**15. Religious Minorities**

The Indian Constitution talks about the idea of equality among its citizens and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion. It also committed for preservation, protection and assurance of the rights of minorities (Article 14, 15, 29 & 30). Five religious communities, viz. Muslims, Christian, Sikhs, Buddhists Jains and Zoroastrians were declared as minority communities under section 2 (c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992. Despite several Constitutional provisions for equal opportunities and rights to all, the minorities, particularly Muslims remained the most deprived of India’s groups and communities. The Muslim community makes the largest share, more than 70 percent, of the total minority population.

The Sachar Committee Report, 2006 found the Muslim community lagging behind other religious groups on several development indicators, which included identity issues, exclusion, flaws in public policies and poor implementation of government development interventions. In order to address the specific problems of backwardness among Muslims, the Sachar Report advocates special attention to developmental issues within the Muslim community in areas of education, economic development and access to basic amenities. Other general policy initiatives such as setting up a National Data Bank, an Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) and constructing a Diversity Index were pushed to promote inclusion of excluded Muslims in public institutions. No headway was however made regarding actual implementation so far.

After completion of 10 years of Sachar Report, it is pertinent to assess the gaps in public policies (inadequate budgets, inappropriate policy design, and poor implementation) that come in the way of the poor receiving the desired level of development benefits. The policy gaps and other social, communal and discriminatory factors may be mutually exclusive in preventing Muslims to access to the desired level of development benefits by Muslims.

One of the major concerns in terms of gaps in policy strategies has been regarding the general approach of targeting public expenditure and other affirmative action programmes towards Muslim community. Earlier, public expenditure provided ‘incidental’ (without community specific targeting) benefits from anti-poverty programs to the vulnerable sections such as Dalit, Adivasis and, of late, religious minorities and not any ‘direct policy-driven’ benefits for Muslims.

A commitment was made by the government to address the problems of inequality, deprivation and exclusion of religious minorities in the 11th plan through the approach of ‘faster and inclusive growth’. To address the overall development deficit of minorities, particularly Muslims, Government has adopted a four-pronged strategy since 2006-07 which includes educational empowerment, economic empowerment, access to public services, strengthening of minority institutions and area development.

The Union government has been targeting few flagship programmes / schemes related to education, livelihood and access to public services, credit and skill development for minorities under PM New 15 point programme since 2006. Under the aegis of the Ministry of Minority Affairs (MoMA), new development schemes and programmes related to scholarship, community leadership and area development were devised, the most important one being Multi Sectoral Development Programme (MSDP) as area development programme. Most of these government interventions are minority targeted rather than Muslim focused.

The MoMA is currently running the schemes related to education empowerment, skill and livelihood, special programmes for minorities and area development programme like MSDP. The proposed allocation for MoMA in 12th Plan was around 17000 crore, out of that around 15771 has been earmarked by the MOMA. The budget allocation for MoMA has been increased to Rs 4195 crore in 2017-18 from Rs.3827 crore in 2016-17, indicating an increase of 9 Percent. The budget of MoMA constitutes 0.20 percent of total Union Budget whereas population of minorities accounts for more than 19 percent of the total population. With regard to utilization of funds of MoMA from 201-13 to 2015-2016, it ranges from 68.9 percent to 97.8 percent and has shown improvement over the years.

**Table 1**: **Fund Allocation and Utilisation for the Ministry of Minority Affairs**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year | BE | RE | Actual | % of Utilisation over BE |
| 2012-2013 | 3,155 | 2,218 | 2,174 | 68.9 |
| 2013-2014 | 3,531 | 3,131 | 3,026 | 86 |
| 2014-2015 | 3,734 | 3,165 | 3,089 | 83 |
| 2015-2016 | 3,738 | 3,736 | 3654.8 | 97.8 |
| 2016-17 | 3827 | 3827 |  |  |
| 2017-18 | 4,195 |  |  |  |

*Source:* Compiled by CBGA from Union Budget documents, various years.

A scheme wise assessment shows that only MSDP shows an increase, which is Rs. 141 crore as compared to the RE of previous year. The other major schemes related to education empowerment did not register any significant increase in allocation. MSDP is an area development initiative for provision of better infrastructure towards improving education, health, work participation and access to basic public services in Minority Concentrated Districts (MCDs). It was launched in 90 MCDs under the 11th FYP; only 66 out of 90 districts showed heavy concentration of Muslims. In the 12th Five Year Plan (FYP), MSDP was extended to 710 development blocks of 196 districts and 66 towns. Considering the expanse of blocks and districts covered by the programme under the 12th FYP, allocation for MSDP is quite inadequate.

**Table 2: Scheme-wise Allocation for Ministry of Minority Affairs (Rs.crore)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Schemes** | **Allocation Proposed in 12th FYP** | **2012-13 (A)** | **2013-14 (A)** | **2014-15 (A)** | **2015-16 (A)** | **2016-17 (RE)** | **Allocation in 12th FYP (%)** | **2017-18 (BE)** |
| Maulan Azad Foundation | 500 | 0 | 160 | 113 | 113 | 114 | 100 | 113 |
| Merit Cum Means | 1580 | 181 | 259.9 | 381.3 | 315 | 395 | 97 | 392.93 |
| Free Coaching | 120 | 14 | 23.6 | 31.3 | 44.84 | 40 | 128 | 48 |
| Pre Matric | 5000 | 786 | 962.9 | 1128.8 | 1015.73 | 931 | 96 | 950 |
| Post Matric | 2850 | 326.4 | 515.6 | 501.3 | 552.83 | 550 | 86 | 550 |
| Maulana Azad Fellowship | 430 | 66 | 50 | 0.12 | 55.52 | 120 | 68 | 100 |
| NMDFC | 600 | 85 | 0 | 30 | 120 | 140 | 63 | 170 |
| MSDP | 5650 | 641.2 | 953.4 | 768.2 | 1120.73 | 1059 | 80 | 1200 |

*Source:* Compiled by CBGA from Union Budget documents, various years.

Two new programmes, *Nai Manzil* and USTTAD (Upgrading Skills and Training in Traditional Arts/ Crafts for Development) were announced in 2014-15 and 2015-16 respectively, with the objective of making minorities a part of mainstream development. *Nai Manzil* focuses on education and skill development of school-dropouts while USTTAD aims to conserve traditional arts and crafts along with building capacity of traditional artisans and craftsmen belonging to minority communities. *Nai Roshni*, a leadership training programme for women and MANAS for upgrading entrepreneurial skills of minority youth was also announced. Union Budget 2016-17 has allocated Rs. 175 crore for *Nai Manzil* and Rs. 22 crore for USTAD.

**Physical Progress Report under MSDP**

Though more than 80 percent of the allocations proposed under the 12th FYP for MSDP were earmarked, but physical data shows that components like *Indira Awaas Yojana*, building of schools and health centres, and employment generating infrastructure have a poor rate of completion. Many activities proposed under the MSDP have not even started. Table 3 shows that important activities like School building (1 percent), Additional class rooms ( 22 percent) , hostels (12 percent ) , Free Bicycle for Girl (0 percent), health (6.7 percent), ITI Buildings (7.3) have low physical achievements whereas AWC (33 percent) and housing (35.8) has higher physical achievement. From the assessment of MSDP in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, it is found that a major reason behind low rate of completion in MSDP is notably delays in conducting baseline survey of Blocks and Towns, detailed project report, delay/ lack of recruitment Block Level Facilitator, poor planning and lack of coordination and convergence with respective line departments.

**Table 3: Physical Progress Report under MSDP in 12th Plan (as on 30.06.16)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **School   building** | **Additional  class rooms** | **Hotels** | **Free Bicycle  for Girl** | **AWC** | **Health Centre** | **ITI Buildings** | **Housing** |
| Unit Sanctioned | 995 | 12106 | 605 | 13960 | 8357 | 1738 | 96 | 44054 |
| Unit Completed | 10 | 2664 | 77 | 0 | 2767 | 117 | 7 | 15782 |
| Work in Progress | 126 | 2147 | 98 | 664 | 2230 | 242 | 38 | 9240 |
| % of Completion | 1.0 | 22.0 | 12.7 | 0.0 | 33.1 | 6.7 | 7.3 | 35.8 |

Source: Ministry of Minority Affairs

From the assessment of budgetary allocation for minorities under MSDP and 15 Point Programme , it is found that large amount of total earmarked fund goes to education empowerment of minorities. The table 4 shows the drop-out rates among all Minority communities at different levels of education vis-à-vis other communities. It clearly reflects that the numbers of dropouts among Muslims are the highest among all groups. The departmentally related Standing Committee on Social Justice raised the concern on high dropouts despite having scholarship programmes, MSDP and 15 Point Programme are in operation for 8-10 years. NSSO has compiled information on never enrolled persons according to major religious groups (National Sample Survey Organisation's Report No. 575 of January-June 2014: Education in India). The Committee tried to find the real reasons behind the high dropouts among Muslims and requested MoMA to conduct a comprehensive study in this regard.

**Table 4: Number per 1,000 of never-enrolled persons (age 5-29 years) for different religion**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Religion | Rural | Urban | Rural + Urban |
| Hinduism | 104 | 47 | 89 |
| Islam | 154 | 100 | 134 |
| Christianity | 49 | 20 | 39 |
| Sikhism | 53 | 34 | 48 |
| Other Religions(Jainism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism | 71 | 21 | 51 |
| All (including not reported) | 109 | 56 | 94 |

*Source:* Ministry Of Minority Affairs, Thirty Second Report, Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment (2016 - 2017)