

Science funding: Budget 2011–12

In the Union Budget presented by the Finance Minister of India, Pranab Mukherjee on 28 February 2011, the science, technology and environment sector was allocated Rs 16,186 crores, an increase of more than 18% over last year's allocation of Rs 13,677 crores (<http://india-budget.nic.in/ub2011-12/bag/bag41.pdf>). The budget which has been largely touted as an agriculture centric one, is poised to spend Rs 14,744 crores on agriculture and allied activities and Rs 565 crores on irrigation and flood control. Energy remained the biggest money magnet, with 26.2% of the total budget allocated for this sector (Figure 1).

The Ministry for Science and Technology has received a total of Rs 5679 crores, which has been distributed as follows: DST – Rs 2349 crores, DSIR – Rs 1930 crores and DBT – Rs 1400 crores (<http://indiabudget.nic.in/ub2011-12/bag/bag42.pdf>). For DSIR, the 'most important projects this year are going to be the Solar Energy Mission and the CSIR-800 programme', according to S. K. Brahmachari, Secretary, DSIR and DG, CSIR, New Delhi. To be able to harness the benefits of solar energy, a CSIR-Network of Institutes for Solar Energy (CSIR-NISE) has been set up, which is collaborating with the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, for the Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission. The CSIR-800 programme on the other hand, is another unique initiative to use scientific innovations for improvement in the quality of life of about 800 million Indians who are not able to earn more than Rs 100 a day. The objective here is to bring the benefits of technological

advances made in CSIR laboratories to everyday lives of the underprivileged and help them increase their daily income at least by Rs 15 a day¹. Key focus areas are in the fields of energy, health and agriculture. Speaking for DSIR, Brahmachari said that a 25% increment in the budget is what they expected. He also added, 'In the past, we have not been able to spend all the money allocated to us. Absorption capacity is an important question. It is great that this time we have been able to spend all the money allocated to us, but our absorption capacity does not grow beyond 25%.'

The Ministry of Earth Sciences has received Rs 1220 crores against Rs 1000 crores in the last budget. This agrees well with their expectation of 20% increase in the budget for 2011–12. The Ministry plans to 'spend 41% of this (490 crores) on strengthening meteorological services and climate change research and another 22% (359 crores) on development of infrastructure facilities to conduct front-ranking science in polar research', according to Shailesh Nayak, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences (http://dod.nic.in/RFD2010-11_new.pdf). The Ministry has set up a dedicated centre for climate change research in Pune. Funds will be directed to this centre for active research. The Ministry has also planned to construct a third permanent station in Antarctica to facilitate polar research. Steps will also be taken for the modernization of India Meteorological Department to enable 'improvement of weather forecast and climate prediction, including the Indian monsoon', added Nayak.

The Department of Health Research has been granted Rs 400 crores, which is 20% higher than last year (<http://india-budget.nic.in/ub2011-12/bag/bag42.pdf>). 'Though the department had projected higher budgetary outlay, it should be noted that their budget has doubled in the last 2–3 years and the increase should be considered a substantial one,' said Vishwa Mohan Katoch, Secretary, Department of Health Research. The Department will primarily be directing its funds towards, 'improving health research infrastructure in medical colleges, establishing model rural research units in the states for technology transfer, improving specialized human resource especially in the medical colleges, establishing network of infectious disease laboratories (virology network) covering different parts of the country and grant in aid to projects having inter-sectoral conversion'. He also added that 'consolidation of programmes of ICMR will continue'.

Stepping away from the formal R&D paradigm, a National Innovation Council under Sam Pitroda has been set up to prepare a blueprint for innovations in India. The Finance Minister explained in his budget speech that 'the process of setting up State Innovation Councils in each State and Sectoral Innovation Councils aligned to Central Ministries is underway' (<http://indiabudget.nic.in/bspeecha.asp>).

The Government has been providing special grants to recognize excellence in universities and academic institutions. During 2011–12, it has proposed to provide such grants to nine academic institutions, including IIM Kolkata, IIT Kharagpur, Aligarh Muslim University and Delhi School of Economics (<http://indiabudget.nic.in/bspeecha.asp>).

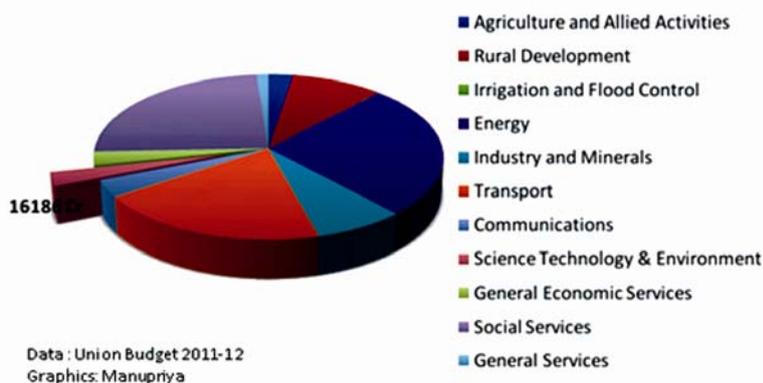


Figure 1. The 2011–12 budget – sector-wise distribution.

1. Brahmachari, S. K., *Manual on CSIR's Inclusive Innovation for Quality with Affordability*.

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Manupriya (S. Ramaseshan Fellow).
e-mail: manupriya9@gmail.com