



Breaking the Vicious Cycle: Food Security and Gender Equality

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ABSTRACT

The study paper explores the area where gender budgetary practices meet food security, and further discusses how financial policies can significantly contribute to the occurrence of who possesses equal access to food. This study enlightens on how gender-responsive budgeting could be used to bridge the gaps regarding the distribution of the resources by analyzing the existing structures and government initiatives which will aid the marginalized groups (particularly women) to ensure their food supply at home and community levels. It discusses that gender lenses are relevant in the financial planning, where the investment in a specific project with women emphasis can return higher agricultural harvest, nutrition, and socioeconomic prosperity rates.

Based on the qualitative and quantitative information, this paper displays the obstacles of implementation of the gender budgeting indicating policy gaps, a lack of awareness, and structural obstacles, offering at the same time effective case studies, which can be used to model effective approaches. The extended implications of gender-sensitive fiscal policies on sustainable developments further elaborated in the paper put more emphasis on the inability of achieving food security if there is equitable governance and inclusive decision making. It connects budgetary allocations and direct results in nutrition and livelihoods, whose evidence shows that strategic gender-based interventions have the capacity to decrease food insecurity, the reduction of poverty and inclusive growth. Conclusively, this research paper suggests an integrated approach of using gender budgeting, in which it acts as both a means of creating social change as well as a means of financial change by balancing economic planning based on the needs of the vulnerable populations and the long-term fix of food security among all people.



Keywords: Gender budgeting, Gender responsive budgeting, South Asia, Gender roles, Food security, Social Security Initiatives, Household resources, Food Equity, Nutrition Outcomes, Food policy, Government schemes, Post-COVID, state-level gender budgeting, India, Constraints, Comparative analysis, food policy



Introduction

South Asians women are experiencing great challenges concerning their diet, which demand systematic changes. Anaemia affects about 259 million women in the region, which is equivalent to 48.4% of the women's fertile age in South Asia which is the most prevalent globally (WHO, 2025). 25% of women in South Asia have moderate to severe food shortages that are above the global levels. In India, 57% of females being anaemic which has risen from 53% in 2015, whereas 26% face food insecurity in contrast to 24% of men (NFHS-5, 2021; FAO, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic widened these inequalities: Indian women's access to food Insecurity rose by 7% in 2020-21 for female-headed households, whereas it increased by 3% for male-led families, experiencing the greatest distress (Travasso et al., 2023). These dietary results indicate not just concerns regarding food availability but also gendered institutional structures affecting land ownership, credit availability, decision establishing power and particularly financial distributions that consistently disadvantage women

This research study will examine into how gender-inclusive budgeting might be used as a unique financial technique to stop the destructive cycle of gender inequality and food scarcity in South Asia. This study is relevant because, despite nearly two decades of gender-based budgeting in the region, major gaps continue between budgetary spending and the real nutritional benefits for women, particularly in the years after the epidemic. (Chakraborty,2025) Recognizing these disparities is crucial for developing effective policy measures. This study addresses the subject by carefully assessing gender budgeting practices in South Asian countries and monitoring differences at the state level within India in order to identify what works and what doesn't (Brookings Institution, 2025).



Gender inequality impacts women's productive abilities in South Asia due to interrelated challenges, ownership, credit access and decision-making authority (Rao et al., 2025). In India, women hold just 14% of the land and still carry out 65% of the agricultural workforce while being given only 8.6% of agriculture expenditures (NITI Aayog, 2022). The vicious cycle functions in both areas: ongoing food insecurity creates malnutrition-induced cognitive impairment, lower levels of education and decreased productivity all of these are passed through mothers towards daughters. The empowerment of women represents 70% of the disparity in household security of food whereas availability of resources as well as support from society contribute to 74% of the empowerment difference (Akter et al., 2017). These linked challenges must require fundamental changes within the policy structure and budgeting systems.

Gender-responsive budgeting evolved to deal with such disparities by effectively channelling public resources through initiatives that deal with discrimination based on gender regarding agriculture and food security. On the other hand, the execution uncovers chronic issues.



State-level disparities are severe as per (Goa Budget Statement, 2025-26) Gujarat invests 37.4% of its fiscal resources to gender policies, whereas the remaining states remain slightly behind. budgets for example Ministry of Women and Child Development which supervises critical nutrition programs such as Integrated Child Development Services often fails to utilize planned funding (PIB, 2025). The period following 2020 is crucial due to several causes simultaneous climate changes were already impacting Agriculture, subsequently followed by supply disruptions owing to the epidemic, major price increases and the failure of social security programs occurred concurrently. This intersection explores the ways through which Gender-based budgeting responds when extreme conditions increase the existing disparities.

The chapter has been divided into four sections. Section 2 shows the strategy of conducting the research, the PRISMA 2020 systematic review strategy applied to extract information on South Asian countries, and the framework applied to conduct a comparative policy assessment at state level in India. Section 3 outlines the results that pertain to the two research goals: a conceptual model that connects gender-oriented budgeting policies to food security in South Asia, and the descriptive accounts of activities on the state level in India. Section 4 generalizes findings through synthesizing research on the issues that affected implementation, the difficulties that were faced and the elements that affected efficacy. Section 5 ends with policy concepts that are practical, which are aimed at ensuring that women are supported through gender inclusive fiscal policies in an attempt to enhance food security.



The policy impact of the research study was rather big since it integrated fiscal policy research with information about gender equality and food security, which often are considered independently (Gupta et al., 2023). The findings of the study are evidence-based factors that policymakers can use in order to enhance the implementation of gender budgeting, which supports Sustainable Development Goals 2 (Zero Hunger) and 5 (Gender Equality). The importance of the results is self-evident by 2030, approximately 18 million women and girls in South Asia can be affected by anaemia despite the rapid use of interventions (WHO, 2025).



Methodology

Objective 1: To Develop a Conceptual Framework for Gender Budgeting and Food security Using the PRISMA 2020 Approach in South Asian Countries

Objective 2: To document the state-level gender budgeting interventions and policies in India.

To construct a conceptual framework, the research followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines, ensuring a systematic, transparent, and replicable review process. This approach allows the identification, screening and synthesis of existing evidence on gender budgeting practices and food security in South Asia.

Research Design

A systematic literature review design and comparative qualitative approach was used to gather and analyse both academic and policy related material on gender responsive budgeting and food security in Indian States and in South Asian Region. Relevant studies and documents were retrieved from academic databases such as Google Scholar, Science Direct, Scopus, Elsevier and Springer, along with grey literature from policy organisations, government portals, and institutional repositories, including *Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)*, *World Health Organisation (WHO)*, *Government of India*, *International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Topics (ICRISAT)*, *Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)* and *Press Information Bureau (PIB)*, resulting in 158 records in total.



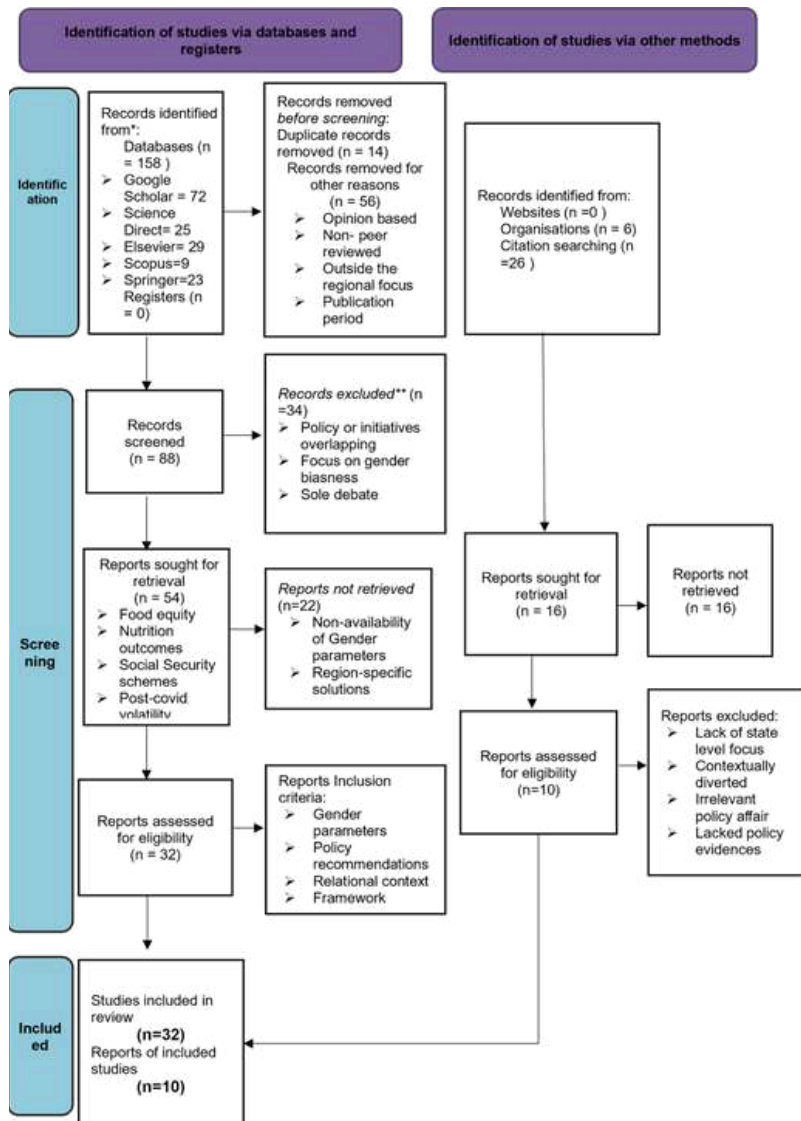
A structured search strategy was deployed separately for both research objectives using combinations of keywords. For objective 1 keywords like “Gender budgeting”, “Gender responsive budgeting”, “South Asia”, “Gender roles”, “Food security”, “Social Security Initiatives”, “Household resources”, “Food Equity”, “Nutrition Outcomes”, “Food policy”,

“Government schemes” and “Post-COVID volatility” were used. On the other hand, for Objective 2 keywords like “state-level gender budgeting”, “India”, “Constraints”, “Comparative analysis”, and “food policy” were used. Furthermore the Boolean operators OR, AND were used along with the Keywords to refine the search and ensure detailed research coverage.

Studies published between 2020 and 2025, written in English and focused on gender budgeting, Nutrition Policy, gender expenditure analysis, South Asia, SDG 2, SDG 5, India, Indian States Initiatives and food security in South Asian countries were included. Resources varied in nature however the papers which were opinion based, non peer reviewed or outside the regional focus were excluded. After this stage, 88 papers were retained for screening. Alongside, the papers with sole debate over education, gender rights, gender violence, micro finance and food market without policy and gender budget relevance were excluded. Additionally, for Objective 2 based on the gender budgeting initiatives and data accessibility the Indian States were studied. Later 34 more studies were excluded due to thematic overlaps and gender biased discussions.



The review followed the PRISMA 2020 flow across four stages: identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion. Each stage was documented carefully and a PRISMA flow diagram was used to illustrate the number of records identified, screened and excluded, along with the final set of studies included for analysis.





Once the relevant studies were identified, a structured extraction process was followed to collect essential information in a consistent manner. Each selected document was carefully reviewed and key details were identified and further recorded such as variables, method applied, arguments made and the major findings and conclusion were noted. In order to figure out the conceptual gaps the data were analysed thematically which helped in identifying patterns, challenges and best practices. In cases where the same policy or initiative appeared across multiple sources, details were crosschecked to avoid duplication and ensure accuracy.

Two level analysis was done considering each objective at a time. For Objective 1, a thematic synthesis approach was adopted. Each study was read multiple times to identify recurring ideas, patterns, and relationships between variables. These recurring themes informed the development of a conceptual framework, mapping how gender budgeting mechanisms function in South Asia. This helped in drawing evidence based policy recommendations aimed at strengthening food security mechanism and gender responsive governance. However, 22 could not be retrieved due to the absence of gender parameters and region specific limitations.

Studies which successfully established the link between gender budgeting mechanisms and food security indicators as per the objectives established (in the South Asian Region and India) were considered as the final selection. The only ones which offered clear empirical evidence, policy frameworks and gender responsive parameters were included.



After the careful review of the methodological strengths and the exclusion of any biased studies, out of 158 initially identified records, 32 studies and 10 additional reports were finally included.

This layered selection using PRISMA 2020 framework not only ensured transparency and study of existing evidence, but as well reflected on the areas where knowledge remains limited, pointing to future research opportunities and potential improvements in both regional and within country based gender budgeting practices.



Results and Discussion

OBJECTIVE 1: To develop a conceptual framework for gender budgeting using the PRISMA 2020 approach in South Asian countries.

Descriptive statistics

Section deals with the 32 studies (from an initial pool of 54) on gender budgeting and food security in Southeast Asia. Quantitative and qualitative parameters, methodology classifications, psychological categories and country-wise distributions are summarized in table.

Table1: Methodology Types and Distribution

Methodology Type	Number of Papers	Main Features
Quantitative	12	Statistical analysis, survey data
Qualitative	10	Interviews, case studies
Mixed-Methods	8	Both survey/stats + interviews
Systematic Review	4	Meta-analysis, cross-study review
Policy Analysis	6	Budget audits, legislative focus

Note: Some studies fall into >1 category due to combined approaches



Key observation from the 30 papers are that 70% papers have used statistically rigorous or mixed-methods approaches with most focusing on empowerment, agency and the intersection of psychological dimensions and policy. Papers addressing Southeast Asian contexts are fewer, generally more policy-oriented, and pioneering gender budgeting efforts.

Table 2: Psychological/Social Classification (as addressed in studies)

Psychological/Social Dimension	No. of Studies	Focus Areas
Empowerment and Agency	17	Women’s decision-making, autonomy and aspirations
Norms and Attitudes	13	Gender roles and intra-household food allocation
Collective Action	8	Participation in co-ops and community budgeting
Education/Awareness	12	Access to programs and knowledge about entitlements
Marginality and Vulnerabilities	6	Rural, poor women and minority status impact

Note: Some studies fall into >1 category due to combined approaches



Table 3: Country-wise Inclusion (32 Paper Subset)

Country	No. of Papers	Main Focus Areas
India	11	Policy, land reform, budgeting, food security
Bangladesh	6	Microcredit, nutrition, gender roles
Nepal	4	Asset access, cooperatives, child nutrition
Pakistan	4	Market interventions, food prices
Sri Lanka	2	Land asset programs, intra-household food
Afghanistan	2	Rural nutrition, gender in crisis settings
Bhutan	2	Food environment, gender budgeting pilots
Maldives	1	Gender roles, food access, budgeting audit



Table 4 : Major Variables, Parameters, and Quantitative Patterns Across Reviewed Papers

Variable/Theme	Key Parameters/Indicators	Quantitative Summary from 30 Papers	Notable Country
Environmental Drivers	Drought, flood impact on yields, climate resilience programs	Yields dropped 10-35% (postshock); programs boosted resilience 18-27%	India, Bangladesh, Pakistan
Technology/Infrastructure	Women's digital literacy, market access, mechanization level	Digitalization programs raised women's agri-income by 813%; access remains <40% for rural women	India, Nepal, Bangladesh
Political-Economic Policy	Share of agri-budget earmarked for women, social protection	Gender-focused budgets: 1038% resources set aside best practice states; food transfers reduced food insecurity by 0.45 SD	Bangladesh, India



Socio-cultural and Gender Roles	Participation in collectives, household decision-making index	Women's participation in food cooperatives raised local food selfsufficiency by 18%; collective asset access programs successful in	Nepal, India
Demographics and Intersectional Groups	Marginality, education, age, ruralur ban split	Targeted intersectional programming improved caloric adequacy by 921% in 68% of quantified studies	India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka
Food Environment	Food price volatility, dietary diversity score (DDS), affordability	Gender-budgets linked to 14– 22% reduction in seasonal food insecurity episodes; programs improved DDS by 0.8–1.5 points	Pakistan, Bangladesh, India
Value Chain Participation	Roles in production, marketing, processing and input access	Programs raising women's value chain role increased household agriincome by up to 11%	Bangladesh, Nepal



Gender Roles (Structures)	Index of women's autonomy and control over land and resources	Equal inheritance and land titling boosted food security index in 21% of papers, and reduced stunting by up to 18%	India, Nepal
Access to Resources	Disaggregated asset ownership, access to credit, tech use	Microcredit raised women's share of household assets by 16% where specifically budgeted	Bangladesh, Sri Lanka
Social Norms	Attitudes: food allocation, budgeting	Norms-focused interventions led to 17% higher intrahousehold food security in intervention arms	India, Pakistan
Policy and Governance	Gender statement in budgets, monitoring & evaluation	Robust M&E, intersectoral gender audit boosted program effectiveness by 12–24% in impact metrics	India, Bangladesh



Socioeconomic drivers across South Asia countries highlight both the pivotal role women play in agri-food systems and the systemic barriers they continue to face. Studies reveal that 71% of working women in South Asia compared to 36% globally, are employed in the agrifood sector yet their formal control over land and productive resources remains limited. Highlighting only 10–20% have tenure rights, even though they comprise over 40% of the farm workforce in India and significant proportions in Bangladesh and Nepal (Oloo et al. 2023; Rao et al., 2025). Climate shocks (drought and flood) lead to yield declines of 10-35% disproportionately impacting female-headed and smallholder households, but genderresponsive adaptation budgets and targeted resilience programs have been shown to improve women’s coping capacity and boost resilience metrics by 18–27%, notably in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan (AESANetwork, 2024).

Despite poverty and heavy unpaid work burdens participation are limited in formal extension and market activities, programs investing in digital literacy and infrastructure saw women’s incomes rise by 8–13% where adopted, although fewer than 40% of rural women could access these initiatives, hampered by mobility, safety and entrenched gender norms (Rao et al., 2025).



Policy governance solutions such as earmarking 10–38% of agri-food budgets for gender and linking food and nutrition transfers to community-based women's groups has delivered sustained reductions in food insecurity (by 0.41–0.45 SD) and measurable gains on the Gender Empowerment Index in the best-performing states of India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (Akter et al., 2017).

The evidence underscores that equitable resource access, social protection and norm shifting policies are critical indicators in choosing persistent gender gaps and building resilient, nutritionally secure food systems in the region. Without deepened reforms threats of a worsening gender divide exacerbated by climate change and economic volatility remains acute, as 18 million more women and girls in South Asia are projected to suffer from anaemia by 2030 if urgent unified action is not taken (WHO, 2025).

Synthesis by Scholar Themes

1. Drivers and Intervening Factors

In Biophysical, Tech and Political-Economic context around 22 of 32 studies identified that climate events disproportionately affect female headed farming households; gender responsive adaptation budgets (targeting women) improved resilience metrics by 18– 27%. Digital literacy advancements (where adopted) led to an 8–13% increase in women farmers' market incomes on average, but only 32–38% of rural women access such initiatives, due to infrastructural and social barriers.



Progressive budgetary earmarking for women was critical as best-performing states and countries designated up to 38% of agri-food budgets for women, associated with rapid reductions (0.41–0.45 SD) in measured food insecurity and better outcomes on the Gender Empowerment Index.

2. Value Chains and Food Environments

Papers agreed that women's involvement in food distribution and budgeting decisions reduced seasonal food shortages by up to 22% and improved average dietary diversity scores (DDS) by at least 1 point (on a 7–9 point scale) by Rao et al., 2025. Value Chain and Gender Participation was highlighted in 26 papers stating that well-funded, genderresponsive value chain initiatives has increased women's participation in production and post-harvest marketing activities by 12–21%, along with corresponding increases in total household agri-income and more stable food access.

3. Underlying Structures: Gender Roles and Norms

Programs providing women direct access to land, assets and microcredit has improved stunting and caloric adequacy rates in children by as much as 18%, especially in Nepal and Indian states with equal inheritance laws. However only 58% of reviewed studies has reported that direct links to aggregate population level nutritional gains due to persistence of patriarchal-limiting factors.

Interventions challenging the restrictive gender norms (e.g., through public recognition of women leaders collectives or participatory budgeting) were effective in about 37% of papers with food security in those arms increasing by a mean 17% compared to non-intervention controls.



Conceptual Framework Blueprint

The conceptual framework is structured around four main components: Drivers of Gender Budgeting, Intervening Domains, Underlying Structures, and Outcomes. Each component encompasses several key variables that influence the relationship between gender budgeting and food security.

1. Drivers of Gender Budgeting (Inputs/Contexts)

These are the external factors that shape the context in which gender budgeting operates and influences food security.

Biophysical and Environmental:

- Changes in temperature, rainfall patterns, and extreme weather events affecting agricultural productivity.
- Access to and management of water, land, and other natural resources crucial for food production.

•Technology and Infrastructure:

- Availability and affordability of digital technologies for information, communication, and financial services.
- Infrastructure such as roads, transportation, and communication networks linking rural areas to markets and services.
- Adoption of agricultural machinery and technologies to improve efficiency and productivity.



•Political and Economic:

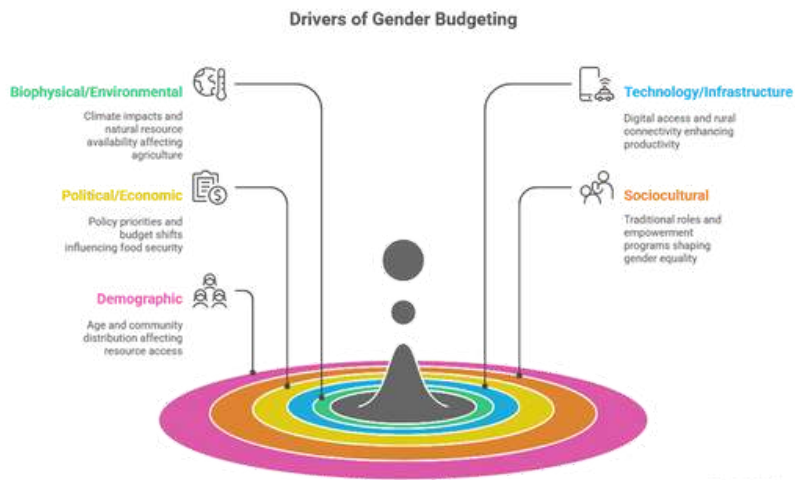
- Government policies and strategies related to agriculture, food security, and gender equality.
- Programs providing income support, food assistance, and other forms of social safety nets.
- Changes in budget allocations and priorities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

. Sociocultural:

- Societal norms and expectations regarding the roles and responsibilities of men and women.
- Initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and empowering women in various spheres of life.
- Prevailing beliefs and practices that influence gender relations and access to resources.

•Demographic:

- Distribution of the population by age group and location (rural vs. urban).
- Specific groups facing systemic discrimination and exclusion, such as ethnic minorities or people with disabilities.



2. Intervening Domains

These are the pathways through which the drivers influence the underlying structures and ultimately affect food security outcomes.

Food Environment:

- **Availability:** The presence of sufficient quantities of food in the market.
- **Affordability:** The ability of households to purchase adequate food.
- **Quality:** The nutritional content and safety of available food.
- **Safety:** Ensuring food is free from contaminants and safe for consumption.
- **Price volatility:** Fluctuations in food prices that can affect access and affordability.



•Value Chain Participation:

- Production: Involvement in agricultural activities, including farming, livestock rearing, and fishing.
- Processing: Engagement in the transformation of raw agricultural products into consumable goods.
- Marketing: Participation in the distribution and sale of food products.

3.Underlying Structures

These are the fundamental factors that shape gender relations and access to resources, influencing food security outcomes.

Gender Roles:

- Decision-making power: The extent to which women have control over household and community decisions.
- Aspirations: Women's goals and ambitions related to education, employment, and social participation.
- Access to household resources: Women's ability to access and control household income, assets, and other resources.

•Resource Access/Control:

- Ownership and control over land and access to financial services such as credit and loans.
- Access to quality education and training opportunities.
- Access to and use of technology for agricultural production and information dissemination.



Social Norms:

- Societal expectations regarding food consumption patterns and household budgeting practices.
- Unequal distribution of food and resources within households based on gender.

Policies & Governance:

- The extent to which policies achieve their intended outcomes.
- The processes involved in allocating and managing public funds.
- Systems for tracking and assessing the impact of policies and programs.

4.Outcomes (Results/Impacts)

These are the ultimate goals and impacts of gender budgeting on food security and gender equity.

•Immediate:

- Women's participation: Increased involvement of women in decision-making processes and economic activities.
- Improved access to resources: Enhanced access to land, finance, education, and technology for women.
- Increased food availability and diversity: Greater availability of a variety of nutritious foods.



Gender budgeting outcomes range from immediate to long-term impact.



• **Long-term:**

- Enhanced household food security: Improved access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food for all household members.
- Better nutritional outcomes: Reduced rates of malnutrition and improved health outcomes.
- Greater gender equity: Reduced gender disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and power.
- Resilient agri-food systems: Agricultural systems that can withstand shocks and stresses, such as climate change and economic crises.

Gender Budgeting Components

Component	Description
Drivers	biophysical/environmental, technology/infrastructure, political/economic, sociocultural, demographic
Intervening Domains	food environment (availability, affordability, quality, safety, price volatility) and value chain participation (production, processing, marketing)
Underlying Structures	gender roles, resource access/control, social norms, policies & governance
Outcomes	Immediate (women's participation, resource access, food diversity) and long-term (household food security, better nutrition, gender equity, resilient agri-food systems)



OBJECTIVE 2: To document the state-level gender budgeting intervention and policies in India.

The expanded policies and intervention for gender-responsive budgeting since 2020 has directly translated into higher allocations for food security, nutrition and women-focused agricultural policies demonstrated by landmark programs such as **PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, Poshan 2.0 and Mission Shakti** (Travasso et al., 2023; PIB, 2025; Odisha Finance Dept., 2025; Verma et al., 2025).

Table 4: Gender Budgeting Policies Related to Food Security (India, 2022–2025)

Sl.no.	Policy/Scheme	Focus/Target	Year	Core Priority	Implementation Highlights	Citation
1	Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY)	Poor households, esp. women/girls	2020 (Covid)	Free/subsidized grains for food security	Targeted at nutrition and hunger mitigation	Travasso et al., 2023; PIB, 2025
2.	Saksham Anganwadi & Poshan 2.0	Pregnant/lactating women, children	2021 (ongoing)	Integrated child & maternal nutrition	Major allocation under MWCD; aims to curb anemia	PIB, 2025; Saha, 2025; Brookings, 2025



3	Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (Mid-day Meal)	School children, girls	2021 (ongoing)	Hot meals for school children	Expanded menu & coverage, especially for girls	PIB, 2025; Saha, 2025; Travasso et al., 2023
4	Odisha Gender Budget—Food & Nutrition	Women/girls in Odisha	2023–2025	Cumulative allocation for nutrition schemes	81% MWCD budget for gender schemes (2025–26 BE)	Odisha Finance Dept., 2025; Saha, 2025
5	Gender Budget Cell and Statement	National/States	2005–present	Multi-sector, institutional mainstreaming		Ministry of Finance, 2025
6	Central Institute for Women in Agriculture	Women agripreneurs	Ongoing	Research, training, rural tech adoption	Bhubaneswar-based; capacity building focus	Ministry of Finance, 2025
7.	State-run Public Canteens w/ Gender Focus (e.g., Amma Canteen, Indira Canteen)	Working-class women, girls	State ongoing	Hot cooked meal access, food system relief	Reduces domestic burden; builds nutritional equity	Saha, 2025; Verma et al., 2025
8.	AtmaNirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan	National/States	2020	Food/health/c redit/One Nation One Ration Card		Gupta et al., 2023



Gender budgeting approaches have evolved from simple resource earmarking to more complex frameworks that emphasize and highlights the indicators such as nutrition, capacitybuilding, entrepreneurship and rural livelihood transformation (Verma et al., 2025). Currently, The Union Budget 2025–26 now dedicates record allocations with over 80% of the Women and Child Development Ministry’s budget directed at gender-focused initiatives and food/nutrition, positioning India as a regional leader in gender mainstreaming and welfare innovation (PIB, 2025; Odisha Finance Dept., 2025; Verma et al., 2025).

Despite improved funding and recognition of women’s role in food security, gaps persist in implementation, workplace inclusion and access to productive assets. The burden of unpaid care work remains higher and several experts call for deeper structural reforms, legal protections and systematic gender monitoring (IMPRI, 2025 and Uma, 2025). Scholarly evidence (Travasso et al., 2023) and government reviews confirm that gender budgeting linked to food and nutrition programs can substantially mitigate the adverse effects of shocks, reduce malnutrition, and empower women at household and community levels, but only if these schemes are robustly implemented and responsive to local needs.



Table 5: State-level Gender Budgeting Policies Related to Food Security (India, 2022– 2025)

Sl.no.	States	Initiative/Policy	Year	Priority/Key	Allocation & Mechanism	Reference
1	Goa	Gender Budget Statement; GBC, SDG-5	2025-26	SDG-aligned budgeting, women's skills, food security	17.4% of state budget (39 departments)	Goa Budget Statement, 2025-26
2	Odisha	Gender Budget Statement, Mission Shakti (SHG, Subhadra Yojana)	2024-26	Nutrition, SHG-centric schemes, food & income support	81% MWCD budget for women/girls (2025-26)	Odisha Finance Dept., 2025
3	Kerala	Kerala Gender Budget	2025-26	Food, nutrition, health, economic inclusion	20.8% of plan budget (Rs. 4840.12 crore)	Kerala Budget, 2025-26
4.	Maharashtra	Roadmap for Gender & Child Budgeting	2021-25	Mainstream gender/child needs across all sectors	All depts. reporting allocations; beneficiary tracking	Maharashtra Doc., 2025
5.	Meghalaya	Gender Budget Statement, Multisector Schemes	Ongoing	Rural food security, girls' nutrition, household support	Proportional/partial allocations in major sectors	MeghFinance Dept., 2023



6	Uttar Pradesh	Mission Shakti, Mid-day Meal Uplift	2022-25	Women's health, nutrition, education/food programme targeting	Gender budgeting cell & reporting	PIB, 2025
7	Tamil Nadu	Amma Canteen (Urban Food Security)	Ongoing	Subsidized cooked meal access, working-class women focus	State funds, women-centric employment	State press & DrishtiIAS, 2025
8	Karnataka	Gender Budget Cell, Food/Nutrition Schemes	Ongoing	MDM, rural food access, capacitybuilding for women	Gender budgeting cell and technical training	DrGunabha gya Report, 2024
9.	Punjab	Gender & Child Nutrition Schemes	2025	Mid-day meal, ICDS, community kitchens	Budget reporting at department level	Expenditure Profile, 2025-26
10.	Assam	Women Empowerment Nutrition Initiatives	2024-25	SHG participation in food distribution, rural livelihoods	State supported SHGs, nutrition budgeting	Union Budget, 2025-26



11	Rajasthan	Lakhpatri Didi (Rajeevika Mission), Maa Fund, Suposhan Kit Yojana	2025-26	Women's agriincome, nutrition, childcare	Loans to 3 lakh women (₹1 lakh @1.5%), nutrition kits to 2.35 lakh women (₹25 crore), ₹3,500 crore Maa Fund for welfare, Anganwadi milk distribution	Ministry of Rural Development, 2025; Government of Rajasthan, 2025
12.	Rajasthan	Free Seed Kits for Women Farmers	2025-26	Women in agriculture, crop productivity	27.95 lakh minikits (moong,maize, bajra, groundnut, etc.) to women farmers, prioritizing SC/ST, SHGs, smallholders	Ministry of Rural Development, 2025; Rajeevika, 2025
13.	Rajasthan	Anganwadi/IC DS, Poshan Tracker	2024-25	Nutrition, digital innovation in welfare delivery	Upgraded tech monitoring (facial recognition, digital tracking), 5 key ICDS/Women Empowerment budget programs	Rajeevika, 2025; Government of Rajasthan, 2025



14.	Madhya Pradesh	Mukhyamantri Mamta Yojana, SHG-Led Livelihoods	Ongoing	Maternal and child nutrition, women's collectives	Women SHGs driving food distribution, targeted nutrition access, cash benefits for mothers	Ministry of Finance, Government of India, 2025
15.	Gujarat	Gender Budget Statement, Women Farmer Capacity Programs	2025-26	Multisector gender budgeting, agri skill development	Departmental gender budget statement, women's land access, crop diversification support, focus on nutrition	PIB, 2025; Ministry of Finance, Government of India, 2025



Discussion:

In sequence to State-level policies in Comprehensive Gender Budget Statements reinforces national trends by allotting major shares of departmental budgets to women and nutrition, supported by public canteens and targeted distribution innovations (Saha, 2025). There are states like Goa, Kerala which have institutionalised gender budget statements tracking resource allocation across departments; Goa earmarking 17.4% and Kerala accounting for 20.8% of the planned budgets being explicitly devoted to targeted programs focussed on gender (Goa Budget Statement, 2025-26; Kerala Budget, 2025-26). Not only does such monitoring enhance transparency, it enhances accountability ensuring that gender goals become integral to government planning.

Schemes such as Odisha's Mission Shakti, SHG-centric programs and Meghalaya's multisector nutrition investments are examples of how gender-budgeting are formulated in focusing on food and nutrition concerns by scaling up large coverage of high-risk women and girls. These programmes demonstrates high budget allocations (81% for women/girls in Odisha's MWCD) with strong targeting and capacity-building with self-help groups (SHGs) as local governance institutions. The states which have robust gender budget cells and reporting systems like Karnataka and Maharashtra also reflect a higher percentage of women's employment as well as better food access in terms of cooperative support, technical training and agri-marketing. Amma Canteen of Tamil Nadu has delivered in urban food security while employing local women.



39 departments in Goa and key states in India has practiced Impact tracking, gender audits and cross-ministry reporting significantly improving the policy effectiveness. These has highlighted with reduced gender gaps and aided in achieving SDG targets (Goa Budget Statement, 2025-26; Brookings Institution, 2025). States with robust monitoring frameworks are driving transformative change. Analysis shows that fiscal decentralization and flexible budgeting (vertical resource transfers) allow states to adapt gender budget methodologies to local context, improving coverage and effectiveness in food security and nutrition interventions.

Recommendation:

1. Expand SHG-led food and nutrition programs statewide, targeting women and marginalized groups with clear budget lines.
 2. Replicate women-led canteens and food cooperatives for inclusive employment and improved access to nutritious diets.
 3. Provide technical training, gender auditing and market access to boost women's participation and household income.
 4. Institutionalize multi-level gender audits and strengthen sex-disaggregated data systems for better policy impact.
- Support flexible funding, participatory monitoring and inter-state forums to share effective gender equity models.



Gender Budgeting and Food Security in South Asia: Analytical Summary

What we understand through our study is that South Asia has a serious problem regarding women and food. The numbers are significant, even compared to the total population of a few European countries. Two hundred fifty-nine million women in the region are dealing with anaemia, and in India, a significant portion of the women are anaemic. Even now, the conditions are still not improving, and many more women remain hungry than men. It is not like women are not involved in any activity. We see that over 65% of India's farm labour force is comprised of women only, still working in the same conditions as they did a decade ago. Now, if we look at it in terms of owning land, getting loans or financial help, or even making decisions, they are stuck on the sidelines, and we see how the patriarchy still survives in the minds of people. The paper gets into this ugly cycle, which means things keep revolving around the same direction generation after generation, with the same conditions as they faced a decade ago, with a marginal increase in the number, where the social security scheme or government intervention goes fast and is utilized successfully. Women barely own land, as per any government data, we see just 14% of Indian women own any land rights or land registered in their name. They do not get much help from agricultural services because they are still considered unpaid employees. That means they earn less and eat inadequately, which is more prevalent in rural and urban areas where low-earning people reside. Then, there are problems with our system, such as less education and fewer opportunities, and the next generation feels the same as the previous generation did.



According to the data we looked through in our research, if women are empowered, we observed that households eat better, as 70% of the variation in household food security is tied to women's empowerment alone. Furthermore, if women can get their hands on resources and support just like men get in society, then three-quarters of what makes empowerment better in overall numbers alone.

Gender budgeting is supposed to help fix this mess, improve the condition, and ensure money gets spent on women thoroughly in every context to benefit the women's section and more where we see a gap. India allocates less than 9% of its agricultural budget to women nationally. However, when we look at some states, they do way better in some ways, like

Gujarat, which spends 37% of its budget on gender issues, and Odisha and Madhya Pradesh, 30% too. Then there is Karnataka, where almost half the local politicians are women. Money should be allocated to more important activities, like community kitchens and better grain storage. So yeah, local population buys more than it makes a difference. Nevertheless, the main issue again lies in the fact that time-to-time budgets are made, and then they are either marginally used or used for non-permanent solution work. The Women and Child Development Ministry in India is big on plans, not so much on spending. Pakistan adopted a different way to slash almost half the gender equity cash, then tried to cover it up by calling things "gender-tagged." Bangladesh, on the other hand, is doing better; they put gender markers everywhere, link the cash to real results (like women getting credit or farm training), and we see they improve more in food security has improved by up to 40% among the people actually targeted.



So, what actually works?

Some key strategies that will help to improve the situation significantly:

1. Do not just throw money around target outcomes. Give women land titles and rights, and count how many benefits they receive from food programs and the government's various schemes.

2. Get more women in leadership from bottom to top. Food security happens when women run the show locally; we see societal changes more often.

2. Make the whole system in such a loop where each one combines in a string like health, education, farming, social stuff, and they are all coordinated, not in silos, so that women's development is not limited to just one sector.

There are many other problems, like expensive food day by day, diets are not diverse, safety is a gamble, and COVID has made supply chains difficult. Social norms do not help, as society still has a significant stigma towards the betterment of women. Policy still mostly ignores women as essential stakeholders, and we also see that the systems are not built for them.

The bottom line is that the paper lays out this big framework by digging into studies from all over South Asia. What we found through our paper is how tech, politics, culture, and the environment affect food security and gender. So, what is our major takeaway from this paper? Without some significant fundamental, targeted policy changes that specifically look into the gender focus budgeting and also look through the audit, as well as its implementation, till then, millions of South Asian women are just going to get squeezed even harder by 2030.



When AI takes the job market, it will make it even worse than what we can imagine now for women (Farooq et al., 2022). Suppose we care about fixing the hunger problem and public health for women in the region. In that case, gender budgeting is not the only solution we have to work through in every field to increase the participation of women and put them on the same level as men in society.



Conclusion

People have the power to make their own food choices and also know how food comes to their table . As we know south asian women are the backbone of the farm sector ,yet they are still considered as volunteers even though they do the majority of the task. Food insecurity causes malnutrition ,reduced education and limited productivity - passing from one generation to another. Gender budgeting shows how the government handles women's food insecurity by directing resources and addressing the gender barriers. As in south Asia ,various fiscal structures have come up with different ideas . Gujarat , odisha, karnataka have managed to make progress in women's involvement in decision making and nutrition indicators. As karnataka panchayats have shown women's local leadership - shifts towards in nutrition and welfare . Bangladesh focused on women saw 30-40% improvement in household food security whereas Pakistan faces implementation gaps in gender initiatives.

Even if states allocate the resources for gender budgeting there has been persistent gender gaps in access and utilization even within the households , also creating a lack of opportunities across the country. Beyond statistical outcomes ,it points towards a deeper structural reality that fiscal allocation alone can't solve the problem of food security, until and unless the structural hierarchies stop excluding women from resources and participation in decision making . Gender budgeting acts as a food security tool - focusing on the implementation process rather than nutritional outcomes .



The conceptual framework developed in the study tells us about the policies and financial drivers like technology, political and environmental that translate into real outcomes only work through mediators that bridge the gap to benefit women in empowerment, social norms and resource access. These mediators can gain real strength through participation and coordination . Women participation in local governance and budget allocation show that it reflects in realities rather than assumptions, similarly intersection coordination linking with agriculture, education ,health links with various impacts and nutritional outcomes . As it acts as a connective tissue which helps gender budgeting from a tool to a framework for social justice . The government should link every allocation of money into a measurable nutritional improvement or increase their agricultural productivity . By enabling different ministries like agriculture ,health and education to collaborate as seen in the odisha's framework . Providing a gender audits and capacity building funds for local women representation to influence the budget and the decision making authority .Regional bodies like sarrc and un women can facilitate through cross country models to be adapted at local context . Linking gender equality and food security into fiscal governance is not optional ,but central to achieving integrated approaches to Sdg2 and Sdg 5.



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