

Gender Budget 2025

Posted at: 04/03/2025

Gender Budget 2025: A Critical Analysis

The **Union Budget 2025** has allocated a record **₹4,49,028.68 crore** to the **Gender Budget (GB)**, marking a **37.3% increase** from the previous fiscal year and accounting for **8.86% of the total Budget**. However, a closer examination reveals that this increase is **primarily due to the inclusion of the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (24% of GB)**, rather than substantial investments in **care infrastructure** or **gender-responsive schemes**.

Despite the **Economic Surveys of 2023-24 and 2024-25** emphasizing **care infrastructure** as a key factor in **women's empowerment**, the current Budget **fails to make tangible investments** in this sector. This underscores the **continued invisibility of care work** in India's economic planning, limiting women's participation in the workforce.

The Burden of Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW)

- **Global Scenario:** On average, **women spend 17.8% of their time on unpaid care and domestic work (UCDW)**. The burden is **higher in the Global South**.
- **India's Situation:** Indian women **spend 40% more time** on unpaid care work than women in **South Africa and China**.
- **Labour Force Participation:**
 - **53% of Indian women** remain **outside the labour force** due to care responsibilities.
 - Only **1.1% of men** cite care work as a reason for staying out of the workforce.
- **Impact on Poor and Marginalized Women:**
 - Women in low-income families juggle **17-19 hours of daily tasks**.
 - This leads to **'time poverty'**, affecting their **physical and mental well-being**.

Structural Factors Exacerbating the Burden

- **Broader Unpaid Work in the Global South:**

- Beyond caregiving, women in the Global South engage in **family farming, water and fuel collection, and domestic chores.**

- **Infrastructure Deficiencies:**

- Due to **limited access to water, clean energy, and sanitation**, women **spend up to 73% of their time** on unpaid care activities.
- Women in India **spend nearly 5 hours daily collecting water**, while men spend only **1.5 hours.**

- **Climate Change Impact:**

- Water-related unpaid labour in India is projected to reach **\$1.4 billion by 2050** under a **high-emissions scenario.**
- **Low public investment** in care infrastructure worsens this crisis.

The Way Forward: Addressing the Care Economy

1. Recognizing the Full Spectrum of UCDW

- The **2019 Time Use Survey** revealed that **Indian women spend an average of seven hours daily** on UCDW.
- Despite its policy relevance, conducting such surveys is costly.
- A **practical solution** is integrating **Time-use modules** into existing **household surveys.**

2. Reducing the UCDW Burden Through Infrastructure and Technology

- **Investment in Time-Saving Infrastructure:**

- Expanding access to **safe water, clean energy, sanitation, and affordable childcare.**
- The **Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)** has been extended until **2028** to ensure **100% potable water coverage.**
- However, **funding delays and underutilization** have **hindered implementation.**
- **Budget Allocation Concerns:**
 - The **JJM Budget declined by 4.51%** from last year's **Budget Estimates (BE).**
 - However, it saw a **195% increase** over **Revised Estimates (RE),** highlighting **allocation-spending mismatches.**
- **Policy Recommendations:**
 - Strengthening JJM's **implementation framework.**
 - Ensuring **sustainable water management** for long-term impact.

3. Redistributing Care Work Across Households and the State

- Care work must be **shifted from individual households to the State.**
- **Urban Challenge Fund (₹1 lakh crore):**
 - **₹10,000 crore** allocated for FY 2025-26.
 - Will finance up to **25% of bankable projects.**
 - Encourages **public-private partnerships** in urban redevelopment, **water supply,** and **sanitation.**
- **Learning from Global Models:**
 - **Bogotá's Care Blocks** centralize caregiving services to **reduce women's unpaid work.**

- India can integrate similar models into the **Smart Cities Mission**.

4. Increasing Women's Representation in Decision-Making

- **Gender-Sensitive Governance:**

- Women's participation in **decision-making and policy implementation** ensures **better-targeted policies**.

- **Impact of Women's Involvement:**

- Studies show that policies designed with women's input are **6-7 times more effective**.

- **Addressing Policy Gaps:**

- Without women's representation, policies remain **disconnected from real-life gender disparities**.

Conclusion: A Missed Opportunity for Gender-Inclusive Growth

- The government emphasizes **Nari Shakti** as a **driver of economic growth**.
- However, the **2025 Budget fails to prioritize care work** as a core element of economic planning.
- **Unpaid care work remains a major barrier** to women's economic participation.
- **For true gender-inclusive development**, India must adopt a **comprehensive care economy strategy** that:
 - **Recognizes, reduces, and redistributes** care work.
 - Ensures **women's representation** in governance and policy-making.
 - Strengthens **infrastructure investment** to reduce **time poverty**.

- Implementing these measures will **boost women's workforce participation** and lead to **sustainable and inclusive economic growth**.

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