Date: 2nd July 2021

To

The Hon’ble Finance Minister
Government of Assam

Greetings from North East Network (NEN)!

We are a women’s organisation working in Assam. For more information about our organisation, visit www.northeastnetwork.org.

NEN recognizes the efforts made by Govt. of Assam in extending financial support to individual women. The state has extended cash assistance to widow, single and disabled women, pension schemes for old age, marriage support, financial support for women SHGS, transport facilities for public and girl students, distribution of sanitary pads, wage compensation for pregnant women from tea tribes among others.

We take this opportunity to express our concern regarding the issue of women’s safety and protection in our society. This is also based on our work experience through the Gramin Mahila Kendras which are recognized as Service Providers under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence (PWDV) Act, 2005 by the Social Welfare Department, Government of Assam1. We are deeply concerned at rising crimes against women in Assam. Assam has the highest crime rate against women, which is about three times more than the national figure, according to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2019)2.

According to NFHS-5, 32% women in Assam suffered spousal, physical and sexual violence, and 8% of young women have faced sexual violence before they turned 18, the data showed3.

The sustainable development goals (SDG) index released by NITI Aayog in June 2021, states that Assam is the worst performer in the goal of gender equality4. Notwithstanding various

---

schemes and policies implemented by the government in the past for women’s empowerment, this data proves our skewed perspective of understanding the issues of gender equality.

At 91%, Assam had the sixth highest pendency rates in the courts, i.e. cases where trials are underway. Also, 39% of cases took more than three years to get resolved in Assam, in contrast to 24% for the rest of India⁴.

Our suggestions

We welcome your initiative towards public engagement on state budgets. Low public spending is a constraint to achieve the highest safety standards for women and to achieve successful development plans.

We would like to draw your attention to implement a multi-dimensional unified response to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in private and public spaces within the framework of good governance and budgetary dimensions.

A higher magnitude of public spending with state policy on women’s safety and protection is the crucial need of the hour. In the upcoming state budget 2021-2022, we urge upon your good office to consider the following concerns in budgetary allocations and outlays.

1. Allocate appropriate budget for implementation of a state policy for women on safety and protection with a state level task force comprising of members of government, court and legal services, women’s organisation, women’s commission, WHL181 and public sectors undertaking. To this effect, women’s safety committees must be established at Panchayat, Ward and VCDC levels with paid staff and adequate infrastructure;

2. Allocate budget for appointment of full time Protection Officers or Assistant Protection Officers under the PWDV Act. DSWOs are already burdened with multiple responsibilities which is a barrier towards effective implementation of the PWDV Act by the state;

3. Allocate adequate budget for the state Nodal Agency to ensure effective implementation of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act up to the block levels in both formal and informal sectors;

4. Equal distribution of fund to establish Swadhar Greh and Ujjwala homes especially in districts which do not have these services to ensure long term housing and shelter facility for women;


5. Allocate appropriate budget to implement the MOHFW guidelines and protocols on medico-legal care for survivors/victims of sexual violence-2014, Supreme Court Guidelines on Poison Possession and Sale Rules, 2013 to monitor and regulate the sale of acid, Rules for Assam Witch Hunting Act of 2018;

6. In order to enhance women’s sense of safety and strengthen their access to public spaces, allocate a dedicated budget for improving infrastructure such as installing functional street lights, user friendly pavements and installation of functional CCTVs in public spaces etc.

7. Increase budget to include additional women in police force and activate the Veerangana women police unit in all districts;

8. Allocate appropriate budget for establishment of night shelters/permanent shelters for vulnerable homeless women including migrants workers, vendors, beggars in each district under National Urban Livelihood Mission.

9. Allocate budget for collection of gender disaggregated data in order to assess social and economic conditions of women towards understanding gender inequality between men and women for the state of Assam

10. Accelerate Gender Responsive Budget exercise by different departments and reaffirm your commitment to SDG Goal 5 on Gender Equality especially in the context of the impact of COVID19 on women’s safety issues

We trust your obligation to address the safety of all women and girls in the state in all spaces through a gendered fiscal policy.

Anurita P. Hazarika
Nilanju Dutta
Rashmirekha Borah

Phone no. 9957029961