CHAPTER - VI

RURAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES SCANNED

Against the background of the official version of the Rural Employment Programmes implemented by TP and ZP of Dharwad district and the field investigation carried out in the ten selected villages of the same district, the following observations can be made

1) It is necessary to identify the target population for any rural employment programme and communicate the needy but eligible population about the programme.

   The implementing agencies failed to give any publicity of the programmes and their details to the target populations. Inspite of enormous progress in the communication technology like the press, the Platform, the Radio, the Tele-vision and the Internet, the target population is unaware of the programmes. The old system of Tom-tomming in the strategic places in the villages seemed to be more effective.

2) For better implementation, a register containing all the details of target population including the names of the eligible and willing labourers has to be maintained. There has been a mention of NMRs in the guidelines, but the investigation revealed that no such register is maintained and no such names enrolled. Wherever NMRs are maintained, the names found in them do
not tally with the names under investigation. This leads to an impression that the NMRs are fake and fictions.

3) To ensure effective implementation of the programmes and reach the target population, the guidelines mentioned the need for the issue of family cards. In the course of investigation, it was found that family cards were not issued.

4) The workers employed in the scheme were not aware of the stipulations of the rural employment programmes. There are clear instructions regarding the type of the people to be employed, the number of days they should be employed, the place where they should be employed, the quantum of wages to be paid to each worker, the manner in which wages are to be distributed etc. None of the workers had any idea about these stipulations. This is an indication of flouting all the guidelines. In the absence of required information it is difficult to evaluate any programme and find out the extent of benefits that accrued to the workers.

5) The implementing authorities may impose many restrictions on those whom they do not include in the employment programmes. Restrictions like compelling the workers to bring the implements required for the work keep many of the workers out of the orbit. Some such restrictions are reported during the course of investigation. These are evil practices.
6) The benefits to the target population depend upon three aspects.
   1) number of members per family employed 2) Number of days of employment offered and 3) Quantum of wages given. On all these three counts, the programmes have utterly failed. Number of workers is abnormally low, the number of days worked is very small and the wages offered are not commensurate with the cost of living in the area. Thus the programmes become only a scratch on the surface.

7) Rural employment programmes have to be labour-intensive to ensure continuous and wide employment benefits to the labourers. Investigation has revealed the opposite. A large number of works has been executed by the contractors with the help of mechanical devices. To that extent the poor are deprived of the benefits which go to the non-poor.

8) The investigation found out that neither the Taluk Panchayat nor the Zilla Panchayat had any shelf of the projects to be readily implemented when the situation demanded. Adhoc programmes have been implemented on adhoc basis depriving the benefits to the target population. Guidelines direct the necessity of implementing the projects in the vicinity of villages. This would save the time of workers and ensure the maximum amount of time for workers. This is not followed in practice.

9) The agencies of rural employment programmes are expected to create adequate employment for the rural masses. The actual number of days of employment created is far below than what is
stipulated. There is a wide and yawning gap between the expected and the achieved. The efforts of the implementing agencies have only resulted in creating unsteady and unstable employment.

10) To insulate the target population from the rising cost of living, provision has to be made to disburse a part of wages in kind i.e., in the form of food-grains. In no village under investigation wages are paid in kind.

11) In the course of implementation many evil practices are followed. The implementers join hands with the local merchants and the local money-lenders and delay the payments under one or the other pretext. This forces the workers who live on hand to mouth basis get into the clutches of the local merchants or the local money-lenders. Full payment on timely basis go a long way in protecting the poor people.

12) In view of illiteracy and absence of knowledge about the stipulations of the employment programmes, workers are likely to be paid less than the stipulated wage by obtaining the thumb impression for having received a stipulated wage. Proper information and knowledge on the part of the workers would prevent this malpractice.

13) In view of the above deficiencies in the programme, the benefits that accrue to the target population are not commensurate with the outlay incurred, where such programmes should have
profoundly changed the economic scenario of the target population. They have only touched the fringe and not even enabled them to maintain their consumption level.

14) There are directions in the guidelines on taking up projects, which add to the assets of the community that should be durable in nature. More often than not there is a conflict between creation of durable community assets and generation of employment for unskilled workers. Creation of durable assets requires skilled workers and the use of mechanical devices. On the other hand, generation of employment for unskilled workers is likely to affect the durability of the assets. One cannot have the cake and eat it too. These findings help in probing into some organisational, financial and administrative issues pertaining to the implementation of Rural Employment Programmes.

15) The Rural Employment Programmes launched by the Center and the State Governments are well intentioned and laudable, but as is the case with many such programmes, there has been a wide gap between the promise and its fulfillment. The data collected in respect of ten villages drawn from five taluks of Dharwad district and its analysis make it abundantly clear that the rural employment programmes have not been much of a success. There are administrative, organisational and financial hurdles in the implementation of the programmes apart from the bureaucratic corrupt practices, though clear
guidelines have been laid down by the governments in respect of the choice of schemes and time, and manner of implementation and selection of the prospective beneficiaries, especially from population below the poverty-line (BPL), the guidelines have not been followed. There have been too many lapses than observance; from the point of view of policy directives some of the guidelines are contradictory in application. For example, one of the guidelines is that the implementing authorities should take up such projects which help in creating durable assets. Creation of durable assets requires the efficient execution of the projects with skilled labour, and if necessary, with mechanical operations. If Rural Employment Programmes are meant to help the rural poor during the slack season and to help them maintain their consumption level, manual works have to be undertaken. In case of manual work, which is prolonged for the entire slack season or at least for one hundred days, the quality of work suffers because semi-skilled and unskilled labour is employed. It is heartening to note that the mid-term appraisal of the Ninth Five Year plan has recognised this Lacuna. Secondly, for efficient execution and durable quality of operation, continuous work is required.

16) It is observed that the employment under Rural Employment Programmes would come to a halt when rains set in. If rains continue, labourers will not be available to take up the work, because they will go back to their fields for sowing operations.
The intermittent nature of work and bit by bit execution of such projects to help rural poor is bound to affect the quality of work. It is suggested in the guidelines that the projects selected must be in the village or in the vicinity of the village. If in each village employment works are to be launched, they have to be restricted only to road building, or construction of Anganawadies. The guidelines direct that at the district level, there should be a list of projects fully worked out with regard to their feasibility and their financial implications to be launched immediately when the situation calls for. Projects resulting in durable assets like de-silting of tanks can not be had in each and every village or in the vicinity of the village. Thirdly, it is stated that recently all the rural employment programmes have to be executed by the Gram panchayats. Since the sphere of operation of Gram Panchayat is very small, funds will also be inadequate to finance the projects. In this context it is necessary to have a fresh look into the problem and explore the possibilities of entrusting employment projects to Taluk Panchyats rather than Gram Panchayats. A Gram Panchyat is too small a unit for employment programmes.

17) The insistence on the implementing agencies to submit accounts by the end of the financial year compels the implementing bodies to execute the projects by hook or by crook before the end of the financial year. It is this condition that compels them to employ efficient contractors and machines, which restrict the scope for employing the really
needy persons. In case, the implementing bodies fail to execute the projects in time and show the spillover in the following year they are likely to be punished by lesser allocation in the following year thinking that the implementing body is unable to spend the whole amount of funds. The allocation for the next year would be reduced.

18) The most important objective is to help the population below the poverty line (BPL), and that too, the people belonging to the weaker-sections. The analysis of data reveals that no attempt has been made to identify the target population and communicate it to this section of the population. The Rural Employment Programes are introduced by the government for the benefits of the rural poor. Attempts are not made to reach them; the country being illiterate today the modern means of communication like, Television, Radio, Press and Platform do not reach the target population. The time-old practice of tom-toming and collecting the people, announcing the government programmes verbally in the presence of the target population is more effective. Programmes involving water-conservation through desilting of old tanks and improvement of agricultural lands through leveling and bunding should receive priority over road construction or construction of Anganwadi buildings. Aforestation is another priority sector where much work could be executed through unskilled labour. This should receive utmost attention in view of the poor and scanty rainfall experienced in the country. Rural housing is another sector
where there is a lot of scope for utilising rural skill and rural resources. For example, the villagers could be persuaded to change their thatched roofs into tilled roofs and change their huts with unburnt or burnt bricks. These two go a long way in ensuring continuous employment for a sizeable section of population below the poverty line (BPL). Part of the cost of such projects will be borne by the villagers themselves through 'Shramdhan' along with government supplying them cheap food grains and cash-wages partly. The observations made by the mid-term appraisal of the Ninth Five Year Plan is revealing in this context. 'employment generation programmes create incomes for the rural poor, but leave no assets behind. Once such programmes are withdrawn, the poor may again fall below the poverty line in the absence of family based assets'!

19) The governments-both central and states-have suggested in their guidelines that a register containing the names, addresses and signatures of the persons seeking and getting employment has to be maintained. Such a register helps in assessing the benefits accruing to the target group and also helps in taking follow-up measures. A register has to be prepared and kept ready even before the project is implemented and funds allocated for the same. To the utter dismay of the researcher, such registers are never maintained in any of the villages visited for the purpose of investigation. Even where such registers are produced by the officials, it turned out to be completely bogus. This has many
implications. The names appearing in such registers, known as NMRs, are fictions. Such a situation arises because of the absence of a monitoring agency free from the influence of implementing agencies. Secondly, such situation arises due to sheer ignorance of the villagers regarding the programmes, their nature, duration and the financial outlay provided for. In the third place, the employment of workers on adhoc basis prevents them from forming into an organisation and it also prohibits them from articulating their grievances. If politics is also combined with the implementing agencies the situation goes from bad to worse. Instances are reported where people given employment are supporters of a particular political party or the followers of the village politician. These politicians sabotage the employment programmes, so that preventing of some labourers from getting employment is a punishment for not subscribing to the views of political parties. It is pertinent to note at this stage the views of Mahatma Gandhi who insisted that Gram Panchayats should be free from politics. The democracy at the gross-root-level should be fostered on non-political lines. Otherwise, the grass-roots of democracy foster politics without democracy. There is need for maintaining a continuous, reliable NMRs to evaluate the impact of many rural development programmes and rural employment programmes in particular. In the absence of such a register, funds are misutilized and may be appropriated by
non-poor class consisting of bureaucrats, politicians, traders and financiers.

20) There has been a huge transfer of funds during the last two to three decades with a view to alleviate poverty among the rural masses. These funds are siphoned into the rural sector under various programmes, of which rural employment programmes are such a category. On paper there has been a systematic formulation of projects with regard to employment programmes. The selection of the programmes and their operation of the programmes, the financial outlay, the manner in which outlay is to be disbursed and the way the accounts are to be kept are all neatly worked out. In practice it is these cumbersome procedures, which come in the way of effective implementation of the programmes. In different areas, the beginning of the slack season may vary and no sooner it starts, programmes have to be commenced. But the programmes can start only if funds are made available in time or even before time. There is some such vicious circle in which funds cannot be allocated without the clear proposals of the programmes. The programmes depend upon the nature of work, duration of the slack season and the extent of financial burden. All these cannot be estimated in advance. There is need for creation of a general fund out of which the financial allocation will be made immediately without waiting for the procedures to be followed. At least 75 percent of the funds should be released immediately to start the works. There are some instances
where at the onset of a drought, the affected workers wait on a deputation to the local Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) and the district officials. The officials then prepare the projects along with financial requirements and submit to the higher bodies for sanction. They in their turn examine the proposal in detail, seek explanation and make back references before approving the projects and then sanction the funds. By the time financial allocations are made, the need for it might have gone, it would be too late to implement the scheme in full. Programmes are hurried through, procedures by-passed and guidelines discarded to ensure the complete expenditure of the funds within time limits. The cumbersome financial procedures lead to ineffective and incomplete execution of the schemes involving wasteful expenditure and denying the full benefits to the target population. As the programmes, directed towards the target population, are many until recently, the implementing agency was not one. With different agencies implementing different programmes, there is bound to be overlapping of schemes leading to wasteful expenditure. There is lack of co-ordination among different agencies handling the programmes. Of late, under the Sampurna Grameena Rojagar Yojana (SGRY), all the programmes are to be pushed through Gram Panchayats. Many programmes are such that they have to encompass many Grama Sabhas. They can not be restricted to a single Gram Panchyat. There is need for an agency at a suitable level above the village level, may be at the taluk level,
to implement all the programmes coming under its jurisdiction. However, non-party and non-governmental representatives from each village may form a body to approve the projects and their location, the time and manner of implementation etc. This body can also keep a vigilance on the implementation of the projects and in the end evaluate the performance of the implementing agency keeping in view the objective of the programmes implemented.