

Gender And Child Budget Statement 2024-2025 In West Bengal

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Abstract:

The Gender and Child Budget Statement for the fiscal year 2024-2025 in West Bengal marks a pivotal moment in the state's commitment to fostering gender equality and ensuring the well-being of its children. This statement serves as a comprehensive framework for understanding the budgetary allocations and policy priorities aimed at addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by women and children across the state. As West Bengal continues its journey towards inclusive and sustainable development, the government recognizes the critical importance of investing in initiatives that empower women and promote the rights and welfare of children. In the context of West Bengal, gender disparities persist in various aspects of life, including education, healthcare, employment, and access to resources. Despite progress in recent years, women continue to face systemic barriers that limit their opportunities for advancement and participation in decision-making processes. Similarly, children, especially those from marginalized communities, often experience barriers to accessing essential services, protection from violence and exploitation, and opportunities for education and development.

Key-words: Gender, child budget, healthcare, employment, violence.

Date of Submission: 12-08-2024

Date of Acceptance: 22-08-2024

I. Introduction:

Against this backdrop, the Gender, and Child Budget Statement for 2024-2025 underscores the government's commitment to addressing these challenges and advancing the rights and well-being of women and children. By integrating gender and child considerations into the budgetary process, the government seeks to ensure that resources are allocated strategically to promote equality, empowerment, and social justice.

This introduction sets the stage for examining the key objectives, priorities, and strategies outlined in the Gender and Child Budget Statement for 2024-2025. Through a comprehensive analysis of budget allocations and policy initiatives, this statement aims to provide insights into the government's efforts to create an enabling environment where women and children can thrive, participate fully in society, and contribute to the state's overall development.

As we delve deeper into the Gender and Child Budget Statement, it becomes evident that investing in women and children is not just a matter of social responsibility but also a sound economic strategy. Empowered women are key drivers of economic growth, productivity, and innovation, while ensuring the well-being of children is essential for building a strong foundation for future generations. By prioritizing investments in education, healthcare, social protection, and gender mainstreaming, the government seeks to unlock the full potential of women and children as agents of change and progress.

In the following sections of this statement, we will explore in detail the key objectives, priorities, and budget allocations for various sectors and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and child rights in West Bengal. By analysing the government's budgetary commitments and policy directions, we can gain valuable insights into the state's efforts to create a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future for all its citizens, with a particular focus on the well-being of women and children.

II. Literature Review:

The Gender and Child Budget Statement for the fiscal year 2024-2025 in West Bengal builds upon a rich body of literature and research highlighting the importance of gender-responsive budgeting and child-centric policies in promoting inclusive development. This literature review provides an overview of key concepts, empirical evidence, and theoretical frameworks that inform the government's approach to budgetary planning and resource allocation for women and children in West Bengal.

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) has emerged as a critical tool for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in public policy and budgetary processes. Studies have shown that integrating gender

considerations into budget formulation, implementation, and monitoring can help address gender disparities and promote women's participation in decision-making, economic opportunities, and social development (Elson & Eversheds, 2000; OECD, 2009). By analysing budget allocations through a gender lens, policymakers can identify and address gender gaps in access to resources and services, such as education, healthcare, employment, and social protection.

In the context of West Bengal, gender disparities persist across various sectors, including education, healthcare, employment, and political representation. Research indicates that while progress has been made in narrowing some gender gaps, significant challenges remain, particularly for women from marginalized communities (Das & Chakraborty, 2021; Government of West Bengal, 2022). Factors such as cultural norms, social attitudes, and institutional barriers continue to limit women's access to opportunities and resources, reinforcing gender inequalities in the state.

Similarly, children in West Bengal face various challenges related to health, education, protection, and participation. Despite efforts to improve child well-being, issues such as malnutrition, child labour, child marriage, and inadequate access to quality education persist, particularly among marginalized and vulnerable populations (UNICEF, 2020; Ghosh & Ghosh, 2019). Research suggests that targeted investments in child-focused programs and policies are essential for addressing these challenges and ensuring that all children have the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

The literature also highlights the importance of mainstreaming gender and child concerns across sectors and ministries to ensure comprehensive and coordinated responses to gender and child-related issues. Gender mainstreaming involves integrating gender considerations into all aspects of policy development, implementation, and evaluation, thereby addressing the root causes of gender inequalities and promoting women's empowerment (UN Women, 2014). Similarly, child mainstreaming aims to prioritize children's rights and well-being in all policy domains, ensuring that children's needs are central to decision-making processes (UNICEF, 2018).

Moreover, studies emphasize the need for robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress towards gender equality and child rights goals and hold policymakers accountable for their commitments (Budlender & Hewitt, 2002; UNDP, 2021). By collecting sex-disaggregated data, conducting gender-sensitive impact assessments, and engaging stakeholders in the monitoring process, governments can better understand the differential impacts of policies and programs on women, men, girls, and boys and adjust their strategies accordingly.

The literature review underscores the importance of the Gender and Child Budget Statement for 2024-2025 in West Bengal as a strategic framework for advancing gender equality and child rights in the state. Drawing on insights from gender-responsive budgeting, child-focused policies, mainstreaming approaches, and monitoring and evaluation practices, the government aims to address the specific needs and challenges faced by women and children and create an enabling environment where all individuals can realize their rights and potential. Through evidence-based policymaking, stakeholder engagement, and transparent reporting, West Bengal seeks to build a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable society for future generations.

III. Objectives:

The Gender and Child Budget Statement for the fiscal year 2024-2025 in West Bengal is guided by a set of overarching objectives aimed at promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, and the rights and well-being of children across the state. These objectives serve as the foundation for budgetary planning, resource allocation, and policy implementation, reflecting the government's commitment to creating an inclusive and equitable society where every individual, regardless of gender or age, can thrive and fulfil their potential. The objectives outlined below encapsulate the key priorities and aspirations of the government in its efforts to address the specific needs and challenges faced by women and children in West Bengal.

1. **Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment:** One of the primary objectives of the Gender and Child Budget Statement for 2024-2025 is to promote gender equality and women's empowerment across all sectors of society. This objective encompasses various dimensions of gender equality, including economic empowerment, political participation, access to education and healthcare, and protection from violence and discrimination. By allocating resources towards gender-responsive programs and initiatives, the government aims to address systemic barriers to women's advancement and ensure equal opportunities for women in all spheres of life. Through targeted interventions, such as skills training, entrepreneurship development, and access to finance, the government seeks to empower women to realize their full potential, contribute to the economy, and participate actively in decision-making processes at all levels.
2. **Ensuring the Rights and Well-being of Children:** Another key objective of the Gender and Child Budget Statement is to ensure the rights and well-being of children in West Bengal. This objective encompasses a range of issues related to child health, education, protection, and participation. The government aims to prioritize investments in child-focused programs and policies that address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of children, particularly those from marginalized and vulnerable groups. By strengthening healthcare services,

expanding access to quality education, and implementing child protection measures, the government seeks to create a supportive environment where all children can grow and thrive. Additionally, the government aims to promote children's participation in decision-making processes and ensure that their voices are heard and respected in matters that affect their lives.

3. **Mainstreaming Gender and Child Concerns Across Sectors:** A fundamental objective of the Gender and Child Budget Statement is to mainstream gender and child concerns across all sectors and ministries of the government. This objective reflects the government's recognition that gender equality and child rights are cross-cutting issues that require integrated and coordinated responses across policy domains. By integrating gender considerations into sectoral policies, programs, and budgets, the government aims to address gender disparities and promote women's empowerment in areas such as education, healthcare, employment, and social protection. Similarly, by prioritizing children's rights and well-being in all policy domains, the government seeks to ensure that children's needs are central to decision-making processes and that their rights are protected and upheld.
4. **Ensuring Accountability and Transparency in Budgetary Processes:** An essential objective of the Gender and Child Budget Statement is to ensure accountability and transparency in budgetary processes related to gender equality and child rights. This objective underscores the government's commitment to transparently reporting on budget allocations and expenditures for gender and child-focused programs and initiatives. By providing comprehensive and accessible information on budgetary priorities, resource allocations, and program outcomes, the government aims to enhance accountability, foster public trust, and promote informed public participation in the budgetary process. Additionally, the government seeks to strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress towards gender equality and child rights goals and hold policymakers accountable for their commitments.
5. **Fostering Stakeholder Participation and Collaboration:** Finally, the Gender and Child Budget Statement aims to foster stakeholder participation and collaboration in the design, implementation, and evaluation of gender and child-focused programs and policies. This objective recognizes the importance of engaging civil society organizations, women's groups, children's advocates, academia, and other stakeholders in the budgetary process. By soliciting input, feedback, and expertise from a diverse range of stakeholders, the government aims to ensure that the needs and priorities of women and children are effectively addressed and that resources are allocated efficiently and equitably. Additionally, the government seeks to build partnerships and collaborations with various stakeholders to leverage resources, share best practices, and maximize the impact of interventions aimed at promoting gender equality and child rights in West Bengal.

The objectives outlined in the Gender and Child Budget Statement for 2024-2025 reflect the government's commitment to advancing gender equality, women's empowerment, and child rights as fundamental pillars of sustainable development in West Bengal. By prioritizing investments in gender-responsive and child-centric programs and policies, mainstreaming gender and child concerns across sectors, ensuring accountability and transparency in budgetary processes, and fostering stakeholder participation and collaboration, the government seeks to create an enabling environment where all individuals, regardless of gender or age, have the opportunity to thrive and contribute to the state's progress and prosperity.

IV. Methodology:

The development of the Gender and Child Budget Statement for the fiscal year 2024-2025 in West Bengal involved a comprehensive and participatory methodology aimed at ensuring the effective integration of gender and child concerns into budgetary planning, resource allocation, and policy formulation processes. The methodology adopted for the preparation of the budget statement drew upon a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, stakeholder consultations, data analysis, and policy analysis techniques. This section provides an overview of the methodology employed in the development of the Gender and Child Budget Statement, highlighting key steps, processes, and considerations.

1. **Review of Existing Policies and Legislation:** The methodology began with a review of existing policies, legislation, and strategic documents related to gender equality, women's empowerment, and child rights in West Bengal. This review aimed to assess the policy landscape, identify gaps and challenges, and understand the legal and policy frameworks governing gender and child-related issues in the state. Key documents reviewed included the National Policy for Women, the National Policy for Children, the State Gender Policy, and relevant sectorial policies and programs.
2. **Data Collection and Analysis:** A critical component of the methodology involved data collection and analysis to inform budgetary decisions and policy priorities related to gender equality and child rights. This process included gathering sex-disaggregated data, conducting gender analysis, and assessing the situation of children in West Bengal. Data sources included national surveys, administrative records, research studies, and reports from government and non-governmental organizations. Data analysis techniques such as descriptive statistics, trend analysis, and gender-responsive budget analysis were employed to identify patterns, trends, and disparities related to gender and child-related issues.

3. **Stakeholder Consultations:** Stakeholder consultations played a crucial role in the development of the Gender and Child Budget Statement, ensuring the inclusion of diverse perspectives, experiences, and priorities in the budgetary process. Consultations were conducted with a wide range of stakeholders, including government officials, civil society organizations, women's groups, children's advocates, academia, and international development partners. These consultations provided an opportunity for stakeholders to share their insights, provide feedback on budgetary priorities, and contribute to the formulation of recommendations and action plans.
4. **Gender and Child Impact Assessments:** To ensure that budgetary decisions and policy interventions effectively address gender and child-related concerns, gender and child impact assessments were conducted as part of the methodology. These assessments aimed to identify the potential impacts of budgetary allocations and policy measures on women and children, including their access to services, resources, and opportunities. By incorporating gender and child impact assessments into the budgetary process, the government sought to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of its interventions and ensure that they contribute to advancing gender equality and child rights in West Bengal.
5. **Gender-Responsive Budgeting:** A key component of the methodology was the adoption of gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) principles and practices to guide budgetary planning and resource allocation. GRB involves analysing budget allocations through a gender lens to identify and address gender disparities in access to resources and services. By integrating GRB into the budgetary process, the government aimed to promote gender equality, women's empowerment, and social inclusion across all sectors and ministries. This involved allocating resources towards gender-responsive programs and initiatives, such as education and healthcare for women and girls, economic empowerment programs, and gender-based violence prevention initiatives.
6. **Child-Centric Budgeting:** Similarly, child-centric budgeting principles were integrated into the methodology to ensure that budgetary decisions and policy interventions effectively address the needs and rights of children in West Bengal. Child-centric budgeting involves prioritizing investments in child-focused programs and services, including healthcare, education, nutrition, protection, and participation. By allocating resources towards child-centric programs and policies, the government aimed to create a supportive environment where all children can grow, develop, and thrive.
7. **Policy Formulation and Budget Allocation:** Based on the findings from data analysis, stakeholder consultations, and gender and child impact assessments, policy recommendations and budget allocations were formulated to address priority areas related to gender equality and child rights in West Bengal. These recommendations and allocations were incorporated into the Gender and Child Budget Statement for 2024-2025, providing a roadmap for the implementation of gender-responsive and child-centric initiatives across sectors and ministries.

The methodology employed in the development of the Gender and Child Budget Statement for 2024-2025 in West Bengal reflects a comprehensive and participatory approach aimed at promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, and child rights in the state. By integrating gender and child concerns into the budgetary process, the government seeks to ensure that resources are allocated effectively and equitably to address the specific needs and challenges faced by women and children in West Bengal. Through data-driven decision-making, stakeholder engagement, and policy formulation grounded in gender-responsive and child-centric principles, West Bengal aims to create an inclusive and equitable society where every individual, regardless of gender or age, can thrive and fulfil their potential.

V. Expected Outcomes:

The Gender and Child Budget Statement for the fiscal year 2024-2025 in West Bengal sets forth a series of expected outcomes aimed at promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, and the rights and well-being of children across the state. These expected outcomes reflect the government's commitment to creating an enabling environment where women and children can thrive, participate fully in society, and contribute to the state's overall development. By prioritizing investments in gender-responsive and child-centric programs and policies, the government aims to achieve tangible results that improve the lives of women and children and advance the state towards its broader social and economic goals.

1. **Increased Access to Education for Girls and Boys:** One of the primary expected outcomes of the Gender and Child Budget Statement is increased access to quality education for girls and boys in West Bengal. By investing in education infrastructure, teacher training, and educational materials, the government aims to reduce gender disparities in school enrolment, retention, and completion rates. The expected outcome is a higher proportion of girls and boys completing their primary and secondary education, leading to improved literacy rates, better employment opportunities, and enhanced social mobility for future generations.
2. **Improved Maternal and Child Health Outcomes:** Another key expected outcome is improved maternal and child health outcomes in West Bengal. By strengthening healthcare services, expanding access to prenatal and postnatal care, and promoting maternal and child nutrition, the government aims to reduce maternal and child mortality rates and improve overall health indicators. The expected outcome is a decrease in maternal and child

morbidity and mortality rates, leading to healthier families, stronger communities, and improved economic productivity.

3. **Enhanced Economic Empowerment of Women:** The Gender and Child Budget Statement also aims to achieve enhanced economic empowerment of women in West Bengal. By investing in women's skill development, entrepreneurship training, access to credit, and market linkages, the government aims to increase women's participation in the formal economy and promote their economic independence. The expected outcome is greater financial security, improved livelihoods, and increased household incomes for women, leading to poverty reduction and sustainable economic growth.
4. **Strengthened Child Protection Systems:** A critical expected outcome is the strengthening of child protection systems in West Bengal. By implementing child-friendly laws, improving child welfare services, and enhancing mechanisms for preventing and responding to child abuse, exploitation, and neglect, the government aims to ensure the safety and well-being of all children. The expected outcome is a reduction in incidences of child labour, child marriage, trafficking, and other forms of exploitation, leading to a more secure and nurturing environment for children to grow and develop.
5. **Increased Participation of Women in Decision-Making:** The Gender and Child Budget Statement seeks to achieve increased participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels of society. By promoting women's leadership, political representation, and participation in governance structures, the government aims to amplify women's voices and perspectives in shaping policies and programs that affect their lives. The expected outcome is greater gender parity in decision-making bodies, leading to more inclusive and responsive governance and policy outcomes.
6. **Enhanced Social Inclusion and Equity:** Another expected outcome is enhanced social inclusion and equity in West Bengal. By targeting resources towards marginalized and vulnerable groups, including Dalits, Adivasis, minorities, and persons with disabilities, the government aims to reduce disparities and promote social justice for all. The expected outcome is greater social cohesion, reduced discrimination, and improved access to opportunities and resources for historically marginalized communities, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable society for all.
7. **Strengthened Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:** Finally, the Gender and Child Budget Statement aims to strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress towards gender equality and child rights goals and hold policymakers accountable for their commitments. By collecting sex-disaggregated data, conducting gender-sensitive impact assessments, and engaging stakeholders in the monitoring process, the government aims to ensure that budgetary allocations and policy interventions are effective, efficient, and equitable. The expected outcome is improved accountability, transparency, and evidence-based decision-making in the implementation of gender-responsive and child-centric initiatives in West Bengal.

The expected outcomes outlined in the Gender and Child Budget Statement for 2024-2025 reflect the government's commitment to achieving tangible results in promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, and child rights in West Bengal. By prioritizing investments in education, healthcare, economic empowerment, child protection, women's participation, social inclusion, and monitoring and evaluation, the government aims to create an enabling environment where women and children can thrive and contribute to the state's progress and prosperity. Through targeted interventions and evidence-based policymaking, West Bengal seeks to build a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable society where every individual, regardless of gender or age, has the opportunity to fulfil their potential and lead a dignified life.

VI. Timeline:

The development and implementation of the Gender and Child Budget Statement for the fiscal year 2024-2025 in West Bengal involve a structured timeline that encompasses various stages, processes, and activities. This timeline outlines the key milestones and deadlines for the preparation, adoption, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the budget statement, ensuring that gender equality, women's empowerment, and child rights considerations are integrated effectively into the budgetary process.

January – March 2024: Preparatory Phase

During the preparatory phase, the government initiates the process of developing the Gender and Child Budget Statement by convening interdepartmental meetings, establishing a budget committee, and appointing focal points for gender and child-related issues in relevant ministries and departments. Data collection and analysis activities begin, including the review of existing policies and legislation, stakeholder consultations, and gender and child impact assessments. The government also conducts capacity-building workshops and training sessions for government officials and stakeholders on gender-responsive budgeting and child-centric policy analysis.

April – June 2024: Formulation Phase

In the formulation phase, the government consolidates the findings from the preparatory phase and begins drafting the Gender and Child Budget Statement for 2024-2025. This involves setting budgetary priorities, identifying key areas for investment, and formulating policy recommendations and budget allocations to address gender and child-related issues in West Bengal. Stakeholder consultations continue, and feedback from civil society organizations, women's groups, children's advocates, and other stakeholders is incorporated into the budgetary process. The government also conducts gender and child impact assessments to assess the potential effects of budgetary decisions on women and children.

July – August 2024: Budget Adoption Phase

During the budget adoption phase, the government finalizes the Gender and Child Budget Statement and submits it to the state legislature for approval. The budget statement is presented to the legislative assembly as part of the overall state budget, and discussions and debates take place on the proposed budget allocations and policy priorities related to gender equality and child rights. Amendments may be made to the budget statement based on feedback and recommendations from legislators and stakeholders. Once approved by the legislature, the Gender and Child Budget Statement becomes an integral part of the state budget for the fiscal year 2024-2025.

September – December 2024: Implementation Phase

Following the adoption of the budget statement, the government begins the implementation phase, where budget allocations and policy measures outlined in the statement are put into action. This involves disbursing funds to relevant ministries and departments, initiating programs and projects, and monitoring progress towards achieving budgetary objectives related to gender equality and child rights. The government collaborates with civil society organizations, women's groups, children's advocates, and other stakeholders to ensure effective implementation of gender-responsive and child-centric initiatives across sectors and regions of West Bengal. Regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are established to track progress and identify challenges and opportunities for improvement.

January – March 2025: Monitoring and Evaluation Phase

In the final phase of the timeline, the government conducts monitoring and evaluation activities to assess the impact of budget allocations and policy interventions on gender equality and child rights in West Bengal. This involves collecting data, conducting performance reviews, and analysing outcomes to determine the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of budgetary decisions and programmatic interventions. The government prepares a comprehensive report on the implementation of the Gender and Child Budget Statement, highlighting achievements, challenges, lessons learned, and recommendations for future action. The report is disseminated to policymakers, stakeholders, and the public to promote transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in budgetary planning and implementation processes.

The timeline for the Gender and Child Budget Statement for 2024-2025 in West Bengal outlines a systematic and phased approach to integrating gender equality, women's empowerment, and child rights considerations into the budgetary process. By following this timeline, the government aims to ensure that resources are allocated effectively and equitably to address the specific needs and challenges faced by women and children in the state, ultimately contributing to the achievement of broader social and economic development goals.

VII. Budget:

In the Gender and Child Budget Statement for the fiscal year 2024-2025 in West Bengal, the government allocates funds to prioritize investments in key areas aimed at promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, and the rights and well-being of children. The budget allocations outlined below provide an example of how resources are distributed across various sectors and initiatives to achieve these objectives.

1. Education

- Construction and renovation of schools in underserved areas: INR 100 million
- Provision of free textbooks and uniforms for girls and boys: INR 50 million
- Training of teachers in gender-responsive pedagogy: INR 20 million
- Scholarships and incentives to encourage girls' enrolment: INR 30 million

2. Healthcare

- Establishment of maternal and child health clinics: INR 80 million
- Provision of essential medicines and supplies for maternal and child healthcare: INR 40 million
- Immunization programs for children: INR 60 million
- Nutrition interventions for pregnant women and young children: INR 50 million

3. Social Protection

- Widow pensions for vulnerable women: INR 70 million
- Maternity benefits for pregnant women: INR 40 million
- Disability allowances for persons with disabilities: INR 30 million
- Child support grants for vulnerable families: INR 50 million
- 4. Economic Empowerment
 - Establishment of women's livelihood centres: INR 60 million
 - Vocational training programs for women: INR 40 million
 - Support for women-owned businesses and self-help groups: INR 50 million
 - Incentives to promote women's participation in non-traditional sectors: INR 30 million
- 5. Child Protection
 - Establishment of child welfare committees: INR 50 million
 - Child-friendly legal aid services for children in need of protection: INR 30 million
 - Capacity-building of frontline workers in child protection practices: INR 40 million
 - Child helplines and shelters for children in need of care and protection: INR 60 million
- 6. Gender Mainstreaming
 - Gender training and capacity-building of government officials: INR 30 million
 - Development of gender-sensitive indicators and targets: INR 20 million
 - Implementation of gender-responsive planning and budgeting tools: INR 40 million
 - Gender-based violence prevention initiatives: INR 50 million

The example budget allocations outlined above demonstrate the government's commitment to addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by women and children in West Bengal. By prioritizing investments in education, healthcare, social protection, economic empowerment, child protection, and gender mainstreaming, the government aims to achieve tangible results in promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, and child rights across the state. Through transparent and accountable budgetary processes, West Bengal seeks to build a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable society where every individual, regardless of gender or age, has the opportunity to thrive and fulfil their potential.

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