

Social Sector Expenditure in India and Punjab: Trends during Pre-Reforms (1980-1991) and Post-Reforms (1991-2011) Periods

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Social sector generally comprises those sectors of the economy which usually deal with human welfare and not with pure economics and economic considerations. Expenditure on it is generally welfare-oriented and no particular return in monetary terms is expected from it. Considering the importance of social sector expenditure and to understand the degree of government's involvement in and commitment to it, this paper examines the trends in social sector expenditure in India and Punjab during pre-reforms (1980-1991) and post-reforms (1991-2011) periods. It shows a decline in social sector expenditure and calls for an urgent introspection of policy-makers so that the provision of basic social services receives balanced weight in the formulation of all macroeconomic plans, policies and programmes.

Introduction

The term 'social sector' has not been formally defined. It is one of the several terms created as an alternative to non-profit sector and non-government sector. Scholars and organizations view this sector differently and include varying heads under it. Dreze and Sen (1989) view social sectors as those providing social security, where the term social security is used in the broader connotations. They classify social security into protective social security and the promotional social security. While the protective social security is defined as the protection which the society provides to its members through a series of measures against the economic and social distress that otherwise would be caused by the stoppage or substantial reduction of earnings, resulting from sickness, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, invalidity, old age and death, provision of medical care, and subsidies for families for children, the promotional social security includes poverty alleviation programmes, employment generation programmes, provision of basic needs and public distribution system. According to Prabhu (2001) the term social sector is often used to refer to education, health and nutrition sectors. Apart from them, she includes poverty alleviation programmes (including asset and employment generation) and social assistance

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