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Q18

Performance of welfare schemes that are implemented for vulnerable sections is not so effective due to absence of their awareness and active involvement at all stages of policy process - Discuss.(15).

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · GS II · 15 marks · Welfare Schemes for Vulnerable Sections

Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Core demand of the question

- Performance of welfare schemes that are implemented for vulnerable sections is not so effective due to absence of their awareness and active involvement at all stages of policy process. Discuss

Revision summary

Articles 15(4), 16(4) and 46 frame welfare for vulnerable sections; performance depends on last-mile knowledge and voice.

Absence of awareness and of involvement in design, delivery and audit is a major cause of exclusion and leakage.

MGNREGA social audits and NFSA grievance systems are statutory models of involvement.

National Commissions and PESA gram sabhas are institutional voices that schemes often skip.

Funding, staff and digital exclusion also matter; the statement is the core diagnosis, not the only one.

Introduction

Welfare for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, women, persons with disability, minorities, and the income-poor is a constitutional duty (Articles 15(4), 16(4), 46, and the local-government chapters). Schemes fail most often at the last mile: the intended beneficiary does not know the entitlement, and is not in the room when the scheme is designed, budgeted, or audited. The statement names that gap correctly; money, targeting errors, and staff also matter.

Body

Why awareness and involvement decide performance

- **A scheme is a chain:** problem, design, law or guideline, budget, frontline delivery, grievance, and evaluation. If vulnerable groups enter only as names on a list at the end, exclusion errors and leakage follow.
- Illiteracy, remote hamlets, disability, and patriarchal households block information; a portal or a newspaper advertisement does not equal awareness.

- **Without involvement, officials guess demand:** toilets without water, hostels without food, scholarships that miss the girl who has already dropped out.

Evidence in major schemes

- **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005**, built social audit and the gram sabha into the statute; where those forums are real, performance improves, and where they are captured, the same Act under-delivers. That is involvement as a legal design, not a slogan.
- The **National Food Security Act, 2013**, names entitlements and grievance structures; awareness of the ration scale and of the right to a food-security allowance is still uneven, which is why some States use strong local publicity and others do not.
- Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe sub-plans, hostels, and Post-Matric Scholarships fail when students do not know timelines and when parent groups are absent from review.
- The **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016**, and the National Trust architecture need disabled persons' organisations in planning; UDID and accessible buildings stall where those organisations are not at the table.
- PESA, 1996, in Scheduled Areas requires gram sabha consent on some resources; skipping that involvement is both illegal and a performance failure of tribal welfare.

Absence at all stages of the policy process

- **Agenda setting:** vulnerable groups rarely write the Cabinet note; civil society and commissions (**National Commission** for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Women, Backward Classes, and Minorities; **Chief Commissioner** for Persons with Disabilities) are the usual proxies, and they are unevenly heard.
- **Formulation:** guidelines are Union-drafted; pre-legislative consultation is thin.
- **Implementation:** frontline (anganwadi, ASHA, gram rozgar sevak) is the only daily contact; if that worker is overburdened or biased, involvement dies.
- **Evaluation:** dashboards without social audit become a collector's race, not a beneficiary's voice. The **Second Administrative Reforms Commission** on social capital and on local governance stressed participatory monitoring.

Other reasons performance lags (so the statement is not the whole story)

- Under-funding, delayed State share, and staff vacancies would weaken a perfectly aware community.
- Elite capture and middlemen can be worse when a scheme is known but the gram sabha is weak.
- Digital KYC and Aadhaar seeding can exclude the very groups the scheme names, even when they are "aware" of the benefit.

What involvement at all stages looks like

- Pre-legislative consultation and draft guidelines in regional languages.
- Gram sabha and ward sabha as statutory clearance for beneficiary lists (already in MGNREGA and NFSA practice in better States).
- Social audit units with independent facilitation, as Andhra Pradesh and some other States showed.
- **Right to Information Act, 2005**, and public hearings as default, not as activist extras.
- Representation of vulnerable groups on scheme advisory bodies, not only on national commissions after a scandal.

Flow diagram

Vulnerable sections -> Awareness of entitlement
Vulnerable sections -> Involvement all stages
Awareness of entitlement -> Better scheme performance
Involvement all stages -> Better scheme performance
MGNREGA social audit gram sabha -> Involvement all stages
No voice digital exclusion -> Weak performance

Conclusion

Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections under-perform when those sections lack awareness and have no role in design, delivery and audit. MGNREGA social audits and NFSA entitlements show that involvement can be written into law; vacancies, capture and digital exclusion show that awareness is necessary, not sufficient. The statement should be accepted as the central last-mile diagnosis, and then completed with money, staff and honest lists.

Facts & figures

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005

Demand-based wage guarantee with statutory social audit and gram sabha role - involvement built into the law.

National Food Security Act, 2013

Legal food entitlements, transparency and grievance redress; performance still tracks local awareness.

PESA Act, 1996

Requires gram sabha involvement in Scheduled Areas; skipping it weakens tribal welfare schemes.

Right to Information Act, 2005

Information tool that makes scheme lists and budgets usable by beneficiaries and social auditors.

Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016

Rights-based disability law that expects persons with disabilities and their organisations in implementation, not only as clients.

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