

Gender sensitizing development policy in Kerala: Plan/budget making and the economic review

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The backdrop

With the persistent mismatch between government policy and development outcomes for women, feminist scrutiny has increasingly focused on macroeconomic/development policy, and the urgent need to make it gender-sensitive, that is, mainstreaming gender into policies/programmes/schemes for bringing about a transformation of women's position in society. Socially constructed gender roles (men as bread winners and women as home makers) leave women with little power economically, socially, and politically, the flip side of which is men's socio-biological drive for mastery, manifested increasingly as violence against women. In this brief Note we discuss Kerala government's conscious attempt to integrate gender into planning reflected in its Plan/Budget and related documents like the Economic Review.

Gender Mainstreaming was formally established as a major global strategy for the promotion of gender equality at the 4th UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 cited in the Beijing Platform for Action. Gender Budgeting (GB) has been adopted as a tool for mainstreaming gender perspective at various stages of planning/budgeting/ implementation/ impact assessment of policy/programme objectives and allocations endorsed by over 100 countries globally.

GB is an entry point into macro economic policy; not a separate Budget for women. It seeks to break down the usual Budget according to its impact on girls/boys, men/women assessed

through a number of steps designed for the purpose. This means that gender should be introduced not only into plan/budget of the state but also in the Economic Review (ER) which gives us a detailed overview of the state of the economy, key activities undertaken in each sector of the economy, major achievements, gaps and problems identified. It is well accepted that Gender cuts across sectors and hence it is essential to move beyond a focus on the Chapter on Women and Child Development to looking at women as growth agents in the state's political economy across all sectors which means engaging with: i. visibilising women in each sector; ii. recognising their contribution as consumer, producer or worker in every sector of the economy; iii. emphasising the need to consider their needs/interests in the overall determination of sectoral and macro development policy and iv. the extent to which budgetary allocations can be shifted towards social and economic investment and provision of public goods, beneficial for women.

We must remember that the Plan/Budget of a year learns a lot from the ER of the year that has gone by: what have been the achievements, the gaps identified, in particular gender gaps, have resources been directed towards these gaps, for which we need to understand how men and women are positioned in each sector, consciously visibilising women's contribution very often ignored even in sectors like agriculture where women are increasingly playing a critical role globally in ensuring food security (Asadullah and Kambhampati 2021).

Introducing the concept of gender into plan/budget making in Kerala

Kerala has been attempting to 'mainstreaming gender' through Gender Budgeting (GB) or Gender Responsive Budgeting as an integral part of the planning process since the 11th Plan. In fact even earlier, Kerala initiated a very concerted attempt at gender aware planning at the local level in the 9th Plan itself, consciously including gender in each phase of the decentralized planning process and mandating that 10 percent of the devolved funds to local governments should be used for women specific schemes- what came to be known as the women component plan (WCP) while all other schemes should go through a gender lens.

Introducing gender into development planning highlights the economic significance of women's unpaid work in the household and care economy which tends to be neglected in macro development policy, the assumption being of the stereotype household model- of man the breadwinner and woman the home maker. Also that women's time in household work is infinitely elastic enabling them to balance work and home while adjusting to any adverse

impact of changes in macro economic policy to keep the household running. Therefore GB foregrounds the need to consider women's needs/interests in the overall determination of macro development policy and the extent to which public investment can be increased in these activities to enable women to participate equally in the development process. A Gender Budget has been prepared in Kerala since 2017-18 and has become a sustained exercise since then, with flow of resources to women increasing every year; allocations have been made for transgender persons also.

Introducing the concept of gender into the economic review of Kerala

So let me start with what is being discussed, which is the Economic Review (ER) brought out by the Planning Board (supported by Departmental inputs) prior to the presentation of the following year's Budget, focusing here specifically on the 2021 ER. As stated earlier, we all keep talking about the need to recognize that Gender cuts across sectors and therefore, what one would like to see in an Economic Review is that women are visibilised in each sector, their contribution and needs identified as workers, producers or consumers, when the different chapters are being written up. This has been emphasized very strongly in the 13th Plan through the well established planning process in the state, when the Annual Plan proposals are formulated and discussed by the Departments with the Planning Board. During these discussions, while impressing upon Departments the importance of differential gender needs some of which can be addressed through women specific schemes but more largely through general or composite schemes in most departments which impact both men and women, the need to indicate the share of women or the share expected to flow to women based on gender disaggregated beneficiary data, is also emphasised.

Departments are encouraged /persuaded to break up total scheme outlays into components, highlighting those directed at girls/women; or have a woman component in terms of a specific percentage; or make available gender disaggregated data on beneficiaries (in some cases perhaps of the previous year) which could then be used to separate out the flow of resources to women from the total outlay. Such information would enable the Plan write ups to be gender sensitive, as also the sectoral Chapters written up in the ER. Most importantly it would make it easier to prepare the Gender Budget, which has now become one of the documents presented with the annual Budget. This helps in creating awareness on the significance of gender across departments, even those which are apparently gender neutral, like the infrastructure sectors.

It makes one happy to see that every year some progress has been made in sensitizing the write-ups which is reflected in substantial changes as seen in this year's ER. This year one big improvement is in Agriculture. One was always anguished to find that such a significant large sector, where women are there in large numbers as workers and producers, but never seemed to be visible in the long Chapter on Agriculture in the ER. An effort has been made, this time to amend this and that makes one happy. To the extent, for instance, of giving us a gender breakup of the 'manpower' (should be human power), in agro service centers and the Karshaka Karma Sena. This means we have got a gender break up at that level which is very satisfying. Similarly the role of Kudumbashree JLGs in cultivation has been visibilised but their major contribution towards enhancing food security by cultivating fallow land should have been forefronted. Despite these improvements, the Chapter still needs to be strengthened given the fact of women becoming farmers and agriculture being feminized which we're seeing all over, and reading about, but reading the Chapter, one still doesn't get the feeling that there are women farmers. Our image is still of a male farmer.

Another Chapter I pick up is on Decentralized Planning, where right from the beginning, gender was being consciously integrated into the decentralized planning process and it has been mentioned in the chapter, but as Prof Oommen says we are far from mainstreaming gender into the local plans; other than the women specific schemes under the Women Component Plan allocations to women in composite schemes are not very evident. Another important aspect which needs emphasis at the local level and is missing in the Chapter is the role of local governments in addressing Gender based violence, which is best tackled at the local level. One was hoping that vulnerability mapping of crime, involving huge participation of women, as was attempted in Mararikulam panchayat which did a lot of good in reducing violence, should have extended its reach. Some other gender gaps noted in the decentralised planning chapter, which can be taken care of next year are absence of a gender break up of things like key resource persons mobilized to give training, etc.

I have not covered all chapters of the ER, but in some other chapters like Manufacturing sector, Tourism and IT sector, where we know women are there in large numbers one is happy to see that in a number of schemes -Entrepreneur support scheme, nano units, Women start ups, Responsible tourism etc- a separate allocation has been mentioned for women in the write-ups. Another welcome improvement is that, under the SC/ST chapter, there was actually a separate table for training of SC, training of ST youth. Training of NORKA people,

members of Kudumbashree units, was also available in the relevant Chapters; however disaggregation by gender was missing.

So, given the fact that we need more gender sensitive writeups, it means we need more gender disaggregated data. And if we look at Volume 2 of the ER, we realize that one of its big contributions is actually giving us tables on many things we don't get elsewhere. Such information is sourced from the departments. For instance for the Manufacturing sector, one was fascinated to see data for micro enterprises given in such detail in the ER tables. But what is missing is that a lot of data is still needed by gender which is not available in the published documents. But in the course of doing gender budgeting in the Planning Board, it was realized that actually departments have information on who the beneficiaries are by gender, but it needs to be aggregated and organized and so it becomes difficult to provide the data immediately.

Some lessons learnt

So a strong recommendation in this context which is also possible to do, is that we really need to strengthen the departments' technical ability to organize and manage the massive data that exists with them scheme-wise, a gender break up of which could be used for the Economic Review much more than is being used now.

The second thing is, as emphasized by others too, that the Economic Review should be linked to the budget for the next year, and also, of course, it has long term implications. So we have to make an analysis of this year's budget for 2022-23, to examine how much it has really captured of what were thrown up as problems and limitations in the ER 2021. For instance the low female work force participation rates in Kerala despite high levels of female literacy, and hence the urgent need to raise WPRs which means investing in women's employment. If one examines the 2022-23 budget and a few prior to it, one is happy to find increases in allocations to promote women's employment which was reflected in changes in female WPRs over the period under study. A look at the data on female workforce participation from 2017-18 to 2019-20, shows that it has increased from about 16.4 percent to 26.3 percent which could be achieved because there was a very conscious investment in women's employment, especially during the floods and the pandemic-- large increases in allocations to Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, a larger allocation for the Ayankali Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme, and for Kudumbashree. So this strengthens the need to

make plan/budget/ER more gender sensitive leading to higher gender allocations bringing about positive gender outcomes.

Another issue that needs to be flagged when we are linking the ER to the Budget is how we turn certain announcements into being gender sensitive. For instance the emphasis now on the Knowledge Economy and Society in Kerala. How much are we going to equip or enable girls and women and transgender also to access the advantages of the higher education system that we will introduce, because there is absolutely no doubt that the campuses have to be made gender friendly. It is stated that about 20 lakh educated people will get employment through the knowledge economy, and through all the programs which have been mentioned in the budget, like units being set up in industrial parks, mini industrial units with modern technical facilities and startups which can be set up adjacent to engineering colleges, polytechnics, ITI's, arts and science colleges, so that students, along with their studies participate in economic and production process, acquire training and procure employment. However, we must remember that some of the young girls who come to universities will be married women. So there is need to provide a social infrastructure and basic amenities in university campuses and whatever other physical areas are identified as locations for industrial units, industrial parks etc. We talk about physical infrastructure, on which there is a strong emphasis in the Budget but it must be remembered that this infrastructure should include social infrastructure, if one really wants the advantages of the growing investment in higher education, skilling and employment to be accessible for the educated women who are also equally keen to enter the employment market and not be constrained by their household and care work. So an enabling environment which provides child/elderly care, safe transportation/accommodation/ basic facilities like toilets /safety and security at workplace and a reasonable wage and working conditions become necessary investments in the Budget for the benefits of the knowledge economy to be gender friendly and accessible.

To conclude, there is also a slow recognition of the need to include transgender persons wherever possible besides the separate allocation made for them in the Gender Budget. That is because a lot of efforts have been made at the local level and by certain departments, like the education, health, and industry departments to have schemes for the transgenders, besides of course the well known recruitment of transgender into the Kochi metro. No doubt there is much more gender sensitization seen in the Economic Review, 2021 which will grow more

rapidly if we support the Departments in collating and managing scheme wise data disaggregated by gender and we have spelt out the state's gender priorities.

Reference

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