



## **Budget Justice for Addressing Inequalities**

### **Concept Note**

People's Budget Initiative (PBI) is a coalition of civil society organisations from across the country, which came together in 2006 to promote people's voice in policy making processes related to government budgets in India. Over the years, it has created a platform where civil society organisations articulate key policy-asks and expectations from government budgets, particularly the Union Budget.

In the recent years, the governance landscape in the country has undergone significant changes; effecting a realisation within PBI for the need to revamp the coalition. In 2017, PBI committed to deepening the policy discourse on governance issues with a particular emphasis on budgets, both at the national and sub-national level, and stepping up its outreach and mobilisation efforts. Hence, collaborating more systematically with other rights-based coalitions and people's movement, and popularising budgets by creating a bottom-up '*people to budgets discourse*' emerged as a critical mandate for PBI.

PBI recognises the significance of deepening democracy through political empowerment of people vis-à-vis budget processes; improvements in public revenue mobilisation and public expenditure on essential services; and promotion of equity and social justice in the domain of government budgets. However, the larger civil society's engagement with issues of public expenditure has been limited, but it is increasingly gaining momentum, led by efforts of few CSOs at the national and state level. There need to be more concerted efforts to make the larger civil society conversant with the discourse on budgets, particularly from the lens of the disadvantaged sections of the population.

Thus, PBI in 2018 aims to roll-out a campaign on 'Budget Justice' building on the two decades of civil society work on budgets and social accountability in India. The Budget Justice Campaign aims to address inequalities by making budgets more responsive to the needs and rights of the disadvantaged sections of population.

Focusing on 'Budget Justice' for the disadvantaged sections of population such as the Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims, Women, Children, Sexual Minorities and Persons with Disabilities is crucial as they face various forms of deprivation and discrimination. These sections of population are

poor and heavily dependent on public provisioning of essential services like food, water and sanitation, education, healthcare, among others. Also, they have not benefited equally from public policies and public spending owing to gaps in policies and poor implementation of government interventions. This recognition had led to the adoption of policy strategies like, the Special Component Plan for Scheduled Castes (SCSP), Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) for Scheduled Tribes, Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme for Minorities, Child Budgeting and Gender Responsive Budgeting in India's budgetary policy framework in the past. However, a number of concerns have been raised with regard to the design of these strategies as well as their implementation.

Moreover, civil society's work has highlighted that the programmes and schemes meant exclusively for these disadvantaged communities have been historically under-funded, have lacked needs-based planning and are marred by bottlenecks in implementation. In order to address existing inequalities, increasing budgetary allocations alone is not enough – budgets need to be responsive and interventions they fund need to be accessible, sustainable and appropriate to the needs for these communities.

PBI and partner organisations have been working towards and demanding greater budgetary allocations for social sectors and equitable access to essential public services. The overarching goal has been to empower the disadvantaged communities to participate in planning processes, monitor and avail government finances, policies and programmes. Building on its experiences, PBI aims to roll-out the 'Budget Justice' campaign to promote equity and social justice through budgets. PBI will campaign to advocate for progressive changes in policies and budgets that address inequalities faced by these communities.

Towards this end, the National Consultation on 15 March 2018 will bring together representatives of people's movements, civil society coalitions, grassroots level organisations, and budget groups from across the country working within the rights-based framework on different aspects of governance and human development. PBI seeks to link issues, prioritise demands and develop clear positions to build an inclusive narrative on budgets. It also seeks to leverage the experience of its partners in analysis of public expenditure, capacity building, advocacy and campaigns. Specific nuances of the campaign will be developed through discussions during the day-long Consultation.

**The Objectives of the Consultation are as follows:**

- Discussing key governance issues and articulating the narrative in which PBI's 'Budget Justice' campaign ought to be rooted;
- Highlighting key demands that PBI could advocate for and popularise as part of its 'Budget Justice' campaign;
- Identifying and prioritising the strategies that the 'Budget Justice' campaign needs to adopt in the coming years.