

## Social Sectors

58. The incidence of poverty has continued to decline during the 1990s. The Government finally approved the methodology for estimating poverty with a slight modification of the Lakdawala Expert Group methodology. According to this, the poverty ratio for rural and urban areas combined, for the country as a whole declined by 2.9 percentage points in 1993-94 over 1987-88 (Planning Commission estimate). The incidence of poverty has declined considerably over two decades from 56.4 per cent in 1973-74 to 37.3 per cent in 1993-94 in rural sector and from 49 per cent to 32.4 per cent in urban sector. Overall, the all India poverty ratio declined from 55 per cent to 36 per cent over the period 1973-93. Rapid growth in subsequent years should have further reduced the poverty ratio.

59. Improvement has also been recorded in the trends of the basic indicators of human development. All India death rates, birth rate and infant mortality rates have shown declining trends since 1992. The life expectancy at birth has increased to 62.4 in 1996 according to the report of the Planning Commission's Technical Group on Population Projections.

60. Average real wages for unskilled agricultural labour that reflect the economic condition of agricultural labourers declined by 6.2 per cent in the crisis year of 1991-92 (Agricultural year July to June) for the country as a whole. But in the subsequent years they have increased each year except in 1994-95 when there was marginal fall of 0.4 per cent.

61. The alleviation of poverty has been the central objective of our development planning and policies. The various employment and poverty alleviation programmes, which have been in operation over the years, have contributed to improvement in the socio-economic status of the poor. The Central Plan and non-Plan expenditure on social sectors including Rural Development and Basic Minimum services recovered to an average of 1.7 per cent of GDP during 1995-96 to 1997-98 (RE). This compares with an average of 1.5 per cent of GDP during 1992-93 to 1994-95. The Central Plan allocations on major schemes for social sectors and programmes grew by about 13 per cent in 1997-98 (RE) over 1996-97 (RE). The outlay for education has gone up by about 30 per cent in 1997-98 (RE) over 1996-97 (RE). A new scheme "Balika Samridhi Yojana" (BSY) to

provide college and technical education to girls has been launched on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1997.