

## **Regional Analysis of Poverty in India**

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### **Abstract**

Lacking assets is both a cause and an outcome of poverty. Poor health, deficient skills, scant access to basic services, and the humiliations of social exclusion reflect deprivations in personal, public, and social assets. Assets are also central to coping with shocks and reducing the vulnerability that is a constant feature of poverty. Poverty is an outcome not only of economic processes. It is an outcome of interacting economic, social, and political forces. In particular, it is an outcome of the accountability and responsiveness of state institutions. Values, norms, and social institutions may reinforce persistent inequalities between groups in society – as with gender-based prejudice throughout much of the world, the caste system in India, and race relations in South Africa and the United States. In the extreme, these social divisions can become the basis of severe deprivation and conflict. The paper finds that the potential for economic growth and poverty reduction is heavily influenced by state and social institutions. Action to improve the functioning of state and social institutions improves both growth and equity by reducing bureaucratic and social constraints to economic action and upward mobility. However, devising and implementing these changes require strong political will, especially when the changes fundamentally challenge social values or entrenched interests. Governments can do much to influence public debate to increase awareness of the societal benefits of pro-poor public action and build political support for such action. Economic development brought about essentially by liberalizing trade and markets, investing in infrastructure, and providing basic social services to poor people to increase their human capital was seen as key to reducing poverty. The paper finds that growth in per capita income and poverty reduction is inversely related to each other. The relationship between poverty and

unemployment is positively related that decline in poverty leads to decline in unemployment except Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal where decline in poverty leads to increase in rural unemployment and decline in urban unemployment. However, Uttar Pradesh is the only state where decline in poverty leads to increase in both rural and urban unemployment during 2011-12. Himachal Pradesh shows something different result, where decline in poverty leads to decline in rural unemployment and increase in urban unemployment.

**Keywords:** poverty, unemployment, Access, social assets, political forces.

## INTRODUCTION

Poverty is pronounced deprivation in well-being. But what precisely is deprivation? The voices of poor people bear eloquent testimony to its meaning. To be poor is to be hungry, to lack shelter and clothing, to be sick and not cared for, to be illiterate and not schooled. But for poor people, living in poverty is more than this. Poor people are particularly vulnerable to adverse events outside their control. They are often treated badly by the institutions of state and society and excluded from voice and power in those institutions.

Poor people in 60 countries were asked to analyze and share their ideas of well-being (a good experience of life) and “ill-being” (a bad experience of life). Well-being was variously described as happiness, harmony, peace, freedom from anxiety, and peace of mind. People describe ill-being as lack of material things, as bad experiences, and as bad feelings about oneself (Narayan, 2000).

The 20th century saw great progress in reducing poverty and improving well-being. In the past four decades life expectancy in the developing world increased 20 years on average, the infant mortality rate fell more than half, and fertility rates declined by almost half. In the past two decades net primary school enrolment in developing countries increased by 13 percent. Between 1965 and 1998 average incomes more than doubled in developing countries, and in 1990–98 alone the number of people in extreme poverty fell by 78 million. But at the start of a new century, poverty remains a global problem of huge proportions. Of the world’s 6 billion people, 2.8 billion live on less than \$2 a day, and 1.2 billion on less than \$1 a day. Six infants of every 100 do not see their first birthday, and 8 do not survive to their fifth. Of those who do reach school age, 9 boys in 100, and 14 girls, do not go to primary school. These broad trends conceal extraordinary diversity in experience in different parts of the world—and large variations among regions, with some seeing advances, and others

setbacks, in crucial non income measures of poverty. Widening global disparities have increased the sense of deprivation and injustice for many. And social mobility and equal opportunity remain alien concepts for far too many people (World Development Report 2000/2001).

The Planning Commission has updated the poverty lines and poverty ratios for 2011-12 based on the recommendations of the Tendulkar Committee using Household Consumer Expenditure Survey 2011-12 data of the National Sample Survey (NSS) 68th round. Accordingly, with the poverty line at all India level at monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) of Rs. 816 for rural areas and Rs. 1000 for urban areas in 2011-12, the poverty ratio in the country has declined from 37.2 per cent in 2004-05 to 21.9 per cent in 2011-12 (Economic Survey 2013-14).

Poverty estimates indicate that Bihar which had the second highest poverty headcount ratio (HCR) in 2004-05 moved to first place in 2011-12 with the HCR at 33.7 per cent relegating Odisha to second place. While the all India poverty HCR was 21.9 per cent, states like Madhya Pradesh, Assam, and Uttar Pradesh, besides Bihar and Odisha had above all India poverty levels in 2011-12. The purpose of the present paper is to examine the issue of nature and evolution of regional poverty in India.

### **OBJECTIVES**

This paper attempts to evaluate and examine the regional poverty in India. The paper has two-fold objectives:

- To delineate the process of nature and evolution of regional poverty in India.
- To find the causes of regional poverty and the remedies to do away with it.

### **DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY**

The paper is based on the secondary source of information gathered from various government publications. The data were collected from various issues of Five Year Plans, published by Planning Commission, Government of India, Annual Report, Reserve Bank of India (RBI); Handbook of Statistics on Indian Economy, RBI; Report on Trends and Progress of Banking in India, RBI; various issues of RBI Monthly Bulletin; World Development Report, published by the World Bank, Washington DC; various issues of Economic Survey, Government of India.

### **NATURE AND EVOLUTION OF REGIONAL POVERTY**

Poverty amid plenty is the world's greatest challenge. Poverty is the result of economic, political, and social processes that interact with each other and frequently reinforce each other

in ways that exacerbate the deprivation in which poor people live. In a world where political power is unequally distributed and often mimics the distribution of economic power; the way state institutions operate may be particularly unfavourable to poor people (World Development Report 2000/2001:01). For example, poor people frequently do not receive the benefits of public investment in education and health. They are often the victims of corruption and arbitrariness on the part of the state. Poverty outcomes are also greatly affected by social norms, values, and customary practices that, within the family, the community, or the market, lead to exclusion of women, ethnic and racial groups, or the socially disadvantaged. Vulnerability to external and largely uncontrollable events—illness, violence, economic shocks, bad weather, natural disasters—reinforces poor people's sense of ill being, exacerbates their material poverty, and weakens their bargaining position.

The World Development Report 2000/2001 accepts the now established view of poverty as not only encompassing only material deprivation (measured by an appropriate concept of income or consumption) but also low achievement in education, health, nutrition, and other areas of human development. This broadens the notion of poverty to include vulnerability, fear and exposure to risk—and voicelessness and powerlessness. All these forms of deprivation severely restrict what Amartya Sen calls the “capabilities that a person has, that is, the substantive freedoms he or she enjoys to lead the kind of life he or she values.” This broader approach to deprivation, by giving a better characterization of the experience of poverty, increases our understanding of its causes (World Development Report 2000/2001).

These different dimensions of poverty interact in important ways. Increasing education leads to better health outcomes. Improving health increases income-earning potential. Providing safety nets allows poor people to engage in higher-risk, higher-return activities; eliminating discrimination against women, ethnic minorities, and other disadvantaged groups both directly improves their well-being and enhances their ability to increase their incomes. Providing protection for poor people (reducing vulnerability in dealing with risk) not only makes them feel less vulnerable—it also allows them to take advantage of higher-risk, higher-return opportunities. Increasing poor people's voice and participation not only addresses their sense of exclusion—it also leads to better targeting of health and education services to their needs. Understanding these complementarities is essential for designing and implementing programs and projects that help people escape poverty (World Development Report 2000/2001).

Poverty may be broadly defined as unacceptable deprivation in well-being - in terms of material deprivation (measured by an appropriate concept of income or consumption), human deprivation, and a range of other deprivations: lack of voice, vulnerability, violence, destitution, social and political exclusion, and lack of dignity and basic rights.

In India, and indeed throughout the world, the conventional approach equates poverty with material deprivation and defines the poor in terms of incomes or levels of consumption. The Planning Commission, for example, has for many years defined poverty in terms of the level of per-capita consumer expenditure sufficient to provide an average daily intake of 2400 calories per person in rural areas and 2100 calories per person in urban areas, plus a minimal allocation for basic non-food items (World Bank, 2002:13).

The world has deep poverty amid plenty. Of the world's 6 billion people, 2.8 billion—almost half—live on less than \$2 a day, and 1.2 billion—a fifth—live on less than \$1 a day, with 44 percent living in South Asia. In rich countries less than 1 child in 100 does not reach its fifth birthday, while in the poorest countries as many as a fifth of children do not, while in rich countries fewer than 5 percent of all children under five are malnourished as against poor countries, where as many as 50 percent of all children are malnourished. This destitution persists even though human conditions have improved more in the past century than in the rest of history—global wealth, global connections, and technological capabilities have never been greater. But the distribution of these global gains is extraordinarily unequal. The average income in the richest 20 countries is 37 times the average in the poorest 20—a gap that has doubled in the past 40 years.

There have also been major advances and serious setbacks in crucial non-income measures of poverty. India has seen marked progress in girls attending school, and in the most advanced state, Kerala, life expectancy is greater than in other places with many times the level of income (such as Washington, D.C.).

Experiences are also vastly different at sub-national levels and for ethnic minorities and women. Different regions in countries benefit to very different extents from growth. In some African countries infant mortality rates are lower among politically powerful ethnic groups, and in Latin American countries indigenous groups often have less than three-quarters the schooling on average of non-indigenous groups; women continue to be more disadvantaged than men. In South Asia women have only about half as many years of education as men, and female enrolment rates at the secondary level are only two-thirds the male rates (World Development Report 2000/2001:04).

The World Bank's latest estimates indicate a reduction of approximately 1.7 percent a year between 1990 and 1998. Much of the slow progress observed in some regions is due to low or negative growth. In some cases rising inequality compounded this effect; this was particularly so in some countries in the former Soviet Union. Hence, fighting against poverty required high growth along with different policy measures regarding access to different government safety net programmes, education, and health etc.

### **CAUSES OF POVERTY**

Lacking assets is both a cause and an outcome of poverty. Poor health, deficient skills, scant access to basic services, and the humiliations of social exclusion reflect deprivations in personal, public, and social assets. Human, physical, and natural assets also lie at the core of whether an individual, household, or group lives in poverty or escapes it. These assets interact with market and social opportunities to generate income, a better quality of life, and a sense of psychological well-being. Assets are also central to coping with shocks and reducing the vulnerability that is a constant feature of poverty (World Development Report, 2002:77). Poverty is an outcome not only of economic processes. It is an outcome of interacting economic, social, and political forces. In particular, it is an outcome of the accountability and responsiveness of state institutions (World Development Report, 2002:99). Values, norms, and social institutions may reinforce persistent inequalities between groups in society – as with gender-based prejudice throughout much of the world, the caste system in India, and race relations in South Africa and the United States. In the extreme, these social divisions can become the basis of severe deprivation and conflict (World Development Report, 2002:117)

India suffers severe deprivations in education and health—especially in the North, where caste, class, and gender inequities are particularly strong. In studies in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh poor women and men emphasized their extreme vulnerability and the ineffectiveness of state institutions, from schools to police (World Bank, 2010). There are also marked differences within India. In southern part of India, particularly the state of Kerala having sharply better education and health has life expectancies greater than those in Washington, D.C., despite vastly lower income levels. The effectiveness of public action in Kerala has been attributed to its strong tradition of political and social mobilization.

The root cause of poverty is: (i) Lack of income and assets to attain basic necessities – food, shelter, clothing, and acceptable levels of health and education, (ii) Sense of voicelessness and powerlessness in the institutions of state and society, and (iii) Vulnerability to adverse shocks, linked to an inability to cope with them.

Those materially deprived feel acutely their lack of voice, power, and independence. This helplessness subjects them to exploitation at the hands of the institutions of state and society. They are prevented from taking advantage of new economic opportunities or engaging in activities outside their immediate zone of security. Unaccountable and unresponsive state institutions are among the causes of relatively slow progress in expanding the human assets of poor people.

In agrarian societies poor people's lack of assets and income-earning opportunities ties them to rich landowners in patron-client relationships. And for women, a lack of savings and assets precludes a more independent role in decision making in the household and the community. Poor women are discriminated against in the household and in land, labour, and credit markets. This both causes poverty and undercuts development—for women's agency is a powerful source of human gains, especially for children. Discrimination based on ethnicity, religious beliefs, social status, and race has similar effects. (World Development Report 2000/2001:36).

Poor people also are exposed to risks beyond their community – those affecting the economy, the environment, and the society in which they live. Civil conflict and wars, economic crises, and natural disasters affect not only their current living standards but also their ability to escape poverty. Global forces such as volatile capital flows, global climate change, and arms sales are the causes of shocks and disruptions in poor countries, the inability or unwillingness of the global community to address them increases the vulnerability of poor people (World Development Report 2000/2001:04).

### **TRENDS OF POVERTY AND ITS ANALYSIS**

The Planning Commission has updated the poverty lines and poverty ratios for 2011-12 based on the recommendations of the Tendulkar Committee using Household Consumer Expenditure Survey 2011-12 data of the National Sample Survey (NSS) 68th round. Accordingly, with the poverty line at all India level at monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) of Rs. 816 for rural areas and Rs. 1000 for urban areas in 2011-12, the poverty ratio in the country has declined from 37.2 per cent in 2004-05 to 21.9 per cent in 2011-12. In absolute terms, the number of poor declined from 407.1 million in 2004-05 to 269.3 million in 2011-12 with an average annual decline of 2.2 percentage points during 2004-05 to 2011-12 (Table 1). Annual average decline in poverty during 2004-05 to 2011-12 was 2.32 per cent and 1.69 per cent in rural and urban area respectively, while total decline in poverty at national level was 2.18 per cent. The Planning Commission constituted an Expert Group

under the Chairmanship of Dr. C. Rangarajan in June 2012 to ‘Review the Methodology for Measurement of Poverty’.

**Table 1: Number and Percentage of Poor People**

Year	Poverty Ratio (Per cent)			Number of Poor People (Million)		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
2004 - 05	41.8	25.7	37.2	326.3	80.8	407.1
2011- 12	25.7	13.7	21.9	216.5	52.8	269.3

Source: Economic Survey 2013-14, Government of India.

The socio-economic profiles and inter-state comparison of some major states of India are discussed in Table 2. This table shows that higher per capita income growth in per cent during 2011-12 results in decline in poverty in 2011-12 except Kerala and Odisha where per capita income growth rate was lower in 2011-12 as against 2012-13, yet poverty declines in 2011-12 as shown in Table 2. The paper finds that growth in per capita income and poverty reduction is inversely related to each other that is increase in per capita income leads to decline in poverty. The relationship between poverty and unemployment is positively related that decline in poverty leads to decline in unemployment except Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal where decline in poverty leads to increase in rural unemployment and decline in urban unemployment. However, Uttar Pradesh is the only state where decline in poverty leads to increase in both rural and urban unemployment during 2011-12. Himachal Pradesh shows something different result, where decline in poverty leads to decline in rural unemployment and increase in urban unemployment.

**Table 2: Socio-economic Profiles and Inter-state comparison of Major States of India**

States	Decadal Growth of Population(2001-2011) in per cent	Sex ratio (Females per 1000 Male)	Absolute Per capita Income 2012-13 (Rs.)	Per capita Income Growth (Per cent) 2012-13 (2011-	Poverty Headcount Ratio 2011-12 (2004-05)	Unemployment Rate per 1000 under Usual Status (adjusted)	
						Rural 2011-12 (2004-05)	Urban 2011-12 (2004-05)

				12)			-05)
Andhra Pradesh	11.00	993	78958	4.5 (5.75)	9.2 (29.6)	12 (7)	43 (36)
Assam	17.1	958	40475	4.6 (7.24)	32.0 (34.4)	45 (26)	56 (72)
Bihar	25.4	918	28774	13.9 (15.44 )	33.7 (54.4)	32 (15)	56 (64)
Gujarat	19.3	919	96976	6.6 (8.65)	16.6 (31.6)	3 (5)	8 (24)
Haryana	19.9	879	120352	5.0 (6.18)	11.2 (24.1)	24 (22)	42 (40)
Himachal Pradesh	12.9	972	83899	5.1 (5.76)	8.1 (22.9)	10 (18)	40 (38)
Karnataka	15.6	973	77309	4.2 (6.69)	20.9 (33.3)	9 (7)	29 (28)
Kerala	4.9	1084	88527	7.7 (7.13)	7.1 (19.6)	68 (107)	61 (156)
Madhya Pradesh	20.3	931	44989	8.6 (10.48 )	31.6 (48.6)	4 (5)	26 (28)
Maharashtra	16.0	929	107670	5.8 (8.73)	17.4 (38.2)	7 (10)	23 (36)
Odisha	14.0	979	49241	5.2 (4.64)	32.6 (57.2)	22 (50)	35 (134)
Punjab	13.9	895	86106	3.9 (4.24)	8.3 (20.9)	19 (38)	28 (50)
Rajasthan	21.3	928	59097	2.9 (3.72)	14.7 (34.4)	7 (7)	31 (29)
Tamil Nadu	15.6	996	98550	3.5 (6.72)	11.3 (29.4)	20 (12)	27 (35)
Uttar	20.2	912	33137	3.6	29.4	9	41

Pradesh				(4.17)	(40.9)	(6)	(33)
West Bengal	13.8	950	62509	6.4	20.0	27	48
				(5.67)	(34.2)	(25)	(62)
<b>India</b>	<b>17.7</b>	<b>943</b>	<b>67839</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>21.9</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>34</b>
				<b>(5.16)</b>	<b>(37.2)</b>	<b>(17)</b>	<b>(45)</b>

Source: Economic Survey 2013-14 and 2012-13, Government of India.

### **STRATEGY AND ACTION FOR REDUCING POVERTY**

The approach to reduce poverty has evolved over the past 60 years in response to deepening understanding of the complexity of development. In the 1950s and 1960s many viewed large investments in physical capital and infrastructure as the primary means of development. In the 1970s awareness grew that physical capital was not enough, and that at least as important were health and education. It was argued that improvement in health and education were important not only in their own right but also to promote growth in the incomes of poor people. The 1980s saw another shift of emphasis following the debt crisis and global recession and the contrasting experiences of East Asia and Latin America, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Emphasis was placed on improving economic management and allowing greater play for market forces. World Development Report 1990: Poverty proposed a two-part strategy: promoting labour-intensive growth through economic openness and investment in infrastructure and providing basic services to poor people in health and education. In the 1990s governance and institutions moved toward centre stage—as did issues of vulnerability at the local and national levels. World Development Report 2000/2001 proposes a strategy for attacking poverty in three ways: promoting opportunity, facilitating empowerment, and enhancing security (World Development Report 2000/2001:06). Promoting opportunities concerned with providing material opportunities to poor people. This means jobs, credit, roads, electricity, markets for their produce, and the schools, water, sanitation, and health services that underpin the health and skills essential for work. Overall economic growth is crucial for generating opportunity. So is the pattern or quality of growth. In societies with high inequality, greater equity is particularly important for rapid progress in reducing poverty. This requires action by the state to support the build up of human, land, and infrastructure assets that poor people own or to which they have access. Facilitating empowerment is concerned with the choice and implementation of public actions that are responsive to the needs of poor people depend on the interaction of political, social, and other institutional processes. Achieving access, responsibility, and accountability is intrinsically

political and requires active collaboration among poor people, the middle class, and other groups in society. Active collaboration can be greatly facilitated by changes in governance that make public administration, legal institutions, and public service delivery more efficient and accountable to all citizens—and by strengthening the participation of poor people in political processes and local decision making. Sound and responsive institutions are not only important to benefit the poor but are also fundamental to the overall growth process. Enhancing security requires effective national action to manage the risk of economy wide shocks and effective mechanisms to reduce the risks faced by poor people, including health- and weather-related risks. Reducing vulnerability to economic shocks, natural disasters, ill health, disability, and personal violence is an intrinsic part of enhancing well-being and encourages investment in human capital and in higher-risk, higher-return activities (World Development Report 2000/2001:07).

There is no simple, universal blueprint for implementing this strategy. Developing countries need to prepare their own mix of policies to reduce poverty, reflecting national priorities and local realities. Choices will depend on the economic, socio-political, structural, and cultural context of individual countries—indeed, individual communities.

As countries become richer, on average the incidence of income poverty falls. Other indicators of well-being, such as average levels of education and health, tend to improve as well. For these reasons, economic growth is a powerful force for poverty reduction. With economic growth, income poverty falls; with economic contraction, income poverty rises. While economic growth is systematically associated with poverty reduction, the rate at which growth translates into lower poverty depends on the initial level of inequality in the distribution of income; and how that distribution changes over time. Growth and its effectiveness in reducing poverty also depend on sound, stable governance. So confronting socio-economic inequalities and building sound institutions can be important both for providing a socially sustainable basis for overall growth and for ensuring that poor people gain substantially from that growth. The potential for economic growth and poverty reduction is heavily influenced by state and social institutions. Action to improve the functioning of state and social institutions improves both growth and equity by reducing bureaucratic and social constraints to economic action and upward mobility. However, devising and implementing these changes require strong political will, especially when the changes fundamentally challenge social values or entrenched interests. Governments can do much to

influence public debate to increase awareness of the societal benefits of pro-poor public action and build political support for such action (World Development Report 2000/2001:09).

Poverty is more than inadequate income or human development. It is also vulnerability and a lack of voice, power, and representation. With this multidimensional view of poverty comes greater complexity in poverty reduction strategies, because more factors—such as social and cultural forces—need to be taken into account. The way to deal with this complexity is through empowerment and participation. Participatory mechanisms can provide voice to women and men, especially those from poor and excluded segments of society.

Meager assets, inaccessible markets, and scarce job opportunities lock people in material poverty. That is why promoting opportunity—by stimulating economic growth, making markets work better for poor people, and building up their assets—is key to reducing poverty. Poverty outcomes are also greatly affected by social norms, values, and customary practices that, within the family, the community, or the market, lead to exclusion of women, ethnic and racial groups, or the socially disadvantaged. That is why facilitating the empowerment of poor people—by making state and social institutions more responsive to them—is also key to reducing poverty. Vulnerability to external and largely uncontrollable events weakens their bargaining position. That is why enhancing security—by reducing the risk of such events as wars, disease, economic crises, and natural disasters—is key to reducing poverty (World Development Report 2000/2001:03).

Expanding education and health services will require that state governments reverse the deterioration in their fiscal positions, as subsidies to the loss-making power sector crowd out spending in the social sectors. The higher spending will need to be matched by better service provision. This will require deep improvements in governance, often weakest in India's poorest regions, and in combating teacher absenteeism. Also needed is more equitable service provision, which will require empowering women and members of lower castes (World Development Report 2000/2001:34).

## **CONCLUSION**

Poverty amid plenty is the world's greatest challenge. Poverty is the result of economic, political, and social processes that interact with each other and frequently reinforce each other in ways that exacerbate the deprivation in which poor people live. In a world where political power is unequally distributed and often mimics the distribution of economic power; the way state institutions operate may be particularly unfavourable to poor people. Poverty not only encompassing only material deprivation (measured by an appropriate concept of income or

consumption) but also low achievement in education, health, nutrition, and other areas of human development. All these forms of deprivation severely restrict what Amartya Sen calls the “capabilities that a person has, that is, the substantive freedoms he or she enjoys to lead the kind of life he or she values.” The root cause of poverty is: (i) Lack of income and assets to attain basic necessities – food, shelter, clothing, and acceptable levels of health and education, (ii) Sense of voicelessness and powerlessness in the institutions of state and society, and (iii) Vulnerability to adverse shocks, linked to an inability to cope with them. Poverty may be reduced in three ways: promoting opportunity, facilitating empowerment, and enhancing security.

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