

INDIA FULFILLING ITS HUMANITARIAN PLEDGE**DR. JOYEETA AHMAD**Associate Professor,
Department of Pol Science,
Deshbandhu College (DU),
Kalkaji, New Delhi, India**Abstract:**

Persistent poverty and growing inequality have called for multiple approaches, embodying well-coordinated and definite actions, to deal with the complete issue of poverty alleviation. However, our country has adopted two broad approaches to alleviate poverty. One is the direct approach which seeks to raise the income-earning potential of the poor through direct intervention. This is done in the form of targeted programmes and are sponsored by the government. The

second or the indirect approach lays emphasis on increasing the poverty reducing potential of the growth process. This was to be achieved via land reform measures and technological upliftment. This approach also consisted of setting up labour-intensive high-productivity units with an export market orientation. Price increasing policies are also included as it not only raises the wages of the poor, but it also augments the productivity of their assets. This is meant to ensure that, income and employment-oriented poverty alleviation strategies would be being more income for the poor which can then be used to buy food. Finally, as the rapid growth of population has prevented the fruits of economic development from reaching the people, birth control measures along with attitudinal social changes have also been rendered indispensable for stimulating a broad-based growth.

Key Words:

Growing inequality, strategic policies, poverty alleviation, income generation, rural development, economic growth, persistent poverty, credit facilities, target groups, training facilities.

Introduction:

After independence our country has experienced numerous economic problems of which the most acute has been that of the problem of poverty. A large number of people in our country, particularly in the rural areas are extremely poor. A large chunk of our population living in poverty has become a stark reality of our economic destiny. As, poverty makes a person incapable to secure the minimum requirements for life, health and efficiency, it adversely affects the general health of the people. Because of poor standard of health, the

efficiency of the people in work also suffers thereby lowering the level of productivity. Low productivity in turn affects the country's economic development. In the absence of adequate economic development, people continue to live in conditions of deprivation. This forms a vicious circle. Poverty alleviation has thus become one of the primary objectives of the planning process in the country.

Aim of Study:

The stark and pervasive nature of Indian poverty makes the challenge of its eradication a formidable one. Its complete annihilation in the near future looks like being next to impossible, though significant advance made in the technological field and their implications on agriculture and rural development have opened up new channels for fight against poverty. Thus, despite various anti-poverty schemes, the struggle against it is on. Within the existing economic structure, it has been near impossible to adopt a full proof and effective anti-poverty policy. But nevertheless, the Indian government continue to remain motivated and hence committed in its pledge to ameliorate the penurious conditions of the major deprived sections of our population. To dissect such efforts of our government a detail study of the major efforts initiated by it in this direction has been undertaken in the present article.

Review of Literature:

1. Albert P.J., "Global Poverty Alleviation: A Case Book" (Springer Publication, 2013)
The above book calls for a joint effort amongst profit sectors and individuals living in poverty to improve the condition of life of the poor. A number of countries including India has been taken up for study. It basically calls for improvement in and partnership amongst all sectors to improve the fate of the poor.
2. Bagchi, K.K., "Employment and Poverty Alleviation Programmes in India", (Abhijeet Publications, 2009)
The above book as the name suggests discusses the close relationship between an increase of employment opportunities and its obvious impact on reduction in levels of poverty. As such it has discussed the various employment generating schemes being implemented in our country which have a pro-poor standing.
3. Crowben Thorpe Mary, "Survival and Change in the Third World", (Polity Press, Cambridge 1988)
The above book discusses the economic and social problems faced by the developing countries and how they seek to accommodate themselves amongst these adverse circumstances. The broad changes in response to external and internal factors happening in these countries have also been analyzed.
4. Eswaran Mukesh, Kotwal Ashok "Why Poverty Persists in India" (Oxford University Press, 1997)
Even after more than five decades of our independence poverty exists in India. The above book discusses as to how the diverse sectors in the economy have an impact on the process

of development. The central understanding of the book is that poverty can be removed only when labour is shifted from agriculture to industry and agricultural output is increased.

5. Kohli Atul, "Poverty Amid Plenty in the New India", (Cambridge University Press, 2012)
Atul Kohli in his above book blames the newly formed alliance between the ruling power and the business for the growing inequalities and hence poverty in our country. It is because of this fact that anti-poverty programmes have a limited impact on the target groups and hence new political problems are being created. The author as such makes an appeal to the ruling class to accept this truth so that pro-poor policies can be accordingly tuned.
6. Mishra S.K., Puri V.K., "Indian Economy – Its Development Experience", (Himalaya Publishing House, Delhi, 1989)

The above book written jointly discusses the major changes which had taken place in the Indian economy over a period of time. How the diverse policies and programmes initiated by our government have had an impact negative or positive on the lives of the under-privileged have also been discussed.

Main Text:

Poverty when considered from a general point of view stands for too small a quantity of income generating assets owned by the poor households and too low a market price for their products and services resulting in an inadequate incremental income for them. As such it was accepted that any viable strategy for poverty alleviation should incorporate within itself two essential goals. One being an improvement in the access of the poor to assets and augmenting its productivity. The other would-be steps to increase the productivity of the main asset of the poor i.e., their labour through investment in human capital including formation and enhancement of their skills and capabilities. The IRDP which forms the core of the strategy of rural development is a major scheme in the government's strategy to alleviate rural poverty. Adopted since the Sixth Five Year Plan, IRDP seeks to bring about an overall development of the 'target groups' so that they are in a position to raise themselves above the poverty line. The category of people who comprise the target group are the extreme poor of the rural areas, namely, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, rural artisans and craftsmen, small marginal and landless farmers, agricultural labourers etc. Under this scheme once the target group is identified they are provided with credit based productive assets (other than land such as livestock, small implements etc.) because this was supposed to provide them with self-employment opportunities on a long-term basis. Besides strengthening the asset base of the rural poor, the target group is also given help in the form of subsidy by the government and loans from the financial institutions so that they are able to undertake income generating activities in all sectors of the rural economy.

From the very nature of IRDP it becomes very clear that this scheme considers two important causes for poverty. One is because of the low asset base of the poor and the other is the lack of or limited access of the poor to all forms of institutional credit. Initially IRDP was implemented in a selected number of blocks but gradually it was extended to the whole of the country. As the scheme is a Central Sponsored one it is funded by both the

Central and concerned State Government equally. Thus, this scheme initiated on October 2, 1980, was the most significant scheme in the package of the Sixth Five Year Plan but the actual percolation effect of the scheme has not been satisfactory. Ineligible families have been selected as beneficiaries. This is true particularly in a backward state like Assam. Infact it has so happened that in a number of states a large number of beneficiaries belonged to the category of small and marginal farmers who are in a much better position to avail the credit facilities. It thus means that IRDP has been helping the upper layers of the rural poor and the extreme poor has been by passed. The doing away of this shortcoming should be the first consideration if IRDP has to be a success. Targets are fixed without indulging in a realistic understanding of the magnitude of poverty in a particular region resulting in benefits being passed on to the well-to-do sections. The viability of IRDP is also questioned on the ground that it is not planned along with other programmes and the development needs or resource base of a region are not taken into consideration. The design of the scheme is also not appropriate as they reflect inadequately planned activities which cannot be carried out because of inadequate finance. Even after this scheme has been implemented for a number of years “the roots of inequalities were perhaps getting stronger in the village economies”¹. Moreover, as several agencies are involved in the programme there is a lack of co-ordination among them and severe weaknesses in training, technical assistance, finance, marketing etc. are a natural corollary to it. Besides there is too much of centralization in the formulation and implementation of the scheme resulting in inefficiency and lack of dedication among the lower officials. Bureaucratic tendencies and competition at all levels have devastated the future of this programme to a point of no return.

The above criticism does not mean that IRDP has no achievements to its credit. It has been successful in such circumstances where the asset and employment base of the poor has been more or less secure. Its performance in the relatively well-to-do areas has been good. But even in relatively prosperous areas it has particularly benefited those who are close to the poverty line. As far as the extremely poor households are concerned the impact has been a mixed one. Whereas in Assam those at the bottom have not been able to avail the assets in other States like that of West Bengal a significant number of the very poor could retain the assets given to them and they have shown a satisfactory rise in their level of income. IRDP has also been successful in providing incremental income to the poor households even though the number of households to cross the poverty line has been relatively in- significant. As such IRDP has not only provided substantial additional income to a number of poor and needy households but it has also increased their productive assets. It has also contributed to a profitable metamorphosis of the occupational structure of the beneficiaries. There has also been a definite increase in the secondary and tertiary sector activities and also in the credit subsidiary ratio. Assets transfer programme have also achieved a partial success.

Infact, IRDP is the most important scheme which makes a direct attack on poverty. It is a substitute for the much-accepted belief that the fruit of economic growth is sure to trickle down to the lower levels of the society. IRDP is in fact a comprehensive strategy for alleviation of rural poverty because it seeks to attack the problem from all sides. It involves policies for better growth opportunities for employment generation availability of

credit facilities, integration of social and economic processes and lastly a sharp focus on the target groups so that benefits surely reach them. All these makes IRDP a significant aspect of the country's development strategy and more importantly a well-conceived anti-poverty programme.

Though the impact of IRDP fell short of official expectations to seek improvements in its performance with in the prevailing political and economic constraints is necessary. While recognizing the need to establish adequate linkages to augment the income earning capability of the households in a sustained manner, the primary need is to ensure that the new enterprises and investments undertaken are viable and durable. This in turn calls for a more decentralized approach with a greater degree of financial devolution and democratization along with the strengthening of grass root institutions. There is also a need to activate the integrated land and water management programmes. A systematic process of identifying the beneficiaries in an objective manner is also called for. Steps should also be taken to strengthen the administrative set up with an accent on the training of personnel and developing an adequate supervisory mechanism. Greater involvement of the voluntary agencies in the rural work programmes should be encouraged. Inherent insecurity of impersonal and ruthless market forces has made collectivity in economic action indispensable for the viability of IRDP scheme. A conscious policy has to be adopted for the encouragement and promotion of group activity among the IRDP targets.

Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM) is a scheme meant to boost employment opportunities in the non-A-farm sector. crucial aspect of asset disbursal is the development of skills so that the poor are able to use their assets productively and hence gainfully. Capital investments to improve the skills of the poor is a significant step in the reduction of poverty. Keeping this in mind, TRYSEM as a skill development programme was introduced in 1979 to provide the youth of the poor rural households with technical skills and also to upgrade their traditional skills so that they become technically competent to seek employment in rural industries and trade. TRYSEM aimed at making the rural youth capable enough to take up self-employment ventures in different spheres across sectors. Since 1987 the range of this scheme was enlarged to incorporate wage employment for the trained youth or beneficiaries. This scheme also seeks to establish organizational and operational linkages with other institutions so that the trainees are able to enjoy the benefits of such supporting services like credit, marketing design development etc. TRYSEM also envisages extending stipends to the unemployed rural youth for a period determined by the nature of the trade. It thus provides them a temporary relief from unemployment. But this programme could achieve only a marginal success as it was inflicted by numerous shortcomings. The main reason for its failure is the absence of linkages i.e., no proper assessment of the prevalent opportunities were made where the skills could be profitably used. As such it remains neither linked with industrial policy nor with the process of rural industrialization. In most cases the training imparted is of a low category.

TRYSEM has also proved to be deficient with regard to imparting sophisticated skills for employment in the non-farm sector. This programme also maintains a distance from the ongoing development programmes. In the midst of much severe shortcomings, it is

pertinent to take up remedial actions in the nature of strengthening institutional support, diversification and updating of training programmes, conducting efficient surveys regarding skill endowment etc. It should also establish links with the agricultural university, krishi vigyan centers, voluntary bodies etc. so that it can be aware of policy changes in the farm sector at least and bring about the required changes in its training schedule. However, when a training programme is implemented in a particular area, the growth of that area, the demands and needs of the people of that area should also be brought under consideration. It is only then can the programme make use of its inherent potential and go a long way in generating employment for the rural youth.

As an exclusive scheme for women DWCRA was launched in 1982 to improve the economic status of women thriving below the poverty line. This programme functioned as a sub-scheme of IDRP. DWCRA sought to improve the income earning opportunities of rural women through collective efforts so that the patriarchal and socio-economic constraints are neutralized. This scheme also helps women to organize themselves to fulfil their identifiable needs by applying pressures on the personnel working for their benefit. It also enables women to improve their efficiency by providing them with supportive services like organizing childcare facilities, provision of congenial working conditions etc. But the DWCRA scheme in the absence of group activities have nullified the importance of supportive services meant for particular groups. In principle this scheme is a sound one but in implementation its impact has not been satisfactory. This is likely due to the absence of cohesion among women groups formed under the banner of DWCRA and also because of their failure to identify activities that would provide them with sustained income earning opportunities. In this context the voluntary organization can play an important role in organizing women to take up group-based economic activities and improve their economic status. This programme however had a beneficial impact on the families of backward classes particularly selected under the scheme. Their financial strength also improved. Hence this programme still continues.

Wage employment programmes are meant to provide relief to the unemployed poor which in turn will have an impact on overall unemployment thereby raising people above the poverty line. These are also likely to augment labour absorption capacity via investment in durable and in those public assets that would generate income earning opportunities. Wage employment also strengthens the social infrastructure which is the base for any process of industrialization to begin with. Employment programmes were never regarded as significant instruments of poverty alleviation until the initial years of 1980s in almost the entire country. These programmes were given an expanded form during the sixth plan period (1980-85) under the titles National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) and the Rural Landless Employment Generating Programme (RLEGP). In the year 1989-90 these two programmes were modified and combined into a new scheme, the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna (JRY).

A major instrument for poverty alleviation in the rural areas is the NREP. This is not altogether a new programme. The Food for Work Programme (FWP) preceded the NREP. As such NREP is a restructured programme. The FWP was initiated in the year 1977 when excess of food grains in the country provided the government an opportunity to use food

grains as payment for work to the person living below the poverty line. Food grains were to be given in exchange of the whole or part of the labour rendered in the execution of specified projects. Infact FWP was meant to generate additional gainful employment in the rural areas and to create durable community assets so that the social infrastructure is strengthened. Such a policy was expected to augment production and raise the living standard of the people of the rural areas. But FWP was a failure because this programme was too small to make any noticeable dent on poverty. As it was not a part of Integrated Rural Development Programme it failed to create additional sources of employment opportunities. The limited coverage of the programme (using only food grains for payment) was its another shortcoming. To make the programme viable and effective it was suggested to include soap, clothing, shoes etc. besides food grains so that “additional indirect employment is generated in the sectors producing them, and thus have a multiple effect”.²

Considering the enormity of the shortcomings of FWP, it was finally withdrawn, modified, and renamed as NREP in October 1980 NREP aimed at creating wage employment for the unemployment and underemployed in the rural areas. It took care of that segment of the rural poor who remained unlocated by the development process. They depend entirely on casual wage employment and during lean agricultural season they are completely without any source of livelihood. The NREP established a close link between the development projects and the target group-oriented employment generation projects. Its basic objectives were (a) to generate additional gainful employment opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed persons both men and women in the rural areas, (b) to create durable community assets for strengthening the rural infrastructure.

The following deficiencies were noticed in the implementation of this programme. This task which are implemented through NREP are often not coordinated with the demands of families identified for assistance under IRDP. In other words, it functioned on an isolated plane without providing any support to the beneficiary-oriented development programme of IRDP and other such programmes of area development. Another weakness of this programme is that the governmental departments regard NREP as a part of the general programme of development, but the planners had considered it as an additional programme for generating employment. Wrong approach adopted by the governments were responsible for a declining trend of employment generation. Lastly the principle aim of NREP was to make use of local resources be it materials or manpower to create employment opportunities, but states had developed a tendency to indulge in construction activities with sophisticated material components which was contrary to the basic aim of NREP.

The progress of NREP as far as its basic objective of employment generation is concerned has not been satisfactory. While more and more funds have been pumped into the programme, commensurate increase in employment generation has not been achieved. Infact NREP has failed in its basic objectives because the employment it provides are on a short-term basis and thus has only a marginal impact on the living standard of the rural poor. Wages paid under it are also lower than the wage rates in the market. In addition to these, departments in charge of implementation of this scheme has not been working efficiently. This can be seen from a decline in food grains utilization particularly during

the sixth plan. Inadequate arrangements of distribution availability of food grains at a much lower price in the market were some of the causes for this situation.

Even though no single programme is adequate to alleviate unemployment and hence poverty NREP at its own level was a step in the right direction. IRDP has a long-term perspective to augment the level of income and employment opportunities. As such the NREP should have been implemented as a complementary scheme to the IRDP because the former on its own could only provide short term relief. This means that a scheme having creation of employment opportunities as its primary goal should be woven with other related objectives or else the twin problems of unemployment and under development will continue to defy solution.

As a totally centrally financed programme introduced in 1983 RLEGP had two primary objectives to improve and expand employment opportunities for the rural poor, along with a provision to guarantee employment to at least one member of every landless rural household up to 100 days in year and to create durable assets for boosting the rural infrastructure so that a rapid growth of the rural economy becomes a possibility. While most of the objectives and stipulation under RLEGP were similar to those of NREP the main distinguishing feature of the former was employment guarantee element for 100 days. The guaranteed part of the programme has not been put into operation due to lack of adequate funds. In the sphere of employment, preference is given to women scheduled castes/tribes, landless labourers and other weaker sections of the society. This means that RLEGP had a clear directive and a clear focus in which direction the entire works programme should be oriented. Another feature of RLEGP is that part payment of wages in grain was compulsory. Both wheat and rice could be substituted for this purpose.

In spite of all efforts to seriously tackle the problems of poverty this programme in its implementation stage began to exhibit certain weaknesses. Projects were not prepared on the basis of an area approach. The provision of 100 days guarantee employment could not be implemented. In addition to these some other shortcomings as concentration on asset, creation on the basis of departmental plans, absence of any systematic procedure for the selection of beneficiaries had inhibited RLEGP to achieve its much-popularized objectives. Nevertheless, it was the first programme that guaranteed employment benefits to the rural landless.

The JRY introduced in April 1989 is a significant step in the direction of tackling the problems of poverty and unemployment via specific programmes which are formulated and also executed by the people. It is a wage employment programme to be implemented in all the districts of the country and in all the village panchayats as well. In other words, the programme is implemented in a decentralized manner. The then two existing wage employment programmes i.e., NREP and RLEGP were merged into the JRY. The primary objective of JRY is to generate additional gainful employment opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed men and women in the rural areas thriving below the poverty line. The secondary objective includes strengthening the rural economic infrastructure so that sustained employment is created, as also community and social assets in favour of the rural poor particularly the backward section of the society for their direct

and continuous benefits. In short JRY sought to bring about an improvement in the overall quality of life in the rural areas.

Conclusion:

It has been seen from the records of the performance of the central government that all such governments have treated the issues of production and distribution separately. Production and distribution are closely related to each other in a different sense as well. It is the pattern of income distribution that determines the nature of production. The pattern of income distribution should be changed if the objectives of augmenting the production of wage goods adequately to remove poverty is to be achieved. This can be achieved only if the mal distribution of assets is changed in favour of the poor both in the rural and in the urban sector. Thus within, the existing socio-economic structure it is in fact impossible to adopt effective anti-poverty policies. The intentions behind them have always been laudable but the core of the problem has remained untouched. Laws have remained on the statute book alone. This is because they have not been effectively implemented. Those concerned with the implementation of laws are either indifferent hostile or corrupt. Laws can easily be enacted to raise the condition of the backward and weaker sections of the population. What is however essential is that these laws should be honestly impartial and ruthlessly obeyed. A radically divergent direction should be given to the growth process so that the poor get an opportunity to participate in it. No real democracy can be achieved without social equality and economic growth in the true sense of the terms.

Footnotes:

- 1 Indira Hirway, Critique of Target Group Approach: A Study of Gujarat. Indian, Journal of Agricultural Economics, Conference Numer, July-September, 1984, p. 282.
- 2 L.K. Jha, Unemployment, Outline of a new approach, Economics Times. March 5, 1980.

References:

- 1 C.T. Kurien, Poverty, Planning and Social Transformation (Allied Publishers, Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1978), p. 126.
- 2 S.K. Misra and V.K. Puri, Indian Economy Its Development Experience, (Himalaya, Publishing House, Delhi. 1989), p. 325.
- 3 G.N. Seetharam, Strategy and Tactics of India's Agricultural Development: The role of the State, (Ajanata Publications, Delhi, 1984), p 17.
- 4 Report of the Committee of Panel on Land Reforms, Government of India, p 99.

- 5 Planning Commission, Report of the Task Force on Agrarian Relations, (1973), p 9-10.
- 6 V.S. Vyas, P. Bhargava, Public Intervention for poverty alleviation, Economic and Political Weekly, Volume, No. 41 and 42, October 14-21, 1995, P 25.
- 7 Workshop on Small Farmers and Agricultural Labour, Planning Commission, Government of India, New Delhi, 1971, PP 21-2.
- 8 Nilkanth Rath, Garibi Hatao - Can IRDP do it? Economic and Political Weekly, February 9, 1985, p. 241.
- 9 Barbara Hariss, S Gupta, R.H. Cassen (eds.). Poverty in India Research and Policy. (Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1972) p.
- 10 Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, National Rural Employment Programme : A Guideline, 1983, p. 2.

