

Gender Responsive Budgeting: Highlighting micro-implementation of KGBV scheme in Bihar

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ABSTRACT

Reducing gender gap in school enrolment has always been one of the most important goals of educational policy. It has been recognized that there is a need to provide extra initiatives to bring girls to school. Gender responsive budget initiatives can help reduce gender gaps by ensuring that the public money is raised and spent effectively. The following paper attempted to draw parallels between the budgets of a government and their direct impact on the access to education for adolescent girls. This was done in regard to the effective functioning of the KGBVs at the grassroots level. It was realized that government budget and expenditure have a direct impact on access to education for these girls and is promoting inclusion. This paper also attempts to define the gaps that exist in the implementation process of the scheme on-ground.

Key Words : Gender, Educational policy, KGBVs, Budget, Adolescent girls, Gender budgeting

INTRODUCTION

Reducing gender gap in school enrolment has always been one of the most important goals of educational policy. It has also been defined under the Sustainable Development Goals- to promote quality education and gender equity (UNDP, 2012). Millions of girls are still denied education around the world. There are still 31 million out-of-school girls of primary school age (UNESCO, 2013). The lack of education amongst girls has a huge impact on the society as a whole. Educated women are less likely to die during childbirth, their education improves child nutrition, they are less likely to undergo early pregnancies, evident demographic transition in lower birth rates, and lead to empowerment of women. Thus, education plays the most important link in achieving the development goals through gender mainstreaming and promotion of gender equality (Kundu, 2013).

Many social and political theories recognize that institutionalized biases result in power distribution among sub-groups. This power is distributed in an unfair and inequitable manner (Elliot, 2014). While the last few decades have witnessed a surge in equity research in India, most studies have analysed education inequalities along a particular dimension of social power, assuming that these dimensions are mutually exclusive. There are, however, a few research studies that have considered the complex interactions of multiple inequalities (Davis, 2008). Different axis of social power such as gender, caste, economic class, religion and ethnicity often operate simultaneously.

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They are interrelated, they intersect, and mutually reinforce each other (Whittle and Inhorn, 2001). Thus, investing in girls' education belonging to marginalized populations is the highest return investment available in the developing world (Murphy, 2009).

Most governments have expressed a commitment to gender equality and gender mainstreaming but often there is a gap between the policy statements and the ways in which the government raises and spends money (UNIFEM, 2002). Governments have also expressed a need for greater transparency and accountability but there is always a gap between allocations of resources (UN Women, 2015). Gender responsive budget initiatives can help reduce these gaps by ensuring that the public money is raised and spent effectively. GRB initiative does not aim to produce a separate budget for women, but to analyse any form of public expenditure from a gender perspective. It aims to identify the impacts and implications for women and girls as compared to men and boys. A gender budget statement is therefore prepared, which is usually described as a gender-specific accountability document produced by a government agency to show what its programmes and budgets are doing in respect of gender (ESCAP, 2014).

In terms of education, it has been recognized that there is a need to provide extra initiatives to bring girls to school. This is because cost of bringing in boys to school and girls to school differs. The schooling is proven to be more costly for girls because of involvement of direct costs (school fees) as well as opportunity costs (help in household chores, taking care of siblings).

Thus, education as a resource can be accessed two relative sides:

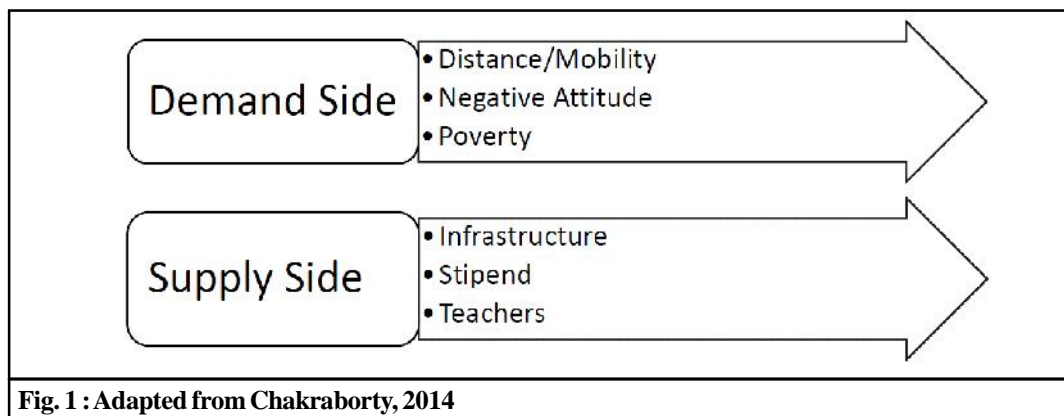


Fig. 1 : Adapted from Chakraborty, 2014

Government budgets put forth how a government plans to raise its finances (revenue) and spend resources (expenditure). The revenue of the budget indicates the amount of money the government expects to raise. The sources of revenue include: taxation (both direct and indirect), user fees for public services, sales of public assets (privatization), and development co-operation grants. The expenditure of the budget states how a government will distribute resources that are raised (UNIFEM, 2008).

Government policy choices about revenue and expenditure are not gender-neutral. Budgets are one of the key policy statements that tend to reflect a government's socio-economic and political priorities. Thus, government budgets have an impact on people in a number of ways. The most direct impact is through distributing resources to people via expenditure and claiming resources from them via taxes and fees. Likewise, budgets also have secondary impacts on people through the effect they have on employment levels, inflation, and the levels of economic growth. These impacts are frequently different for women and girls, than for men and boys (UNIFEM, 2008).

There exists a significant gender gap in the enrolment of girl children at the elementary level. This gap is more acute for schedule caste and schedule tribe girls. For them, it is approximately 30% at primary level and 26% at the upper primary level. The reduction of this gender gap has now plateaued. In order to further reduce this gap, there is a need for concerted focus on the hard-to-reach groups. Therefore, it is important to include certain interventions that specifically address the needs of girl children, belonging to socially marginalized groups (CBGA, 2014).

The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme is one of the Gender Budget Initiatives of the Government of India which was launched in August, 2004. The scheme functions for setting up residential schools at upper primary level for girls belonging predominantly to the SC, ST, OBC and minorities in difficult areas. Initially it ran as a separate scheme, but was merged with the SSA programme with effect from 1st April, 2007. With the RTE Act, 2009 coming into force with effect from 1st April 2010, and the SSA Framework of Implementation being revised to correspond to the RTE Act, the KGBV component of SSA was also implemented in the overall context of child rights and child entitlements and in harmony with the spirit and stipulations of the Act (Revised Guidelines for Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, 2011). The main objective of KGBVs is to ensure access and quality education to girls from disadvantaged groups by setting up residential schools at upper primary level.

But as argued, there is a need to properly design, implement, and monitor gender budgeting; though it is a very important tool for promoting gender mainstreaming. This would require commitment from all the stakeholders and a sustained action to ensure that the objectives of gender equality are achieved (UNDP, 2017).

Since there is no similar program for marginalized adolescent girls, retention of girls is a problem after grade 8 (NITI Aayog, 2015). But, the opportunity to have this space has been proven to be crucial for the intrinsic empowerment. It helps in developing individual's (both students and teachers) autonomy, awareness, and self-confidence (Shah, 2011).

KGBV has been a revolutionary initiative which was designed with a specific objective of bringing back dropout and never enrolled girls to the folds of education. It has immense potential and these girls can act as a catalyst and change agents once they go back to the society (NCERT, 2008).

The problem lies in the fact that these schools are only for upper primary level and these girls have to return back to their villages after class VIII. Thus, the SSA society shall ensure the convergence of KGBVs with Mahila Samkhyas Program and NPEGEL. It should also ensure that the funds allocated to the school are appropriately utilized through effective monitoring systems.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY :

This study attempted to draw parallels between the budgets of a government and their direct impact on the access to education for adolescent girls. It becomes more complex because of the inclusion challenges that come along with the dissemination of education.

KGBV was launched as a 100% women-centric scheme, thus falling in the first category of gender budgeting process. The budget allocation to the scheme, as a component of SSA will be analyzed, along with what is done with the money that is left unspent. The financial management system will reflect the honest commitment of the programme.

Besides, the study is an attempt to fill the knowledge gap between the policy makers and the educational facilitators- in regard to the effective functioning of the KGBVs. The commitment of the programme towards influencing the lives of adolescent dropout girls will be analyzed and how

it is contributing in the disadvantaged section of the society, especially to the minority social groups.

METHODOLOGY

The study involved understanding the perceptions, experiences, and perspectives of different stakeholders involved in the implementation of KGBV scheme at the grassroots level. Primary data was collected from the girls studying in KGBVs, teacher, hostel warden, and parents of the girls.

Sampling technique:

Criterion sampling was used to select the girls, based on the premise that girls studying in class VIII would hold most experience of studying in the school. The girls who were studying in class VI and VII were excluded because they did not hold much experience in this regard.

Data collection:

The study adopted an in-depth interview schedule, focus group discussion, and participant observation as instruments of data collection in a qualitative approach. A semi-structured interview schedule was used with five girls studying in class VIII which helped in unfolding various aspects of the access and quality of education received, the infrastructure facilities, and the social and economic impact of services rendered through the government expenditure on KGBV scheme. The interview schedule was used to collect data in a semi-structured format. Besides, a focus group discussion was carried out with the students of class VIII which was useful in understanding the group dynamics in the school, the collective voice of the girls at school, and the overall picture of the lives of girls in the residential school. Five parents, hostel warden and teacher were also interviewed based on the pre-prepared semi-structured interview schedule.

Data analysis:

Interviews and Focus Group were recorded using a digital voice recorder. These recordings were then transcribed. These transcripts formed the foundation on which the process of data analysis was built. At the next step, coding was done to apply labels to segments of transcripts that define them. Thematic analysis was further adopted to identify the patterns or themes within the qualitative data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-demographic profile of girls:

All the girls who were interviewed had minimum three other siblings who were striving to receive good quality education. Most of the girls had elder sisters who were already married and had not received any formal education. One of the girls was the first child in the extended family to get enrolled in a school because the parents could not afford to enrol their children in school. KGBV provided them a platform to let her pursue education at upper-primary level too. 60% of the girls who were interviewed told that their fathers were daily-wage laborers. This made them financially vulnerable and thus were unable to afford their children's education. All the girls in the sample had elder siblings, in which only their brothers were reported to go to school as parents could not afford to provide education to all the children. The family income of all the girls who were interviewed was not more than Rs. 12,000 per month, *i.e.* they were not financially comfortable.

The family size of these girls was 5-6 members and sustaining in this amount was difficult. This affected their access to resources like health and education. Admitting their girls to KGBV assisted these families with not only their educational costs, but also with their living expenses.

Enrolment and stability :

The admission process is not stringent but the number of girls that turn up for admission is quite less as compared to the number of seats available. The school that was visited had only 30 girls in the class VI, which was followed by dropouts during the next two classes. It was not easy for either of the girls to get enrolled in KGBV despite the services offered by the school. 60% of the parents were concerned about the opportunity costs that would be invested to send their daughters to the residential school. Her absence at the home disburse them indirect costs of household chores, care of younger siblings, or labor. Girls reported going to the field after school to help family members in manual labor work, cooking meal for all family members, and inevitably taking care of the younger siblings. 20% faced the difficulty of insecurity, demonstrated by their parents and grandparents, since they were required to attend the residential school. Besides, the insecurity around stringent social norms of allowing girls to stay out of the house, delaying their marriage, and making them independent deepened the concerns of many families.

Quality and access to education:

The education facilities at the KGBV studied were not found satisfactory by the principal investigator. The unavailability of teachers at the school was a major problem which was rectified by sending students to a nearby government school to study while the KGBV was being used only for residential purposes.

Social impact :

Besides the difficulty of accessing good quality education at school, the positive learning environment different from home helped many girls evolve as better empowered human beings. The harmonious environment helped them talk freely about their problems, become more disciplined, learn to take decisions of their own, and gain ability to speak for themselves. The appreciable bond between the girls amidst themselves as well as with the teacher and the hostel warden translated to a safe flourishing environment.

Flow of funds :

The teacher, hostel warden, cook, and security guard complained of receiving no salary since September 2017. The untimely payment was observed to be directly affecting their motivation to work at the school. Looking after residential facilities demanded continuous vigilance and support for girls. Also, it required a timely flow of funds to maintain the flow of resources. Providing five meals a day to 100 girls was not possible without receiving funds in a timely manner. The food supply for one month cost Rs. 1,00,000 for 100 girls. This resulted in debts on the school and failure of timely repayments of the loans.

HOW BUDGET IS PROMOTING INCLUSION? :

Sufficient allocation and flow of funds is helping bring out-of-school girls back into formal schooling through following interventions:

Residential schooling:

The intervention of introducing a residential schooling has motivated many families to enrol their daughters in KGBVs as it helps to dismiss many dropout factors including the issue of distance, fear of harassment, poverty etc. The added burdens of taking care of their siblings, doing household chores, inability to play with friends get dismissed in this case. Residential facilities contributed in the overall development of the students. All the facilities provided in KGBV were just a dream for these girls belonging to poor households.

Better water, sanitation, and living facilities :

The students reported unavailability of toilets at their homes in the village. KGBV on the other hand challenged the idea of open defecation and worked on behavior change for students to adopt the practice of using toilets. Besides, there were activities conducted in the school around the issue of Menstrual Hygiene Management which enabled the girls reaching menarche understand the importance of health and hygiene during the menstruation days and adopt healthy and safe menstrual hygiene practices.

Combating nutritional deficiencies:

KGBVs are mandated to provide nutritious food to the students. This involves five meals a day. Since the girls came from poor households, they were glad to get access to good quality food including fruits and dry fruits. Lack of awareness, poor socio-economic background, dietary inadequacy, and poor quality of diet were the main factors that were catered to, in order to combat nutritional deficiencies.

Vocational training:

Apart from receiving good quality education, introducing vocational courses help girls learn the ability to earn a better standard of living through exposed to vocational training courses like stitching and embroidery. These vocational trainings do provide these girls an opportunity to become financially independent after passing out from school, but they also reinforce gender stereotypes.

Stipends:

Students are given a sum of Rs. 600 per annum in terms of stipend. This helps the girls to meet the essential needs. These are primarily meant for pocket money, but are generally used after they leave the KGBV for further admission processes.

Role of teachers:

Despite of low salaries of teachers, they are willing to continue working at KGBVs and both the teachers agreed that they enjoy being at KGBV. The psycho-social support rendered by the hostel warden was evident in the way the students addressed and interacted with her.

Increase in awareness among parents:

With the role of teachers and the functioning of KGBV, parents of the girls were involved through monthly meetings. This in turn increases the awareness level among parents around the issue of girls' education.

Mentorship by older girls to younger girls:

The beautiful association created between the young girls and the older girls was observed to be fruitful for their overall development. The older girls were considered allies for the younger ones, who guided them and helped them through difficult times.

RECOMMENDATIONS :

In order to make this intervention more effective and fruitful for all the stakeholders, following are the few suggestions observed through the field visit:

Regularity in maintenance of financial records:

With the subsequent discussions, it was observed that since 2013 when involvement of Mahila Samakhya was withdrawn from KGBV programme, the records in the schools have not been regularly submitted. This further delayed the release of funds, leading to debts and untimely flow of funds. Thus, regularity in maintenance of records would make the flow of funds timely and would be beneficial for all the stakeholders especially the students, teachers, hostel warden, and the non-teaching staff.

Adequacy of resources/materials of daily requirement like milk, vegetables etc.:

Due to untimely receipt of funds, it was informed that the daily requirements in the school like milk, vegetables etc. were not adequate to meet the needs of the students. This led to the exercise of taking loans from the provider.

Appropriate utilization of resources:

The availability of resources was not a problem but adequacy and utilization were. For instance, sewing machines and computer systems were available in the school but were not being utilized to the best of their use. This was because of lack of availability of the trainers to conduct vocational trainings in this regard.

Security:

The state of the gate and the compound wall are important to provide security at the school. It was not an absolute absence of both, but the height of the wall and the gate were low enough to transcend. Besides, there was no security guard during the night time at the school. The teacher and hostel warden suggested an appointment of male security guard for the same.

Timely receipt of funds:

Things could be better planned and executed in the school if the flow of funds remains timely. It is imperative to ensure that the daily needs and requirements are met with adequate supplies.

Better parenting programmes and active involvement of village committees:

It was observed that since it was a residential school which was away from the village, there was a limited involvement of parents in schooling and learning of their child. Since KGBV caters up till upper primary level, there is a need to sensitize the parents towards the importance of girls' education and completion of schooling. This can be done by strengthening the links between schools and the community. Better parenting programmes and involvement of village committees thus become imperative to advocate the need and importance of girls' education and completion of

schooling.

Media programmes:

In order to challenge the attitudes and practices towards girls' education, students, teachers and parents must be involved in media programmes like story books, street plays, gender-awareness trainings, programmes focusing on disability and inclusion etc. A few trainers from "Going to School" were actively involved to give trainings in this regard but the programme was discontinued due to lack of funding.

Water and sanitation programmes:

The school did hold sessions around menstrual hygiene according to the hostel warden. But the living conditions of the washrooms was not hygienic. Thus, there is a need to sensitize all the stakeholders about importance of water and sanitation.

Psycho-social support for students and teachers:

In situations of crisis and instability, requisite support must be provided to the students as well as the teachers to make school a safe environment.

Absence of life skills training:

There was an availability of infrastructure but absence of trainers and teachers to conduct life skills trainings with the students. The teacher believed that even if the girls get married early, they would have requisite skills to earn their own livelihood through these trainings.

CONCLUSION :

The non-financial factors determine the probability of girls attending or not attending school. The opportunity costs hinder girls from pursuing education. KGBV as a residential school initiative has been doing its bit to provide home away from home to these girls. The girls in KGBV did attain a sense of empowerment in themselves, but the struggle of achieving a good quality education is still far-fetched. The flow of funds has to be deeply examined as the government expenditure (both state and central) directly impacts the access to education in terms of quality and infrastructure.

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