



Approaches on Poverty and its measurement problem: Public policy outlook

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Abstract: This paper looks into the accepted approaches to poverty and highlights the presence of close linkages between different schools of thought. The further paper attempts a debate of revisiting questions on indicators or parameters of measuring poverty and suggesting some of the ways to measure poverty in between. Paper has considered the case study of India's new poverty line and its link to the multi-dimensional poverty index. Further, the paper does a two-stage panel regression to analyze the correlation between the initial conditions, non-farm sector development, and poverty level of twenty-one states of India. The findings suggest that the public expenditure on education and urban development are two important aspects in poverty alleviation. The paper concludes that public policy should consider the alternative approach where the poverty line serves as a mere reference value and channel public expenditure to bring a conducive environment to guarantee a dignified living for all.

Keywords: Multidimensional poverty measurement, Basic need approach, capabilities, Non-farm sector, India poverty line

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I. INTRODUCTION:

Poverty is being accepted as a multi-dimensional concept that is the cause and effect of many variables. It will be difficult to define such dynamic variable within the standard units, which is interdependent or interrelated to different socio-economic variables. In the words of Jean-Bosco, "poverty consists in any form of inequity, which is a source of social exclusion, in the distribution of the living conditions essential to human dignity" (p. 10.). So faces of poverty can be income, education, health, food, employment, accessibility to other basic needs or even market and community participation. Further these face become important and take different dimension when considered at individual level (Jean-Bosco and Tuan Anh 2009).

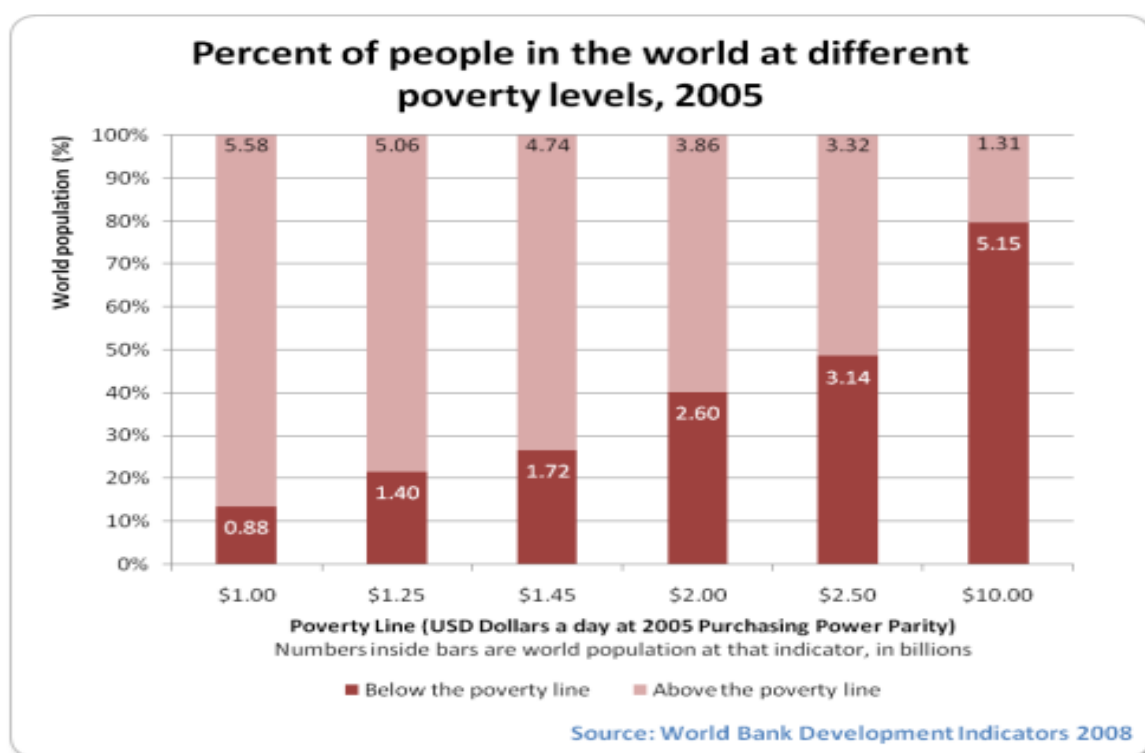
The conventional of head count methodology for measuring absolute poverty defines poverty line as a relationship between household per capita incomes or expenditure to a calories intake estimates of minimum income or expenditure. The measurement of poverty is dependent on nationally-representative household surveys measuring the distribution aspects of consumptions or incomes across nation.

Accordingly, World Bank has defined International poverty line is measured at \$1.25 a day for 2005, which is the mean of the reference group consisting 15 countries² with consumption per capita at 2005 PPP

¹ Jean-Bosco Ki Vu Tuan Anh(2009) " Analysis of Multidimensional Poverty Theory and Case Studies" Springer Science + Business media 2009

² 15 countries—namely Malawi, Mali, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Niger, Uganda, Gambia, Rwanda, Guinea-Bissau, Tanzania, Tajikistan, Mozambique, Chad, Nepal and Ghana. (Their median poverty line is \$1.27 per day)

below \$60.00 per month. As per the defined International Poverty Line more than 20 % of the world population is poor or having income less than \$1.25 a day. It can also be seen from the chart that almost half the world or over three billion people live on less than \$2.50 a day.



The above data highlights, the absolute statistical measurement of poverty. These absolute poverty lines can be used to identify groups or regions requiring special policies for poverty reduction; for distribution social security of transfer payments and to monitor the progress of such programs over time. However, the measurement of absolute poverty faces problems in identifying the minimum basket of essential goods and services with the good representative of consumption patterns, household budgets, and prices.

Further, it is difficult to count on non-monetary income or benefits, self-consumption, and other personal services. Moreover, these data cannot provide any picture of relative poverty or the poorness of the poor. The problem of affordability, accessibility, and adaptability of basic social needs cannot be determined. The myopic vision of the basic needs approach leads to the development of another approach of analyzing poverty by considering capabilities or entitlements. However, the multi derivative nature of poverty cannot be determined by one approach it should be an amalgam of all approaches.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

As mentioned above, the basic purpose of poverty measurement is to suggest the number in order to come up which some particular measurement unit we need to develop a theoretical framework. In order to build a measurement of poverty World Bank³ has suggested first defining relevant welfare measures, secondly setting up a threshold for classification of haves and have not, and lastly selecting a poverty indicator– which is used for reporting for the population as a whole or for a population sub-group only.

However, theoretically, there can be three main schools of thought concerning poverty that are: (1) the Welfarist school, (2) the Basic Needs School, and (3) the Capability school. The Welfarist are the believers of economic well-being or economic welfare (Michael Lipton and Martin Ravallion, 1995). This school belongs to great thinkers or great utilitarians, David Hume, Jeremy Bentham, Mills, and Adam Smith. Following this approach, utilities are the basis of social preferences, including poverty comparisons. This approach revolves around the ‘Invisible Hand’ of Adam Smith where the decisions of production what, how and for whom, should be determined by the unknown preferences of individuals. This approach recommends policies of increasing productivity, employment, and income to alleviate poverty.

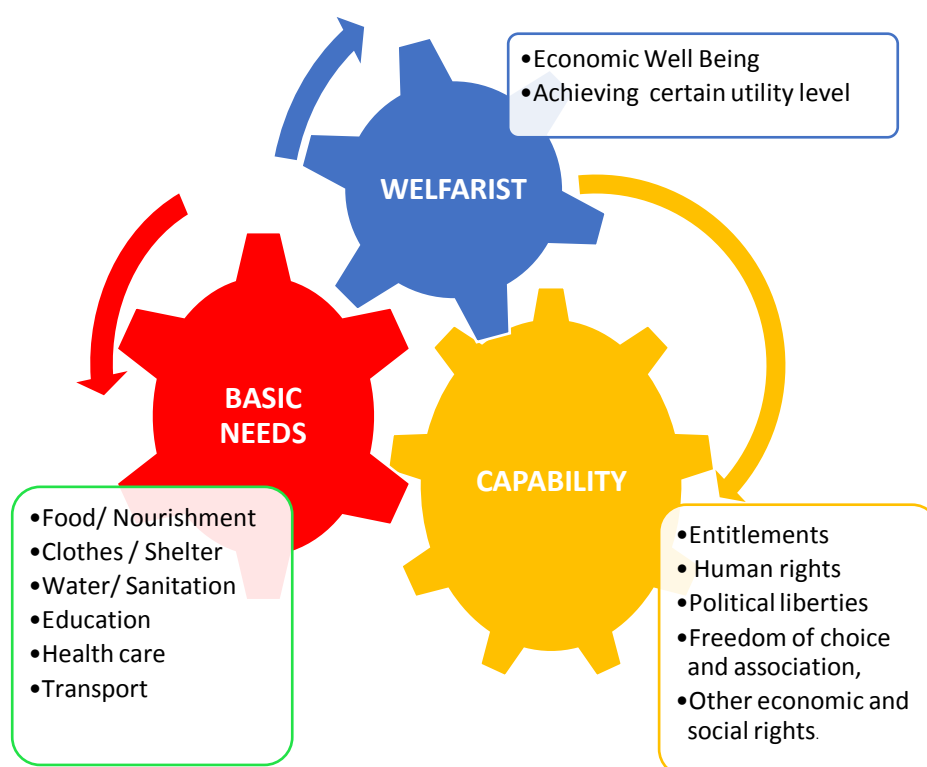
³ <http://web.worldbank.org/wbsite/external/topics/extpoverty/extpa>

The second school of thought belongs to the group that believes that the public policies are meant to address the lacking or constraints of livelihood. The needs are basic in nature that are requisites to quality of life; they are not initially perceived as generators of well-being. The schools thought, it is more important to "be" before one can be elevated to the level of "well be" (N. Kabeers 1994 p 162)⁴. Therefore, this school refocuses the fundamental concern of development is to fulfil the basic need of human.

Third the Capability school whose principal advocate was Amartya Sen (1990) who in search to address the problem of food, economic, entitlement and development in third world founded the new concept of what has value for the human being (p189)⁵. Sen believe that the value of someone's life has broader meaning than only utilities and more ingredients are involved to determine someone's capability. The functioning of this approach varies from mere physical need to the more complex social achievements which encompasses human rights.

It can be inferred that due to the property of variable poverty which is multi-dimensional in nature had caused the emergence of above mentioned different schools of thought. The chart below summaries the difference of thought and help to build the framework the poverty measurement is amalgam of all approaches.

CHART 1: POVERTY AMALGAM (FRAMEWORK)



II. LITERATURE REVIEW:

The literature on poverty highlights that several attempts have been made to establish a cross-cultural classification of basic need and broaden the concept of measuring poverty beyond the survival needs of human. Galston (1980) differentiated between the principle of equity and equality. He highlighted that the fulfillment of basic as well as secondary needs provide the satisfaction and meaning to one's life.

Henry Shue (1980) underscored basic rights are not only basic need for survival but also the sense of security. He stressed that the human right must increase participation in directing economy which provides subsistence and security. The rights or empowerment to define its basic needs or subsistence level indirectly influence the economic policies and governance.

⁴ N. Kabeers, "Beyond the Poverty Lines: Measuring Poverty and Impoverishing Measures" in *Reversed Realities, Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*, 1994, Verso, London, p.162

⁵ A.K Sen (1990), "Food, Economics, and Entitlements," in Staatz, John & Carl Eicher, eds, *Agricultural Development in the Third World* (Johns Hopkins Univ. Press) 189---205.

Human resource development and growth-oriented policy reforms have been prominent themes in writings on development as seen in journals of Sen writing on India, and Thorbecke on Indonesia. Sen's 'capability approach' came as a criticism of basic need and welfare economist which highlighted the human rights or entitlement in arena of development.

Despite, this study was not focused on poverty alleviation, it broadens the dimension of human poverty. The need for a multidimensional view of poverty and deprivation of Anand and Sen guided the further research where economist and social thinker regressed independent variables of human development like skill development, labour market reform, education, land reforms and other developmental aspects to established the cause and effect relationship with poverty.

Datt and Ravallion (1999) outline a simple dual economy model showing the existence of earnings and other income disparities between urban and rural sectors is clearly an important dimension of overall inequality in developing countries. Poverty reduction in this model takes the form of absorption of poor farm-sector workers into the non-poor non-farm sector. The difference of growth being pro-poor in some states than in other was due to the differences in these basic or initial conditions of development.

The work by T. Besley and R. Burgess (2000) done a panel analysis on 16 Indian states with the hypothesis that land reforms in developing countries improve the poor's access to land thereby increasing productivity and growth which curtail income poverty.

Haverman and Bershadker (2001) considered the degree of household skills as a symbol of income and exploitation of limited resources. The analysis holds that the household with more skills is more competitive and utilizes the resource more efficiently to gain income and reduces the poverty level of that household.

Duncan, Whitener, and Weber (2002) evaluated the barriers to labor force movement and its participation as determinants causing poverty. They emphasized that well-regulated labor reforms or an economy with better labor market conditions facilitates the mobility of labor i.e. transport and road-rail connectivity. These factors lead to higher economic growth or alleviate poverty.

Burgess and Pande (2004) analyzed the financial inclusion of the Indian economy and its impact on poverty. They took variables like the state's initial financial condition and public sector bank branches in rural areas. The finding suggested that the financial inclusion is one of the important policy options to reduce poverty as states with a greater number of banks were able to reduce poverty in large magnitude as compared to others.

Fisher (2005) use the panel data of income measures of asset poverty for metro and non-metro areas. They find that residents of central metropolitan counties are more likely to be poor in terms of net worth, but that nonmetropolitan residents are more likely to be poor in terms of liquid assets.

In 2010, under UNDP the Human Development Reports Research Paper series Alkire and Maria Emma developed Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) by using the mathematical structure of one member as proposed by Alkire and Foster (2007, 2009) across 104 countries. This index considered three dimensions of human development i.e. health, education, and standard of living. Alkire, and Sabina (2013), under OECD Publication, had constructed income poverty and multidimensional poverty measure made up of several indicators of deprivations. It was accepted that MPI 2.0 would be created with dimensions, indicators, and cut-offs that reflect the goals that are agreed upon for the post-2015 framework.

III. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Developing the discussion on the theoretical framework it can be inferred that the basic need and functions (food, clothing, lodging, etc.) can provide utility or economic well-being. These aspects consider only accessibility of minimum requisites for a human being. However, economic development cannot be done in a vacuum, it is interdependent on many factors. The needs for self-reliance, participation, and security that affects national and cultural identity, should be considered basic needs.

Under the Welfare school of thought order to categorize someone as well-being, it requires interpersonal comparisons. The ability to compare an individual's utility functions envelopes the social choice policy (Arrow's Social Choice and Individual Values, 1951). Welfarist's approach who stresses affordability faces the constraints of Arrow's paradox as the interpersonal comparison depends on pre-specified conditions in terms of no irrelevant alternatives, non-dictatorship, and Pareto efficiency. Further, the welfarist approach is value laded and can be trapped in its own strict rules. This approach will consider someone as poor who can be materially better off but not satisfied and can classify financially weak but satisfied people as non-poor.

Capabilities school are very closely linked to rights, it uses the concept of accessibility and adaptability which supplements someone's capabilities and human rights. This approach faces the problem of defining the property rights of common resources (Coarse theorem). Further evaluation of equity cannot be done without specifying the social welfare function, a function defined as relative weights to utilities of different individuals. Thus this also sounds similar to the welfare school of thought.

Criticizing the schools of thought does not undermine the importance of poverty measurement. All the schools justify the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. “One size does not fit all”, thus poverty measure lies somewhere in between the three schools of thought. Deprivation of basic needs determines the first stage of poverty i.e. accessibility, while the requisites of the basic lifestyle of one country are fulfilled then the second level of poverty remains i.e. affordability where the requisite is as per one’s preference or need. Lastly, the third stage of poverty lives whether a satisfied person of basic need has adapted or has the right /entitlement to develop their capacity and capability. This leads to the concept to honor the future generation claims. Thus poverty measurement lies in the concept of “poverty in-between”.

The literature review highlighted that the economist and social thinkers have used different variables like road density, rural bank branches, land reforms, etc. Most of the studies had signifies that poverty is the cause and effect of many factors in one’s economy. However, all the studies have one thing in common they believe that poverty decline when there is an increase in income or the economy grows. As income increases, the poor are able to fulfill their basic needs for survival and then improve towards well-being and develop their capability to stay there for a long duration.

Recently, Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) was coined to integrate three dimensions of human development i.e. health, education, and standard of living which are heavily bent toward the per-capita GDP across 104 countries. The MPI is a product of the percentage of people who are poor i.e. incidence times the average intensity of deprivations among the poor (Alkire and Foster, 2011).

This approach is based on the headcount method and measures only the absolute level of poverty reduction and had not focused much on the relative level of poverty. MPI indicators have focused on economic growth and increasing the per-capita GDP. For example, the MPI attempts to capture life sustainability by measuring the longevity of life. But long life cannot guarantee a dignified life with the capability to earn a better livelihood.

MPI has limited utility owing to the difficulty of measurability, timing, and data for the socio-economic variables to capture the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty. For example, of child mortality indicator is the problem of the population as a whole and not of households, therefore considering it at the poverty line for an individual will not be effective.

Further, MPI had ignored the non-economic aspects of society where good governance and institutions that guarantee the rule of law and public accountability are must conditions to address the capacity constraints of the poor.

CASE STUDY FOR INDIA’S NEW POVERTY LINE:

The Indian government had considered poverty as one of the important aspects of public policy and the approaches to measure poverty have changed from time to time. The planning commission of India is the nodal agency for the measurement of the poverty line and establishes expert groups to evolve a better methodology to measure poverty. The first uniform recall period methodology to measure national level poverty was devised by an expert group under Y K Alagh in 1979. The group used the minimum level of consumption expenditure can be derived, in turn, in terms of minimum expenditure on food and non-food items which are related to fulfilling certain nutritional standards⁶.

This approach was further improvised by the Lakdawala Expert Group in 1993 where the group estimated the poverty after disaggregating the national poverty line into state-specific poverty lines. The Tendulkar Expert Group 2009, used the same methodology as the Lakdawala expert group. The group did not calculate the poverty line and converted this poverty line by using a mixed recall period to get a better representation of consumption expenditure.

The latest Expert Group (Rangarajan) incorporated the importance of other criteria of consumer basket by adopting certain normative levels of adequate nourishment, clothing, and education along with the food expenditure for nutritional value. The group had used modified mixed recall period consumption expenditure data from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) where the different time period is used for different types of expenditure like weekly for food and yearly for durable and social security expenditure. By this recall period, the Rangarajan group had incorporated the behavioral aspect of consumer expenditure for other non-food items.

As per the latest Rangarajan Expert Group Report (2014) monthly per capita consumption expenditure of Rs. 972 in rural areas and Rs. 1407 in urban areas is treated as the poverty line at the all-India level. The poverty ratio at all Indian levels for 2011-12 comes to 29.5% of which 30.9% stands for rural poor and 26.4% of the urban population was below the poverty line in 2011-2012.

⁶ As per Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) norms 2,155 kcal per person per day in rural areas and 2,090 kcal per person per day in urban areas at present

Seen from the multi-dimensional aspect of poverty outlined above, this approach to India's new poverty line can be classified as an attempt to integrate a few dimensions of human development by stressing the consumer expenditures on different uses in a different time period.

However, it cannot be stated that this new poverty line is a completely socially defined poverty line as it is practically difficult to measure all the aspects of poverty.

Like multidimensional poverty index (MPI) where different indicators relating to health, education, and standard of living have limitations in public policy regarding their measurability, timing, and data variables. If we want to capture health parameters in poverty MP suggests the child mortality indicator however it is a problem for other populations as a whole and not for households or individuals. Therefore, considering them at the poverty line which determines the public policy and social benefit transfer will lead to different results.

In order to have a better understanding of poverty, and measurement issues it is important analysis the correlation of various selected dimensions of development and their impact on poverty.

REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF POVERTY

Further developing on the case study of India, we may attempt to have regression analysis between poverty and its related dimensions across different states of India. Ravallion and Datt (1999) outline a simple dual economy model showing the existence of earnings and other income disparities between urban and rural sectors which affect the poverty level coupled with the different initial conditions. This model explained the role and importance of the initial conditions of social and economic infrastructure which are important for labor mobility and reducing the poverty level.

On the basis of the model, we attempt to regress and highlight the other dimensions of economic policy which are relevant in poverty analysis rather than just focusing on calorie intake. We have two-stage regressions at the first stage the log of non-farm sector output is regressed on the log of educational expenditure at state levels, urban development expenditure, road density, and productivity per hectare. In the second stage, we used the linear predicted values of the northern-farm sector as a regressor. In this equation, the poverty level is regressed on the estimated non-farm sector with other explanatory variables like government expenditure, inflation, and openness index.

Combining these features, our test equation takes the form:

$$\ln Nfs = \beta_1 + \beta_2 \ln Edu + \beta_3 \ln Urban + \beta_4 \ln Road + \beta_5 \ln yield + \varepsilon_{it}$$

$$Pov_{it} = \alpha_1 EstNfs + \alpha_2 Inf + \alpha_3 Open + v_{it} \cdot \text{Where}$$

Pov_{it} is the measure of absolute consumption poverty (on a per capita basis) in state I (=1... n) at year t (=1... t) source was Headcount state level poverty is taken from planning commission data.

- Nfs is non-agricultural state domestic product as a percentage of state GDP at its logarithmic form in state I and year t, Source Central Statistical Organization (CSO)
- Edu is State level educational expenditure as a percent of SDP, taken in its log form, State level educational expenditure as a percent of SDP is taken from Central statistical Organization (CSO).
- Urban is the state expenditure urban development polices source. State Statistics and CSO
- Road is the log of the road density state wise. Source was Ministry of road transport and highway.
- EstNfs is the estimated non-farm sector from the first regression used as independent variable.
- Open is the measure of the openness of the state economy. Openness Index at the state level, derived by Maiti and Marjit (2010), has been used.
- Inf is inflation in the primary sector source Reserve Bank of India (RBI)
- Yield is farm yield (output per hectare). Mean farm yield, given by real agricultural state domestic product (SDP) per hectare of net sown area in the state is also taken from CSO.

- ε_{it} And v_{it} are the error term

Data: Since in India multiple expert group had used multiple indicators and methodology to measure poverty. Even latest estimates by expert group 2014 is quite different from previous estimated figures and has influence of non-food items which was not present in earlier studies. Therefore, we considered the time period from 1983 to 2003 where there was no influence of capability approach on poverty measurement. It is a panel data with three years 1983, 1993 and 2003 and considering 21 states. As discussed above, the poverty measures are hypothesized to depend on both a set of time-dependent variables as well as a set of basic conditions of development variables that determine how poverty-reducing the time-dependent variables are correlated to each other. Building on the empirical approach used in our earlier work (Datt and Ravallion, 1998a), we use time-dependent variables related to agricultural and non-agricultural growth, public spending on economic and social services, and inflation.

Regression Results: We have used a two-stage panel regression to check the impact of education on the poverty level. The risk of multi-collinearity was checked and the correlation matrix also justifies this as none of the explanatory variables has a coefficient of correlation of more than 0.7.

Correlation matrix:

	Lnfs	Lnedu	Lnroad	lnurban	Lnyield
Lnedu	0.4295	1.000			
lnroad	0.2739	0.2383	1.000		
lnurban	0.5003	-0.0466	0.0811	1.000	
lnyield	0.3090	0.2443	0.3505	0.3480	1.000

Variables are taken at their log form to get the symmetry in distribution and give equal weightage to all data values. The log form help to explain the growth of one variable and how influence the growth of other variables. The preliminary study shows the growth of non-farm sector output is positively related to other variables. The negative correlation between educational and urban development expenditure could be because the high urbanization means a highly educated class of people so there the educational expenditure should be decreased. The positive 0.24 correlation between education and yield shows that literacy helps in the increase of productivity in the farm sector along with growth in the non-farm sector.

Non-farm sector regressed on different controlled variables: STAGE 1

VARIABLES	Coefficients	Z value
Educational expenditure	0.0765***	3.28
Road density	0.0222	0.74
Urban Expenditure	0.1946***	3.06
Yield per hectare	0.0372	0.74
Constant	3.317***	8.36
No.of observation	48	
R Sqr	0.45	
Hausman Value	8.33	P = 0.08
F value	3.81***	
Random Effect	Yes	

*** Significant at 5% ** Significant at 10%

All the results are robust and the significance level of 5% shows that educational expenditure and the urban development expenditure significantly explain the growth of the non-farm sector. However, the yield per hectare is not significantly explained by the growth of non-farm sector activities, still, the sign is positive. Even taking road density has an explanatory variable that also was insignificant. This shows that migration which is affected by road connectivity and free movement of labor in other terms directly does not affect the growth of the non-farm sector. The positive sign is not considered a variable is insignificant.

The model under random effect shows that the unobserved effect is uncorrelated with each of the explanatory variables. The Housman test shows that the model should be of random effect as shown in the table. Since the variables are taken in the ratio forms and the time variable has influenced both the numerator and denominator. So the time-specific fixed has not influenced the model thus in the ratio we have incorporated the time-variant influences.

Moving towards stage two where we used the predicted fitted value of the nonfarm sector from the first regression which was in log form. We take the antilog of the predicted value of the non-farm sector and used as a controlled variable. The other controlled variables are the openness index and inflation.

Poverty level Regressed with the estimated non-farm sector: STAGE 2

VARIABLES	Coefficients	Z value
Estimated Non-Farm sector	-0.996	-5.40***
Openness	0.227	0.56
Inflation	95.937	1.82

Constant	0.110	0.00
No. of observation	44	
R Sqr	0.45	
Housman value	0.66	P= 0.95
F value	8.35***	
Random Effect	Yes	

*** Significant at 5% ** Significant at 10%

This regression shows that the non-farm sector is affected by developmental spending in areas of educational expenditure and urban development. This growth of the non-farm sector further reduces the state-specific poverty levels. Another aspect came out that openness of the economy is not significant showing that liberalization may not increase the growth of non-agricultural activities and there will not have a significant impact on the poverty level.

Another important factor that came into highlight is influence the of inflation on poverty in India. Since inflation is not significant its positive sign coefficient shows that an increase in inflation has increased poverty but with a low impact value. This is due to the higher development of initial conditions which assist development and economic activities to minimize the impact of inflation on poverty. Even in Datt and Ravallion's study, they argued that the main channel through which inflation mattered to India's poor was through its short-term adverse effect on the real wage rate for unskilled labor.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION:

The conventional development theories of the basic need approach have not proved to be strong enough in reducing poverty. This may be due to a myopic vision of basic needs, neglect of certain initial conditions of the economy which are pre-requisites for development, or the creation of a big push for the economy to take off.

The capability approach to poverty is all about gender equality, equity in work participation, and the capability of the workforce. It is difficult to measure such qualitative indicators into a quantified variable that can be added to countries' poverty line measurements.

Considering the importance of the poverty line in public policy where it is used as a baseline to distribute the social transfer payments and other social expenditures of public finance to bring equality. It is difficult to incorporate all the dimension multidimensional poverty indicators relating to health, education, and standard of living in the country's poverty line owing to their diverse measurability, timing, and data variables.

Take the example of the child mortality indicator which is the problem of the population as a whole and not of households, therefore considering it at the poverty line for individuals will not be an effective policy suggestion.

Considering the case study of India and in regression using state-level poverty measures for India spanning 1983 to 2003-04 state-specific dummies, we find that higher urban and educational spending and higher non-farm poverty-reducing poverty reduction. This is close to John Friedman's (1992), alternative development model having has caveats of livelihood, personal well-being, habitat, and social network.

As Friedman explained the self-inducing behavior of the poor and the economic cycle creates the condition for the development of another strong informal sector. If government policies develop initial conditions like the level of education, the extent of market dualism, infrastructure, urbanization, and other important variables. Then this growth of other productive sectors or better considers the non-farm sector growth which is measurable will serve as a policy tool to break the vicious circle of poverty.

Considering a public policy prescription and just to suggest a qualitative parameter of data which can be a proxy for the poor's capability is to add some normative level of consumption expenditure for essential non-food item groups like education, clothing, conveyance, and house rent in accordance to country's condition.

It is important to keep in mind that poverty lines are only approximations to the socially accepted minimum standards and it is to be reviewed from time to time with the changing needs of the population. Here, considering the poverty line as an end for public policy will be wrong. As poverty is a socio-economic and multi-dimensional broader concept. So public policy should go beyond the limited concept of indexing poverty and should focus on the development of initial conditions. Public policy should consider the alternative approach where the poverty line serves as a mere reference value and channel public expenditure to bring equity and local participation, education to increase the capability of the workforce, and a conducive environment to guarantee a dignified living for all.

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