

SOCIAL SECURITY NOW (SSN)

27/02/2008

Press Release

Social Security for Unorganised-informal Workers:

Globalisation has resulted in structural adjustment of the national economy which has pushed the division of labour to the limit and employment is largely getting informal and unorganized and thus denying the workers basic employment protection laws, trade union laws and social security laws. In the context of India more than 93 percentage of the entire work force that is roughly 423 million are unorganized and informal who contribute 62% of the total GDP and getting only one per cent allocation in the national budget. They are the worst sufferers without any institutional backing.

Government is consistently deceiving

Repeated assurance by the Government to come out with a comprehensive law for social security for 423 million unorganised workers has remained a dream. Though it floated 14 legislations in eight years, resulting in the announcement of a diluted version of welfare based law and referred to Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour which in its part revised and came out with an improved version in December 03, 2007. It addresses some of the social security provisions, i.e., old age, pension, medical needs, etc. but the bill is neither comprehensive nor right based and even the budgetary provision is too little to address the issues.

Our demand

Our demand has been comprehensive and consistent that the entire issue of 'Social Security' should be viewed through a rights perspective and never as scheme-based and 'basic social security' should always be non-contributory and must flow down from the national exchequer. The ILO Convention No. 102 includes 9 core contingencies like sickness, employment injury, unemployment, invalidity, old age, death, the need for long-term medical care and for supporting families with children as social security cover. The proposed bill is only talking about some of the issue such as a) Life and disability covers b) Health and maternity and c) Old age protection for self and family, but silent on the issues of protection during unemployment, livelihood disruption and displacement.

The definition of social security should definitely include the 'unpaid women workers' of the unorganized sector household and the contribution of grants should be clearly and minutely defined. Again there should be absolute clarity on the question of P.F., and gratuity. The quantum of benefits should go concurrently with the needs for medical care, old age, maternity benefits and it should never be private insurance based. There should be adequate safeguards for vulnerable groups like minorities, dalits, adivasis and women with proportional representation in the national/ state boards. There should be regulation of employment, dispute resolution with regards to unorganized workers. Registration of employers of unorganised workers should be mandatory.

Hence, *Social Security Now (SSN)* summarily rejects insurance, welfare, scheme and charity-based law and demands for a non-contributory comprehensive social security law with employment and livelihood regulation and dispute resolution mechanisms.

Our demands runs concurrently to the voice of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of Article 9 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to which India is a signatory and the adopted general comment No 19 on November 23, 2007 clearly argues for comprehensive, fully state funded social security protection to unorganised and poor workers population. It specifically mentions for social protections to excluded, indigenous, migrants and minority groups and emphasizes that it should be non contributory, adequate, non-insurance based and comprehensive.

In an election year as it is the last budget of the UPA government and again the issue of drafting a comprehensive social security was very much part of the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) 2004 government should be reminded to its promise. A country wide protest movement would be initiated, involving civil society organizations, human rights groups in 500 districts, if the government dares to ditch and play with the aspirations of 423 million workers and their dependents. This campaign also aims to put mounting pressure on the political parties to include the issues of social security as the core of their election manifestos and make it that this government never returns to power if it backtracks from its overtly stated promises.

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