Rural Development Policies, Programmes and Strategies

Development programmes in the lives, livelihoods and opportunities for rural people offers the greatest impact against poverty and its related ills. There is thus need for economic and social improvements in the countryside of all the developing countries.

(1) At independence, India inherited the problem of mass rural poverty and a shattered economy. To fight against this abject poverty and economy, the Government of India framed and implemented in its successive Plan periods different programmes to improve its economy. First Five-year Plan gave highest priority to increase agricultural production and irrigation. Second five year Plan's priority was rapid industrialisation, expansion of employment opportunities, reduction of inequalities in income and wealth. The Third Five year Plan objectives were self-sustaining growth to secure 25% increase in national income, self-sufficiency in food grains. Growth towards stability and self-reliance were to be achieved by the Fourth Five Year Plan period. Fifth Plan aimed at eradication of poverty. While removal of poverty was the foremost objective of the Sixth Plan, rapid generation of productive employment, alleviation of poverty, attainment of self-sufficiency in food and a higher degree of self-reliance were the proclaimed objectives of the Seventh Plan. The
Eighth Plan's emphasis is on growth and modernisation. It also proposes to reduce poverty level 18-20%.

The result of these measures:

- From a food deficit state, India became a surplus producer. It has attained the seventeenth position among the industrially developed nations in the world. Third largest in terms of technical and scientific manpower. Yet the other side of the economic development is equally disheartening.

- The plight of the majority of rural population has not improved. The so-called economic planning and development have largely bypassed the real beneficiaries. It is supposed to benefit despite the heavy investment. Adversely, year after year, and plan after plan, the number of the poor has continued to swell. At Fifth Plan, there were an estimated 220 million below poverty line. And the Sixth Plan (1978-83) projected 290 million. Accordingly to official figures, recently recorded there were 254 million people still living below the poverty line. This figure however is not acceptable to several non-official agencies which put the figure much more than 254 million. Thus the fact remains that poverty in our country is a rural problem.

Rural Development

Rural Development is a complex phenomenon covering a wide spectrum of activities meant to ameliorate the condition of people, living in rural areas. World bank paper
on Rural Development states "RD is a strategy to improve the economic life of a specific group of people- the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest among them who seek livelihood in rural areas. The group includes small scale farmers, tenants and landless" (3)

The allocation of funds since the beginning of the Plan period has been disproportionately low and even that the allocated funds was not properly utilised. There have been glaring deficiencies in planning. Priorities were fixed strictly in accordance with the urgency and needs. The information also suffered due to absence of proper monitoring and close supervision. There had been a wide gap in almost every sector of rural development, between what was proposed to be done and what was actually achieved. The worst suffered was always the weakest group. The entire focus of planning has to be shifted to rural areas, if change is to come for the poor majority. Education is the most important single factor in achieving the economic development and technological progress. The outlay on education in various Plans, or the extent of seriousness in its implementation do not reflect this awareness. The total outlay as a proportion to the grand total Plan outlay, rose to the maximum of 8.1 percent in the Third Plan but in the subsequent plans there has been a sharp decline (4).

Thus we have not been able to achieve universal education goal set forth for children up to the age group 14. The progress in adult literacy is still worse. Until recently it did not receive the attention worth the name. The Third and Fourth Plans targeted to mobilise local community resources and voluntary efforts. Fifth Plan gave some attention to this problem and adult literacy was included. The secondary education on the other hand had a reasonable quantitative expansion. In the total process, the
rural areas were the worst suffered. The expansion of higher education had very little impact on the benefit for the rural population. There is a dismal picture in medical and agricultural education as well. The biggest and the basic problem of our education system has been its wrong orientation from the beginning as the shift is outward looking. Solving of the real problem towards the developmental goal is to make a definite shift of an education system oriented inwards which covers a large majority of rural masses.

**Rural Development Policy**

The concept of rural development is not a free India's contribution. A few States and individuals had initiated programmes much before Rabindranath Tagore had started his rural reconstruction work at Shantiniketan in 1921. The other notable experiments were those of F. T. Brayne in Gurgaon (1920), of Spencer Hatch at Martandam (1921) and of Sri V. T. Krishnamachary in Baroda district and Tangaturi Prakasham Pantulu in the erstwhile composite state of Madras (mid-thirties). The experience of organisational self-help in establishing refugee township of Nilokheri (1947) by S.K. Dey and Etawah Project (1948) also made their contribution formulation of development concept.

The policy of rural development as reflected in the various rural development programmes formulated since the Planning began has undergone changes. The policy approaches adopted in rural development basically fall into the following (5):

- Community approach
- People's participation approach
- Area approach
• Target group approach
• Employment approach
• Minimum needs approach and
• Integrated development approach

Though at first it appeared that the approaches were ad-hoc to respond to emergent situation the transition reflected the improvement in the perception of the problems. The main emphasis of the Community Approach which was launched on 2nd October 1952 was on the development by self reliance in the individual and initiative in the community to achieve the desired goals. This programme was broad based covering all aspects of villages life. In brief the programme aimed to provide food, shelter and clothing to the rural masses. The programme was initially launched in 55 project centres in a concerted and co-ordinated manner. Even the United Nations Evaluation Commission on India (1958-59) categorised this programme as one of the major experiments of the 20th century. The programme did not yield the desired results for firstly, as it attempted to cover a wide range of activities with very limited finances, second reason for failure is the lack of co-ordination between various development agencies and there was no popular participation. The Community was also not made to involve in the decision making process.

On the recommendations of the Balawnthrai Mehta Committee (6), a three-tire organisation of Panchayat Raj consisting of Village panchayat at village level was constituted, Panchayat Samithi at Block level and Zilla Parishad at District level were created in 1959 for the effective rural development through people's participation. This fell through as many State Governments doubted their utility and discontinued their political and economic support. Their reluctance to share in the
decision making with the local leadership was another problem, with political consideration being more dominant than technical and administrative requirements (7).

The Area approach was focused in view of the food scarcity and the need for increasing agriculture production. Under this Area Development Programme the following were given effect to:

- Intensive agriculture district programme, IADP 1961
- Intensive agriculture area programme, IAAP 1964
- The drought prone programme, DPAD 1972 and
- The Command area development programme, CAD 1972

The focus of rural development shifted from growth oriented programmes to programmes specifically designed for a particular group (target group approach) to improve the conditions of small and marginal farmer and agricultural labourers with the introduction of Small Farmer’s Development Agency (SFADA) and Marginal Farmer’s and Landless Labourers Agency (MFAL) both in 1971. To this, Integrated Tribal Development Project was launched during Fifth Plan to help tribal areas and people.

During the Fifth Plan the problem of serious unemployment specially in the rural areas needed the attention with the formulation of the following programmes:

- Crash scheme for rural employment, CSRE programme designed to provide employment to assist 1000 persons in every district during the working period of ten months in a year.
• Food for Work Programme, FFWP, 1977 created some additional employment on projects designed to create works of durable utility to the rural population.

• National Rural Employment Programme NREP Food for Work Programme of the Fifth Plan became NREP in the Sixth Plan.

The programme on Minimum Needs Approach emphasised on providing basic social services in rural areas like elementary education, health, water supply, roads, electrification, housing for landless, introduced in 1973, it tried to cover those who are below poverty line, effected through public agencies.

The Integrated Development Approach 1978 was initiated through Integrated Rural Development Programme. Thus the emphasis has shifted from one aspect to the other. None of these programmes, excepting the Community Development Programme covered the whole country. The result has been the limited success in terms of coverage, adequacy and benefits.

Planning for Rural Development

In the planning for rural development, participation of the people for whom the Plan is being targeted is an important factor. Close local participation in the implementation of the Plan raises the achievement level. The Third and the Fourth Plan documents had emphasised the need for peoples participation. Unfortunately planning in our country is top-down, and the grassroots level planning has been a far cry. Below the state level, there was no regular planning machinery, to consider the local problems and priorities. The other issue of importance, for non-performance has been the gap...
between the preparation of the Plan document, and its implementation at National, State, Block and Village levels with co-ordination of different agencies at each level, with targets assigned (8)

To achieve the objectives of the Plan layout, a strong administrative set-up at district level can act effectively by

- Breaking the policy directives from State and Central level into suitable action programmes,
- Organise and direct field staff,
- Fix targets and standards for performance,
- Supervise, co-ordinate, and analyse the progress of the projects and programmes,
- Review procedures and methods of work, and
- Send feedback to the state headquarters

In many states Field Unit thus set-up is at a level lower than district level i.e., Taluk / Block level. The lowest level field worker will be the village level workers (VLW) trained in various sectors like Education, Health & Hygiene, Agriculture & Horticulture, Forestry, Animal husbandry, Sericulture, Small-scale industries, Village and Cottage industries and in their respective vocations so that they interact with the respective beneficiaries to achieve the targeted goal. As on September 1983 Karnataka, had 4 villages per Gram Panchayat, 175 District development councils (in place of panchayat samitis), 9 district development councils per Zilla Parishad and 19 Zilla Parishads.
The problem of rural development can be hastened only if there is some significant change in the power balance in favour of the poor majority. The rural masses have to organise themselves as a formidable force compelling the government/s to take greater interest in their problems. Then only, rural development schemes get implemented in the proper prospective. The process, however, is bound to be slow, because the forces arrayed against the rural majority are too strong.

**Rural Development Programmes**

Rural Development Programmes have passed through several phases. The first one began with the inception community development programme. It was the first decisive attempt in the direction of comprehensive area planning and rural development. The primary objective of the community development programme (CDP) was to bring about an overall development of rural India covering economic resources as well as cultural and economic aspects of community life. CDP sought to achieve the fullest of available human and material resources on an area basis, attempting to raise the living standards of rural community to higher levels of living with their active participation.

During the Second Five Year Plan the CDP was supplemented with the introduction of Panchayat Raj. Panchayat Raj concept was a three-tier structure introduced in 1959 having local self-government at village, block and district levels. The states were left free to make suitable changes in this structure to fit the local conditions. The Panchayats were responsible for agricultural production, rural industries, medical relief, and child welfare, for the maintenance of sanitation. This democratic decent realisation experiment fell through as it was not implemented in right earnestness.
The next phase of Rural Development was the emphasis on reduction in poverty and promotion of economic prosperity by way of self employment. Government of India and the State governments launched a number of rural development schemes, some of them are crash programmes, like Minimum Need Programmes (NMP), Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA) 1960, Draught Prone Area Programme (DPAP) 1970, Farmers' training Programme, Food for work (FPF) 1977, rural industries projects and the like. These programmes helped to accelerate the overall development, but their contribution to reduction in rural poverty or to employment generation was meagre. With every increase in farm as well as factory production, the disparity between those who owned the productive assets and those who did not grew wider. The result was, at the end of Fourth Plan there was a backlog 14 million unemployed. The weakness of this programme is because of their priority concern with the development of primary sector. Those who owned land were the beneficiaries. Large number of rural households belonged to agricultural labours, rural artisans, non-agricultural wage earners and other self employed persons in tertiary and service sector. These group unfortunately were left outside the scope of these programmes.

Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was the next programme introduced in the year 1978-79. This was initiated in 2000 Community Development blocks which were already included in one or the other special programmes of SFDA, DPAP. The programme also envisaged 300 additional blocks to be covered every year under its fold with a target of covering 3500 development blocks up to 1985. Presently 5011 development blocks have been brought under the IRDP programme. The various schemes under IRDP have not worked up to the expectations. The reason could be the diversification of jobs in the secondary and
tertiary sectors was greater than the desired level. The other reasons were improper identification of beneficiaries, loose link in backward and forward interactions and charges of corruption.

With this background a drastic change was desired in the implementation of rural development programmes. Only major policy changes in the planning process as desired by our Prime Minister is, Planning from the bottom upwards and decentralisation of planned administration and implementation with a view to make it more effective to reach the poorest of the poor. It is envisaged in Eight Plan (1990-95) to extend to the district administration the responsibility to shoulder the formulation of district planning. Panchayat Raj institutions at least in their administrative and functional structure reflect this subject to their being given proper effective implementation by those concerned. All this has happened when in reality there is no alternative to strengthening our vast rural base on which stands the economic development of the rural masses. The main hurdles which come in the way of planning from below are as under:

- Decentralised planning under the Panchayat Raj demands decentralisation of the finances and delegation of power. However, in actual implementation there are certain problems because panchayat and Zilla Parishads depend solely on the funds devolved from the central and state governments and therefore could not work with adequate independence.

- In the absence of basic socio-economic reforms and a structure of popular institutions at district level and village which are accountable and responsible to the people, decentralised planning will be prevented by the vested interests in
collusion with bureaucratic machinery and deprive the masses of their minimum right and intensify their exploitation

- At present there is no specific and adequate constitutional provision regarding the structure and financial and administrative power of rural institutions. As observed by expert committee reports these Panchayat Raj institutions have been at the mercy of the State government and their bureaucratic systems.

- Another issue relates to the social aspects of the rural society of India. After several years of economic planning, Indian rural scene witnesses feudal tendencies in land structure. Usually, caste and communal conflicts and social and cultural backwardness are additional contributing factors responsible for malfunctioning of Panchayat Raj institutions. Therefore, it becomes imperative for the government to focus its attention on the aforesaid issues to make the grassroots level planning a grand success especially in context of rural development programmes to uplift the rural poor.

**Programme Shortcomings**

It has been observed that the impact of anti-poverty programme implementations to rise the living standards of the rural poor have had some shortcomings in course of their implementation. The limitations both at programme and at policy level planning not being comprehended in totality have resulted in the failures. Some of these shortcomings which are identified can be used as indicators for future planning of new programmes and policies with in-built flexibility for mid-course correction.

Majority of the beneficiaries were not eligible for assistance under the anti-poverty programme. The targets fixed were not realistic in terms of understanding the magnitude of poverty in specific groups and regions. This resulted in the benefits...
being snatched by a well off few. The programme has not helped in rising the income of those families who were below poverty line to the desired level. There were limitations in the creation of targets for employment and also large scale financing under particular scheme created marketing problems and work availability. The corrective measures for a massive anti-poverty programme like IRDP has to be from the stage of formulation taking it through all levels of implementation to be flawless. Pumping only money without supportive facilities does not allow for optimal absorption. Another fact is a close public participation to a measure to be conducive not only for the concerned individual but also for the smooth implementation of the programme.

Other factor is non involvement of financing agencies in not identifying the beneficiaries before hand. The programmes have been thrust upon some of them—the real needy ones being out of picture. This may be due to political intervention. The quality of lending has been observed to be much below the standard in as much as that in financing milch animals to proper care with reference to milk yield, breed, availability of the fodder and the like. The administrative subsidy has also resulted in unscrupulous elements taking advantage of the subsidy rather than the real purpose of improving the standards of the rural target groups. There was also pocketing of subsidy by bureaucratic local politicians and farmers.

The uniform approach to identify the target group puts all the rural poor in one category without bothering potential viability or their capacity to run enterprises independently. Other factor is all the households are not equally viable as some are only potentially viable. The risk bearing capacity or an enterprising attitude is another negative indicator. Thus the major weak point in the approach is the emphasis on self
employment taken too far without the process of solution to all the poor. The staff of the development administration, co-operative and banking staff should also function independently without interference from the rich, political, clouts who unofficially try to control panchayat and co-operative societies. The planning component of this strategy has to be strengthened substantially and this is absolutely essential.

All the rural poor do not also need self employment, the suitability and the acceptability factors have to be weighed for providing self employment and wage employment. The continued fragmentation of the land has driven large number of farmers to forcefully accept the agricultural labour or migrate to urban areas in search of new job. Thus the poverty of land to the landless haunts the rural people. Rural poverty is also multi-dimensional. Half of the rural population are poor in food consumption, poor in health, living in hut house, illiterate, ignorant, suppressed as well as exploited by their own people. Unemployment is rampant, per capita income is the lowest and so also the per capita consumption. This has resulted in people below the poverty line in rural areas multiply at a higher rate. The objectives announced in formulating programmes and policies from time to time during Plans though are laudable have made little impact on rural society. Inequality in rural India has widened further due to the conspicuous failures of the Planned programmes and policies rising the percentage of poverty and unemployment. Other shortcomings identified are the inadequate and inefficient administrative machinery to implement programmes to ensure social justice - our urban approach to solve rural problems. What calls for with the foregone results and conclusions is a micro-planning approach system to find solutions to this multi-dimensional problems. The lack of coordination between District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), the black and other departments which cause bottle-necks in preparation of proper household survey and
plans, development of perspective and annual action plans to reflect a balance mix of sectorial priorities based on local needs and resource availability(10) The monitoring and follow-up action has been inefficient neither guidance is provided nor beneficiaries are enquired about utilisation of loans, non availability of marginal skills at the field level is one more hurdle

Achievements

Some of the gains are

- Even if all the beneficiaries have not been able to go above the poverty line, between 40-90 percent of them have registered income increase in varying degrees in different regions of our country
- The number of earning members in many of assisted households has increased
- The period of employment per month has also gone up
- The administrative machinery has also been considerably strengthened, which can be judged as a success of our rural development strategy to some extent
- These rural development programmes are now acting as an instrument of socio-economic changes, which are taking place in rural areas. The people have started to participate in rural development programmes. In this sense, nobody can say that people's involvement in developmental activities is a neglected dimension in India. However, it is other thing that progress made in this direction is far from satisfactory
Decentralisation of Planning

Decentralised, means grassroots planning from below. In the present system of rural development, it is at the top level that decisions are taken as to what should be in the interest of the rural masses in terms of social services, education, employment, industry, agriculture and the like. This has resulted in the development of a casual, if not apathy, attitude among the village folks to all such planning which neither involves them at the stage of planning nor will it give them a chance to spell out what their needs are. This has presented a serious problem without having a solution. Panchayat Raj system took birth out of this strategy only, the devolution of authority has never been easy. As of today, one can see over enthusiasm to strengthen this system has only resulted in the development of two institutions viz, Zilla Pramukh and Ziladhish. Ziladhish is the head of district administration whereas Zilla Pramukh functions as a marshal and mobilises available resources for developmental activities in such a manner that he gets co-operation of villagers and involves them both in planning the plan at the village panchayat level and also for the successful implementation.

Rural Development Strategy

The rural development programme occupy a significant position in our economic planning. Our villages represent real India. Without uplifting rural masses, we cannot accelerate the overall economic development. For this reason, considerable efforts are been made in successive Plans to improve the quality of life of rural poor. The integrated development of area and the people through optimum development and utilisation of local resources—infrastructure, biological and human, and bring about the necessary institutional, structural and attitudinal changes by delivery of a package of services to encompass all sectors of human activity includes social
infrastructure and services in areas of health, nutrition, sanitation, housing, drinking water and literacy with the ultimate objective to improve the quality of life of "Rural Poor and the Rural Weak" The objectives of rural development aims at

- Providing certain goods and social services in terms of social and economic infrastructure,
- Increasing the income of every rural family and to see that those who are below the poverty line or enable to come above the line in the coming years,
- Improving the quality of life of rural poor,
- Creation of additional employment opportunities in rural areas

With this background rural development strategy can be defined as a set of goals, operation processes, terminal objectives and structural arrangements designed to bring about change and development in the lives of rural people (11) A typical rural development strategy is termed as one "that achieves desired increase in farm output at minimum cost and make possible wide spread improvements in the welfare of rural population, contributes to the transformation of the predominantly agrarian economy and facilitates the broader process of social modernisation (12) These conditions help in accelerating the process some of the pre-requisites that can be mentioned are

- proper co-ordination between different, credit providing institutions, such as nationalised banks, co-operative banks and regional rural banks
- provision of subsidy for acquiring new assets for improving their existing assets to make the project bankable
- ensuring supply of raw material or inputs at the doorstep of rural poor or at least at carting distance from the village
marketing arrangements for marketing of their products ensuring a fair price so that they may be able to repay loans and also get some money for consumption to improve their quality of life

Arrangements for improving and upgrading of their existing skills

Undertaking research and development on a continuous basis so that rural productivity increases in agriculture, animal husbandry and allied activities and rural industries by upgrading technology

Provision of social infrastructure, especially
- Drinking water
- Education facilities to inform artisans and vocational trades about the local needs, and
- Adequate health care

Provision of economic infrastructure in terms of
- Roads which are at least cartable throughout the year connecting every village to the nearby market and
- Electricity and bus transport

Organically linking voluntary agencies with the new rural development administrative structure

Supplementing economic activities of the rural poor for several years to help raise his net income through providing employment in public works to those who are under-employed. It will have to be done by identifying periods of unemployment or under-employment in a year,

Areas or pockets in the district suitable for this purpose, and

Concrete public works project for creating double assets in such villages

The designing, recruitment and training of functionaries at different levels in such a way as to inculcate spirit of dedication to rural development
among them and motivation to implement the programmes efficiently, honestly and economically. Quality personnel should be recruited and helped to stay on to man rural development administration.

- Continuous planning, monitoring and evaluation of rural development programmes to ensure that all the above mentioned facets are properly integrated or co-ordinated. The effectiveness of achieving the object depends upon the extent and efficiency of such integration / co-ordination.

Keeping the rural development objectives in mind, the Government of India has launched various poverty alleviation programmes. In this connection, development of fundamental infrastructures in rural areas was given the first priority by including the Minimum Needs Programmes (MNP). Under this, water supply and sanitation, schemes relating to land reforms, agricultural marketing, rural godowns and development of road in rural areas were undertaken. MNP thus envisaged to provide certain economic and social infrastructure ensuring facilities like roads, electricity, road transports, drinking water, medical care and primary schools which are basic requirements of development. They are fundamental and essential, act as catalysts to bring the changes most essential for the successful implementation of the poverty alleviation.

As regards increasing the income of individual rural poor, the government initiated programmes of Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Development of Women and Children in rural areas, Drought Prone Area Programme, National Rural Employment Programme, Desert Development Programme, Rural Landless Employment Programme and Training of Rural Youth for Self-employment Programme (TRYSEM). IRDP aimed at lifting the beneficiary family above the
poverty line by providing them with financial assistance (partly by way of loan and partly by way of subsidy) to enable them to acquire productive and income generating assets. This programme has also been extended to the whole country in the form of a scheme for productive skill (through TRYSEM). The National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) has been designed to provide wage employment opportunities for those segments of the rural poor who are without assets to supplement the IRDP. Rural Landless Employment Generation Programme (RLEG) was designed to provide short-term jobs for one hundred days to one member of a landless family in rural areas.

References


