

A women's special in the Budget

Gender Budget Statement, a first for Tamil Nadu, appears as the last chapter of the document

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For the first time the State government this year presented a Gender Budget Statement as part of the annual budget documents, quantifying the allocations that will benefit women during this fiscal.

The statement appears as the last chapter in the appendices to the Budget documents published by the Finance Department and tabled in the Assembly on March 15. The Budget speech by Finance Minister O. Panneerselvam did not mention it.

Explaining the objectives, Finance Secretary K. Shanmugam said it is the first time such an exercise has been undertaken. The government is looking for more proposals for inclusion in the next year's budget.

The gender budget has three parts. Part A deals with exclusive women beneficiaries. Part B discusses individual beneficiaries among whom will be women. Part C sets out indivisible allocations under various heads. The government estimates women would benefit from these allocations to the extent of at least 30%.

Explaining the nature of the allocations in Part C, Mr. Shanmugam said, "There are certain schemes where you cannot give exclusive allocations separately. For ex-

Positive trend

Even as gender inequality poses a challenge to the development of India, the Tamil Nadu government, for the first time, has sought to address the issue by presenting a Gender Budget Statement, with specific allocations that will benefit women

Part A includes schemes meant for women, which has 100% outlay

Part B includes beneficiary-oriented schemes, with 40% to 99% funds earmarked for women

Part C includes indivisible items, at least 30% of the outlay is meant for women

Education, sports and culture

Part A - ₹275.54 crore

Part B - ₹6,723.34 crore

Health and family welfare

Part A - ₹114.73 crore

Part B - ₹1,918.5 crore

Social welfare and nutrition

Part A - ₹3,865.99 crore

Part B - ₹5,304.78 crore

Labour, labour welfare

ample, we are laying a road that is based on the population size; some factor is deducted from that, which is why we take 30%. It is a presumed estimate."

'Needs sub-categories'

Activists and academicians say the gender budgeting exercise has to be better to cover the needs of all women. Also, it has come a decade after the country formally adopted it in 2005-06.



Towards equality: The government is looking for more proposals for inclusion in the next year's budget. ■ FILE PHOTO

Part A - ₹1.59 crore

Part B - ₹6.23 crore

Water supply, sanitation, housing and urban development

Part B - ₹1,806.19 crore

Other social services

Part B - ₹10.65 crore

Welfare of SCs, STs, BCs, MBC and minorities

Part B - ₹1,969.01 crore

Agriculture and allied activities

Part B - ₹3,652.81 crore

Rural development

Part B - ₹2,011.89 crore

Energy

Part B - ₹1,652.22 crore

Industry and minerals

Part B - ₹283.14 crore

Science, technology and environment

Part B - ₹0.07 crore

General economic services

Part B - ₹3,120 crore

Total outlay

Part A - ₹4,806.1 crore

Part B - ₹28,458.84 crore

Part C - ₹31,806.71 crore

Grand total - ₹65,071.65 crore

Pengal Thozhilalar Sangam. "It has not prioritised long-term improvement in infrastructure, health and alternative employment."

'Anomalies in allocation'

Ms. Mody said there were anomalies in the allocation heads. The budget provided for the women's commission is ₹31.47 lakh and that for a women's helpline is ₹44 lakh. "How do you expect the commission to function effectively with such a paltry sum?"

S. Anandhi, Professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies, said a gender budget must cover inter-sectional interests of women. "There should be a caste-wise mapping of needs among women from various communities. We can't have an overall gender budget and [treat] women as one to be considered for benefits."

"It is not the class of women but the caste of women who suffer many kinds of discrimination that must be factored in while budgeting, specifically addressing needs that are curbed or being regulated by social norms and values," she notes.

An official of the State Finance Department clarified that there was no specific reason why the Gender Budget Statement was not mentioned in the budget speech. "We usually include new schemes in the last chapters," he said.

Kamakshi Sundaramurthy, senior researcher, Social Watch Tamil Nadu, said the gender budget does not address the needs of sub-categories among women, such as those from among the minorities, Dalits and sub-castes.

"These women need better education, healthcare and hostel facilities. Employment is also critical for their empowerment. They need the gender budget

more than any of us but remain excluded," Ms. Sundaramurthy said.

Activists working for women's empowerment want the document to be much more specific with respect to the allocations. For instance, ₹2.3 crore has been allocated to government arts colleges for women. "It doesn't state if the sum would be used to pay the salaries or for maintenance," said Sujata Mody, president,