

S. Mahendra Dev, Piush Antony, V. Gayathri and R.P. Mamgain (eds.) *Social and Economic Security in India*. Institute for Human Development, New Delhi, 2001, 523 pages, Rs. 750.

Report of a seminar held in Delhi, 15-17 March 1999

On April 15-17 1999 a seminar took place on social security in India. It was held in the India International Centre in Delhi and was organised by the Institute for Human Development and the Indian Society for Labour Economics. It was attended by approximately 80 people: Indian and foreign academicians, people from international organisations, a few politicians and senior officials.

### *First Day*

The seminar was inaugurated by Mr. K.C. Pant, vice chairman of the Planning Committee. He mentioned the huge social security problems in India and welcomed the contributors to the seminar. During this first session, Gerry Rodgers of the ILO emphasised the processes of globalisation and the fact that new problems in social security arise with market-led developments.

The second morning session included two general papers. J. Juetting (Centre for Development Research, University of Bonn) gave a general introduction to the concept of social security. He stressed that it is important to realise that there are four different types of providers: the state, the market, households and member-based organisations. It is important to see these providers as complementary, and to look for synergies and partnerships. The second presenter, Mahendra Dev (Indira Gandhi Institute for Development Research, Mumbai), presented an overview of the main social security problems and policies in India.

In the afternoon there were two sessions. The first focused on food and nutrition security. It started with a paper by Bruno Dorin (Centre de Sciences Humaines, Delhi) about access to lipids in India. Dorin emphasised that discussions about food production and security in India should include oilseed production and lipid consumption. Oilseed distribution could be an easy (less bulky) form of calory distribution. The second paper, presented by Anuradha Rajivan (IAS) discussed the noon-meal scheme in Tamil Nadu. The remaining three papers focused on the Public Distribution system. Prof. Datt (Institute for Human Development, Delhi) defended the introduction of targeting within the PDS. Madhura Swaminathan (Indira Gandhi Institute for Development Research) challenged the idea of an ever expanding food subsidy. She showed that as a percentage of GDP and government expenditure the food subsidy has remain more or less stable. My own paper focused on a number of wrong assumptions in recent policy proposals to target the PDS. Like Madhura I emphasised that targeting alone will not bring down the food subsidy bill. As long as procurement prices are high and the FCI has the obligation to take whatever is offered, procurement is costly and the food subsidy will remain high.

The next session was on employment security. Ajit K. Ghose (ILO-SAAT, New Delhi) described the four main characteristics of the employment situation in India:

- + Most people are employed in one way or another, but their income is insufficient. In short, a lot of the work is not very productive nor remunerative

- + Insecurity of income, even though there may be employment security
- + The labour market is rather discriminatory
- + There are several unacceptable forms of employment, including bonded labour and child labour.

Unfortunately, Ajit Ghose claimed, the employment situation in India has not improved in recent years in terms of these four points.

While Ajit Ghose presented a very general paper, Ajit Ranade (Indira Gandhi Institute for Development Research) presented a detailed overview of the Employment Guarantee Scheme in Maharashtra. Specific questions were raised about the wage rate, organisational forms of the EGS and participation of women. An interesting point raised in the discussion was that the high participation rate of women in the EGS was, perhaps, linked to the low wage rate. It was suggested that an increase in the wage rate could lead to a decline of female participation and an increase in male interest.

### *Second Day*

The day started with a session about social security for vulnerable groups. There were four papers: on women by Indira Hirway (Gandhi Labour Institute, Ahmedabad); on ageing (by Muneer Alam and R.N. Agarwal (Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi), on scheduled castes (S.K. Thorat, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi) and on tribals in south Bihar (Harishwar Dayal, Ranchi University and A.K. Karan, Institute for Human Development, Delhi). One of the points made in the discussion was that citizen-based rights are more important for women than employment-based rights, since not all women are working.

The second session focused on micro-level experiences and security for vulnerable groups. Three papers discussed the situation of workers in different kinds of industries, and especially what happens after closure of the industries. Jan Breman (Centre for Asian Studies Amsterdam) described the situation of textile workers in Ahmedabad. He emphasised that job regularity, stability and dignity are all lost after closure of the mills. There are no social security arrangements, and workers felt betrayed, not only by the state but also by the trade unions. Ramesh Datta (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai) reported very similar types of developments with regard to textile workers in Mumbai, although he was slightly more positive about the role of the trade union in providing social security. Vijay (Institute of Social Studies, the Hague) discussed informalisation and casualisation of labour in the new industrial towns in Andhra Pradesh. He distinguished between different kinds of social security provisions and stated that most of these arrangements are weakening. In the discussion strong emphasis was placed on the minimum wage and the fact that it is not implemented.

The next session was on education and health. Ravi Srivastava (Allahabad University) discussed the relation between caste, class and schooling. He started by saying that education has positive effects on almost all dimensions of deprivation. In the rest of the paper, he stressed, however, that the way education is organised and the context in which it operates make that it reinforces inequality, rather than reducing it. Anuradha De of the PROBE team reported on research undertaken by this team on parents' motivation to educate their children. Generally, this was high, but the aspiration has strong gender, caste and class dimensions. She also reported on the extreme poor infrastructure in most schools and low quality of schooling. For instance,

in almost 50 per cent of the schools which were investigated there was no teaching activity at all among the teachers. The whole school environment was child-unfriendly, and especially children from a lower class background felt in a hostile environment. The government does not take the quality of education and universal education seriously enough. The next two papers by Shiv Kumar (Unicef, Delhi) and Devraj Chauhan (Foundation for Research in Community Health, Mumbai) emphasised that child health and survival continues to be a problem. Highest priority should be given to health of infants and children, eliminating gender inequalities and promoting women's capabilities. The discussant stressed differences in the health situation between different districts, and that micro-studies are required to understand what factors contribute to a relatively good health situation in particular districts.

### *Third Day*

The third and last day started with a session about shelter, sanitation and violence. Amitabh Kundu (Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi) recounted that for some time after Independence housing and sanitation was considered as secondary after food security, until one realised that sufficient food does not necessarily lead to less malnutrition, due to infections and other diseases, and that housing and sanitation are essential to improve overall well-being. His paper gave an overview of the housing conditions and policies regarding shelter and basic amenities in the various States. Jean Drèze (Delhi School of Economics) drew attention to violence as an insecurity issue. Together with Reetika Khera, he had done a study about the relationship between murder rates and various development indicators. Based on 1981 data they concluded that there is no clear correlation between urbanisation or income and murder, but if there is one it suggests that higher per capita GDP goes together with more murder and that the murder rates per capita are higher in rural than urban areas. One correlation that was, however, very clear was that between the female/male ratio and murder. The higher the proportion of women, the lower the murder rate. Arvind Das questioned the statistical underpinnings of Drèze and Khera's study in the discussion, and emphasised that many more factors should be taken into account.

The next session included six papers on state-level experiences. Seeta Prabhu (University of Mumbai) discussed expenditures on promotional and protective social security across States. After this there were presentations on Andhra Pradesh (S. Indrakant and S. Galab, both Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad), Bihar (B.K. Sinha and Pushpendra, LBS Academy, Mussorie), Kerala (K.P. Kannan, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram) and Uttar Pradesh (Nisha Srivastava, Allahabad University). The various presenters emphasised the large number of schemes, the relevance of Panchayat bodies, the importance of employment security, unequal access to land in some States and the issue of governance.

The last afternoon started with a 'panel discussion' about economic reforms and social policy. In reality, however, this session differed very little from the other sessions: there was again very little time for discussion. The panellists focused on retrenchment and retraining of workers, macro-economic shifts in the Indian economy and various labour issues. I must say I found this the most frustrating session of the whole seminar. Due to the fact that there were many papers there was limited time for discussion throughout the seminar, but in a session announced as 'discussion' one

expect something else. The seminar was closed with a valedictory address by Jan Breman.

To conclude, a few things became very clear during the seminar. First, the scale of insecurity for millions of people, but yet the conviction that the problems are not impossible to overcome. Second, the difficulty to think creatively about social security. It was observed by several people that the old model of social security has lost its credibility. But the alternative (described in terms of complementarity of different 'providers', synergy, or partnership of state and market) is also not (yet?) very satisfactory. In any case, examples of this new model are either dubious or trivial. Third, the dominance of economists in the debate, or rather the absence of political scientists. This resulted in a situation that among the participants there was sufficient awareness of the problems and commitment to work on them, but at the seminar not sufficient analysis of and discussion about the political strategies required to make the life of the most vulnerable population in India less insecure.

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