



Mains Marathon

Day 29: Will India's gender budget 2022-23 foster women-led development? Give reasons in support of your arguments. (250 words)

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Approach / Explanation / Answer

- Introduce by briefly explaining the gender budget and related data.
- Discuss how gender budget will promote women led development.
- Discuss the shortcoming of the gender budget.
- Conclude by stating the need for the hour to focus on women.

Answer:

Gender budgets have recognized as a **fiscal tool to rectify gender inequities** and ensure women have access to socio-economic benefits as much as men. India began issuing gender **budgets in 2005**. India's gender budget 2022-23 aims to **address challenges women face** and create opportunities for **inclusive development**. The overall **gender budget has decreased from 0.71% of the GDP** of the revised estimates (RE) for **2021-22 to 0.66% of the Budget Estimate for 2022-2023**.

The Covid-19 health crisis has pushed more and more women towards **casual labour**. From January to March 2021, women accounted for **9.3% of the casual labour force** against 7.7% during January to March 2020. In the context of the ongoing health crisis and the exacerbating gender inequalities, it is essential to understand **whether the current gender budget truly serves as an instrument for ushering women-led development in the post-pandemic era**.

Gender Budget will foster Women led development:

- Under the current gender budget, **the Part A component comprises 100% women-specific schemes increasing by 6%** from the last gender budget. Part B, which includes programmes where **at least 30% of the allocation is for women**, has **witnessed a hike of 12% compared to last year**.
- The current gender budget was, thus, expected to provide assistance to women to recover and grow through economic opportunities, tax benefits, formal sector jobs and better financial inclusion.
- Nearly **two lakh Anganwadis would be upgraded this financial year** to have better infrastructure and audio-visual aids to improve early childhood development environments. But the schemes that will cover these expansions, such as the **Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 schemes of the Ministry of Women and Child Development**, have received a **little hike of**

0.75% from last year's budget.

- The education sector has been a significant gainer for this financial year, with allocations for the **Samagra Shiksha scheme** for school education increased by 25 per cent.
- The Department of Higher education received a 10% hike.

Arguments against the allocation of the current gender budget

- This year's gender budget, like previous years, has continued to **remain below 5% of the total expenditure and less than 1% of the GDP**.
- Approximately **91% of the increase in this year's gender budget is from schemes in Part B, which are only 30% reserved for women**. While the increase in **Part A** that is entirely reserved for women only **received a meagre hike**. A total of 10 schemes constitutes nearly 80 per cent of the gender budget 2022-23.
- This **clustering of the gender budget into a few schemes** is, nonetheless, **indicative of the lack of gender mainstreaming**, particularly in job-creating sectors, including infrastructure or industrial development.
- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (**MGNREGS**), of which **women constitute a large number of the beneficiaries** has been **reduced by 20%**.
- **Women-centred employment opportunities have not been prioritized** in the current gender budget, especially in rural areas.
- **Fiscal response measures** in the current gender budget have **failed to protect the affected women-led MSMEs** and **did not provide them with any tax relief**.
- **Digital Saksharta Abhiyan** targeted towards **the promotion of digital literacy** saw a reduction of 17% in this year's gender budget and allocation for **the Digital India Programme was reduced to zero**.
- Schemes that focus on providing safety to women, such as One Stop Centres, Mahila Police Volunteer, Women's Helpline, Nari Adalat, have declined from Rs 587 crore in 2021 to Rs 562 crore this year.
- Allocations for the **National Scheme for Incentive to Girl Child for Secondary Education**, a key programme to bridge learning losses for teenage girls as schools reopen, has been provided with **no allocation at all**.

Overall, the focus of the 2022-2023 gender budget might have been on **alleviating gender inequality, but in reality**, it has failed to present a sensitive front to prioritize critical challenges that women are facing in light of the ongoing pandemic. However, given that India's economic growth had already been witnessing a decline even before the onset of Covid19, its revival in the post-pandemic era will **be impossible if women continue to be left out**. It is perhaps time that the Indian government begins to walk its talk on bringing about women-led development.

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