

GENDER RESPONSIVE BUDGET ALLOCATION, SPENDING AND GAPS IN NEPAL'S PUBLIC EDUCATION SECTOR

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Introduction



Gender responsive budgeting (GRB) is an arrangement and institutional mechanism that is aimed at enhancing gender equity in society through resource allocations justifiably and their uses effectively. A better GRB involves gender participation and influence in the budget making and implementation processes for ensuring that gender equity is embedded in socio-economic development agenda embodied in a country's budgetary system.

As periodic plans and medium term expenditure frameworks greatly influence the budget, how gender dimensions are prioritized in them becomes equally important. Fundamentally, it is a process of ensuring the socio-economic empowerment of women who have been structurally deprived since long resulting from unequal power and social relations, prejudices, biased or unfair development policies, programs and implementation mechanism¹.

Need for a gender responsive budgeting received impetus during the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995. The Conference organized by the UN urged member countries to integrate a gender perspective into the government budgetary processes. Along with subsequent UN resolutions, beginning of incorporating a separate gender budget started for the first time in Australia in 2006. Subsequently, a system of formulating a separate gender budget as a part of overall budget began across the developing countries. More importantly, the SDGs signals on the essentiality of more resolute commitments for such a budget with more comprehensiveness by fixing the

¹ From larger political economy perspectives on major impediments to gender equality and women empowerment see Muchhala 2023.

goals of achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls by 2030. This indicates that gender equality is fundamental to achieving the SDGs. It, among others, underscores on the need of increasing financing and investment on women. It apart from adequate resources, calls appropriate tools to track budget allocations for gender equality². There are three criteria that are generally prescribed for such a purpose which include integration of gender equality objectives/measures in government programs and their respective budget allocations, integration of gender budgeting in public financial management systems and dissemination to the public on the availability of budget allocations for gender equality. Here utmost importance of education budget comes to the fore as it is obvious that without universal access to education and educational right to women and girls, the gender equality is unthinkable. This means that as a part of gender responsive budgeting to what extent the resources are allocated to the education and subsequently progresses are made to accomplish the specified gender related goals becomes highly critical and important.

Amidst commitments and signatory to global agenda and resolutions, Nepal took initiatives in 2005 to introduce a gender responsive budgeting by forming a Gender Responsive Budgeting Committee which was tasked with designing and monitoring gender-sensitive budget allocations and expenditures. In 2007/08, Nepal implemented a gender responsive budget with the aim of promoting gender equity by evaluating the impact of development policies on men and women, ensuring equitable service delivery, and enhancing women's political roles at the local level. In 2012 a gender responsive budgeting manual was published by the Ministry of Finance. Again in 2020, model guidelines with standardized framework for government agencies to incorporate gender right from the budget formulation stage of the budget cycle and classify the levels of gender responsiveness in their programs and budgets was developed. Such a guide line covered provinces and local levels more exclusively³. The GRB has also been included into the Budget Management Information System (BMIS) and the Line Ministry Budget Information System (LMBIS) of the ministry of finance. The Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) has developed 'health-specific gender responsive budgeting guideline' to make GRB context-specific and strengthen gender inclusion in the programming and budgeting cycle.

In parallel, institutional mechanisms for gender equality and empowerment has also been developed and extended since long. The Department of Women Development was established in 1981 to oversee women's empowerment programs. The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare (MOWCSW) was established in 1995 followed by formation of National Women's Commission in 2001. Again in 2002, gender focal persons were appointed in all line ministries. At present, there is one women development office in all 77 districts. Similarly, there is women development ministry and a women development division in all seven provinces apart from a women development and empowerment section in all 753 local levels. Recent periodic plans also focus on institutionalizing the GRB in all sectors at the local level⁴.

In this way, adoption of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) accompanied by various related initiatives has played an important role in integrating gender dimension into the budgetary system. It, along with enhancing government's accountability in gender budget, has helped to improve gender equality and women's empowerment through increased access of women in education services, among others⁵. Expansion of budget on women related programs, increased land ownership of women, higher representation of women in civil services and augmented participation of women in modern economic sectors and activities are outcome of this⁶.

² <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

³ Five quantitative indicators viz, women's capacity development, women's participation in programs formulation and implementation, benefit incidence of public expenditures on women, support for women's employment and income generation and positive impact on women's use of time and care work are reported to be the bases of budget allocation to a program with equal weight to each indicator.

⁴ See NPC 2020 and 2024.

⁵ For facts and figures on the progress associated with gender equality see MWCSC 2024. It gives broad idea on the progress on education front as well.

Notwithstanding the progresses made so far, the outcomes compared to commitments, goals and targets are reported to be far behind in many critical areas. The Constitution of Nepal guarantees free education up to the secondary level and mandates compulsory basic education. It also commits to providing free secondary education for students with disabilities and children from low-income families, along with scholarships for Dalit students pursuing higher education. However, these constitutional provisions are yet to be fully implemented. Pledging made to achieve SDG-4 requires ensuring of inclusive and equitable quality education for everyone. Though the latest SDG related indicators show satisfactory progresses in some areas, many important areas still remain far behind. The progress on vocational and technical education coverage is reported to be still disappointing⁷. More worryingly, in recent years the budget share on education has declined substantially with probable adverse impact on gender budget on education. This is bound to make adverse impact on learning outcomes, teaching quality, vocational education expansion, and overall literacy and numeracy, more so from the gender standpoint. With more budgetary impact on public schools, children of poor and low income families may suffer more. As an offshoot, concerns remain about the effectiveness of budget allocations in achieving genuine gender equality in education despite federal government's commitment to support gender-responsive education plans to local governments. These are some of the pertinent issues needing in-depth examination and analysis for exploring better policy options for improved outcomes and effectiveness of gender responsive budgeting in education.

With the aim of exploring better policy options, an in-depth study on *Gender Responsive Budget Allocation and Spending on Nepal's Public Education Sector* has been carried out recently with the initiatives of the Action Aid Nepal⁸ which is based on intensive desk work. Earlier studies, reports, secondary data and information as well as a few testimonies have been the major sources of desk work. The present policy brief is primarily based on the major findings of this study. Below it, at first, analyses and evaluates the gender responsive budgeting in Nepal with focus on budgetary allocation and expenses in public education programs from gender and inclusion perspectives. Thereafter, it assesses the progresses and identifies the major gaps and challenges in the budgetary system that hinder gender responsive budgetary allocation and uses in the education system in an effective way. Lastly it provides some important policy recommendations from the standpoint of influencing policy makers for making gender responsive budgetary system in education wider and effective.

⁶ For such a progress reporting see Bhul 2022.

⁷ See NPC 2024. See also SDGs NN Nepal 2024 for a progress review from civil society perspectives.

⁸ See Karki 2024.

Gender Responsive Education Budgeting in Nepal: Review of Policies, Allocations in Programs and Actual Spending



2.1 Gender Responsive Strategies and Policies

There are 36 existing policy documents (Act, policy, regulations, working procedure, standard, guidelines) in the education sector. Such policies cover school, university, science and technology in education, artificial intelligence, curriculum and book etc. Education for all (2004-2009) introduced in the early 2000 was perhaps the first of its kind that was aimed at improving equity in access to education, especially for girls and students from disadvantaged communities. Other initiatives taken to improve gender disparity in education include free mid-day meals from 2015 (Food for Life Nepal) and free sanitary pads for girls in community schools from 2021.

Many of the recent policies have been driven by the Constitution of Nepal which as briefly indicated above recognizes education as a fundamental rights and states that every citizen shall have the right of access to basic education (up to 8th grade), free education up to secondary level (9- 12th grade) and free higher education (above secondary level) to the disabled and economically disadvantaged citizens. It also provides right to every Nepalese community residing in Nepal to receive education in their mother tongue.

From the policy standpoint, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy developed in 2021 followed by preparation of action plan with the initiation of the Human Rights Commission is important. Reassessment report of the Commission in 2023 emphasizes the importance of gender-responsive budgeting, women's empowerment, and gender mainstreaming for tackling deep-rooted inequalities within Nepali society.

From the Gender Responsive budgeting, the Gender Responsive Budget sample Guide for Provinces and Local Levels (2020) is important. The guide defines what is gender-responsive budgeting and indicates that how gender-responsive budgeting has to be prepared and implemented at the subnational government level. It also outlines on the need of conducting gender analysis for ensuring the equitable distribution and use of resources for fulfilling the goal of achieving gender equality.

There is wider coverage of education related strategies and policies in the current 16th periodic plan (2024/25-2028/29). It besides proposing education from the early childhood, stresses on the need of accessible, inclusive,

quality, timely and useful education system to be contributory to the overall development process of the country. For that purpose, it emphasizes on building competent and competitive manpower for making education as a cornerstone of economic prosperity, social progress and a knowledge-based economy.

The strategies and policies covered in the 16th Plan include policy and institutional reform, better provision of physical and other educational infrastructure, making the curriculum and educational program contemporary and practical, formulation of national manpower development plan, linking of education and skills with production and market, expanding investment for quality and inclusive education and ensuring educational governance. Inclusive education is one of the focus of the strategy. It emphasizes on the need of expanding investment in all levels in which more stress has been given on quality and inclusive education. It also comes with cost sharing strategy in higher education through a system of involving private sector. Some specific strategies covered include spending 2 percent of the total budget on research and development by the end of the plan, use of modern technology in higher education, priority to distance learning and developing entrepreneurship⁹.

The policy of prioritizing the gender responsive budgeting can be gauged to some extent by examining the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF). The MTEF of this fiscal year 2024/25 has included most of the projects and programs under P1 category. Out of the 17, only two projects are categorized as priority 2 and 3 respectively which are CTVT (Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training) and SESP (School Education Sector Plan) program respectively. Added to these, Madhesh Province, since 2022, has launched a daughter education insurance/ and fixed term savings program to counter gender gaps in education and early marriage.

The current fiscal year 2024/25's budget has made some additional policy announcements besides committing to make the ongoing policies effective. Though there are very few directly gender specific policy announcements, there is a larger coverage on education. The budget stresses on better access to quality education and also talks about a revision in the technical and vocational education curriculum for aligning with national efficiency standards based on labor market demand. It declares a policy of nutritional day meal through the use of local produce. Other important policy announcements made in the budget include expansion of unprivileged scholarship up to the 12th grade, increase in the access of Dalits to technical higher education, fulfilling of teacher's scarcity in subjects like English, mathematics and science, integration of research, innovation, professional education, and entrepreneurship as a mandatory in higher education and advancement of scientific research, innovation, and invention through the involvement of university, schools, researchers, and scientists as well as non-resident Nepali. Noticeably, if all these are implemented effectively they may have wide-ranging positive impact on gender education in general and quality education in particular¹⁰.

2.2 Major Programs, Budget Allocations and Spending

2.2.1 Overall Budget Allocation

Notwithstanding various strategies and policies proposed in the periodic plans and budgets in an expanded way over the years, recent overall budget allocation pattern, however, shows an opposing trend. Amidst continued low share of education budget in the past, the share of education budget has further declined since 2020/21 with some fluctuations. Its share reduced to 10.95 percent in 2024/25 from 11.27 percent in 2023/24. On the other hand, during the period 2014/15 to 2018/19, the share of expenditure on administration related services increased from 32.76 percent to 44.49 percent. Moreover, as per function-wise gender responsive education expenditure

⁹ For details see NPC 2024. Noticeably, most the strategies and policies focused on schools are guided by the School Education Sector Plan (2022/23-2031/32).

¹⁰ For details see budget statement of 2024/25 (MoF 2024). It should be

classified for 2021/22, only 8.64 percent has been categorized as directly supportive of women with as much as 91 percent termed as indirectly supportive and rest is treated as neutral. Based on the LMBIS related information verified and following the same criteria as practiced, in 2023/24 only 8.83 percent of the local budget was directly gender responsive, 14.2 percent was indirectly gender responsive and as high as 76.97 percent was neutral. It is to be noticed that out of the total education budget more than 60 percent goes to the local level. It is also noticeable that education budget allocations have followed same classifications since 2007/08 with considerable variations, indicating frequent reallocations in an inconsistent and ad hoc manner. Another phenomenon is that out of the total education budget at all levels, the share of capital budget is negligible with almost no room for investment in infrastructure which is key for quality education.

2.2.2 Major Gender Responsive Specific Programs, Budget Allocations and Spending

The gender responsive specific programs are largely guided by the strategies and policies presented above. The major gender responsive specific programs under implementation are follows.

a) Mid-day meal program: In the current fiscal year's budget of 2024/25, 8 billion 390 million Nepalese rupees has been allocated for the mid-day meal program, which is expected to benefit three million students from early child education to grade five. The girls become equally beneficial from this program.

b) Scholarship program: A budget of Rs. 600 million has been allocated for all types of school level scholarship programs in this fiscal year's budget. Such a scholarship provided from grade 9 to 12 is to be extended to grade 6 to 12 for easy access of education to children belonging to extreme poor and marginalized groups which is expected to serve an additional 45 thousand students. Similarly, scholarship programs in higher technical education for deprived and diligent students has been introduced in this year's budget to increase the access of the Dalit community in such technical higher education. For this, Rs. 1 billion 590 million has been allocated.

c) Radio program that addresses inclusion: The program aims to broadcast stories of different communities that reflect the originality, values and norms of Nepali society. Such a broadcast will be in Nepali and other native languages through television, radio and social networks.

d) Creation of gender-sensitive and safe classroom: Such a program was started in 2081/82 with construction of drinking water facilities and toilets in five hundred schools prioritizing backward areas and communities. For this fiscal year, Rs. 2 billion 500 million has been allocated for the construction of one thousand disabled friendly, gender sensitive and safe classrooms.

e) President's educational reform program: The President's Educational Reform Program launched in FY2019/20 aims to improve the quality of community schools in Nepal. The program, funded through fiscal transfers at the local level, focuses on school reforms and infrastructure development, including the construction of classrooms, toilets, and ICT labs. In the last four fiscal years, a total budget of Rs 26.76 billion has been allocated, with over Rs 14 billion already spent, including Rs 8.27 billion released in the current fiscal year. The program has funded the construction of 10,236 classrooms, 2,181 ICT labs, 446 libraries, and 315 toilets. Additionally, 164 community schools have received grants for the implementation of learning materials and new technologies. The "Reading and Earning" program, initiated in FY2021/22, has also been integrated, providing Rs 1 million grants to 140 schools, and was expanded to 100 more schools in FY2022/23. This program encourages student participation in income-generating activities, such as animal husbandry and vegetable farming. The ICT labs have been established and upgraded in secondary schools, benefiting 1,455 schools in FY2022/23, following the successful establishment of labs in 3,193 secondary schools in the previous year.

Progresses¹¹, Gaps and Major Challenges in Gender Equality in Education



3.1 Progresses and Gaps

Nepal's literacy rate has increased for both women and men over the last decades. In 2021, 76 percent of the Nepali population aged 5 years and above were literate. In 2021, 84 percent of men and 69 percent of women were literate. Even though the rise in literacy has been higher for women than for men in the same period, there is still a substantial gap.

For primary education, Nepal has achieved gender parity in all provinces except one. The disparity across provinces also is reported to be high. In Koshi and Bagmati, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) is 1.04 and 1.06 respectively, indicating a slight favor towards girls. The GPI of Madhesh is 0.94, indicating a slight disparity in favor of boys.

As reported, in 2021 there was no significant gender disparity in promotion, repetition, drop-out and survival rate at either basic or secondary level. In 2000, 57 percent of girls and 54 percent boys had completed basic education level. This ratio increased to 83 percent in basic education and 66 percent in secondary education of girls and boys in 2020/21. With increased survival rate, the gender gap closed in the period leading up to 2020/21. The gender difference in repetition rates was also small, only about 5 percent in basic level and almost 3 percent in secondary level for both girls and boys respectively in 2020/21. Moreover, in 2020/21 the drop-out rate for boys was slightly higher than for girls in primary and secondary level¹².

Notwithstanding above progresses, the gender gap in literacy rate in some provinces is very high. In Madhesh province, only about half of the female population (55 percent) were literate in 2021. It should also be noted that

¹¹ Most of the progress reported without citation can be found in MWCD 2024

¹² CEHRD 2022.

the literacy rate for men in Madhesh is also the lowest among all provinces (72 percent). The findings of the NMICS further shows that despite elimination of gender gap in youth literacy, the gap still persists in Madhesh¹³.

As per population census report, another phenomenon is that higher education attainment among male is higher than female, more so at the post graduate level. Almost 360,000 people are deprived of education and in that women make up more than two thirds.

In 2022/23, 46 percent of the children enrolled in early childhood development (ECD) and pre-primary class (PPC) were girls and this has been stable over the last years¹⁴.

Net enrollment rate at the basis level (1-8-boys 96.5 and girls 95.7 percent) is almost the same between boys and girls. But the ratio to the secondary level is higher among boys at 59.4 percent compared to girls at 55.7 percent.

Almost two-thirds of children in Nepal are enrolled in community schools. Of the children enrolled in privately run institutional schools, there are more boys than girls enrolled in all provinces. This means that despite higher costs in institutional schools, boys are preferably sent to such schools. As a consequence, the lower share of girls in institutional schools results lower quality of education for girls with lower opportunity to gainful and decent employment. Karnali Province has the highest percentage of pupils in community schools, and Bagmati the lowest. In all provinces, except in Bagmati, there are more students of both genders enrolled in community schools compared to institutional schools. Widening quality education gap between community school and privately run institutional schools is a matter of concern as it perpetuates inter-generational poverty and deprivation. Additionally, it may prolong gender inequality gap for many years to come. It is also reported that a tendency of students shifting from community school to institutional schools increases with higher grades.

One of the basic indicators of progresses in enhancing quality education including improvement in gender equality in quality education is the outcome of the results of SEE, among others. Despite various policies and programs announced and initiated, the overall results are disappointing, more so in quality aspects. For instance, in 2022/23, out of the 464785 students (comprising girls 231503 and boys 233272), only 47.87 percent had passed. In that also pass percentage of girls was low compared to boys at 44.59 percent. Though a separate data by girls and boys is not readily available, the overall quality performance shows a very miserable situation. Out of the total passed students, only 186 students secured GPA 4. Students securing 3.6 to 4 were merely 31209 or 6.7 percent. More worry is the persistence of very large gap among different provinces. In Bagmati, 47.77 percent of students received a GPA between 3.6 and 4, the highest in the country. In Karnali province, only 1.18 percent of students secured 3.6 to 4 GPA.

Similarly, despite a positive development in the enrollment of higher education in recent years with girls often outstripping boys on the average, a biggest gender difference in enrollment persists in technical faculties such as science, technology and engineering.

The flash reports of CEHRD also show that¹⁵ there is still a lower share of female school teachers in compared to male. The gender gap is more visible at secondary level, where only 21 percent of teachers are female compared to 44 percent in basic level. Madhesh and Karnali provinces have a lower proportion of female teachers at both basic and secondary level, whereas Bagmati and Gandaki provinces have a higher proportion compared to other provinces. At

¹³ For details see CBS 2019.

¹⁴ See Report flash CEHRD 2023.

¹⁵ See Flash Report CEHRD 2022 and 2023

higher secondary level (class 11-12), the ratio is more disproportionate with share of female teachers remaining in the neighborhood of 13 percent.

Amidst persistence of gender equality gaps in education in general and quality education in particular compounded by deep rooted structural discriminations in societies, there are some critical areas where gaps are more serious. One is the very low female labor force participation rate which is just 26 percent compared to around 54 percent among men. In that also, large difference among provinces is found. Only one in six women in Sudurpashchim Province are employed or seeking employment. In total, only 22.9 percent of working-age women are in some form of employment in Nepal¹⁶.

The overall unemployment rate among women is 13.1 percent which is higher than men at 10.3 percent. At the same time, women are concentrated in elementary occupation and jobs such as agriculture, forestry and fishery as opposed to men employed in high earning jobs. More worry is that out of 84.6 percent labor force still employed in informal sector, the share of women is more than 90 percent. As an offshoot, women earn only 67 percent of what men earn.

The Gender Inequality Index (GII) reveals the continuity of larger gaps and inequalities in education system. The Nepal Human Development Report 2020 shows that in Nepal such an overall index is 0.479 compared to overall HDI of 0.587. A comparison of GII by provinces reveals that due to ratio of total women population completing secondary education being very low, the GII in Karnali, Sudurpaschim and Madhesh provinces is estimated to be very high¹⁷.

3.2 Major Challenges

Based on the above discussion, it is clear that despite progresses in bringing gender parity at different educational levels along with introduction of gender responsive budgetary system, the problems are still deeper and challenging in many areas.

Deep-rooted Structural Problems: The foremost challenge is that still there are deep rooted structural problems that have inhibited to ensure that in the entire development discourse, strategies, policies and governance system the gender equality dimension is genuinely embedded. Long-standing and gender biased approaches in planning and budgeting give less priority to social aspects which are the key for the transformation of society and nation. GRB is highly constrained by all these. As an offshoot, absence of decisive participatory role of women in overall gender responsive budget preparation, policy and program fixation and implementation by following transformative approach has circumscribed such a scope¹⁸. Largely, a ritualistic approach is still prevalent.

Entire BRB Approach Narrow and Lopsided: As an offshoot above, despite gender responsive budgeting trying to bring certain departure, entire approach is very narrow and lopsided. The decline in total budget allocation in education in recent years and corresponding impact on gender responsive education budgeting corroborates this. Interestingly, along with introduction of fiscal federalism, the total budget share of education has declined. So much so, out of the ongoing programs only small percentage is directly beneficiary to the gender. The criteria frequently changed as demonstrated by indicators reveals that largely a tinkering approach or adhoc criteria is followed.

GRB Guidelines Hardly Followed: Apart from poor knowledge and skills, neither guidelines are strictly followed nor they are mandatory.

¹⁶ See CBS 2018.

¹⁷ For details see NPC/UNDP 2020.

¹⁸ A critical review on those lines can be found in Klatzer, Tamrakar and Adhikari 2023.

GRB Not Properly Integrated with PFM System: The GRB is not properly integrated into the PFM system which includes revenue management as well. As such, the MTEF and annual budgets do not clearly show the financing side for gender-equality priorities.

Low Priority and Limited Programs: Along with declining priority to the education sector, only limited gender specific programs are under implementation today. Despite recently initiated President Education Reform program getting modest budget, it is not gender specific. As experience of three levels indicates, priorities are given on physical and visible infrastructure development rather than on social sector and gender specific programs. This means, there is a lack of commitment to prioritizing gender equality leading to insufficient funding and resources for GRB, as well as for policies, services and investments that could promote gender equality under the federal system.

Wider Inter-Provincial Gender Gap in Education/Quality Education: A bigger challenge is such that there is wider inter-provincial gender gap in education which, indeed, is perpetuating in a systemic way notwithstanding that one of the main aim of federal system is to induce disproportionate socio-economic development for facilitating early catchup by the lagging provinces. As an offshoot, the gap in quality education is more serious.

Larger Quality Gap between Private Sector led Institutional Schools and Community Schools: Apart from continued gap in quality education between private sector led institutional schools and community schools, there is continued gender gap in quality education.

A Tendency of Majority Girls Students Joining General Subject in Higher Education: There is also a tendency of majority of girl students joining general course rather than more technical subject at the higher educational having no or limited demand in the labor market. As an offshoot, the discriminatory informal labor market disfavoring women may continuously perpetuate for many years to come. All these may have big impact on inter-generational gender gap for long.

Poor Gender Data Base, Weak Monitoring and Assessment of GRB: Lack of gender based data base is also a major problem with problems in effective monitoring and assessment on the performance of GRB. Despite GRB being a separate part of a budget, no special priority on implementation, performance evaluation and dissemination is given which has hindered enhancing gender based data system as well. The allocation of budget on GRB related programs lacks the details of the implementation process such as procurement plans, activities to be implemented, expenditure tracking, reporting or monitoring as well as public audits. Despite Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens (MOWCSC) being responsible for many of these as a part of its gender equality enhancing role, it has neither resources nor capacity. At the same time, it has no formal organizational linkages with sub-national governments.

Negligence to Tax Policy Implications on Gender: Though through budget certain facilities or rebates are provided through tax policies, larger incidence of tax policy on gender is hardly analyzed while framing or revising tax policy as a part of budgetary exercise.

Negligence to Parliament and the Office of Auditor General (OAG) in the GRB Process: Experience shows that no role or involvement of parliament and OAG is visibly seen in the process for making it wider and effective.

Poor Collaboration and Coordination with Civil Society and Other Stakeholders: Civil society and concerned stakeholders are the changing agent of society. They play critical role on advocacy, decision making and monitoring. Despite this, no institutional mechanism for better collaboration and coordination with them in the GRB process is there.

Major Policy Recommendations



Based on the challenges noted above, following major policy recommendations are made:

1. Embedding Gender Equality in Development Discourse

Foremost necessity is that the gender equality is genuinely embedded in the development discourse at all levels of government. This requires that a transformative approach is followed in essence through which production, social and distributional relations could be changed for augmenting gender empowerment process. This, among others, requires not only changes and reforms in rules of the game (both formal and informal) but also in economic policy discourse with added focus on macroeconomic policy alteration. It has to be recognized that integration of gender equality and social justice in economic policy making and implementation processes is a prerequisite.

2. Internalizing Gender Transformation in Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB)

As a part of overall transformative approach, gender transformation approach has to be internalized in the GRB. Such an approach should recognize that equality enhanced through larger investment in gender would be major catalyst of rapid growth, prosperity and well-being of people through tangible contribution to higher productivity, employment generation and improvement in the living standard of people.

3. Legal Framework for GRB

Time has come based on the experience to bring the GRB under a legal framework to make it more enforceable and mandatory. This will lead to integrate it more forcefully in both planning and fiscal system of all governments.

4. Overhauling GRB with Education as a Core Component

Along with such fundamental shifts, overhauling of gender responsive budgeting system has to be initiated in which education should be one of its major components. As such, a formality, patch up and tinkering approach basically following a tactics of shifting limited heads from one place to another grounded on decades old criteria has to be replaced by a more comprehensive but robust framework making education component as a critical part for it. The framework should be driven by right to education and gender equality committed in the constitution and set targets in the SDGs.

5. Integration of GRB into Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF)

Above required shifts and commitments unveil that the GRB is integrated into the MTEF which has now largely been converted into a ritualistic framework. While making it as a more robust framework, high priority has to be given to raise the share of education budget up to 18 to 20 percent in medium term with focus on gender dimension. To accomplish the target of Rs 30000 per student by 2030 from 22,000 in 2022 also requires major expansion in school education budget.

6. Maximizing Revenue Mobilization for Gender and Education Goals

Along with such a priority shift, the possibility of revenue mobilization has to be maximized. There is a big scope of mobilization of revenue through expansion in the tax base, raising progressivity in tax system, controlling large scale tax evasion and leakages.

7. Emphasizing Gender-Responsive Decision-Making

It should also be acknowledged that simply allocating funds is not enough; a gender-responsive decision-making process is essential for effectively addressing gender inequality. The GRB process in Nepal needs to be more focused, data-driven, and empirically based for its impact on gender equality that could also ensure achieving SDG 5.

8. Strengthening Institutional Coordination and Civil Society Involvement

There is a need of strengthening institutional collaboration and coordination both horizontally and vertically. In this respect, the collaboration and partnership with civil society organizations and other key stakeholders has to be strengthened. Particularly, the involvement of civil society in advocacy, monitoring and decision making will be critical for the successes of GRB in a sustainable way.

9. Gender-Just Revenue and Tax Policy

As a part of GRB process, it is also necessary that the revenue and tax policy ensures that gender equality in education is strengthened. Largely, a tax justice system has to be followed and strengthened.

10. Introduction of Scientific Performance Budgeting

Introduction of scientific performance budgetary system is a prerequisite for larger improvements in the overall budgetary system through which allocative and implementation efficiency in education could be enhanced simultaneously for better outcomes and quality in education. Some of the specific recommendations are as follows:

a) Reforming Gender-Responsive Budget Classification and Planning Frameworks

There is a need of bringing reforms in function-wise gender-responsive budget classification to replace inconsistent and often ad hoc relying on subjective central-level estimates rather than systematic scoring mechanisms. Similarly, there is a need of gender budget indicators embedded in key planning frameworks like the Annual Strategic Implementation Plan (ASIP) and Mid-Term Expenditure Framework. Based on the medium-term expenditure framework, there is a need of more systematic and transparent system for allocating budget on SDG 4 for ensuring meaningful gender responsiveness in education budget.

b) Bridging the Gap Between Institutional and Community Schools Through Quality Reforms

Overcoming gap between private led institutional schools and community schools is necessary which demands wide ranging reforms in community schools especially from the standpoint of enhancing quality education. In this respect, there is a need of disproportionate policy rules for increasing the ratio of women teachers especially in secondary level education and above.

c) Reducing Inter-Provincial Disparities in Education Through Targeted Budgeting

One of the high priorities in the policy agenda should be on reducing inter-provincial gaps while preparing gender-responsive budgeting. Large expansion in education budget in provinces like Karnali, Madhesh and Sudurpaschim is needed for improving educational outcomes and equity across the country. This means more targeted interventions in education policy is needed.

d) Investing in Subject-Specific Teachers in Community Schools

As a part of expansion in education budget, more resources is required in community schools specially to attract teachers in subjects like science and management. This will greatly help to reduce the persistence of large quality gaps in community and privately run institutional schools.

e) Enhancing Supervision and Monitoring Through Robust Performance Indicators

Strengthening of regular supervision and monitoring should form the integral part of the policy reform. In this regard, along with introduction of performance budgeting system, more robust performance indicators to facilitate monitoring and tracking progresses has to be developed, introduced and made functional effectively.

f) Institutionalizing Gender Impact Assessments and Gender Audits

A system of strengthening Gender Impact Assessments (GIAs), gender equality performance evaluation and gender based auditing should be integral part of the GRB. For institutionalizing such a system, creation and strengthening of reliable data at all levels will be equally necessary.

g) Reassessing and Strengthening the Midday Meal Program Aligned with SDGs

The Midday Meal Program in Nepal requires a comprehensive reassessment to address poverty, hunger, and education simultaneously, aligning its objectives with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 (No Poverty), 2 (Zero Hunger), and 4 (Quality Education). Budget allocations must be enhanced to reflect the program's critical role in improving nutritional outcomes, increasing school enrollment, and reducing dropout rates, particularly among marginalized communities. Additionally, the program's effectiveness hinges on the establishment of rigorous monitoring mechanisms to track implementation, assess impact, and ensure transparency, thereby maximizing its potential to support holistic development outcomes.

h) Improving Gender Parity Index in Literacy to Meet 2030 Targets

Enough care has to be given to improve gender parity index based on literacy rate for meeting the target of 2030 which is still far behind at 0.8 in 2022. Based

i) Addressing Basic Student Needs and Ensuring Inclusive School Infrastructure

Based on the field observations, a large gap in fulfilling student's basic needs has been found. Therefore, there is a need of meeting student's basic needs such as sanitation, internet facility and wash facilities. Schools have to be made disable friendly too. For ensuing such facilities including computer and other IT facility, special grant for schools will be warranted.

j) Budgeting for Teacher Shortage Due to Maternity Leave

Schools face scarcity of teachers due to maternity leave by female teachers for 3 months. An alternative arrangement has to be made through budgetary provision.

k) Providing Psychological and Career Counseling for Female Students

Female students need psychological and career counseling to inspire ambition and guide career decisions. Programs like those planned by Shankharapur Municipality aimed at addressing child marriage problem and supporting career development could be made across all municipalities.

l) Addressing Academic Challenges Faced by Students from Agricultural Backgrounds

Many students, particularly in agricultural households, face heavy workloads, leading to academic struggles and high dropout rates. So remedial classes and additional budgets can help address these challenges.

m) Engaging Parents in Collaborative Academic Planning and Support

Parents must be engaged through education sessions to identify and address the reasons behind poor academic performance. Collaborative planning between parents and teachers is essential.

n) Prioritizing High-Poverty Municipalities in Education Budget Allocations

Municipalities with low revenue and high poverty rates should be prioritized. Education budgets must include poverty-reduction measures, such as incentivizing parents to send children to school rather than work.

o) Ensuring Budget Transparency and Mandatory Public Dissemination in Schools

Asymmetric information can be misleading for parents. Therefore, public school's budget spending should be made public regularly and system of audit and dissemination be made mandatory.

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