



ANTI-POVERTY PROGRAMMES UNDER THE FIVE-YEAR PLANS IN INDIA

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Abstract

Poverty is a social-economic phenomenon in which a section of society is unable to fulfil even its basic necessities of life. The minimum needs are food, clothing, housing, education and other basic minimum human needs. Humanity faces pains and miseries if it does not attain a subsistence level of such needs. It is generally agreed that only those who fail to reach a certain minimum consumption standard should be regarded as poor. "Growth with Social Justice" has been the basic objective of development planning in India since independence. At the beginning of the First Five-Year Plan, almost half of the Indian population was living below the poverty line, 80 % of which lived in the rural areas. The incidence of poverty in villages was widespread. This problem was further aggravated by disparities that existed among the states, between men and women and among different social groups. The magnitude of poverty and disparities that existed between various social groups, such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, other backward castes, women, children, the physically handicapped and the disabled was considerable. The main objective and focus of this paper anti-poverty programme under the five-year plans in India.

Key Words: Poverty, Social-economic, Phenomenon, Consumption, Considerable.

Introduction

"Growth with Social Justice" has been the basic objective of development planning in India since independence. At the beginning of the First Five-Year Plan, almost half of the Indian population was living below the poverty line, 80 % of which lived in the rural areas. The incidence of poverty in villages was widespread. This problem was further aggravated by disparities that existed among the states, between men and women and among different social groups. The magnitude of poverty and disparities that existed between various social groups, such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, other backward castes, women, children, the physically handicapped and the disabled was considerable. Planning in India was intended, in the words of the Government Resolution of March 1950, "to promote a rapid rise in the standard of living of the people by efficient exploitation of the resources of the country, increasing production, and offering opportunities to all for employment in the service of the community."

In December 1954, Parliament adopted a resolution, which contained the following clauses:

1. The objective of economic policy should be a Socialistic Pattern of Society; and
2. Towards this end the tempo of economic activity in general and industrial development in particular should be stepped up to the maximum possible extent.

Integrated Rural Development Programme/ Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana

Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), introduced in selected blocks in 1978-79 and universalized from October 2, 1980 has provided assistance to the rural poor in the form of subsidy and bank credit for productive employment opportunities through successive plan periods. Subsequently, Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Supply of Improved Tool Kits to Rural Artisans (SITRA) and Ganga Kalyan Yojana (GKY) were introduced as sub-programmes of IRDP to take care of the specific needs of the rural population. These schemes were, however, implemented as 'stand alone programmes', an approach which substantially detracted from their effectiveness.

On April 1, 1999, the IRDP and allied programmes, including the Million Wells Scheme (MWS), were merged into a single programme known as Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY). The SGSY is conceived as a holistic programme of micro enterprise development in rural areas with emphasis on organizing the rural poor into self-help groups, capacity-building, planning of activity clusters, infrastructure support, technology, credit



and marketing linkages. It seeks to promote a network of agencies, namely, the District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs), line departments of state governments, banks, NGOs and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) for implementation of the programme. The SGSY recognizes the need to focus on key activities and the importance of activity clusters. The programme has in-built safeguards for the weaker sections. It insists that women must exclusively form 50 per cent of the self-help groups and that 50 per cent of the benefits should flow to SCs and STs. There is also a provision for disabled beneficiaries.

Wage Employment Programmes

Wage Employment Programmes, an important component of the anti-poverty strategy, have sought to achieve multiple objectives. They not only provide employment opportunities during lean agricultural seasons but also in times of floods, droughts and other natural calamities. They create rural infrastructure which supports further economic activity. These programmes also put an upward pressure on market wage rates by attracting people to public works programmes, thereby reducing labour supply and pushing up demand for labour. While public works programmes to provide employment in times of distress have a long history, a major thrust to wage employment programmes in the country was provided only after the attainment of self-sufficiency in food grains in the 1970s. The National Rural Landless Employment Programme (NREP) and Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programmes (RLEGP) were started in the Sixth and Seventh Plans.

Jawahar Rozgar Yojana/ Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana

The NREP and RLEGP were merged in April 1989 under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY). The JRY was meant to generate meaningful employment opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed in rural areas through the creation of economic infrastructure and community and social assets. A major proportion of JRY funds were spent on roads and buildings. Over 47 per cent of the employment generated benefited SC/STs.

The JRY was revamped from 1 April 1999 as the Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY). It became a programme for the creation of rural economic infrastructure with employment generation as a secondary objective. The 60:40 wage labour/material ratios in the JRY was relaxed. The programme is implemented by village panchayats and provides for specific benefits to SC/STs, the disabled and provides for the maintenance of community assets created in the past.

Employment Assurance Scheme

The Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) was launched on October 2, 1993 covering 1,778 drought-prone, desert, tribal, and hill area blocks. It was later extended to all the blocks in 1997-98. The EAS was designed to provide employment in the form of manual work in the lean agricultural season. The works taken up under the programme were expected to lead to the creation of durable economic and social infrastructure and address the felt-needs of the people. The EAS is a centrally sponsored scheme, with the Centre providing 75 per cent of the funds and the states 25 per cent. The zilla parishads and panchayat samitis were the implementing agencies.

Food for Work Programme

The Food for Work programme was started in 2000-01 as a component of the EAS in eight notified drought-affected states of Chattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Uttaranchal. The programme aims at augmenting food security through wage employment. Food grains are supplied to states free of cost. However, lifting of food grains for the scheme from Food Corporation of India (FCI) godowns has been slow.

Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana (SGRY)

Given the complementarity of the JGSY, EAS and Food for Work Programme, all of which aim at the creation of employment opportunities in rural areas, they were revamped and merged under the new Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) scheme from September 2001. The basic aim of the scheme continues to be generation of



wage employment, creation of durable economic infrastructure in rural areas and provision of food and nutrition security to the poor.

Rural Housing

Initiated in 1985-86, the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) is the core programme for providing free housing to BPL families in rural areas and targets SC/STs and freed bonded labourers. It was first merged with the JRY in 1989 and then spun off into a separate housing scheme for the rural poor in 1996. The Ninth Plan Housing Programme under IAY was framed in the light of the National Housing and Habitat Policy 1998, 10 • Poverty Alleviation Programmes in India which set an ambitious target of providing shelter for all in the rural areas by the end of the Plan period.

The Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) has extended its activities to rural areas, providing loans at a concessional rate of interest to economically weaker sections and low-income group households for construction of houses. HUDCO's rural housing programme was given a major boost in the Ninth Plan.

Social Security Programmes

Democratic decentralization and centrally supported Social Assistance Programmes were two major initiatives of the government in the 1990s. The National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), launched in August 1995 marks a significant step towards fulfilment of the Directive Principles of State Policy. The NSAP has three components:

1. National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS)
2. National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS)
3. National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS)

Land Reforms

Land reforms, as a programme for ushering in a just social order were an important item on the national agenda even before independence. As a poverty alleviation measure, the main emphasis of land reforms until recently was on redistributive policies. The successive lowering of the ceiling on agricultural holdings (which was first introduced in the mid-1950's) in the early 1960's and again in the early 1970's was aimed at sequestering the surplus land and redistributing it amongst landless rural households or those who cultivated marginal holdings.

Public Distribution System

The Public Distribution System (PDS) in the country facilitates the supply of food grains to the poor at a subsidised price. With a network of more than 4.62 lakh fair price shops (FPS) distributing commodities worth more than Rs. 30,000 crore annually to about 160 million families, the PDS in India is perhaps the largest distribution network of its kind in the world. The PDS in its original form was widely criticized for its failure to serve the BPL population, its urban bias, negligible coverage in the states with highest concentration of the rural poor and lack of delivery. Realising this, the Government streamlined the system by issuing special cards to BPL families and selling food grains under PDS to them at specially subsidised prices with effect from June 1997. This is known as the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS). This was expected to benefit about 60 million poor families. The identification of the poor is done by the states. The emphasis is on including only the really poor and vulnerable sections of the society.

Education Programmes

Operation Blackboard

The Operation Blackboard scheme, started in 1987- 88, aimed at improving the classroom environment by providing infrastructural facilities, additional teachers and teaching-learning material to primary schools and provision of a third teacher to schools.



Restructuring and Reorganisation of Teacher Education

The scheme of Restructuring and Reorganisation of Teacher Education started in 1987, aims to strengthen the institutional base of teacher training by taking up special programmes for training of teachers in specified areas and other non-institutional training programmes. Other objectives of the scheme are: setting up District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) to provide academic and resource support to elementary school teachers and non-formal and adult education instructors; and establishment of Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs) and Institutes of Advanced Studies (IASs) for pre-service and inservice training for secondary school teachers. The scheme also envisages strengthening State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERT); orienting teachers in the use of Operation Blackboard material; and implementation of Minimum Levels of Learning (MLL) strategy.

District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)

DPEP, launched in 1994, is assisted by the World Bank, European Commission, and department for International Development (DFID) of UK, the Netherlands and UNICEF. It aims at operationalising the strategies for achieving Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) through district-specific planning and disaggregated target-setting in low female literacy districts and builds on the successful Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) which has created a favourable climate for universalisation.

Shiksha Karmi Project and Lok Jumbish Project in Rajasthan

Two externally aided projects for basic education are the Shiksha Karmi and Lok Jumbish projects in Rajasthan. Both are innovative projects aimed at the universalisation of elementary education together with a qualitative improvement in remote and socially backward villages with a primary focus on gender. There is a special emphasis on community participation in these projects. The Village Education Committees (VECs) have contributed a great deal to the improvement of the school environment, augmentation of infrastructure and facilities, larger enrolment of children through school mapping and micro-planning in the Shiksha Karmi schools.

Mahila Samakhya

Another externally assisted programme with a specific focus on gender is Mahila Samakhya started in 1989 in five States. It aims to promote women's education and empowerment of women in rural areas, particularly women in socially and economically marginalized groups.

Mid-Day Meal Scheme

The National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education, commonly known as the Mid-Day Meal programme, was launched in 1995. It aims to give a boost to universalisation of primary education by increasing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improving the nutritional status of students in primary classes. Under the scheme, cooked meals are served with calorie value equivalent to 100 gm of wheat or rice per student per school day. The Mid-Day Meal scheme was initiated in Tamil Nadu.

Non-Formal Education (NFE) and EGS & AIE

The non-formal education (NFE) scheme introduced in 1977-78 on a pilot basis and expanded in subsequent years, focused on out-of-school children in the 6-14 age group who have remained outside the formal system due to socioeconomic and cultural reasons. The programme was revised and renamed the Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative and Innovative Education (EGS & AIE) in 2000. It provided for opening EGS schools in habitations where there are no schools within a radius of one km.

Janshala (GoI-UN) Programme

This programme is a collaborative effort of the Government of India (GoI) and five United Nations (UN) agencies – UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO and UNFPA. It provides programme support to the ongoing efforts towards achieving UEE.



Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was launched towards the end of the Ninth Plan to achieve the goal of UEE through a time-bound integrated approach, in partnership with states. The programme, which aims to provide elementary education to all children in the 6-14 age group by 2010, is an effort to improve the performance of the school system and provide community-owned quality elementary education in the mission mode. It also envisages bridging of gender and social disparities at the elementary level. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has a special focus on the educational needs of girls, SCs and STs and other children in difficult circumstances.

Integrated Child Development Services

Integrated Child Development Services Programme (ICDS) is considered the largest child welfare programme in Asia and probably the largest in the world. Targeted at marginalized and neglected groups, the objectives of the programme include: improving the nutritional and health status of children; reducing mortality, morbidity and malnutrition; reducing the rate at which children drop out of school due to health reasons; and providing health education to enhance the ability of the mother to make correct choices for her children's health, etc. Immunisation of the mother and child; supplementary nutrition to pregnant and lactating mothers and their children; providing referral services, and non-formal education are some of the services provided under ICDS. Launched in 1975 with 33 projects on an experimental basis, ICDS has expanded considerably in subsequent years.

Evaluation of Anti-Poverty Programmes

IRDP/ SGSY

Implementation of the programme between 1999- 2000 and 2001-02 has highlighted many areas of concern. While the IRDP concentrated on individual beneficiaries, the SGSY laid greater emphasis on social mobilisation and group formation. However, the DRDAs responsible for administering the programme did not have the requisite skills in social mobilisation. Linkages with NGOs, which could have facilitated this process, were also not in place. The programme, therefore, suffered in the initial years. Central releases were substantially lower than the allocation as the field offices were not in a position to organise self-help groups, which could be provided financial assistance. Credit mobilization also suffered in the process.

Wage Employment Programmes

JGSY

The works taken up under JGSY have not been comprehensively evaluated for their quality and employment potential. Initial reports from the states, however, indicate that since every village panchayat has to be covered by the scheme, many panchayats get less than Rs. 10,000 per annum. Except for states like Kerala, west Bengal and Orissa, where village panchayats cover large areas and get substantial funds under the scheme, in other states most panchayats get less than Rs. 50,000 per annum. Benefits to the SC/STs and the disabled have to be earmarked. In addition, the administrative expenses of the panchayat and expenditure on assets already created are to be met from JGSY funds. In effect, panchayats are left with very little money to take up meaningful infrastructure projects.

Employment Assurance Scheme

Though the creation of community assets has important spin offs for rural poverty and development, the impact of these programmes on employment and income has been limited. The universalisation of the scheme severely eroded its basic objective of providing assured employment in areas of extreme poverty and chronic unemployment. Allocations were based on a fixed criterion that did not specifically provide for regionally differentiated needs. This led to a very thin spread of resources across the country. In spite of their many shortcomings, wage employment schemes have proved beneficial in some respects. They created much-needed rural infrastructure. The programmes are self-targeting in nature since only the poor come to work at minimum wage rates. The various works undertaken created demand for unskilled labour and exerted upward pressure on wage rates.



Indira Awas Yojana (IAY)

An evaluation of the IAY shows that while the programme has certainly enabled many BPL families to acquire pucca houses, the coverage of the beneficiaries is limited given the resource constraints. In addition, there has also been high level of leakages with a large number of non-eligible beneficiaries getting houses. The fact that houses are provided free of cost under IAY has meant that there has been virtually no progress in the other sub-schemes of IAY such as credit-cum-subsidy scheme for rural housing.

Land Reforms

Land reforms seem to have been relegated to the background in the 1990s. More recently, initiatives of state governments have related to liberalisation of land laws in order to promote large-scale corporate farming. Though the pressure of population has led to sub-division and fragmentation of land holdings, thereby considerably weakening the case for further lowering of land ceilings, the need for effective implementation of the existing land ceiling laws cannot be over-emphasized. The case of tenancy reforms is equally unsatisfactory. The progress on the consolidation of land holdings has also been slow. Alienation of tribals from their land is a major issue in tribal areas.

Public Distribution System

All is not well with PDS. The annual food subsidy involved in maintaining the system is huge. The level of food subsidies as a proportion of total government expenditure has gone up from a level of 2.5 per cent or below in the early 1990s to more than 5 per cent at present. The high carrying cost of stocks in excess of the buffer norms pushes up the food subsidy bill and actually amounts to subsidizing the cereals producers/surplus farmers. Under the TPDS though there is a clear indication of improvement at the national level, the situation is not uniform across states and there are certain states where conditions need to be improved.

Integrated Child Development Services

A number of studies have been undertaken to look into the effectiveness and performance of the ICDS. These have revealed that ICDS operational areas are characterized by a better utilization of services, and a significant improvement in health indicators. An evaluation by the National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) revealed that while health services were being utilized by only 30 per cent of expectant mothers in non-ICDS areas, the corresponding figure for ICDS areas was 50 per cent. The difference was even more pronounced in tribal areas: the percentage of LBW babies in ICDS areas was 43.3 as against 80 per cent in non-ICDS tribal areas.

However, critics of existing evaluation studies argue that considering the large budget for ICDS interventions and the manpower and infrastructure available to the scheme, the difference between indicators in ICDS areas and non-ICDS areas is negligible. Critics also argue that the indicators related to morbidity have been analyzed only in relation to ICDS presence and not in relation to other, very significant and influential variables of serious concern is a 2001 report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), which highlights the failure of the ICDS to supply therapeutic food in nine states because severely malnourished children were not identified. The report also noted that in a majority of the states there was no supply of Vitamin A solution and iron and folic acid tablets from 1992 to 1999. In Tamil Nadu, the percentage shortfall in coverage of children for the first dose of Vitamin A ranged from 56 per cent to 75 per cent and for the second dose, from 79 per cent to 93 per cent. For a programme of such dimensions and importance, this state of affairs is unacceptable.¹

Conclusion

Thus, poverty alleviation has been one of the guiding principles of the planning process in India. The role of economic growth in providing more employment avenues to the population has been clearly recognized. The growth-oriented approach has been reinforced by focusing on specific sectors, which provide greater opportunities to the people to participate in the growth process. The various dimensions of poverty relating to health, education and other basic services have been progressively internalized in the planning process. Central and state governments have considerably enhanced allocations for the provision of education, health, sanitation



and other facilities, which promote capacity building and well-being of the poor. Investments in agriculture, area development programmes and afforestation open avenues for employment and income. Special programmes have been taken up for the welfare of SCs and STs, the disabled and other vulnerable groups. The Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) protects the poor from the adverse effects of a rise in prices and ensures food and nutrition security at affordable prices.

Reference

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