



BILL & MELINDA  
GATES *foundation*



POLICY  
BRIEF

17

# How Budget 2024 Can Provide an Impetus to Women-led Development

## Synthesis of the First Roundtable of the Network on Economic Policies for Women-led Development (EPWD)<sup>1</sup>

January 2024

---

<sup>1</sup> The policy note has been prepared by Radhicka Kapoor, Deepak Mishra and Shravani Prakash, drawing on the ideas and recommendations made by the participants at the roundtable event organised by ICRIER, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and UNDP on January 17, 2024 (see Annex 1 for the list of participants). The authors would like to thank the participants of the roundtable and the two funders for their inputs and support. For questions and queries on the policy brief please write to: [rkapoor@icrier.res.in](mailto:rkapoor@icrier.res.in), [sprakash@icrier.res.in](mailto:sprakash@icrier.res.in)



## How Budget 2024 Can Provide an Impetus to Women-led Development

### *Synthesis of the First Roundtable of the Network on Economic Policies for Women-led Development (EPWD)*

Under its G20 presidency, India initiated the mainstreaming of gender into economic policy discussions by shifting the focus from women's development to women-led development. In this new paradigm, women are not simply seen as beneficiaries but as drivers of growth and development. This signals that gender has moved from being a social and moral issue to a macro-critical issue, and that closing gender gaps in the labour market, entrepreneurship, corporate leadership, policymaking and caregiving is not just desirable but an imperative.

Against this backdrop, ICRIER along with Gates Foundation and UNDP, announced the launch of a Network on *'Economic Policies for Women-Led Development'*. The network is committed to advancing proposals that focus on removing barriers to women-led development and creating an enabling ecosystem for women to realize their full potential, transforming their lives as well as those of others. The launch event also marked the first activity of the network, a roundtable on *"How Budget 2024 Can Provide an Impetus to Women-led Development"*. The roundtable brought together multiple stakeholders - academics, industry practitioners and civil society members (see Annex 1 for the list of participants).

#### Key Takeaway from the Roundtable

The main message of the discussion was that to enable women-led development, a multi-pronged approach that addresses constraints - both on the supply side (the burden of care and domestic work, lack of skills and education, social and cultural norms) and demand side (limited demand for women's work) - is the need of the hour. Public policy tools such as the budget can play an instrumental role in alleviating these constraints.

The deliberations during the roundtable brought out specific measures that can be included in Budget 2024 as well as long-term focus areas for fiscal policies to give an impetus to women-led development<sup>2</sup>. We list some specific ideas below:

#### **I. Announce a Program to Build a Comprehensive Care Economy to Reduce the Burden of Unpaid Childcare, Elderly Care And Domestic Work**

- Targeted transfers that reduce time spent by women on household chores and domestic work can help free up time to engage in economic activities and increase earnings. Several such schemes are already in place, and it is necessary to expand their coverage and facilitate their effective implementation.

---

<sup>2</sup> Several other recommendations pertaining to advancing women-led development were also discussed during the roundtable. These pertained to financial sector policies, monetary policy and need for gender disaggregated data. In this note, we present only those pertaining to the budget.

- Nearly half of the 50 hours a week that women spend working on domestic chores is for cooking. Targeted government schemes like the *Ujjwala Yojana* reduce the burden that women face in terms of fuel collection and reduce the time spent on cooking by 30-60 minutes per day. To enable women to save time spent on collecting fuel and cooking, it is important to ensure that the budgetary allocations to the programme are enhanced such that all eligible women have access to the scheme and an adequate number of cylinder refills are within the reach of beneficiary households. Supplementary measures such as increased direct transfers for refills or payment of the subsidy in advance, instead of poor households waiting for subsidy amount after paying from their own pocket, can be considered.
  - Ensuring full coverage and efficient implementation of *Har Ghar Nal Se Jal Yojna* is important from the lens of enabling women to save time spent on collecting water.
  - Other similar programs that build a robust infrastructure (such as regular supply of electricity and quality housing) to reduce time spent on domestic chores can be announced and resourced better to reach every beneficiary.
- Increase budgetary allocations for Anganwadi services to enhance the capacity of Anganwadi centres to function effectively as creches and day-care centres for children. The additional funding is important for both enhancing the physical infrastructure of the centre and training of Anganwadi workers.
  - Make investments in care economy infrastructure such as creches and day-care centres for children eligible for corporate social responsibility (CSR) funding. For the MSMEs, who may not be generating enough CSR funding, it is worth examining if certain incentives can be given to them to expand their care economy infrastructure.
  - Enforce implementation of creche policy in every government and public sector organisation and institution. Imparting education in these creches can be helpful for mothers who work as well. Ensuring that creches operate for at least 6 hours is important to enable women to have adequate time to engage in the workforce.
  - Rapid expansion of the *Palna-National Creche Scheme* that provides safe daycare facilities, enhancing the cognitive, nutritional, and health development of children is desirable. Under this scheme, creches are required to be open for 26 days a month and seven and a half hours a day.

## II. Taking a Sectoral Approach to Increase Demand for Women's Work

- Identify sectors or industries that employ a high share of women and announce measures to accelerate the growth of such women-employment-intensive industries. Targeted incentives, such as those adopted in the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, could also be considered for sectors that employ a large share of women. Key sectors identified by discussants for boosting women's employment include textiles, garments, food processing, tourism and care-giving.

### **III. Focussing on Digital Skilling**

- While India's digital transformation provides new avenues for the economic empowerment of women, there exists a significant digital gender gap both in terms of access and usage of new technology for women. Bridging this gap will require greater budgetary allocations for digital skilling. Women need to be imparted with necessary digital skills either at the school level or through skilling centres.
- Given the occupational segregation of women in low-paying and low-productivity sectors, it is important to encourage women to enter new-age sunrise sectors, in particular STEM sectors. Allocations for programmes for developing STEM skills in women should also be considered.

### **IV. Announce a Women-led Urban Development Scheme**

- The provision of accessible urban transport services facilitate women's participation in economic activity. This requires enhanced allocations to establish safe, reliable, accessible and gender-responsive public transport (bus and rail-based) systems.
- A multi-scalar 'Women-led Urban Development Scheme', is proposed. At the city level, three contours of the programme could include: (i) quantitative and qualitative data on the gender, age, and income differences in travel behaviour in cities; (ii) understanding the gendered differences in issues and priorities in public transport systems and implementing interventions that improve women's safety and access to opportunities; (iii) increasing women's employment and leadership in the transport sector; (iv) investing in a dense network of care infrastructure (and services); (v) a coordinated gender responsive grievance redress mechanism; and (v) transforming urban governance to mainstream gender equality. An empowered coordination cell on gender equality in urban metropolitan transport authorities can be considered to ensure that transport policies, programs and projects at the city-level are gender-responsive and transformative. Simultaneously, reform of transport and urban development codes, laws, regulations at the national and state level can ensure institutionalizing of gender equality.

### **V. Move towards an Outcome Based Gender Budget**

- While the gender budgeting strategy, which India has adopted since 2005-06, provides a useful analytical framework for budgetary allocations targeted at women, there are several gaps in the existing approach. In particular, India's gender budget is looked at from an input lens, in terms of assessing which schemes require how much allocation for women. For advancing women-led development, the importance of moving towards an outcome-based gender budget could be considered.

## Annex 1

### List of Participants at the Roundtable on How Budget 2024 Can Provide an Impetus to Women-led Development

**Date:** January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024, **Venue:** Held at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

<b>Participant Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
1. Anantha Nageswaran	Ministry of Finance
2. Deepak Mishra	ICRIER
3. Radhicka Kapoor	ICRIER
4. Shravani Prakash	ICRIER
5. Pranay Sinha	Gates Foundation
6. Isabelle Tschan Harada	UNDP
7. Ameer Misra	UNDP
8. Puja Mehra	ICRIER
9. Aasha Kapur Mehta	IHD India
10. Pallavi Chavan (virtual)	RBI
11. Kavita Rao	NIPFP
12. Sumita Kale (virtual)	Indicus
13. Farzana Afridi	ISI, Delhi
14. Lekha S. Chakraborty (virtual)	NIPFP
15. Laveesh Bhandari	CSEP
16. Nidhi Bhasin	Nasscom Foundation
17. Sairee Chahal (virtual)	Sheroes and Mahila Money
18. Sudha Srinivasan (virtual)	The Nudge
19. Sonal Shah	Urban CateList
20. Dr. Rashmi Singh (IAS)	Commissioner Tax, J&K
21. Sonakshi Chaudhry	The Quantum Hub
22. Rajib Sen	Niti Aayog
23. Sona Mitra	IWWAGE
24. Christopher Michael Garroway	UN Resident Coordinator's Office



Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER)

**Our Offices:**

4th Floor, Core 6A, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110003  
Plot No. 16-17, Pushp Vihar, Institutional Area, Sector 6, New Delhi-110017

**O:** +91 11 43112400 / 24645218

**F:** +91 11 24620180 | **W:** [www.icrier.org](http://www.icrier.org) | **E:** [info@icrier.res.in](mailto:info@icrier.res.in)