

SW-TN and DALIT BUDGETING

Dalit Budgeting has been one of the key areas of public policy advocacy, research and alliance-building that SW-TN (and earlier TNPFS) has been involved in, right from its beginning. And it is an area where SW-TN can duly claim some credit too!

From Total Denial to Complete Acceptance

The dalit budget advocacy efforts of SW-TN have mostly centered around the empowering paradigm of Special Component Plan (SCP) for dalits.

Even though the Central Government of India had introduced the SCP, as early as late 1980's, as a revolutionary paradigm for planning and budgeting for the empowerment of dalits, the programme has remained a victim of bureaucratic resistance and indifference, as well as lack of political will from the ruling classes. Civil society too, including most dalit organizations, had hardly understood the significance of the programme for the empowerment of dalits.

In the late 1990's, when SW-TN took up the cause of SCP, only a few dalit bureaucrats (Mr.Karuppan IAS, Ms.Sivakami IAS and Mr.Christudoss Gandhi IAS) had dealt with the programme. And when, inspired by our researches, Mr.Thirumavalavan, then a member of the Tamilnadu State legislative Assembly, raised the issue in the Assembly, the then Chief Minister had coolly denied the very existence of such a programme. And it was the same Chief Minister who, during the 2010-2011 Budget session, proudly acclaimed that Tamilnadu is the first state to fully comply to the demands of SCP by allocating Rs 3,828 crore for the programme, as per the requirements of SCP. Much of the credit for the change in the political arena can be claimed by SW-TN, besides a handful of bureaucrats and some dalit organizations.

MULTIPLE STRATEGIES

SW-TN, in its advocacy on dalit budgeting (mainly focused on SCP), has used multiple strategies of research, alliance building and advocacy – at all levels, ranging from the international to local bodies – and covering all sections of society – policy makers, researchers and civil society activists.

FOCUSED RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS /

SHARP ADVOCACY TOOLS

SW-TN has used, regularly, well-researched and user-friendly publications to push the advocacy on dalit budgeting forward. The monograph “**Social Development of Dalits and Tamilnadu Budget – A Critique**’ (in English and Tamil), published by TNPFS in 1999 (and popularly known as the ‘Blue Book’), eventually became a sort of benchmark for all Dalit budgeting advocacy efforts, not only by the Forum but also by all other stakeholders, both in the State and in the country.

And the publication “**Special Component Plan: Dalit Hopes Betrayed?**”, released by SW-TN in 2004 (both in English and Tamil), took the advocacy efforts to a higher and wider level, attracting large number of stakeholders.

The publication “**Millennium Development Goals & Dalits - The Missing Dimension**” published in November 2004 drew instant national and international attention to the fact that MDGS will remain an empty dream in India, if dalit-focussed policy frameworks were not evolved and implemented.

In 2009, SW-TN facilitated and contributed, in a major way, to the publication of “**The Report of the Working Group on Empowerment of Scheduled Castes during Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012)**’, in a user friendly way, through 3 volumes in English and 4 volumes in Tamil. The Report, better known as the “Thorat Report” has become the foundation of the much of the dalit budget advocacy efforts in the country.

HIGH PROFILE SEMINARS / CONSULTATIONS

And SW-TN has used its research findings and advocacy materials in many **High-profile Seminars, Consultations and Workshops**, attracting hundreds of participants, in order to disseminate the ideas, to give visibility to the theme and to build a vast network of acceptability. These have also proved to be occasions for effective capacity building at different levels.

The state-level seminar, in 1998, on “**Dalits and Social Development**”, addressed by Mr. Ezhilmalai, cabinet minister from the Government of India and Mr. Christudoss Gandhi IAS of the Government of Tamilnadu, was the first effort to bring dalit budgeting onto the political agenda of the State.

And the following have been among the most significant and impact-making seminars / consultations, undertaken by the Forum and SW-TN:

The seminar on **‘Special Component Plan & Dalit Budgeting’** (2002) at Chennai, participated by SC/ST Employees, Dalit Panchayat Elected Representatives, University students and members of civil society, demanded a White Paper on SCP by the State Government.

The seminar on **‘Budgets, Dalits and Public Policy’** (2003), organized in collaboration with the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, at the Asian Social Forum, Hyderabad, provided greater visibility to the Forum’s work on Dalit budgeting.

The seminar on **‘Empowerment of dalits in actualizing opportunities and Government interventions’** (2003), organized in association with Human Rights Foundation for Dalit Liberation and PAALAM, highlighted the need for articulating alternate budget frameworks for dalits.

In 2004, SW-TN collaborated with a major effort taken by Mr. Vallal Peruman, former MP, to bring Mr. P. Chidambaram, the Central Finance Minister, for a major conference, where more than a thousand dalit intellectuals, activists and bureaucrats participated. A draft memorandum was submitted to the Central Government as well as the National Commission for SCs.

The workshop on **“11th Five Year Plan - Lobbying on Dalit Budgeting’** (2006), organized in collaboration with Human Rights Foundation for Dalit Liberation collated varied recommendations towards dalit empowerment and presented them to the Government.

The panel discussion on **“Development Policy and Dalit Empowerment”** (2009), organized in collaboration with Social Work Department of Loyola College, Chennai, provided the platform to release the “11th Plan Thorat Committee Report” as well as to disseminate the recommendations of the Report.

The Consultation on **“Empower Dalits during 11th Plan – Promises to be kept and Recommendations to be implemented”** (2009) organized in collaboration with “AMBU-PAALAM”, drew more than 200 participants,

comprising of dalit bureaucrats, civil society leaders, members of SC/ST Federations, intellectuals and grassroots activists.

The State-level Consultation on “**Budget and Policy for Inclusive Growth – Empowering the Marginalised**” (2009) reviewed the implementation of SCSP-TSP in the lines of Union Planning Commission guidelines, as part of Mid-Term Appraisal of XI Five Year Plan in the Southern States.

The Inter-State Consultation on Dalit Budgeting (2010), participated by Mr. Panda, Special Advisor to the Union Planning Commission, Mr. Christudoss Gandhi IAS as well as dalit activists from the various Southern States, concentrated on evolving alternate schemes for dalit empowerment, to be proposed to the Central and State Governments.

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

Capacity building of young and committed members of the State Legislative Assembly, especially from the opposition ranks has remained, from the beginning, one of the important strategies of the Forum and SW-TN. Providing them with research material coupled with pointed questions to be raised at the floor of the assembly has helped many a legislator to raise the issue of SCP to be part of the political agenda of the State.

The birth of the **Tamilnadu Dalit Legislators Forum** in 2003, mainly due to the concerted efforts of the Forum as well as committed bureaucrats like Mr. Christudoss Gandhi IAS, has been another significant high point in the dalit budgeting advocacy in the State. Even though in its effort to bring together the 44 dalit MLAs in the Assembly, the Forum has not been very vibrant, there have been occasions when the Forum was able to take the concerns of dalits in the State to the rulers in the state, starting with the statement, “Policy Issues & Recommendations – SCs & STs welfare in Tamilnadu - Background Note & Resolutions”, released by the Forum in March 2003, highlighting key policy concerns related to dalit empowerment in the State.

WORKING WITH THE STATE

Though highly critical of the processes of planning and budgeting for dalits as well as its implementation by the State authorities, the TNPFS and SW-TN have continued to interact very closely with the various state organs, as a part of its advocacy efforts.

And due to the professional nature of its work as well as its non-party political approaches, The Government authorities have often found SW-TN as a significant civil society component in the dalit budgeting processes:

- In 2006, the Tamilnadu State Planning Commission invited Fr. John Kumar to present a brief on the significance of ‘Special Component Plan’ in Dalit empowerment. Following this, SW-TN was invited to a meeting, convened by the Vice Chariman of Tamilnadu Planning Commission, of all the secretaries of key departments, to deliberate on policy issues and concerns related to the implementation of Special Component Plan in the State. And finally, SW-TN was invited to be **the sole NGO representative at the Working Group on Welfare of SCs and STs towards the 11th Five Year Plan Approach Paper for the State**. SW-TN presented a paper on Alternate Dalit Budget Proposals with concrete recommendations.
- During March–August 2007, Fr. Kumar accompanied Mr. R C Gandhi IAS, in organizing district level seminars in all the 30 district headquarters, often under the leadership of the respective collector but also bringing in District Adi Dravidar Welfare Department, SC Employee Union members, Trade unions and a large section of civil society actors – to ensure SCP is understood and implemented at the district level too.
- In 2009, Fr. John Kumar accompanied Mr. Christudoss Gandhi to the Regional Consultation Meeting to Review Implementation of SCSP-TSP, as part of the Mid-term Appraisal of the XI Plan, organized by the Union Planning Commission at Hyderabad.

GRAND ALLIANCES WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

SW-TN, from the beginning, has always brought in or collaborated with a vast number of civil society actors – including dalit organizations and networks – at the state, national and international level – in order to give the dalit budgeting advocacy not only visibility but also sufficient momentum at the grassroots, so that our advocacy could be constantly backed by powerful people’s lobbies.

At the State level, while SW-TN has worked with a large number of dalit and human rights organizations, the Human Rights Forum for Dalit Liberation (HRFDL), the Dalit Mannurimai Koottamaippu (Dalit land Rights Federation) and the Human Resource Development Foundation (HRDF).

The sustained efforts of SW-TN resulted in the formation, in 2009, of the **Tamilnadu State Campaign on SCP**, with Fr. John Kumar representing SW-TN, as one of the three conveners of the Campaign. The 'Parallel People's Assembly', which the Campaign organised, coinciding with the Budget Session of the State Assembly, welcoming the quantitative fulfillment of SCP by the State, but castigating the State for the quality of the schemes evolved portended a qualitatively new stage in the struggle of dalit rights in the sphere of public policy and budgeting.

The National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) has been our close collaborator at the national level. NCDHR has also been instrumental in taking our model of dalit budgeting to many other States of the country.

- SW-TN contributed the section on dalit budgeting / SCP in the Alternate Report to the UN Committee on Eradication of racial discrimination, prepared by NCDHR.
- In 2007, SWTN joined as one of the petitioners along with NCDHR in filing a '**Public Interest Litigation on the non-implementation of SCP for SCs in New Delhi**'.

In later years SW-TN has also collaborated with the **National Dalit Forum (NDF)** and occasionally also with the **National Coordination of Dalit Organisations (NACDOR)**, towards ensuring budgetary rights for dalits at the national level as well as in different States of India.

SW-TN has also worked very closely with the **Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA)**, New Delhi and the **National Social Watch Coalition**, to ensure that dalit budgeting becomes inherent part of all mainstream budget advocacy efforts in the country in campaigns such as the Peoples' Budget Initiatives and Wada Na Todo Abhiyan.

Both during the Mid-term Appraisal of the XI Plan and the introductory deliberations on the 12th Plan, SW-TN worked with a variety of civil society actors, ensuring that SCP and due share for dalits in the budgeting processes are assured.

SW-TN has also organized a series of capacity building workshops on SCP or has provided its expertise at programmes organized by others, not only in Tamilnadu but also in other states of India.

SCP AND GRASSROOTS GOVERNANCE

One of the major efforts of SW-TN, towards making SCP relevant to the lives of dalits at the grassroots level, is linking its dalit budget advocacy to the dalit village panchayats.

The Tamilnadu Dalit Panchayat Presidents Association, in whose origin and growth, SW-TN has had a major role, has been, in a sustained manner, monitoring the implementation of SCP at the districts level and submitting to the district and state authorities, alternate plans and budgetary processes. TNPFS and SW-TN have organized a series of capacity building sessions for elected dalit representatives, especially in Kancheepuram district, in collaboration with dalit organizations such as HRDF and DFDL.

RECENT EFFORTS

- Social Watch – Tamilnadu raised concrete questions and issues to the Chair Person, National Commission for Scheduled Caste during the **meeting with Scheduled Caste Representatives, Associations and Civil Society organizations** on 8th July 2015 to review the Status of SCs in Tamilnadu.
- Fr. Manu and Fr. Kumar have presented articles on SCP in ‘**CBGA BUDGET TRACK** Volume 9, Track 1-2, July 2013’.
- Fr. Manu, Advisor-cum-Mentor of Social Watch-Tamilnadu presented, at the recent Research Seminar on "Caste out of Development", a paper on **"SPECIAL COMPONENT PLAN IN TAMILNADU - A NEW DALIT DISCOURSE IN THE MAKING?"**
- The advocacy efforts regarding the implementation of Special Component Plan at the Central and State levels got a major boost recently, when the National Advisory Council, headed by Ms. Sonia Gandhi, President of Congress Party, came up with strong recommendations to the Central Government on proper implementation of SCP. For more details, refer “**Recommendations on Reforming Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP) / Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP)**” and www.nac.nic.in.

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

Even though SW-TN has contributed much in the sphere of Dalit budgeting, the challenges for the future remain.

- There is a need to take the main discourse from mere allocation to the creation of schemes geared truly towards empowerment of dalits.
- Dalit budgeting must also move into specific concerns of dalit women, dalit children, dalit entrepreneurs etc.
- Dalit budgeting must also be linked more to the grassroots processes, especially as part of bottom-up planning and budgeting, especially at the level of districts and panchayats.
- And finally, Dalit budgeting advocacy processes must converge with similar efforts in the spheres of gender budgeting, child budgeting etc as well as linking budgets with ESC Rights, so that truly powerful “Social Equity Budgets” can be evolved as counter to the presently dominating neo-liberal planning and budgetary processes.
