

Mission Shakti: Policy Design, Inherited Failures, and the Fund Utilisation Crisis

Executive Summary

Launched in 2021-22 as an umbrella scheme under the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), Mission Shakti was conceived as India's most comprehensive response to gender inequality. It consolidated over a dozen fragmented women-welfare initiatives into a single, mission-mode framework with a total outlay of Rs 20,989 crore across the 15th Finance Commission period, from 2021-22 to 2025-26. The scheme absorbed and restructured its predecessor, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), which by 2021 had accumulated a damning institutional record: chronic underspending, a near-total diversion of state-level funds toward media campaigns, and no measurable improvement in the child sex ratio attributable to the scheme's own interventions. Mission Shakti was designed to fix these structural flaws. It has not succeeded.^{[1][2]}

Parliamentary records, CAG audit findings, NITI Aayog evaluations, RTI-sourced internal documents, and Standing Committee reports collectively show that Mission Shakti has repeated the most damaging failure of BBBP: allocated funds are consistently not spent. In 2021-22, the scheme's actual expenditure fell 36 percent below budgeted estimates. By the end of November 2023, the Sambal sub-scheme had spent only Rs 140.33 crore out of a provision of Rs 562 crore, and the Samarthya sub-scheme had spent just Rs 141.83 crore out of Rs 2,581.96 crore. Overall, between 2021-22 and 2024-25, Mission Shakti spent 43 percent less than what was budgeted for it. The institutional machinery built to protect women remains chronically underfunded at the point of delivery, not because the money does not exist, but because it is not reaching the ground.^{[3][4][5]}

Part I: Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, A Scheme That Consumed Itself

1.1 The Policy Premise

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) on January 22, 2015, initially targeting 100 districts with the worst child sex ratios (CSR). Its three stated objectives were to prevent gender-biased sex-selective elimination, ensure the survival and protection of the girl child, and promote her education. The scheme was implemented in convergence across three ministries, Women and Child Development, Health and Family Welfare, and Human Resource Development, making it one of the first tri-ministerial initiatives in India's social sector.^[1]

The scheme was, in principle, well designed. It created district-level implementation committees, prescribed six intervention verticals (including health, education, enforcement of the PCPNDT Act, and community outreach), and allocated a specific budget ceiling of Rs 50 lakh per district annually for these interventions. The ambition was legitimate. The execution was not.^[1]

1.2 The Advertising Problem

The most widely documented failure of BBBP is the systematic misallocation of funds toward media campaigns at the expense of substantive interventions. A Parliamentary Standing Committee, while examining the scheme in December 2021, found that out of Rs 446.72 crore released to states between 2016 and 2019, a staggering 78.91 percent was spent exclusively on media advocacy. This was not merely disproportionate. It was a

structural violation of the scheme's own guidelines, which capped the provision for national-level media campaigns.^{[6][1]}

Economist Mitali Nikore's analysis confirmed the pattern: only around 5 percent each was allocated to education and health interventions, while publicity consumed the bulk of disbursements. The scheme's own guidelines earmarked the Rs 50-lakh district provision across six distinct components, yet states routinely collapsed all spending into the single, visible category of awareness events and media buys. Schools meant to receive Rs 15 lakh each got as little as Rs 1 lakh in states such as Haryana.^{[6][1]}

The government has since disputed earlier characterisations of this figure. A 2025 written reply in the Rajya Sabha stated that from 2020-21 to 2024-25, only Rs 7.02 crore, roughly 2.09 percent of total BBBP expenditure of Rs 335.37 crore, went toward media advocacy, with zero advertising spend across the four years following 2020-21. This rebuttal reflects the scheme's revised guidelines, tightened considerably after the 2021 Standing Committee criticism. It does not, however, undo the record for the scheme's first six years, which remains the primary basis for BBBP's institutional failure.^{[7][8]}

1.3 Underutilisation of Funds

Beyond misallocation, the more foundational problem was underutilisation itself. Since inception in 2014-15 through 2019-20, Rs 848 crore was allocated under BBBP, of which Rs 622.48 crore was released to states. Of that released amount, states spent only Rs 156.46 crore, a utilisation rate of barely 25.13 percent. The Standing Committee flagged that the Ministry kept releasing fresh funds to states even when previous tranches remained unspent, in violation of the spirit of General Financial Rules.^{[4][1]}

The 2017 CAG Audit Report reinforced these findings. In Haryana, three of the scheme's twenty active districts were audited, revealing that only one state-level meeting had been held and no district-level meetings at all during 2015-16. In Punjab, only Rs 0.91 crore was spent from the Rs 6.36 crore released during 2014-16. Individual instances of fund diversion were equally telling: in Panipat, Haryana, Rs 3 lakh out of Rs 5 lakh received was spent on constructing a "Theme Gate" at the town's entrance, categorised as irregular expenditure. In another district, Rs 21.24 lakh from BBBP funds went toward purchasing 1,800 laptop bags and 2,900 mugs, items with no provision under the scheme's guidelines at all.^{[9][1]}

1.4 Measurable Outcomes: A Contested Record

The government points to a rise in the Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB), from 918 in 2014-15 to 930 in 2023-24, as evidence of BBBP's impact. The claim demands scrutiny. Independent research published in July 2024 found no statistically significant effect from BBBP awareness programmes on girl children's enrollment, grade completion, learning outcomes, or education-related expenditure when comparing districts where the programme was active against those where it was not. Experts also note that the 0 to 6 years child sex ratio is a poor proxy for sex selection outcomes, since its most important determinant, sex ratio at birth, actually declined from 906 in 2011 to 899 in 2018 before partially recovering to 907 in 2020, still below 2011 levels. The scheme generated substantial political visibility for female foeticide and girl child education; it generated far less measurable ground-level change.^{[10][11]}

An NCAER evaluation across 161 early-implementation districts identified structural barriers the scheme never really addressed. 73.5 percent of surveyed schools cited the dual burden of care responsibilities, lack of

functional toilets, inability to afford uniforms and books, and unsafe commuting as key barriers to girls' education, none of which publicity campaigns could resolve.^[12]

1.5 Structural Causes of BBBP's Failure

The scheme's collapse had multiple causes, but the following factors show up consistently across parliamentary, audit, and independent assessments:

- District-level task force meetings were infrequent or non-existent, monthly progress reports went unsubmitted, and outcome tracking was largely absent.^[13]
- Without disaggregated data, it was impossible to tell what was working and for whom.^[13]
- States found it administratively easier to spend on media events, which are visible, reportable, and less prone to procurement delays, than on sectoral interventions requiring inter-departmental coordination.^[12]
- Field surveys found that ground-level functionaries had no clarity on their specific duties, which created implementation paralysis.^[13]
- Fund diversion to unrelated purchases (theme gates, mugs, laptop bags) occurred with minimal accountability or recovery action.^[9]

Part II: Mission Shakti, The Architecture of Reform

2.1 Design Intent

The Cabinet approved Mission Shakti in 2021 as one of three flagship umbrella schemes of the MWCD, alongside Mission Poshan 2.0 and Mission Vatsalya, to be implemented across the 15th Finance Commission period from 2021-22 to 2025-26. The scheme consolidated more than thirteen previously siloed programmes into two integrated sub-schemes:^[2]

Sambal (safety and security): brings together One Stop Centres (OSCs), the Women Helpline (WHL), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, and the newly introduced Nari Adalat, community-based women's justice forums.^{[14][15]}

Samarthya (empowerment): brings together Ujjwala (anti-trafficking and rehabilitation), Swadhar Greh (institutional support for women in difficult circumstances), Sakhi Niwas or Working Women Hostels, the National Creche Scheme, and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), along with a new Gap Funding component for economic empowerment.^{[15][14]}

The Mahila Shakti Kendra and Mahila Police Volunteers programmes were discontinued as part of this restructuring.^[14]

2.2 Funding Architecture and Rationale

Mission Shakti's total financial outlay over the five-year period comes to Rs 20,989 crore, with the Central Government contributing Rs 15,761 crore and states the remaining Rs 5,228 crore. Sambal is 100 percent centrally funded, while Samarthya follows a 60:40 Centre-State split for most states, and 90:10 for North Eastern and special category states.^{[16][2]}

Funds move through a Single Nodal Agency (SNA) account mechanism introduced in 2022, which requires each state to designate one nodal agency per Centrally Sponsored Scheme, a reform intended to improve fund-flow efficiency and transparency. Every subsequent instalment depends on states submitting Utilisation Certificates (UCs) and Statements of Expenditure (SoEs), as required under the General Financial Rules of 2017.^{[17][18]}

2.3 Diagnostic Improvements Over BBBP

Mission Shakti introduced several design corrections aimed squarely at BBBP's documented failures:

- Rather than BBBP's narrow focus on birth-stage discrimination, Mission Shakti addresses women's needs across the full lifecycle, from conception to old age, including shelter, legal aid, economic empowerment, and maternal health.^[19]
- The OSC model under Sambal is meant to provide medical, legal, psychological, and counselling services under one roof, so women no longer need to navigate multiple agencies separately.^[20]
- Instead of ad hoc media spending, Mission Shakti treats Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) as one of three broad objectives, alongside emergency services and institutional long-term care.^[21]
- The guidelines call for digital infrastructure to track last-mile service delivery.^[19]
- The introduction of community-based women's collectives for local grievance resolution was a genuine institutional innovation that BBBP never had.^[14]

On paper, the scheme was built to be everything BBBP was not: convergent, responsive across the lifecycle, and grounded in direct service delivery rather than awareness campaigns alone.

Part III: Mission Shakti's Fund Utilisation Crisis

3.1 The Pattern Repeats

Despite this reformist architecture, Mission Shakti has reproduced the single most consequential failure of every scheme it replaced: persistent, system-wide underutilisation of allocated funds.

PRS India's analysis of the Ministry's expenditure trends shows that in every year since 2016-17, funds under what is now Mission Shakti have been underutilised. In 2021-22, the scheme's first year of implementation, actual expenditure stood at Rs 1,912 crore, a 36 percent shortfall against the budgeted estimate. Rather than address the absorption problem, the government responded by simply raising the budget. The estimate for 2023-24 was set 38 percent higher than the 2022-23 revised estimate, reaching Rs 3,144 crore.^[4]

A Lok Sabha question, Unstarred Question No. 5600, confirmed the scale of the problem: between 2021-22 and 2024-25, Mission Shakti spent 43 percent less than budgeted, a shortfall proportionally larger than the Ministry's overall underutilisation trend.^[5]

3.2 Component-Level Breakdown

Parliamentary records reveal just how granular the underutilisation problem is. According to PIB data from December 2023, for FY 2023-24 (as of November 30, 2023):

Sub-Scheme	Annual Budget Provision (Rs crore)	Expenditure as on Nov 30, 2023 (Rs crore)	Utilisation Rate
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Sambal	562.00	140.33	~24.97%
Samarthya	2,581.96	141.83	~5.49%
Total Mission Shakti	3,143.96	282.16	~8.97%

This data reflects eight months into the financial year, and expenditure typically picks up in Q4. Even accounting for that, the trajectory for Samarthya, the empowerment-focused component with the larger allocation, was deeply concerning. The Reporters' Collective's investigation, which accessed internal Ministry records, found that spending on Mission Shakti's combined women's safety component (Sambal) was only 31.2 percent of the promised budget in FY 2021-22, and 34.7 percent in FY 2022-23.^[18]

Rajya Sabha records (Starred Question No. 174) show that under the Sambal sub-scheme specifically, expenditure against Revised Estimates for OSC, WHL, and BBBP in 2022-23 broke down as follows:

Component	Revised Estimate 2022-23 (Rs crore)	Actual Expenditure (Rs crore)
OSC	231 (combined with WHL)	65.69
WHL	76.92	Not separately listed
Component	Revised Estimate 2022-23 (Rs crore)	Actual Expenditure (Rs crore)
BBBP	100	90.15
Nari Adalat	2	0

The Nari Adalat, Mission Shakti's flagship institutional innovation, recorded zero expenditure in its first year of operation (2022-23) despite a Rs 2 crore provision. In 2023-24, expenditure amounted to just Rs 0.424 crore.^[23]

3.3 One Stop Centres: A Flagship Component in Systemic Collapse

The OSC scheme, arguably Mission Shakti's most critical delivery mechanism, shows how structural problems eventually translate into human costs. A 2021 NITI Aayog study, obtained by The Reporters' Collective but never made public by the government, found that only about 20 percent of the funds released under the OSC scheme had actually been utilised. Awareness of the scheme among the primary intended respondents was just 4 percent, and in Delhi specifically, only 0.8 percent.^{[18][20]}

As of mid-2026, 1,033 OSCs are administratively approved and 991 are operational nationwide, having assisted over 15.20 lakh women since inception. These numbers look substantial in aggregate. The quality of assistance tells a different story.^[24]

A Delhi High Court order in 2024, triggered by a Bachpan Bachao Andolan petition, found "serious issue of underutilisation" at OSCs, along with salary delays for staff and an absence of Police Facilitation Officers, the very functionaries responsible for helping women register FIRs. In Haryana's Nuh district, one of India's most economically backward regions, the OSC was headed by a man, in direct violation of guidelines mandating a woman as Centre Administrator. Local women told investigators they would not approach the centre with personal grievances because of his presence.^{[20][18]}

Ministry internal correspondence, accessed through The Reporters' Collective's investigation, showed that as of July 2024, "no fund has been released so far this year" for Delhi's OSCs, with state and OSC staff "repeatedly calling and pressing us hard to release funds to clear salaries". Funds were eventually released just five days before the court hearing on the matter. Six months earlier, the Ministry had assured a Parliamentary Standing Committee that fund-flow issues had already been resolved.^[18]

3.4 The RTI and Utilisation Certificate Trail

Under the RTI Act 2005 and the General Financial Rules 2017, states and implementing agencies must submit Utilisation Certificates (UCs) in Form GFR 12-A or 12-C to confirm that grants have been used for their sanctioned purpose. Rule 238 of GFR 2017 states that the next tranche of funding cannot be released until UCs for the previous tranche are received and verified. Nonsubmission is itself a GFR 238(1) breach, grounds for blacklisting and recovery.^[25]

RTI applications seeking UC submission status, expenditure breakups, and balance or refund positions from the Ministry of Women and Child Development reveal a systemic compliance gap. The Rajya Sabha's response on the Sambal scheme cited "delay in submission of Utilization Certificates and settlement thereof" as a primary reason funds went unreleased. States, for their part, blame the Centre's delayed first-tranche releases for their own inability to spend. The Ministry acknowledges internally that "unspent balance as in previous financial years" affects utilisation in the new year.^[23]

The result is a circular accountability failure. The Centre delays releases pending UCs. States delay UCs because unspent balances from the previous year complicate compliance. Centres on the ground go unfunded and understaffed. Women seeking services get turned away or misinformed.

The Working Women Hostel sub-scheme under Samarthya offers another case in point. As of 2023, out of 59 approved hostels, only 13 were operational, a delivery rate of 22 percent. A CAG audit found "major deficiencies" in the scheme's implementation over 2019-2024. Funds released to states for this component followed the same utilisation pattern seen across every other Mission Shakti component.

3.5 State-Level Disparities

Fund utilisation was not uniformly poor. It was sharply skewed, and the worst performers included some of India's most populous states. Under the Nirbhaya Fund, which finances the OSC scheme, states such as Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Lakshadweep, and Madhya Pradesh underutilised more than 50 percent of the funds allocated to them between 2016-17 and 2020-21. A separate CAG audit of Gujarat found that Rs 150.02 crore in unutilised Nirbhaya Fund grants sat parked with the Gujarat State Financial Services Ltd rather than being deployed for women's safety infrastructure, in some cases for three to five years.^{[27][4]}

This state-level pattern points to a governance problem that Mission Shakti's design cannot fully address on its own. The scheme can reform fund-flow architecture, and has, through SNA accounts, but it cannot manufacture administrative will in states where women's welfare schemes simply do not command bureaucratic attention.

Part IV: Structural Causes of Persistent Underutilisation

4.1 Administrative Bottlenecks in Fund Flow

The transition to the Single Nodal Agency (SNA) mechanism in 2022, while sound in theory, created a new layer of delay in practice. States took "considerable time to complete the SNA procedure," according to Rajya Sabha responses, and this bureaucratic re-orientation absorbed a large chunk of the first implementation year. The Finance Ministry's December 2022 instruction to route all Sambal scheme funds exclusively through SNAs arrived late in the financial year, effectively turning the whole 2022-23 cycle into a transition period rather than an implementation one.^[23]

4.2 Staffing as the Fundamental Constraint

Across every Mission Shakti component, the biggest driver of underutilisation is the inability of states to fill sanctioned positions. Under the OSC scheme, funds are primarily meant for salaries and wages of human resources. When states recruit slowly, funds simply sit unspent. Of 758 approved OSCs, only 708 were operationalised as of mid-2022, and many of those ran on skeleton staff who had gone months without pay. OSC guidelines specify staffing norms, including counsellors, police facilitation officers, paramedics, and legal staff, but these norms were "not consistently followed," according to court-ordered audits.^{[28][20][23]}

The broader Ministry-level picture is consistent with this. As of March 2021, 31 percent of Child Development Project Officer positions sat vacant nationally, a figure the Ministry has largely left for states to resolve on their own.^[4]

4.3 Accountability Architecture Deficit

Mission Shakti's implementation guidelines require Utilisation Certificates and Statements of Expenditure before releasing fresh funds. This is a technically sound safeguard, but without active monitoring and compliance, it becomes little more than a bureaucratic trap. There is no grievance redressal mechanism for beneficiaries. As the NITI Aayog's own study found, there was no way to assess quality or efficiency, because no mechanism existed to capture feedback from the women the scheme was meant to serve. The government used this study, which fundamentally criticised the scheme's performance, to justify its record internally while keeping the document out of public view.^[18]

4.4 The Budget-Reality Mismatch

The most striking feature of Mission Shakti's fund utilisation failure is that it has never triggered a downward revision of allocations. Despite 36 percent underutilisation in 2021-22, the budget estimate for 2023-24 was raised 38 percent above the 2022-23 revised estimate. This is a structural mismatch: budgetary ambition keeps outpacing absorption capacity. Meanwhile, the Ministry's share of the Union Budget has declined, from roughly 1 percent in 2018-19 to 0.6 percent in 2023-24, suggesting the headline Mission Shakti figure masks a relative decline in how much priority women's welfare actually receives in national fiscal planning.^[4]

Part V: Consequences in Real Life

The institutional failures documented above are not administrative abstractions. NCRB data shows that from 2012 to 2022, the rate of crimes against women rose from 41.7 to 66.4 per lakh women. In 2022 alone, 31,912 women were raped, 6,516 killed for dowry, and 1,40,019 cases of cruelty by husbands or in-laws were registered, and these figures represent only the fraction of cases formally reported.^[18]

The One Stop Centres built as the first institutional response for women in distress remain understaffed, underfunded, and largely unknown to the population they are meant to serve. The 4 percent awareness rate documented by the NITI Aayog study means the overwhelming majority of women who need these services simply do not know they exist. Women who do approach OSCs, as field reporting from Delhi and Haryana documents, encounter insensitivity, pressure to return to abusive households, and Police Facilitation Officers who are simply not there. The scheme's promise of integrated "one roof" service has, in practice, become just another referral chain.^[18]

Conclusion

Mission Shakti was a genuine attempt to consolidate, rationalise, and elevate India's fractured women-welfare architecture. Its design, lifecycle convergence, integrated service delivery, community-level justice forums, digital tracking, was more coherent than anything that came before it. The failure is not architectural. It is institutional.

What BBBP established as precedent, that money can be allocated, partially disbursed, spent on visible rather than substantive interventions, and be largely unaccounted for, Mission Shakti has inherited almost wholesale. The specific pathology has shifted somewhat: the current failure is less about diverting funds toward advertising and more about failing to spend the funds at all. The Samarthya sub-scheme's expenditure rate of under 6 percent as of November 2023, despite holding the bulk of Mission Shakti's budget, makes this clearest. A scheme built for women's economic empowerment had, eight months into the financial year, spent just Rs 141.83 crore of a Rs 2,581.96 crore provision.

The Standing Committee on Women and Children identified the core problem with real precision back in 2022: underutilisation of funds points to "either poor financial planning or gaps in planning, implementation, and monitoring of schemes". All three have shown up, repeatedly, across BBBP and now Mission Shakti. Without enforceable accountability at the state level, mandatory public disclosure of UC compliance, independent third-party outcome monitoring, and a real shift in how the Ministry measures success, from budget utilisation as a metric to actual outcomes for women, this cycle is likely to continue. Mission Shakti's total outlay of Rs 20,989 crore is not the problem. The governance machinery needed to actually spend it on the women it was designed to reach is.^[4]

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