



Linking Budgets To The Concerns of Weaker Sections

A Decade of the Efforts of Budget Analysis Rajasthan Centre (BARC)

● Bharat Dogra





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Budgets and Weaker Sections

A lot of hectic activity in big business circles is seen every year around the time of finalisation of the annual budgets of various state governments and the central government. This happens because various business interests and lobbies try to present their interests before the government in the most effective way, sometimes linking their narrow interests to some wider public interest, real or imaginary. Various businesses have the resources to do this work effectively and sometimes they succeed in getting their way even when the odds initially do not favour them, or they do not have a strong case.

This raises the crucial question - who will do such advocacy to protect the interests of the poor and marginalised sections of society? Seen from the wider perspective of social and economic justice, clearly the biggest need is for protecting the budget interests of these weak and marginalised sections, but it is precisely these sections who lack the means to present their case in an effective way at the time of budget-making.

What is more, the question is not just one of advocacy at the time of budget-making. There is also a clear need to later follow-up this work and keep checking throughout the year that the allocations made for the weaker sections are actually followed and funds are not diverted from these allocation to other areas. This requires a continuing effort, access to government documents (or

other relevant records and studies) as well as a lot of expertise in analysing budget and other financial papers. Findings of analysis need to be disseminated widely with the help of media. If such an effort succeeds in getting more allocations for the weaker sections, or ensuring that allocations that could have been diverted are actually spent for the weaker sections, then such an effort can lead to benefits of crores of Rs. (or even hundreds of crores of Rs. in exceptional cases).

At a still broader level, there is need for wider analysis of expenditure and revenue patterns from the perspective of weaker sections. At the grassroots level, there is need for analysis of the budget making of local self-government organisations, and also helping their budget-making when needed.

The growing realisation of the importance of these various functions has led to the emergence of budget related civil society organisation in various states and at the national level for 'budget analysis' or more simply for 'budget work'. As Yamini Aiyar and Amitabh Behar write in a paper on 'Budget Work in India', "Budget analysis can be defined as the process through which state budgets are scrutinized from the perspective of the poor and marginalised. Its focus is on critically evaluating budgetary allocations made by governments at the beginning of the fiscal year and tracking expenditure undertaken on the basis of these allocations to determine the extent to which policy translates into outcomes". Further on the importance of these efforts these writers say, "The relevance of budget analysis lies in the fact that it has pro-

vided civil society with a tool through which it can effectively bring the perspectives and concerns of the poor and marginalised in to the process of policy formulation... Budget analysis has thus emerged as an important tool through which civil society organisations can directly engage with the state to promote accountable, responsive and people centric governance. More importantly, through budget analysis civil society organisations have successfully demonstrated the importance of strategic engagement with the state for promoting a people centric democratic discourse."

According to the International Budget Project (IBP) of the Centre on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), Washington, 'the objective of budget work is to access, through analysis, how priorities for public spending as expressed in the budget can affect the lives of the poor and vulnerable'.



Budget Analysis Rajasthan Centre

In Rajasthan an organisation called the Budget Analysis Research Centre (BARC) has taken up the responsibility of budget analysis work during the last decade. This organisation is a part of a reputed voluntary organisation called 'Astha' whose work in South Rajasthan and tribal belt of Rajasthan particularly in the context of mobilisation of tribals and other weaker sections has been widely appreciated.

Astha, which has only recently completed its eventful journey of 25 years, was involved during 1996-2000 in a study of the impact of globalisation on small farmers, workers and other vulnerable sections. In the course of this study several issues come up which emphasised the importance of budget-related issues. Around the same time 'Disha', a well-known voluntary organisation of Gujarat and its related organisation 'Patheya' were doing pioneering work on budget related issues in India. This helped 'Astha' to link up with the wider efforts in the country on budget-analysis. One effort led to another and finally Astha was able to set up BARC about a decade back. Since then this organisation has been able to take up important analysis and advocacy work related to justice for weaker sections in state budgets. In addition BARC has also taken up some other important work on budget-related issues.

One aspect of the work of BARC is to demystify budget related issues so that difficulties created by budget-related jargon can be overcome and people can have a better comprehension of budget related issues. Towards this end BARC has brought out publications which demystify budget related jargon and issues. Also, BARC has made a study of the transparency related issues of state budgets. This study pointed out areas where transparency needed to be improved. This kind of studies have been very rare in Hindi before BARC tried to fill up this gap to some extent.



Efforts to Ensure Justice For Scheduled Castes and Tribes In Budgets

The efforts of BARC to protect the interests of weaker sections particularly dalits and tribals in budgets have been the most important aspect of its work. A special effort was made to ensure that the provisions of Special Component Plans are followed in Rajasthan. In 1979 the Government of India started the 'Special Component Plan' to ensure that the interests of scheduled castes (SCs) are well-protected in Budgets. The main thrust of the Special Component Plan is to ensure that the funds for SCs are allotted at least in proportion to the SC population in any state's total population. In Rajasthan the SC population constitutes 17 percent of the total population and therefore each department is required to allocate and spend 17 per cent of its total plan size for the SCs through the Special Component Plan.

In year 2007 BARC published a pioneering study on this neglected issue titled 'How Long Would the Dalits Continue to be Deprived of Their Due Share?'

This study exposed how the Special Component Plan has been violated in a big way and how Special Component Plan funds have been diverted. Several anomalies in funding were exposed. In addition constructive suggestions were made regarding how these glaring mistakes can be corrected.

This publication, moreover, was only an initial ef-

fort as BARC continued its efforts to continuously monitor SCP budgeting so that attention could be drawn to this injustice year after year. In addition BARC extended this effort to cover the funding of the tribal sub-plan. Here again BARC's work exposed how the norm of funding in proportion to percentage of tribal population was being violated year after year.

These efforts of BARC made a significant contribution to the partial remedial action that has finally been taken in recent years by the Rajasthan government to bring the funding for SCP and tribal sub-plan closer to proper norms. As can be seen in the accompanying table and chart, there has been a significant rise in these components in the budget of Rajasthan in recent years.

BARC brings out a quarterly journal on budget-related issues called 'Budget Samachar'. This journal pointed out in a recent review that in the year 2011-12 the allocation for SC sub-plan could rise to 9% compared to the allocation of about 2 to 5% seen in the previous five years. This is a significant increase although even this is less than the proper norm of 17%. Similarly, in the case of tribal sub-plan the allocation could rise to 7.5% against the allocation of between 2.5% to 4.5% during the previous five years. This again is a significant improvement even though the allocation is still below the proper norm of 12.5%.

Thus BARC has been able to achieve a significant objective of its work which is to promote and protect the interests of weaker sections particularly scheduled castes and tribes in the context of Rajasthan.



Protecting the Interests of Single Women

However BARC has also interpreted vulnerable sections in a wider context to include the overall concerns of women. BARC has brought out a useful publication on gender concerns of budget emphasising that schemes and sectors which have a special relevance for women and girls should not be neglected or under-budgeted.

In this area its most important work has been on single women particularly widows. BARC has published a study titled 'The Destitution of Widows in Rajasthan'.

This is a comprehensive study based on detailed facts and figure collected from various sources in such a way that a very strong case is made for increasing support and help for widows. The conclusion of this study says - "There are about 16 lakh widows in the state, but the Government has budgeted to provide widow pension to a little more than 2 lakh widows. Although all widows are not poor, a substantial number of them are living in destitute condition. There're quite a number of widows who are landless in Rajasthan. If we include those widows who have unirrigated land and whose lands are occupied by others then the number of vulnerable widows goes up. Some may argue in favour of considering the small and marginal farmers too as the vulnerable ones and there is nothing wrong in considering so. Most of the widows are suffering from the lack of basic needs and a large proportion of widows are living outside of

the safety net. State support through social security might improve their quality of life. For them, state support is essential since due to lack of skill most of them are unable to find gainful employment. They also need to be provided with education and training, but initially what they urgently need is basic support for the sake of their survival as well as dignity. The widow pension of Rs. 250 per widow per month is too little to meet the basic needs. This amount needs to be enhanced, and at the same time a much greater number of widows need to be covered with safety net of social security. Providing the widows only with a BPL card will simply not improve their condition. They need both the BPL facilities and widow pension, among others."

This study provides a good example of how studies conducted from the perspective of vulnerable groups by budget analysis groups can promote and protect the interests of these groups in the budgetary context.



Dissemination and Use of Study Results

To be effective and useful at policy levels, the results of the studies and analysis made by BARC should be used by various organisations. In the case of the analysis for tribal sub-plan, for example, effective use of the research done at BARC was made by Astha and other sister organisations involved in mobilisation of tribals. BARC also conducted a useful study on collection of

minor forest produce which drew attention to several problems due to which tribals cannot benefit adequately from this work. In case of the studies done regarding Special Component Plan, dalit organisations made effective use of this work to campaign for budgetary justice to scheduled castes.

Ekal Mahila Sangathan is a reputed organisation of single women which has spread far and wide after its initial growth with Astha's efforts. For this organisation's lobbying on behalf of single women, the well-documented study done by BARC on widows was very useful.

In addition BARC has inter-acted with media at various levels to ensure that the results of some of its important studies can be disseminated far and wide. Particularly around the budget presentation time BARC has a very active and busy inter-action with media. BARC brings out its own quarterly journal on budget related issues called 'Budget Samachar'.

Similarly BARC has made continuing efforts to take its budget analysis work to MLAs. This takes the form of special meetings arranged around budget-presentation time as well as a more continuing inter-action on various other aspects of budget analysis. This effort of BARC has contributed to a more well-informed debate on budget related issues in the Legislative Assembly. BARC has also contributed significantly to pre-budget meetings for consultations of the government with civil society organisations.



Mid-Term Study of 11th Five-Year Plan

The BARC recently completed a mid-term study of the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012) of Rajasthan to evaluate progress at the end of the plan's third year of implementation (2009-2010). This study was made by Nesar Ahmed, co-ordinator of BARC. This study identified infrastructure and human development targets, including:

- lowering the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR),
- improving nutritional levels for women and children,
- improving literacy rates for men and women,
- lowering the drop-out rates of school children, and
- narrowing the gender gap in education.

This study revealed that by the end of the third year these targets seem far from being met by 2012.

- "Only 31 Community Health Centers (CHCs) have been built compared to the goal of 138 CHCs.
- Only 55 Primary Health Centers (PHCs) have been built compared to the goal of 255 PHCs.
- In 2008 the state's IMR was 63 compared to the target of 32.
- In 2009 the MMR was 388 compared to the goal of 148.
- The percentage of institutional delivery barely

reached 45 percent compared to the target of a 70 percent increase during the plan's period."

Such a study can be a wake-up call for the government to step up its steps for achieving crucial plan targets. This is particularly so when the results of this study can be disseminated adequately.

Struggle for Increasing Minimum Wages

In addition to its more regular work, BARC also responds to the needs of various social organisations when their campaigns and struggles need inputs from budget analysis. For example when inmates of a hostel from weaker sections, were not getting proper facilities BARC provided with them information about provision for facilities in the budget so that their efforts for accessing these facilities had a stronger basis now.

A very significant opportunity for such a role emerged in year 2010 when a statewide movement for a rise of minimum wages began to gather force. This movement needed important inputs from budget analysis as well as related information like the level to which minimum wages would've arisen if the necessary additions had been made regularly to take care of the rise in prices. These inputs helped the successful struggle for the rise of minimum wages in Rajasthan.

Other Important Studies

Keeping in view the growing importance of trade related issues in these times of globalisation, the BARC published a study on 'Trade Liberalisation and Indian Farm Sector'. This was mainly based on secondary sources.

BARC published a study of farmers' indebtedness which was based on a study of 200 farmers in 10 districts.

Another important study on food security and related schemes in Rajasthan was conducted in 2010 with the co-operation of Astha. This study revealed important problems regarding the functioning of the public distribution system, employment guarantee scheme and social audits. This kind of information about the grassroots reality of important food security schemes can contribute significantly to the improvement of the food-security infra-structure.

Another useful study which BARC published related to the situation of school education in the new 'right to education' context in Rajasthan. This study clearly revealed the serious shortcomings in school education and how much needs to be done to make 'right to education' a reality for all. This study is particularly useful for the information provided on education in the tribal belt of Rajasthan.

Other important studies of BARC have covered issues like health and water. BARC has also brought out a report on the overall financial situation of the state which

provides an overview context for its other sectorial studies.

Budget and Panchayat Raj

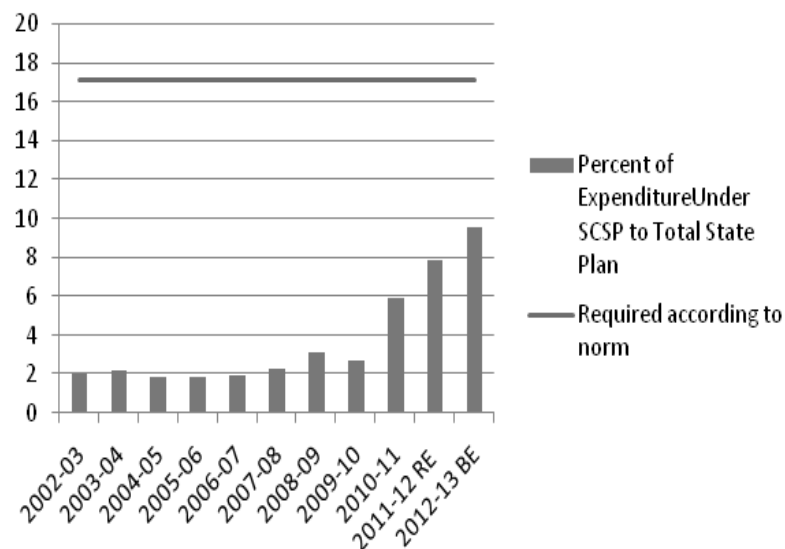
There is an increasing and welcome tendency among some budget analysis organisations to give more attention to budgets at the levels of local self-government. BARC has also followed this trend as this is a real need of our times when more attention needs to be given to decentralisation in general and panchayat raj in particular. BARC has been involved in studying how funds are allocated to panchayat raj institutions at various levels such as panchayats and at district level. In this context the role of State Finance Commission is also important. BARC's studies have revealed how transparency in this respect can be improved so that allocations to different panchayats and panchayat samitis can be clearly identified.

On the other hand various problems associated with the process of budget making by various panchayat raj institutions have also been studied by BARC. In addition the emerging importance issue of social audits has also been studied in detail. Astha has already made an important contribution to the conduct of Social Audits in South Rajasthan.

Yearwise expenditure as percent of Total Plan Size under the Tribal Sub Plan in Rajasthan

Year	Percent of Expenditure Under TSP to Total State Plan	Percent of Expenditure Under SCSP to Total State Plan
2002-03	-N/A-	2
2003-04	-N/A-	2.19
2004-05	-N/A-	1.87
2005-06	4.02	1.83
2006-07	4.16	1.96
2007-08	3.86	2.31
2008-09	3.15	3.13
2009-10	2.92	2.72
2010-11	5.14	5.96
2011-12 Revised	7.16	7.84
2012-13 Proposed	8.21	9.59

Source : Budget Books, Finance Dept., Govt. Of Rajasthan



Information About Publications, Articles and Features Service and Press Clippings Service on Relevant Issues of Social Change

Contact Persons - Madhu and Bharat Dogra

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For any further information on these efforts write to us at the address given at the bottom of this letter. If you are enclosing any cheque, this should be in the name of either Social Change Papers or NFS-India.

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