

**NATIONAL SEMINAR ON
INDIAN PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL SECTOR ISSUES AND SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS
POLICIES, PROSPECTS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Abstracts of the Papers

Technical Session 1: Education and Skill Development

SDGs for School Education in India: Issues and Challenges

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Education in India is improving and definitely enrolments in schools has been increasing with more of the hitherto out of school categories of rural, girls, tribals and minorities reported as seeking school education over the years. Goal 4 of the SDGs 2030 is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Under this there are seven targets and three operating principles. In this paper we will be focusing on two goals pertaining to schooling and pre-schooling. Target 4.1 aims to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. The status of school children in terms of how many of them across rural-urban locations, social groups, and income classes have access to free education and what the costs involved are for those who spend for their schooling; gender equity and gaps across different groups and some simple measure of quality of education at primary level will be assessed using latest NSS and IHDS data sources.

This paper will measure the costs towards education and proportion of children who are out of schooling. These are crucial for the attainment of the SDGs for free school education and completion such that dropouts or discontinuation remains negligible. The practice of non-attendance or irregular attendance remains an extended problem of the latter. The extremely low proportion of pre primary facilities and enrolment of children reflects the poor levels of preparedness for schooling among a large bulk of the child populations. The reasons for many of these are not entirely due to lack of supply of relevant educational facilities although presence of these without charges ought to be beneficial and lead to improvements. The challenges posed by the conditions across the country for attainment of these SDGs will be highlighted in this paper.

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Challenges Beyond Schooling: Innovative Models for Youth Skills Development in India

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A high participation rate in educational programmes along with the motivation of individuals as well as subsequent utilization of the acquired skills in working life can be expected only if educational activities are designed in a way that they meet the needs of the labour market but also of individual participants (Pilz, 2016). The transition from school to work has become a main policy focus especially in relation to the reform of Vocational Education and Training systems in India. This paper discusses issues of skill development to enhance youth employability and highlights the key strategies that are being designed and implemented to align skill training programmes with learner's and labour market needs, especially through the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF)⁶ and National Skill Development Policy 2015. It focuses on the steps taken by the government and private stakeholders for enhancing flexibility in skill development programmes offered beyond schooling, including innovative approaches and models, placement linked schemes of government, collaborations between government and private stakeholders and curricular reorientation. The paper also examines the recent amendments in the Apprenticeship Training and introduction of Recognition of Prior Learning for promoting effective work based assessment and learning and school-to-work transition. The last section deals with the steps taken by the government to meet the needs of female and poorer students to improve their career interests and skills through various skill development schemes.

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⁶ The National Vocational Education Qualifications Framework (NVEQF), which was developed by MHRD (see Mehrotra et.al., 2012) was subsumed in NSQF in 2013.

Knowledge, Skills and Sustainable Development: Role of Higher Education in a Stage of Massification

N.V.Varghese⁷

Economic growth accompanied by widening inequalities is one of the important features of development in the recent past. The growth promoting sectors of the economy are those relying on knowledge intensive production processes. These sectors place higher value on knowledge production. Knowledge production traditionally remained essentially under the domain of public sectors and knowledge remained a public good. Ever since it is realized that investing in knowledge production is rewarding, the corporate interest in knowledge production became evident.

The provision of knowledge as a public good and unhindered access to knowledge is a prerequisite for sustainable development. Universities are important centres of research and knowledge production. Even in those countries where knowledge production has moved away from the universities, research training still continues to be almost the monopoly of the universities. The other role universities play is in training in knowledge and skills relevant for sustainable development. In other words, higher education has a role in generating knowledge to promote growth on the one hand and imparting knowledge and skills to manage development on the other.

The rising skill/qualification requirements in the knowledge economies increase demand for higher education and training. The skill requirements to get a job are different from the skills required to stay in a job. Therefore, training and retraining becomes a regular feature to retain jobs and sustain growth in the present context.

The state enjoyed near monopoly in the provision of higher education in India in the previous century. The unprecedented expansion leading to massification of the higher education sector in the 2000s is through the reliance on market forces and private institutions of higher education. This paper argues that massification of higher education in India reflects a reduced focus on knowledge production and on employability skills leading to questions on the extent of contribution of higher education to sustain economic growth and reducing inequalities in access to higher education. The higher education institutions need to seek a balance between training of minds and training of hands to limit the adverse effects of academic drift on the one hand and producing unemployable graduates on the other.

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Technical Session 2: Health and Nutrition

Public Health Policies: Generating Revenues or Relief?

Imrana Qadeer⁸

Thinking about public health is linked to the struggle for Indian independence and the efforts in the 1930s by the National Congress, Gandhi personally, the trade Union movements as well as the industrialists, who carved out vision plans for India. These exercises were used by independent India to plan its health sector over 1950s and 60s and in 1978, the country became a signatory to the WHO's Alma Ata declaration on Comprehensive Primary Health Care. This was a part of the newly emerging democracies demanding their space in the global arena. The declaration underlined that health was a human right, the responsibility of the state, rooted in welfare and social and economic progress, where people participated in planning. Primary Health care was defined as,

“Essential health care based on practical, scientifically sound and socially acceptable methods and technology made universally accessible to individuals and families in the community through their full participation and at a cost that the community and country can afford to maintain at every stage of their development in the spirit of self-reliance and self-determination. It forms an integral part both of the country's health system, of which it is the central function and main focus, and of the overall social and economic development of the community. It is the first level of contact of individuals, the family and community with the national health system bringing health care as close as possible to where people live and work, and constitutes the first element of a continuing health care process.”

Thirty four years later, the twelfth Plan redefined its task as,

“work towards the long term objective of establishing a system of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in the country. This means that each individual would have assured access to a defined essential range of medicines and treatment at an affordable price, which should be entirely free for a large percentage of the population. Inevitably, the list of assured services will have to be limited by budgetary constraints.’

This glaring shift has seen a sea of change- big and small. Health and nutrition have always been at the core of welfare which historically formed the anchor of democracies committed to building a welfare society. Political commitments may change in intensity and spheres over time within a given framework but when the framework itself changes then, fissures of discontinuity appear as major shifts. This is one such shift, the redefining of health objective shows that the country is attempting to get integrated into a fast expanding neoliberal global market, where health like many other services is a driver of revenue and wealth. The paper attempts to address this shifting paradigm where state supported welfare within a mixed economy is no more welcome or considered viable. The challenge no more is to identify past mistakes and flaws to improve planning but to withdraw welfare drastically and reject planning altogether.

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Interestingly, despite drastic cuts financial allocations in welfare, promotion of markets, rejection of planning at all levels, for political reasons the language of universality and assurance for the disadvantaged, especially the very poor, continues and promotes targeting in official approaches. This is in complete contrast to the developed and many middle income countries undergoing reforms. These countries have retained and protected their health sectors and continue to invest much higher proportions of their GDPs compared to India with better basic services. India alone seems to be taking up escalation at war footing of the dismantling process of its public health infrastructures and disinvesting in public health and food security systems.

This paper reviews four aspects of the Indian experience. (a) The contemporary history of health sector reforms in India and state attempts to retain some aspects of welfare.(b)The current acceleration of reforms and trends as reflected by the new establishment's annual plans and the National Institute for transformation of India- the Niti Ayog. (c) The perspectives of medical industry visa-vi health sector. (d) The projected allocation of resources as presented by the state and its problems. These are analyzed against the officially projected achievements in health indicators and some alternative data analysis to critique the key thrust of the present policy and its professed and real implications both in terms of investment patterns and achievements.

The “Health SDG” in India: Advances and Concerns

*Gita Sen*⁹

Complex and intense contestation among UN member states, the for-profit sector, civil society, and private foundations marked the final global agreement on SDG 3: “Ensure health lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”. In the end these differences of ideology and interest seemed to be resolved, and the multiple MDGs on health were brought together under the single umbrella of SDG 3. SDG 3 has thus been claimed by champions of “universal health coverage” (UHC) to be a victory for an approach focused on strengthening public health systems. Nonetheless, and despite the fact that SDG 3 represents an advance over the MDGs, which treated health-related goals separately thereby undermining a systemic approach, many challenges may only have been papered over.

For India, the SDGs come at a time when complex transitions have to be negotiated. Institutional changes consequent on the abolition of an overarching planning framework, the devolution of funding away from the central ministry, and unresolved issues of quality and accountability in both public and private sectors have to be addressed in the midst of demographic and epidemiological transitions (ageing, urbanization, NCDs) that demand new approaches and fresh thinking.

Will the Health SDG provide a sufficient umbrella to address the major challenges of financing, a growing reliance on the private sector and PPPs, inequality and poor quality and accountability that mark the health sector in the country?

This paper explores these challenges.

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SDG 3 on Health

*T Sundararaman*¹⁰

The strength of the Sustainable Development Goals with respect to health is that it has moved beyond the narrow focus on a very selective list of priorities that characterized the Millennium Development Goals to a wider description of health outcomes and processes. The targets described under the health goal of the SDG are being categorised into three groups- those representing the unfinished agenda of the millennium development goals- essentially with regard to reproductive and child health and some communicable diseases, those that are new inclusions under the SDGs- largely relating to non-communicable disease, substance abuse, injuries and environment health and a third sub-group which are characterised as “means of implementation” targets. A fourth- characterised in official discourse as over-arching is on universal health coverage- though in the official text it is only one target amongst 13. No sooner have these targets been adopted, when a robust discussion has emerged on the choice of indicators and the measurability of progress on these targets. In some ways the discussion on indicators and measurability has over-shadowed the discussion on how nations could make progress towards attaining these goals- and even what is the commitment of global health institutions to assist weaker nations to achieve these goals. The SDGs including the SDG -3 target lend themselves to be interpreted as political statement that defines development as more than economic growth rates, and health as more than universal health coverage. However it is possible for technical support agencies allied with global health institutions to amplify certain targets and attenuate or re-interpret others- a process that is well underway with respect to the health targets. Technical considerations both of feasibility of measurement as well as achievement are often used to rationalise such re-interpretations. Clearly achievement of SDG targets as stated currently is incompatible with neo-liberal understandings of growth and development that inform current national and international economic policies. Which could either justify progressive academic and civil society sections distancing themselves from the entire project or be seen as an opportunity. Engaging with the discussion around its measurement, interpretation and implementation could provide scope for questioning current economic policies and neo-liberal understandings of health reform and posing alternatives to these.

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Technical Session 3: Towards Gender Equality

Towards Gender Equality

Suneeta Dhar¹¹

Over the last two decades and more, governments have not met with globally agreed targets to advance women's rights under the Beijing Platform for Action and other international obligations. The achievements of MDGs were limited because many critical issues that could have advanced gender equality and women's empowerment -such as: ending violence against women - were left out of the MDG3 goal.

The SDGs have moved beyond the narrow framework and targets of the MDGs. There is a standalone goal on gender equality and women and girls' empowerment, and there are specific gender targets across goals. The targets under gender-specific Goal 5 include ending discriminatory practices and violence against women, women's participation in decision making, access to productive resources, and gender inequality in unpaid labour, among others. However, unaddressed issues include sexual rights, women's unpaid care work, and women's role in peace and security. Most importantly, the SDGs have brought back the focus on human rights into the global development agenda.

Leading feminist advocates from DAWN and Women's Major Group have expressed critical concerns about the SDG global framework as it does not address the structural obstacles for the full realisation of women and girls' rights and there is need to rethink the current global economic and financial architecture. Further, unless there is political will and dedicated fiscal resources to back implementation and accountability mechanisms, progress will not be made.

India's poor performance on women's empowerment and gender equality is reflected in some indicators, especially, in the declining child sex ratio. The 2015 UNDP HDR report ranks India at a lowly 130 out of 155 countries in the Gender Inequality Index. Only 12.2 per cent of parliamentary seats are held by women; health remains a huge concern with high infant and maternal mortality rates and poor access to reproductive and sexual health services; women's workforce participation has declined and many women remain insecure in the informal economy. Violence against women is one of the most systematic and widespread human rights violations and conservative forces seek to limit women's freedoms, rights to sexuality and autonomy. Much is to be done at the national front to achieve gender equality.

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Towards Gender Equality & Poverty: Tracking Policies & Programmes

Prof. Lakshmi Lingam¹²

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets, which were announced on 25th September 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly with the title “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, is part of an ongoing attempt to address a range of socio-economic and environmental issues tormenting countries since early 20th century. Among the goals and targets that countries wish to achieve, gender equality and poverty are among the most persistent and have a mirage like characteristic to them. Countries in the global South through their scholarship and activism have informed the discourses on gender equality, development, poverty alleviation and women’s empowerment. While significant breakthroughs have been made in terms of the perspectives and approaches in addressing most of the concerns articulated in the SDGs Agenda document, there are prevailing norms, cultural practices on the one hand and gaps in public policies and programmes that elude the achievement of these goals.

This paper will attempt to track the trajectory of gender equality and gender within poverty discourses in India over the past two decades, in order to inform future directions and strategies for social development.

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Will the SDGs be more effective than MGDs – Reflection on Gender Equality in India?

Vimala Ramachandran¹³

Reviewing the impact of MGDs on gender equality many commentators observed we started counting the number of girls / boys and men / women who were able to access resources or enrol in school or enhance their income. Through the MGD years data took primary and systemic issues that lead to gender as well as social inequality were left unaddressed. In India there is unanimous acceptance of the fact that gender – as a category – needs to be seen within the larger social, regional and location context. India is a land of huge diversity and it is also a country of sharp disparities (Ramachandran, 2009). Whether it is health or education or livelihood – we have still a long way to go before we can achieve any degree of equality. The question is will the SDGs make any significant difference to the development scenario?

The SDGs received a mixed reaction across the world: ““Unlike the MDGs, the SDGs are so encyclopaedic that everything is top priority, which means nothing is a priority...” (William Easterly, 2015) Feminists argued that the SDG targets fail to address issues that facilitate or impede institutional and political transformation and more importantly there is no mention of resources necessary for catalysing change. Equal wages, discrimination in the labour market, systemic issues that frame educational quality and access; women’s health that goes beyond reproduction and gender based violence – have not been addressed. (Linda Paeke, 2015)

In my lecture I will explore what the SDGs mean for us in India. While it may have 17 goals and 169 targets – it remains weak and touches the surface. I will draw upon the education sector example to argue that SDGs would be as ineffective as the MGDs. They are likely to be mere words unless there is both political will as well as the administrative determination to address fundamental issues that frame gender inequality in India.

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Technical Session 4: Poverty, Employment and Inclusive Growth

Are we really concerned about Employment:

Some Reflections on Current Macroeconomic Policy Regime

Praveen Jha¹⁴

It hardly needs any emphasis that sustained and inclusive economic growth, and not simply high rates of growth per se, is critical for eradicating poverty and promoting decent work in general. This of course requires necessary intervention on several fronts, in particular adequate macroeconomic space for national governments while being open to equitable multilateral trading systems. Investments in physical and social infrastructure with due emphasis on rural areas, necessary structural reforms, appropriate fiscal and monetary policies and a climate favorable to micro, small and medium enterprises are among the more important elements in a coordinated macroeconomic policy framework that can take the country in the direction of sustainable and inclusive growth.

It is well-acknowledged that the period since the early 1990s has witnessed a fundamental repositioning of the State versus the Market in the Indian economy. Essentially, the transition has been characterized by a strong push towards a policy reform programme, resulting in a very substantial degree of internal and external economic liberalization. Although the process had begun in the second half of the 1980s, it was in July 1991 that a rapid and sharp shift in the economic policy regime was officially enunciated, which justifies the view of the Indian case that of a transition from a 'mixed economy' policy framework to a 'market-driven' paradigm. Such a paradigm has been seriously deficient in terms of a whole range of macro-economic interventions required for a growth process which can be inclusive and promote decent work. Sure enough, as per the official figures, the period since the early 1990s clearly shows an acceleration in the trend growth rate compared to the 1980s, but it has been seriously flawed in terms of labour market outcomes. Furthermore, it may not be advisable to see the spurt in growth rates as a decisive transition to a significantly higher growth path.

Among the most worrisome labour market outcomes is the fact that the pace of employment generation has been completely out of tune with the rate of growth of GDP and there has been a significant fall in the elasticity of employment with respect to output. In other words, the key message that gets reinforced by the employment data for almost three decades now is that the transition to a high growth trajectory has not delivered much on the employment front. Moreover, organized manufacturing and services appear to contribute very little additional employment creation, and the expectation that these would add significantly to the generation of employment opportunities once neo-liberal policies succeeded in delivering growth has hardly materialized. On the contrary, there has been a significant dip in the absolute count of the workers in organized segments of the economy. Much of the small increase in employment has been in the categories of casual and self-employment opportunities, which have extremely adverse distributional and social welfare implications.

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SDG framework recently adopted by the UN, as post-2015 development agenda, has flagged promotion of “sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” (Goal 8). However, it seems that the currently dominant macroeconomic framework is hardly appropriate for the fulfillment of such a goal and this paper seeks to examine some of the relevant issues in this context.

Economic participation of women and inclusive growth:

Study of women entrepreneurship in India

Jeemol Unni¹⁵ & Ravikiran Naik¹⁶

Though there has been a significant decline in poverty across the world, inequality, and economic vulnerability is still persistent and increasing. The centrality of the full and decent employment for sustainable and inclusive growth is highlighted in 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda¹⁷ Growth to be sustainable and inclusive, the progressive transition to the formal economy and decent work is also required¹⁸. In the recent years, India has emerged as a major economy on a global scenario with accelerated growth and massive structural transformation as a result of the reforms launched the last three decades. However, the so-called growth story has not been an inclusive one and has actually resulted in arise in inequality and informal employment and decline in female labour force participation. With the inability of the saturated formal labour market to absorb the ever-increasing number of a labour force in India, small-medium entrepreneurship is vital for sustainable economic development. Recent literature recognises the women's role in economic growth and advocates the significance of women entrepreneurship to continuous economic development (Allen et. al., 2008)¹⁹.

In this context the paper will analyse labour markets in India with focus on aspects of women entrepreneurship. Considering the prevalence of informal employment and informal sector in the Indian labour market, the paper will analyse women entrepreneurship with respect to formal and informal enterprises in India.

The paper will be based on a national level survey of 9000 firms conducted by the World Bank's Enterprise Survey in 2014. This Survey provides qualitative and quantitative information on infrastructure, trade, finance, regulations, taxes and business licensing, corruption, crime and informality, finance, innovation, labor, and perceptions about obstacles to doing business of enterprises. The current paper seeks to answer the following questions,

1. Do socio-economic characteristics of women entrepreneurs in formal and informal enterprises differ?
2. How do women-owned enterprises fare in performance in productivity compared to male-owned enterprises?

Answers to these questions will help to devise policies to encourage women entrepreneurship to foster inclusive growth.

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¹⁷<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgoverview/post-2015-development-agenda.html> (viewed on 30 March 2016)

¹⁸The informal economy comprises half to three-quarters of all non-agricultural employment in developing countries.

¹⁹Allen, I.E., Elam, A., Langowitz, N. and Dean, M., 2008. Global entrepreneurship monitor. 2007 report on women and entrepreneurship

The Virtuous Cycle of Growth, Employment and Education in India --- Path to Equitable Development

Mona Khare²⁰

People no doubt are at the centre of sustainable development and, in this regard, Rio+20 promised to strive for a world that is just, equitable and inclusive, and committed to work together to promote sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development and environmental protection.

Investment in education to develop human capital and its contribution to economic development and growth is evidenced in literature by many authors (Shultz, Becker, Hanushek and Kimko 2000; Krueger and Lindahl 2000; Hanushek and Woessmann 2007; Kingdon and Soderbom, 2007a,b; Chadha 2004, Mathur 1990). The new wave of linking 'education to work' resultant from emerging labour market needs, evidences of higher salaries and better quality jobs with rising 'skills hierarchy' from the primary to the tertiary levels have been quite evident in global education debates in the past decade. Two emerging shifts that have taken shape in deliberations on Post 2015 MDGs/ EFAs on education seem to reflect the above ideology. These being -- Shift in global emphasis from Elementary to higher and Vocational education and from access, completion to 'Learning Achievements' post 2015. Obtaining a quality education is certainly the foundation to improving people's lives and sustainable development.

The market age is beset with imperfections of all kinds, and the newly emerging human capital market (an outcome of rising privatization and a highly complex as well as dynamic labour market and) is no exception. The imperfections in human capital market are two-fold --- supply side educational inequalities and demand side employment inequalities. The interplay of these two inequities, in turn, propagates economic inequality, that becomes a vicious circle of unequal growth. Thus, it is being increasingly realized that Post 2015 sustainable education goals should target for such an education system which is more inclusive so as to be able to take care of generations to come.

With this background, the paper explores the challenges that India faces in cutting through this vicious circle and embark on the path a virtuous cycle of inclusive development.

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Technical Session 5: Food Security & Sustainable Agriculture

Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture in India

Mondira Bhattacharya²¹, Ankita Goyal²² & T.Haque²³

Sustainable development goals are universally agreed intergovernmental set of 17 aspiration goals with 169 targets. The main agenda of the SDGs is transforming the world by 2030 through sustainable development practices. One of the SDG is on food security and agriculture. It seeks to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. This paper attempts to review Indian perspectives of the SDG on food security and sustainable agriculture. The food security situation in the country will be assessed through supply side factors such as productivity of principle crops, levels of poverty, extent of malnutrition and access to sanitation, safe drinking water and health care. An assessment of the latter three sectors is particularly important as these are needed for improving the food absorption capacity of people. Sustainable agriculture is a system of agriculture which is based on principles and options which are ecologically sound, economically feasible and culturally acceptable. In this paper sustainable agriculture development will be seen through complementarity between usage of non-chemical and chemical fertilizers, water use efficiency in agriculture such as drip and sprinkler system of irrigation, water harvesting and water efficient cropping pattern changes. It would also include an analysis of additional growth of leguminous crops, as these crops are needed for nitrogen-fixation in the soil thereby enhancing its fertility.

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Access to Food and Nutrition among Tribals: A Long Distance to MDG

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Food security has been a major concern in India since last century. Policies were made and strategies formulated to overcome food and nutrition deficiency. Even after six decades post-Independence, we cannot say that India is fairly comfortable in its food availability. The strategies thus far implemented focused on food distribution, employment generation and higher food production. In the recent past we witnessed some positive impact of the strategies implemented in terms of the improvement in the food delivery system, increase in the food buffer stock and MGNREGA to create affordability for the poorest of the poor. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) World Over have sets the threshold to reduce hunger to half along with other 10 other indicators. Indian experience about the success of MDGs in reducing hunger as also other indicators is not very satisfactory. Even though, the aggregate level of poverty and hunger has declined, we cannot claim a freedom from under-nutrition or hunger. Either the MDG targets set were too high for a chronic situation like that of ours or we have not grappled with the issues squarely. There are some social groups and regions that have stayed far behind from anywhere near these goals.

This paper based on a field study to understand the issue of food insecurity / access in the tribal dominated areas of Maharashtra, at micro level as against the comfortable situation shown by many. Actually we miss the real picture due to masking taking place at the macro level data. A comparison of food insecurity between the two groups reveals a higher incidence of food insecurity among the tribal as compared to that of non-tribal and hence this group will have to be carried to that very distant goal. The nutritional status of tribal children is far lower than that of their non tribal counterparts. This finding, however, is difficult to be generalised and the situations elsewhere in the country could be even worse. The vulnerability to food insecurity of tribal communities' would be further aggravated, if they were denied access to forest resources. Their dependence for nutrition on the forest products to which the access is denied through the State control need to be understood as an deliberate policy to keep them away from food of their liking. State should build the capabilities of the tribal communities to overcome food insecurity, particularly in distress situations with the help of their own initiatives. The target of MDG in the case of these ethnic groups is truly a distant dream of many a policy makers.

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Policies for Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture

Madhura Swaminathan²⁶

In this paper, I argue that the historic National Food Security Act passed in 2013 needs to be implemented and strengthened rather than diluted by means of a shift to cash transfers. The paper examines conditional cash transfers and their limitations in the Indian context. The context is, of course, one of mass poverty and malnutrition.

The historical evolution of policies for food security in India resulted in the public distribution system or PDS. Evidence over the last decade clearly shows that the PDS had a significant impact on poverty and nutrition. The impact was larger in States with universal coverage than those with narrowly targeted coverage. The paper argues for the need to strengthen the PDS and address its weaknesses, rather than to dismantle it.

Expanding the food basket of the PDS to include nutritious cereals as well as pulses, and oils, can address the nutritional problem as well as encourage diversified agriculture. To ensure the latter, agricultural policy such as minimum support price and procurement policy needs also to be diversified and made effective for crops other than rice and wheat.

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Technical Session 6: Social Marginalisation and Inequality

Inequality - The Cause of Deprivation

Manoranjan Mohanty²⁷

If the capitalist epoch reduced the centrality of the value of equality to abstract citizenship and ‘equality of opportunity’ the era of globalisation went a step backward to assert that rather than equality, the goal should be prosperity of a society as a whole which it claimed would provide enough to be availed by all. This has been a retreat in the political history of humankind for struggle for equality of all humans, groups and regions was a cherished value of all civilisations-. During the past three decades or so much of the world, including India has seen the phenomenon of the state withdrawing from its public commitment to provide basic conditions of life such as health, education, habitat, work, support the structurally deprived groups to acquire facilities for self-development. It has unleashed a wave of privatisation of public services. Inequalities not only of the old kind- class, caste, gender, ethnic, religious and regional have continued to exist, or widen, new kinds of inequality of knowledge, cultural capacity, defence capacity, communication technology, access to natural resources, clean environment, voice in the media, institutional space and even new forms of political power are visible.

MDG and now SDG are clothed in laudable terms which no one can object to. But they miss the basic structural trend in the global political economy and in the Indian growth process during the past two decades, now in accentuated pace that they are being acted upon on an unequal social landscape. This is happening when all the oppressed groups are rising to assert their democratic rights. Therefore, one notices an aura of unreality and illusion underlying them.

My paper will focus on this contradiction that is likely to create hardships, tensions and violence in society and the world as a large majority will remain deprived by this process and no amount of welfare would be adequate to handle this situation. It argues that social, economic, political, cultural and ecological conditions to reduce inequality and interconnected programmes that promote universal base and also stress the fulfilment of special needs of the deprived in each sector are needed. In all this the political initiative must remain with the deprived sections themselves from the grassroots level upwards. Equality must be the central focus to realise the SDGs in the contemporary world. Or else they would remain a set of tension management measures cleverly propagated to tackle the adverse effects of global capitalist growth.

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Rising Inequality and Social Welfare in India

*Zoya Hasan*²⁸

Growing inequality is one of the central issues of our time which requires close examination. Beyond a certain threshold, it adversely affects social well-being, retards the impact of growth on poverty alleviation, and constrains individual's sense of fulfillment and self-worth. Increasing inequality is a conspicuous issue in India today. Apart from an economic analysis, the Indian case calls for an analysis of political and policy processes that allow certain politically and economically powerful groups to control and manipulate not just economic activities but also democratic processes. This paper examines in brief the politics and policies affecting inequalities chiefly the impact of elite dominance on inequalities and eventually people's well-being. It explores how political processes especially elite capture intensifies inequalities with regard to income and wealth, often referred to as vertical inequalities. While we need to consider inequality in its entirety taking into consideration the social and economic dimensions of inequality (vertical and horizontal inequalities), this paper's principal concern is an exposition of the political factors driving inequality and the prospects of social welfare in India.

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Invisibles in Democracy: Most marginalized Dalit Communities in Uttar Pradesh

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The paper focuses on those who are voiceless, invisible and constantly left out in the almost 60 years of discourse of state led Indian democracy. It presents a narrative catalogue of dalits of dalit, margins of the margin, subalterns of the subaltern that are still left out either from the real or from discourse of the democracy. In this paper I will try and understand how democracy developed in India and view how large sections of various dalit groups are experiencing and articulating their continuous ongoing deprivation and marginalization. The BSP immensely helped empower the vast sections of dalits and Bahujans in the last decade but still a huge cluster of dalit communities are very far from the door of democracy. This paper will try to fix its gaze at the faces of these invisible castes and would also focus on the process of ongoing inclusion of dalits in the democratic sphere, trying to understand the dialectics of contradiction involved in the democratic processes in post-colonial India. It would document, on the one hand, democracy that includes its assertive margins in the sphere of politics and governance, while on the other hand, it excludes many of non assertive, small and margins among the margin as byproduct of its functional character. I will discuss how during the process of democratization of dalit communities some groups are over represented, while most others are still far from the threshold of democracy. These invisible communities among dalits are not even able to demonstrate their politics of presence in the ever evolving democracy of Uttar Pradesh. I would also investigate here the elements and factors that constitute visibility of the marginalized in democratic politics and will try and understand the dilemma and struggle within the entire dalit community of UP for acquiring visibility, empowerment and political space. I will try to creatively capture their growing sense of being left out in democracy and democratic representation and their cry for inclusion, which is yet to transform in properly located assertion in the domain of nation, state, democracy and society.

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