



A 'socially sound' budget



The Union Budget 2010 received many cheers from the corporate sector. At the same time, the key highlight of the Budget is a renewed focus on social welfare, with greater thrust on inclusive growth

The Union Budget 2010 lays the ground for widespread implementation of the Government's social welfare targets with an increased spending on social sector to the tune of 1,37,674 crore. It saw a nearly 16-fold increase in allocation for the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), a step that would ensure proper identification systems for the common man and improved delivery mechanisms of various social schemes. Additionally, there is emphasis on basics such as food and agriculture, education and healthcare.

What do our social leaders think of these steps? Ranjana Kanti, the Director at Clay n' Color Communications, E-dutainment Unlimited and Redstreet Productions, who has started the India Redefined Movement and has mobilising citizens to come forward as volunteers from every nook and corner of the nation feels, "The Union budget has definitely provided a boost for the social sector. I expect an increase in the jobs in the social sector, as a result of the steps taken by the government. The schemes and programmes put on hold in the non profit sector for want of funds do require monetary support to see the light of the day. No one can implement such projects without funding. If funds go to the right agencies, for the right cause, people will benefit. Those in power must support social causes."

Welcoming steps

Another welcoming step has been the extension of banking services to unreached areas, with proposed augmentation of Rs. 100 crore for Financial Inclusion Fund (FIF) and a Financial Inclusion Technology Fund (FITF). In view of such policies for the social sector, there is likely to be greater demand for skilled professionals in rural and agricultural banking. Dhimant Parekh, Founder, The Better India, a social enterprise elucidates, "One of the most appreciable moves has been the introduction of banking for all villages with a population of 2000 and above, by March 2012. This is bound to help a lot of people by including them in formal banking system and allowing greater credit reach. Spending on social sector now stands at 37 per cent of the total plan outlay, promising a more inclusive growth. NREGA has received an additional Rs.1000 crore, taking the total budget allocation to Rs. 40,100 crore. So, the job numbers are bound to increase and might have immediate benefits. However, spending money for the sole purpose of providing jobs can work against basic economics in the long run."

No development without funds?

Do these views lead to the conclusion that without a supportive budget, the social sector cannot forge ahead? Though India's past boasts of many examples when people's movements created social change, without bothering about grants or fund, times today have changed. Government

support not just provides monetary assistance but also overall encouragement. Ranjana elaborates, “There was a time when there was no government funding. Even then, various religious groups came forward to address social concerns. Even small families from very humble backgrounds would work for the nation. The India redefined movement follows the Gandhian philosophy. It is a participatory movement first seeking to alter the behavioural pattern of people and hence, encourage them to work for the nation. Funds are not the primary drivers. Though, in the long run, they do sustain any social endeavour.”

After more than six decades of independence from shackles of a slavery of over four centuries, India now breathes freedom. However, the benefits will lead to visible results only if every single person, right from those at the top to those at the grassroots, joins hands. With the Union Budget 2010, the government seems to be aiming for just that.