Chapter 2

Rural Development: Concept and Evolution

(i) Rural Development: A Brief Conceptual Outline

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RURAL DEVELOPMENT : CONCEPT AND EVOLUTION

This chapter consists of two parts. Part I explores the conceptual dimensions of “rural development”. Part II is devoted to a survey of the post-independence strategies of rural development in the country. In this section, rural development efforts in the pre-independence period are also briefly outlined.

(I) RURAL DEVELOPMENT : A BRIEF CONCEPTUAL OUTLINE

In seeking to understand rural development in its conceptual aspect, we shall here first attempt to grasp the import of the two terms of which this phrase is composed: ‘rural’ and ‘development’. Thereafter, we will examine the concept of ‘rural development’ per se.

What Constitutes "Rural"?

Webster’s Comprehensive Dictionary defines the term “rural” as “that which pertains to the country as distinguished from the city or town”.

According to Longman’s Dictionary, “rural means the country, country people, or life”. It adds, rural is the general word for places that are neither towns nor totally wild [the North pole is scarcely rural]. and the term suggests the existence of agricultural communities.

Encyclopedia Britannica states: “rural society is a generic term for societies in which the predominant human activities are those involving production of food, fibre, minerals and raw materials".
Ruralness essentially denotes a non-urban style of life with a distinct occupation structure, social organisation and settlement pattern.

'Rural', as distinct from 'urban', may be thought to comprise the following features:

- Dependence on primary production by a large percentage of population; and extremely low purchasing power of those involved in primary production.
- Lack of application of science and technology to daily-life activities, resulting in low productivity and, consequently, low net income and poor quality of life.
- Little or no value addition to primary produce through processing.
- Complete lack of scientific understanding about natural resources, and their potential for commercial and industrial exploitation.
- Little or no share of the local people, especially producers, in management and ownership of commercial and industrial enterprises which exploit the local natural resources.
- Almost all the profits/surpluses generated by the commercial and industrial activities, based on local resources, are taken out of the locality; no capital transfer to and formation in, the locality and, consequently, no further industrial/commercial development and social welfare activities in the locality; no employment generation.
- Absence of strong economic organisation of local people which otherwise could be evolved around commercial/industrial enterprises based on local resources for collective benefit of local people.
- Presence of a stagnant social environment, where energies of the young members of the society, and especially of the members of the traditionally dominant families, are not deliberately and fruitfully diverted from traditional ways of satisfying their urge and desire for power and maintaining a higher socio-economic status. Virtually, the only instrument for exercise of power in rural areas is the ownership of land.
Poor social and economic infrastructure in terms of education, health, irrigation, communication and transport, and so on.

Childs and Melton project an important dimension of ruralness, the psychological dimension, as under: "As a psychological construct, ruralness might be defined on the basis of the attitudes and values typically held by the people living in rural communities as differentiated from urban dwellers".

“Development” Defined

The following observation by Paul P. Streeten succinctly sums up the concept of development, as it has been understood since the mid-seventies when it underwent a paradigm shift. “Development”, says Streeten, must be redefined “as an attack on the chief evils of the world today: malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, slums, unemployment and inequality. Measured in terms of aggregate growth-rates, development has been a partial success. But measured in terms of jobs, justice, and the elimination of poverty, it has been failure or only a partial success”.

Dudley Seers adopts similar criteria in conceptualising the idea of development. As he puts it: The questions to ask about a country’s development are: What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three have declined from high levels then beyond doubt this has been a period of development of the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result ‘development’ even if percapita income doubled.
Concept of Rural Development

According to Eisminger "Rural development involves a process of transformation of the traditionally oriented rural culture towards an acceptance of and reliance on science and technology."

World Bank defines rural development as "the strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people: i.e. the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas. This group includes small farmers, tenants, and the landless". According to Robert Chambers: "Rural development is a strategy to enable a specific group of people, poor rural women and men, to gain for themselves and their children more of what they want and need. It involves helping the poorest amongst those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas to demand and control more of the benefits of rural development."

Since the Seventies, the expression of rural development has been understood to mean a strategy which will bring about a reduction in poverty, inequality and exploitation of a specific group of people - the rural poor.

In the above background, rural development may be understood as being a process geared to achieve the following objectives.

- To facilitate the process of realignment of political power in favour of the "excluded" categories through creation of representative assemblies at sub-statal, local and sub-local levels.
- To achieve a spatial balance in social and economic development.
To achieve enhanced production and productivity in rural areas.
- To bring about greater socio-economic equality.
- To establish ecological balance for fostering self-sustained development.
- To develop broad-based community participation in the process of development.

(II) A SYNOPTIC VIEW OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES IN THE PRE-AND POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIODS

This section traces the evolution of rural development in India. The pre-independence efforts are first briefly sketched and, thereafter, we present a survey of the post-independence rural development strategies.

The Pre-Independence Period

In the pre-independence period, the basic British policy in India was to restrict itself to the task of governance and not to become involved in social and economic matters of the country. Rural development activities during this period, were assumed by the British government in a highly restricted and narrow context of recurrent famines, as a humanitarian act without any executive or legal sanction. The Famine Commission of 1880 recommended, for the first time, certain land reforms and agricultural improvement strategies. With the advent of diarchy in the provinces, under the Government of India Act, 1919, rural development became a transferred subject, placed under the charge of elected ministers.

Rural development received a fillip in the wake of the non-cooperation movement started by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920. It was perhaps the first attempt in India to mobilise the villagers and ruralise politics. Besides, the Mahatma designed a comprehensive programme of rural
development which included the use of khadi, promotion of the village industries, provision of basic and adult education, women uplift, etc. Soon, Sevagram and Wardha, where he was translating these ideas into action became household words in India upholding a vision of the future.10

Rabindra Nath Tagore set up the Sriniketan Institute of Rural Reconstruction in 1921 with the aim of making the rural population 'Self-reliant and Self-respectful'. In the same year, the Martandam experiment was started in Madras under the leadership of the Young Men’s Christian Association "to bring about a complete upward development towards a more abundant life for rural people, spiritually, mentally, physically, socially and economically".11 F.L. Brayne, the district collector of Gurgaon, started in 1927 a programme of rural reconstruction based on the principles of hardwork, self-respect, self-control, self-help, mutual respect.12 In 1932, the princely state of Baroda launched a broad-based programme of rural amelioration to promote the will to live better and a capacity for self-help and self-reliance among the villagers.

Rural development received a powerful fillip under the Government of India Act, 1935. Provincial autonomy was established by this Act. The Congress Party fought election under this Act, promising agrarian reforms. The Party was voted to power and the task of agrarian reform was taken up, but the progress halted following the outbreak of the second world war. In 1940s, emphasis was placed on the production of more food. The 'grow more food' campaign acquired urgency in the context of the calamitous Bengal famine of 1943.13

The foregoing form the major highlights of the country’s rural development effort in the pre-independence period.
Post-independence Efforts

It was only after the country's independence that rural development acquired a high priority at the hands of the new leaders. The successive Five-Year Plans have articulated the goals, strategy and logistics of rural development in the country.

While the removal of poverty has from the very beginning constituted a central concern of the planning effort of India, the country's first three Five-Year Plans (1951-66) principally emphasised the objective of higher growth rate in the GNP. This general emphasis on overall growth was induced by the belief that the benefits of higher growth rate would automatically trickle down to the rural masses; that the trickle-down process will eventually work to alleviate poverty. This persuaded the Government into believing that specific programmes directed towards poverty alleviation did not need to be initiated, and that the task of poverty alleviation will instead be achieved as a by-product of the country's general growth strategy. This, as we know, was the dominant development perspective of those decades, shaped as it was by the traditional modernisation paradigm.\(^\text{14}\)

The decade of 1950s was dominated by three momentous initiatives. It witnessed the advent of the Community Development Programme (CDP), the National Extension Service (NES) and the three-tier system of rural local self-government under the label of Panchayati Raj (PR). The Community Development Programme and Panchayati Raj were designed to be people-centric strategies, although it is a different matter that, on the people's participation yardstick, these turned out to have fared poorly. The National Extension Service was differently geared in being focused on science. People per se came within the ambit of National Extension Service to the extent that they benefited from the NES's advocacy of the application of science towards solving
their problems. Broad-based consultative/advisory fora, comprising a large non-official component, were established at the various levels through which the Community Development Programme was administered; this in an effort to impart a flavour of people’s participation to the scheme. These agencies, however, did not cut much ice, and the Community Development Programme remained a bureaucracy-dominated affair. The Committee which was appointed to investigate the status and suggest measures to improve the working of the Community Development Programme, eventually brought the Panchayati Raj system into existence. The factors which accounted for the failure of the first generation panchayats are too well known to warrant a detailed cataloguing. The glaring fact that may, however, be underlined is that the system which operated over the next three decades was a virtual captive of a powerful rural oligarchy, so that the vulnerable sections continued to remain marginalised. These, and a variety of other considerations, eventually paved the way for the enactment of the momentous 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, in December 1992.

The decade of 1960s was dominated by initiatives in the area of agricultural planning. It witnessed the emergence of Intensive Agriculture District Programme (IADP), and Intensive Agriculture Areas Programme (IAAP). These two programmes were based on the idea of concentrating agricultural development efforts in selected areas, where the returns to additional investments would be specially large. This, while ushering in the Green Revolution, had tended to accentuate regional and class imbalances over the years, increasing the disparity in conditions in the backward and less endowed areas which had been neglected and the already developed areas which were further developed.

Beginning with the Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-74) there was, however, a discernible shift in the Government’s approach to the problem of poverty. Growth with social justice became
the new thrust. This was reflected in the emergence, during the course of the Fourth Plan and thereafter, of the special programmes exclusively designed for the benefit of the poorest of the poor, and of the backward areas.

Two special schemes, respectively for small farmers, and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers, were introduced during the Fourth Plan period. The former was administered through the Small Farmers' Development Agency (SFDA) and the latter through Marginal Farmers' and Agricultural Labourers' Agency (MFAL). Other special programmes which came during the period of Fourth Plan were Draught Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) and Desert Development Programme (DDP).

The Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-1979), maintaining the Fourth Plan's emphasis on growth with social justice, witnessed the emergence of two more programmes: the TRYSEM (Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment) and MNP (Minimum Needs Programme).

Before we proceed to take a stock of the developments after the Fifth Plan period, it would be instructive to pause to recount the circumstances and factors which, at the commencement of the Fourth Plan, weighed with the Government in opting for a switch-over to special programmes for the rural poor and backward areas.

The phenomenon of mass poverty had tended to persist inspite of the planning effort of the first eighteen years. Realisation had begun to dawn that poverty could not be removed without a conscious reorienting and restructuring of the system which had an inbuilt elite bias. Poverty, it was realised, was as much the consequence of inequitous and exploitative patterns of growth as of the absence of growth. Any anti-poverty approach which did not take an integrated
view and which did not propose a simultaneous fight against social inequity and exploitation, at the one end, and under-development, at the other, was bound to be ineffective, and even harmful for the interests of the poor.

Based on this, the realisation dawned that persistence of mass poverty, and its aggravation in certain regions, had its source in certain policy choices which had been made in the sphere of agricultural planning, more particularly during the mid-sixties. Intensive Agriculture District Programme (IADP) and Intensive Agriculture Areas Programme (IAAP), as D.R. Gadgil had noted during the Fourth Plan discussions, were based on the idea of concentrating agricultural development effort in selected areas where, due to the previous existence of socio-economic overheads and earlier investments, it was thought, the returns to additional investments would be specially large. This, while ushering in Green Revolution, had tended to accentuate regional and class imbalances. Over the years, as D.R. Gadgil put it, this had led "to increasing the disparity in conditions in the backward and the less endowed areas which have been neglected and the already developed areas which have been further developed."

Committee on Administrative Arrangement for Rural Development (CAARD) further notes, the approach underlying this agricultural strategy resulted in concentration, for agricultural development, on a selected class of middle and substantial farmers (who controlled almost 80% of the operated land), while giving a low priority to 80% of the agricultural population, consisting of small and marginal cultivators and agricultural labourers, who controlled only 15% to 20% of the land surface. An unequal sharing of the benefits, as between the different classes of rural population, and a virtual neglect of the poor regions and poor classes was thus in-built into this strategy.
This growing imbalance was sought to be rectified through the instrumentality of special programmes, aimed specifically at alleviating the plight of the rural poor and the backward regions.

Now, tracking back to the developments on the poverty alleviation scene, the Sixth and Seventh Five Year Plans (1980-85 and 1985-90 respectively) - very much on the lines of the Fourth and the Fifth - continued to place emphasis on the goal of growth with social justice, with special programmes constituting the principal tool for its accomplishment.

Until the end of the Fifth Plan, a variety of individual schemes operated simultaneously in the same geographical area. This had tended to create a territorial overlap and necessitated a multiplicity of funding arrangements which rendered monitoring and accounting difficult.

The Sixth Five Year Plan sought to put an end to this situation through a process of consolidation and rationalisation. SFDA and MFAL, which were essentially confined to agricultural and allied sectors, operating in 1818 blocks, were merged with the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). IRDP was started, on a pilot basis, in 20 districts during the early years of the Fifth-Plan (1976-77) but was, with effect from 2nd October, 1980, extended to cover all the blocks of the country. IRDP was to be administered by the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) - an autonomous body created under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 - which was also inaugurated in the year 1980.

Three other important initiatives were taken during the course of the Sixth Plan. These included, apart from DWCRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas), two wage-generation schemes: National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) and Rural Landless
Employment Guarantee Scheme (RLEGP). NREP and RLEGP were launched respectively in 1981 and 1983-84. NREP and RLEGP were merged to form Jawhar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) in 1989.

The Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-1997) accorded the topmost priority to the task of employment generation. It emphasised the need to treat employment generation and economic growth as being mutually complementing rather than conflicting processes and underlined the need for a deliberate and conscious effort towards employment generation.

As things stood at the commencement of this Plan, two types of special employment programmes for poverty alleviation had emerged on the scene. One, the self-employment programme (e.g. IRDE) and two, the wage-employment programme, like the JRY.

A number of programmes were launched during the Eighth Plan period to extend employment opportunities in rural areas. These were, (1) Supply of Improved Tool Kits to Rural Artisans (SITRA), (2) Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), and (3) Million Wells Scheme (MWS).

The objective of poverty alleviation necessitates a conscious policy of promoting social development and strengthening social security to restore the entitlement of the disadvantaged who are not able to participate in the economic activity due to old age, or other disabilities. National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) was launched on 15th August, 1995 with this aim in mind. The programme represented a significant step forwards the fulfilment of the Directive Principles as reflected in Articles 41 and 42 of the Constitution. This programme has three components, namely:

(i) National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS),

(ii) National Disability Pension Scheme (NDPS),

(iii) National Widows Pension Scheme (NWPS).
National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS), and
National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS)

Elimination of poverty continued to be a major concern of Ninth Five Year Plan, with expansion of employment opportunities, augmentation of productivity and income levels.

Some of the more prominent features of IRDP are as follows:

1. Under IRDP, the accent is on the weaker sections of the rural society, comprising small and marginal farmers, rural artisans, agricultural and non-agricultural labourers, share croppers and families belonging to scheduled castes and schedules tribes below the poverty-line.

2. IRDP is based on the notion of decentralised microlevel planning at the block level; a community development block has been accepted as the basic unit for planning and implementation of the programme.

3. IRDP embraces activities in the Primacy, Secondary and Tertiary sectors. Primary sector includes agriculture, animal husbandry and generally encompasses "rural" activities. Secondary sector includes manufacturing activities, involving the processing of raw materials into finished products, like bakery, handlooms, handicrafts, leather products, etc. Tertiary sector involves the services required by the primary and secondary sectors. Secondary and tertiary sectors taken together constitute the (ISB) sector.

4. Under this programme, income based criteria for identification of the target groups have been prescribed and a household approach is adopted.

5. The programme seeks to raise the level of income of the target group by providing them productive assets financed through a mix subsidy and credit.

6. During the Sixth Plan the target group was identified in terms of an annual income of
Rs.3500/- per family. The poverty-line definition was revised in the Seventh Plan with Rs.6400/- annual income per family as the base. The cut-off line, for inclusion, according to the arrangement under Seventh Plan, is Rs.4800/- annual income per family. During the Eighth Plan, poverty-line was again redefined to mean an annual income, per family of Rs.11000/-. The cut-off line was fixed at Rs.8500/-. 

At the district level, the Programme is implemented through District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), whereas, at the block level, the BDO and other grassroots functionaries are responsible for its implementation. At the state level a coordination committee headed by the Chief Secretary (designated as the state level coordination committee) oversees and monitors the programme.
REFERENCES


3. Since the early Seventies, the consideration of equity came to command a paramount place in the development thinking across the globe. This bottom-up development was vociferously advocated by the protagonists of what has since come to be known as the "Alternative Development." For a discussion on the concept of Alternative Development or People-centred Development, see C. Key, Latin American Theories of Development and Underdevelopment, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989. For a more recent text, see Sing C. Chew and Robert A. Denemark (eds.), The underdevelopment of Development: Essays in Honour of Andre Gunder Frank, Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1996.


9. B. Mishra, District Administration and Rural Development, New Delhi, Oxford

11. ibid, pp.24-25.


15. Reference here is to the Team for the Study of community Projects and National Extension Service (popularly known as Balvantrai Mehta Committee) which submitted its Report in December, 1957.

16. For a discussion of the factors responsible for the failure of PRIs, see S.R. Maheshwari, *op.cit.*, pp.56-58

17. It may be recalled that the three-year period immediately following the Third Five Year Plan (1966-69) was declared to be a 'plan holiday' phase. As such, the Fourth Five Year Plan commenced in 1969.


20. ibid, p.8.

21. ibid, p.17.