

Interim Budget 2024-25 Focuses on Gender, Health, and Welfare

The Interim Budget for the fiscal year 2024-25, presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, emphasizes the government's commitment to addressing the needs and aspirations of marginalized sections of society. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision underscores a prioritization of four key segments: the poor ('Garib'), women ('Mahilayen'), youth ('Yuva'), and farmers ('Annadata'). This analysis delves into the major highlights of the budget, with a particular focus on gender-related allocations, healthcare initiatives, and welfare schemes targeting vulnerable groups.



(Source: ET Healthworld)

Gender Budget Allocation Surges

The Gender Budget, aimed at empowering women and promoting gender equality, witnessed a significant increase of 38.6% in the fiscal year 2024-25. This surge reflects the government's heightened focus on addressing gender disparities and uplifting women across various sectors of the economy.

Key Points

1. 43 Ministries/Departments/Union Territories reported a total allocation of Rs. 3.09 lakh crore in the Gender Budget Statement 2024-25, compared to Rs. 2.23 lakh crore in the previous fiscal year.
2. Notably, 22 Ministries/Departments and 5 Union Territories reported 100% allocation for women-specific schemes, while 31 Ministries/Departments and 4 Union Territories allocated 30-99% of their budgets for women-centric initiatives.



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3. The share of Gender Budget in the total Union Budget increased to 6.5% in 2024-25 from 5% in the previous year, indicating a concerted effort towards gender mainstreaming in policy and resource allocation.

Drivers of Growth in Gender Budget

The substantial increase in the Gender Budget can be attributed to heightened allocations in critical sectors benefiting women and girls. Notably, 87% of the increment stems from augmented allocations in key Ministries/Departments such as Home Affairs, Electronics and Information Technology, New and Renewable Energy, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Petroleum and Natural Gas, Drinking Water and Sanitation, and Rural Development.

Policy Emphasis on Women's Health

A notable highlight of the Interim Budget is the government's renewed emphasis on women's health, particularly targeting adolescent girls for the prevention of cervical cancer. This initiative underscores the importance of preventive healthcare measures and underscores the government's commitment to ensuring the well-being of young girls.

Vaccination Drive Against Cervical Cancer

The government announced its intention to actively promote vaccination for girls aged 9-14 to prevent cervical cancer. This initiative aligns with global efforts to combat preventable diseases and underscores the significance of immunization in reducing the burden of cervical cancer, a leading cause of mortality among women in India.

Serum Institute's Indigenous HPV Vaccine

India's Serum Institute has developed Cervavac, the country's first indigenous HPV vaccine for cervical cancer prevention. The inclusion of this vaccine in the national immunization program is expected to enhance accessibility and affordability, potentially reducing the incidence of cervical cancer among vulnerable populations.

Extension of Health Insurance Coverage

The government extended the flagship Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme to all Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) and Anganwadi workers, recognizing their critical role in grassroots healthcare delivery. This extension aims to provide financial protection and healthcare access to frontline workers, thereby strengthening the healthcare infrastructure at the grassroots level.

Strengthening Nutritional Support Programs



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The Interim Budget allocates substantial funds towards enhancing nutritional support programs, particularly for children, adolescent girls, pregnant women, and lactating mothers. The Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 scheme received significant financial backing, reflecting the government's commitment to tackling malnutrition and improving maternal and child health outcomes.

Integration of Maternal and Childcare Schemes



Towards a new dawn

**Ministry of Women and Child Development
Government of India**

(Source: Wikipedia)

The budget emphasizes the consolidation and integration of maternal and childcare schemes under a comprehensive program to streamline implementation and maximize impact. This strategic approach aims to optimize resources and enhance the effectiveness of interventions targeting maternal and child health.

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Addressing Implementation Challenges

While the budget outlines ambitious initiatives, there are concerns regarding the effective implementation and reach of these programs. ASHA and Anganwadi workers, vital stakeholders in healthcare delivery, express apprehensions about the operationalization of the Ayushman Bharat scheme and the need for greater clarity on enrollment procedures.

Mission Shakti: Empowering Women for Safety and Rights

The government's commitment to women's safety and empowerment is exemplified through Mission Shakti, aimed at integrating efforts to safeguard women's rights and enhance their access to entitlements. This initiative underscores the government's holistic approach towards gender empowerment and social inclusion.

Enhanced Financial Allocations

The surge in the Gender Budget is not merely symbolic; it is substantiated by concrete financial commitments. The increase from Rs. 2.23 lakh crore in the previous fiscal year to Rs. 3.09 lakh crore in 2024-25 marks a substantial uptick, signaling the government's resolve to bolster initiatives aimed at women's empowerment and gender parity. This surge in allocation underscores the prioritization of gender-sensitive policies and programs across various sectors of governance.

Sectoral Breakdown of Budget Allocations

The heightened allocations in critical sectors reflect a strategic approach towards addressing gender disparities comprehensively. For instance, the Ministry of Home Affairs, a pivotal institution in ensuring women's safety and security, witnessed a notable increase in budgetary allocation. Similarly, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, responsible for spearheading digital inclusion efforts, received augmented funding, reflecting the recognition of technology as a catalyst for women's empowerment. Additionally, sectors like New and Renewable Energy, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Petroleum and Natural Gas, Drinking Water and Sanitation, and Rural Development witnessed increased allocations, highlighting the government's commitment to mainstreaming gender perspectives across diverse domains.

Healthcare Prioritization

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The budget's emphasis on preventive healthcare, particularly through the vaccination drive against cervical cancer, signifies a proactive approach towards addressing women's health needs. The allocation of resources towards promoting vaccination for girls aged 9-14 underscores the government's recognition of the importance of early intervention in combating preventable diseases. Moreover, the inclusion of the indigenous HPV vaccine, Cervavac, in the national immunization program is a significant step towards enhancing accessibility and affordability of healthcare services, especially for vulnerable populations.

Expansion of Welfare Schemes

The extension of the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme to all ASHA and Anganwadi workers reflects the government's commitment to safeguarding the well-being of frontline healthcare workers. By providing financial protection and healthcare access to these grassroots workers, the government aims to strengthen the healthcare infrastructure and improve service delivery at the grassroots level. Additionally, the allocation of substantial funds towards nutritional support programs underscores the government's efforts to address malnutrition and improve maternal and child health outcomes.

Challenges and Opportunities

While the Interim Budget outlines ambitious initiatives, ensuring their effective implementation remains paramount. Addressing operational challenges, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and fostering collaboration between government agencies and civil society organizations are crucial for translating policy commitments into tangible outcomes. Moreover, sustained investment in capacity building and skill development programs will be essential for empowering women, youth, and marginalized communities, thereby fostering inclusive and sustainable development.

In conclusion, the Interim Budget 2024-25 reflects a comprehensive strategy towards advancing gender equality, promoting healthcare access, and enhancing the welfare of marginalized sections of society. By prioritizing initiatives aimed at women, youth, and vulnerable groups, the government underscores its commitment to inclusive and sustainable development. However, realizing the full potential of these initiatives necessitates concerted efforts to address implementation challenges, foster collaboration, and prioritize investments in human capital development.

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