Current Poverty Alleviation Programmes and Suggestions offered with reference to the Study Area
CHAPTER - VII
CURRENT POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES
AND SUGGESTIONS OFFERED WITH REFERENCE TO THE STUDY AREA

There are two reasons to be concerned that Indian agriculture may indeed be facing a wider, deeper crisis: (i) The long term growth trend in production and productivity may actually be slowing down (2.5 - 3 per cent) on an over to for the last five decades (ii) The growing economic and social disparities between agriculture and the rest of the economy and between rural and urban sectors.

The approach paper to the Eleventh Plan has fixed a target of 10 per cent growth in GDP. Achieving still higher growth rates, including double digit ones, is said to be within the realm of possibility. Though the GDP is increasing (8 per cent on an average) and the sensex rising, the suicides of debt-ridden farmers continued. This is a clear evidence that the fruits of development have not reached the grass roots.

The farm sector alone can not support the entire rural population. Industries have a major role to play in eradicating poverty. New jobs have to be created and hence the creation of SEZs.
7.1. Special Economic Zones

Special Economic Zone Act was passed in the year 2006. The success story of SEZs in China is tremendous. India should evolve its own strategies. India should follow a system to suit to the local conditions and to integrate with the world of peasants and artisans.

In deed, peasants must be taken as stakeholders in the creation of SEZs. The farmers are a vulnerable section of society and should not become victims of this development process. Agriculture and food security must get top-most priority. SEZs would be permitted only on barren lands and even single crop agriculture land should not be acquired. If such a scheme is implemented in this study area employment will be generated.

7.2. Poverty Alleviation Programme

With the funding of World Bank and the State Government the rural poverty alleviation programme, “Vazhndu Kattuvom” would be implemented in 15 districts over a period of 6 years on an outlay of Rs.717 crores.

The village panchayaths that will be covered by the scheme are 633 in Tinuelveli and 541 in Tuticorin districts. This would help poor families with special focus on poorest of the poor through support for productive activities. The village panchayaths would identify the needy and to implement the scheme effectively.
The village panchayaths in the study area need such schemes to reduce poverty by providing help to the needy.

7.3. Concept of Micro – Credit

Micro – credit should be developed as an instrument in the struggle against poverty. Dr. Mohamed Yunus dubbed as “Banker to the Poor” won the Noble Peace Prize (2006) for helping millions escape the poverty trap through a system of small – scale loans.

Dr. Yunus began fighting poverty in 1974 with a loan of $27 to save a group of villagers from clutches of money lenders.

The Grameen Banks are cutting out the middlemen and transferring their lives through self-employment. Such a concept has to be developed in India. The Self Help Groups should be strengthened. It should be a forum of enterprising women and not a mere group of borrowers.

The Grameen Bank has improved the standard of living of millions of poor, most of them women by providing micro credit without collaterals.

A study on the working of the Bank will help replicate the experiment successfully in India.
The Nobel citation says “Lasting peace can not be achieved unless large population groups find ways to break out of poverty. Micro-credit is one such means”.

We hope the system will succeed in India too and help reducing poverty.
One need not have the resources, but only a strong conviction to surmount all odds.

7.4. Plan to form 617 SHGs in Tuticorin

The Mahalir Thittam will form 617 self-help groups in the district under the ambit of Anaithu Grama Anna Marumalarchi Thittam (AGAMT) during the current fiscal to enable its members to avail credit-linked subsidy under various government sponsored schemes.

Of the total groups, 185 will be constituted by youth members (both male and female aged between 18 and 35 years) and the rest will have all women members.

“Once the groups were constituted, we will guide them to obtain credit-linked subsidy under schemes like Swarnajayanthi Grama Swarozgar Yojana, initially to argument the resources of the group through revolving fund assistance and later to take up economic activities,” said M. Madasamy, Project Officer, Mahalir Thittam.
He said the salient feature of the groups formed under the AGAMT was that the members of each group would take up "homogeneous" economic activities, unlike under other schemes where members within the groups could be involved in different income generation activities.

A total of 24 trades have been identified by the Mahalir Thittam for the groups. "The trades were selected in such a manner that it provided the members of the groups a sustainable income through out a year", he said.

The trades picked included traditional one such as jaggery production, seaweed cultivation and goat farms. Besides, sericulture would be encouraged considering its immense potential in the district. Mr. Madasamy said the groups which were to be formed in the villages of Kayathar, Aathikulam and Aiyyanaroothu, would be buoyed up to take mat production, since the region possessed inherent strengths for a mat production cluster.

Apart from the formation of groups, the Mahalir Thittam plans to augment the infrastructure at select 85 village panchayats spread over 12 blocks under the AGAMT before March 31, 2007, on a need-basis.

"A survey is now on to study the lacunae in infrastructure in the respective village panchayats to evaluate
financial requirements needed for upgrading them," the Project Officer said.

He said the scheme covers development works, such as laying of concrete roads, installation of street lights, creating ponds, establishment of burial grounds, and providing recreational facilities. "The remaining 323 village panchayat too would be covered under the scheme is subsequent fiscals," he added. The study area needs such development works so that the inhabitants can be involved in the income generating activities and bring solace to the people below the poverty line.

7.5. Precision Farming

Projects to be extended to Tiriunelveli District. The Agricultural University should pay more attention to developing High yielding varieties and increasing productivity. Technological informations should be taken to small farmers.

Direct purchase centres should be opened in the study area at the time of harvest enabling them to get fair price.

7.6. The Seed Village Scheme

The Department of Agriculture will implement 'the seed village scheme' in the district on an outlay of Rs 1.86 lakh during the current fiscal to improve the production and productivity of paddy and
pulse crops. For paddy seven villages in Srivaikuntam and Tiruchendur Taluks were selected as seed villages. (2006; December) A three phased programme will be organised; sowing, plant protection and harvesting are the three phases in which the officials will be at service.

It is heartening to note that our study area has been included in the scheme. This should be continued in the years to come enabling the respondents to generate more income and free themselves from the clutches of poverty.

7.7. Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY)

Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) was introduced in 2001 to provide employment to all the rural poor who do not have employment to earn their livelihood and desire to do manual and unskilled work in and around the villages. Since 26 per cent of the respondents do not have employment during the off season such schemes would go a long way in ameliorating the poverty.

7.8 Antyodaya Anna Yojana

Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) was launched in December 2000. Under this scheme food grains are made available at a subsidised rate of Rs. 2 per Kg for wheat and Rs. 3 per Kg for rice.
The Tamil Nadu Government as promised in the election campaign has been successfully implementing the distribution of **rice** at a highly subsidized rate of Rs. 2 per Kg. This provides relief to the respondents who have to spend now lesser amount on the major staple food of the area. **The Public Distribution System** should expand it supplies by including edible and other necessaries at a subsidized price.

**7.9 Indira Awaas Yojana**

Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) aims at **providing dwelling houses** to the poor families of the SCs and STs. In the study area 35 per cent of the respondents are living in rented houses. Mostly the Scheduled caste people do not have dwelling places of their own. Therefore, the scheme should be extended in the Srivaikuntam Taluk Villages.

**7.10 Farmers' Clubs**

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has opened two clubs in the district on 7\(^{th}\) December 2006. **One such club is situated at Srivaikuntam Block.** The objective of the programme is to augment agriculture and allied activities through credit, technology transfer and capacity building.

The clubs would act as a bridge between village and the Indian Overseas Bank. NABARD would **extend financial support to**
the clubs for the first 3 years. It includes maintenance grant and also funds for conducting workshops. The farmers of the area should avail this opportunity and the authorities of NABARD should open more farmers clubs.

**Conclusion**

Any poverty alleviation programme for that matter should address the present poverty conditions of the Scheduled Caste people in particular and the agricultural labourers in general.

Poverty when not eradicated in a single place in the country will become all–pervasive and the people will plunge into the morass of poverty.

A study of this kind would help us understand the problem. The distress suicides reported in the newspaper columns bring to the fore the complex and endemic nature of poverty.

Therefore making overtures towards the farmers would go a long way in bringing down the percentage of people under poverty and make it ‘0’ within a time span of ten to twenty years.

“*No democracy can exist for long in the midst of poverty, want and inequality*” said the Indian First Premier M. Jawaharlal Nehru.
Therefore, Eradication of poverty should be the Prime objective of any government plan. Higher growth rate, escalating sensex and other economic indicators have shown a state of euphoria. We should not forget the people who are under privileged, under nourished and living in deplorable conditions. Let them be liberated from the devastating conditions and let equality and prosperity prevail in India.

The citation for Nobel peace prize for Dr. Mohammed Yunus for the year 2006 says, "Lasting peace cannot be achieved unless large population groups find ways to break out of poverty. Micro - credit is one such means".
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