and overall social standing. To mitigate these disparities, gender budgeting has evolved as a vital public policy mechanism designed to ensure a balanced, gender-sensitive allocation of public resources. The relevance of this study lies in the fact that despite two decades of implementing gender-responsive budgeting, the desired grass-roots transformation across various sectors of women's empowerment has not been fully realized. By providing a rigorous sociological analysis of its effectiveness, socio-economic impacts, and administrative bottlenecks, this study offers insights that can be utilized to optimize future policy-making for gender equality and inclusive development.

Women Empowerment: A Sociological Perspective

From a sociological standpoint, women's empowerment is not merely a process of individualized advancement; it is a structural reconfiguration of society. It is an organized process to challenge patriarchal institutions, gender hierarchies, and deep-seated social dogmas. Sociologically, it is defined as the process that dismantles patriarchal barriers to enhance women's access to assets, resources, and institutional decision-making power. It enables women to exercise independent agency over their lives and secure equal partnership in society.

In a developing society like India, indicators such as education, healthcare access, employment, and political representation are paramount. While state interventions like gender budgeting, political reservations in local bodies, and welfare schemes accelerate this process, persistent social barriers, cultural discrimination, and traditionalist mindsets continue to challenge its realization. Hence, empowerment is treated as an ongoing, dynamic process of structural transformation toward complete gender parity.

Gender Budgeting

Gender Budgeting is an institutionalized policy and fiscal process through which public budgets, welfare schemes, and development programs are structurally analyzed via a gender lens to narrow down the socio-economic and opportunity gaps between men and women. Its core intent is never to create an isolated financial plan for women, but rather to ensure that the dividends of development reach women equitably and that their distinct needs are permanently integrated into core policy formulation.

It represents a continuous, inclusive governance cycle encompassing policy design, target-group assessment, structural review of ongoing schemes, resource allocation, program implementation, and rigorous outcome evaluation. Through this tool, the state evaluates the differential impacts of public expenditures on genders and identifies sectors requiring corrective investments—such as female literacy, maternal health, nutritional security, digital/vocational skill training, and micro-entrepreneurship—thereby systematically advancing the socio-economic status of women.

Initiatives for Gender Budgeting: Global & National Perspective

On the global stage, systemic frameworks have been introduced to advance gender equality. On December 18, 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)", which remains an international bill of rights for women. Additionally, the "Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)", established in 1946, has played a pivotal institutional role in advocating for women's global rights. The operational roots of Gender Budgeting trace back to the mid-1980s in Australia, which became the first nation to evaluate its national budget through a gender perspective. Later, the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women created a global mandate, urging governments to integrate gender-responsive frameworks into their macroeconomic and budgetary architectures, leading to its widespread international adoption.

In India's post-independence era, early initiatives were heavily modeled around the concept of "Women's Welfare," focusing primarily on basic protections and amenities. This paradigm later shifted toward "Women's Development," emphasizing education, employment, and formal economic contribution. By the 1990s, influenced by economic liberalization and social justice movements, the discourse matured into "Women's Empowerment." This perspective focused on granting women absolute decision-making power, asset ownership, and political agency. To institutionalize these rights, the National Commission for Women (NCW) was set up in 1990. The Ninth Five-Year Plan introduced a mandate to direct at least 30% of developmental benefits to women, and the Tenth Plan explicitly formalized financial outlays for women's development. The year 2001 was officially designated as the "Year of Women's Empowerment."

India formally institutionalized Gender Budgeting in its Union Budget for the fiscal year 2005–06. Under this setup, the Ministry of Finance began presenting a dedicated "Gender Budget Statement" (GBS) alongside the annual budget, explicitly mapping the financial allocations earmarked by various ministries for women's development and empowerment.

India's Gender Budgeting: Historical Landscape

The historical trajectory of gender budgeting in India has been shaped by domestic policy shifts and global realities. A major turning point occurred in 1974 when the Committee on the Status of Women in India published its landmark report titled "Towards Equality", which presented alarming data regarding the sub-optimal socio-economic realities of Indian women, forcing a comprehensive policy pivot toward targeted developmental interventions. This internal awakening coincided with the UN's First World Conference on Women in 1975, followed by the global mid-term conferences in 1980, 1985, and the historic 1995 Beijing Conference, all of which reinforced India's sovereign commitments to build robust gender-mainstreaming frameworks.

Following this global momentum, the implementation of gender-sensitive resource distribution progressed systematically through the country's Five-Year Plans. The Seventh Five-Year Plan (1985–1990) initiated the inclusion of gender awareness in national planning by institutionalizing monitoring mechanisms for 'Beneficiary-Oriented Schemes' targeted at women. Later, during the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997–2002), specifically in 1997–98, the government introduced the "Women's Component Plan" (WCP), which created a formal policy directive mandating ministries to channel at least 30% of their funds toward women-centric programs.

This commitment was further intensified during the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002–2007), which sought to translate rhetorical gender promises into precise budgetary outlays by initiating a gender-disaggregated analysis of public expenditures. This progression led to a formal institutional breakthrough from 2004–2005 onwards, when the Ministry of Finance mandated the setting up of "Gender Budget Cells (GBCs)" across all central ministries. This effort culminated in the formal publication of India's first official "Gender Budget Statement (GBS)" in the 2005–06 Union Budget, under the collaborative leadership of the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the Ministry of Finance. Subsequent planning cycles, including the Eleventh (2007–2012) and Twelfth (2012–2017) Five-Year Plans, successfully focused on expanding this critical mechanism to state governments and ensuring that gender-responsive metrics were deeply integrated into core infrastructure ministries.

Trend Analysis of Gender Budgeting in India

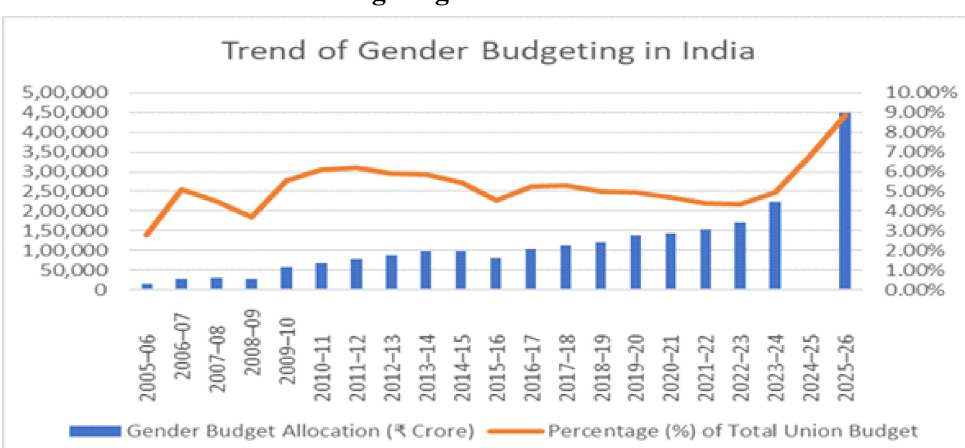
The table below traces the long-term fiscal trend of Gender Budget allocations and its proportional share in India's total expenditure over the last two decades (2005–06 to 2025–26):

Table: Trend Analysis of Gender Budgeting in India (2005–06 to 2025–26)

Financial Year	Gender Budget Allocation (₹ Crore)	Percentage (%) of Total Union Budget
2005–06	14,379	2.79%
2006–07	28,737	5.09%
2007–08	31,178	4.50%
2008–09	27,661	3.68%
2009–10	56,858	5.57%
2010–11	67,758	6.11%
2011–12	78,251	6.22%
2012–13	88,143	5.91%
2013–14	97,134	5.83%
2014–15	98,030	5.46%
2015–16	81,249	4.57%
2016–17	1,03,346	5.23%
2017–18	1,13,327	5.28%
2018–19	1,21,961	5.00%
2019–20	1,37,458	4.93%
2020–21	1,43,461	4.72%
2021–22	1,53,326	4.40%
2022–23	1,71,006	4.33%
2023–24	2,23,219	4.96%
2024–25	3,27,000 (Approx.)	6.80%
2025–26	4,49,028	8.86%

Source: Compiled from Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) Reports and Union Budget Documents, Government of India (2005–06 to 2025–26).

Chart: Trend of Gender Budgeting in India



https://doi.org/10.31995/jgv.2026.v17i01.009

Analysis of the Trend

The data highlights a significant long-term growth curve in India's gender budgeting allocations. The absolute allocation, which stood at a modest ₹ 14,379 crore (2.79% of the total budget) during its inception in 2005–06, expanded remarkably to reach an all-time high of ₹ 4,49,028 crore (8.86% of the total budget) in the 2025–26 fiscal year. This expansion indicates an institutional shift, showing that the state has increasingly prioritized women-centric development within its macroeconomic frameworks.

Sociologically, while a brief contraction in the proportional percentage share was observed between 2015–16 and 2021–22 due to a rapid expansion in the total volume of the overall union budget, the absolute fiscal figures earmarked for women consistently scaled upward. Following 2023–24, the gender budget experienced sharp upward acceleration, signaling a renewed policy commitment toward targeted social and economic security schemes. This trajectory confirms that gender budgeting in India has evolved past a routine accounting exercise into a potent instrument for structural transformation and social inclusion.

Gender Budgeting and Women's Empowerment

A sociological evaluation demonstrates that gender budgeting alters existing power dynamics and reconfigures gender equations across multiple institutional dimensions:

Economic Empowerment

Gender budgeting plays an instrumental role in upgrading women's fiscal self-sufficiency. By guaranteeing dedicated outlays for female employment, financial inclusion, micro-loans, and vocational training, it bypasses traditional structural blocks. Initiatives channeled through Self-Help Groups (SHGs), rural credit schemes, and entrepreneurship programs have enabled millions of women to set up micro-enterprises. Reflecting these institutional pushes, India's Female Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) increased significantly to reach 42% in the 2023–24 macrocycle. This economic mobilization is backed by the unprecedented fiscal backing of the 2025–26 Gender Budget Statement, which allocated ₹ 4.49 lakh crore (8.86% of total outlay) to solidify female asset ownership and financial independence.

Education and Skill Development

Dismantling educational barriers remains a core focus of gender budgeting. Earmarked allocations fund targeted scholarship programs, girl-friendly school infrastructure, and specialized digital literacy initiatives. Flagship operations like "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" have triggered substantial shifts in community attitudes toward female education. Consequently, the female literacy graph has maintained a steady upward climb. Public investments in technical and vocational training academies are increasingly arming women with competitive skills for the modern labor market, reducing dropout rates, and enabling a smoother transition from academic spaces to formal employment.

Health and Wellbeing

Gender budgeting has driven vital interventions in maternal nutrition, safe reproductive healthcare, and institutionalized birthing networks. Programs like 'Janani Suraksha Yojana' and 'Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)' receive dedicated, protected funding lines to ensure high-quality maternal care. By January 2025, the PMMVY framework alone extended direct cash assistance totaling [1] 17,362 crore to roughly 3.81 crore expectant and nursing mothers. These targeted public health outlays have led to an increase in institutional deliveries and a sharp, verified decline in the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) across the country.

Political and Social Empowerment

Fiscal funding under gender budgeting reinforces women's socio-political participation. Earmarked allocations for leadership development, training modules for elected local government representatives, and legal aid clinics complement constitutional amendments that reserve seats for women in local self-governments (Panchayati Raj Institutions). Today, over a million elected women lead local panchayats, reshaping regional governance and local decision-making. Concurrently, targeted investments in institutional safety networks, emergency hotlines, and anti-discrimination awareness drives have boosted social confidence and challenged historical patriarchy at the grassroots level.

Challenges in Gender Budgeting

Despite substantial policy gains, several systemic challenges impede the optimal performance of gender budgeting in India:

Implementation Gaps and Strategic Re-labeling: A persistent challenge is the practice of "gender-neutral" accounting or administrative re-labeling, where general public expenditures are superficially tagged as women-centric outlays without ensuring direct, targeted benefits to women.

Data Scarcity: The lack of comprehensive, gender-disaggregated data across diverse sectors severely hinders precise target-group mapping and limits the scope of objective impact evaluations.

Coordination Vulnerabilities: Policy fragmentation and weak horizontal alignment between central ministries and provincial state departments often lead to duplicated resources or uneven fund distribution.

https://doi.org/10.31995/jgv.2026.v17i01.009

Cultural Resiliency: Deeply embedded socio-cultural barriers in rural and marginalized areas continue to restrict women's actual access to education, employment, and political agency, occasionally muting the real impact of enhanced fiscal allocations.

Conclusion

From a sociological perspective, gender budgeting represents a vital policy intervention that challenges patriarchal social structures and institutionalizes gender equity within public finance. It is not merely a mechanism for resource distribution; it is a transformative tool for rebalancing power dynamics within family systems and the broader social structure. The historical analysis demonstrates that the structural expansion of India's Gender Budget Statement has driven a gradual improvement in women's educational status, healthcare outcomes, and economic self-reliance.

By converting women from passive recipients of welfare into active financial agents and political leaders, gender budgeting promotes a gradual restructuring of traditional gender roles. Sociologically, it serves as an instrument of social change, working to build an inclusive and equitable society. Moving forward, maximizing its transformative potential requires addressing implementation bottlenecks by embedding absolute fiscal transparency, demanding data-driven outcome assessments, and cultivating deep public participation across all stages of budgetary formulation and evaluation.

References

1. Agarwal, B. (2010). Gender and land rights in South Asia. Oxford University Press.
2. Chakraborty, L. (2016). Fiscal decentralization and gender budgeting: A comparative study of Indian states (Working Paper No. 165). National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP).
3. Elson, D. (2002). Gender responsive budgeting through the lens of social justice. Development and Society, 11(2), Pg. **23–41**.
4. Goyal, V., & Madan, K. (2019). Women development through gender budgeting: Institutional coordination and monitoring. Journal of Management & Governance, 8(3), Pg. **201–215.**
5. Kabeer, N. (2005). Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third Millennium Development Goal. Gender & Development, 13(1), Pg. **13–24.**

6. Lahiri, A. K., & Ghosh, S. K. (2018). Gender responsive budgeting: Challenges in policy allocation and impact assessment. Economic and Political Weekly, 53(18), Pg. **45–52.**
7. Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), Government of India. (2015). Evaluation report on a decade of gender budgeting in India. Government of India.
8. Sen, A. (1999). Development as freedom. Oxford University Press.
9. Sharma, R. A., & Gupta, N. (2018). Gender budgeting and awareness of women-centric schemes in rural India. Indian Social Review, 14(2), Pg. **112–128.**
10. UN Women. (2020). Gender-responsive budgeting: A global guide to best practices. United Nations.
11. UN Women. (2021). Building back better: Gender-sensitive fiscal policies post COVID-19. United Nations.

a. Websites and Online Documents

12. Ministry of Finance, Government of India. (n.d.). Union budget documents. https://www.indiabudget.gov.in
13. Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. (2025). Gender budget statement 2025–26. https://www.indiabudget.gov.in
14. Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. (n.d.). Annual reports and gender budgeting division. https://wcd.gov.in
15. Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. (n.d.). Gender budget statements (2005–06 to 2025–26). https://www.indiabudget.gov.in
16. Press Information Bureau (PIB), Government of India. (n.d.). Budget and gender budget related releases. https://pib.gov.in