

Right to Information and Inclusive Development

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ABSTRACT: : *The subject of inclusive development has gained importance after the pronouncement of Millennium Development Goals which emphasize the need for creating a new world with peace, non violence, democracy and inclusive development. Inclusive development is a pro-poor approach that equally values and incorporates the contributions of all stakeholders - including marginalized groups - in addressing development issues. It promotes transparency and accountability, and enhances development cooperation outcomes through collaboration between civil society, governments and private sector actors. The farmers, artisans, workers, minorities, backwards, Dalits, tribals and women are the most excluded sections of society from the mainstream of development in India. The low income and middle income groups are also included in the economic mainstream for inclusive innovations and developmental initiatives. The goal of inclusive development can be achieved on the basis of greater transparency, both in the policy making and in the delivery systems. The Right to Information Act was a great step in this direction. The civil society groups, judiciary, media and other agencies played a proactive role in facilitating inclusive development through disclosure of information on governance and development related activities. Inclusive development calls for a focus on effective implementation of various development programmes on the basis of dissemination of timely and adequate information to the beneficiaries. The great democratizing power of information has given the people better opportunities to assert their rights and engage with the development activities. Effective implementation of disclosure of information policy is the best way to increase trust in government institutions and inclusive development.*

Key Words:

Preamble

The term inclusive development denotes the growth coupled with equal opportunities in all walks of life to all citizens regardless of space and time. The process of inclusive development practically involves a combination of mutually reinforcing measures for securing social security, promoting economic sustainability, enhancing the capacity of the people and empowering women and weaker sections of society. The Millennium Development Goals primarily aim at broadening access to developmental resources and opportunities to the impoverished and excluded sections of the society.

Inclusive development is a pro-poor approach that equally values and incorporates the contributions of all stakeholders - including marginalized groups - in addressing development issues. It promotes transparency and accountability, and enhances development cooperation outcomes through collaboration between civil society, governments and private sector actors. Inclusive development can be achieved by active Public Private Partnership under the changed economic environment in the age of globalization. The citizens and marginalized communities should be actively involved in the planning, execution and monitoring of development programs in order to overcome corruption, deprivation and marginalization. The role of right to information in inclusive development of women and weaker sections is examined in this chapter on the basis of qualitative research methodology.

Concept of Inclusive Development

The process of inclusive development basically improves the welfare of marginalized sections of society who are excluded from the national mainstream. The state enterprises, multinational corporations, non-government organizations and other firms have introduced pro-inclusive innovations.

The farmers, artisans, workers, minorities, backwards, Dalits, tribals and women are the most excluded sections of society from the mainstream of development in India. The low income and middle income groups are also included in the economic mainstream for inclusive innovations and developmental initiatives.

Economic growth has increased in the past 30 years by a factor of four, from 1 billion to about 4 billion. Growth has accelerated in the global economy and in an even wider set of developing countries. There is, perhaps for the first time in history, a reasonable chance of transforming the quality of life and creative opportunities for the vast majority of humanity. Sustained growth enables and is essential for things that people care about: poverty reduction, productive employment, education, health, and the opportunity to be creative (Spence, 2008:18).

Millennium Development Goals

The subject of inclusive development has gained importance after the pronouncement of Millennium Development Goals which emphasize the need for creating a new world with peace, non violence, democracy and inclusive development. There are several ingredients and approaches to inclusive development which calls for protectionist and pro-active developmental methodologies (Commission on Growth and Development, 2008:05). Inclusive development can be achieved on the basis of accumulated experience and integrated efforts made by all the stakeholders since it touches the lives of millions of people in the world. The basic needs, infrastructural facilities, expansion of agriculture, development of industrial sector and other activities are closely associated with the inclusive development. The world has to march towards inclusive development through constructive initiatives including right to information.

Inclusive Society

The world is more digitally connected to meet the greater societal expectations of an inclusive future. Increasing more affordable high-speed internet access also ranks high in their list of effective policy actions. The government organizations and corporate houses have initiated certain measures in creating a more inclusive society in modern times. The UN Sustainable Development Goals also sensitized the stakeholders of development to prepare grounds for adoption of progressive RTI laws and implementation of inclusive development programmes through active participation of people.

Technological advancements and RTI laws have transformed people's lives and livelihoods over a period of time in the world. The Right to Information has provided unique opportunity to the people to participate actively in the development programmes and enjoy the benefit of inclusive development. The stakeholders of inclusive development have to create the right environment for transforming the lives of the people from the state of backwardness to empowerment through adoption of inclusive developmental approaches. The goal of inclusive development can be achieved on the basis of greater transparency, both in the policy making and in the delivery systems. The Right to Information Act was a great step in this direction.

Need for Inclusive Development

Inclusive growth is a major concern for human development in India with rising inequalities. The economic exclusion continued in terms of low agriculture growth, low quality employment growth, low human development, rural-urban divides, gender and social inequalities and regional disparities etc. It is imperative for the planners and policy-makers to make growth inclusive through adoption of pragmatic policies. The dominant challenges include the imperative of maintaining the acceleration of economic growth without compromising on human development and sustainability. The inclusive growth is a wider connotation encompassing social, economic and political factors (Vijaykumar, 2012:21).

Denial of information has perpetuated the political, social and economic exclusion of millions in India and other developing nations. Lack of access to information, ignorance about development schemes, absence of rights-based approach to development, inadequate good governance at various levels, exclusion of weaker sections from the mainstream of development and other drawbacks have impeded the process of inclusive development in India. The right to information and inclusive development are mutually beneficial factors. The public officials should provide timely and adequate information to the people relating to good governance and inclusive developmental initiatives in order to enable the citizens to participate actively in governance and exercise their rights.

RTI for Inclusive Development

The initial post reform period witnessed intense political discourse about the merits of reforms. Now the serious political discourse seems to be concerned with 'inclusiveness of growth'. It is noteworthy that during its previous term, the same UPA government had brought in Right to Work Act (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) and Right to Information Act. It is not mere coincidence that these right based approaches to food, work and information emerged in the same period. But a closer look at the issue of non-inclusiveness reveals inherent relationship of openness (or lack of it) in governance to the developmental concerns of the large section of the society which has remained at the margin of the process of the economic growth (Murugkar and Zhiyong, 2012:14).

The civil society groups, judiciary, media and other agencies played a proactive role in facilitating inclusive development through disclosure of information on governance and development related activities. Certain factors, circumstances and limitations could not ensure more transparent, accountable and inclusive governance and long-term development outcomes in India. The drive for effective implementation must come from the State, civil society, media, judiciary and non-government organizations to ensure effective implementation of RTI laws for good governance. Regional and national coordinating strategies are equally important for the delivery of goods and services in the interest of inclusive development of marginalized sections of society.

The policy makers have addressed the challenges of sustainable and inclusive economic growth in Philippines. They developed the industrial sector to create productive job opportunities for the growing labor force. The government needs to play an active role to help entrepreneurs take advantage of market opportunities. Structural transformation is the core issue of inclusive development since inclusiveness of economic growth depends on the direction and the speed of structural transformation in each country. Strategic public sector support that embodies a long-term vision of the economy makes it possible to change the economic structure that drives inclusive growth in the Philippines (Usui, 2012:20).

Access to information relating to governance and development activities enhances the possibility of inclusive development of women and weaker sections in modern world. The marginalized sections have faced several challenges due to digital divide, absence of pro-active disclosure of information, inadequate participatory approaches to governance and other disadvantages. Scientific investigations have suggested that effective implementation of RTI laws and development of Open Data would advance inclusive development and facilitate vibrant democracy in the world. Inclusive development calls for a focus on effective implementation of various development programmes on the basis of dissemination of timely and adequate information to the beneficiaries.

The Open Government Partnership is a new multilateral initiative that aims at securing concrete commitments from governments on promoting transparency, citizens empowerment, fighting corruption and harnessing new technologies to strengthen governance (Bukonya and Yanguas, 2013:03). Inclusive development has strong links with the right to information which promotes access to government information as a fundamental right to development of the disadvantaged sections of the society.

Our democratic system ensures that India remains an inclusive nation where every individual has a right to participate in governance as a matter of right. Our democracy is supported by an enlightened judiciary that enforces rule of law, and a vigorous and vigilant media. Inclusive growth is a broad based and shared growth which decreases the growth rate of poverty and increases the involvement of people into the growth process of the country. There is a correlation between inclusive growth and the level of public expenditure on social development including education and health (Wadhwa, 2013:22).

The Indian Constitutional values and perspectives have emphasized the need for inclusive development for the benefit of all Indians. The Right to Information Act has become a key instrument of empowerment of people. It makes the process of Government procurements and contracts much more transparent, thus reducing the opportunities for corruption. Right to information is the most significant factor in participatory governance and inclusive development in India.

The new information and communication technologies have transformed the educational, social, economic, political and cultural activities in the world. These technologies are also deployed worldwide to advance global development goals since they are potential for inclusive growth in all walks of life. The digital technologies have ensured connectivity between the service providers and beneficiaries and fostered inclusive growth. A new common framework of legal standards for digital management and development processes is needed to help government organizations and corporate houses to reach global society.

Inclusive development is used to counter the dominant neo-liberal capitalist agenda (Pouw and McGregor, 2014:17). The multiple and intimate connections of economic growth to social and political aspects of development came increasingly to the fore. The focus of development studies has become human development. The relationships between growth and governance in each society provide a distinctive background against which efforts are pursued to improve the human condition. There is a need for achieving sustainable results in a manner appropriate to the local context. The current trend is toward locally- led collaboration to identify problems, preserve the value of existing institutions and collective action frameworks, formulate specific solutions that provide a good fit in the local circumstances, and assure broad participation in the design and implementation of strategies (Michel, 2014:12).

The RTI has supporting clauses that almost make it mandatory to provide Internet access to everyone. In India, a great majority of a people are digital illiterates due to prevailing social and economic backwardness. Access to information is the pre-requisite to inclusive development in India since

information flow and decentralization is directly proportional to wider and inclusive development. The government must take proactive action to improve Internet access, particularly in rural areas, with the help of civil society groups, spread awareness about RTI Act, and harness the resources for inclusive development of the people.

The principles of accountability, transparency, participation, and inclusion have become nearly universal features of the policy statements and programs of international development organizations. Democracy and human rights practitioners generally embrace an explicitly political understanding of the four concepts and fear technocratic or purely instrumentalist approaches (Carothers and Brechenmacher, 2014:04). The people who are well informed on constitutional provisions, RTI laws, government policies, welfare measures and inclusive developmental aspects can play a crucial role in reversing the paradigm of development and achieving development through active participation.

The information and communications technologies have enabled inclusive social and economic development. Creation of a new information society based on right to information and information infrastructure development are the pre-requisites to inclusive development. The digital divide has to be overcome on the basis of systematic efforts and holistic perspective that considers ICTs not only as infrastructure, but as tools for economic development (Economic and Social Council, 2014:07).

The right to information was guaranteed to the people of India as a fundamental right to facilitate their inclusive development within the constitutional and democratic frameworks. The people can access information on their development rights, privileges and opportunities. The great democratizing power of information has given the people better opportunities to assert their rights and engage with the development activities.

The stakeholders of good governance and inclusive development must ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements. The national governments must establish legislative guarantees. Legislative guarantees and mechanisms for public access to information are critical to promoting peaceful and inclusive societies (Lemieux, 2015:11). The right to information laws benefits the countries around the world to adopt progressive legislative guarantees and to build their capacity for effective implementation of various development programmes.

Pro-Poor Approach

Inclusive development is a pro-poor approach that equally values and incorporates the contributions of all stakeholders including marginalized groups in addressing development issues. It promotes transparency and accountability and enhances development cooperation outcomes through collaboration between civil society, governments and private sector actors. The development initiatives become fruitful when all stakeholders, especially citizens and marginalized communities are well informed and actively involved in the planning, execution and monitoring of development programs.

There are multi-dimensional measures of development which have emerged in the context of sustainable societies on the basis of certain conceptual frameworks and practical foundations. The recently developed Decent Society Model provides such a framework in about fourteen countries of East and Southern Africa. In reality, socially inclusive societies are more stable and have greater potential for economic growth (Abbott et. al, 2016:01). Successful governance and effective access to information naturally contribute to the inclusive development of the backward sections of the society.

For growth to be inclusive, it must be sustained, sustainable and equitable. Growth, gender, poverty, human rights and environment are well connected components of development. The people have the fundamental rights to information, democratic participation and inclusive development. Inclusive and sustainable development demands the leverage of social technologies, political innovations, true engagement and honest evaluation. Informed and catalytic strategies are needed now more than ever before to achieve the goal of inclusive development of the disadvantaged sections of society in the world.

It is rare for a government leader to offer explicit support and resources for social auditing, a process in which citizens monitor government services and programs to ensure that they are inclusive and serve the needs of the people. A social audit examines different aspects of a public service or program, such as: levels of access to information, public involvement in planning, actual implementation compared to promise standards of service, financial management, and outcomes for the community (Failor and Leahy, 2017:08). Effective implementation of disclosure of information policy is the best way to increase trust in government institutions and inclusive development.

The Supreme Court declared that Right to Information was just and inevitable to facilitate the flow of information which is closely linked with the empowerment of people through inclusive approaches. A right-enabling public sphere is absolutely important to achieve the goal of inclusive development on the

basis of free flow of information between the government and society and vice-versa. Information disclosure on vital aspects of good governance and inclusive development naturally enable the people to live with human dignity, remain free from exploitation and share the resources and opportunities in a democratic environment.

The young Africans are largely alienated and marginalized despite advances in terms of policy commitments to youth development, both nationally and regionally. At the same time, the yardstick for success of African countries will be adequately measured by future generations if policies are weighted against action to foster transformative and inclusive development. The young people should be well educated, informed and involved in the implementation of sustainable development goals for a more inclusive future (Hamdok, 2017:09).

There is a worldwide consensus on the need for a more socially-inclusive approach to national development. International organizations have also provided comprehensive reports and guidelines to achieve greater synergy between economic growth and collective welfare of people. Many countries have faced certain challenges in satisfying social expectations in this regard (World Economic Forum, 2017:23). Inequality is largely an endogenous rather than exogenous challenge for policymakers across the globe. This calls for a collective commitment to greater responsiveness and responsibility in political and economic leadership by government and corporate houses.

Access to information, administration, development and justice is integral to achieving the goal of inclusive development in the world. Women and weaker sections normally face multiple forms of discrimination, violence and harassment because of the system failures. The RTI laws enable the people to understand and use the laws for participatory communication and development endeavors in a democracy. These laws also enable the most marginalized sections to achieve justice, protect their interests and participate in development activities in an inclusive manner.

Inequality and lack of access to public goods and services has been the bane of Indian society for centuries. The economic inequality is prevalent not only among the various states of the country, but also within a state itself. Intra and inter-state variations are not just restricted to economic parameters but are equally applicable to social indicators. The Social Progress Index clearly reveals that inclusive growth has remained elusive in the post independence era (Kapoor, 2018:10). The issues concerning the inclusive development of the marginalized sections of society are likely to be resolved through effective implementation of Bharat Net Project — connecting nearly 2.5 lakh gram panchayats through broadband.

India has become one of the fastest growing economies in the world but the state of inclusiveness in the growth process is not satisfactory and adequate. The country's spending on social sector, especially those focusing on basic needs such as education and health, continues to lag many of the emerging economy peers (Mohana et. al, 2018:13). Government institutions are required to facilitate collectivization and participation of beneficiaries in policy design and implementation in order to increase the extent of inclusiveness economically and socially. The RTI laws have created new avenues for inclusive development of the people who are neglected by the system.

The present financial development has not contributed adequate opportunities of human development for those on low-incomes and allied disadvantages (Asongu and Chikaodi, 2018:02). The current model of social protection in developing countries covers only a small fraction of the population based on payroll insurance system (Devarajan, 2018:06). A vast majority of the people working in the unorganized sector are deprived of healthy working conditions, life security and developmental opportunities. The new initiative of inclusive development has potential for changing the thinking of development actors as well as the practice of development cooperation in ways that can enhance and sustain inclusive growth and good governance.

The main cause of non-inclusive development today is a capitalist economic system which is structurally designed to encourage a small group of individuals to possess and control a vast majority of global wealth, thus leaving millions of people at the bottom of the wealth ladder (Tchamyou, 2018:19). The right to information has become an effective instrument of inclusive development. The people should seize this moment of opportunity all over the world in order to enjoy the fruits of inclusive development by gaining increased access to information pertaining to environment, development, human rights protection and other vital aspects of good governance.

The under privileged sections of the society have become increasingly vulnerable mainly due to capitalism and globalization processes. The liberalization of information and communication technology (ICT) sector over the past decade has substantially transformed the macroeconomic and microeconomic landscapes in developing countries, by providing among others: technical regimes, interactive networks and services to underserved sectors such as health and finance. There is a need for conducting more research on

the challenges and opportunities the new information technologies and RTI laws in relation to inclusive development in the world.

Indian farmers are the most neglected section of Indian society by the government which has made little investment in the infrastructure to provide marketing support or benefits to producers. In all this, the risk to the business of farming has grown because of climate change and variable weather. The migration of farmers to cities in search of livelihood opportunities has resulted in the crisis of services and environment pollution in the country. The pollution of water bodies has worsened the situation. There is no other planet that can take our waste (Narain, 2019:16).

Democracy is founded on the notion of an informed public that is able to participate actively and constructively in its own governance. The Right to Information is a fundamental human right which ensures access to information to democratic participation and empowerment of the people who remain at the receiving end due to series of system related failures and drawbacks. The government is responsible for providing certain vital information pro-actively to facilitate active participation of people in various nation building endeavors.

Participatory democracy and inclusive development are enhanced by policies of openness and good governance. It effectively reduces the distance between government and people and combats exclusion of people from the mainstream of national development. The great democratizing power of information has given the mankind an opportunity to participate actively in various developmental activities. Inclusive development is enhanced and deepened by the right to information which is an important tool of decentralization and democratization of governance at various levels.

The farmers, workers, artisans, women, Dalits, Adivasis, backwards and minorities have become the worst victims of the politics of exclusion adopted by the caste power and money power which have ruled India. The right to information laws and social justice friendly programmes are absolutely essential to bridge the gap between the backwards and forwards in India. The concept of 'inclusive development' has emerged as an important aspect of development discourse.

Inclusive development becomes a reality if the stakeholders of development achieve success in the mainstreaming of women and weaker sections. Social protection has the potential to generate a double development dividend as an effective input for inclusive economic development. But the prevailing social system and political system have impeded the inclusive development of marginalized sections in India. Salient information on state performance, people's participation, collective action and vibrant civil society are primarily responsible factors associated with inclusive development.

Accelerated economic growth has been a major factor bringing down Indian poverty ratios in India. A path of fiscal consolidation and implicit flexible inflation forecast targeting was adopted in 2014 to bring in new laws and regulations at par with international best practices. We need to focus on research, innovation, sincere implementation and constant monitoring by following reform path (Naidu, 2019:15). The right to information is the driver of inclusive development in Indian democracy and will play a vital role in the empowerment of the deprived sections of society.

The recent statistics reveal that the number of Indians living in abject poverty has falling rapidly from 125 million in 2016 to 75 million in 2019. It is likely to fall to 20 million by 2022. The faster reduction rate in poverty depends mainly on inclusive developmental initiatives and effective mass movement for implementation of RTI laws in India. The stakeholders must introduce a number of structural changes in the economic sector to ensure expansion of knowledge, diversification of professional education, skill upgradation and promote innovative entrepreneurship to meet the demands of inclusive development and sustainable development in India.

The challenge for the international organizations is to enhance the quality of its international integration and to boost the inclusive impacts of education, health, research and developmental initiatives for more equitable development. Inclusive development is required to eradicate poverty and helplessness in all its forms and dimensions through expanding opportunities and addressing related challenges. The right to information ensures participatory implementation of welfare and development schemes in modern society. Open, inclusive, accountable governance is fundamental to delivering sustainable development and tackling the challenges of inclusive development in the age of globalization. The global context for governance and development is changing rapidly. The international initiatives play a crucial role in the process of inclusive development which has become a thrust area of development.

The concept of inclusive development has gained new prominence in academic and development circles. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls upon countries to pursue a different kind of growth, one that is socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable. A considerable increase of Artificial

Intelligence applications in business, the public sector and society has the potential to improve the quality and efficiency of various operations dealing with inclusive development. The policy makers should use alternate formats, contents and initiatives to ensure communication and information are accessible for better participation of people in program planning and implementation.

Conclusion

In recent years, there has been a consensus among scholars, civil society actors, and policy-makers about the role that right to information may play in the construction of solutions to social exclusion problems. There is a general agreement on the need to orient RTI towards goals of inclusive development, protecting human rights and empowering the marginalized sections of society. The Inclusive Development Index has been developed as a new metric of national economic performance as an alternative to GDP. There is a closer connection between access to information and inclusive development in the global economic power landscape. This calls for coordinated programmes that increase the information access on matters concerning good governance and inclusive development. There are a sizable chunk of women and disadvantaged persons around the world. The international development organizations must take proactive measures to bring people with disabilities into the development process as policy makers, implementers and beneficiaries. Adoption of disclosure of information and inclusive development leads to the empowerment of the weaker sections in the world.

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