



POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES IN INDIA: AN OVER VIEW

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Abstract

Poverty Alleviation Programmes aims to reduce the rate of poverty in the country by providing proper access to food, monetary help, and basic essentials to the households and families belonging to the below the poverty line. Poverty is the state of extreme economic poorness, wherein the person does not have enough money to fulfil basic needs such as food, cloth, and shelter. People who live in poverty have little to no access to proper healthcare, education, clean water, and other basic human rights. For any country to progress its poverty levels should be low, i.e. the number of people living in poverty should be as low as possible. It improves the overall quality of standard of living in the country. Government of India after independence adopted many policies and programmes to eradicate poverty such as five years planning, public distribution system, Mahatmas Gandhi employment Guarantee scheme etc. The present article will examine the poverty eradication programmes in India.

Key words; poverty Alleviation, country, poverty line, poor, Policies.

Introduction

India is a developing country. Even if there is growth in its economy, the nation faces many challenges that act as an impediment in its development process. One such challenge is the existence of widespread poverty in India. Although there is a reduction in the percentage of people residing below the poverty line, the digits aren't favourable after that either.

Poverty Alleviation Programmes aims to reduce the rate of poverty in the country by providing proper access to food, monetary help, and basic essentials to the households and families belonging to the below the poverty line. Poverty is the state of extreme economic poorness, wherein the person does not have enough money to fulfil basic needs such as food, cloth, and shelter. People who live in poverty have little to no access to proper healthcare, education, clean water, and other basic human rights. For any country to progress, its poverty levels should be low, i.e. the number of people living in poverty should be as low as possible. It improves the overall quality of standard of living in the country. Government of India after independence adopted many policies and programmes to eradicate poverty such as five years planning, public distribution system, mahatmas Gandhi employment Guarantee scheme etc. However, the Government has been attempting hard to raise aloft these individuals out of the clutches of poverty through various **poverty alleviation programmes**, but that has some contradicting perspectives in India.

According to the World Bank, Poverty is pronounced deprivation in well-being and comprises many dimensions. It includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Poverty also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice, and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life.

Poverty Alleviation is the set of steps taken in an economic and humanitarian way for eradicating poverty from a country. According to the World Bank, if a person is living on \$1.90 a day or less, then



he/she is living in extreme poverty, and currently, 767 million people of the world fall under that category. According to the last released official data, in 2011, 268 million people in India were surviving on less than \$1.90 a day. Various Programmes and Schemes under the Government of India were launched to eradicate poverty and for providing basic amenities to the poor households.

Below Poverty Line (BPL) can be defined as an economic benchmark used in the identification of economically weaker people and households. BPL is set by the Government of India based on a threshold income. The households or individuals having an income below this threshold value are considered to be under the below poverty line.

Measuring BPL in India

The poverty line solely depends on the per capita income in India rather than the level of prices. The poverty line is the minimum income required to purchase the basic goods and services that are essential to satisfy the basic human needs. The proportion of the population that is below this poverty line is called the poverty ratio or headcount ratio. Similar approaches are followed by most countries and international institutions for determining BPL.

The most heated and debated topic not only in India but in entire world is to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030. Poverty is a socio-economic incident and it is closely related with disparity. It adverse effects on human health, efficiency and output, which in turn effect an individual income. Due to poverty, it becomes close to impossible to fulfil even the bare requirements of life viz; food, clothing, shelter, education and health in deprive section of society. If households or individuals are unable to attain subsistence level of such needs than humanity faces pains and agonies (sorrows or miseries). From 1993-94 to 2011-12, national poverty estimates is reduced from 50.1% to 25.7% in rural areas on the contrary in urban areas, its rate of reduction is from 31.8% to 13.7%. In India, poverty rate is declined by 17.89% from 1993 to 2004 and further declined by 41.13% in a period of 2004-2011 (as per Tendulkar Committee estimates). As per SDG India Index Baseline report 2018, 21.92% of India's population was below poverty line in 2011.

In India, the first official rural and urban poverty lines at the national level were introduced in 1979 by Y. K. Alagh Committee. Criteria for the measurement of BPL are different for the rural and urban areas.

- Currently, according to the Tenth Five-Year Plan, the degree of deprivation is measured with the help of parameters with scores given from 0–4, with 13 parameters.
- Families with 17 marks or less (formerly 15 marks or less) out of a maximum of 52 marks have been classified as BPL.
- The poverty line is calculated every 5 years. According to the recent estimation based on inflation, the threshold income should be more than Rs. 962 a month for urban areas and Rs 768 a month in rural areas i.e., above Rs. 32 a day in an urban area and above Rs. 26 a day in a rural area.

Poverty Alleviation in India- Five Year Plans

Eleven Five Year Plans were launched to eradicate poverty from India. The list of these Five Year Plans that started in the year 1951 is given below:

- First Five Year Plan (1951- 1956): The plan focused mainly on agriculture and irrigation and aimed at achieving an all-round balanced development.



- Second Five Year Plan (1956-1961): It focused on the growth of basic and heavy industries, expansion in employment opportunities, and an increase of 25 per cent in the national income.
- Third Five Year Plan (1961-1966): The Chinese aggression (1962), Indo-Pak war (1965), and the severest drought led to the complete failure of the third five-year plan. It was replaced by three annual plans that continued from 1966 to 1969.
- Fourth Five Year Plan (1966-1974): It aimed at increasing national income by 5.5 per cent, creating economic stability, reducing inequalities in income distribution, and achieving social justice with equality.
- Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-1979): This plan mainly focused on the removal of poverty (Garibi Hatao) and aimed in bringing larger sections of the poor masses above the poverty line. It also assured a minimum income of Rs. 40 per person per month calculated at 1972-73 prices. The plan was terminated in 1978 instead of (1979) when the Janata Government came to power.
- Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-1985): Removal of poverty was the main objective of the sixth five-year plan with a major focus on economic growth, elimination of unemployment, self-sufficiency in technology, and raising the lifestyles of the weaker sections of the society.
- Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90): The Seventh Five Year Plan aimed in improving the living standards of the poor with a significant reduction in the incidence of poverty.
- Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97): This plan aimed at employment generation but later failed in achieving most of its targets.
- Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002): The ninth five-year plan focused on the areas of agriculture, employment, poverty, and infrastructure.
- Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007): The tenth five-year plan aimed at the reduction of the poverty ratio from 26 per cent to 21 per cent by the year 2007 and also to help the children in completing five years of schooling by 2007.
- Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012): The eleventh five-year plan targets towards reducing poverty by 10 percentage points, generating 7 crore new employment opportunities, and ensuring electricity connection to all villages.

Role of Public Distribution System in Poverty Alleviation

The Public Distribution System (PDS) which evolved as a system of management for food and distribution of food grains plays a major role in poverty alleviation. This programme is operated jointly by the Central Government and the State Government of India. The responsibilities include:

- Allocations of commodities such as rice, wheat, kerosene, and sugar to the States and Union Territories.
- Issue of Ration Cards for the people below the poverty line.
- Identification of families living below the poverty line.
- Management of food scarcity and distribution of food grains.

PDS was later relaunched as Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) in June 1997 and is controlled by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Government of India. TPDS plays a major role in the implementation and identification of the poor for proper arrangement and delivery of food grains. Therefore, the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) under the Government of India plays the same role as the PDS but adds a special focus on the people below the poverty line.



Employment generation

The unemployment issue in India is considered as one of the major causes of poverty in India. The poverty rate of a country can be reduced with high economic growth and by reducing the unemployment problem. Various poverty alleviation programmes are set up under the government of India that aims to eradicate poverty by providing employment on-demand and through specific guaranteed wage employment every year to the households living below the poverty line.

The generation of employment is important in poverty alleviation because of the following reasons:

- It will increase the income level of the poor household families and will help in reducing the rate of poverty in the country. Hence, there is a significant relationship between unemployment and poverty.
- It will decrease the rural-urban migration through the generation of employment programs in rural areas.
- An increase in the income level through the generation of employment programs will help the poor in accessing basic facilities including education, health facilities, and sanitation.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

This act was passed in the parliament, in August 2005. The basic aim of MGNREGA is to enhance the livelihood security of people living in rural areas by guaranteeing them 100 days of wage employment in one financial year. The wage employment is given to the rural household whose adult members volunteer to do the unskilled manual work.

Therefore, every individual (poor) who is willing to work at a minimum wage can report for work in those areas where MGNREGA is implemented. In the year 2017-18, 57.4 million people had sought work under MGNREGA.

Major Poverty alleviation programs

The major reasons for the ineffectiveness of the poverty alleviation programs are mentioned below:

- The poverty alleviation program may not properly identify and target the exact number of poor families in rural areas. As a result, some of the families who are not registered under these programs are benefited by the facilities rather than the eligible ones
- Overlapping of similar government schemes is a major cause of ineffectiveness as it leads to confusion among poor people and authorities and the benefits of the scheme do not reach the poor.
- Overpopulation of the country increases the burden of providing the benefits of the schemes to a large number of people and thus reduces the effectiveness of the programs.
- Corruption at various levels of implementation of schemes is another major reason

Poverty eradication programmes by the Government of India

Poverty alleviation is described as the set of ways framed by the government to deal with the issue of poverty. The main intention is to hoist people out of the grasps of poverty. Various schemes have been undertaken by the government to eliminate this evil of poverty from our country. Moreover, due to the lack of infrastructure and other basic facilities in the rural areas, the extent of poverty in rural households is more than the metropolitan ones. Some of the **poverty alleviation programmes** launched by the Indian government are:



1. Integrated Rural Development Programme(IRDP)

IRDP is one of the driving schemes of **poverty alleviation programmes** that has bestowed a lot in ridding the evil of deprivation to some extent. Introduced in 1978-79, the major objective of the scheme stands as providing self-employment to the target audience that exists below the poverty line. This target group includes agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers and rural artisans. In addition, inclusions are compelled where 50% is allotted to the scheduled castes and tribes.

2. Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana

The above scheme is the reformation of the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana. Currently, this programme is known by the name of Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana. Under this, the matter-of-fact is generating demand-driven communities in the rural areas with the rationale of employing the people. Employment is provided to those living below the poverty line defined by the government. Furthermore, 3% has been allocated to providing barrier-free infrastructure to those people who are disabled.

3. Pradhan Mantri Grameen Awaas Yojana

Launched in the year 2015, the above programme is one of the most flourishing schemes under the **poverty alleviation programmes** initiated by the government. The main aim is to provide free houses for the people living in the rural areas that are considered BPL. Here, the advancement is made through the subsidy process, involvement of the private sector and reasonable housing to the people at subsidized rates.

4. National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)

The programme was launched in the year 1995, with its main objective of giving social security to the neglected categories of the society i.e., widows, disabled persons, aged persons belonging to the BPL section of the society. There are three schemes under this particular programme:

- National Old Age Pension Scheme

This provides pensions to the people who are contemplated as destitute. The main purpose of this scheme is to bestow social security to the eligible beneficiaries. In this, the beneficiaries don't have to contribute at the first phase to receive this pension under the National Old Age Pension Scheme.

- National Maternity Benefit Scheme

The government provides funds under this scheme to the women for their prenatal and postnatal sustenance. This financial grant is given to those women belonging to families that aren't well financially. The person gets cash-based aid directly from the government.

- National Family Benefit Scheme

The funds are provided to those families whose main wage earner dies due to any reason. Under this, a sum of 10,000 is provided to the household.

5. Annapurna

The scheme had its initial enactment in 1999-2000 where its main aim has always been to provide a nutritional diet to the senior citizens who are unable to do that for themselves.

This scheme under the **poverty alleviation programme** provides 10 kg of free nutritional diet every month for the aged citizens of the above classification, Critical evaluation of poverty alleviation programmes.

There are conflicting views about the success and failure of the **poverty alleviation programme in India**. Some think that it succeeded in alleviating poverty to some extent, and some think that this didn't help. Here is a **critical evaluation of poverty alleviation programmes** in India during the pre-reform and post-reform periods.



Pre-reform phase (1947-1990)

After the independence of the country, there was no such concentration on the economic strategies for the alleviation of poverty from the country for straight two decades. The scholars were of the view that industrialization will have a prolonged effect on the economy and will help in alleviating poverty in India. But sadly this did not happen in the economy. However, the evils of low per capita income, high population growth rate and demand-supply mismatch generated more difficulties in the country. The government after all this took some steps and started plenty of programmes like IRDP, NREP, RLEGP and TRYSEM. Failingly, the government languished in classifying poor people.

Post-reform Period (1991 onwards)

During the eighth 5-year plan (after the economic reforms), the creation of employment reliefs and strengthening productivity were the two tasks focused on by the government. But the main issue was its result could only be visible in the medium and long-term phases. The high growth rate during this period generated income for the government which was further used to finance the **poverty alleviation programmes**. Succeeding five-year plans also did a great job in alleviating poverty from India to some extent where they highlighted faster, sustainable and comprehensive growth as their central objective. To, this plethora of **poverty alleviation programmes** are availing basic facilities so that our country could get rid of poverty.

Conclusion

In India, poverty has certainly been reduced, but the result is not that widespread or to that aimed level with the **poverty alleviation programmes**. The country has to go an extended way for the complete alleviation of poverty from India. Poverty alleviation programs are a noble step in the direction to ensure justice and security for all. Through such social programs, the government ensures that a major section of society does not remain underfed and devoid of basic life necessities. Programs have been launched in every vertical – food, housing, pension, gas connection, employment, etc. The basic idea is to empower the beneficiaries and enable them to rise in society. It is true that poverty has been reduced but not up to the intended level. As a citizen or as a government, still we have to focus on the food chain, clothing, population control, free education at the basic level, empowerment of women and fiscally weaker sections of society, medical facilities, etc. for better results. After adopting many policies and programmes by the government of India the poverty is still existing, corporate sector and civil society also should take responsibility and act positively by participating in policy implementations.

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