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**International Women's Day**

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**Investing in Women and Girls - India's Experience on Gender Responsive Budgeting for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

Thank you for inviting me to speak on this important event on International Women's Day 2008. Professionally and personally, this is a day when we dwell on issues of vital importance to our future world – issues relating to the status of women globally.

My presentation on the subject today is: "Investing in Women and Girls - India's Experience on Gender Responsive Budgeting for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment".

I begin with an introduction of India's past and present experiences of investing in women and girls advancement. India is fully committed to promoting the participation of women in government decision making. Today, we are proud to have a woman President of India among other path-breaking Indian women in important positions.

Gender equality and empowerment of women have a critical role in the development process, particularly through a multiplier effect. Participation of women in decision-making and policy formulation, improvement in women's literacy, enhancing women's access to productive resources and opportunities, and investing in women's health and nutrition, significantly enhance sustained economic growth and reduce poverty. Gender equity and equality has been a key guiding principle of the Common Minimum Programme of the present government in India. As Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh stated "*We remain deeply committed to this objective because I believe no civilized society, no modern polity, no developing economy can ignore the aspirations and the rights of women.*"

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Besides the Constitutional provisions, there have also been a host of women-specific legislative measures.

India's planning process is fully committed to enabling women to be equal partners in development. A separate Department for Women and Child Development, created in 1985, was upgraded to a Central Ministry in 2005. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women.

Through an amendment of our constitution in early 1990s that marked a turning point in our effort to empower women, we have provided for a minimum of 33% representation of women in local self-government nationwide. This has led to the mobilization of women in rural areas across the country and has brought over one million women at the grassroots level into political decision-making. A similar reservation of seats for women in the Indian Parliament remains under consideration.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee of the Indian Parliament on Empowerment of Women continues to play a crucial role in monitoring the application of gender equality principles in all legislation and also to ensure that legislation in India is gender responsive.

The Government actively encourages and supports group initiatives in formation of women's self-help groups. Today, there are more than 2 million women self-help groups in the country supporting more than 10 million rural families. We are also encouraging women entrepreneurs through special assistance schemes. India is implementing the Act passed by our Parliament on Social Security for Workers, including women workers, in the unorganised sector. To enhance women's employability in high-end vocations, strong emphasis is being laid on skill building through exclusive institutes of vocational training. New schemes are being implemented to widen the base of women entrepreneurs, including special schemes promoted by financial institutions/banks. As a result, the number of women entrepreneurs in India has risen very considerably.

To realise the goal of reducing the female poverty ratio by 5% by 2007 and by 15% by 2012, a number of result-oriented programmes have been initiated in India. A National Rural Employment Guarantee programme was launched in 2006, which provides 100 days assured wage employment annually to every rural household with at least one-third women beneficiaries. The Hindu Succession Act has been amended in 2005 to delete gender discriminatory clause to enable daughters and widows equal right in ancestral property including agricultural land.

As part of the drive to achieve complete enrolment in elementary education, the government has resolved to increase public spending on education to at least 6% of the GDP with at least half of this amount earmarked for primary and secondary education sectors. Moreover, elementary education is now a Fundamental Right in India. The Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, i.e., Universal Elementary Education Scheme, has been expanded covering the entire country. This programme has a special emphasis for girls. Gross Enrolment Ratio in Primary Education for Girls has increased from 64% in 1980-81 to 95.6% in 2003-04. The expanded Integrated Child Development Services [ICDS] Programme for achieving major national nutrition, health and pre-school education goals, now covers over 41 million beneficiaries. This programme has now emerged as a unique and perhaps the largest early childhood development programme in the world. The National Rural Health Mission also supplements health needs of rural women and girls.

The Indian Parliament passed an important legislation in 2005 to provide immediate and emergency relief to women in situations of domestic violence. The Act provides for free legal service, protects the rights of women to secure housing and includes a provision to

prevent the abuser from causing further violence. It also involves NGOs as service providers for giving assistance to the abused. The Immoral (Traffic) Prevention Act is also being amended proposing more stringent punishments for traffickers. India is home to the largest child population in the world. We share a deep concern about the status and welfare of children including girls, who comprise 41% of the country's population.

Government initiatives for gender equality have been buttressed by the proactive role of the higher judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court of India. The right to approach the Supreme Court for enforcement of fundamental rights is itself a fundamental right and in proceedings under Article 32 viz. Right to Constitutional Remedy, the Court has addressed issues of concern to women in several innovative ways. In the UN context, India was honoured to provide the first-ever Female Formed Police Unit, which recently joined the UN Mission in Liberia (UNIMIL). This participation also reflects India's commitment to assist the UN in more effectively reaching out to vulnerable sections, particularly women and children, in conflict and post-conflict societies. India stands ready to work with the international community for early realization of the Millennium Developmental Goals through effective implementation of gender empowerment and gender mainstreaming both within and outside the UN.

I now would like to move on to the specifics of Indian experience in gender responsive budgeting and the fact that integrating gender perspective into budgetary policy has dual dimensions of equality and efficiency. The Government of India is fully aware of the importance of gender responsive budgeting in addressing socio-economic discrimination against women by providing sufficient funding for the implementation of various policy commitments. We have institutionalised gender-sensitive budgeting and are promoting gender responsive legislations. We are also making efforts to mainstream gender in policies and programmes of various Government departments. Gender responsive budgeting at various level of democratic governance in India – central, state and local – is being actively promoted.

The **Ministry of Finance** of the Government of India institutionalized gender budgeting since 2005-06. Several **state governments** have also actively begun to adopt gender budgeting. Feminization of **local governance** and measures towards fiscal decentralization are also helping the cause of gender responsive budgeting through empowerment of women.

**The Planning Commission of India** has always focused on women's issues as per the perceptions of their members on women's status within the economy.

- **The First Five Year Plan** (1951-1956) set up the Central Social Welfare Board in 1953 to promote welfare work through voluntary organisations, charitable trusts and philanthropic agencies.
- **The Second Five Year Plan** (1956-1960) supported development of Mahila mandals for grass roots work among women.

- **The Third, Fourth and Interim Plans** (1961-74) made provision for women's education, pre-natal and child health services, supplementary feeding for children, nursing and expectant mothers.
- **The Fifth Plan** (1974-1978) **marked a major shift in the approach towards women, from welfare to development.**
- **The Sixth Plan** (1980-85) **accepted women's development as a separate economic agenda.** The Multidisciplinary approach with three- pronged thrust on health, education and employment. From the sixth Five Year Plan onwards, the plan document has been including a separate chapter on women and children.
- **The Seventh Plan** (1985-1990) **declared the OBJECTIVE TO BRING WOMEN INTO THE MAINSTREAM OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.** During this period, the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) was established within the Ministry of Human Resource development of Government of India. The Seventh Plan introduced the concept of monitoring of 27 beneficiary oriented schemes for women by DWCD. The exercise continues and the number of schemes covered is being expanded.
- **The Eighth Plan** (1992-1997) **projected paradigm shift, from development to empowerment and promised to ensure flow of benefits to women in the core sectors of education, health and employment.** Outlay for women rose from 1 million US Dollars in the First plan to 500 million US Dollars in the 8th Plan. The Eighth Plan highlighted for the first time, a gender perspective and the need to ensure a definite flow of funds from the general developmental sectors to women. The Plan document made an express statement that "...the benefits to development from different sectors should not by pass women and special programmes on women should complement the general development programmes. The later, in turn, should reflect great gender sensitivity".
- **The Ninth Plan** (1997-2002) **stated that Empowerment of women was its strategic objective and adopted 'Women Component Plan' as one of the major strategies and directed both the Central and State Governments to ensure "not less than 30% of the funds/benefits are earmarked in all the women-related sectors."** Special vigil was advocated on the flow of the earmarked funds/benefits through an effective mechanism to ensure that the proposed strategy brings forth a holistic approach towards empowering women. The **National Policy for Empowerment of Women 2001** of Government of India adopted during this period envisaged introduction of a gender perspective in the budgeting process as an operational strategy.
- **The Tenth Five Year Plan** (2002-2009) **suggested specific Strategies, policies and programmes for Empowerment of women. It Appreciated efforts at ensuring gender-just and gender-sensitive budget and promised to continue**

**the process of dissecting the government budget to establish its gender-differential impact and to translate gender commitment to budgetary commitments.** It accepted that the Women Component Plan & Gender Budget should play complimentary role for effective convergence, proper utilisation and monitoring of fund from various developmental sectors. The Ministry of Women and Child Development was established during this plan period.

The Tenth Five-Year Plan also set out certain monitorable targets for women which included reducing gender gaps in literacy and wage rates; reduction of maternal mortality rate; increasing the representation of women in premier services and the parliament, etc. This was an important set up in setting up targets.

An essential component of the 11<sup>th</sup> National Five Year Plan (2007-12) for gender empowerment and equity includes special measures on four aspects namely violence against women, economic empowerment, political participation and women's health.

- The Approach Paper to the **Eleventh Five Year Plan mentions "Gender Equity requires adequate provisions to be made in policies and schemes across Ministries and Departments. It also entails 'strict adherence to gender budgeting across the board'.** It promises special focused efforts for creation of 'an enabling environment for women to become economically, politically and socially empowered'.

Gender budgets have now become an integral part of the budget exercise. The number of central ministries that have set up gender cells in order to mainstream gender concerns in their policies and programmes is growing steadily. All Ministries in the Government are required to prepare outcome budgets that will ensure effective utilisation of the amount allocated for women in the budget. The Government of India is using a two category format designed to assist government officials with the analysis of the budget and as the basis of presentation in the Gender Budget Statement in the Union Budget. These are: Pro-women allocations, where 100% of the allocation is meant for women, and pro-women allocations, where 30-99% of the allocation is meant for women

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