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Commentary

India Needs Gender Responsive Budgeting, Not Just a Gender Budget

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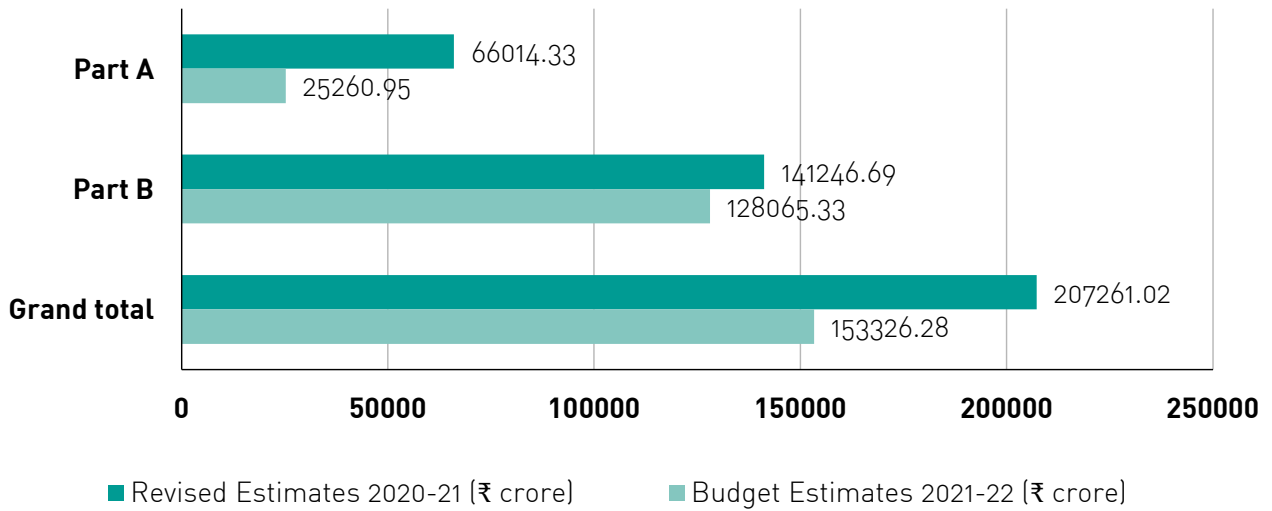
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India ranked 112th out of 153 countries on the Gender Gap Index which tracks progress in these dimensions.

Women, comprising half of India's population, lag behind in socio-economic, health, education and other development indicators. It is not surprising then, that India ranked 112th out of 153 countries on the Gender Gap Index which tracks progress in these dimensions. Yet, a fleeting look at the Gender Budget (GB) 2021 will tell you that budgetary allocations for the same have fallen - by 26% to be exact.

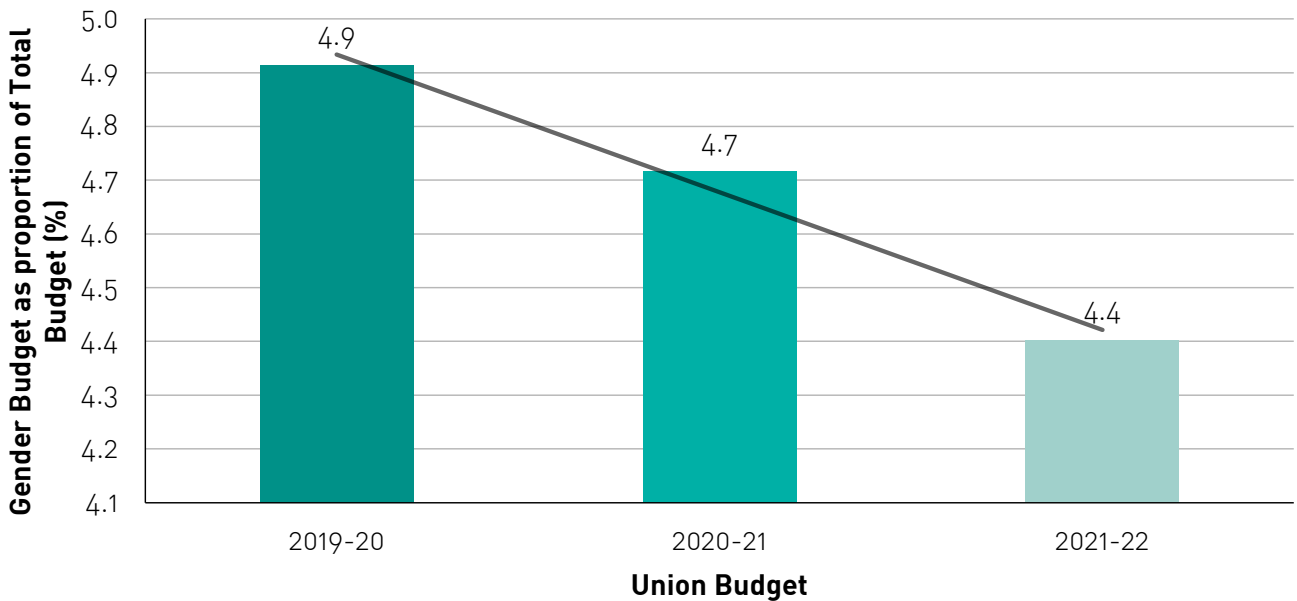
Both Part A of the budget with 100% women-specific programmes and Part B, with 30% women specific programmes have seen a decrease in allocations by 62% and 9.3%, respectively (Figure 1). In fact, the GB as a proportion of the Total Expenditure through Budget has fallen by 6.6%, when compared to last year (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Allocations to Part A and B of the Gender Budget



Source: Gender Budget

Figure 2: Total Gender Budget as proportion of Total Expenditure through Budget (%)



Source: Expenditure Profile, Union Budget 2021-22

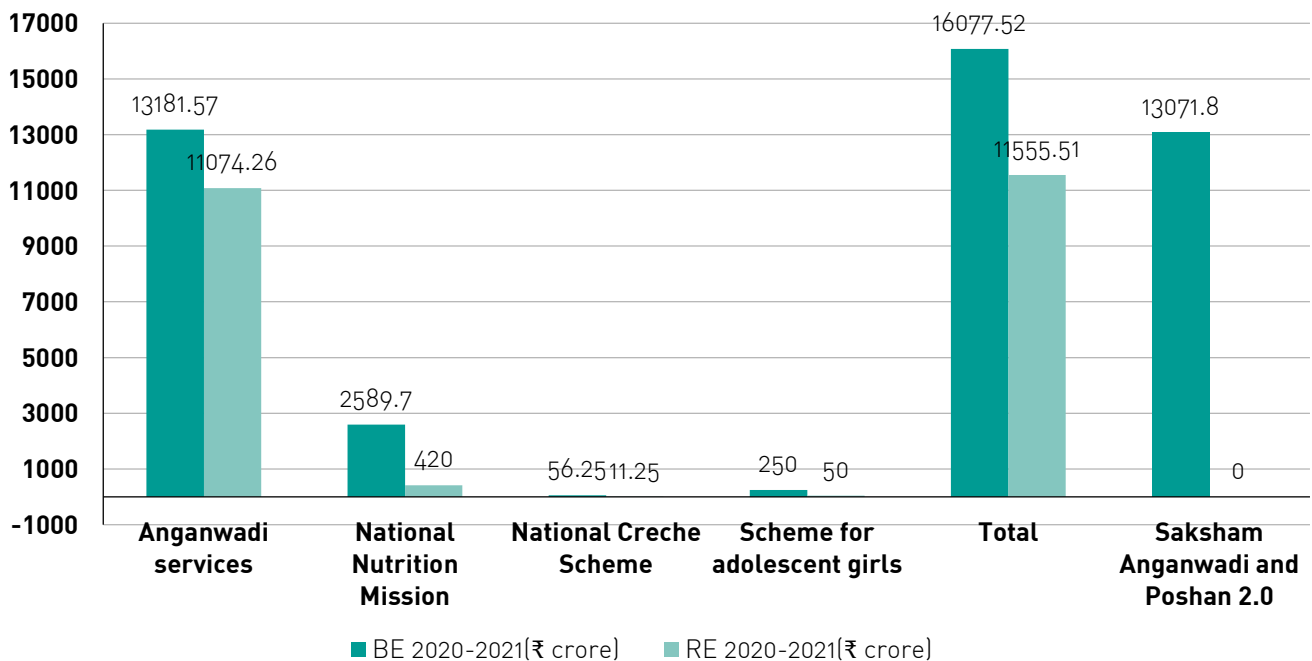
Bearing in mind that COVID-19 has widened gender gaps, this GB contraction is not going to help women. Not trivializing the pandemic’s devastating impact on all vulnerable and marginalised communities, it is crucial to note that women have suffered from disproportionate impact. Examining the GB through the lens of - first, the need for socio-economic empowerment and development of Indian women; second, pre-existent gender disparities; and third, the additional setbacks driven by the COVID-crisis - raises concerns.

Turning to nutrition and health, the recent NFHS-5 data showed that while overall indicators for women have improved, incidence of anemia has worsened; more

than 50% of women [1] and children are anaemic in 13 of the 22 States/UTs. The COVID-blow dealt to family planning services is likely to, in the best case scenario, lead to 1.94 million unintended pregnancies and 1.18 million abortions, more than half of it being unsafe abortions, impacting the well-being of women [2].

With this backdrop, the merging of the Anganwadi services, National Nutrition Mission, National Creche Scheme and Scheme for adolescent girls into ‘Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0’ raises questions about the individual allocations for each of these schemes. As shown in Figure 3 below, we can see a distinct drop when we compare the revised estimates (RE) 2020-21 for these schemes when compared to the budget estimates (BE) for the same, indicating the adverse impact of the pandemic on the utilisation of the budget’s allocations. More importantly, this year’s BE for ‘Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0’ (INR 13071.8 crore) has seen an 18.7% fall when compared to last year’s budget allocations for all these schemes put together (INR 16077.52 crore). The allocations to the Ministry of Women and Child Development makes only 0.7% of the total budget, a fall from last year’s 1%. The Mid Day Meal scheme, which is a crucial child welfare scheme, has also witnessed a 11% fall in allocations.

Figure 3: Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 vs its components



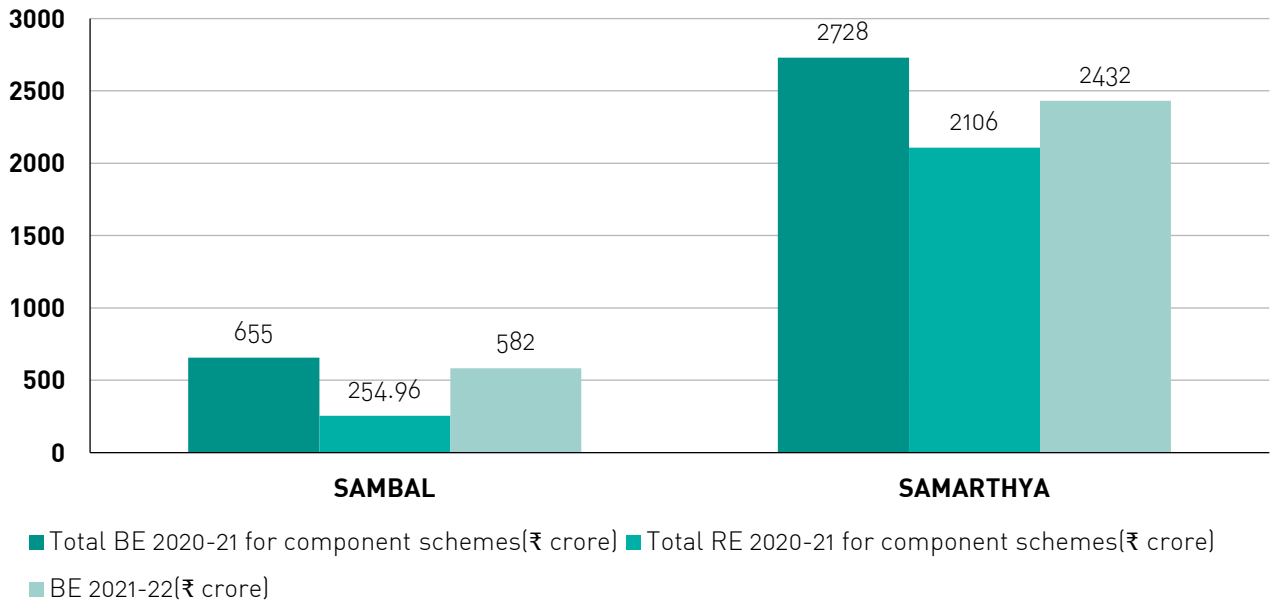
Source: Gender Budget

The new umbrella schemes - SAMBAL¹ and SAMARTHYA² - also do not tell us about individual allocations of the component schemes. Figure 4 shows how both SAMBAL and SAMARTHYA schemes have seen significant increases if compared to RE 2020-21 of their component schemes put together. However, since no breakdown of the allocation is available, it is hard to say how vital schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, with a record of under utilisation [3] and misallocation [4] of funds, fare.

¹ Includes Swadhar Greh, Ujjawala, Working Women’s Hostel, Women’s Helpline, One Stop Centre, Mahila Police Volunteers, and Home for Widows

² Includes Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Creche, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, Gender Budgeting/Research/ Skilling/ Training

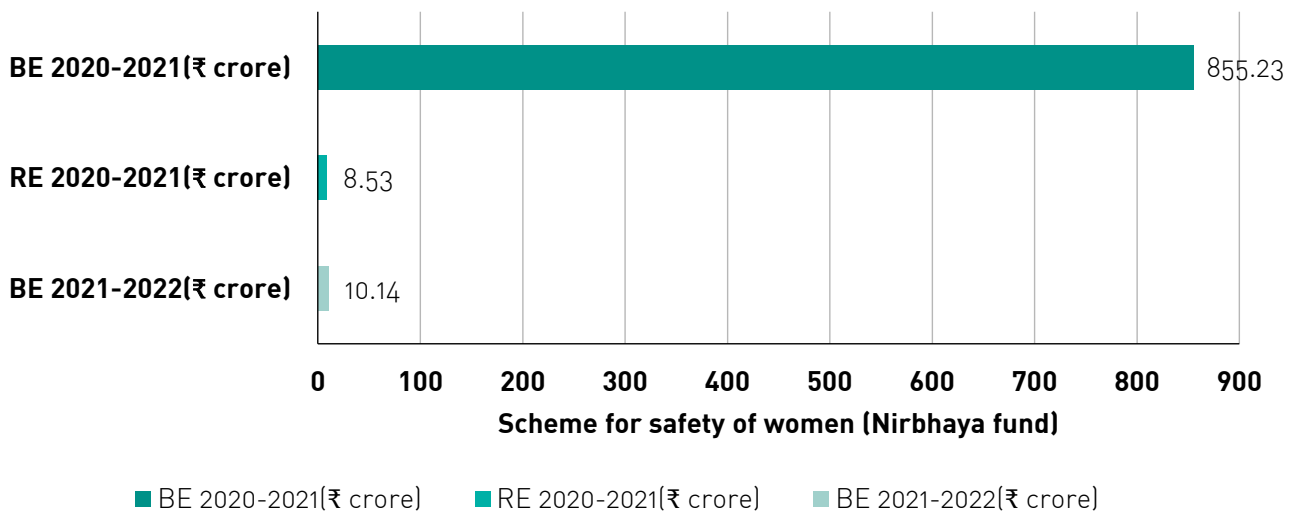
Figure 4: SAMBAL and SAMARTHYA schemes vs their components



Source: Gender Budget

Amidst COVID-induced lockdowns, economic uncertainties and rising stress, a shadow pandemic of mental health and violence [5] also spread, putting women and children at risk. While the National Commission for Women has seen an increase in allocations to INR 27 crore, the Nirbhaya Fund has seen about INR 2 crore boost. The fact that RE 2020-21 has fallen to one-hundredth of the BE 2020-21, is worrisome - we might be staring at a huge underutilisation of funds [6].

Figure 5: Budget allocations to Nirbhaya Fund



Source: Gender Budget

The disruption of supply chains due to lockdowns, also magnified the challenges that women and girls face in accessing menstrual hygiene products. A Menstrual Health Alliance India (MHAI) survey stated that 22% of the organisations [7] part of the alliance do not have access to menstrual products. The lack of adequate

toilets [8], water availability and privacy, and the stigma around menstruation, augmented the disproportionate burden [9] they already carried. In this context, the 80% increase in allocation to Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM-Gramin), in GB is welcome. But, because Menstrual Hygiene Management is a less highlighted vertical of the SBM, similar questions about the distribution of funds arise. Also, a critical programme that has direct impact on women's drudgery of work and health outcomes - the Jal Jeevan Mission - has been left out of the GB.

The lockdowns also exacerbated the unpaid domestic work done at home by women, which was already almost 10 times [10] that done by men. Gender has played a critical role in determining labour market outcomes during the pandemic as women were 9 times [11] more likely to lose employment during the lockdown as compared to men and were 17 times less likely to recover than men. With 95% of women employed in the unorganized sector without any socio-economic security, where many lead micro and small businesses, these findings indicate acute hardship [12].

However, no allocations can be found under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in the GB. There has also been a 34.5% decrease in MGNREGA allocations, despite it providing a useful support system during job crises, especially for women. The National Rural Livelihood Mission-Aajeevika has received a 44% hike in allocations to INR 6638.38 crore. A glance at the funds allotted to skilling indicates that it's a very small part of the GB.

COVID-19 also exposed the gender differential in access to digital education as even when 59% women are mobile owners, only 16% are mobile internet users [13] (Figure 6). The allocations to the Department of Higher Education has increased by INR 2000 crore and the PM Gramin Digital Sakshrta Abhiyan has been allocated INR 200 crores. While the allocations to Samagra Shiksha has seen an 11% uptick, the National Scheme for Incentive to Girl Child for Secondary Education has seen a huge fall in allocation (Figure 7). The allocations to the Department of Higher Education has also increased by INR 2000 crore and the PM Gramin Digital Sakshrta Abhiyan has been allocated INR 200 crores.

Figure 6: Mobile Owners (%) and Mobile Internet Users (%)

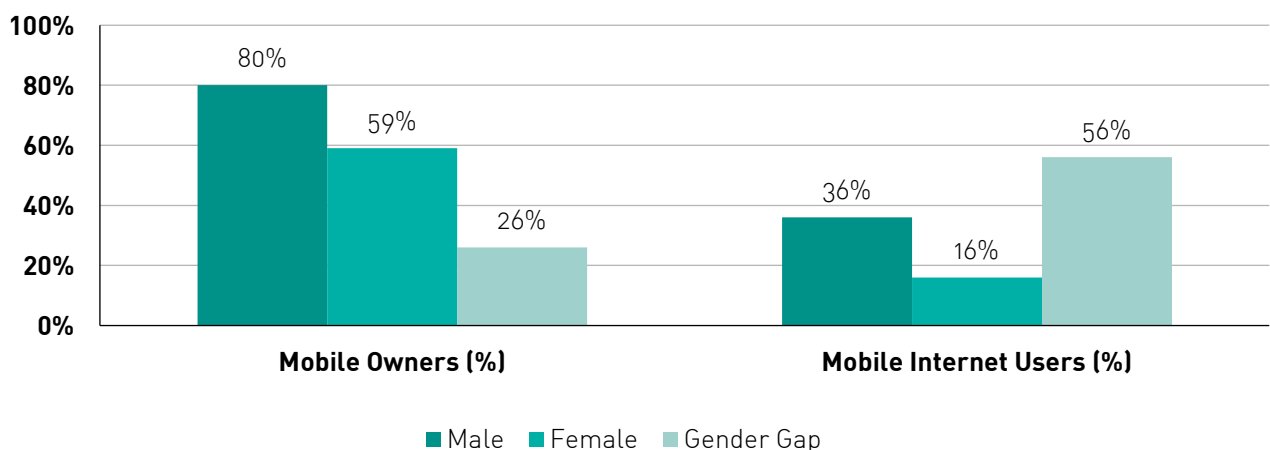
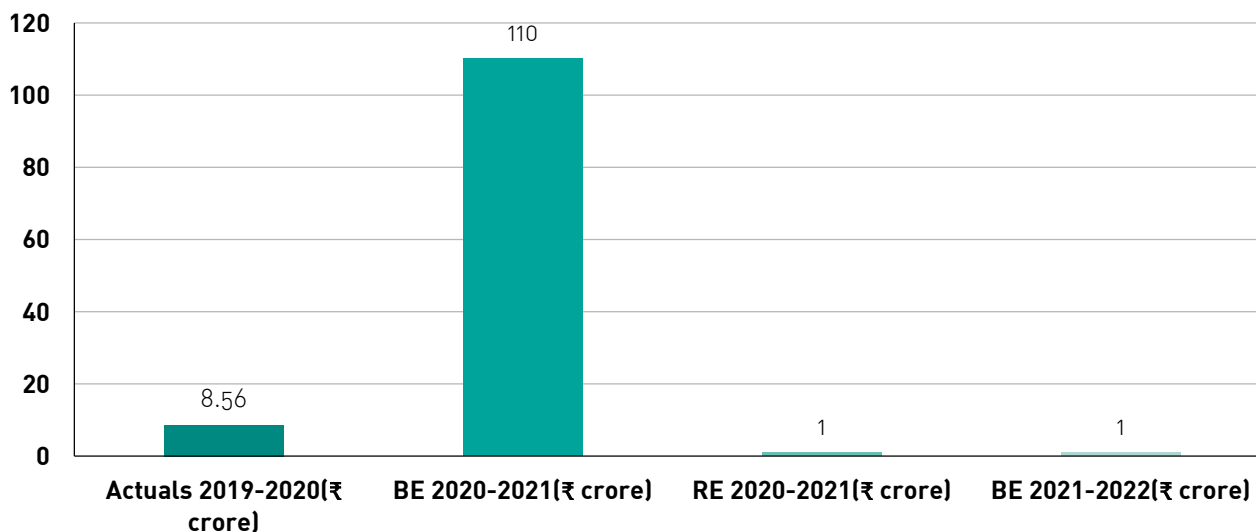


Figure 7: Budget allocations to National Scheme for Incentive to Girl Child for Secondary Education

Source: Gender Budget

While majority of the allocations are made across five Departments - Rural Development, School Education and Literacy, Higher Education, Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Women and Child Development, it is also important to recognize the unique potential of Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Textiles, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and, Labour and Employment in improving the socio-economic outcomes of women through direct impact. Considering that the female labour force participation in India has been dwindling for over a decade now, funds for re-employing women who lost their jobs and boosting their overall participation in the labour market should have been a priority, even if economic growth is all we are aiming for.

Thus, the Gender Budget Statement has to move forward from what looks like a mere collation of funds and schemes that focus (or might focus) on women, to actual efficient action plans leading to certain set goals of gender equality and women empowerment. Meaning, Departments and Ministries must reverse the approach they are adopting currently: women-centred targets - on the basis of an efficient needs-assessment - must be set first, followed by the action-plans or interventions to reach these targets and then, funds must be allocated on the basis of the previous two. For target setting, what we need is a critical analysis of challenges faced by women in specific areas of say, skilling, health, social justice, followed by ambitious targets that will create real on-ground change.

Infact, the Gender Budgeting Handbook [14] by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), makes a great case for women's participation in "each stage of the policy cycle - from its preparation and enactment to its monitoring and impact assessment" and lays out a five-step framework for gender budgeting. The Handbook also states capacity building and training programmes for different Ministries as one of the main thrust areas of MWCD's work. Hence, while sensitization workshops are being conducted, how much it is impacting the process of building the GB is still a question.

Table 1: Five-step framework for gender budgeting

01	An analysis of the situation for women and men and girls and boys (and the different sub-groups) in a given sector.
02	An assessment of the extent to which the sector's policy addresses the gender issues and gaps described in the first step.
03	An assessment of the adequacy of budget allocations to implement the gender-sensitive policies and programmes identified in step 2
04	Monitoring whether the money was spent as planned, what was delivered and to whom.
05	An assessment of the impact of the policy/ programme/scheme and the extent to which the situation described in step 1 has changed.

As Step 5 above indicates, merging schemes into one umbrella scheme is not problematic as long as the direction of funds is not ambiguous and tracking of these individual schemes is consistent, so that we know whether the action plan is effective or not. For this, gender disaggregated data is needed, which is not present.

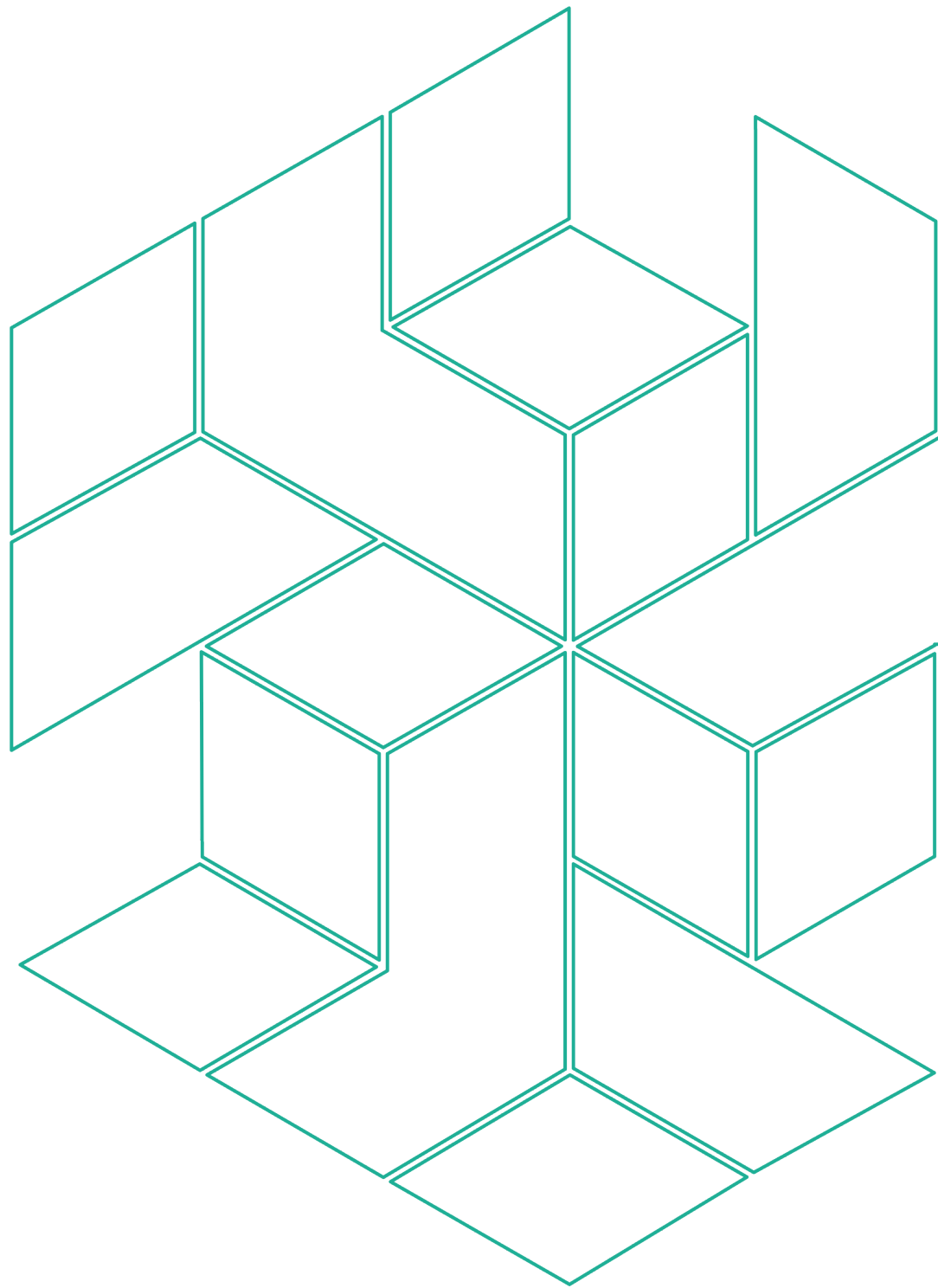
It is critical to acknowledge that the Gender Budget holds significant power in opening the door to gender mainstreaming in policies, mitigating inequalities and granting a running start to creating Atmanirbhar women in an Atmanirbhar Bharat. Hence, there is an absolute necessity for this process to be intensified and strictly aligned with the frameworks of the Gender Budgeting Handbook by the MWCD.

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