

Social Inequality and Inclusion Policies in India: Lessons Learned and the Way Forward

Authors : Usharani Rathinam

Abstract : Although policies directing inclusion of marginalized were in effect, majority of chronically impoverished in India belonged to schedule caste and schedule tribes. Also, taking into account that poverty is gendered; destitute women belonged to lower social order whose need is not largely highlighted at policy level. This paper discusses on social relations poverty which highlights on how social order that existed structurally in the society can perpetuate chronic poverty, followed by a critical review on social inclusion policies of India, its merits and demerits in addressing chronic poverty. Multiple case study design is utilized to address this concern in four districts of India; Jhansi, Tikamgarh, Cuddalore and Anantapur. These four districts were selected by purposive sampling based on the criteria; the district should either be categorized as a backward district or should have a history of high poverty rate. Qualitative methods including eighty in-depth interviews, six focus group discussions, six social mapping procedures and three key informant interviews were conducted in 2011, at each of the locations. Analysis of the data revealed that irrespective of gender, schedule castes and schedule tribe participants were found to be chronically poor in all districts. Caste based discrimination is exhibited at both micro and macro levels; village and institutional levels. At village level, lower caste respondents had lesser access to public resources. Also, within institutional settings, due to confiscation, unequal access to resources is noticed, especially in fund distribution. This study found that half of the budget intended for schedule caste and schedule tribes were confiscated by upper caste administrative staffs. This implies that power based on social hierarchy marginalize lower caste participants from accessing better economic, social, and political benefits, that had led them to suffer long term poverty. This study also explored the traditional ties between caste, social structure and bonded labour as a cause of long-term poverty. Though equal access is being emphasized in constitutional rights, issues at micro level have not been reflected in formulation of these rights. Therefore, it is significant for a policy to consider the structural complexity and then focus on issues such as equal distribution of assets and infrastructural facilities that will reduce exclusion and foster long-term security in areas such as employment, markets and public distribution.

Keywords : caste, inclusion policies, India, social order

Conference Title : ICSISS 2017 : International Conference on Social Inequality, Sources and Solutions

Conference Location : Toronto, Canada

Conference Dates : June 15-16, 2017