

Has Poverty Actually reduced in India? Nutritional Intake Approach

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Indian economy has experienced extraordinary growth rates since economic reforms and is now considered as one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. However many have acknowledged India's accelerating economic growth, some have revealed apprehension about the distributional impacts of the growth process. Due to its large population in vulnerable poverty, India's authorities have included inclusive economic growth as crucial objective in their development strategy. Despite this India's poverty level as well as poverty line remains a widely debated issue. During last 25 years the question of poverty levels and trends has become predominantly contentious matter because number of government officials and also the economists coupled with World Bank has revealed considerable decline in poverty in India, particularly during the era of economic reforms. The planning Commission based on National Sample Survey (NSS) data on Consumer Expenditure, claimed that overall poverty ratio in India has declined significantly between 1993-94 and 2011-12. During the same time many economic and social indicators advocate that not merely is the level of absolute poverty in India high, there has also been an unfavourable impact of neoliberal strategies on poverty. During 2004-05, country suffered from the financial crisis, 2007-08 was the year of global recession which has severely affected most of the nations of the world and during 2009-10, India faced severe drought. All these adverse developments are expected to worsen the poverty situation in the country. Moreover the NSS data for 2009-10 year on various economic indicators: employment, consumption expenditure and nutritional intake have itself confirmed the deteriorating situation. All these trends suggest that official estimates of poverty have underestimated the poverty level and thus have presented a bogus picture. Thus there is need to reconsider the picture.

In this context the present paper is an attempt to capture the incidence and intensity of poverty in nutritional dimension for India. For this purpose unit level data from NSSO and its various reports for different years has been used. This paper also attempted to compare the official estimates of poverty with the minimum nutrition requirement based estimates.

By employing the direct poverty estimation method i.e. nutritional norm in terms of calories, it is found that in 1999-2000, around half of the population who are actually poor are excluded from the set of officially poor. In 2011-12, it is found that the

percentage of persons not able to satisfy the nutrition norm in terms of calories is more than four-fifth in rural and three-fifth in urban areas, which is still significantly higher than the official poverty rates. Whereas calorie intake at the official poverty lines is found to be much lower than the direct poverty lines i.e. 1914 calories in rural areas and 1746 calories in urban areas. Similar to calories intake study also attempts to analyse other nutrients and their contribution to destitution of a person. The study concludes that nutritional intake is an important factor in determining the poverty status of a person, so one should not ignore it and consider it as important dimension in poverty estimation, so that appropriate targeting through various poverty eradicating programmes can be made.