

Suggested Policies and Programmes for Consideration of Congress Government (2014-2019): Agriculture and Farmers Welfare

Preamble

It has been the privilege of the Indian National Congress to have provided the political leadership that heralded significant achievements in the agriculture sector. The Green Revolution was initiated by Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru and consolidated by Indira Gandhi ji. The Revolution transformed India from an economy that was a heavy importer of food grains to a self-sufficient Nation that provided food security to its population and progressive opportunities for its farmers.

The Indian National Congress has stress on achieving rapid growth which involves faster growth in agriculture, and especially in rain-fed areas where most of the poor live. We have focused on making farming a profitable occupation. Programmes for agricultural diversification, agri-processing and rural industrialization have been pursued systematically. Dairying, aquaculture, fisheries, horticulture and sericulture have also received a boost.

During 2010-11, inclement agro-climatic conditions affected several parts of the country interfering with agricultural production process. However, due to pro-active intervention, the detrimental impact could be nullified leading to a record agricultural production in the year.

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 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.

Series of consultations were organized with farmer organizations, small and marginal farmers, women farmers, movements and experts from the field.

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 Agriculture and Farmers Welfare

1. Due to the forward-looking reforms instituted by the Indian National Congress, the agriculture GDP growth went up from 2.6% (under the NDA) to 3.1% under UPA-I and further to 4% under UPA-II.
2. Today, we produce 263 million tonnes of food grains. Ten years ago, we produced 213 million tonnes of food grains. A similar trend of increased production is true for oilseeds, sugarcane, cotton, potatoes etc.
3. The Congress-led UPA government has endeavoured to make agriculture profitable and support farmers through (i) increasing Minimum Support Prices (MSP); the MSP for wheat went up from Rs. 640 per quintal in 2004-05 to Rs. 1400 per quintal in 2013-14 (ii) by waiving farmer loans and (iii) by increasing credit from banks and reducing interest rates on crop loans and (iv) improving irrigation infrastructure.
4. Several programmes for land development have been undertaken. The Desert Development Programme (DDP), Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) and Integrated Wastelands Development Programme (IWDP) have been integrated into a comprehensive Integrated Watershed Development Management Programme (IWMP).
5. The Congress-led UPA focused on increasing access to inputs. The Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) has been introduced w.e.f. 1.4.2010, replacing the erstwhile concession scheme, for P&K fertilizers.
6. Accelerated Pulses Production Programme was introduced in 2010-11 in 16 States covering about 1 million ha area to boost the production of pulses.
7. Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojna was launched in 2007. This Programme has been at the core of the agriculture development in the last few years, particularly for sectors like animal husbandry, dairying and fisheries sectors.
8. Livestock Insurance Scheme was launched in 2006 to provide protection to the farmers and cattle rearers against any eventual loss of their animals due to death.

9. National Horticulture Mission was launched in 2005 to enhance horticulture production, support technological innovations through an area based regionally differentiated strategies. Per capita availability of fruits and vegetables has increased to about 169 gms/person/day and 332 gms/person/day respectively.
10. The seminal Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 - a key campaign promise of the Indian National Congress in 2009 - was enacted in 2013 after two years of nationwide consultations. This law was a historic victory for our brothers and sisters working in the agriculture sector. The law ensures that land cannot be acquired without the land owners consent, promises up to four times the prevailing market value as compensation and repeals the draconian Land Acquisition Act of 1894.

The Detailed Action Plan 2014 - 2019

The Indian National Congress will continue to provide an impetus to agricultural growth productivity and incomes. We will also stay focused on providing all possible support for all farmers, in particular women and small and marginal farmers.

1. The Indian National Congress instituted schemes like the RashtriyaKrishiVikasYojana. As a result of these measures, the agriculture GDP growth went up from 2.6% (under the BJP) to 3.1% under UPA-I and further to 4% under UPA-II.
2. The historic decision by the Congress-led UPA government to allow Foreign Direct Investment in multi-brand retail will transform the agrarian economy as it will create a beneficial value chain from farm to fork, creating rural infrastructure for sorting, grading, packing, cold storage facilities and ware housing. It will ensure that the farmer gets a much higher value for his price.
3. We will continue to nurture private-public partnerships for increasing investments in value chains, cold storage facilities, grading and standardization, quality certification and warehouses. This will greatly aid in increasing agriculture exports.
4. We will add 1 crore hectares to irrigated area by completing the radical Water Reforms Agenda of the 12th Plan, which is based on Irrigation Management Transfer to Water Users Associations of farmers. This will ensure Gross Irrigated Area crosses 100 million hectares in India.
5. The current water use efficiency in irrigation is 40%. The Indian National Congress will actively support more efficient water use technologies including reuse and recycling of water. We will complete the historic aquifer mapping and groundwater management programme launched by UPA-II over the next five years to ensure sustainable utilisation of groundwater to secure the

livelihoods of lakhs of our farmers, particularly in regions where groundwater depletion has taken place.

6. Small and marginal farmers own more than half the country's total cattle and buffalo. However, only 12% of the total expenditure on agriculture is on livestock development. The Indian National Congress will place a special emphasis on livestock, fisheries, opening of veterinary schools and centres, fodder development through animal husbandry programmes and schemes like MGNREGA. MGNREGA will also be harnessed to support the construction of poultry shelters and water bodies for fisheries.
7. The Indian National Congress will increase spending to ensure access and quality in agriculture education, including increasing the amount for and number of post-matric scholarships and research fellowships and for veterinary students.
8. The Indian National Congress will increase coverage of crop insurance schemes, from the current 25% to 50%, particularly among the small and marginal farmers and non-loanee farmers. Settlement of claims on time, better crop yield estimation to determine premiums etc. and involvement of private sector will be other areas of focus.
9. The Indian National Congress will allocate special funds to agriculture research to develop new technologies for disease management of crops and livestock, high yielding varieties of crops, etc.
10. The Indian National Congress will promote resource conservation technologies and agriculture practices like integrated farming, zero tillage, organic farming and develop wastelands for dry land farming.
11. We will cover 250 lakh hectares as watersheds, as part of the dramatically reformed Integrated Watershed Management Programme launched by UPA-II.
12. There are lakhs of families in our coastal belts that depend on fishing for their livelihood. To enhance their welfare, a new Ministry of Fisheries will be established and all steps will be taken to further enhance their livelihood security.
13. The Indian National Congress honouring the commitment made in the 2009 Manifesto enacted the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013. The Indian National Congress will ensure fast and fair implementation of the Act such that farmers and landowners get adequate compensation for their acquired land.
14. The Indian National Congress has more than doubled the Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for

wheat and paddy from 2004-05 to 2013-14. The MSP for other cereals increased three-fold. We will continue our endeavour to provide higher MSPs for farm products to increase profitability of agriculture.

15. The Indian National Congress will provide concessional loans to groups/collectives of small, marginal farmers and women farmers upto Rs. 5 lakh to enable them to gain better access to inputs and services.
16. The Indian National Congress will strive to lower interest rates for farmers to ensure they are able to access extension services and agriculture inputs like seed, water, fertilizers etc.

The promises detailed above reflect the Indian National Congress' commitment towards agriculture and farmers welfare, in response to the wide range of aspirations articulated by this community 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. Review feasibility of linking subsidies to the size of land holdings to ensure equitable access of government welfare spending for small and marginalized farmers
2. Transfer ownership and funds for management of downstream water canal networks to gram panchayats
3. Ensure access of soil moisture measuring sensors for all farmers
4. Set up debt recovery tribunal to resolve disputes related to farmers' loans.
5. Provide subsidized loans to cooperative societies to purchase farm machinery
6. Provide 50% subsidy for crop insurance premiums
7. Institute Government program to appoint agriculture graduates to provide training and support to small farmers in villages. Provide soil card for all agricultural land
8. Regulate commission chargeable on agriculture produce sale
9. Provide advance information on MSPs to farmers to enable informed sowing decision-making
10. Make provision for farmers to sell produce throughout the week to supplement weekly market which functions on one day only

11. Ensure protection of farmer interests in the Seeds Bill
12. Provide substantial subsidy on knee length boots and rubber gloves to guard against snake bites, electrical short-circuits, finger bruises etc
13. Implement crop insurance/risk mitigation system to prevent debt servitude
14. Provide increased subsidy on milch machines for women dairy farmer
15. Improve data collection/management for crop survey methods, installation of rain gauge etc
16. Ensure improved input services and infrastructure such as electricity supply, irrigation works, welfare schemes etc.
17. Bring a KisanSwaraj Policy to ensure economic security and viability of agriculture based livelihoods, ecological sustainability to preserve productive natural resources, people's control over agricultural resources, ensuring non-toxic/diverse/nutritious/adequate food for all
18. Allow farmers to sell produce in open markets and not just designated mandis
19. Ensure adequate representation of farmers in the Agricultural Prices Commission
20. Ensure easy access to tractors through collateral-free loans and provision of tractors at factory rates
21. Reduce the role of middle men between farmers and consumers where possible
22. Policy on export-import of agricultural products to be made in consultation with agricultural ministry
23. Provide usage-linked subsidy on electricity bills for small farmers
24. Establish a National Farmers Commission to advance the interests and development of farmers
25. Eliminate harmful chemicals and provide safe alternatives to prevent and treat health problems in farmers
26. Introduce agriculture as a subject in rural schools for classes 6-10
27. Provide for a separate agriculture budget
28. Ensure protection of Western Ghats and the interests of farmers of the region
29. Safeguard farmers interests while entering into trade agreements
30. Encourage crop diversification in response to declining water tables

Appeal

We appeal to all our farmer 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.

Suggested Policies and Programmes for Consideration of Congress Government (2014-2019): Empowerment of Minorities

Preamble

The Indian National Congress has always believed in affirmative action for all religious minorities including Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis and Jains and linguistic minorities. We have remained committed to protecting their rights and our secular nationalism is founded on a celebration of India's many diversities.

The Congress-led UPA Government constituted the Sachar Committee in 2005 to report social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community in India. A separate Ministry of Minority Affairs was constituted in 2006 to ensure focused interventions to deal with issues relating to the minorities and to facilitate their development. The Prime Minister's New 15 Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities was launched in June, 2006 to ensure equitable allocation of resources for development of minorities by earmarking 15% of target/outlays under important flagship development programmes of Government. The districts with more than 20% Muslim population were identified for special attention under different programmes. Educational empowerment of minorities is an avowed objective for our Party.

The minority welfare programmes and policies of the Indian National Congress have begun to show significant results, like increase in education levels, financial inclusion, etc.

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 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.

In keeping with the belief of Congress party leadership that the party's manifesto must reflect the voice and aspirations of the common people, widespread consultations were held with various minority communities. The Congress Vice President Shri Rahul Gandhi personally interacted with the representatives from Minority communities from all over the country.

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 Minorities

1. The Ministry of Minority Affairs was created on 29th January, 2006 under the Congress-led UPA to ensure a more focused approach towards issues relating to the Minorities.
2. The Prime Minister's 15-Point Programme for Welfare of Minorities was set up to focus on their education, health, employment, housing, safety etc.
3. Today the Minorities have 43,52,000 bank accounts in 121 districts of the country. The total volume of lending stands at Rs. 66,500 crore. Ten years ago, minorities had 14,15,000 bank accounts. The total volume of lending was just Rs. 4,000 crore.
4. Education has been a major focus for the Indian National Congress. The enrolment of Muslim children at the primary level has increased from 9.4% in 2006-07 to 14.2% in 2012-13; this has exceeded the share of Muslims in the country's population. Enrolment at the upper primary level has also gone up from 7.2 percent to 12.1 percent during the same period.
5. Several scholarship Schemes have been started, where 30% of scholarships are reserved for girl students ensuring proper focus on redressing gender imbalance in education. The total beneficiaries under these Schemes are around 3 crore.
6. The Congress-led UPA instituted the Multi-Sectoral Development Programme. The Programme has been implemented in 90 minority districts of 20 States and UTs.
7. The Indian National Congress has launched new programmes for skilling minority men and women; Nai Roshni is a Scheme that aims to build the capacity of women to provide them with knowledge, tools and techniques for interacting with Government systems, banks, intermediaries etc. Seekho Aur Kamao (Learn & Earn) is a Skill Development Initiative for Minorities
8. Maulana Azad Taleem-e-Balighan has been launched to impart functional literacy, basic education, vocational skill development and continuing education to cover about one crore Muslim adults in the age group of 15 years and above.
9. More than 24.77 lakh houses have been constructed for minorities with an expenditure of Rs. 8,276.69 crores under Indira Awas Yojna (IAY).

10. The welfare and protection of minority children have also remained an area of focus for us. Around 70,106 Anganwadi Centres operationalised in minority concentration blocks under Integrated Child Development Scheme.
11. The Waqf Act has been amended with effect from 1st November, 2013 for improving the management of waqf properties and streamlining of functioning of State Waqf Boards.
12. National Waqf Development Corporation (NAWADCO) has been set up for developing the potential waqf properties of about 6 lakh acres in the country.
13. Computerization of records of State Waqf Boards is being undertaken. 2,81,427 waqf records have been computerised and pre-digitization work of 1,15,518 waqf properties completed thus far.

The Detailed Action Plan 2014 - 2019

The Indian National Congress will focus on accelerating concrete, sustainable and long-term plans for the welfare of the Nation's Minorities.

The Indian National Congress has always been at the forefront in promoting schemes for the welfare of minorities. A separate and dedicated Ministry of Minority Affairs was established under the first Congress-led UPA Government. Since then many far-reaching programmes in various sectors have been implemented with significant results.

1. Numerous scholarships have been distributed to children belonging to the minority community. The Corpus of the Maulana Azad Education Foundation has been more than tripled to over 700 crores in an attempt to encourage candidates from the minority communities to pursue opportunities in higher education. This work will be continued so as to ensure that no child who applies for educational support is denied a scholarship at any level.
2. To encourage entrepreneurship ('Priority Sector Lending' disbursement for minorities has steadily increased), we will continue to ensure that members of the minority communities have easy access to credit and other incentives like tax rebates etc.
3. For the effective management of Waqf properties and in realisation of the specific promise made in 2009, the Congress-led UPA Government became the first Government to pass a law providing clear guidelines to prevent the usurpation and mismanagement of Waqf properties. The Indian National Congress pledges to continue with this programme.
4. The Communal Violence Bill which was drafted and introduced by the Indian National Congress will be passed as a matter of priority.
5. The Congress-led UPA Government has taken steps to address the conditions of backward minorities by providing for reservation in educational institutions and in Government employment. We will pursue this closely in the Supreme Court and ensure that the policy is implemented through proper legislation.

6. We will work to create a ready corpus, along the lines of the Maulana Azad Educational Fund for young entrepreneurs. Skills development programmes for minorities which have been carried out successfully in various districts, will be implemented across the country.

7. While much work has been done to implement the recommendations of the Sachar Committee, the Indian National Congress will work tirelessly to ensure that every single recommendation is reviewed and efforts are made for their implementation.

The promises detailed above reflect the Indian National Congress' commitment towards the empowerment of Minority communities, 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. Extension of Scheduled Caste status to all Dalit Minorities
2. Examine feasibility of mandating the next Delimitation Commission to ensure that Minorities aren't disenfranchised through reservation of constituencies where minority population equals or exceeds SC/ST population
3. Ensure adequate representation of Minorities in all public positions
4. Ensure that funds earmarked for Minorities are allocated to various minority groups in a population-proportionate manner
5. Earmark reservation of 4.5 percent for backward Muslims in the existing OBC reservations
6. Ensure adequate representation of minorities in student and faculty in educational institutions
7. Establish a Minority Commission in every state to safeguard the interests of minorities
8. Undertake special awareness drives to educate Minorities about government schemes for their benefit
9. Ensure improved accountability mechanisms for proper implementation of government schemes for the welfare of minorities
10. Press for implementation of former Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi's letter to state chief ministers to ensure that Waqf properties illegally occupied by state and Central governments are vacated and restored to the State Waqf Boards
11. Ensure utilization of funds allocated for the publicity of Madrasa Scheme (SPQEM) in Urdu and other languages
12. Ensure implementation of Central Urdu Teachers Scheme across states
13. Empower Equal Opportunity Commission to check discrimination against Minorities in employment and education opportunities
14. Institute a Committee to enquire into the socio-economic status of all Minority groups, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Muslims to ensure equitable access to government benefits for the welfare of Minorities

Appeal

We appeal to all our friends from the Minorities community to support the INC so that we can fulfill the promises made in the Election manifesto to the minorities communities.

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

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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.

Suggested Policies and Programmes for Consideration of Congress Government (2014-2019): Empowering Panchayati Raj and Urban Local Bodies As Institutions of Local Self-Government

Preamble

Devolution of power is one of the fundamental political ideas that have driven the Congress Party. Our uncompromising commitment towards the decentralised system of governance comes from the legacy of our great leaders Mahatma Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi who had deep conviction about the transformative energy of millions of Indians. Our Party has acted upon its belief in devolution through the passage of the 73rd and 74th Amendments of Constitution. With that single action, we as a Nation enshrined the third tier of government in our Panchayats and Municipalities.

The Congress Party is committed to continuing on this journey to allow the emergence of the third tier as vibrant democratic 'institutions of local self-government'. We will continue to strengthen systems that devolve political power to the very grassroots of the Nation, all the way to its people.

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 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 Rajiv Gandhi Panchayati Raj Sanghatan (RGPRS) conducted a large-scale and systematic participatory program between December 2013 and February 2014 to reach out to Panchayati Raj and Urban Local Government (ULG) practitioners across the country and bring their wisdom into the Congress manifesto. RGPRS conducted 280 'Jan Aavaz Sanghoshtis' at the Block/District level and two consultations at the National level, in which over 10,000 practitioners of Panchayati Raj and Urban Local Bodies participated. Gram Sarpanchs, Gram Panchayat Ward Members, Block Panchayat Presidents and Members, Zilla Parishad Chairpersons and Members, Chairpersons and Ward Members of Nagar Panchayats, Municipal Councils and Municipal Corporations, Panchayat Secretaries, Anganwadi Field Workers, Congress Party Office Bearers and Workers, representatives of NGOs, social workers, teachers, village leaders, officials of local District and Block administrations, and SHG women leaders participated in the consultations to discuss and highlight the challenges

faced by them in Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies in exercising their leadership and fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.

These consultations were conducted by 64 trained Conveners who made great efforts to get the opinions and voices of women, dalits, marginalized groups and minorities among others in these consultations. One consultation was conducted exclusively with elected women representatives of Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies to understand specific challenges faced by women representatives at the grassroots.

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.

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Major Achievements of the Congress Party for the Empowerment of Panchayati Raj and Urban Local Bodies

- After the enactment of the landmark 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, we enacted the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) that extended Panchayats to tribal areas. We have recently issued guidelines for the effective implementation of PESA.
- With the launch of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), the Indian National Congress has given a major impetus to urban reforms in India.
- JNNURM was a landmark initiative undertaken by the Congress led Government; it put the urban agenda center stage. We will launch JNNURM-II will give priority to the strengthening of human and institutional capabilities, local planning and improvement in governance.
- With programmes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, we have secured more financial, planning and development powers to the Gram Panchayats; the average annual expenditure under the programme for a Panchayat is around Rs. 15 lakh.
- The seminal Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 strengthened the role of PRIs by making the consent of the Gram Sabha mandatory for acquisition in the Scheduled Areas under the Fifth Schedule referred to in the Constitution and by involving Panchayat representatives in the Social Impact Assessment Study.

- The Congress-led UPA initiated the Rural Business Hubs (RBH) Scheme with the aim to synergistically linking rural areas/producers with industrial and marketing organizations so that rural products can reach wider market and the benefits of value addition are shared.
- The Congress-led UPA government set up consultative mechanisms to review the functioning of Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) in the States/UTs. These mechanisms at different levels have been constantly monitoring the progress and implementation of decisions related to the devolution of powers to the Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- The Congress-led UPA launched a series of schemes to empower the Panchayats. These schemes include Panchayat Empowerment and Accountability Incentive Scheme (PEIAS) which has now been merged with Rajiv Gandhi Panchayat Sashaktikaran Abhiyan (RGPSA); Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Yojana, Panchayat Mahila Evam Yuva Shakti Abhiyan and Backward Regions Grant Fund.
- To make Panchayats more transparent, efficient and accountable, a wide range of web applications have been rolled out under e-Panchayats Schemes for facilitating e-Governance in Panchayats.

The Detailed Action Plan 2014 - 2019

1. The Indian National Congress will substantially increase Panchayat funding, especially of untied funds. We will also encourage Panchayats to raise their own resources so that Panchayat representatives, in consultation with Gram and Ward Sabhas, can themselves decide how and on what to spend their money.
2. We will set up a National Panchayati Raj Commission, with branches in each State and Union Territory, so that:
 - a. Probity and transparency is ensured in the functioning of Panchayats and their elected representatives
 - b. Panchayati Raj functions in line with the Constitution and the laws of the land, especially in tribal areas covered by PESA
 - c. Gram Sabhas are strengthened and legally mandated to secure responsible and responsive local government
 - d. The individual citizen is empowered to secure through the local Panchayat, his or her rights and entitlements and other benefits provided for in the Constitution.

The promises detailed above reflect the Indian National Congress' commitment towards the empowerment of the institutions of local self-government, 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. Restore the Dignity and Respect of Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies and their Representatives

Systematic efforts have reduced the role of Panchayati Raj and Urban Local Bodies to implementation agencies and elected representatives to agents of various departments and schemes.

No PRI and ULB representative should be punished, reprimanded and ill-treated by the agencies of executives. We shall strive to end all practices that keep '*Elected Representatives*' disempowered. Highlighting one of the significant demands heard in most of the consultations, we also emphasize the Constitutional role of PRIs and ULBs as 'institutions of local self- government', and not as implementation agencies.

- End all discriminatory rules against the Rural and Urban body representatives. Ensure uniform eligibility criteria for candidates for Parliament, State Assemblies, Panchayat representatives or representatives of Urban Bodies elections.
- Secure the rights and dignity of elected representatives in all bodies of local self-governments. We will ensure that elected representatives of Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies are accountable to the people and cannot be punished or dismissed by the executives or government officials. Alternate mechanisms will be evolved to ensure accountability of such elected representatives while minimizing bureaucratic intervention and role
- Take input from elected representatives to write the Annual Confidential Reports of Government Employees in their work areas
- Ensure inclusion of elected PRI and ULB representatives as voters in the Legislative Council seat for Panchayati Raj Institutions

2. Devolve Power (funds, functions and functionaries) to Panchayati Raj and Urban Local Bodies

In the current form, elected representatives of all three tiers of Panchayati Raj and the Urban Local Bodies experience a lot of centralisation of power within the system as rigid *Government Resolutions* manipulate all the funds and functions. Elected Representatives have no power to hire their functionaries. Though, all the state governments have enacted laws in tune with 73rd and 74th Amendments to implement Panchayati Raj and Urban Local Bodies system, most of them are yet to transfer the required resources, 'funds, functions and functionaries' to strengthen the units of local self-governments. Besides this, existing parallel bureaucratic structures in Centrally

Sponsored Schemes (CSS) and in various Urban Development Authorities are instrumental in undermining the role and mandate of PRIs and Urban Local Bodies.

- Urge state governments to devolve all 29 subjects of Article 11 in the 73rd Amendment and 18 subjects of Article 12 in the 74th Amendment to the PRIs and Urban Local Bodies.
- Devolve maximum power to Gram Sabhas, all three tiers of Panchayats and the Urban Local Bodies and end the '*Government Resolution Raj*' in all the states.
- Our government will develop comprehensive guidelines for creating specific guidelines under respective state acts. This set of guideline will explain the role, functions and rights of PRIs and Urban Local Bodies. This will see an end of '*GR Raj*'.
- Ensure that beneficiary selection of all Central Schemes is undertaken only by the Gram Sabha.
- Implement these suggestions in centrally sponsored schemes and link fund transfers to states based upon the adherence of these principles. Ensure that these guidelines and principles of devolution are followed in all the central legislations, as done in '*Land Acquisition Act 2013*'.
- Allocateworks under state departments and local governments on the basis of the principle of Subsidiarity, i.e. every task must be done at the level at which it is best done.
- Ensure reasonable proportion of Government of India revenues go to PRIs and Urban Local Bodies.
- Make effective functioning of State Finance Commission mandatory as this is the only Constitutional process to meet the financial requirements of local self-governments.
- Create a devolution friendly environment in all the states. An Independent National Level Devolution Commission consisting of practitioners and experts will be created under the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the Ministry of Urban Development to assess the status of devolution across the states periodically. A *People's Devolution Index* will be constructed through participatory methods to suggest measures to strengthen PRIs and Urban Local Bodies.
- Link the state allocation decisions of Central Finance Commission to the People's Devolution Index. This index will be an additional one to the existing CFC parameters in devolving funds to the states.
- Ensure decentralized planning for the 13th Five Year Plan and begin preparation from 2014-15.
- Discourage parallel bureaucratic authorities for urban development. Those urban bodies implementing development plans through *Nagarik Sabhas* will be promoted through an incentivised system under Ministry of Urban Development.

- Integrate all parallel bodies in health, education, agriculture, water supply and sanitation with PRIs and ULBs.

3. Strengthen Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies for them to Emerge as Institutions of Local Self-Government

- Substantially increase Panchayat funding, especially of untied funds.
- Launch special training programmes for all PRI and ULB representatives to enhance their understanding of Panchayati Raj Institutions, Urban Local Bodies, their roles and responsibilities and the provisions in the Centrally Sponsored Schemes
- Launch a massive ‘devolution awareness campaign’ under the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and Urban Local Bodies
- Ensure internet connectivity of all Zilla Parishad Panchayats, Block Panchayats, Gram Panchayats and all Urban Local Bodies. Ensure steps to electronically network them.
- Transfer all departments to ULBs
- Ensure that ULBs have the authority to implement rehabilitation programmes for those displaced by the Slum Eradication and Poverty Alleviation Programmes

4. Deepen Participation of Women in Gram Sabhas, Panchayati Raj and Urban Local Bodies

We believe in creating a gender sensitive political environment in the country to ensure the effective participation of women in politics and governance. To make this possible, we will take steps to address the widespread complaints from women representatives across the country about the discriminatory and gender insensitive work space and hostile work environment in the PRIs and ULBs.

- Increase reservation of women from 33.3% to 50% in PRIs and Urban Local Bodies.
- Bring the urban and rural local bodies under the purview of Work Place Act to provide protection and safe work environment for elected women representatives. Ensure implementation of Vishakha guidelines stipulated by the Supreme Court.
- Constitute special assistance fund to promote gender budgeting in local governments through incentivisation. This will encourage the local governments to initiate various provisions for women and children like ladies toilets in public places, training centres, working women’s and girls’ hostels, crèches, transit camp for sex workers and street children etc.
- Formulate and implement gender sensitisation programmes for elected male members and officials under Ministries of Panchayati Raj, Urban Development and Women and Child Development

5. Ensure the Implementation of Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act

- Ensure that the Ministry of Tribal Affairs incentivises states which implement the PESA Act in letter and spirit. Central funds earmarked for Scheduled Areas will be allotted with the guidelines congruent to the PESA act.
- Ensure that the Special Central Funds to the tribal regions under Maoist influence are spent effectively. We will initiate a mechanism among the ministries concerned that can help the elected Panchayat representatives in those regions to formulate plans through the Gram Sabhas in participatory manner.

Appeal

We appeal all our PRI and ULB elected representatives 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.

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 SwarojgarYojana (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

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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.

Suggested Policies and Programmes for Consideration of Congress Government (2014-2019): Empowering Youth and Students

Preamble

The Indian National Congress believes our youth is our biggest asset. In the 1980s, Rajiv Gandhi gave the youth of India the 'Right to Vote' by reducing the voting age to 18. When the Lok Sabha passed this Bill, he said it was "an expression of our full faith in the youth of the Country". He also brought about the Information Technology revolution in order to facilitate the growing aspirations of the youth of this nation. In the past decade not only have we actively encouraged young leadership and political opportunities for all but also remained committed to creating an enabling and rewarding environment to build the capacity of our youth to take on roles more actively in our country's future. We spend more than Rs. 90,000 crore across various schemes for the youth, and we will only increase this.

The Indian National Congress has been unequivocal in its emphasis and support for providing affordable and quality education. We strongly feel that education is a 'great equalizer' and that an inclusive and accessible education system is an essential foundation for an equitable society. We also believe that it is the right of every student to have a voice in decision-making that moulds our education system.

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 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 National Students' Union of India (NSUI) and Indian Youth Congress (IYC) held widespread consultations with students and youth across the country to channel their views and aspirations into the Manifesto of the Congress party.

To this end, NSUI initiated hundreds of consultations involving college, district and state units across the country. Inputs were also received in writing as well as via social media platforms. NSUI also created a web portal exclusively for the manifesto consultation process, and thousands of ideas and suggestions were received through this portal.

Similarly, the Indian Youth Congress engaged in extensive deliberations across the country through its State Units and organized several consultations and discussions with youth across different walks of life and social groups. A consultation exercise was organized in Bangalore where a diverse group of youth from across the country interacted with Congress Vice President, Shri Rahul Gandhi and shared their thoughts and aspirations. In addition, written feedback forms and responses via emails, text messages were also sought online. Youth connected with the Nehru Yuva Kendra have also contributed their suggestions and ideas in this process.

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.

Achievements

1. The UPA Government has formulated the National Skill Development Mission in 2008-09 to contribute significantly to overall target of skilling/upskilling 50 crore youth in India by 2022.
2. Under UPA I and II, the per capita public expenditure on education increased from Rs. 888 in 2004-05 to Rs. 2,985 in 2011-12.
3. We enacted the Right to Education Act 2009, which provides for free and compulsory education for children between the ages of 6 and 14. As a result, enrolment of children at the primary education stage has now reached near-universal levels. 1.98 lakh primary schools and 1.1 lakh upper primary schools have been constructed.
4. More than 10 crore children benefit from Mid-Day Meal Scheme annually. More than 26 lakh cook cum helpers are currently engaged to prepare and serve mid-day meals to the school children.
5. A scheme for construction and running of girls' hostels for students of secondary and higher secondary schools in about 3,500 educationally backward blocks of the country was launched in November, 2008.
6. The actual enrolment in Higher Education grew from 16.6 crore to 25.9 crore during the 11th Plan period. The Gross Enrolment Ratio for Higher Education went up from 12.3 percent in 2006-07 to 17.9 percent in 2011-12.

7. Central Universities increased from 17 to 44 during 2004 to 2013. Almost each State now has at least 1 Central University. In the period after 2004-05, the number of IITs has increased from 7 to 16 and the number of IIMs from 6 to 13. Five new IISERs have been established. The number of Indian Institutes of Information Technology has also doubled to 4.
8. The National Mission of Education through ICT aims at ensuring high speed broadband connectivity to universities and colleges and providing access devices at low cost. About 400 universities and more than 19000 colleges have already been provided connectivity under the Mission.
9. With the aim of providing at least one NIT in each of the larger States/ UTs, the Government has since established 10 new NITs at Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Goa, Delhi, Uttarakhand and Puducherry (as of 2011-'12).
10. The Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development was upgraded as an Institute of National Importance.
11. A set of special initiatives, including the skill development and employment Scheme called "Himayat" and the special industry initiative, known as "Udaan" have been launched for the youth of Jammu and Kashmir. Himayat aims to train 1,00,000 youth in 5 years and provide atleast 75% of them with jobs. "Udaan" aims to target 40,000 youth in 5 years.
12. The UPA Government has launched the Panchayat Yuva Kheela Utkarsha Abhiyan to promote sports and nurture talents at the block and village levels by ensuring universal access to basic sports infrastructure.
13. Rs. 142.47 crore was spent on 732 athletes under Operation Excellence for London Olympics, 2012" to improve India's medal count in the Olympic Games.
14. Skill acquisition was introduced as an additional component for 30,000 volunteers of National Service Scheme in 2011.
15. The National Youth Corps (NYC) scheme has been launched to tap the potential of the youth for channelizing their energy towards nation building. Under the scheme, 17600 volunteers, including 7098 volunteers in Jammu & Kashmir have been selected, trained and deployed in different districts across the country so far.

The Detailed Action Plan 2014 - 2019

The Indian National Congress will continue to focus on youth capacity building, education, leadership and development. Opening up the political system and giving a voice to each and every young Indian will continue to be a priority area.

Building the Best Education System in the World for our Students

The Indian National Congress has been unequivocal in its emphasis and support for providing affordable and quality education. We will continue to keep education on the very top of our development agenda.

Education is the backbone of human development and is vital to ensuring equal social, political and economic opportunities for all citizens. We enacted the Right to Education Act 2009, which provides for free and compulsory education for children between the ages of 6 and 14. As a result, enrolment of children at the primary education stage has now reached near-universal levels. 1.98 lakh primary schools and 1.1 lakh upper primary schools have been constructed. Under UPA I and II, the per capita public expenditure on education increased from Rs. 888 in 2004–05 to Rs. 2,985 in 2011–12. Our focus will now be on improving the quality of education- we will move from “SarvaShikshaAbhiyan” to “SarvshreshthShikshaAbhiyan.”

1. The Indian National Congress will strengthen the implementation of the Right to Education Act to ensure quality learning outcomes, adequate infrastructure and facilities in school, regular teacher training and an optimal Pupil Teacher Ratio. We will also ensure quality in teacher training by making suitable investments and amendments to regulations, wherever required.
2. We will enhance focus and resources on the implementation of the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan, to improve quality of secondary education. We will achieve near universal enrolment in secondary education with a Gross Enrolment Ratio of 100% by 2019.
3. The Indian National Congress will place a special emphasis on reducing the drop-out rate particularly in middle and secondary levels.
4. We will establish an independent regulatory mechanism to oversee State and private institutions to ensure standardization and quality of education.
5. We will support regional and context specific curriculums as well focus on developing life skills including leadership building.
6. We are committed to the cause of special education. We will provide special measures for children

with special needs and disabilities. We will also award priority to developing infrastructure for differently-abled persons.

7. The Indian National Congress will take systematic steps to address issues relating to discrimination against students from the North East and Jammu and Kashmir.
8. We will continue to place a special focus on ensuring educational access to civil strife affected areas and the North East region.
9. To focus on higher education, we launched the Rashtriya Uchhatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) to provide strategic funding to improve college and university infrastructure. RUSA will help create 70 new universities, provide infrastructure in current universities, upgrade autonomous colleges to Universities, and create a new model of general degree colleges and professional institutions.
10. The Indian National Congress will set up a 'National Commission for Students', a body which will protect and promote the interest of students. This commission will review the constitutional and legal safeguards for students, recommend remedial legislative measures, facilitate redressal of grievances and advise the government on all policy matters concerning students.
11. The Indian National Congress will continue to expand its support to providing interest-free educations loans to students at all levels especially to weaker sections of society.
12. The Indian National Congress is committed to exploring the possible partnerships with the private sector in the delivery of education. New PPP models will be explored and appropriate regulation systems, accreditation procedures, policies and incentives will be developed, to enable private education providers to take on the challenge of expanding and improving secondary education, in particular.
13. Indian National Congress will establish a National Youth Commission, which will be a professional and dedicated focal point for youth development in all aspects.
14. We will establish a central students exchange programme to encourage National unity.

Promoting Sports

The Indian National Congress remains committed to ensuring that sports opportunities are expanded and made more available and accessible to the youth.

Love of sports invigorates the soul of the Nation; its youth. It breeds competition and fair play. We will strive to be a Nation where sport in all its forms is promoted and encouraged.

1. Due to the UPA-II's recent efforts India has been reinstated as a member of the International

Olympic Committee. The Indian National Congress will continue to clean up sports administration. We will ensure active involvement of former sportspersons in sports administration.

2. The Rajiv Gandhi Khel Abhiyan launched by the Congress-led UPA government will be implemented to ensure high quality sporting facilities in every block of the country.
3. A National Sports Education University will be set up to educate students of exceptional talent. There would be a team of experts who would be continuously scouting for talent in every sport across the country in the age-group 8-15 years. It will have world class coaches and facilities.

Other Youth Issues

The Indian National Congress will promote social inclusiveness, employability and entrepreneurship development among the youth.

1. 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.
2. We will start a special drive for recruitment from North East and Jammu & Kashmir for aspirants in Railways, Indian Army and other central government departments.
3. The Indian National Congress remains committed to eradicating the problem of drug abuse. A nation-wide assessment of the prevalence of this problem will be undertaken. Funding will be adequately provided for drug-rehabilitation centres which will be set up in each district by 2020.
4. The National Service Scheme, launched by the Congress-led UPA government for graduates, aims to enhance IT literacy, financial literacy, English communication and other soft skills; to make the youth more employable. The Indian National Congress is committed to increasing funding and reach of this scheme while prioritising its implementation.
5. We will seek to ensure priority to differently-abled youth with respect to education and employment opportunities.
6. We will set up government run employment exchange/ facilitation centers for youth seeking foreign employment opportunities. These will help curtail middlemen/fraudulent recruiting agencies. The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs will be the nodal agency.

The promises detailed above reflect the Indian National Congress' commitment towards the empowerment of students and youth, 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. Provide an increased focus on IT for education using internet and mobile technology at scale such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC).
2. Provide a legislative framework for compulsory elections to student unions in all private as well as Government institutions across India.
3. Develop a model law to frame guidelines for the establishment of VidyarthiPanchayat, an open forum for students and authorities to resolve grievances and participate in decision-making.
4. Establish A 'National Research & Development Fund' to encourage innovation in all streams of education.
5. Institute National Students and Youth Exchange Programme to encourage National unity
6. Ensure that all public educational institutions in India publish details of faculty engaged and budgets online as mandated under Section 4 of the RTI Act.
7. Frame a model law against ragging and discrimination in education institutes.
8. Establish a Central Educational Information Centre that will function as a portal to information on all institutions, courses, fees, fellowships, scholarships, schemes etc in the country.
9. Institute a 'Teacher Assessment Mechanism' linked with performance incentives to improve quality of teaching in the country.
10. Promote counseling cells in all educational institutes to enable students to make informed education and career decisions. Offer personal counseling to students to help them cope with the high demands of work, education and personal life.

11. Strengthen Employment Exchanges for improved placements, through better coordination with the private sector.
12. Provide recognition of courses offered by registered 'Madrasa' on the same lines as other educational institutes.
13. Ensure that Equal Opportunity Cells for SC, ST, OBC & Differently-Abled students are set up in all education institutes as per UGC guidelines.
14. Provide tax concessions to youth between the age of 18-35
15. Ensure speedy closure of proceedings of under-trial prisoners below the age of 35. Institute a review of all existing under-trial prisoners and institute mechanisms to provide bail wherever prisoners are in jail for inability to provide bail surety or where time spent in jail is already greater than sentence if convicted.
16. Ensure that the 5% reservation in public employment is provided for Persons with Disabilities
17. Provide special incentives to private companies who employ a significant number of Persons with Disabilities.
18. Strengthen the Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008 and ensure its effective implementation.
19. Set up a High Level Committee to examine the need for reservations for SC, ST and OBCs in private sector and also to formulate appropriate modalities for enforcing quota system in private sector..
20. Institute national program for HIV Positive youth to address their education, employment, rehabilitation and health needs in mission mode.
21. Accord priority to fund Micro Small and Medium Enterprises started by Youth in the age group of 18 to 35 years
22. Undertake special recruitment drive to fill backlog vacancies for persons with disabilities particularly for persons suffering from blindness and low vision in terms of section 33 of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995

Appeal

We appeal to all our student and youth 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.

Suggested Policies and Programmes for Consideration of Congress Government (2014-2019): Women's Empowerment and Protection of Children

Preamble

The Indian National Congress is a party that has gone beyond the rhetoric and hyperbole, relied on by most parties, when it comes to the empowerment of women and the welfare of children. Several strides have been made to improve their status since independence under Congress governments. Smt. Indira Gandhi emerged as an icon for women's empowerment, not only for women in India, but for women across the world. It was the vision of our late Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi, that greater political representation of women at every level would lead to more women oriented development and also allow for sensitization towards women's issues. It was under his leadership that the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution, which gave one-third reservation for women in local self-government institutions, were conceptualized.

The Indian National Congress, acknowledging that our sisters and mothers have suffered certain historical disadvantages, is ever mindful of a pressing need to take far reaching measures to correct these injustices

The Indian National Congress, taking cognizance of the need for stronger legal protection, and equality of opportunities for women and children, has instituted several progressive laws and policies.

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 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 All India Mahila Congress (AIMC) organized several Consultation Meetings with women stake holders as per the vision of the Congress Vice President, Shri Rahul Gandhi. Our Manifesto is the voice of women in organized and unorganized sectors such as, ASHA workers, Anganwadi Workers, NGOs, SHGs, Women Farmers and land less agriculture labour, House Wives, Activists, Academicians, Elected representatives from different levels of Governance, Professionals, Entrepreneurs, the Corporate world, retired Officers and so on.

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 Women and Protection of Children

1. To protect and support the welfare of children, the Congress-led UPA set up a National Commission for Protection of Child Rights in 2006. New laws have also been passed to prohibit child labour and child marriage.
2. We enacted the Right to Education Act 2009. As a result, primary and secondary enrolment ratio of girls to boys has gone up from 89.9% in 2004 to 98.4% in 2011. In other words, there are now as many girls enrolled in primary and secondary schools as boys. Female literacy level also saw a significant jump as compared to males, from 54 % in 2001 to 65 % in 2011. The male literacy, in comparison, rose from 75 % to 82 %. Several new scholarships with an earmarked 30% for girls have been launched.
3. The Congress-led UPA established an independent Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2006 for the empowerment and upliftment of women.
4. In the health sector, Fertility Rates have come down. Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) is improving, from 301 per 100,000 live births in 2003 it has come down to 212; Institutional deliveries have risen from 41 per cent in 2006 to 73 per cent in 2009.
5. It has been the Indian National Congress's concerted effort to provide easy access to quality and affordable health care through programmes like JaniniSurakshaYojana (JSY) and JananiShishuSurakshaKaryakaram (JSSK). JSY has achieved good success in increasing the number of beneficiaries from 7.39 lakh in 2005-06, to nearly 113 lakh pregnant women in 2010-11.
6. The Indian National Congress has enacted several Acts to ensure dignity, safety and prosperity for women and children, including the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act 2005, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005, Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006, Maternity Benefit (Amendment Act) 2008, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012, Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2013 and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013.
7. We have also ensured that gender equality and child care facilities are mainstreamed in government schemes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, where the participation rate of women is around 50% per year. Government's other Schemes like the RashtriyaKrishiVikasYojana (RKVY) are also striving to include a quota for women. The MahilaKisanSashaktikaranPariyojana (MKSP), launched in 2010-11, seeks to empower women in agriculture by making systematic investments to enhance their participation and productivity, as also to create and sustain agriculture based livelihoods of rural women.

8. The Congress-led UPA government has been promoting hygiene for girls and women through construction of toilets and programmes like Promotion of menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls for providing low-cost Sanitary Napkins in rural areas for girls in the age group of 10-19 years.
9. The Indian National Congress launched Ujjawala-a new comprehensive Scheme for prevention of trafficking and rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration of victims of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

The Detailed Action Plan 2014-2019

The Indian National Congress will ensure the safety and security of our women and children. We will provide them equal access to social, economic and political opportunities.

1. The Indian National Congress will ensure that all laws for the welfare of children including the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences will be strictly enforced.
2. We will further strengthen and expand the scope of the the National Commission for Protection of Children Rights, set up in 2007.
3. We will also ensure that the strongest possible action will be taken to prevent child trafficking.
4. The quality of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) programme will be vastly improved and special incentives will be given to Anganwadi workers.
5. The Indian National Congress is committed to the enactment of the Women's Reservation Bill to reserve 33 % of all seats in theLokSabha, and in all State legislative assemblies for women.
6. We will initiate immediate action to formulate a Citizens Charter for Women's Safety and Security.
7. The Indian National Congress has placed a high premium on the education of women. We will continue with this focus to achieve gender parity in literacy level.
8. Fast track Courts will be established with 'in camera' and video proceeding facilities in State headquarters and in regional centres. The purpose of these Courts will be solely to address crimes against women. Mandatory procedure for the rapid conclusion of cases where custody of children is involved shall be put in place.

9. We will increase the number of girl's hostels, particularly in tribal areas and hostels for working women, with day care, to encourage women to become well educated and earn their own livelihood.
10. We will ensure that all measures are taken to make women feel safe and protected. We will expedite such measures as the creation of functional helplines in all major towns and cities and rural areas for prompt grievance redressal for women, exclusive 24 hour transport facilities and gender sensitivity classes for police men and women, particularly in registering and investigating complaints made by women.
11. The Indian National Congress will open "One Stop Crisis Centres" for women in all hospitals to provide medical, legal and psychosocial aid in cases of rape and domestic violence against women.
12. The Indian National Congress, true to its long-standing history, will take measures to enable increased participation and reservation for women at all levels within the government. We will ensure that at least 25% of the total police officers, sub-inspectors and constables at every police station in the country will be women, over the next five years. We will ensure the number of women police stations in the country goes up from 500 to 2000 in the next five years.
13. The Indian National Congress will earmark at least 30% of all funds flowing into panchayats and nagarpalikas, for development of women and children and focus on the special needs of female agricultural labour and women cultivators.
14. We will encourage the setting up of "Poorn Shakti Kendras" at block level to provide a single window mechanism for awareness, information, access and utilization of government schemes and programmes.
15. The Indian National Congress will provide land rights for women especially single women and women-headed households whose husbands have migrated from the villages.
16. The Indian National Congress will strive to clear all pending compensation to women with missing husbands in areas of unrest and conflict and especially border areas including providing employment to war widows and their families.
17. We will set up an institutional arrangement to target access to credit, training and marketing for women in the unorganized sector in peri-urban and rural areas.
18. The Indian National Congress is deeply distressed with the continued sexual exploitation of tribal girls at various places, such as hostels, and continued trafficking in young women belonging to tribal communities. This matter will receive the highest priority and will be taken up with all State Government and special Schemes introduced, like through the

National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) for securing livelihoods.

19. The Indian National Congress will work with women's Self Help Groups for the distribution of free sanitary napkins for adolescent girls.
20. The Indian National Congress believes that society should be more sensitive to the rights of the transgender community. This issue will receive separate and continued attention.
21. Through the NRLM we will provide low interest loans, of uptoRs. 1 lakh, to women for livelihood activities.
22. 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.
23. We will continue to support Self-Help-Groups (SHGs) and assist the poor to set up small businesses. We will set up more branches of the BharatiyaMahila Bank and women only branches of other public sector banks. Our target is to ensure the formation of 7 crore SHGs by 2019.
24. The Indian National Congress will provide concessional loans to groups/collectives of small, marginal farmers and women farmers uptoRs. 5 lakh to enable them to gain better access to inputs and services.
25. An overwhelming number of women, especially in rural India still use polluting biomass for cooking, which puts an unbearable health burden on them. The Indian National Congress is committed to providing clean cooking fuel across the country in an accelerated manner in order to address this
26. The Indian National Congress will implement a Universal Pension Scheme, for the elderly, destitute, widows and other similar groups (based on certain exclusions).

The promises detailed above reflect the Indian National Congress' commitment towards the empowerment of women and children, 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 implementation of Vishakha Guidelines in all private and government organizations to protect women against sexual harassment in the workplace
2. Ensure audiovisual recording of all FIRs in police stations
3. Effective implementation of 'Ahimsa Messengers', a program aimed at preventing violence against women and children by creating awareness of basic legal rights, procedures and provisions amongst women and children
4. Eradicate honor killings through mass social awareness programs and strict criminal action against all instances of honor killings
5. Zero tolerance approach to human trafficking
6. Ensure safety of women tourists in our country
7. Increase the number of Old Age Homes for Women and Shelter Homes for homeless women
8. Review pension schemes for senior citizen women, widows, single women, disabled women and endeavor to increase sanctioned amounts
9. Special measures to increase women's enrollment in ITIs to encourage their financial independence
10. Ensure early detection of cancer in women by increasing access to screening facilities and healthcare
11. Ensure that all women in India have access to banking facilities by holding special camps for their enrolment
12. Create domestic and international marketing linkages for women in SHGs to sell their products
13. Provide subsidy for small loans to women engaged in livestock activities such as cattle rearing, poultry, fisheries, piggeries, beekeeping, mushroom cultivation, etc
14. Rebate in registration fee of agricultural land purchased in the name of women
15. Provide reservation in employment for women in central and state government departments along the lines already being provided in some states
16. Ensure gender parity in wages
17. Ensure implementation of minimum wage for women
18. Bring a national policy for domestic workers
19. Work with state governments to ensure uniform honorarium and benefits for anganwadi workers in all states
20. Bring out a human resource policy for anganwadi workers detailing their honorarium, benefits, promotions and other working conditions
21. Ensure parity in honorarium for Mini Anganwadi Workers and Anganwadi Workers (AWWs)
22. All Congress party led state governments will increase reservation for women in panchayat and urban local body elections from 33% to 50%
23. Open an Academy for Political Empowerment to provide elected women representatives legal and administrative education and develop their leadership skills
24. Ensure transparent and fair selection process for National and State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights, Child Welfare Committees and Juvenile Justice Boards
25. Constitute Special Courts for Children and ensure sensitization of judges and staff

26. Ensure allocation of accessible play areas for children in all building plans, master plans for urban areas

An Appeal to the Women of India

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Vote for Congress for Women’s Empowerment.
“SashaktMahilaSashakt Bharat”