

Budget allocation for women and child development may see 20% hike

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The last Budget of the Narendra Modi-led government is expected to offer something for women, a major vote bank. Indications are that there will be a hike of nearly 20 per cent in Budget allocation for the Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD).

While the Budget allocation for WCD for 2018-19 stood at ₹24,700 crore, it is expected to rise to ₹29,500 crore for the upcoming year. This seems to have enthused the officials in the Ministry. Though the Ministry had demanded slightly more of about ₹30,000-35,000 crore, “we are happy with this also,” an official from the Ministry told *BusinessLine*.

However, the actual expenditure of the WCD stood at ₹16, 873.52 crore in 2016-17, despite higher allocation. This was mainly due to implementation delays as it involved inter-ministerial as well as Centre-State coordination.

Also, women’s safety seems more like a rhetoric than reality if the slow implementation of schemes is anything to go by.

For example, under the Nirbhaya Fund set up by WCD, clearance to use the funds was given to various ministries, including Home Affairs, Railways, Transport and Ministry of Electronics



The budgetary allocation for 2018-19 was ₹24,700 crore

and Information Technology (MeitY), for different projects. The implementation status of funds sanctioned for making eight ‘smart cities’ safer for women is not exactly known as it is the responsibility of other ministries, the official said adding, “WCD only sanctions funds”.

Of close to over ₹2,900 crore worth projects that were sanctioned, nearly ₹300 crore were considered way back in 2017, to integrate all emergency response numbers to 112. Two years down the line, the service which entails emergency response from the nearest police station on dialling the number, has yet not started. One of the reasons being that the facility is only restricted to Android phones.

In fact, WCD has taken it up with the MeitY.

“Currently, the service is not available on feature phones which majority of the women use. We have written to MeitY to change that. Also the user acceptance tests in areas such as Ghaziabad,

Meerut and Noida took a lot of time,” said Rakesh Srivastava, WCD Secretary. Apart from this, the Pradhan Mantri Matrutva Vandana Yojana, a pet scheme of the Prime Minister, which is being jointly implemented by the WCD and the Ministry of Health, has seen an expenditure of ₹2,800 crore till date, more than the initial allocation of ₹2,400 crore in 2018-19.

“We have disbursed ₹5,000 to 56 lakh first-time mothers since September 2017. However, the additional ₹1,000 is to be disbursed by the Health Ministry. We are having immense difficulties in getting both databases merged. At the moment, as far as disbursements are concerned we are running at a lag of six to seven months,” Srivastava explained.

Under the National Nutrition Mission goes, the funds have been lying grossly under-utilised for years. In spite of a hefty allocation of ₹3,000 crore last year, the actual expenditure for 2016-17 was barely ₹199 crore.