

Sustainable Development and Rural Poverty Alleviation measures: Media Perspectives

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Abstract

Poverty is a phenomenon no one likes and everyone avoids encountering. Development is answer to eradicating poverty and destitution. And development is economic prosperity plus change. On the whole the process to cure the disease is as complicated as the disease itself. Researchers and academicians have always recommended a relatively hassle-free path of setting a poverty line, studying the consumption expenditure of people and then figuring out who comes below the poverty line to be called poor. This methodology is quite significant for India as being the second most populous country it has the largest number of poor people. Since independence the country has introduced a number of programmes for improving the living standard of people. The present paper is a brief overview of the state of poverty in India and the challenges that emerged for all stake holders including media in pursuing various methods from time to time and creating public opinion for effective implementation of development schemes.

Key Words: Poverty, Sustainable Development Goals, MPI, NITI
Aayog, media in India

Introduction

India is considered home to world's highest number of poor. Last estimated, they numbered 228.9 million, nearly 23 Crore, constituting 16.4 per cent of country's population. The underbelly of the country emerged following release of the 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) report in October jointly by UNDP and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI). The MPI is an annual exercise that takes into account collected data on human deprivations across three dimensions comprising 10 indicators: health (child mortality, nutrition), education (years of schooling, enrolment), and living standards (water, sanitation, electricity, cooking fuel, floor, assets).

As per the report, titled 'Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2022: Unpacking deprivation bundles to reduce multidimensional poverty', India still has a sizeable number of poor people even after lifting 41.5 Crore people from out of poverty in the last 15 years between 2005-06 and 2019-21. The yearly pace of poverty reduction was 11.9 per cent in the first 10 years and 8.1 per cent in the last five years. So many still stuck in poverty indicates the depth of lingering destitution in the country. More so, the MPI calculations are based on pre-Covid19 pandemic information. Given the fact that globally the pandemic has reverted poverty reduction by three to 10 years, India despite the pre-2020 achievement remains vulnerable to Corona or similar such crisis. Added to the woes of people are steady rise in prices of food and energy. In 2019-21 there were 97 million children estimated in the country.

What is ironical and wryly funny is that even after implementing myriad welfare schemes since independence India is far to visibly come out of the poverty zone. Most poor people, nearly 90 per cent, live in villages. Odisha is amongst the 10 poorest states in India.

World Focus on India

From global perspective India has bigger responsibility to end the scourge of poverty by roping in all resources at its disposal. One

reason is that the United Nations puts a lot of hope on India for the success of the much-hyped Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Since India with over 1.4 billion people is the single country having so many poor, reduction in their number would be seen as a big unburdening of poverty globally. The first target of SDG (Goal 1) is to end poverty 'in all its forms everywhere' by 2030. Half of SDG's life is over since its introduction in 2015. If in the next eight years India could lift most of the 23 Crore poor from their present state of adversity it would help the UN to mirror its development agenda to the world to emulate.

India also stands to gain a lot. The country is now rated as one of the fastest-growing major economies. It targets to become the third largest economy in the next 10-15 years. India getting stronger economically, becoming a military power, oldest democracy with strong 'Basudheiba Kutumbakam' (one world one family concept) tradition, not imperialistic and challenging countries pursuing hegemonic policies is viewed as spokesman of third world countries to champion their causes. India's standing in the global platforms now being in upward trajectory, the country cannot afford to sustain its aspirations with a large number of poor people at its backyard.

The World Bank has forecast 6.9 per cent GDP growth for FY23. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and other agencies have forecast seven per cent growth. Global Investment bank Morgan Stanley in its report titled 'Why this is India's decade' has predicted India to become world's third largest economy 'before the end of this decade ending 2030'. It said households earning more than \$35,000 a year would increase fivefold to over 25 million in the next decade, thereby doubling the GDP to more than \$7.5 trillion by 2031. By that time India's per-capita income would also increase from the current USD 2,278 to USD 5,242.

India presently pursues a twin strategy of taking the GDP growth to 8 per cent level and simultaneously implements several target-oriented welfare schemes. The purpose of the welfare schemes is more to do with building the resilience of people rather than making them contented with momentary benefits. Resilient population possesses

the capacity to counter possible economic, social and environmental shocks in the future (Goal 1.5).

Development is easier said than done, especially in a gigantic country like India where under the cover of democratic rights dissenting voices myopic of reality, bureaucratic red tape, array of diversities pertaining to races, religion, culture, and corruption among many other factors often get in the way of developmental programmes to yield the desired results. The fate of the Community Development Programme, one of independent India's early efforts to bring meaningful changes in the lives of people, proves the point.

The programme got up to a grand start after inauguration on Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary day on October 2, 1952. It was described as a move to create a 'burning desire' in the millions of rural families to 'live better' by giving up old outlooks. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said "These Community Projects appear to me to be something of vital importance, not only in the material achievements that they would bring about, much more so, because they seek to build up the community and the individual, and make the latter a builder of his own village centre and of India, in the larger sense". Studies however said the programme was a 'total failure', one of the reasons being failure to involve people for whom it was intended.

What is Poverty?

Poverty is a complex societal issue. It has many faces and features and obviously is seen differently at different places. Being a multifaceted concept inclusive of social, economic and political elements, poverty has not one but many definitions depending on the context it seeks to describe. It largely refers to a specific condition of a person or a community unable to meet certain standard of living. Simply put it is lack of money to meet basic needs of life such as food, shelter and clothing. Poverty is hunger often encountered by a person. Poverty can be understood as an aspect of unequal social status marked with inequitable social relationship experienced in the form of social exclusion and dependency.

Sphere of Poverty

The United Nations views poverty in denial of choices and opportunities, violation of human dignity, lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. Insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities are reflections of poverty. Poverty means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living in marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation.

The World Bank has pointed out a range of deficiencies as manifestations of poverty. They include hunger, lack of shelter, being sick and not able to see a doctor, not having access to school and not knowing how to read, not having a job, fear for the future, and living one day at a time. Lack of power to express opinion, negotiate, access to opportunity and decent work, inability to exercise choices, violation of human rights and labour rights violations, child labour, forced labour and human trafficking all fall under the category of poverty. The European Union defines poverty from a different perspective: distribution of income in each member country using relative income poverty lines.

Conventionally poverty was a euphemism for economic depravity. Its ambit has since expanded beyond the traditional meaning to incorporate new perspectives like lack of education, health care etc., and even human rights. Arguments proffered in defence are that they too are basic needs to be understood in the context of what is called human development. Basic needs here refer to those essentials that reflect prevailing standard of living in the community.

Poverty can be defined in measurable technical terms also. It can be characterized in a multidimensional manner in relation to its causes, context, and consequences. Such being the ramifications of poverty

affecting several aspects of human lives, the UN since 2010 has been annually publishing the multidimensional poverty index (MPI) to reflect upon multiple deprivations in the areas of health, education and living standards of people.

The position of individual countries in the MPI list is decided on an overall value ranging from 0 to 1. Higher value denotes higher poverty. India's MPI value began falling from 0.283 in 2005-6 to 0.122 in 2015-16 and further to 0.069 in 2019-21, indicating steady reduction in poverty in the country. As regards achieving the SDG target 1.2 (Reducing poverty in all dimensions) the trend shows it is possible to improve the condition of remaining 16.4 per cent population afflicted by multidimensional poverty including 21.8 per cent children and 14 per cent adults. Majority of the extremely poor people, 21.2 per cent, are living in villages compared to 5.5 per cent in urban areas.

Mahatma Gandhi viewed poverty as not God-given but 'most definitely man-made'. According to him 'no one is born poor' and it is the 'moral collapse of society' due to dominance of 'social evils' that has created such a situation. He named seven evils responsible for polluting the society such as wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, worship without sacrifice, and politics without principles. 'Every palace that one sees in India is a demonstration, not of her riches, but of the insolence of power that riches give to the few, who owe them to the miserably required labours of the millions of the paupers of India', he said.

Global resolve to fight poverty

Poverty is a situation no one loves and everyone wants to escape. That calls for concerted action involving all sections of people 'so that many more may have enough to eat, adequate shelter, access to education and health, protection from violence, and a voice in what happens in their communities.' Poverty is a state of being extremely poor. It is all about being backward, living in deficiency and scarcity. Poverty is absence of development. It thrives at the expense of the later. For, development concerns not only man's material needs, but

also the improvement of the social conditions of his life and his broad human aspirations, as observed in the UN Development Decade report.

The 21st century world has come to terms with the overarching idea that human development could remain illusory and unattainable if a large chunk of people is left sinking in poverty. More so, remaining in depravity has all the traits of breeding contempt and violence, thereby heightening the prospects of spoiling peace, a major factor for realizing prosperity. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of peace and non-violence, poverty is the worst form of violence.

At the United Nations General Assembly the international community while adopting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the just preceding Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) had unanimously endorsed this view that in the interest of the present and upcoming generations the world must be freed from poverty in all its forms and they had the responsibility to work united to achieve the goal. The SDGs has poverty elimination prioritized to the top of the 17-Goal agenda. Poverty reduction was also the top most mission of 8-Goal MDG. Further, poverty is closely linked to hunger, inequality, discriminations, education, health, livelihood, and more importantly the inhabitability of the planet. All this apparently impelled the world leaders to commit themselves to go by the UN initiated development framework in letter and spirit.

Types of Poverty

Poverty is no more defined not having money to meet the basic needs. People meeting the basic needs yet can be labeled poor if they don't have access to education, health, and several other factors required for human development. Thus poverty can be of different types like Absolute poverty, Relative Poverty, Multidimensional Poverty, Situational Poverty, Generational Poverty, Rural Poverty and Urban Poverty.

Absolute poverty: Absolute poverty is poverty too acute to arrange basic needs including food to survive. So, it is called extreme or abject poverty. Former World Bank president Robert McNamara

described this level of poverty as a ‘condition so limited by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, squalid surroundings, high infant mortality, and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency’. Absolute poverty is a condition of the quality of life being poor, inability of a person to obtain essential commodities like food, shelter, and clothing. In absolute poverty condition children are the worst casualties. Absolute poverty is hardly seen in developed countries. The concept of absolute poverty gained currency in 1990 when daily earning of one dollar a day was set as the economic threshold or poverty line to determine the number of poor people. Those below the poverty line were adjudged poor. The poverty line benchmark has since been revised a number of times, which however many developing countries do not agree. Many countries have their own poverty line to figure out the extreme poor. Absolute poverty is caused by debt, population increase, natural disasters like frequent flood, famine, cyclones, war, child labour etc.

Relative Poverty: Relative poverty is judged from social perspectives beyond meeting the biological needs. It is rather a comparison between two people, one slightly above the other. In other words those living in relative poverty are somewhat better than their counterparts in absolute poverty zone. It is a comparison of living standard with economic standard of the population in the surroundings. Relative poverty is usually measured to find out the proportion of people with income less than some fixed proportion of median income. Since absolute poverty is almost absent in developed societies relative poverty assumes great importance in public discourse particularly from the perspective of social inclusion indicators. Unemployment, dependence on government doles, poor health, and inequality within the labour market are some of the incidents that cause relative poverty.

Multidimensional Poverty: Most countries understand poverty as lack of money. But poverty is much more than that. Those who experience or have experienced in their daily lives know what it means to not able to get education, to see a doctor, nutrition deficient, not having electricity, clean water, poor quality of work,

discriminated in wages and at work places, threat of violence, and living in areas that are environmentally hazardous etc. The galore of disadvantages form the multidimensional poverty. The multiple deprivations bring home an important point: Poverty is not one dimensional nor can be judged from income alone.

Situational Poverty: The very name suggests that unexpected adverse situations such as sudden loss of job, severe health problem, and environmental problem could cause resource constraints for persons choking their ability to access basic needs both for themselves or their families. Those living slightly above the poverty line are prone to becoming victims of such situations, many of whom struggle with small assistance to manage.

Generational Poverty: There is no dearth of incidents of individuals and families enduring poverty from one generation to another. In India there were many of them during the colonial period and the years before ruled by invading Muslim forces. Their number began dwindling after independent India introduced many rural development programmes. Even as some of the programmes failed in their mission and some are yielding below expectation results, on the whole the measures have cheered smiles in many families. The plight of people suffering from generational poverty soars when they find little escape routes and remain trapped in the cycle of exploitation.

Rural Poverty: Rural poverty is the most talked about phenomenon in India and the world over, across rich and poor nations. Be in the USA, India or African nations, majority of poor live in rural areas. These people in their daily lives suffer from multiple deprivations, clutching to situations generally marked by poor infrastructure, difficulty in accessing to markets, lesser opportunity to quality education and health care to name a few. Being far off from the seat of administration social protection and justice also keep eluding a large number of people in rural areas. Researchers and academicians often discuss the condition in villages in conjunction with spatial inequality. Rural areas are large geographical spread-outs. There are places located in intractable interior pockets amidst hills and forests where reaching out the people remain a daunting task. As a

consequence not only it is difficult to implement development programmes there, but poverty taking advantage of the situation rules the roost there.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), about three quarters of the extreme poor live in rural areas, with most dependent on agriculture for their livelihood and food security. And agriculture is always vulnerable to extreme weather. The increasing climate changes have heightened the prospects of the situation worsening in the future.

In the USA poverty rates are higher in rural areas compared to urban areas. Over 38 million face hungers each and every day including 1 in 6 children there. The USA despite being the wealthiest country in the world has nearly 40 million people, 11 per cent of the population, live in poverty, according to an Oxfam report. As many as 95 per cent persistent poverty counties in the U.S. are rural. Structural inequalities are cited as major cause of poverty that has stranded millions of working families, especially historically marginalised people such as Black and Brown, immigrants and refugees, and women and girls in such a situation.

Urban Poverty: Despite attracting a lion share of all kinds of developmental schemes, urban areas still have people in poverty. Some of them under extreme poverty category resort to begging. There are others, particularly children, who are engaged in rag picking. There are also people who do odd jobs, and such other works that barely meet their daily food costs. Also are families in urban areas who subsist on such meagre incomes. They are so vulnerable that any crisis like the Corona pandemic can make them go hungry.

Challenges are many for these people. Little social protection mechanism, violent and unhealthy environment due to overcrowding, inadequate or no shelter to live, and limited access to education and healthcare facilities contribute to their poverty.

Measuring Poverty

Measuring poverty is as difficult as defining it. For, it is understood differently in different contexts. So, there have been different approaches appropriated across countries to tackle it. Poverty therefore is attributed to the condition of an individual or household not able to meet the expenditure required for maintaining basic minimum standard of living. This expenditure is called the 'poverty line'. Taking this line as the benchmark poverty is measured in terms of the number of people living below poverty line (BPL), headcount ratio (HCR) or poverty ratio showing the percentage of poor to the total population, the depth and severity of poverty etc.

Traditionally public perception centred round food as the basic need. Now that there is the concept of human development at play mere survival of an individual or household by just earning to meet the daily food need is no more treated not to be called poor. Poverty has come to be understood in the context of multidimensional deficiencies. Accordingly, the 'basic need basket' now constitutes inputs from sectors such as education, health and the necessities for maintaining a standard of living.

Globally, countries adopt methods of their choosing to gauge poverty. But the underlying principle remains the same - setting a poverty line calculated on the basis of expenditure required for minimum standard of living. The poverty line or for that matter the ways to estimate the size of poverty hence is not same in all countries. The USA in 2020 found poverty rising in the country with the number of poor having increased to 37.2 million from 33.9 million recorded the year before. The estimate was based on a poverty income threshold of \$26,246 per year for a family of four with two under 18 children and \$15,644 per year for two people over 65 years with no children under 18. The USA Census Bureau conducts the survey to determine the status of people by applying one of the multiple thresholds to a person or family. The method is applicable throughout the country.

The World Bank in 2017 came up with new median poverty lines grouping countries broadly into four categories. Many countries expressed their reservations. The global poverty lines are:

- \$1.90 per person per day — in 33 low-income countries
- \$3.20 per person per day — in 32 lower-middle-income countries, including India
- \$5.50 per person per day — in 32 upper-middle-income countries, such as Brazil and South Africa
- \$21.70 per person per day — in 29 high-income countries

On the basis of \$1.90 income per person per day the World Bank estimated the number of people in extreme poverty at 10 per cent of the world population, which is about 711 million living in 2021. It also claimed COVID-19 pandemic to have impoverished roughly 100 million people. The World Bank has since changed the international poverty line. In September 2022 it updated the line from \$1.90 to \$2.15 per person per day.

The new poverty line is due to the evolving price levels across the countries, the World Bank said. The new extreme poverty line at \$2.15 is based on 2017 purchasing power parities (PPPs).

Accordingly, the number of extremely poor globally was estimated at about 648 million in 2019. It said the rise in international poverty line reflects the increase in basic need prices of food, clothing, and shelter in low income countries between 2011 and 2017, relative to the rest of the world. “In other words, the real value of \$2.15 in 2017 prices is the same as \$1.90 was in 2011 prices”, the World Bank contended.

The \$2.15 line will also be adopted for monitoring SDG 1.1.

Given the complex phenomenon of poverty, countries are now trying innovative methods by deploying modern technologies including mobile phones to find out the condition people across nations, regions or at macro level. They say the global poverty line may sound feasible from global perspective, but cannot give a true picture of poverty at individual country level. The annual income threshold set in a developed country like the USA to count the poor there, for example, cannot be used as a measuring rod for the same work in a low income

country. If applied, meaning converting US dollar into local currency, the result could be staggering. The same logic holds good amongst middle and low income countries where currency equivalence differs too.

Poverty Measurement in India

For India measurement of poverty means a lot. It is the second most populous country, accounting for 17.7 per cent of the world population. Majority of the more than 140 crore people live in villages with many in inaccessible pockets bounded by hills, forests and rivers. Development is pre-requisite to eliminating poverty, but effective implementation of development programmes especially in interior areas have always posed a major challenge for government and non-government agencies engaged in the field. Measuring poverty is essential for formulating efficacious poverty reduction strategies, to track schemes under implementation and whether they are reaching out the target beneficiaries.

Since independence India has regularly introduced several developmental programmes. The primary targets of these programmes have been to create a just and equitable society by enhancing the self-sustaining capacity of people more than addressing their emergent needs. Since resources are limited and the numbers of potential beneficiaries being quite large, the government has since undertaken several structural adjustments and policy changes in order to reduce the dependency syndrome of people and make them stand on their own feet. But development to eradicate poverty is not possible without first identifying the poor. And the first step in this regard is to set the poverty line, meaning quantifying the monthly household expenditure needed for meeting the basic need.

Poverty Line Estimation

Pre-Independent: India spanning over a century has piled up plenty of expert studies on measurement of poverty. There has been no

consensus opinion emerged yet on estimating the contentious poverty. Noted freedom fighter and scholar Dadabhai Naoroji in 1901 in his book 'Poverty and Un-British Rule in India' quantified the poverty line Rs 16 to Rs 35 per capita per year at 1867-68 prices. He based his study on the cost of a subsistence diet for the emigrant coolies during their voyage. In 1938, the National Planning Committee set up by then Indian National Congress president Subhash Chandra Bose under the chairmanship of Jawaharlal Nehru suggested a poverty line ₹15 to ₹20 per capita per month as minimum standard of living. The Bombay Plan in 1944 suggested a poverty line of ₹75 per capita per year.

Post-independent:

After independence the Planning Commission since 1960s constituted many expert committees to assess poverty in the country. They came up with many suggestions. Poverty line accordingly was calculated in terms of monthly per capita consumption expenditure. Required information on the consumption expenditure and its distribution across households was provided by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) through periodic national surveys in every five years. Though the household expenditures were evaluated from time to time, poverty line calculated, and the number of people living below the poverty line (BPL), deemed as poor, estimated, yet the whole exercise has been far from getting consensus support. That every time an expert committee report came there was stiff opposition paving way for another to come proves the point. The silver line nevertheless is that India is committed to eliminating poverty and for that has not gone back in honouring dissenting voices. After all, poverty involves a vast majority of country's population.

Expert Committees:

1. The Planning Commission for the first time in 1962 constituted a 'Working Group' to study and quantify a poverty line for a

desirable minimum level of living. The Group recommended two separate poverty lines: Rs 20 per capita per month for rural and Rs 25 per capita per month for urban areas with no regional variations. Balanced diet recommended by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) was foremost before the panel, which did not take into account health and education. For about two decades the poverty line was in use for estimating poverty ratio at national and state level.

2. Two economists, VM Dandekar and N Rath, carried out what is called the first systematic analysis of the National Sample Survey (NSS) data in 1971 and suggested poverty line to be Rs. 15 per capita per month for rural households and Rs. 22.5 per capita per month for urban households at 1960-61 prices. They based their findings on consumption levels required to meet minimum calories per capita per day. The calorie criterion was a sharp departure from the subsistence criteria adopted earlier to estimate the poverty line.
3. In 1979 a Task Force on 'Projections of Minimum Needs and Effective Consumption Demand' headed by Dr. Y. K. Alagh following the calorie criterion recommended urban poverty line at Rs 49.09 for rural and Rs 56.64 per capita per month at 1973-74 prices. Based on the approach of the Task Force poverty counts in the country was undertaken for the first time.
4. Like a universal poverty line is unsuitable across countries, a common poverty line similarly cannot give a representative picture of poverty especially of a vast country like India full of diversities and hence differences in consumption patterns and prices. The practice continued till the Planning Commission set up the Lakdawala Expert Group in 1989 to look into the issue and redefine, if necessary, the poverty line. The expert group in its 1993 report recommended state-specific poverty lines in order to reflect the inter-state price differentials. It suggested to

keep updating the poverty lines by using the Consumer Price Index of Industrial Workers (CPI-IW) in urban areas and Consumer Price Index of Agricultural Labour (CPI-AL) in rural areas. The method however lost its acceptance over the years in the face of among others flawed price data and failure to preserve the original calorie norms.

5. In 2005 another expert group was constituted led by Suresh Tendulkar to review the poverty estimation methodology. The Tendulkar committee submitted its report in 2009 suggesting several changes to the way poverty was measured. Its recommendations made the case for incorporation of private expenditure on health and education while estimating poverty. It broke the monthly household consumption criterion into daily per person per day consumption, resulting in the figure of Rs 32 and Rs 26 a day for urban and rural areas respectively. The national poverty line for 2011-12 was estimated at Rs. 816 per capita per month for rural areas and Rs. 1,000 per capita per month for urban areas.
6. The Tendulkar committee recommendations met the same fate like those in the past of losing support forcing constitution of the Rangarajan Committee. The committee in its report submitted in 2014 raised the daily per capita expenditure at 2011-12 prices to Rs 47 for urban and Rs 32 for rural from Rs 32 and Rs 26 respectively. The all India poverty line was set at monthly per capita consumption expenditure of Rs. 972 in rural areas and Rs. 1407 in urban areas. The government sent the report to the cold store.

Thus, estimation of poverty requires:

- (a) - information on consumption expenditure and its distribution across households
- (b) –quantification of poverty line for evaluation of the information

Ground Reality

The last National Sample Survey of Household Consumer Expenditure (NSS 68th round) was done between July 2011 and June 2012. The subsequent quinquennial (in five years) national sample survey was carried out between July 2017 and June 2018. But the government raised objections and junked the survey findings saying the data collected were of poor quality. It denied media reports that the survey was discarded for political reasons because it found consumer expenditure falling in the country.

So, as of now effectively there is no official data after 2011-12 for determining poverty lines, counting the poor and poverty ratio based on consumption spending below a certain level and the percentage of households falling within that deprivation threshold. With no latest data in hand it's difficult to gauge whether the welfare schemes introduced in the last ten years are reaching the genuine persons and that whether poverty is really falling in the country. Without fresh data also means poverty estimations and policy formulations presently being done are based on a decade old data.

The government also conducts the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC), which too is as old as the household consumption expenditure survey done a decade back. The SECC gives some aspects of beneficiaries of poverty alleviation programmes. The importance of being armed with updated data before announcing welfare schemes or formulating policies can be known from the 2011 caste census survey. It found 24.49 households in the country including 17.97 crore in villages, 10.74 crore households identified as deprived, approximately 30 per cent rural households landless and dependent on income from manual labour, and around 13 per cent families in villages live in one-room house. Other major findings included 56 per cent rural households having no agricultural land, 60 per cent of the total rural households deprived or poor compared to 35

per cent in urban areas, and 1.80 lakh households engaged in manual scavenging for livelihood. Interestingly, while recording the number of illiterates the 2011 SECC figure was found more than the 2011 census figure.

Role of Media

Media is intrinsically connected to development. Both are in a way inseparable, meaning without the help of media development programmes cannot yield the intended results. For, people are primarily the focus of development. In a country like India large numbers of people are poor for which poverty removal is central to all developmental programmes. Since poverty is now understood as multidimensional deprivations, the changed concept has also implored governments particularly to first let the people know the ins and outs of developmental schemes before implementing them. Hence, has been the need of media in developmental activities. Because only media has the ability to carry development messages to the people and bring them closer to government. For this, developmental programmes are no more covertly structured on top-down frameworks. Instances of people increasingly questioning the efficacy of development projects have become routine. The poor consequence of independent India's first mega scheme -Community Development Programme- launched in 1952 is a case in point. Studies later described CDP a 'total failure' and held the government responsible for implementing it without taking people into confidence.

The success of many programmes launched by the present government in the last few years like the Jan Dhan Yojna, Mission Swachh Bharat, Ujjwala Yojana to name a few is attributed to massive public sensitisation activities carried through media. The most important aspect of media is that it is a platform where not only the functioning of government but also the developmental

programmes are analysed and interpreted from different dimensions and presented before the public.

In India's democratic fabric media occupies a significant position. It creates public opinion, impacts the social structure and human living, gives voice to the voiceless, and can influence the governance system for larger interest of the society in general and people in particular. Media believes in sustainability, be it government decision or implementation of development programmes. Communication is more than carrying information. It is used as a tool to keep people posted about development programmes and ensure their participation. Now that modern technology has taken media to new height beyond the traditional information dissemination outlets like newspapers and television, its impact as well as the responsibility has also increased manifold. Information is now treated as one of the major daily consumer products.

Conclusion

The Narendra Modi government since coming to power has implemented a number of schemes with the twin purpose of reducing poverty and making people self-reliant so that they become resilient enough to withstand possible future shocks. Exclusive programmes are also under implementation to empower women, protect children, and improve the quality of education, health and standard of living. Reforms in the administration and repeal of a number of archaic laws are amongst steps initiated to tune the governance machinery for the purpose. Many of the flagship programmes like rural housing, direct benefit transfer (DBT), toilets for every house, free LPG and electricity connections while being implemented relied on data then available from the 2011 census and the socio economic and caste census (SECC).

Many anti-poverty schemes are meant to uplift the BPL category people from the present level, hence are not permanent in nature. But

those really poor not being identified comes in handy for vested interests to pocket the benefits. Politicians also take advantage of such a situation. Further, fresh data helps government in policy formulation and tracking the implementation of schemes.

In the absence of fresh data any estimate on India's poverty only adds to the confusing scenario. The World Bank says the Covid-19 made 5.6 crore Indians poor. An International Monetary Fund (IMF) paper claims Covid caused no rise in extreme poverty level in India because of free food grain provided to about 80 crore people over and above of what they have been getting under the National Food Security Act. Extreme poverty was at 0.8 per cent of the population before 2019 and remained same even during the pandemic in 2020, the paper said.

In June 2019 a World Bank working paper said 14.6 per cent Indians had been living below the international \$1.9 per person per day poverty line in 2014-15. Another WB paper, released in April 2022, used the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) data and put the number of BPL people prior to 2019 pandemic at 10.2 per cent of the population. Yet another survey in 2021 asserted the upper ceiling of poverty in the country at 25.9 per cent. Same year the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) released by the NITI Aayog said one in every five persons, or 25 per cent of country's population is poor. With fresh consumption expenditure data available the MPI used schooling, access to drinking water, cleaner fuel, sanitation etc. to decide the state of poverty.

Under the circumstances researchers have been trying to bank upon alternative methods to determine poverty in India, which logically do not 'paint an accurate picture' about poverty. Though various surveys are often undertaken by the government, for the purpose of knowing poverty they provide inferential information. Researchers are of the view that nothing can replace the large sample survey on household consumption expenditure as done by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) in every five years.

As already pointed out the last household consumption survey was carried out in 2011-12. For the government the 2009 Tendulkar

committee formula continues to be the official line till date. The committee in the backdrop of FY 2004-05 consumption survey had set the urban and rural poverty line at Rs 32 and Rs 26 respectively and the Planning Commission later based on Tendulkar committee report estimated 26.98 Crore, or 21.9 per cent of the population poor in the country in 2011-12. The 2014 Rangarajan Committee report, which the government did not accept, had taken the poverty figure to 29.5 per cent of the population.

Sometimes issues under study when overstretched become too complicated for common public to comprehend. Poverty is one such complex issue having turned more complex by new data-deficient studies. India is committed to the mandate of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to eliminate poverty by 2030 deadline. Being the second most populous country the global community has been keenly watching India's performance in the poverty reduction sector. Poverty affects the rich and poor alike. The United Nations while adopting a resolution to observe October 17 as International Day for eradication of poverty three decades back had entreated countries, in their national context, concrete activities for eradication of poverty and destitution. From India's perspective developmental programmes though are directed to achieve this mission however need proper identification of the poor and cause of their poverty. Consumption expenditure survey has been acknowledged as the first step in that direction.

The government meanwhile has begun the latest round of consumer expenditure survey from July 2022. The yearlong survey would be all over the country except 'difficult to access' villages in Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Clarity on poverty in India and efficacy of the development programmes are expected to be out in the public domain soon.

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