PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE POOR IN INDIA: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SAFETY NETS,

Nisha Srivastava and Pravesh Sharma (editors),

New Delhi: World Food Programme, 2006.

Standards of living of people across nations and regions differ significantly depending on the availability and accessibility of social and economic well-being. While increasing and improving the quality of growth process is very important, spreading the benefits of this growth process across regions to tackle poverty is a much debated issue. Further, one of the major challenges of developing countries is to provide social protection to their citizens. Developed nations have developed highly sophisticated social safety nets while developing nations have yet to reach a desirable level of social protection. India, a country of more than one billion population, has a major concern for her millions of vulnerable poor people, who do not have access to basic amenities of life.

The World Food Programe had hosted a national workshop on protecting the vulnerable poor in India in October 2004 to provide a forum to discuss various issues of social protection, food security, and poverty alleviation. The book under review edited by Nisha Srivastava and Pravesh Sharma is based on the selected and revised papers presented by renowned academicians, researchers, administrators, and representatives of civil society organizations.

The book is divided into three parts: conceptual framework, experience with food-based safety nets, and issues with non-food based safety nets. Altogether it consists of 11 chapters. The first part of the book comprises two introductory chapters. Chapter 1 describes social security, poverty reduction, and development arguments for enlarging the concept and coverage of social security in a globalizing world by Dr. K. P Kannan. Chapter 2 deals with role of social protection for the poor and vulnerable sections in India by Dr. S. Mahendra Dev.

The second part of the book addresses issues relating to food based programmes, public distribution system, integrated child development service programme, and innovative interventions. These are covered in Chapters 3 through 7. In Chapter 3 Naresh C. Sexena focuses on the food based programme as a safety net in India. In Chapter 4, Pravesh Sharma shows how the public distribution system works as a safety net and draws lessons from three states. Amitabh Kundu's work on food security system in India is covered in Chapter 5. Efficacy of integrated child development services programme is covered by R. Radhakrishna, S. Indrakanta, and C. Ravi in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 describes food for work project in the Chhatishgarh tribal development programme and is written by Nisha Srivastava.

The third part of the book dwells upon non-food based safety nets. These are covered in Chapters 8 to 11. Chapter 8 by Ravi S.Srivastava provides the explanation for poverty reduction programmes in the context of decentralization. Role of credit in coping with shocks is covered by Pradeep Srivastava in

Chapter 9. Chapter 10 by Indira Hirway focuses on employment programmes for protecting the vulnerable poor. How social safety nets for the vulnerable poor and elderly in India work can be seen in Chapter 11.

The book provides a new dimension to understand the real problems faced by the deprived and vulnerable sections of Indian society. It provides a theoretical and empirical framework for understanding the issues relating to social protection, poverty alleviation and food security. While targeting the socially and economically deprived section of society is itself not so difficult, managing through food and non-food based programmes and reaching the targeted people is not easy. It calls for reformulating the policies for efficient allocation of resources and proper distribution and implementation of these polices in order to address the issues of mitigating poverty, providing social protection, and securing food availability. This book will immensely useful to students, policy makers, academicians, and civil society institutions in finding answers to questions on social protection, food security, and poverty alleviation.

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