

## **Summary**

# **Gender Budget Perspectives on Macro and Meso Policies in Small Urban Manufacturies: Gendered Reality of Workers in Greater Mumbai**

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The study attempts to provide a gender budget critique of the impact of altered macro and meso policies over the last decade as specifically related to the all-important and under-studied 'hard' sector of industries in the context of declining employment opportunities located in the concrete gendered reality of urban small-scale manufacturies. The major concern therefore centres on both quantitative and qualitative State policy objectives translated into government expenditure, and, of necessity, incorporating an evaluation of the very concept underlying applicable employment schemes.

Macro policies during the last decade have negatively impacted the three sectors of overall industry, manufacturing and small-scale units in both the nation and the state. The growth rates of small-scale industries (SSIs) have fallen not only in terms of units and employment, but also output. Even so, this sector has managed to survive somewhat better than the others. This is not because it has been less negatively impacted, but primarily because its survival is based on its conversion into a 'captive' sector.

The State has tended to neglect the increased potential of the development of the already proven productivity and employment possibility of the labour-intensive SSI sector. Also, gendered policy commitments have generally remained mere rhetoric in the specific context of the reality of increasing unemployment and poverty particularly in urban areas.

Apart from examining several layers of state as well as civil budgets over a 13-year span, fieldwork has been conducted in 109 small-scale units situated in 33 Industrial Estates in half of all geographical locations in Greater Mumbai. 446 workers were interviewed, about 47 per cent of them women; a gender-comparative perspective was consciously utilized in order to analyze relative locations in the industrial production process as well as the structured hierarchy of the urban manufacturing labour market as it operates today.

SSIs do not restrict themselves to manufacturing only one product; the majority, in fact, fabricates several items at one time. The fundamental restriction is in relation to the material utilized in the process of production. 92.8 percent of these workers are, as they say, '100 percent temporary'. All are, without exception, given a 'holiday' once a week, this unpaid day-off doubling up as a break-in-service.

Gender based differentials exist quite sharply at several levels. Over two-thirds of women workers are unmarried mainly because there are no male earners in their households,

particularly due to retrenchment and unemployment. Owners, of course, prefer unmarried women workers for predictable reasons.

Contrary to popular belief, almost all women are involved in direct production activities and not packaging alone. Gender based division of labour is ignored when production tasks are to be performed, men and women multi-tasking equally. Specialization of labour appears to have been almost totally subsumed under macro processes that demand multi-tasking from captive small-scale manufactories.

The issues of urban unemployment and poverty are much more complex, particularly in the context of a region that has historically witnessed the first-ever mass participation of women in the manufacturing sector. The operative macro as well as meso policies which have driven both men and women out of the formal sector and increased 'flexibility' in the labour market, have also restricted the implementation of all forms of labour legislation.

The prevailing perspective on gendered economic empowerment is that of resignedly accepting the shrinking of employment opportunities outside the home, of withdrawing from the 'outside' world, and ultimately of restricting particularly women within their homes through policies concentrating almost exclusively on micro-credit and self-employment. Here too, however, the seriousness of the issue seems to be increasingly ignored, as reflected in declining budget allocations aimed at improving workers' situations; women's welfare, of course, is perceived as a virtual non-issue.

The issue of micro-credit needs to be perceived in a holistic manner, incorporating emerging conceptual and empirical issues. There appears to be an increasing shift towards depending on micro finance as the major method rather than as only one of the several components of empowerment policy. Without in any way suggesting that micro-finance should be withdrawn, it is crucial to revert this conception.

Gendered State Plans and policies are inherently problematic as they reduce the concept of empowerment to 'upliftment', and therefore also tend to trivialize women-centric strategies. The approach is primarily 'top-down', with women being perceived as a 'weak' group of puppets who need to be lifted up with the strings of policy 'intervention'. Equally problematic is the approach that views women as 'targets' who are aimed at in order to fulfill 'goals'. The concept of empowerment essentially implies the mobilization and participation of women in their own development; also, empowerment comprises of the two interlinked components of purpose and process which women themselves need to be involved in.

Men and especially women workers apparently have an increasingly diminished role to play in the prevailing dominant 'development' paradigm; even worse, they are thrown into the arena of an unregulated, erratic and insecure labour market that is becoming increasingly inegalitarian and therefore ultimately anti-growth in the short, medium and long run. The implication should by no means be perceived as a romanticization of the past, but that the process of denial is being reinforced.

Consequently, the central aspect of gender budget analysis is not only the expansion of allocations, but also the rescheduling of public means and expenditures in order to facilitate entry into a new nonpartisan expanding labour market that guarantees secure and decent employment to both men and women based on a transformation of the very fundamentals of development.