

Suggested Policies and Programmes for Consideration of Congress Government (2014-2019): Empowering Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes

Preamble

The principles of equity and inclusion have been weaved into the very fabric of the Indian National Congress. It is because of the initiatives of the Indian National Congress that the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes have seen an improvement in key socio-economic indicators. In fact the annual rate of decline for poverty in the period between 2004–05 and 2009–10 has been much higher than between 1993-94 and 2004-05 for SCs and STs.

The Indian National Congress has enacted several laws for the weaker sections including the Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 to push for rehabilitation of these families. The Constitution (117 Amendment) Bill 2012 to provide reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in promotions in government services has been passed by the Rajya Sabha. We will continue to fight the deep-seated prejudices, traditional hierarchies and disparities faced by these sections, socially, politically and economically.

The Open Manifesto Process

The Indian National Congress has pioneered an entirely new way in which political party election manifestos are prepared. It is our firm belief that the Indian National Congress Election Manifesto must reflect the voice and aspirations of the people and a new vision for the country. There were several consultations held across the country over a five-month period (from October, 2013 to March, 2014) with different stakeholders, to get their inputs on India's future growth, development and inclusion agenda.

The AICC SC, ST and OBC Departments organized multiple consultations with wide variety of citizen groups and movements. Union Ministers, Senior Congress Party office bearers and the Vice President Congress Party, Shri Rahul Gandhi attended the consultations. The SC Department, AICC also organized in-house consultations with MLAs and MPs from these communities. Finally grassroots consultations in villages and urban bastis were organized to directly reach out to the intended beneficiaries and include their suggestions in the prioritization of demands and making of the manifesto.

In addition to this a dedicated website (www.incmanifesto.in) was established to invite suggestions from all citizens for the Manifesto.

We received many suggestions through these consultations on the websites and social media platforms, phones, emails, etc. These suggestions were carefully considered and have been included, wherever feasible.

We believe this unique exercise has made the Manifesto inclusive and fully reflective of the voice of the people of India.

Major Achievements of the Congress Party for the Empowerment of SC, STs and OBCs

1. Abolished Bonded Labour with the enactment of Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 which unilaterally freed all bonded labourers from bondage with simultaneous liquidation of their debts.
2. Gave Scheduled Tribes and traditional forest dwellers rights over the land they cultivate in forest areas through the Forest Rights Act 2006.
3. Criminalized caste-based discrimination and atrocities through the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. Amendments to strengthen the Act have been proposed.
4. The new Land Acquisition Act strengthens the Gram Sabha and makes consent of the Gram Sabha mandatory before acquisition can begin in 'Schedule V' areas. The law also provides for advance compensation, resettlement in the same Schedule Area and other rights for the Tribals being displaced.
5. The Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013 prohibits employment of manual scavengers and has provisions for mandatory survey and rehabilitation of these families.
6. In 2006, the Congress led UPA Government brought about a momentous Amendment to the Constitution of India through the 93rd Amendment Act. This enables the Constitution to provide for reservations of OBCs in all educational institutions, including private institutions.
7. The Constitution (117 Amendment) Bill 2012 to provide reservation for SCs and STs has been passed by the Rajya Sabha.
8. The OBC list has been expanded to include the Jat community

9. Better education opportunities for marginalized sections has been a priority for the Indian National Congress. Initiatives like Kasturba Gandhi BalikaVidyalays, early childhood care centers and the MahilaSamakhya program have greatly contributed to an additional enrolment of around 3 million SCs and STs girl students since 2006-07.
10. Between 2007 and 2012 over Rs. 8000 crores and Rs. 3000 crores were provided as pre-matric, post matric and other types of scholarships to SC and ST students.
11. The MGNREGA, the world's largest public employment programme provides 100 days of unskilled work to every rural family. Nationally, the share of SCs and STs in the work provided under MGNREGA has been high at 40–50% across each of the years of the Scheme's implementation. Almost Rs. 74,000 crores have been provided to SC/ST households as wages under MGNREGA.
12. The MGNREGA also has a significant provision that allows for work to be taken up on individual lands of SC, STs for land development, horticulture development, irrigation etc. Till date around 14 lakh SCs, STs, and Small Marginal Farmers have benefited under this particular provision.
13. Launched the Indira AwasYojana to provide houses free of cost to BPL SCs and STs below the poverty line. The Million Wells Scheme was started to provide irrigation to farmers belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In FY 2012-13 alone, around 13.5 lakh houses have been sanctioned for SCs and STs; i.e. over 52% of the total houses sanctioned under the Scheme.
14. The Swaranjayanti Gram SwaroggarYojana (SGSY) re-launched as National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), focused on SC/ST houses in particular to link them with sustainable livelihoods. In each of the year of the Scheme's implementation 50% of the total beneficiaries were required to be SCs and STs
15. New government norms now reserve 4% of procurement from small and medium SC/ ST enterprises. This promises strident growth for dalit businesses

The Detailed Action Plan 2014 – 2019

The Indian National Congress will continue to work towards the empowerment of the marginalized sections of society.

1. We now pledge to enact central legislations on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Sub Plans so that the development of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes can be accelerated to become at par with development of other castes.
2. The Indian National Congress will ensure the passage of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Bill, 2013.
3. With a strong focus on education and vocational skills, we will endeavor to establish one Navodaya Vidyalaya type of school of high standards for weaker sections, in every Block of the country.
4. We will continue to provide assistance to fund the cost of education in both private and government institutions for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students, with priority to those students whose parental income is less than Rs. 6 lakh per annum.
5. All Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students fulfilling the admission criteria will be provided with universal access to the Rajiv Gandhi Research Fellowships. In addition, 1000 overseas scholarships for eligible students will be provided annually.
6. Every Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe unemployed graduate or post graduate will be provided with a Skill Development Voucher of Rs. 10,000 to pay for the appropriate skill development course.
7. The Indian National Congress has ensured the reservation of 4% of procurement from small and medium Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe enterprises. We will push for strict implementation of this norm.
8. The Indian National Congress, recognizing that Dalit women are more socially and economically vulnerable, has endeavored to work for their upliftment and welfare and will continue to ensure dignity through economic and social empowerment.
9. We will encourage and support Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe entrepreneurs by providing them easy access to credit and other incentives like tax rebates at the initial stages of establishment

of their business etc.

10. We will focus on development activities for creating social and economic opportunities for adivasi populations. We will ensure the stringent implementation of PESA, 1996 and the Forest Rights Act, 2006 to ensure that Scheduled Tribes are empowered and brought into the mainstream.
11. The Indian National Congress is committed to creating national consensus on affirmative action for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the private sector.
12. We will take steps to ensure that all reserved posts are filled and a special drive will be undertaken to fill all the backlog vacancies in reserved posts in Government and Public Sector Undertakings.
13. The Indian National Congress is deeply committed to developing a National Action Plan for the Development of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. There shall be a special survey, which will be undertaken once every five years to estimate, on select development indicators, the gap in the development of these groups.
14. The Indian National Congress will ensure that the existing Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Candidates will be extended to students belonging to Other Backward Classes.
15. The Indian National Congress will establish Special Commissions for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes to identify communities within each group which have not benefited from reservations and other affirmative action programmes and which need to be given a special focus.
16. The Indian National Congress will provide a special youth development package (entrepreneurship/employment) for Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected areas with special focus on women and SC/ST.

The promises detailed above reflect the Indian National Congress' commitment towards the empowerment of SC, ST OBC in response to the wide range of aspirations articulated by these communities in our consultations. We recognize that there are some more expectations expressed by these groups, which will continue to guide the Indian National Congress' efforts towards their development. The Indian National Congress is committed to finding a way forward towards meeting all such expectations of these groups, by putting in concerted efforts, as detailed below.

1. Ensure political empowerment of SCs/STs/OBCs through adequate representation of SCs/STs/OBCs in all positions within the Party and in statutory commissions/bodies, development boards and nominated posts.
2. Ensure adequate representation of SC, ST and OBCs in appointments to the posts of Governor, Chairmen of various corporation and Commissions as well as ensure their elevation to the posts of chairman of PSUs and Secretary level posts in the government.
3. Operationalize Article 15(5) of the Constitution brought in through the 93rd Constitutional Amendment by bringing a central legislation to provide reservation for SCs & STs in admissions in educational institutions, including private educational institutions, whether aided or unaided by the State.
4. Mandate reservation for SCs and STs within the 25% reservation for EWS students in admissions into private unaided schools as per the 'The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009'
5. Provide SC students with education loans **without collateral security** or guarantors
6. Set up a special capital fund to enable SC/STs establish educational institutions.
7. Ensure, regularization of contract employment in grade III and IV government posts; ending the practice of contracting safaikarmachari employment and the safaikarmacharis; payment of statutory minimum wages and fully coverage under the social security available for unorganized workers.
8. Ensure that all reserved posts are filled. The UGC will be empowered to enforce strictly the implementation of reservations for posts of lecturers, readers and professors in colleges and universities by direct recruitment or promotion.
9. A National Land Reforms Policy to ensure the effective implementation of land reforms

intended for landless SC/ST households, with provision of title-deeds to women, to enhance their access to cultivable land with irrigation facilities. This will be combined with the launch of a National Level Land Purchasing Scheme for financing the purchase of agricultural land by landless SCs/STs, including share croppers and tenant cultivators and with preferential consideration for women.

10. Waive outstanding loans advanced to BPL SC/ST/OBC families by nationalized banks or State SC Finance Corporations
11. Scheduled castes today form a large percentage of those living in poverty in urban areas. Assist them to have house of their own with proper title, access to basic civic amenities and universal access to all social security measures envisioned for the unorganized workers, as per the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008.
12. In addition to continuing the programmes that have been in place during the past 10 years:
 - a. Provide BPL cards to every SC/ST household (with appropriate exclusion criteria).
 - b. Endow every SC/ST family with a right to at least 5 cents of homestead land, a pucca house with an individual sanitary latrine, piped drinking water and electricity.
 - c. Connect every SC (and ST where appropriate) locality with an approach road and internal cement roads with proper drainage facilities.
13. Ensure due consideration of SC women and children in planning and programmes. Ensure that inter-sectionality is made a guiding principle in planning across all sectors within all policies, schemes and laws in order to ensure adequate protection of the rights of SC women and children, and that they receive their due share of entitlements under all relevant schemes.
14. Extend SC status to Dalit Minorities
15. Institute National Bank for the development of the SCs and STs on the pattern of NABARD/ National Mahila Bank. This will be the amalgamation of all existing separate Finance Development Corporations for the SCs and STs and SafaiKaramcharis that involve huge administrative expenditure and do not yield proportions returns.
16. Immediate and effective implementation of the Act guaranteeing Minimum Support Prices for the minor forest produce which is the main source of livelihood of the tribal.
17. Reserve 50% seats for SC and ST candidates in all skill development programmes

18. Allot government open land for cultivation by SC/ST/OBCs

19. Establish separate Ministry for OBCs

Appeal

We appeal to all our SC, ST and OBC friends to support the INC so that we can fulfill the promises made in the Election Manifesto

For the Indian National Congress, a Manifesto is more than a catalogue of promises and pledges to be forgotten after elections are over.

It is an agenda for governance to be followed diligently and meticulously.

It is an agenda for good governance on which progress must be reported to the people of the country, regularly, in a transparent manner.

It is in this spirit that the Congress-led UPA government has been releasing a “Report to the People” every year. This will continue.

The 2014 Lok Sabha elections will offer stark choices.

On the one side is the Indian National Congress with its long track record of achievements and accomplishments, with its vision and values bequeathed to it by a most remarkable generation of Indians led by Mahatma Gandhi.

On the other side is an ideology of hate, bigotry and prejudice, an ideology that negates the very idea of India that has been cherished by us for centuries.

On the one side is the Indian National Congress, which celebrates and rejoices in the multitude of diversities of India.

On the other side is an ideology that seeks to impose uniformity in the name of unity.

A vote for the Indian National Congress is a vote for fulfilling the aspirations of the youth of our nation, for ensuring that women lead a life of dignity.

Economic growth, social harmony, empowerment of weaker sections and strengthening of democratic institutions have to all go hand-in-hand.

It is only the Indian National Congress that will, by its very character, ensure that this happens.