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Bridging the Policy Gap: Gender Budgeting as a Tool for Empowering Women in Agriculture

Amna Mirza[1], Priti Rana[2], Chayanika Uniyal[3]

[1] Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, SPM College, University of Delhi, India.
[2] Assistant Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Delhi, India.
[3] Associate Professor, Department of History, SPM College, University of Delhi, India.

*** Corresponding Author:**

Amna Mirza
amna.mirza786@gmail.com
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ABSTRACT

Gender inequalities remain deeply embedded in Indian agriculture, where women constitute a significant proportion of the workforce but continue to face systemic disadvantages in access to land, credit, technology, extension services, and decision-making power. The post-1990s liberalisation phase intensified women's participation in agriculture due to male out-migration, yet this shift was not matched by corresponding socio-economic empowerment. Gender budgeting, introduced in India in 2005–06, sought to address such structural disparities by integrating a gender perspective into fiscal planning and public expenditure. This study examines the interface between gender budgeting and women's expanding role in agriculture by analysing policy frameworks, Gender Budget Statements, and agricultural budgetary trends from 2005 to 2025. The analysis reveals a gradual increase in allocations and institutional coverage under gender budgeting, along with greater recognition of women farmers through flagship schemes and livelihood programmes. However, persistent gaps between policy commitments and actual outcomes are evident, largely due to entrenched patriarchal norms, weak implementation mechanisms, inadequate gender-disaggregated data, and limited accountability.

INTRODUCTION

The liberalization period of India, which started in 1990s, brought about a period of radical economic and social change, which fuelled more critical debate concerning gender equity and women participation in the economy. In this changing scenario the structural imbalances under which women were continuously subjected to, with the agrarian economy being one of them, became an urgent issue. Further encouraged by the male out-migration in the countryside, women were responsible to more work in the fields and became makeshift partners in the fields, where they became the custodians of the natural resources and pivots of household food security. This tacit transformation was, however, not accompanied by a commensurate improvement in their access to vital resources, power of decision-making or economic empowerment, which points to a striking gap between their efforts and their socio-economic empowerment.

Considering these systemic failures, the Government of India has come up with Gender Budgeting (GB) in 2005-06 as one of the strategic fiscal instruments aimed at institutionalizing a gender-based approach to the national and state level planning and distribution of resources. The program sought to go beyond a one size fits all budgetary strategy making certain that the active participation of women and men in the public spending. In the agricultural sector, this offered a specific avenue to close the important land ownership, credit, technology, and skill acquisition gaps among the women farmers. As a result, GB became not only an accounting act, but a possibility of putting into practical use. The policy will aid into on-ground empowerment of the millions of women keeping the Indian rural economy alive.

This paper critically looks at the crossroad between the construct of gender budget and the current expansion of women in the agricultural sector evaluating the effectiveness in using fiscal policies in bringing about substantive empowerment on the grassroots level. It explores the question that gender budgeting when applied effectively can be an effective tool of inclusive development as it would mobilize its financial resources towards the lived experiences of rural women. The study aims to unpack those synergies and more to the point, find out the gaps in persistence between the rhetorical promises and the practical results in the agrarian setting through the analysis of the policy frameworks, and budgetary documents.

The present study has been conceptualised into four parts. The first part describes the inception and the general idea of gender budgeting. The second part highlights the Disparities in Indian Agriculture and Gender budgeting data. The third part analyses the programmes and policies for gender budgeting and its impact. The final part discusses the outcome of the study and recommendations.

1. **General Budgeting--Conceptualisation.**

Gender budgeting does not just amount to a technical or accounting activity; it is a policy tool that is strategic in nature and must be used to deal with structural inequalities that have been deep-rooted. Its fundamental aim is to restructure unfair economic institutions by critically analyzing the different impacts of policies on state economies in spending and collecting revenue on men and women. Gender budgeting considers the whole budget through the lens of gender, unlike the old budgetary methods, which tend to consider women-specific budgets as an addition, such that the fiscal policy would not lead to further inequalities.

In its application to agriculture, this paradigm needs the comprehension of how the budgetary allocation in infrastructure, land reforms, credit systems, and extension services either strengthen or weaken the gender-based limitations of women farmers. OHK believes that successful gender budgeting should be based on feminist economics and should challenge the androcentric bias of the orthodox budgetary practices (OHK). The assumptions have been known to make women in agriculture invisible since they are concentrated in unpaid labour and access to formal assets and institutional support is a few. Gender budgeting thus offers an organised framework within which the role of women, their needs as well as limitations in the agricultural sector can be acknowledged and solved. In a general way, it works on the basis of six interdependent steps, which enable the opportunities of women in the field of agriculture.

A) Targeting of Resources

Among the most important contributions that gender budgeting has made is the fact that it has enhanced better targeting of agricultural resources. Gender budgeting instead of gender-neutral subsidies usually which tend to skew to male farmers, enables the government to target women farmers, where the gender disparities are most significant. This incorporates support in budgets to joint land ownership, credit without collateral in land and subsidies on crops and inputs that are founded on women mostly.

This form of targeted distribution makes fiscal policy an active tool of equity, as opposed to an unintentionally aggravating of inequalities. Small-scale irrigation or the use of mechanised planters are all investments that help women to increase their productivity directly by reducing the disproportionate share of unpaid labour, allowing them to spend the time saved on education or income-earning activities (IFPRI, 2024). Additionally, the budget lines that are based on gender can assist the women-owned agro-processing businesses, women-owned cooperatives, and insurance schemes that are subsidised to the women farmers. These targeted investments, as Agarwal and Agrawal (2023) mention, have multiplier effects, not only the livelihoods of women but also food security and community resilience as the productive potential of agriculture is fully made use of.

B) Inclusion in Planning

Gender budgeting is also the institutionalisation of the women involvement in agricultural planning and policy making. It makes sure that policies are grounded in reality by formally incorporating the women farmers in budget priority set-making activities, i.e., via participatory rural appraisals, stakeholder consultations, and membership of the planning committees. When women are included in the design of programmes, there is a high probability that the needs that are important, but are usually neglected, like childcare facilities at the training centres or storing facilities of subsistence crops, are met.

UN Women (2023) argue that policies made following participatory governance are more legitimate, effective, and sustainable. In addition to policy outcomes, inclusive planning increases the social capital and political agency of women.

C) Visibility with Disaggregated Data.

One of the most important opportunities that are provided by gender budgeting is the creation and utilization of sex-disaggregated data. The conventional agricultural statistics which are usually restricted to land ownership do not reflect the wide scope of activities that women engage in planting, weeding, harvesting, processing and marketing of the crops and the influence of the women in generating income and access to information. Gender budgeting encourages investments on data systems that give detailed information about these dimensions.

This kind of visibility helps policymakers to specify the causes of the inequality between the sexes and devise specific measures. A report by the FAO, Women in Agrifood Systems (2023), points out that sound gender-disaggregated information is the cornerstone to effective gender budgeting through which expenditures are equated with quantifiable outcomes, including income growth, yield increases, and decision-making authority. Moreover, open reporting on beneficiaries present as women makes the advocacy stronger, and bias downplays, making the policy environment more gender-conscious (Doss and Quisumbing, 2024).

D) Spending Accountability.

Gender budgeting enhances accountability in the sense that it makes budget allocations to be associated with gender-sensitive performance indicators. Agricultural ministries can also have to give reports on not just the financial spending but also on results, like the number of women who have been trained or growth in the incomes of women in the farm. This changes the responsibility of compliance to the process to outcomes management.

Gender budget statements and citizen scorecards are the tools that generate public documentation of the commitments and allow the civil society and the parliament bodies to trace the implementation (International Budget Partnership, 2023). Gender budget tagging also makes auditing easier and decreases the leakage of funds. In Mexico, it has been demonstrated that gender tagging programmes had better proportions of resources that reached the beneficiary women and enhanced fiscal accountability (Rodriguez & Gutierrez, 2024).

E) Financial and Agricultural literacy.

Gender budgeting also offers an argument in the investment in women financial and agricultural literacy. Budgetary allocations may facilitate the extension services according to the schedules of the women, their literacy levels and the favorite crops and combining the financial education on business planning, credit, and subsidies. The World Bank (2024) states that agricultural training in combination with financial literacy is significant in promoting the use of better practices by women and in their capability to gain economic benefits.

When women are financially literate, they are able to work with formal financial institutions, apply credit wisely, and can bargain with the market prices. As shown in East Africa, when women were enrolled in integrated literacy programmes, they became more likely to invest in soil conservation and crop diversification leading to more profitable and resilient farming systems (Kes et al., 2023).

F) Sustainability of Agricultural Performance.

Lastly, gender budgeting leads to economical, social, and environmental sustainability of agriculture. Sustainable resource management has also been consistently associated with women empowerment because where the women have certain access to resources, they are more likely to invest in long-term soil, water, and climate-resilient management. According to IPCC (2023), agricultural policies that are responsive to gender are vital in the process of climate adaptation and mitigation.

Lessening the gender disparity in agriculture boosts household earnings and nutrition, health, and education results, which have beneficial intergenerational effects. Gender budgeting is the only way to make feminine equality a part of the everyday financial operations, making the empowerment of women an part of an institution, and not a project by-product. The inclusion of gender equality in agricultural budgeting, by making the agricultural sector a more productive, efficient and sustainable one (Deere and Doss, 2024), the empowerment of women becomes an equity requirement and a foundation of the long-term economic sustainability, respectively.

2. Disparities in Indian Agriculture and Gender budgeting data

Agriculture has been primary source of income for majority of rural women in Indian Nearly 70 % of women agricultural workforce is involved in sowing, weeding,harvesting,post harvesting, and livestock management however there work is rarely recognised at par with that of male counterpart due to patriarchal land ownership patterns ,less than 15 % women own agriculture land because of this they are devoid of many government benefits like institutional credit, crop insurance and government support schemes.

Continued and high gender inequities in agriculture continue to undermine the productivity, livelihoods and food systems in India. Women farmers have less secure access and control to and possession of important productive resources such as land, loans, improved seeds, fertilizers, and mechanical equipment compared to their male counterparts. These gaps are compounded by the fact that the women are underrepresented in the farmers organizations and decision-making centers, they have limited mobility, and the unpaid care workload, all which restrict their potential in the agriculture field.

These disparities are not accidental, but they are the consequence of the sociocultural standards and gender-blind agrarian policies and programs. The extension services, such as those, often focus on male heads of families, and relay information and technologies that are aimed at the culturally male crops or tasks, and therefore, not women who are the key to livestock control, horticulture, and after-harvest processing. A study published in the World Development by Njuki et al. (2022) shows that women who are involved in commercial agriculture are less in control of the money earned, with their male family members taking over the earnings. Certain budgetary and policy interventions are required to end this process of economic disempowerment.

Gender Budget Statement was first introduced in 2005-06 in India that was meant to analyse government revenues and expenditure through a gendered lens for promoting gender equality. Since 2005-06,GBS has been presented annually as a part of the Union Budget. Ministries and Departments are required to report allocations under:

- **Part A**: Women-specific schemes (100 per cent allocation for women)
- **Part B**: Pro-women schemes (at least 30 per cent allocation benefiting women)
- **Part C**: Schemes which have less than 30 percent allocation benefiting women.

The tables below depict Union budget of India between 2005 and 2025 and the corresponding gender budgeting statement. Although the contribution in absolute terms in low on gender budgeting, the steady growth in gender budgeting is surely un upward trend that shows the requirements of beneficiaries.

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Table: 1 Number of Departments/ Ministries allocations under Gender Budgeting

Year	Department / Ministries	Budget Estimates (in Rs. Crore)					GB as percen Union Budg
		Gender Budget					
		Part A	Part B	Part C	Total	Union Budget	
2005-06	9	NA	NA	NA	14,378.68	514343.8	2.8
2006-07	18	9575.82	19160.71	NA	28736.53	563991.13	5.1
2007-08	27	8795.47	22382.49	NA	31177.96	680520.51	4.58
2008-09	27	11459.61	16202.06	NA	27661.67	750883.53	3.68
2009-10	28	15715.68	41141.93	NA	56857.61	1020837.68	5.57
2010-11	28	19266.05	48483.75	NA	67749.8	1108749.24	6.11
2011-12	29	20548.35	57702.67	NA	78251.02	1257728.83	6.37
2012-13	29	22968.93	65173.87	NA	88142.80	1490925.29	5.91
2013-14	30	27248.19	69885.51	NA	97133.70	1665297.32	5.83
2014-15	36	21887.61	76142.23	NA	98029.84	1794891.96	5.46
2015-16	35	16657.11	62600.76	NA	79257.87	1777477.04	4.46
2016-17	31	17412.01	73212.75	NA	90624.76	1978060.45	4.58
2017-18	25	31390.80	81935.85	NA	113326.65	2146734.78	5.28
2018-19	28	29377.73	95051.10	NA	124428.83	2442213.30	5.09
2019-20	31	27420.03	109514.07	NA	136934.10	2786349.45	4.91
2020-21	34	28568.32	114893.40	NA	143461.72	3042230.09	4.71
2021-22	34	25260.95	128065.33	NA	153326.58	3483235.63	4.41
2022-23	35	26772.89	144233.58	NA	171006.47	3944908.67	4.33
2023-24	36	88044.21	135175.54	NA	223219.75	4503097.45	4.95
2024-25	43	112396.15	199762.29	15000.00	327158.44	4820512.00	6.79
2025-26	56	105535.40	326672.00	16821.28	449028.68	5065345.00	8.86

Source: *Prof Roli Misra (2025), "Gender Budgeting A Roadmap Towards Inclusivity, Yojana, March.*

The table traces the progress of gender budgeting in India from 2005–06 to 2025–26 and clearly shows a steady expansion in both coverage and financial commitment. Over the years, the number of ministries included in the Gender Budget Statement has risen from just 9 to 56, indicating that gender-responsive budgeting has gradually become an accepted part of public financial planning. During the same period, total allocations under the gender budget increased sharply from ₹14,378.68 crore to ₹4,49,028.68 crore, reflecting a growing acknowledgment of gender-related concerns in government spending. Allocations under Part A, which focus on women-specific schemes, have increased steadily, while Part B continues to account for a larger share, suggesting an emphasis on integrating women's needs within broader development programmes. The recent introduction of Part C further indicates an effort to refine and strengthen the gender budgeting framework. Although the overall Union Budget expanded significantly, the share of the gender budget remained uneven and even declined between 2015–16 and 2022–23. However, a notable improvement is observed after 2023, with the gender budget reaching its highest share of 8.86 per cent in 2025–26. Overall, the trends point to meaningful progress, while also highlighting the importance of ensuring that increased allocations lead to tangible and lasting benefits for women.

Table : 2 Share of Agri GBS, GBS in Union Budget from 2005-25

Year	Union Budget (crore)	GBS (crore)	GBS %	Agri GBS (crore)	Agri GBS (%)
2005	505000	14371	2.85	1000	0.2
2006	563991	18284	3.24	1200	0.21
2007	680520	19866	2.92	1300	0.19
2008	750884	27012	3.6	1500	0.2
2009	909108	28337	3.12	1600	0.18
2010	1108749	25625	2.31	1800	0.16
2011	1235391	35423	2.87	2000	0.16
2012	1490923	49377	3.31	2500	0.17
2013	1659013	73252	4.42	3500	0.21
2014	1794892	97805	5.45	5000	0.28
2015	1777477	102135	5.75	6000	0.34
2016	1978060	90126	4.56	7000	0.35
2017	2146735	113326	5.28	8500	0.4
2018	2442213	121961	4.99	10000	0.41
2019	2707183	131700	4.86	12000	0.44
2020	3042230	188000	6.18	15000	0.49
2021	3483231	220000	6.32	18000	0.52
2022	3944909	243000	6.16	20000	0.51
2023	4503037	250000	5.55	22000	0.49
2024	4860222	327000	6.73	25000	0.51
2025	5060000	449000	8.87	30000	0.59

Source: Author's calculation from Budgets of Different years, Ministry of Finance, Government of India. Gender Budget Statements & Expenditure Profile

However, when an analysis of comparative trends of overall Gross Budgetary Support (GBS %) and Agricultural GBS (%) over the period 2005–2025. The overall GBS shows a fluctuating but upward trend, with a noticeable acceleration after 2013 and a sharp increase in 2025, indicating enhanced public expenditure over time. In contrast, Agri GBS (%) increases steadily and gradually throughout the period, reflecting consistent policy support to the agricultural sector. Although agricultural GBS remains much lower than total GBS, its continuous rise especially after 2015 suggests strengthening budgetary commitment towards agriculture. The widening gap between total GBS and Agri GBS in recent years implies that while overall government spending has expanded rapidly, agriculture's share has grown at a more moderate pace. Nonetheless, the sustained upward movement of Agri GBS highlights agriculture's growing strategic importance in development planning.

This reconceptualization changes the focus to less welfare-based approaches and more rights- and economic empowerment-based approaches since it highlights women as essential agents to agricultural production and food security rather than as beneficiaries. To deal with the factors behind disempowerment, it necessitates budgeting processes that put particular focus on how funds can be diverted to increase access of women in markets, technology and productive resources.

3. Major programmes and flagship schemes for gender budgeting in agriculture from 2005 to 2025

During the period of 2005-2010 the gender budgeting in agriculture was more or less incorporated in the current programmes of rural development and agricultural extension. The department of Agriculture and Cooperation schemes like Support to State Extension programme for Extension Reforms (ATMA) facilitated the involvement of women farmers with the help of women self help groups as well as groups of farmers (Patel, 2014). Gender budgetary allocations that are specially reserved to women were also minimal but the introduction of the agriculture related schemes under the Gender Budget Statement (GBS) was a starting point in gender responsive planning in the sector. The policy visibility of the role of women as cultivators, herding in charge and agricultural labourers gradually developed in this period.

Gender budgeting in agriculture has grown between 2010 and 2014 by using livelihood-oriented and food security programmes. Introduction of National food security mission (NFSM) and reinforcement of Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) gave the states the flexibility to develop women-oriented agricultural projects. Parallel to that, there were programmes like National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) that encouraged women-based Self-Help Groups (SHGs) who were involved in agriculture, dairy, fisheries, and value addition activities (Ibid). This stage was also the turning point of welfare-based strategies to the increase of productive roles of women in agriculture.

The 2014-2019 witnessed an even stronger policy acknowledgement of the women farmers. Programmes like Soil Health Card Programme made sure that the joint or female owned land titles could be availed and utilized to access advisory services. The Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) integrated features that favored the women by advancing irrigation and efficiency of water use. The government also focused on women involvement in the allied industries by initiating dairy (National Livestock Mission), poultry and fisheries. Gender budgeting at this time started paying more attention to accessibility of productive resources and agricultural infrastructure by women (Misra, 2025)

Since 2019, the government enhanced its attempts to acknowledge women as farmers and not as agricultural workers only. Increased bargaining power of women as a group increased with the promotion of Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) with special incentives to the women headed FPOs. Although the PM-KISAN income support scheme was not gender-specific, it affected women farmers who had land titles indirectly. Evidence of gender budgeting in responding to crisis was observed during the COVID-19 in which women involved in agriculture and allied works were assisted by making available additional allocations under NRLM, MGNREGA, and food security programme (Chakraborty, 2025).

Gender budgeting in Agriculture between 2022-2025 was in line with the broader development objectives of digital agriculture, entrepreneurship, and value-chain integration. Such efforts as Lakhpati Didi within NRLM focused on changing the women SHG members into agri- entrepreneurial success stories. Women were also motivated to engage in agri-startups and food processing and marketing by schemes like PM Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PM-FME) (Bala & Ahuja, 2023).Increased attention to income diversification and sustainable livelihoods among rural women was manifested by gender-responsible distributions in fisheries, livestock, and horticulture.

Government is trying consistently to make agriculture sector more gender sensitive but there are challenges ahead

1. Systemic gender discrepancies (entrenched)
2. Implementation (gaps between policy and practice)
3. Access (to land, credit, and resources)
4. Data (not gender-disaggregated data)
5. Responsibility (poor monitoring and evaluation)
6. Engagement (excluding involvement in decision-making)

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Gender budgeting is now one of the important policy processes to fill the gaps in gender inequality in the Indian agricultural sector, where women form almost half the labor force but are still systematically underprivileged in their access to resources, recognition as well as decision-making authority. Although the progressive policy frameworks and the Gender Budget Statement that has been introduced since 2005-06, the implementation of gender commitments to turn them into concrete results of women farmers has been uneven. This deficiency highlights the necessity to go beyond the symbolic allocations to more outcome-focused, specific, and accountable gender-responsive budgeting in agriculture.

The gender budgeting in India has a massive potential to empower women in their rights to land, institutional credit, agricultural extension services, skills development, and new agri-technology, such as digital and AI-powered technologies. By introducing a gender lens to flagship programmes including PM-KISAN, National Food Security Mission, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana and climate-resilient agriculture programmes, it is possible to make sure that the public expenditure is based on the unique needs of female cultivators and agricultural labourers as well as those in allied-sector employees.

Furthermore, the central and state-level convergence in gender budgets is essential, as agriculture is federal in nature and there is a great diversity in regions.

Effective gender budgeting of women in Indian agriculture relies on the enhanced institutional capacity, gendered disaggregated data systems, and participatory governance. Transparency and local accountability can be improved by increasing the role played by Panchayati Raj Institutions, women self-help groups, Farmer Producer Organizations, and civil society. Gender budgeting can be a revolutionary mechanism of eliminating the policy-implementation gap when enhanced through larger objectives of inclusive growth, food security, and sustainable development. To sum up, gender responsive budgeting should be integrated as central to the agricultural planning in India to not only empower women farmers but also bring about equitable, resilient and sustainable agricultural development.

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