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Anna Adhikar Abhiyan opposes Rs. 20 / day cut off for Urban & Rs.15 for rural Poverty Line

Anna Adhikar Abhiyan vehemently opposes the unrealistic cut-off of Rs.20 per day for urban and Rs. 15 a day for rural areas, as recently proposed by the Planning Commission and supported by the UPA government. Such an unrealistic cut-off will only pave the way for more manipulation, corruption and further marginalization of the already vulnerable poor.

The Rs.20 and Rs. 15 a day cut-off for urban and rural poverty line which stems from the economic Darwinist positions of the neoliberal economists of the Planning Commission, is not part of an exercise towards eliminating poverty but a political and economic ploy to make the poor invisible in the Government records. It is a blatant attempt to help the Centre claim “success” in poverty reduction and thus deny legitimate subsidies to the poor. It is a crude attempt on the part of our policy makers to earn brownie points to justify that they have achieved economic growth together with social justice.

If one can live on Rs. 20 or Rs. 15 per day, what justification does the government have for raising the monthly income of elected representatives and Government employees under 6th pay commission? And if corporate taxes worth Rs. 3,74,937 cores have been waived during 2005-06 to 2009-10, then why deny the poor subsidies to ensure their survival? This proposal is part of a nefarious design to divert money from food and other subsidies for the poor to benefit the corporate sector.

The Commission has propounded that a city dweller cannot be termed poor if his average monthly expenditure exceeds Rs. 31 on rent and conveyance, Rs. 18 on education, Rs.25 on medicines and Rs. 36.5 on vegetables. For rural people it is even less. When the minimum fare in a BSES bus has been raised to 4, when slum-lords demand lakhs for a zhopdi, when the price of dal, veg, milk, grain has sky-rocketed, when the public health is not available to the poor, this unrealistic data sadly makes a mockery of the poor. Further, food security is not only about starvation but also about nutritional security, health and dignity. This includes the right to basic services such as safe potable water, energy, safe shelter, education and entertainment. It is a shame that even after 62 years of independence, the government is not able to ensure food security for all.

The submission of the Planning Commission only confirms our long-held view that the UPA government has gone back on its promise to bring about transformative changes in the food sector to ensure food security. The unrealistic cut-off mark, is meant to ensure that when the Food Security Act sees the light of day, its applicability will be limited to a miniscule population.

In order to include all the poor and marginalized groups in its food security net, the Anna Adhikar Abhiyan demands that:

- The poverty line should be based on the Arjun Sengupta report which emphasizes that 77 per cent people are poor in India.
- Criteria for poverty line should be based on basic human needs besides income and nutrition. Lack of basic needs such as access to education, shelter, health, sanitation, drinking water and other basic services must be considered while measuring poverty.
- Structural conditions which lead to poverty such as disadvantages, vulnerability, powerlessness, exploitation, marginalization and alienation, should be considered.
- Consumer price Index and not per capita consumption should be taken into account while deciding the income cut off line.

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