

EFFORTS FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN INDIA

Dr. M. Sivakumar

Assistant Professor
PG & Research Department of History
A.V.C.College(Autonomous) Mannampandal-609305

Introduction

Poverty means not having access to a whole lot of services like education, health services, water supply, sanitation and so on. It also means loss of status in the community, exclusion from certain social functions, and a sense of inferiority in the group or community. In short, poverty means marginalization of an individual or household in the community. There is no denial that poverty alleviation programmes should lead income to the poor but also requires to basic services.

Since India became part of the global economy and underwent economic reform in 1991, its economy is growing at a faster rate of nearly 10 percent per annum. In the process, India has become the fourth largest economy in the world. In the last two decades significant proportion of the population across the country has reaped the benefits of this economic growth. They have become the part of global economy and market, and their lives have transformed into one of global citizens with all the comforts and luxury in life. A part from this burgeoning middle class in the county, the economic growth seemed to have touched the lives of the poor also.

Reduction of Poverty

According to the National sample survey results, people living below poverty line have dramatically come down during the post economic reform .However it is not the matter to join the debate on the level of poverty reduction in the country but to recognize the reduction of poverty in the country during the post-economic reform era and to undertake a social audit of poverty alleviation programmes in this era of fast economic growth.

Education Vs Economy

One-third of the country's population is still illiterate and a majority is not educated up to the age of 15 years. Even among the educated, all do not have employable skills of the modern economy. The education system is not tuned to the changing economic senario.The large agriculture workforce in rural areas is not sustainable with dwindling cultivable land and use of modern methods of cultivation. As a result, the rural labor is pushed into cities in search of work but they do not have any employable skills In the urban formal sector often end up doing odd jobs in urban areas.(*Mehta.J, Poverty in India, April,6,2004*)

Economic reform

Poverty is not uniformly spread in the country. States like Orissa, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh have high level of poverty and do not have the capacity to participate in the economic development process. Such groups need government to ensure that they are not left behind in the development process and deprived of the benefits because they do not have the capacity to be part of the global economy. The government needs to develop safety nets for such groups and try to main stream them in the development process.

Need of poverty alleviation programme

They need welfare measures in the form of poverty alleviation programmes to ensure that they survive if not prosper in this era of economic reform.Further, the poor are not a homogeneous population and their capacity to survive the economic reform varied from one group of poor to another.Especially,those who are below the poverty line or the poorest among the poor need more government help.

Poverty alleviation programmes

The programmes have been broadly classified into self-employment programmes,wage employment programmes ,food safety programme and social security programmes. The focus is on the central government scheme only.It is not possible to map the special programmes of all the States.It must be noted here that some of the progressive States have added additional components or given further subsidy to enhance the benefits of the central schemes. For example, in the highly subsidized public distribution system of Andhra Pradesh,the BPL(Below Poverty Line) card holders were? (*Government of India Employment and Unemployment situation in India Jult 2004 New Delhi*)

Self-employment programmes

This programme was started in 1970s in rural areas of the country in the name of Integrated Rural Development Programme(IRDP) to increase the source of income of small farmers and landless laborers. The beneficiaries were given subsidized credit, training, and infrastructure, so that they could find new sources of earning. In this scheme , agricultural laborers and small farmers received new skills to involve in vocations other than cultivating land. They included fishery, animal husbandry, and forestry. In the 1980s, this scheme was extended to schedule castes and tribes, women and rural artisans. IRDP suffer from certain short falls. One important factor is the attempt to develop an entrepreneur out of the unskilled landless laborer,who has no experience in managing an enterprise. Considering the shortfalls of the IRDP,the government replaced this programme with *Swarna Jayanthi Gram Swarozgar Yojana(SGSY)* in 1999. Considering the non-viability of the enterprise of the poor individual and his/her poor credit worthiness, SGSY focused on groups to lend money and develop micro-enterprises.

Wage employment programme

The main purpose of the employment programmes is to provide a livelihood during the lean agricultural season as well as during drought and floods. Under these progammes, villagers worked to improve the village infrastructure such as Deeping the village ponde,constructing village schools and improving the roads. Thus the programmes not only provided employment to the villagers

but also improved village infrastructure and created village public assets. A positive fall out of this that it created higher demand for village labour, thereby pushing up the labourer in the village. Wage employment programmes were first started during the sixth and seventh plan in the form of National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) and Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP). These two programmes were later merged in 1989 into more well known *Jawahar Rozgar Yojana* or JRY. The JRY was supposed to produce employment for the unemployed and the underemployed and improve the village infrastructure and assets.

The JRY was revised and re-launched in April 1999 and was named as *Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana* or JGSY. The secondary objective of the JRY has become the main objective, i.e., creating economic assets and infrastructure for the village and the creation of employment is a by-product of the main objective. (*Alleviation :India: A tale of two surveys; 2002 working Paper No.822: Los Angeles: University of California, July 6, 2007*)

Food security programme

Meeting the very basic need of access to food is a major challenge to the government in the post economic reform era. Those who are below poverty line are faced with the problem of meeting this very basic need. Starvation and hunger have been reported in different parts of the country, even in economically advanced States like Maharashtra. There is mal-nutrition in all age groups, especially children. Problem of low birth weight due to under nutrition of mother during pregnancy and underweight of children are rampant in the country. The purchasing power of certain section of society is so low that they cannot access food at the market price. They need the safety net of food subsidy. In this context, public distribution system or PDS assumes importance. The PDS was originally a universal public distribution system or UPDS. The central government initiated a new PDS programme in June 1997 and called it targeted public distribution system or TPDS.

Social security programmes

Social security programmes are meant for those who are at the bottom of the BPL (Below Poverty Line) facing destitution and desertion. The central government or NSAP in August 1995. Under NSAP, there are three schemes. The first one is the National Old Age Pension Scheme NOAPS.

In addition to NOAP, the government has launched another programme called *Annapurna* for those elderly who are eligible for NOAPS but did not receive it due to budgetary constraints family, where the breadwinner of the family died of natural or accidental causes. The total amount is given to a member of the deceased family who has assumed the role of head of family.

The scheme is available to BPL families only.

Urban poverty alleviation programme Urban poverty is the spillover effect of rural poverty. It is the push factor rather than the pull factor that is driving the urbanization process in most developing countries like India. Central, State and municipal government use the dual approach of providing minimum amenities to some slums that are well established and also try to demolish and evict the poor to prevent the spread of slums in the city. Comparable to the self-employment and wage employment programmes in rural areas is the *Nehru Rozgar Yojana in urban areas. It has three components.* First one is scheme of urban micro Enterprise. The second scheme under the *Nehru Rozgar Yojana* is the scheme of Urban Wage Employment or SUWE. The third component is the Scheme of Housing Shelter Up gradation SHASU. The largest urban poverty alleviation programme currently operating in the country is the Urban Basic Services for poor or UBSP. It is based on the principle of community development involving the community, especially women to improve communities and environment. This programme implemented in 25 States and 6 union territories covering 296 cities. Ten million urban poor are benefited from this programme.

Review of poverty alleviation programme From the above review of poverty alleviation programme, one gets the impression that these programmes are not benefiting the poor in terms of increasing their income. For example, the PDS is plagued with seepage, corruption, high administrative cost and targeting errors. Self-employment programme like the micro-credit scheme is better utilized by the non-poor or those who are above BPL. Wage employment programme is caught in red-tapes and administrative delays leading to poor use of the allocated funds. All these factors have been used by some economists to argue against these programmes and to suggest the winding up of the programmes. Looking at purely narrow economic point of view is not the right approach to poverty alleviation. Poverty does not mean not having enough income alone.

Towards poverty alleviation

First involvement of the local community is key to the success of poverty alleviation programme.

In the absence of community involvement, the programmes are plagued with bureaucratic muddle and corruption at every level. Wage employment to show too much of administrative interference has led to underutilization of funds, high administrative cost corruption and poor employment generation. (*Chavan P, Ramakumar R Micro-credit and rural poverty page 37, 2002, Economic and political*).

Achievements and challenges in Reducing poverty

Poverty imposes an oppressive weight on India. Especially in the rural areas where almost three out of four Indians and 77 percent of the Indian poor live, Although poverty has been reduced during the past four decades, it remains painfully high.

Because of India's rapid population growth rate, even the advance however, has not been sufficient to reduce the absolute number of poor, which increased from around 200 million in the 1950's to 312 million in 1997-94. This leaves India with the largest concentration of poor in the world. Particularly in villages - fewer than 5000 people - where 60 percent of all Indians live, stragglers as the overall numbers, remain - 240 rural poor and 72 million urban poor - they do not tell the full story of change.

Million Development Goals

Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 is a millennium Development Goal.

1. Access to information on sexual and reproduce health.
2. Action against domestic violence.
3. Appointing governments scientific advisors in every State.
5. Drugs and AIDS Tuberculosis, and malaria.
7. Legislation for women's rights including rights to property.
9. planting trees.
10. providing mosquito nets.
11. Access to electricity, water and sanitation.
12. Training programs for community health in rural areas.
13. Upgrading slums, and providing land for public housing.

Conclusion

While some of the poverty alleviation programmes discussed above, may not be performing well in terms of utilizing the allocated funds and initiatives with increasing the income of poor, these programmes have contributed to the social arena of poverty. The fruits of economic growth should be ploughed in the social sector to elevate the quality of life in the country by raising the economic and social status of the population. It makes good economic sense also, because better quality of human resource in terms of better health status, employable skills and better will add on to the economic investment of the country.

The poverty Alleviation /Eradication programme Government has recognized many of the inter related problems associated with poverty. The inclusion of poverty in the national programme recognize that the needs of women and children must be an integral part of the national strategy.

With women's participation forming the frame work for concerted action, in project cities and communities with neighborhood groups moving towards self-reliant action, dramatic improvements have been in health and education indicators, with these communities and families themselves taking greater responsibility than earlier, with government playing a facilitating role.

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