



Ramification of Gender Budgeting on Gender Equality towards Achieving SDG 5: The Assam Experience

Chhanda Biswas¹, Indranil Roy², Diya Dey³

¹ Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Arya Vidyapeeth college (Autonomous), Assam, India

² Department of Economics, Gauhati University, Assam, India

³ Department of Economics, Arya Vidyapeeth College (Autonomous), Assam, India

Abstract

The concept of gender equality is not a contemporary one. It is a concept that has evolved through the various experiences it has experienced throughout its long-lived history to the form that we witness today. The feminist movement, which is one of the key pioneers of the theme of gender equality, has accelerated and evolved into its fourth wave that had initially originated back in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The modern notion of the feminist movement massively focuses upon the elements of economic justice & equality, digital awareness, reproductive rights, and health, and the same is endorsed by the sustainable development goals 5. It is worth noting that the achievement of these objectives demands strong economic endorsements, and in the absence of economic assistance and aids, these objectives shall remain far beyond reach. One vital economic instrument that shall prominently fuel the operations is the concept of "gender budgeting." This subject matter focuses on utilizing a country's budget as a tool to address gender inequality by channelling essential economic resources into relevant initiatives. While gender budgeting covers a broad range of issues, the key areas of concern include health, education, and the gap in employment and income opportunities. With special allusion to Assam, this study shall utilize a quantitative analysis approach fueled with data sourced from secondary sources so as to analyse the trends of the gender budget with a limelight upon the elements of health, education, and employment. Subsequently, appropriate conclusions shall be drawn, and the same shall be evaluated simultaneously with trends of demographic vitals so as to deduce the implications of the trends of gender budgeting elements upon the evolving dynamics of these vitalities. At the termination, requisite conclusions are drawn outlining the ramification of gender budgeting on gender equality towards achieving SDG 5.

Keywords: Gender budgeting, gender equality, sustainable development goal 5

Introduction

Gender disparity has a long history of limiting women's access to education, health, politics, and employment opportunities. Though global movements have improved the situation, still there persist significant disparities in wages, labour force and other resources. In the contemporary times, Gender discrimination across various field has drawn major attention of the society. With the Indian society being a dynamic one, the severity of this issue is being realised with the increasing adoption of modernism and relinquishing traditional superstitions. Despite this realisation, substantial efforts are needed to be made in this aspect, as the situation still remains majorly grim. With special allusion to India, the GDI indicates towards numerous persistent inequalities. Women face challenges like low literacy rates, low wages despite similar workloads, and underrepresentation in politics. Noteworthy, this disparity is not concentrated to a few fields, but to all major ones. However, with consistent efforts of the government and society, the GDI is improving at a steady rate, yet inequalities in economic and politics remain significant as of now. Amongst the major instruments utilised by the government to address this issue, gender budgeting withholds crucial importance and plays a significant role in addressing the gap. Several schemes of Government of India like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao; MUDRA Yojana; Janani Suraksha Yojana; Mission Indradhanush, and Reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions forms a prime constituent of Gender budgeting aiming to address this challenge. Noteworthy, this approach aligns with the Sustainable Development Goal

(SDG -5) which aims to bring gender equality and empower females. However, the efficacy of this approach is to be analysed with special allusion to Assam and the same can be evaluated by comparing the relative trends of gender budgeting expenditure and trends of demographic indicators. The trend of demographic indicators is bound to be influenced by Gender budgeting and the relative observation shall unveil the aggregate efficiency of gender budgeting in addressing the issue of Gender disparity. Nonetheless, strengthening the gender budgeting and policy implications are crucial for bridging disparaging and achieving sustainable development. This analysis shall highlight the opportunities, potential outcomes, ramifications, and any essential steps that should be taken to improve the effectiveness of gender budgeting in achieving SDG-5.

Literature Review

The idea of gender budgeting has been extensively discussed for quite some time, with various elements being assessed in light of the reduction of gender inequality. For instance, a study by (Del Gesso, 2019) ^[1], which sought to investigate the incorporation of a gender perspective into the budgeting processes of Italian regional governments, identified four essential thematic areas relevant to different sectors that require attention with a focus on gender issues. These areas included promoting women's employment, advancing equal gender opportunities, improving social inclusion, and addressing gender-based violence. In Accordance to (Kumari, 2024) ^[7], if the Indian experience is

taken into consideration, gender budgeting was introduced in India as early as 2005, with Bihar being one of the first states to adopt it in 2008-09. They assert that the Government of Bihar has taken various initiatives in budget allocation to improve the condition of women and reduce gender gaps to ensure gender equality, which however is not sufficient to address the concurrent detriments. It is claimed that gender budgeting holds significant promise in advancing the United Nations 2030 Agenda, particularly in terms of promoting gender equality and empowering women. It is to be noted that, to achieve substantially more impactful outcomes, policies must be combined with a stronger focus on raising awareness among the general public and women in particular, so that they are aware of their important rights if the advantages of these programs are to be truly realized. In conclusion, the significance and necessity of gender budgeting in the contemporary era are suitably assessed. However, analysis and evaluations regarding the relationship between gender budgeting and SDG:5 with special emphasis on demographic vitals are still remarkably lacking. Thus, this research paper aims to fill the potential research gap by analysing the impact of gender budgeting on SDG:5, with a special emphasis upon the demographic vitals.

Objectives

1. To evaluate the trends of various aspects of Gender Budgeting and their impact on the changing trends of Demographic Vitals with special allusion to Assam
2. The evaluate the significance of these approaches in fostering the attainment of SDG:5

Methodology

The objective of this study is to assess how gender budgeting impacts GDI and gender equality with regard to achieving SDG:5. Both statistical approaches for facts and data-driven research are utilized for research purposes with

the aim to discover patterns throughout time. Secondary data is majorly utilized with appropriate precautions in place to prevent any potential complications. Microsoft Excel has been utilized to carry perform and compute necessary operations in order to analyse the collected data and derive relevant conclusions. Additionally, they incorporated the use of suitable illustrations for analysis.

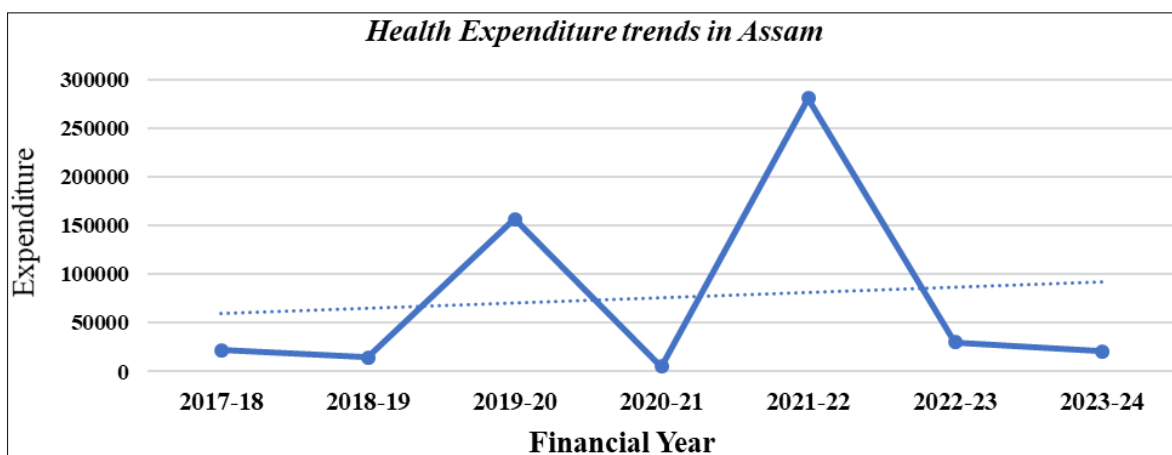
Findings and Analysis

The concept of Gender Budgeting is a vast and extensive one, withholding a diverse array of subject matters. Amongst the various aspects of Gender Budgeting, the components that shall be evaluated and emphasized upon are the expenditures on Health, education and skill & employment. The analysis of these components shall facilitate the evaluation of the impact of Gender Budgeting on the key demographic vitals that are crucial for the achievement of Sustainable development Goal 5 in India. It is to be noted that, the components are shortlisted and analysed ensuring appropriate conceptual alignment with the deemed demographic modules, so as to obtain appropriate and suitable outcomes.

Analysis of Expenditure of The Vital Sectors

a. Expenditure on Health

Fostering a prosperous health is one of the most crucial requirements in addressing the issue of Gender disparity. A grim health is a serious hindrance in the achievement of Gender equality. While proper diet and health consciousness withholds immense importance in fostering a prosperous health, the availability of adequate infrastructure for the treatment of ailments is vital in restoration of a degraded health, subject to the procurement of a disease. The expenses data pertaining to this aspect, accounts for the expense of the health department. The expenditure trends of this sector that were incurred throughout the deemed timeline can be graphically observed:



Source: Gender Budget of Assam

Fig 1: Line Graph for health expenditure trend in Assam

The expenditure curve indicates towards an irregular expenditure. Since FY 2019-20, the health expenditure had steeply declined and had almost flatlined in 2020-21. However, in FY 2021-22, the expenditure again surged, following which it witnessed an ever-declining trend as of FY 2023-24. This can be attributed to the influence of COVID-19, which may have fueled the complete diversion of the budgetary resources towards the general expenses

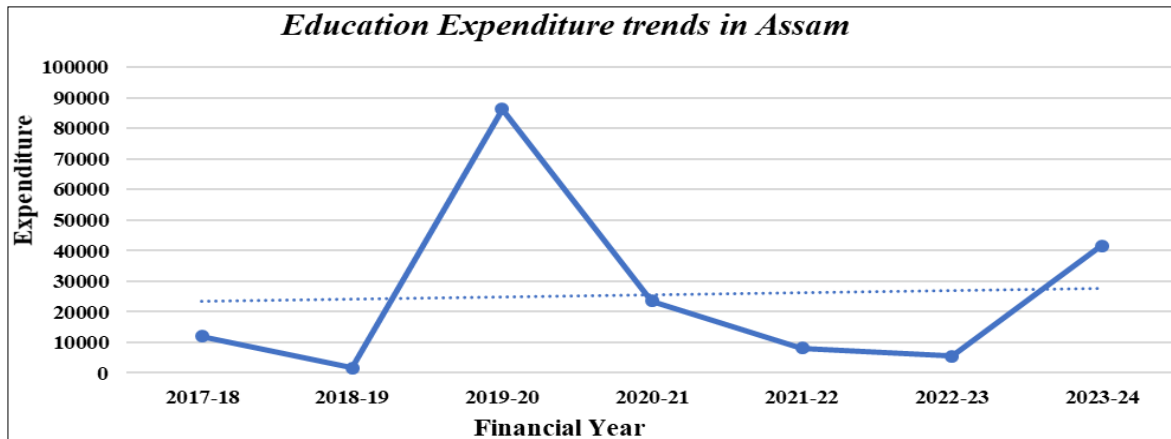
leading to a declining gender budget expense. Another aspect of the same should be bought into focus, wherein post- 2020 the diversion is undertaken so as to develop the overall health infrastructure which is however not detrimental as far as the aspect of gender disparity is concerned, as an aggregate development of the health infrastructure shall cast a trickledown effect and shall benefit the entire public irrespective of gender. Nonetheless,

even though the gender budget expenses have taken major falls, several women centric schemes have been rolled out in Assam. For instance, “Wage Compensation Scheme for Pregnant Women in Tea Garden Areas (2018)” which Provides ₹15,000 in four instalments to pregnant women in tea garden areas (up to two children, age 18+), supporting their health and nutrition without affecting their livelihood, “Sanjeevani – Village Health Outreach Programme (2018)” which Deployed 80 Mobile Health Units across Assam to deliver basic diagnostics and medicines for lifestyle diseases, improving rural healthcare access etc. Moreover, the linear expected expenditure trendline indicates towards

an optimistic future with the presence of a possibility of increments in expenditure. Thus, though gender budget in case of health has declined, the situation is not too vulnerable or alarming.

b. Expenditure on Education

Education is one of the most vital sectors as far as gender budgeting is concerned. Improvements in this sector shall facilitate elimination of gender disparity with ease. The expenditure trend of the education sector is demonstrated via the following diagram:



Source: Gender Budget of Assam

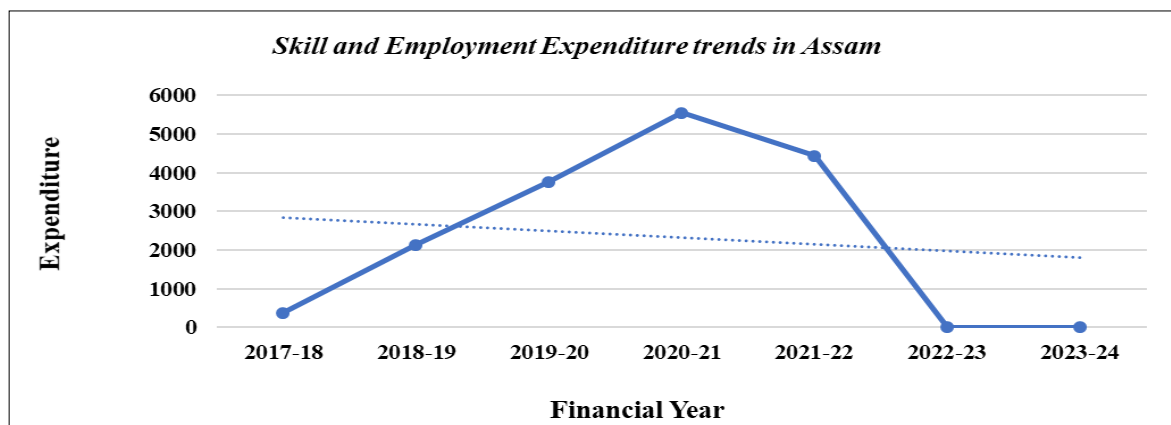
Fig 2: Line Graph for education expenditure trend in Assam

The diagram indicates that the expenditure on education has witnessed significant increments in the recent years. This can be owed to the various policies of the government which facilitated in addressing the issue gender disparity. For instance, The Mukhya Mantri Nijut Moina Scheme (MMNM) is an initiative by the Assam Government, aims to reduce school dropout rates and resist child marriages by providing financial assistance to girls. Under this scheme, girls enrolling in class XI with receive assistance of Rs.10,000; for first-year undergraduate courses Rs. 12,500; and for postgraduate courses Rs.15,000. This scheme aims to benefit 10 Lakh girl students across the state. Other than this, the Sukanya Samriddhi Scheme as a part of the national Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao scheme, Scooty distribution, and many such initiatives is been taken by the Assam government. These initiatives are expected to majorly benefit the female students of the states and sustaining a

higher enrolment into educational institutions, thus facilitating major surges in the literacy rates. This is an optimistic observation wherein, a flourishing literacy amongst the girls shall enable a smoother achievement of gender parity.

c. Expenditure on Skill and Employment

Upskilling women and providing them financial independence through employment is one of the most proficient approach to facilitate and foster the steady achievement of gender equality. The expenses data pertaining to this aspect, accounts for the expense of the Skill, Employment & Entrepreneurship Department. The expenditure trends of this sector that were incurred throughout the contemplated timeline can be graphically observed:



Source: Gender Budget of Assam

Fig 3: Line Graph for skill and employment expenditure trend in Assam

The trends of the skill and employment expenses reflects that, since FY 2017-18, the expenditure on skill and employment has steadily incremented and it reaches it peak in FY 2020-21. However, since then, the expenditure has steeply fallen and gets flatlined in FY 2022-23 with no improvement in the following financial Year. This changing trend since FY 2021-22 may be the outcome of operation of a number of factors. However, the most probable and weighted justification of the trend can be attributed to the fact that, the Government of Assam has undertaken a significant policy shift wherein it has ceased to allocate funds to specific departments and divert them towards specialised schemes aiming to directly address the objectives. The crucial and significant ones that are worth mentioning are the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan, Mukhya Mantri Nijut Moina (MMNM) Scheme and the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan (MMUA). These schemes, launched in 2023, August 2024 and January 2024 respectively are some flagship schemes aiming towards women employment and may be the potential factor fuelling the cease of department centric fund allocation. Thus, subsequently, if this policy shift persists, the analysis of the trendline concerning the expenses of Skill, Employment & Entrepreneurship Department

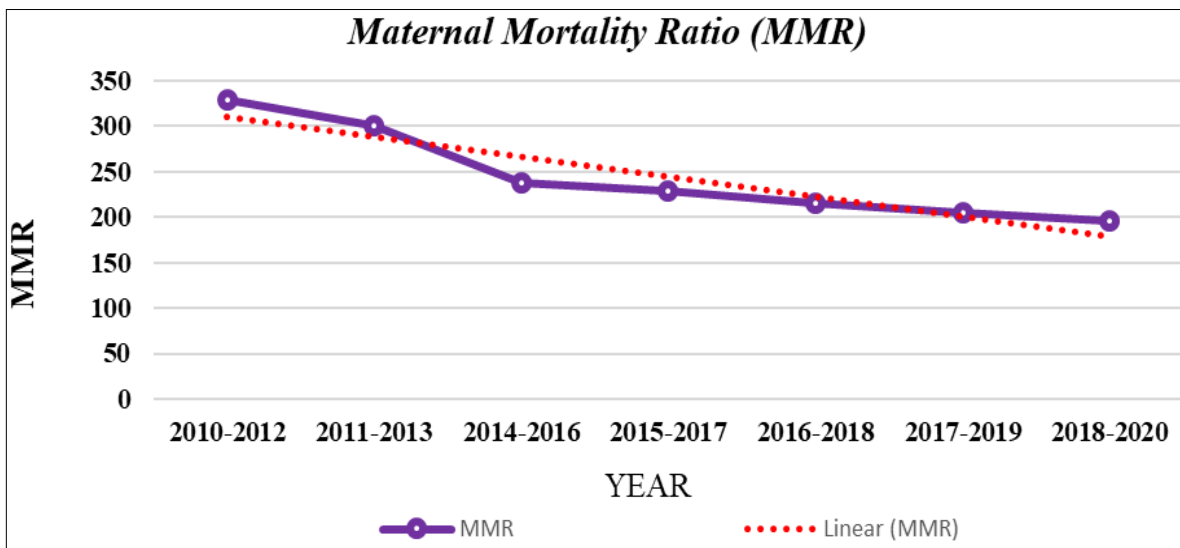
withholds no importance, as it expected to remain flatlined in the unforeseen future, subjected to the absence of any significant policy shifts, thus, demands no major attention to be levied and is unalarming.

Analysis of Demographic Vitals

Given that the dynamic trends of the expenditure of the health, education and employment sector is being evaluated, subsequently, the aggregate impact that these trends have levied upon the broader demographic landscape is worth to be analysed. This shall reveal the overall transformations that had been stimulated by the dynamicity of the Gender Budgeting trends.

a. The Health Sector: Maternal Mortality Rate

For the purpose of analyzation of the potential developments with regards to the health sector, there exists a number of key indicators. Amongst them, the indicator shortlisted for evaluation is Maternal Mortality Rate. Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) refers to the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births within a specific time frame, typically a year. It is a key indicator of maternal health and healthcare system effectiveness. The trend over the deemed timeline is to be graphically observed:



Source: SRS, Special Bulletin on Maternal Mortality in India, ORGI.

Fig 4: Line Graph for Maternal Mortality ratio (MMR) trend in Assam

The trend of the Maternal Mortality Ratio reflects a significant optimistic status. Assam has been witnessing an applaudable rate of decrement of in its maternal mortality ratio, indicating towards a prospering health sector. The rate of maternal mortality has fallen by 40.55% in 2018-2020 as compared to the initial years of 2010-2012. However, the rate of decline of the maternal mortality rate is worth observing, wherein, the average rate of decline till 2015-2017 is significantly higher (10.97%) as compared to the subsequent years (5.21%). However, it cannot be concretely claimed that this phenomenon is exclusively fueled by the changes in gender budget as the expenditure had indeed risen post 2018-19 as previously observed. Nevertheless, although the MMR has registered falls since its initial years,

Assam’s MMR still stood at 195 in 2018-2020 which is substantially higher compared to the country’s average of 97. Thus, although the prevalence of the trend of declination is an optimistic indication, the rate of decrement has to be maintained at a higher rate so as to match the country’s average.

b. The Education Sector: Maternal Mortality Rate

With respect to the education sector, the indicator to be analysed is male and female Gross Enrolment rates (GER) and the Gender Parity Index in GER. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) is a measure that compares the relative access to education, employment, and other opportunities between males and females. The trend of GPI and respective GER over the deemed timeline is to be graphically observed:

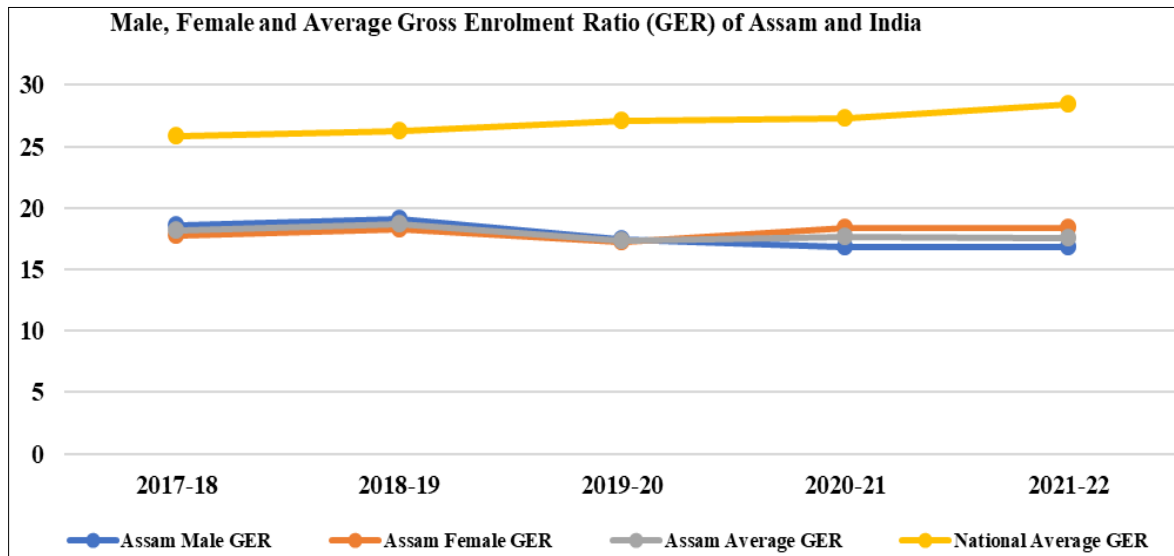
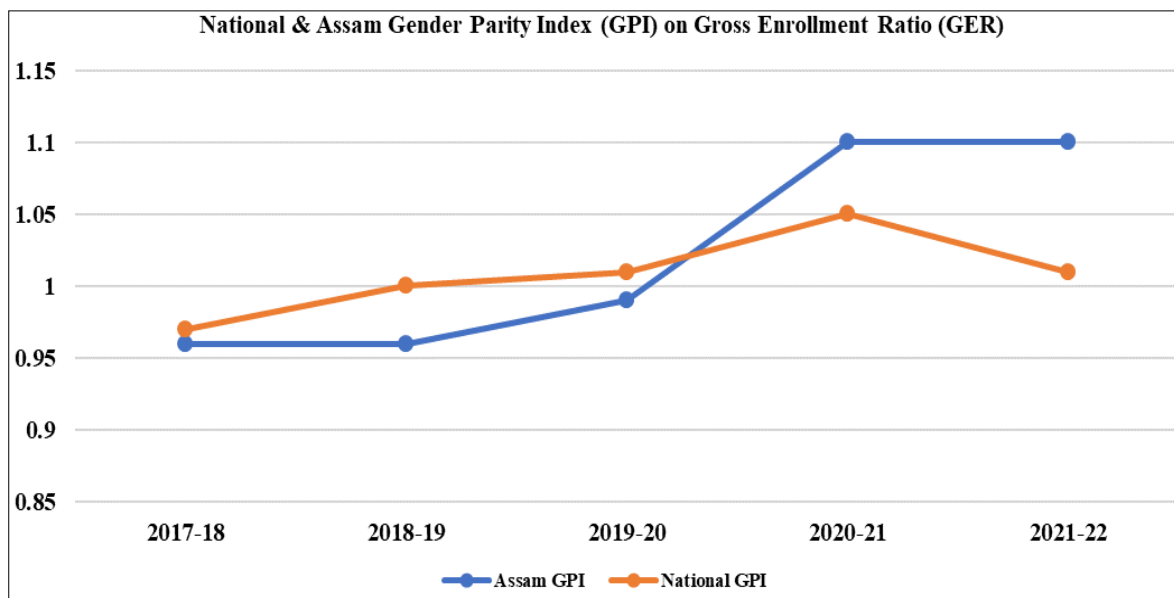


Fig 5: Line Graph for Male, female and average Gross enrolment ratio trend in Assam



Source: All India survey on higher education 2021-22, Government of India, Ministry of education, Department of Higher education, New Delhi

Fig 6: Line Graph for National and Assam Gender parity index on GER

The trend of the GER of women indicates towards an optimistic scenario with the rates registering significant increments over the deemed timeline. The interesting trend that is to be observed here is that, the male GER is initially higher as compared to the female GER till 2019-20. However, post 2019-20 the trend reversed and the female GER surpassed male GER which is an applaudable achievement. The same is indicated by the Gender parity index trends, wherein, the progression was fairly low till 2019-20 and there existed considerable disparity with values lying below 1. However, post 2019-20, the rates took major leaps and surpassed the perfect parity benchmark of 1 and finally stagnated at 1.1. Nonetheless, it is to be noted that, the outcome thus obtained is multidimensional. If the aspect of Gender parity in enrolment is taken into consideration, the outcome is incredibly optimistic with women enrolment surpassing male enrolment and the scale of parity being much more promising compared to the relative national GPI

values. However, if the aggregate numerics are taken into consideration, the situation of Gross enrolment as a whole is majorly grim. The Average GER of Assam majorly lags behind the national average which is alarming. Though there is an absence of Gender disparity, the overall enrolment ratio demands major improvements to be at par with the national average.

c. The Employment Sector: Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)

The third most significant aspect that fuels the empowerment and well-being of women is financial independence. The concurrent status and the historical trend of this aspect can be evaluated by the analysis and evaluation of the employment outlook of women over a deemed timeline. The indicator that shall be taken into consideration is the Labour force participation rate of women and the relative gender gap in LFPR. It is diagrammatically presented as:

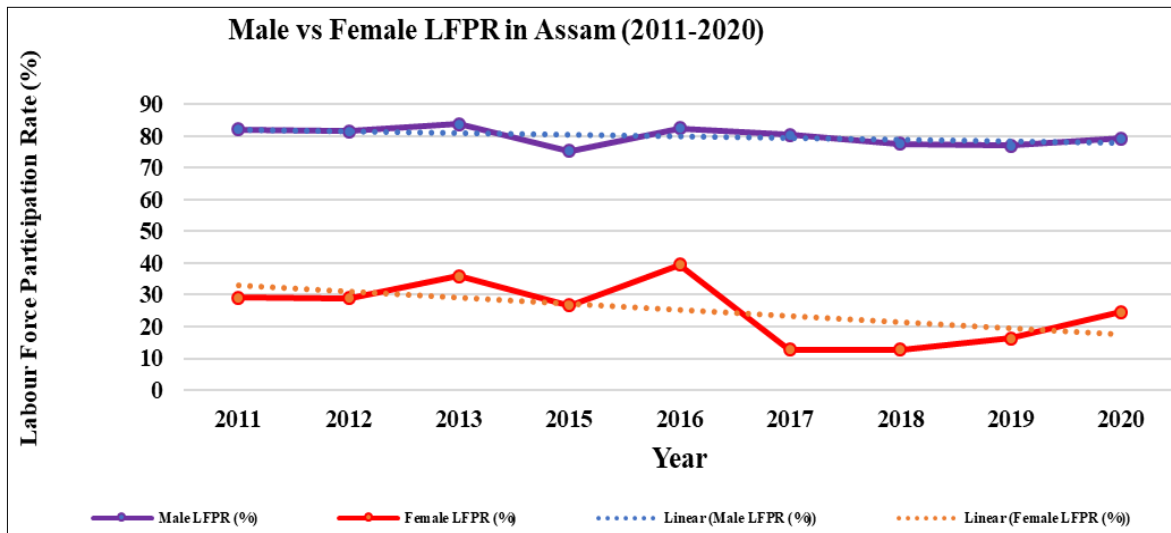
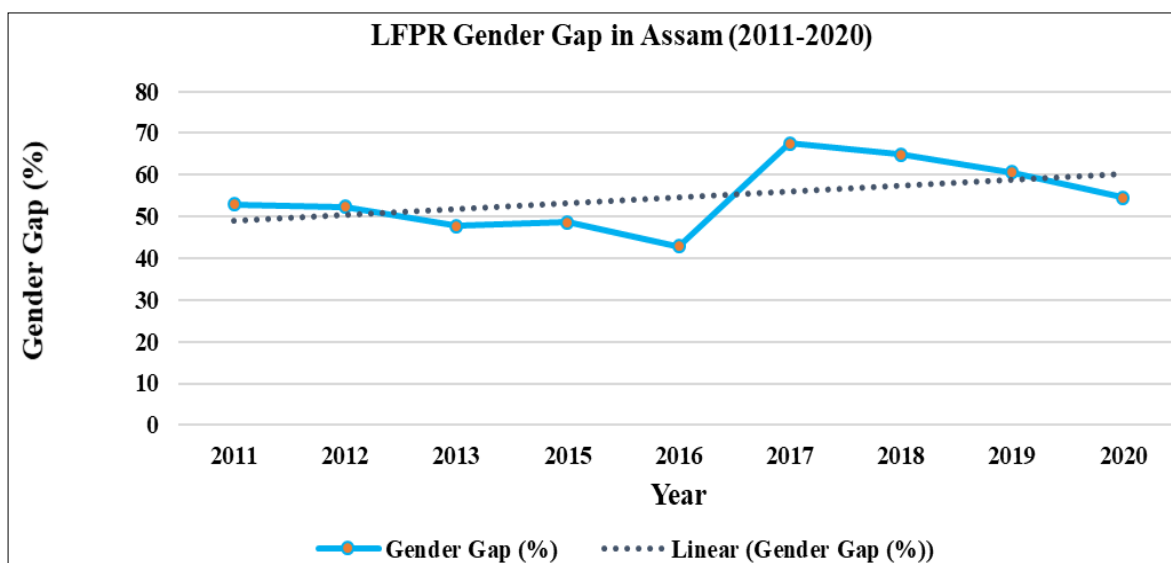


Fig 7: Line Graph for Male & female Labour force participation rate trend in Assam



Source: Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment. Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 78, answered on 18th July 2022, and Labour and Employment Statistics 2022. Directorate General of Employment, New Delhi.

Fig 8: Line Graph for Gender gap in Labour force participation rate in Assam

The observation of the graphs unveils numerous key insights. Primarily, it can be vividly deduced that the LFPR of men has been significantly higher as compared to the LFPR of women, whose record high level was as low as 40% in 2016. Post 2016, the rates registered steep declines and struggled to achieve even the 30% mark. With respect to the aspect of consistency, the fluctuation rate of LFPR of men was as low as 3.28% as compared to 8.49% of women. This indicates that the LFPR of men is much more consistent as compared to the LFPR of women. If the trend of aggregate gender gap with regards to LFPR is to be observed, the gender gap initially registered significant declines till 2016 at an average rate of 4.94% after which it significantly surged in 2017. However, post 2017, the rates again undertook a declining trend at an average rate of 6.84%, which is an optimistic indication. Nevertheless, the long run trend doesn't indicate towards an optimistic scenario as, while keeping the historical trend into consideration, the LFPR of women have higher chances of declination and the gender gap have chances of surging in the long-run, as indicated by the respective long-run trendlines. Nonetheless, in the concurrent scenario, as of

2020, the trends of LFPR and gender gap have closed in a promising status, which if maintained, may fuel significant improvements in the long-run.

Policy implications and Conclusion

Prolonged analysis of all the vital and requisite aspect of gender budgeting and trends of demographic indicators has unveiled several key observations. As the concept of Gender budgeting inculcates a vast range of subject-matters and sectors, the most crucial ones have been shortlisted for analysis; viz, Health, education and employment. The analysis of the respective sectors has disclosed heterogenous observations but a fairly homogenous conclusion. While the expenditure on health sector and skill and employment has witnessed significant decrements, the expenditure on education has surged following an initial downfall. However, the expected scale of detriments of these trends is fairly grim. This can be owed to the fact that these detriments in expenses on health and skill and employment is compensated by the roll-out various schemes targeting the very same objectives that are primarily objectivised by gender budgeting. This certitude is further verified by the

analysis of the appropriate demographic indicator concerning specific sector. The analysis reveals that there is a presence of no major vulnerabilities or perils. The maternal mortality rate has witnessed significant downfall in the recent years, the gross enrolment ratio of female has taken a major leap with Assam's gender parity index surpassing the national average and women's LFPR witnessing significant increments post an initial downfall. However, noteworthy, the absolute absence of any vulnerabilities for the unforeseen future cannot be claimed, as simultaneous to these optimistic observations, certain complications were observed. The major complication that has been observed, which is common to all the sectors, is concerned with the efficiency and scale of improvement and growth. The rate of amelioration of the indicators is not majorly satisfactory and if this rate persists, it withholds a high possibility to fall and stagnate in the forthcoming future. Furthermore, with regards to the education sector, the gross enrolment ratio is fairly below the national average and even though the GPI seems well-off relative to the national average, the aggregate female GER of Assam lags behind the national average female GER. With regards to the employment sector, though the LFPR has improved, it still falls short of the highest benchmark that it had initially achieved in 2016 following a steady growth in its preceding years and the same can be claimed with regards to the Gender gap. Such insights can be attributed to a number of factors; *viz.*, inefficient implementation of the policies, other related aspects and factors impacting the growth of the same, absence of all-round development, lack of awareness regarding the schemes, absence of adequate infrastructure and a mismatch of requisites and allotment. A report by (Bahutva Karnataka, 2024), has highlighted numerous bottlenecks and inefficiencies. It states with emphasis upon the 'Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana' that, only 45% of the PMJDY accounts had been used for financial transactions, while roughly 20% of these accounts are inactive. Furthermore, it is claimed that less than 30% of borrowers from banks were women despite women being account holders and women receive only 27% of their deposit value as credit against 52% for men. With regards to the 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)' scheme, it is claimed that between 2017-18 and 2022-23, over half of the funds allocated—around 55.3%—for the concerned initiative went unutilised. The situation worsened in 2022-23, with an alarming 77% of the budget remaining unused. From 2014 to 2021, a significant portion—58%—of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme's funds was directed primarily toward media campaigns. In December 2021, a Parliamentary Committee expressed concern over this pattern of underutilisation. It recommended that the focus shift away from promotional activities and instead be directed towards tangible improvements in sectors like education and healthcare. The Global Gender Gap Report 2022 by the World Economic Forum placed India at the 107th position out of 146 countries in terms of female educational outcomes, factoring in literacy and enrolment rates across primary, secondary, and higher education. Alarming, about 40% of adolescent girls are still out of school, with nearly two-thirds of them involved in domestic responsibilities. These claims vividly highlight the presence of potential inefficiencies and bottlenecks that are most likely to be mirrored in Assamese context as well. As tangible responsive measures, the government may scrutinise its operational framework for the presence of any major inefficiencies and eradicate them. Furthermore, all the

other related aspects should be examined that may be hindering the development of the sectors. In the absence of adequate infrastructure and all-round development, the schemes shall fail to realise their potential and shall underperform. In such a case, policies should be enacted so as to construct new infrastructure and renovate the existing ones that shall facilitate the schemes to perform optimally. Constructing new schools and skill training institutions, equipping them with latest instrumentations and machines, providing industry demanded courses and skills shall facilitate the absorption of the beneficiaries into industries and market shall result in a surge in LFPR rate and shall make the framework attractive and rewarding enough to surge the enrolment rates. Equipping the hospitals with modern machineries and instrumentation, recruiting adequate number of doctors, providing quality medicines at affordable rates shall facilitate and assist the schemes to realise its full potential. If these objectives are successfully achieved, it shall majorly benefit the women of the state and shall significantly empower them and make them better-off, which is perhaps the most crucial step towards fostering gender equality.

Thus, even if the situation of the vital sectors concerning women not majorly vulnerable and is being addressed by gender budgeting and its instruments, the rate of development demands attention and undertaking the requisite steps shall address this issue and boost the overall efficiency of operation of gender budgeting instruments and foster the attainment of gender quality and SDG5 in the state of Assam.

References

1. Del Gesso C. Gender budgeting implementation in Italian regional governments: Institutional behavior for gender equality and women's empowerment. *International Business Research*, 2019;12(12):110–120. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ibr.v12n12p110>
2. Directorate General of Employment. Labour and Employment Statistics 2022. Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India, 2022.
3. Finance Department, Government of Assam. Gender Budget, Assam Budget. Government of Assam, 2018–2025.
4. Government of Assam. Highlights of Budget 2023–24. Finance Department, Government of Assam, 2023.
5. Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment. Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 78: Male and female participation rate. Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2022.
6. Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment. Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 78: Male and female participation rate. Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2022.
7. Kumari N. Fostering equity: Bihar's journey with gender budgeting. *International Research Journal on Advanced Engineering and Management*, 2024;2(5):1564–1572. <https://doi.org/10.47392/IRJAEM.2024.0212>
8. Ministry of Education, Government of India. All India Survey on Higher Education 2021–22. Department of Higher Education, New Delhi, 2023.
9. Office of the Registrar General, India. Special Bulletin on Maternal Mortality in India 2014–20. Sample Registration System, Vital Statistics Division, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 2022.