

Budgetary Allocations and the Child in Tamil Nadu: Some Initial Findings

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Abstract: *In the absence of an explicit policy for the child by a State government, its programmes for child protection and development can serve as a close proxy. R. Srinivasan, Associate Professor in Economics, Directorate of Distance Education, University of Madras, points out that though Tamil Nadu has been a pioneer in child-related programmes such as expansion of schools, mid-day meals, and effective implementation of the Integrated Child Development Scheme; of late new initiatives are rare. The National Policy for Children and the programmes that the Union government has been supporting with matching grants have shaped the construction of Tamil Nadu's child policies. However, there is still scope for the State to leave its distinct imprint on this policy space with new initiatives.*

In India's federal framework, which is skewed towards the Union rather than the States, the National Policy for Children is the overarching framework. The Union government's acceptance of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and enactment of a host of legislations to protect children against atrocities and to realise the rights of the child towards education, protected life and development are the compelling policy related legislations that shape the public policy for children in a State.

States are expected to adhere to such laws, constitute their commission for protection of child rights, and implement mechanisms to protect and develop children in conflict with law, eradicate child labour, ensure universal access to education, health and nutrition and shelter and care. The centrally sponsored programmes such as the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), and the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and similar schemes, structure the allocation of States' resources to the benefit of children. These schemes are based on matching grants from Union and State governments, hence, on one hand, reduce the autonomy of the State government in allocating its own resources and on the other hand, compel the State government to allocate resources for schemes that it would otherwise neglect. In this context, the States have to make a difference in terms of scaling up the size of programmes and effectiveness in implementing the programmes. Of course, there are a few areas where new initiatives from the States are possible.

The National Policy for Children and Schematic Interventions

The rights-based National Policy for Children recognises any one below the age of 18 years as a child and childhood as an integral part of life with a value of its own. It is thoughtful on the part of policymakers to have recognised children as heterogeneous by age, sex, community, location, disability and vulnerability. This compelled the state to implement programmes targeting children with differences in these aspects. While recognising family as an ideal environment for a child to grow, it also recognises that every child is unique, which makes the state directly address the

issues of a child, irrespective of the family and social background. The independence of children is also recognised and one of the guiding principle states, “Children are capable of forming views and must be provided a conducive environment and the opportunity to express their views in any way they are able to communicate, in matters affecting them”.

The National Policy identifies seven board areas for the state to intervene, of which the following three are important:

1. A child has a right to life and survival and should have equal access to health and nutrition. A child’s right to life and survival could be ensured only when the state supplements the family resources to provide adequate food and nutrition and health care. In the case of children without families, it is the state’s duty to protect such children either through running homes for them or to facilitate adoption.

Starting from funding of ICDS and NRHM, the health sector is crowded with centrally sponsored schemes, including provision of health education and nutrition supplement to adolescent girls. The Mid-day Meal Programme for school children up to upper primary level is also partially funded by the Union government.

Tamil Nadu has the rare distinction as a pioneer to provide mid-day meal to school children in 1950s and the scale of operation was enlarged in 1981. Tamil Nadu is well known in scaling up the programmes funded by the Union government: the Muthulakshmi Reddy Scheme for Maternity Benefit is an example. Any indicator of maternal and child health would show Tamil Nadu is far ahead of most other States in the country. This has been possible due to scaling up of central programmes with State’s own resources and efficiency in service delivery. At the same time, quality of service delivery in health care, reaching the marginalised, particularly the differently abled and people in remote locations such as Scheduled Tribes are the areas where there is a need for fresh initiatives from the State.

2. Every child has inalienable right to education and to develop one’s capability. It is the state’s responsibility to secure this right, through promotion of required environment, information, infrastructure, services and other supports. Starting from early childhood care and education, the state’s responsibility extends up to higher secondary level, including vocational education, education for the marginalised such as migrant children, street children, child labour, and children with special needs. Bringing children with special needs to schools, designing curriculum and providing educational services are important towards development of the child’s fullest potential. Once again, the education sector is also filled with of programmes funded by the Union government.

The Union government’s efforts to allocate resources for SSA, RMSA and host of schemes to provide education to differently abled children, girls, and children from minorities and depressed communities like OBCs, SCs and STs should be matched by the State’s resources as stipulated in the programmes. As in the health sector, Tamil Nadu’s achievement in education places it as one among the most literate with a large educated labour force in the country. However, access to education for the differently abled leaves much to be desired, as their literacy rate is just 62 per cent and enrolment ratio is down to single digit in secondary school. The drop-out rate among

STs is also high. We do not have reliable information about street children, migrant children and other marginalised groups to evaluate the efficiency of delivery of educational services to them.

Moreover, the quality of education has been in debate as reflected in the performance of State board students in national and the State's university examinations. The functional independence of the State government enlarges its scope to act in improving the quality of school education and designing and implementing educational systems for the different groups of marginalised children.

3. Protection of a child is the precondition to realise all other rights of a child. Ensuring safe space for living, learning and for other activities is a necessity that cannot be compromised. It is important that family, society and the state together should ensure the child's space whether it is the house or the public place is safe and devoid of discrimination and exploitation. An effective State commission for protection of the child is an important institutional set up in achieving this. Safety of a child is also achieved with active participation of the child herself; hence, educating children about their rights and means to secure them are important.

How Child Centric are Tamil Nadu's Budgets: Initial Findings of an Analysis of Nine-year Data

Though the national policy for children is governed by laudable objectives and clearly stated principles to design and implement programmes, the realisation of the objectives starts with allocation of financial resources for the various child-related programmes of the government. As mentioned already, the Union and State governments together provide the financial resources and the delivery is entirely with the State government. The UNICEF and other international agencies working on child related issues have been advocating child centric analysis of government budgets. Though a budget should be analysed from both the revenue and expenditure aspects, the child centric analysis is often restricted to expenditure side.

We present here some of preliminary findings of a study, *'Public Expenditure on Children in Tamil Nadu'* funded by UNICEF, (Tamil Nadu and Kerala), Chennai. Our analysis is based on the expenditure of the Government of Tamil Nadu (GoTN) over the last nine years, using the Demand for Grants of all the departments.

We identified 11 department of GoTN spend on schemes that directly benefit children. Some of the schemes have been targeted at children such as schools and preventive medicine. Certain other expenditures have children as beneficiaries along with college students, such as hostels. Here we used enrolment and differences in dietary charges between school and college students as the basis for calculation. We also considered expenditure on pregnant women and lactating mothers as expenditure on children.

In this analysis, we excluded certain indivisible expenditures that could have benefited children, for want of adequate data, such as expenditure in general hospitals and water and sanitation. We shall include these once we have a methodology to apportion the expenditure which could have benefited children. Similarly, we are also in the process of designing a methodology to calculate the reach of subsidised food grains to children. We have not included Union government direct

grants to autonomous bodies for schemes like SSA, RMSA and NRHM. Given these excluded items, we present a conservative estimate of GoTN's expenditure on children.

The Table compiled by us shows that the GoTN's spending on children increased by 180 per cent in nine years (from Rs. 12,797.39 crore in 2009-10 to Rs. 35,896.08 crore in 2017-18). The Department of School Education followed by Departments of Social Welfare and Nutritious Meal Programme and then the Health and Family Welfare are the major spenders on children. On the whole, according to our initial findings, the government spends around 18 per cent of the total budgetary disbursements on children.

The expenditures on children in the financial years 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 have been estimated as Rs. 29,938.39 crore, Rs. 32,104.83 crore and Rs. 35,896.08 crore respectively. In these years, the grants for various child centric schemes from the Union government were Rs. 3,700.40 crore, Rs. 4,871.03 crore and Rs. 6,629.88 crore. Thus, roughly the Union grants are in the range of 12 per cent to 18 per cent of the expenditure on children. This is in addition to the general untied grants through finance commission and grants to societies. Thus a substantial portion of GoTN's expenditure is influenced by programmatic grants from the Union government.

We cannot comment on the adequacy of this volume of financial allocation. But the reach of government to the marginalised can improve in terms of quantum and efficiency of expenditure is debatable. To give an example, all the schools in the welfare departments see sharp decline in enrolment for the last many years. The faster growth of enrolment in private schools shows that people prefer private schools to government schools. Generally, students from poor and low income families study in government schools, though there are exceptions.

The total enrolment ratio for children with special needs is still less than 50. This low enrolment is despite providing assistive devices to children with special needs and special training to teachers. Now the number of teachers trained in imparting education for children with special needs in primary and upper primary education is around 30,000. Here the teacher-pupil ratio is 1:4 for children with special needs.

Detailed examination of expenditure in each scheme shows some disturbing trends. For instance, the absolute number of children taking mid-day meal has been declining while the total enrolment is increasing in government and government aided schools. We have heard of systematic leakages in the system. The quality of mid-day meal is often revisited and corrected for nutrition component; yet, the meal is not attractive for children. We cannot assume away that the children are rich enough to bring home cooked food.

Though the popular discourse is that Tamil Nadu has been a pioneer in social policy and programmatic intervention, its actual engagement is otherwise. There can be a long history of reservation system and mid-day meal for school children, but the plethora of schemes and institutional mechanism are actually driven by the Union government through national level policies and legislations. Thus, the National Policy for Children followed by the Union grants for specific schemes structure the State government's policy and programmatic intervention in child sector. But there is still scope for the State government to put its stamp on the child welfare through better designed and efficiently delivered services for the children.

Table 1: Aggregate Public Expenditure on Children in Tamil Nadu, 2009-10 to 2017-18 (Rs. Crore)

Departments	2009-10 (Accounts)	2010-11 (Accounts)	2011-12 (Accounts)	2012-13 (Accounts)	2013-14 (Accounts)	2014-15 (Accounts)	2015-16 (Accounts)	2016-17 (R.E)	2017-18 (B.E)
AdiDravidar and Tribal Welfare	441.51	529.62	737.85	704.85	851.10	1428.20	1531.95	1120.08	1160.41
BC, MBC and Minorities Welfare	280.94	333.04	391.80	466.76	514.65	535.16	516.72	554.83	580.83
Differently Abled People Welfare	68.88	83.15	138.20	168.60	179.34	260.29	301.60	324.30	324.42
School Education	9265.83	11114.48	12803.43	13764.88	16506.75	19914.34	21025.47	23824.20	26430.04
Social Welfare and NMP	1710.44	2377.41	2336.19	2498.15	3150.29	3408.88	3212.07	3627.87	3872.88
Higher Education – Polytechnics	103.92	193.23	218.58	189.22	241.83	352.34	272.64	331.23	360.99
Labour and Employment - ITI	0.17	0.21	0.27	7.74	50.41	20.98	19.65	35.62	33.94
Special Programme Implementation	0	0	29.08	1387.41	1000.94	817.32	1100.83	536.89	760.85
Transport	301.85	302.87	390.84	337.17	623.81	448.90	481.10	506.54	542.08
Environment and Forests	4.21	5.47	6.65	6.38	9.19	6.97	7.70	7.48	7.62
Health and Family Welfare	619.64	624.11	838.15	966.18	1211.39	1252.85	1468.66	1235.79	1822.02
Total Exp on Children	12797.39	15563.59	17891.04	20497.34	24339.70	28446.23	29938.39	32104.83	35896.08
Total Exp of TN government	72750.31	90901.68	109486.75	121419.05	153659.43	172937.29	159987.80	183451.62	203081.75
% of Children Exp to Total Exp	17.59	17.12	16.34	16.88	15.84	16.45	18.71	17.50	17.68

About the author

R. Srinivasan is Associate Professor in Economics, Directorate of Distance Education, University of Madras, and has been in the academic field since 1988. He served as a teacher in several colleges in the Union Territory of Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu. He was an economist in the Tax Reforms and Revenue Augmentation Commission, Government of Tamil Nadu in 2002-03 and then a member of the State Planning Commission, Government of Tamil Nadu in 2006-11. Since 2008 he has been with the University of Madras.

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[Back to Table of Contents](#)