

## Press Release

### ***Civil society groups urge the Finance Minister to address the pressing need for enhancing resources and strengthening accountability measures across social sectors***

**New Delhi; 12 January 2016:** As part of the pre-budget consultations on Union Budget 2016-17, the Finance Minister met representatives of a number of groups working on social sector issues today. More than fifteen civil society networks, campaigns and development sector organisations took part in this meeting and highlighted key priorities at the current juncture for sectors and issues ranging from agriculture, food security and social security for unorganized workers to education, health, drinking water and sanitation, among others. The civil society groups not only stressed the need for stepping up public investment in these crucial sectors, they also gave a number of suggestions for enhancing transparency and accountability in public provisioning in these sectors. The need for special attention and adequate resources in the Union Budget for the vulnerable sections of population also got underscored in today's discussion, which is all the more important in the context of the Union Government recognizing the interventions for vulnerable sections as a top priority in the national development agenda.

**Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability**, which made a submission on behalf of a network of CSOs working on budget related issues called the ***People's Budget Initiative***, highlighted the need for greater budgetary support from the Union Government for social sector programmes even after the recent changes in Centre-State sharing of resources, as the increased autonomy to States (in terms of the higher proportion of untied resources within their budgets) has been accompanied by substantial reductions in resource support to States for Plan spending. While all States have gained more autonomy now in setting their budgetary priorities, some of the States such as, Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, are heavily dependent on Central transfers for mobilizing resources for their State Budgets; given the stronger need for increasing public investment in social sectors in these States, it is necessary that the Union Government does not reduce the priority for social sector programmes in its budgets.

Preliminary analysis of some of the State Budgets and Supplementary Budgets for 2015-16 indicates that States like Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha have increased the priority (in terms of the share of a sector in the total State Budget) for sectors like *Energy* and *Public Works*, while the priority for *Rural Development and Panchayati Raj* sector appears to have declined in the State Budgets of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. In terms of the various social sector programmes, *Integrated Child Development Services*, *SABLA*, *Mid-Day Meal*, and *National Rural Drinking Water Programme* have been adversely affected in terms of the overall budget allocations in a number of poorer States in 2015-16. Hence, the Union Ministry of Finance needs to provide adequate resources for social sector schemes in general, and the schemes identified above in particular, both in the Revised Estimates for 2015-16 and the Budget Estimates for 2016-17, said **Subrat Das** of Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability.

**Dipa Sinha**, representing the Right to Food Campaign, said although the National Food Security Act provides for a universal maternity entitlement for all pregnant women, the entitlement is currently being provided in only 53 districts (the pilot districts under *Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana*). Citing the affidavit filed by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development in the Supreme Court, which stated that it would universalize the scheme in three years starting with 200 districts in the current year, she urged Union Budget 2016-17 for adequate provisions to cover this in at least 200 districts this year, with a plan to ensure

universalization within three years' time. **Neeraj Jain**, WaterAid said that the government needs to acknowledge the importance of drinking water and make adequate allocations in the forthcoming Union Budget, which lost focus after Swachh Bharat Mission being discussed at length.

On behalf of Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, **Ravi Duggal** urged for adequate budgetary provision for free medicines and diagnostics at all public healthcare facilities and filling up the vacancies in frontline health service providers; he added that even the Indian Public Health Standards, which are less than optimal, are far from being reached and huge vacancies (of doctors, specialists, nurses, paramedics) across the country are hampering the functioning of the public health system and eroding its credibility. Drawing attention to the Kothari Commission recommendation for stepping up public spending on education to six percent of GDP, **Ambarish Rai** of Right to Education Forum asked for Union Budget allocations to be stepped up significantly for enabling the recruitment of trained and qualified teachers and training them as per the provisions of the RTE Act. In view of the adverse impact of budget cuts on children's schemes, **Komal Ganotra**, CRY said that there is an urgent need to increase allocations for Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), on interventions to improve secondary education and for Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)

Drawing attention to the fact that 2015 has been a very difficult year for the farmers with extremes of weather conditions subjecting millions of farmers either to drought or to floods/heavy rains/hailstorms, **Sandeep Chachra** of ActionAid India sought greater emphasis in the forthcoming budget for the small and marginal farmers, tenants and share croppers with focus on rainfed areas; he argued for adequate budgetary provisions to be made for agricultural research, extension services, credit, seeds, water and soil conservation, market, support price, and infrastructure support. **Paul Divakar** of National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights stressed the significance of *Scheduled Caste Sub Plan* and *Tribal Sub Plan* in reducing social inequalities in the country and appealed the Finance Minister to push for proper implementation of these important policy strategies by the Union Government ministries. Sonali Khan of Breakthrough pointed to the need for substantive interventions for prevention and effective redressal of violence against women, and urged the Union Government to supplement the efforts of the States in this domain by providing adequate budgetary outlays in the forthcoming Union Budget.

While making a strong case for stepping up substantially the budgetary resources for social sectors, the civil society representatives also outlined the strong need for enhancing budget transparency across the country, especially at the district and sub-district level so as to facilitate community engagement and social accountability in development programmes and schemes. As funds provided by the Union Government in all Central schemes are flowing through the Treasury System in the States (since 2014-15), it is now possible for the Treasury Office in a District to publish in timely manner information on budgets, which is locally relevant in the district concerned. In this context, **Subrat Das** of Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability urged the Union Government to encourage the States to enhance transparency in fund flow and fund utilisation at the district level by putting out in public domain *timely, relevant, and accessible / usable* information on fund flow and fund utilisation at regular intervals during the course of the year.

- *People's Budget Initiative* (PBI)- a coalition of around 400 civil society organisations from across the country,  
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