



Right to Food Campaign

Secretariat

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Women and Children Ignored in Union Budget 2021-22

The Right to Food Campaign is dismayed to see that, at a time of growing hunger and malnutrition, the Union Budget 2021 has actually reduced allocations for crucial social security schemes such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), midday meals, maternity entitlements, and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA).

The revised budget estimates for 2020-21 show that ICDS and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) suffered greatly because of the lockdown and closing of anganwadi centres. The revised estimate for PMMVY (₹1,300 crore) is barely half of what was allocated for the programme for 2020-21. That itself was low as the scheme covers only the first child, with a reduced benefit of ₹5000, while the National Food Security Act entitles all pregnant women to a maternity benefit of at least ₹6000 per child.

In the 2021-22 budget, ICDS and PMMVY have been clubbed with other schemes, but comparing like with like, it is clear that both programmes have been undermined (see Annexure). The budget allocation for midday meals is pretty much the same in 2021-22 as in 2020-21, and if anything, lower in real terms. The 2021-22 budget for the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) was copy-pasted from the 2020-21 budget, and is also lower in real terms. The budget includes an allocation of ₹1,000 crores for the women and children of Assam and Bengal's tea gardens, but no details are provided on how this money is to be utilized.

It is also disappointing to see that there is no announcement in the budget to expand the Public Distribution System (PDS) to include those who are excluded from the NFSA, to update the population estimates to calculate NFSA coverage, or to include items such as edible oil and pulses. While it seems like the food subsidy has increased, this is only a reflection of the central government finally paying the FCI for the grains distributed over the last few years.

As the recent Hunger Watch survey indicates, even after the lockdown was lifted, distress among marginalized communities continues, with people having lower incomes and reduced food consumption. Even before the lockdown, nutrition levels had stopped improving for some time now, judging from the initial results of the fifth National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5).

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was crucial in providing some wage employment in rural areas. There is an urgent need to increase the guarantee of work of 200 days per year and also to increase the wage rates. But the 2021-22 allocation for NREGA is only ₹73,000 crores (as compared to the revised estimate of ₹1,15,000 for 2020-21).

In this context, what is required are much higher allocations for all these schemes to meet the following demands:

1. The PDS should be universalized. Pulses and edible oil should also become legal entitlements under the PDS, and should be procured at the Minimum Support Price (MSP).
2. Provision of additional food rations under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) should continue for another year.
3. Hot cooked meals under ICDS and midday meals should be revived immediately. The budgets for these programmes should make adequate provisions for inclusion of eggs in the meals.
4. Hot cooked meals should extend to children under three years of age through crèches and to pregnant and lactating women through community kitchens.
5. Maternity entitlements should be universalized and made unconditional. The amount of benefit should be increased to at least ₹6,000 per child, as per the provisions of NFSA.
6. Central government contribution for social security pensions should increase at least to ₹2,000.
7. Allocation for NREGA should be increased to provide at least 200 days of work per year to all rural households seeking employment, at least at the statutory minimum wage.
8. All workers providing care work, such as Anganwadi Workers and Helpers, ASHAs, should be provided with at least the minimum wage and decent working conditions.

Annexure

	BE 2020	RE 2020	BE 2021
Umbrella ICDS -Anganwadi Services	20532.4	17252.3	
Poshan Abhiyan	3700	600	
Scheme for Adolescent Girls	250	50	
National Creche Scheme	75	15	
Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0 (Umbrella ICDS: Anganwadi Services, Poshan Abhiyan, Scheme for Adolescent Girls, National Crèche Scheme)	24557.4	17917.3	20105
Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana	2500	1300	
Mahila Shakti Kendra	100	15	
Beti Bachao Beti Padhao	220	100	
Gender Budgeting and Research, Publication and Monitoring	8	3	
SAMARTHYA (Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana/ Gender Budgeting/Research/Skill Training etc.)	2828	1418	2522
Midday Meal Scheme	11000	12900	11500
National Social Assistance Programme (old age, widow and disability pensions)	9196.92	11660.24	9200