

Book Review

"The Long Road to Social Security", first edition, 2013, edited by K. P. Kannan and Jan Breman and published by OXFORD University Press, New Delhi, Total number of pages 542. Price: IC Rs.995/-

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In recent years, there has been a growing concern on social security and national social protection systems. Comprehensive and inclusive social protection system is an essential component for sustainable economic growth for a country. Recent evidence approves that comprehensive social protection impacts on economic growth along with better redistribution. In addition to this, more inclusive social protection system can generate greater social cohesion and more peaceful societies and reduces risks and vulnerability in society. However, there are policy debates on financing for social security, rather than about coverage or benefits. In this regards, experiences and impacts related to social security interventions are very useful for us.

'The long road to social security' is a book edited by K. P. Kannan and Jan Breman and published by OXFORD University Press, New Delhi in 2013. The book comprises thirteen articles of the prominent authors, which basically are focused in assessing the implementation of National Social security initiatives for the working poor in India. The editors of the book acknowledge this book as the result of the evolution, expansion and execution of the proposal of Jan Breman for detailed studies on the functioning of the two national schemes carried out by the government of India, i.e., (i) National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) of 2005, and (ii) Unorganized Workers Social Security Act (UWSSA) of 2008.

Prior to chapters of the book, "Introduction: Unto the last?" written by Jan Breman and K.P. Kannan, has been placed as an introductory note. In this note, the authors mention that as a precondition to improvement in the plight of the laboring poor is lowering the scale of multiple vulnerabilities which account for their misery. In order to achieve that objective, the National Commission (India) has outlined a 'levelling up' strategy which includes (i) the provision of employment in public works, (ii) a package of contingent social security, including insurance against failing health, and (iii) social benefits for the non-labouring poor.

The first chapter of the book includes two overview papers by K. P. Kannan and Varinder Jain. These papers have been titled as (a) Historic Initiative, Limited by Design and

Implementation: A National Overview of the Implementation of NREGA and National Health Insurance for the Poor: A Review of the Implementation of RSBY. The second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth chapters respectively include the articles regarding the prevailing social security system especially based on NREGA and UWSSA in Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Gujarat, Odisha and Punjab.

D. Narasinha Reddy, in his article ' Functioning of NREGS in Andhra Pradesh', observes that Andhra Pradesh has acquired a reputation of being one of the leading states of India where NREGS is successfully implemented. This has been achieved to an extent through active involvement of self-help groups across the State, and senior administrators of high integrity and commitment to the cause of the marginalized, without any political interference. Moreover, the institutionalization of certain critical processes of implementation, and effective adoption of IT solutions also helped to achieve success. Furthermore, there is a clarity in the approach of Andhra Pradesh that though NREGA is a product of national legislation and is centrally sponsored programme, its implementation success is bound by state-level readiness to initiate appropriate innovation and build institutions that sustain the programme.

Likewise, G. Vijay, in his article ' The business of health care and the challenge of health security: The case of Rajiv Aarogyasri Community Health Insurance Scheme in Andhra Pradesh' comparing between the service-effectiveness of Aarogyasri and RSBY, remarks while the Aarogyasri experience showed too much of a bias in favour of high-end disease and tertiary treatment, the RSBY was focused on relatively low-end diseases and secondary level treatment while catering to in-patient care for out-patient ailments. Considering such a situation he suggests an ideal system of health care might be to move towards a cohesive and judicious mix of Rajiv Aarogyasri Scheme and RSBY approaches, along with taking on board effective out-patient care.

T. P. Kunhikannan and K. P. Aravindam, in their article "Functioning of contingent social security schemes in Kerala" mention that Kerala's development experience is the outcome of the interplay of multiple factors, including social security. The important feature of the outcome is its commendable social and human development, even at low levels of per capita income. This peculiar situation, which is not in sync with conventional economic norms, came to be called the 'Kerala Model of Development'. They further opine to pursue locally specific intervention strategy for still existing pockets of poverty in Kerala.

Similarly, K. P. Kannan and N. Jagajeevan, in their article "Beneficiary as agency: Role of women's agency and the Panchayat in implementing NREGA: A study in Kerala", remark that NREG along with Kudumbasree activities in Kerala led to perceptible

changes in the form of self-awareness, self-dignity, and enhancing self-capability. Besides, they also brought a slow but steady change in the social profile and social status of women workers.

Jan Breman, in his article "The practice of poor relief in rural South Gujarat", states that self-reliance cannot be the organizing principle for providing social security, and protection at the bottom of the rural economy, especially when the working poor barely succeed to take care of their own basic needs, leave alone holding them accountable for looking after the non-working segment of the old and aged, single females and handicapped in their midst. He further suggests that for alleviating the misery in which both the non-working and working poor are entrapped in South Gujarat, the state has to be more forthcoming and forceful in extending social benefits and in generating public employment than it has been.

In the article "Social security for the urban poor: A study in Gujarat", Darshini Mahadevia, rises two major issues with regard to social security of the unorganized workers in the context of a metropolitan city. First, it is a process through which the new worker in the low income category gets assimilated in a city and attains its citizenship. Darshini Mahadevia Till then, he/she is left to fend for himself/herself. If there is no proactive mechanism of identifying such workers, they and their families tend to remain outside the social security net for years. The hardest of all is to get access to a secure shelter and hence an address. Second, the growth path selected by the State, which finds concentrated expression in the development of Ahmedabad, has not been sensitive enough to labour welfare and human development aspects.

Satyakam Joshi, in his article "Social security schemes in tribal areas of Gujarat: A study in the Dangs district", mentions that except NREGS, other schemes such as RSBY, Old Age Pension and Widow Pension were being implemented satisfactorily. Those who got the benefits of Old Age Pension/Widow Pension felt that it had upgraded their status both in the family and society.

Rathi Kanta Kumbhar, in his article "Structural legacy, inefficiency, and weakening social securities: A study of NREGS in a Panchayat in Odisha" argues that MGNREGA programme in Odisha does promote and improve the livelihood of the rural poor. However, there exist a number of social and institutional shortcomings. The socio-economic profile of the job-card-holders indicates that while the share of SC/STs among job-card-holders is high, a sizable segment is kept out, despite their willingness to work. In fact, getting the job-card should form part of their legal right under the NREGA.

In the article "Social health insurance for the poor: A study of RSBY in Odisha", Amarendra Das states that RSBY in Odisha had enormous potential to provide health insurance coverage, and hence health care to the poorest of the poor. However, there were a number of loopholes in the scheme: (i) small number of hospitals available in the locality with adequate infrastructure, (ii) the scheme had been implemented in only six districts out of 30 districts of Odisha, and (iii) the implementation of RSBY was based on clearly defined BPL list, but in Odisha the government provided very old list which consisted only 40 per cent of the target population.

Sucha Singh Gill, Sukhwinder Singh, and Jaswinder Singh Brar, in their article "Functioning of NREGS in a prosperous State: A study in Punjab" observed that NREGS in Punjab, except the Old Age Pension and subsidized food where political commitments are more pronounced, is operating much below expectation.

Likewise, in the article "Social security in Punjab: A blend of state and central schemes", they state that there are still instances of exclusion of the poor and deserving cases, and inclusion of the non-poor or non-eligible cases which need to be rectified. In this context, they also suggest to enhance capacity of state apparatus, utmost transparency, and accountability in selecting beneficiaries must be ensured.