

# Social Inclusiveness of National Food Security Bill: Issues and Concerns

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*The National Food Security Bill (NFSB) came at a point when nutrition based deprivation of not only poor, but also majority of the marginalised communities, especially the SCs is at peril. The main thrust of the bill is built on the existing ICDS, MDM and PDS programmes, however, the existing macro level data and literature clearly shows that nutrition level of children has not improved much in the last two decades. Especially, under nutrition is high among certain social groups such as SCs and STs. But there is no specific mention in the NFSB on addressing the concerns of the marginalised communities. This paper examines the existing utilisation gaps among SC and ST, using the available NFHS and NSSO data. This paper also studies the caste based discrimination in utilising the ICDS, MDM and PDS programmes and proposes measure to bring in social inclusiveness in the NFSB.*

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## 1. Background

The issue of food security has so much priority concern in India that a bill was made to pass in the parliament in 2013 to ensure food entitlement to its citizens. The concern is relevant for the reason that more than one-fifth of its population was poor in 2011-12. In fact, poverty ratio increases substantially if compared with the international standard of two dollars. In addition to this, about half of the children below six years of age are undernourished with wide variation across states in 2005-06. These alarming figures rationalize the efforts of the then Government in bringing the bill to ensure food security in India (Gulati A. et. al., 2012). The Public Distribution System (PDS) has the major responsibility to supply subsidised food. A number of studies have critically examined the efficiency and efficacy of the same. However, subsidised food supply depends on the production and procurement of the food grains. While looking at the production of the food grains, it is observed that food grain production increased from 196.8 million tonnes to 264.4 million tonnes during 2000-01 to 2013-14 (BE) at the rate of 2 per cent per annum. Even the production of rice and wheat has increased from 85 to 106.3 million tonnes at the rate of 1.82 per cent and 69.7 to 95.8 tonnes at the rate of 2.65 per cent per annum, respectively during the same period (GoI, 2014). Similarly the procurement of cereals has been increasing from 19.3 per cent to 29.8 per cent during 2000-01 to 2012-13 (Sinha, 2013). Since the production and procurement are not the concern for food supply, we are left with the distribution problem and its discussion.

With major changes in the economic policy in 1991, universal PDS has been made target based. The studies have shown a number of problems even related to the

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Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) such as high leakages and targeted errors, increasing economic cost and thereby subsidy. The NSSO based estimates indicate substantial decline in the share of leakages from 54 per cent in 2004-05 to 35 per cent in 2011-12 (Sinha, 2013, p. 33). Similar evidences are drawn from the field survey conducted in nine states in 2011 to assess PDS (Khera, 2011). Jha and Acharya (2013) argue that the share of food subsidy to Gross Domestic Product is less than 1 per cent, and it is declining over the period from 0.8 per cent to 0.74 per cent during 2004-05 to 2012-13 (BE). Thus, some of the problems that were debated during the last two decades are not of much concern to that extent now. However, inclusion and exclusion errors still get space in the discussion. In 2004-05, about 63 per cent of the poor households were not covered under PDS indicating substantially high exclusion errors, and about 62 per cent of all BPL and AAY cards were in the hands of non-poor households suggesting a large systematic inclusion error (Svedberg, 2012, p.56).

Despite these positive changes in the production and procurement front, poverty and under nutrition is substantially high among SCs and STs and rate of decline in poverty across social groups in both rural and urban areas is not similar, but it is relatively less for SCs and STs as compared to Non-SC/STs during 1993-94 to 2009-10 (Diwakar, 2014; Thorat & Dubey, 2012, p. 45). It is being evident that the social exclusion and discrimination are still evident in different forms in various spheres such as economic, political, social, educational etc. (Thorat, 2014). As a result of this, SCs and STs are not able to accrue the benefits of the positive changes occurring in the economy, food grain production and its distribution at par with non-excluded counterparts. These groups lag behind in improvement in poverty reduction over the time despite the fact that it prioritised the policy agenda as a part of inclusive growth trajectory. SCs and STs are not only lacking behind economically, but they also face challenges in utilising basic government services like ICDS, MDM and JSY. The discriminatory access to MDM and JSY (Sabharwal et al., 2014a; Sabharwal et al., 2014b); and ICDS (Diwakar, 2014) has hampered the development of the SCs. The consequences of these are clearly evident from the varying rate of changes in poverty decline across social groups. Poverty among SCs declined at the rate of 2.4 per cent in rural areas and 2.1 per cent in urban areas. Among STs, it declined at the rate of 2.1 per cent in both rural and urban areas while among Non-SC/STs, it declined

at the rate of 2.7 per cent and 2.4 per cent per cent respectively during 1993-94 to 2009-10.

Similarly, there has not been much improvement in the nutritional status among children during the last two decades (IIPS and ORC Macro 1995, 2000, 2007; Hungama, 2007; NNMB, 2012). India is the home for most of the undernourished in the world. It is even worse than some of the Sub-Saharan African countries (Horton, 2001). The NFHS data shows that the share of underweight among children below three years of age during 1998-99 and 2005-06 was very high for SC. Moreover, the rate of reduction was relatively low as compared to others (Diwakar, 2014).

In this context, it is necessary to examine the relevance of the National Food Security Bill from inclusive policy perspective as it has been argued that it is a right based approach and provides entitlement to food to 67 per cent of the population in India and helps to clear the social disparity that exists in poverty and under nutrition. In fact, the bill is constantly praised for bringing various existing programmes such as ICDS, MDM and PDS under its umbrella (Mishra, 2011). However, it failed to make necessary changes and was incorporated as it is with the existing limitations. There is a complete lack of understanding on reasoning causes for the existing stagnancy in child undernourishment. This makes the attempt futile in addressing the set goals.

Therefore, we shall briefly introduce the Bill and its features following an evidence on how child poverty and under nutrition has declined across social groups in India for the reason that they constitute a major component of the beneficiaries in the Bill. We will also examine how the existing programmes brought under the NFSB were accessible to the excluded groups. Finally, we will discuss the nature of inclusiveness in NFSB.

## 2. The promises of NFSB - An overview

The National Food Security bill was introduced in 2011 and promulgated in 2013 with the aim of providing legal rights of food entitlement to the needy people such as children, pregnant and lactating mothers and adults from poor households. This bill relies on the existing ICDS, MDM and PDS programmes to achieve this objective with paradigm shift from welfare measures to right based approach where people are entitled to certain amount of food on subsidised rates. The importance of NFSB bill is multiple in nature as it also addresses indirect costs involved due to food insecurity. The prevailing high level of

malnutrition leads to forgo gross domestic product (Horton, 2001) due to inadequate food intake and essential nutrients result in the deterioration in physical growth and development (National Nutrition Policy, 1993; Horton, 2001; Satyanarayana, 1979), as well as cognitive development (Waterlow, 1974).

The PDS entitlement is the first component of the NFSB. It entitles every person belonging to eligible households to receive five kg. of food grains per person per month at subsidised prices. Households covered under Antyodaya Anna Yojana will be entitled to 35 kg. of food grains per household per month at the prices specified by the government. Eligible households will be entitled to food grains at the subsidized price not exceeding Rs. 3 per kg for rice, Rs. 2 per kg for wheat and Rs. 1 per kg for coarse grains for a period of three years from the date of commencement of this Act. Thereafter based on the price fixed by the Central Government from time to time but not exceeding the minimum support price for wheat and coarse grains; and the derived minimum support price for rice.

Secondly, pregnant and lactating mothers will be given a meal free of charge during pregnancy and six months after the child birth through the local *anganwadi*<sup>1</sup>. A minimum of rupees six thousand is provided as maternity benefit, in instalments, as prescribed by the Central Government. Thirdly, every child up to the age of fourteen years will be entitled to nutrition provision. In the case of children in the age group of six months to six years, free of charge and age appropriate meal will be provided through the local *anganwadi* centre. In the case of children up to class VIII or within the age group of six to fourteen years, whichever it is applicable, every day one mid-day meal free of charge will be provided, except on school holidays, in all schools run by local bodies, Government and Government aided schools.

The nutritional standards of children in the age group of 6 months to 3 years, 3 to 6 years and pregnant women and lactating mothers are required to be met by providing "Take Home Rations" or nutritious hot cooked meal in accordance with the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme (ICDS); and supply of hot cooked meals to maintain nutritional standards of children in lower and upper primary classes under the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Scheme. Under this scheme, it is mandatory to provide 450 calories and 12 gm. protein for primary and 750 calories and 20 gm. protein for middle school children.

In case of non-supply of the entitled quantities of food grains or meals to the entitled persons under chapter II, such persons shall be entitled to receive such food security allowance from the concerned State Government to be paid to each person within such time and manner as may be prescribed by the Central Government.

Altogether, it is an achievement of the Act that entitlement of the food has become a constitution right which was lacking in the past even though some of the provisions mentioned in the National Food Security Act were in place through the existing programme. Now it has become a legal right for the poor people, so they can legally make claim if they did not receive the food supply as per the bill. However, it has to be categorically mentioned that the marginalised groups in the country are not homogenous in nature and a few groups are marginalised as a result of long history of discrimination or they were never part of the mainstream development.

The Schedule Caste communities have faced discrimination for long time which has prevented them from making any significant improvement in their human capital. In addition to that, they were also subjected to different kinds of economic as well as social constraints. Similarly, STs were always out of the mainstream development process, facing geographical exclusion, displacement, inadequate human development indicators and inadequate implementations of policies such as PESA.

### **3. Social disparity in poverty and nutritional status of children**

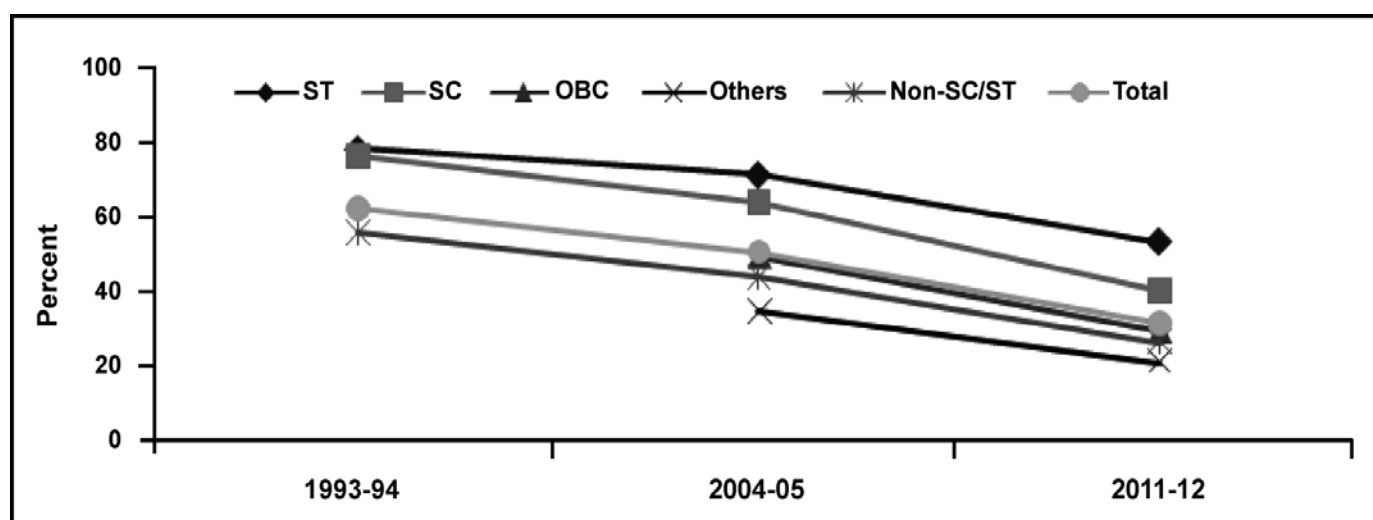
Indian society is heterogeneous in nature and broadly stratified on the basis of class, caste, gender, ethnicity and religion. The social and economic condition varies across social and religious groups. The social and religious status of the individuals plays dominant role in determining access to resources and privileges. The society is not horizontal, but it is vertical in nature, positioning one group over the other. The group on the top enjoys more power and privileges than the others falling below them in the ladder. The SCs and STs are on the bottom of the ladder and they enjoy the least power and privileges in the social hierarchy. The SC face the problem of social isolation and discrimination whereas STs face geographical isolation and segregation. In this context, it is important to examine how these social hierarchical privileges translate into the improvement of any indicator food insecurity such as poverty and under nutrition across social groups. In this section, we will

discuss the level and changes in child poverty and under nutrition by social groups based on the NSSO and NFHS surveys.

### 3.1 Disparity in child poverty

Child poverty has been defined in terms of the share of children below six years belonging to poor households using Tendulkar Method. In India, child poverty halved to 31.4 per cent during 1993-94 to 2011-12 at the rate of 3.7 per cent per annum (Figure 1 and Table 1). The social group wise child poverty shows a high incidence among

STs and STs over the period. In 2011-12, it is 53 per cent among STs, 39.7 per cent among SCs, 29 per cent among OBCs and the lowest 20.6 per cent among others. During 1993-94 to 2011-12, it indicates a relatively low decline in child poverty among STs and SCs as compared to Non-SC/STs. It declined at the rate of 2.1 per cent, 3.6 per cent and 4.1 per cent, respectively. The data for OBCs and Others is available for the period 2004-05 and 2011-12 that shows a substantial variation across social groups being substantially low rate of decline among SC/STs as compared to Others (Table 1).



Source: Estimated based on NSS 50th, 61th and 68th consumption expenditure unit level survey.  
Note: The estimates are based on Tendulkar committee recommendations and mixed recall period.

Fig. 1: Levels of child poverty across social groups in India - 1993-94, 2004-05 and 2011-12

TABLE 1: Annual changes in child poverty across social groups in India

Social groups	1993-94 to 2011-12	1993-94 to 2004-05	2004-05 to 2011-2012
ST	-2.1	-0.8	-4.1
SC	-3.6	-1.6	-6.5
OBC	NA	NA	-7.3
Others	NA	NA	-7.0
Non-SC/ST	-4.1	-2.2	-7.1
Total	-3.7	-1.9	-6.6

Source: Estimated based on NSS 50th, 61th and 68th consumption expenditure unit level survey.

**TABLE 2: Disparity ratio in child poverty across social groups in India**

Social groups	1993-94	2004-05	2011-2012
ST/Non-SC/ST	1.4	1.6	2.0
SC/Non-SC/ST	1.4	1.5	1.5
ST/Others	NA	2.1	2.6
SC/Others	NA	1.9	1.9
OBC/Others	NA	1.4	1.4

Source: Estimated based on NSS 50th, 61th and 68th consumption expenditure unit level survey.

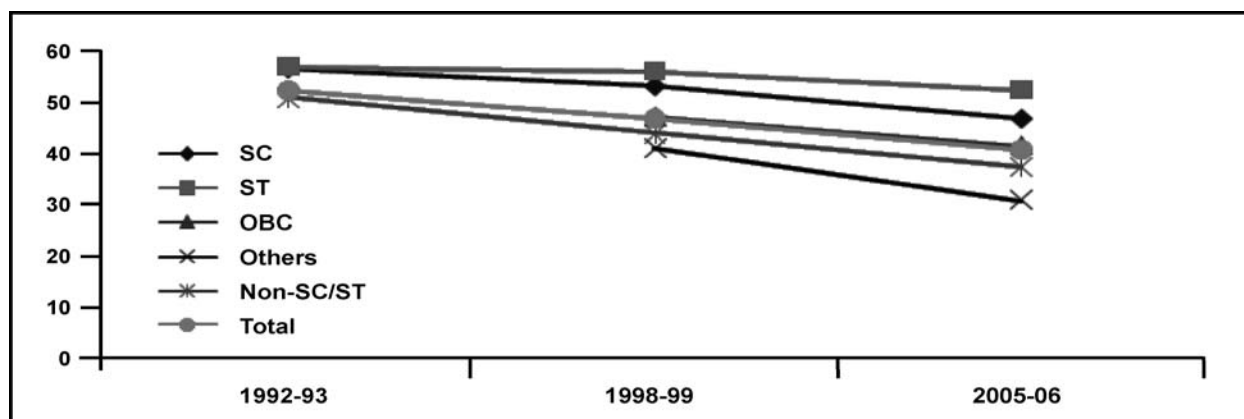
The objective of any development is not just the improvement in the development indicators, but it inherently aims to bridge the gap between various sections of the society. In India, child poverty has declined over the period with increasing rate of change across social groups. However, variation in the rate of decline in child poverty across social groups has increased the disparity between social groups. Disparity ratios were calculated between SCs/STs and others (Table 2). It was 2.1 for STs as compared to Others in 2004-05 and increased to 2.6 in 2011-12. It means that the children belonging to STs had 2.1 times more chances of being in poverty which further increased to 2.6 times during 2011-12 as compared to Others. Similar pattern were observed in the case of SCs and Others. The disparity between SC and Others was constant during 2004-05 and 2011-12. It shows that the chances of children being in poverty belonging to SCs were 1.9 times more than others. Even though disparities exist between OBCs and Others, but the extent is low as compared to SCs and STs.

### 3.2 Disparity in malnutrition

Similar to the levels, changes and disparity in child poverty across social groups in India, incidence of under nutrition also differs across social groups. In this section, an analysis has been discussed on the basis of the overall prevalence of under nutrition as a composite indicator of both acute and chronic under nutrition (Figure 2 and Table 3). In India, the prevalence of underweight children among the children below three years declined over the last two decades from 52.4 per cent in 1992-93 to 41 per cent in 2005-06 per cent at

the rate of 1.7 per cent per year (Table 3). During 1998-99 to 2005-06, the rate of decline (1.9 per cent) was marginally high as compared to that of previous period 1992-93 to 1998-99 (1.7 per cent). The prevalence of underweight is high among STs and SCs as compared to others with increasing difference between SC/STs and Others (even as compared to Non-SC/ST).

The prevalence of underweight declined from about 57 per cent to 47 per cent among SCs at the rate of 1.32 per cent per year and from more than 57 per cent to 53 per cent among STs at the rate of 0.61 per cent per year between 1992-93 and 2005-06. On the other hand, the decline in the levels of underweight is high among others followed by OBCs. Among OBCs+Others (Non-SC/ST), it declined from 51 per cent in 1992-93 to 37 per cent in 2005-06 at the rate of more than 2 per cent per year. Among OBCs, it declined from 47 per cent to 42 per cent at the rate of 1.72 per cent and among 'Others' it declined from 44 per cent to 37 per cent at the rate of 3.5 per cent during 1998-99 and 2005-06, respectively. It is clear from Table 3 that the rate of decline is high among the OBC and 'Others' as compared to SC/STs, which results in the increasing disparity among SC/STs and others (Table 5). The disparity between SCs and Non-SC/ST increased from 1.1 to 1.3 at the rate of 1 per cent during 1992-93 to 2005-06. It means that the chances of SC getting underweight are increased from 1.1 per cent to 1.3 per cent during 1992-93 to 2005-06. Even in case of STs and Non-SC/ST, the chance of STs being underweight increased from 1.1 to 1.4 per cent during same period at the rate of about 2 per cent. The disparities between SC/STs and Others are more prominent and increasing over the years.



Source: Based on IIPS, 1992-93, 1998-99 and 2005-06 unit level data

Fig. 2: Prevalence of underweight children below three years of age

TABLE 3: Rate of changes in child underweight

Social groups	1992-93 to 2005-06	1992-93 to 1998-99	1998-99 to 2005-06
SC	-1.32	-1.01	-1.68
ST	-0.61	-0.25	-0.93
OBC	NA	NA	-1.72
Others	NA	NA	-3.55
Non-SC/ST	-2.06	-2.30	-2.14
Total	-1.68	-1.69	-1.87

Source: Based on IIPS, 1992-93, 1998-99 and 2005-06 unit level data

TABLE 4: Disparity in the prevalence of underweight children

Social groups	1992-93	1998-99	2005-06
SC/Non-SC/ST	1.11	1.21	1.25
ST/Non-SC/ST	1.12	1.28	1.40
SC/Others	NA	1.29	1.52
ST/Others	NA	1.37	1.70
OBC/Others	NA	1.15	1.34

Source: Based on IIPS, 1992-93, 1998-99 and 2005-06 unit level data

#### 4. Access and utilisation of food and nutrition programme

The variation in the incidence of poverty and under nutrition and the rate of change leads to the increasing disparity

between social groups. In a way, it is an obvious reason as each of the social groups is a separate entity with different socio-economic development. However, it cannot be attributed to this but a more generic factor attributed to

this is the disproportionate access. Thus, the question is who access these services? And does these services are fairly accessible to the poor among the marginalised communities? Therefore, we will examine how the accessibility to Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Mid-Day-Meal (MDM) services varies across social groups. We will also examine how Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards are accessed viz-a-viz poverty ratios across social groups. For the purpose, we estimated the Utilisation Ratio for ICDS, SNP and MDM services (see, formula 1). The utilisation ratio is estimated is the ratio of share of utilisation of the services to poverty ratio share of actual beneficiaries accessing services to the total number of persons below poverty line. The ratio one indicates the absence of proportionate access to the services for a particular social group; while the ratio less than one indicates deficiency in accessibility or exclusion from accessing the services and ratio more than one indicates that accessibility is more than need or inclusion is large.

Utilisation Ratio=  $[U_i / NB \text{ below poverty line}]$

Where,  $S_i$  is ICDS, SNP and MDM,

$U$  indicates share of utilisation by beneficiaries and

$NB$  indicates share of total number of beneficiaries

The beneficiaries differ from scheme to scheme. In the case of ICDS scheme, the beneficiaries are children of 0-6 years of age group. For SNP services, the beneficiaries are pregnant and lactating women; while the beneficiaries of MDM are children in the age group of 5-14 years.

#### 4.1 Utilisation of ICDS services by the poor children, pregnant and lactating mothers

The utilisation of the ICDS services by children below six years of age, pregnant and lactating mothers are examined by using the data from National Family Health Survey- 3 (NFHS III) (See Table 5). The utilization of ICDS services in general is substantially low among the children to about 33 per cent in 2005-06. The utilisation of ICDS services across social group shows substantially high to 50 per cent for STs followed by 36 per cent for SCs and 28 per cent for 'Others.' Similarly, a substantially low 26.5 per cent of the children are utilising SNP services in India to 26.5 per cent with a highest utilisation of 44 per cent among STs followed by 30.4 per cent among SCs, 22.4 per cent among OBCs and 23.2 per cent among 'Others.'

On the basis of these results, one may conclude that utilisation of ICDS and SNP services is substantially high among STs and SCs. However, the comparison of these figures with the incidence of child poverty provides a completely different scenario. It can be observed from the utilisation ratio to child poverty that utilisation ratio for both the services is less than one which indicates that the access to these services is not enough to cover all the children belonging to poor households. The estimates of the utilisation of the services cover all children irrespective of the economic position; otherwise utilisation ratio will further decline. The inferences for social groups also changed the relative position being substantially low utilisation ratio for SCs and high for 'Others' in the case of ICDS services; whereas in the case of SNP services, it is lowest for OBCs and SCs and highest for Others.

**TABLE 5: Utilisation of ICDS and SNP services and utilisation ratio by children below six years**

Social groups	Utilisation in 2005-06 (%)		Utilisation ratio to child poverty	
	Any ICDS services	Any SNP services	ICDS services	SNP services
ST	49.9	43.9	0.71	0.63
SC	36.1	30.4	0.57	0.48
OBC	30.3	22.4	0.60	0.44
Others	28.3	23.2	0.84	0.69
Total	32.9	26.5	0.65	0.52

Source: Based on IIPS and Macro International, NFHS III, 2005-06 and NSSO 61th unit level survey

Apart from children, other major groups of beneficiaries of the SNP services are pregnant and lactating mothers. The utilisation of SNP services in India is 34.6 per cent among pregnant women and 21 per cent among lactating mothers (Table 6). The social group wise utilisation of SNP services shows a substantially high utilisation among SCs to 37 per cent followed by STs to 25.5 per cent, OBC to 19 per cent and the lowest is among 'Others' to 13 per cent. Though it appears that the 'Others' are utilising very less SNP services, however, if we see the

utilisation in proportion to their poverty level, it is clear that the utilisation by pregnant and lactating mothers across social groups is less than one. The estimated ratios suggest that utilisation of SNP services by pregnant and lactating women is fairly high among SCs to 0.7 and 0.61, as compared to 'Others' i.e. 0.54 and 0.43 respectively. However, these ratios being less than one also indicate that all the pregnant and lactating women belonging to poor households do not have accessibility to SNP services.

**TABLE 6: Utilisation of SNP and utilisation ratio across social groups in India**

Social groups	SNP utilisation from AWC 2005-06		Poverty (%) 2004-05	Utilisation ratio for SNP by	
	Pregnant women (%)	Breastfeeding mother (%)		Pregnant women	Breastfeeding mother
SC	36.9	32.3	53.0	0.70	0.61
ST	25.5	20.8	60.0	0.43	0.35
OBC	18.8	14.6	40.2	0.47	0.36
Others	13.1	10.3	24.1	0.54	0.43
Total	34.6	21.1	39.5	0.88	0.53

Source: Calculated from IIPS and Macro International, NFHS III, 2005-06: India Vol 1 and estimation of poverty from NSS 61th consumption expenditure unit level survey.

#### 4.2 Utilisation of mid-day meal services

The utilisation of the MDM services by children is estimated from NSSO consumption expenditure survey for 2004-05. In 2004-05, households having children between age group of 5-14 years utilising MDM in the last 365 days have

been considered to estimate the share of MDM utilisation among children. The utilization of MDM services in general is very poor to 17.42 per cent at all India level (Table 7).

The Utilisation of MDM services by children across social group shows that about 25 per cent of ST and 21

**TABLE 7: Utilisation and utilization ratio of MDM**

Social group	Utilisation by households (%)	Utilisation ratio to poverty in 2004-05
SC	21.0	0.40
ST	24.5	0.41
OBC	18.1	0.45
Others	12.5	0.52
Total	17.4	0.44

Source: Estimated based on NSSO 61<sup>st</sup> round



per cent of SC have utilised MDM service as compared to 13 per cent of 'Others.' However, utilisation of MDM services in proportion to incidence of poverty clearly indicates that it has not adequately covered the children belonging to poor household as inferred from the estimated utilisation ratio for MDM services. The result shows that the utilisation ratio is less than one across social groups with substantially low among SCs and STs to 0.40 and 0.41 as compared that of 0.52 for 'Others.'

#### 4.3 Possession of BPL and AAY cards

In India, more than 200 million households out of 250 million households possess PDS ration cards in 2010-11 as estimated on the basis NSSO survey. It means that about 20 per cent of the households do not have any sort of PDS cards invariably which indicates these

are completely excluded from availing services of the PDS. It is to be noted that share of household with not possessing cards is almost evenly distributed across social groups; while share of households accessing various types of PDS cards is substantially high among SCs and STs (Table 8). In this section, our purpose is to examine whether the possession of cards is proportionate to the poverty estimates and does it vary across social groups (Table 9).

The results are presented in Table 9 clearly, which indicate that the estimated possession ratio<sup>2</sup> is more than one in India as well as across social groups. It means that BPL and AAY cards are accessed to even non-poor households in terms of the criterion of official poverty line. This is quite possible because these cards are allocated to the eligible households identified on the basis of 13

**TABLE 8: Possession of BPL and AAY cards by social group during 2010-11 (%)**

Social group	Antyodaya aanna yogna	BPL cards	Possession of AAY+BPL card among the people having PDS Card	Possession of AAY+BPL card of the total population	Other Card	Total
ST	8.9	58.1	67.0	53.87	33.0	100.0
SC	9.1	48.5	57.5	47.53	42.5	100.0
OBC	4.8	39.7	44.5	36.08	55.5	100.0
Other	2.8	23.9	26.7	20.54	73.3	100.0
ALL	5.5	38.7	44.1	35.34	55.9	100.0
Non-SC/ST	4.0	33.5	37.6	29.83	62.4	100.0

Source: Estimated based on NSS 68th consumption expenditure unit level survey.

**TABLE 9: Possession of BPL and AAY-PDS cards and possession ratio to poverty ratio across social group in 2011-12**

Social group	Share of households possessing AAY+BPL cards (%)	Poverty ratio (%) (%)	Ratio of possession of AAY+BPL cards to poverty ratio
ST	67.0	43.0	1.56
SC	57.5	29.4	1.96
OBC	44.5	20.7	2.15
Other	26.7	12.5	2.14
ALL	44.1	22.0	2.01

Source: Estimated based on NSS 68th consumption expenditure unit level survey.

indicators such as access to land, type of house, social group, occupation etc; while poverty is estimated on the basis of consumption expenditure. Due to the lack of data, we rely on poverty estimates to examine the discrepancy in possession of cards. The results show that the possession of BPL and AAY cards is substantially low among SCs and STs to 1.96 and 1.56, respectively as compared to 2.14 among 'Others.' Ideally, the possession of card should have been more among SC and STs, if household food insecurity has to be addressed on equal opportunity hypothesis.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, the attempt has been made to examine whether the food security programmes that are operational and now incorporated in food security act are socially inclusive in nature and whether the act has been incorporated with sufficient checks and balances to make it competitive enough to strengthen socially inclusiveness. First, we discuss the results following a discussion on socially inclusiveness in National Food Security Bill.

The results are twofold. Firstly, proportion of child poverty and under nutrition is substantially high and rate of decline is low among SCs and STs as compared to 'Others.' Over the years, disparity between SC/STs and 'Others' in terms of poverty and under nutrition is widening because of rapid decline in poverty and child under nutrition among Others as compared to SC/STs. Secondly, access to the services provided under various food security programmes is showing relatively high among different beneficiary groups such as children, women and poor households belonging to SCs and ST, but the utilisation of these services is not adequately proportionate to their

poverty levels. For example, about 50 per cent of children belonging to SCs are utilising ICDS services and 44 per cent are utilising SNP services. However, the ratio of utilisation to the incidence of poverty is only 0.71 among SCs which is 0.84 in the case of 'Others.' Similar situation is evident in utilisation of MDM services and possession of BPL and AAY cards to access PDS food grains.

Thus, the major reason for the disproportionate access to the services provided under various food security programmes is the prevailing caste based discrimination against the SC beneficiaries. The studies have shown that children have denied the services (Mander & Kumaran, 2006; Thorat et.al, 2013; Jan Sahas, 2009). The NFSB do not take into account the discrimination practices under that constraint the accessibility of the services.

According to Thorat (2014) the policy should be two fold; one being general policy for all those facing common problem and other being specific policies to address the additional problems of excluded groups because of discrimination and exclusion. The lack of specific policies had an adverse impact on access and utilisation of services by SC/ST which has been highlighted by various studies (Mamgain & Diwakar, 2012; Jan Sahas, 2009; Thorat & Lee, 2005; SEW, 2011; Thorat et.al, 2013). In that line, NFSB should have spelt out policies with respect to i) location specific issues of the infrastructure, ii) recruitment of more service provider from lower caste personnel, iii) universalization, iv) sensitisation training to service provider on implication of discriminatory practices, and v) guidelines and regulations to addressing discriminatory practices in nutrition programmes to ensure uniform development across social groups.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Locally the ICDS centre is called as anganwadi centre. This centre provides the health, nutrition and education services to the children in 0-6 years, pregnant women and lactating mothers.

<sup>2</sup> Similar to the utilisation ratio, possession ratio is the ratio of share of BPL and AAY card possessed to poverty ratio for a particular social group.

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– Native American Proverb

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