

Implementation of Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP): A Policy Review of the Revised Guidelines 2014

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Abstract—The Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP) has been a cornerstone of inclusive planning in India, designed to ensure proportionate allocation of state resources for the socio-economic development of Scheduled Castes (SCs). Despite its importance, implementation challenges have persisted, including diversion of funds, lack of institutional mechanisms, and insufficient monitoring. In 2014, the Planning Commission of India introduced revised guidelines to strengthen the SCSP framework. This paper critically reviews the Revised Guidelines for Implementation of the Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP) by States and Union Territories, with emphasis on their objectives, institutional framework, fund allocation mechanisms, and accountability measures. Using a policy document analysis method, this study highlights the paradigm shift from post-facto accounting to proactive planning. The findings suggest that while the revised guidelines provide a robust institutional and financial framework, challenges remain in operationalising them at the state level. The paper concludes by recommending stronger monitoring, capacity building, and social accountability mechanisms to ensure that SCSP achieves its intended goal of bridging socio-economic gaps for marginalised communities.

Keywords: Scheduled Castes, Sub-Plan, Inclusive Development, Social Justice, Policy Implementation, India

I. INTRODUCTION

The Indian Constitution provides for the social, economic, and political upliftment of marginalized communities, including the Scheduled Castes (SCs). Recognising persistent inequalities, the Government of India introduced the Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP) in the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980–85) as a strategy to ensure targeted allocation of resources in proportion to the SC population. The SCSP was conceptualised as a mechanism to channel plan outlays from general sectors towards the development of SCs, thereby addressing disparities in education, health, employment, and basic infrastructure (Planning Commission, 2014)¹. Over the years, several evaluations revealed weaknesses in SCSP implementation. States often failed to earmark funds proportionate to the SC population, and in many cases, allocations were diverted to schemes not directly benefiting SC communities (Jha, 2016²; Thorat & Sadana, 2009³). Furthermore, the absence of robust institutional frameworks at the state level hindered effective monitoring and accountability. As a response, the Government of India introduced Revised Guidelines for the Implementation of SCSP in 2014, aiming to move from a post-facto accounting model to a proactive planning approach. The 2014 guidelines emphasised non-divertible and non-lapsable fund allocations, the creation of nodal departments and agencies, institutionalised monitoring mechanisms, and enhanced transparency through social audits and web-based reporting systems (Planning Commission, 2014). These reforms were intended to ensure that SCSP serves as an effective tool for bridging socio-economic gaps between the Scheduled Castes and other social groups.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

1. To examine the key provisions of the revised guidelines for SCSP implementation.
2. To analyse the institutional and financial frameworks proposed for effective planning and monitoring.
3. To assess the strengths and limitations of the revised guidelines in ensuring socio-economic justice for the Scheduled Castes.

¹ Planning Commission. (2014). Revised Guidelines for Implementation of Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP) by States/UTs. Government

² Jha, S. (2016). Implementation of SCSP in Indian states: Issues and concerns. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51(25).

³ Thorat, S., & Sadana, N. (2009). *Caste and social exclusion in India*. Oxford University Press.

4. To suggest recommendations for improving implementation mechanisms at the state level.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP) has been widely studied in the context of inclusive planning, social justice, and targeted welfare interventions. The literature on SCSP can broadly be divided into three strands: (a) historical and policy evolution, (b) critical evaluations of its implementation, and (c) debates on equity and social justice.

II.I. HISTORICAL AND POLICY EVOLUTION

The SCSP was first introduced during the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980–85⁴) to ensure targeted allocation of resources for the development of the Scheduled Castes. As Thorat and Sadana (2009) note, the SCSP aimed to bridge socio-economic disparities by earmarking plan outlays proportionate to the SC population. Subsequent Five-Year Plans continued this approach, but implementation varied significantly across states. Policy documents, such as the Planning Commission's strategy papers (Government of India, 2014), emphasised that SCSP funds should be non-divertible, non-lapsable, and should secure direct benefits for SC households.

II.II. IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Several scholars have highlighted gaps in the implementation of SCSP. Jha (2016) observed that states often allocated funds on a notional basis, with little evidence of direct benefits to SC households. Similarly, Karthikeyan (2017)⁵ Argued that the diversion of funds from general infrastructure projects diluted the core objectives of SCSP. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG, 2013)⁶ Also reported was the underutilization of funds and a lack of robust monitoring mechanisms.

Research has further shown that despite SCSP's design, socio-economic indicators such as literacy rates, health outcomes, and employment opportunities for Scheduled Castes continue to lag behind national averages (Nagaraj, 2010⁷; Deshpande, 2011⁸). These findings suggest that weak institutional frameworks and a lack of accountability have limited SCSP's effectiveness.

II.III. DEBATES ON EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

From a broader theoretical perspective, the SCSP reflects India's approach to distributive justice. Scholars like Galanter (1984⁹) and Thorat (2007¹⁰) argue that targeted interventions are essential for addressing the historical disadvantages of Dalits. However, others caution that without proper monitoring, such interventions risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative (Sundar, 2015¹¹).

The 2014 revised guidelines, therefore, represent an important policy shift. They aim to institutionalize accountability mechanisms, strengthen nodal departments, and integrate proactive planning approaches. Academic reviews (Singh & Sharma, 2015¹²) suggest that if effectively implemented, these reforms could significantly enhance the socio-economic status of the

⁴ Gujarat. (1980). Draft : Sixth Five-Year Plan 1980-85 and Annual Plan 1981-82 : Social and Community Services. In *IDC eBooks*. <https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA75851590>

⁵ Karthikeyan, S. (2017). Dalit welfare and the SCSP: A critical appraisal. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 63(4), 639–652.

⁶ Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG). (2013). Report on performance audit of the Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan.

⁷ Nagaraj, R. (2010). Dalit development: Policies and outcomes. *Indian Journal of Human Development*, 4(2), 213–230.

⁸ Deshpande, A. (2011). *The grammar of caste: Economic discrimination in contemporary India*. Oxford University Press.

⁹ Galanter, M. (1984). *Competing equalities: Law and the backwards classes in India*. Oxford University Press.

¹⁰ Thorat, S. (2007). Caste, social exclusion and poverty linkages: Concept, measurement and empirical evidence. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42(44), 4121–4124.

¹¹ Sundar, K. (2015). Social policy and marginalised groups in India. *Journal of Social Development Studies*, 12(2), 45–61.

¹² Singh, R., & Sharma, V. (2015). Social inclusion through SCSP: An assessment of policy reforms. *Indian Journal of Social Policy*, 4(1), 23–40.

Scheduled Castes. However, the success of these guidelines ultimately depends on political will, bureaucratic capacity, and community participation at the state and local levels.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a policy document analysis approach to examine the Revised Guidelines for Implementation of the Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP) issued by the Planning Commission in 2014. Document analysis is a qualitative research method that involves systematic evaluation of official documents to gain insights into their content, intent, and implications (Bowen, 2009¹³).

III.I. DATA SOURCE

The primary source for this study is the official document titled Revised Guidelines for Implementation of Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP) by States and Union Territories (Planning Commission, 2014). Supplementary materials include earlier Planning Commission reports, audit findings of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG, 2013), and relevant government circulars.

III.II. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis focuses on four key dimensions:

1. Objectives – What are the stated goals of the revised guidelines?
2. Institutional Framework – What mechanisms are proposed for planning, Implementation, and monitoring?
3. Financial Framework – How are funds earmarked, allocated, and monitored?
4. Accountability and Transparency – What provisions exist for ensuring compliance, reporting, and social audit?

III.III. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While policy document analysis offers a structured way to examine government guidelines, it has certain limitations. First, the study relies on official documents and secondary literature, without field-level data on implementation outcomes. Second, the analysis is limited to SCSP guidelines and does not extend to the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP)¹⁴, which was also revised in 2014. Finally, variations across states in implementing SCSP are acknowledged but not explored in depth. Despite these limitations, this methodology provides a comprehensive understanding of the revised SCSP framework and its implications for inclusive planning.

IV. KEY PROVISIONS OF THE REVISED SCSP GUIDELINES (2014)

The Revised Guidelines for Implementation of the Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP), issued by the Planning Commission in 2014, represent a significant policy shift in India's approach to inclusive development.

The guidelines attempt to correct structural weaknesses in earlier SCSP implementation and propose stronger institutional, financial, and accountability mechanisms.

IV.I. OBJECTIVES OF THE REVISED GUIDELINES

The central objective is to ensure the economic, educational, and social development of Scheduled Castes in proportion to their population, through non-divertible and non-lapsable allocations that directly benefit SC households.

IV.II. IDENTIFICATION OF TARGET GROUPS

¹³ Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40.

¹⁴ Deka, S., Sehgal, M., Idris, M., & Barbora, A. (2019). Impact Assessment of Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) Project on Socio-economic Status of Tribal of Tinsukia District, Assam, India. *International Journal of Current Microbiology and Applied Sciences*, 8(04), 1670–1678. <https://doi.org/10.20546/ijemas.2019.804.195>

Beneficiaries are identified through the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC). Each SC family should be assigned a unique identity number, enabling targeted delivery of benefits.

IV.III. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The guidelines establish nodal departments, nodal agencies, and SC Development Councils at the state level, along with district-level development boards and Gram Sabha committees for grassroots planning.

IV.IV. PREPARATION OF SUB-PLANS

Departments must prepare annual sub-plans focusing on human development indicators such as literacy, health, and income levels.

IV.V. FUNDING MECHANISMS

States must establish an SCSP Fund proportionate to the SC population, controlled by nodal departments under a single budget head, with special allocations for SC women.

IV.VI. . NORMS FOR ALLOCATION

Schemes exclusively benefiting SCs receive 100% funding from SCSP; mixed schemes are funded proportionately. Non-divisible infrastructure projects are capped at one-third of the SC population share.

IV.VII. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring involves vigilance committees, monthly district reviews, quarterly state reviews, evaluation studies, and awareness programs.

IV.VIII. TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The guidelines mandate public disclosure of documents, annual social audits, grievance redressal mechanisms, performance reports in legislatures, and incentives/penalties for performance.

V. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE REVISED SCSP GUIDELINES (2014)

The 2014 revised guidelines for the Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP) introduced stronger institutional frameworks, more explicit funding norms, and mechanisms for monitoring and transparency. These reforms marked a significant step forward from earlier practices of notional allocations and weak oversight. However, challenges remain in state-level enforcement, such as risks of fund diversion and limited focus on outcome-based indicators. While the guidelines create a solid foundation for inclusive planning, their success ultimately depends on political will, institutional capacity, and genuine community participation to translate allocations into meaningful socio-economic improvements for the Scheduled Castes.

V.I. STRENGTHS

- Paradigm shift to proactive planning.
- Strong institutional framework with nodal agencies and councils.
- Clear norms for fund allocation.
- Emphasis on monitoring and social audits.

V.II. LIMITATIONS

- Weak state-level enforcement.
- Risk of bureaucratic centralisation.
- Continued diversion of funds.
- Monitoring committees are often ineffective.
- Limited focus on outcomes rather than expenditures.

V.III. BROADER IMPLICATIONS

The guidelines highlight tensions between targeted welfare and structural reforms. While allocations are necessary, systemic changes in education, employment, and land ownership are equally important.

VI. CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

VI.I. CONCLUSION

The Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP) is a key instrument for promoting social justice and inclusive growth. The 2014 revised guidelines introduced important reforms, including non-divertible funding, empowered nodal agencies, and stronger monitoring mechanisms. While these measures represent progress, persistent issues such as weak enforcement, diversion of funds, and limited focus on outcomes continue to hinder effectiveness. For SCSP to fulfil its mandate, greater political commitment, stronger accountability, and genuine community participation are essential. If implemented effectively, the revised framework can play a transformative role in reducing socio-economic disparities and ensuring dignity and equity for the Scheduled Castes.

VI.II. RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen the implementation of the Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP), it is essential to enforce compliance mechanisms more rigorously so that the earmark is stated and funds proportionate to the Scheduled Caste population are utilised. Local institutions such as Gram Sabhas and district-level development boards should be empowered with decision-making authority to ensure that grassroots priorities are reflected in planning. Monitoring systems must focus not only on expenditure but also on outcomes such as education, employment, and health indicators, so that progress can be measured in real terms. At the same time, the nodal departments require capacity building in planning, data management, and evaluation to improve efficiency. Greater involvement of civil society organisations and academic institutions in social audits and awareness campaigns can enhance transparency and accountability. Finally, targeted schemes for Scheduled Caste women should be prioritised to address gender-based disadvantages within the community.

VI.III. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The SCSP framework provides lessons for inclusive planning. It underscores the need for integrating equity into mainstream development, enhancing accountability, and shifting from symbolic allocations to transformative investments.

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