Abstract

The economic liberalization initiated during the final decade of 20th century has gained momentum in this decade. However, the benefits of this growth have been confined mostly to urban area. Poverty and lack of basic facilities such as schools, health services, roads, electricity, communication etc., have resulted in the migration of rural population to cities to seek better lives and jobs. This cannot be prevented unless rural development is ensured and the standard of living of the villagers is improved. Periyar Maniammai University which is situated at Vallam, Thanjavur has undertaken the role of supporting institution that bridges the urban rural relationship through rural development. A programme called as PURA “Providing Urban Amenities to the Rural Areas” was launched to develop the rural area. The programme was initiated based on the principles of the great social reformer Thanthai Periyar, who proclaimed that villagers should get the same amenities as enjoyed by people in cities and towns. This scheme was introduced in sixty-five villages in Thanjavur District. This scheme was later known as Periyar PURA which is named after the great Thanthai Periyar. These villages were grouped into six clusters so as to conceptualise them as “one field-one cluster” meaning each cluster is given an activity such as coconut based activity, alternate building material, bamboo based activity, herbal activity, dairy farming, bio-fuel and food products. These six clusters are Budhalur, Palayapatti, Vallam, Veeramarasanpatti, Rayamundanpatti, and Achampatti. The grouping of the cluster was based on the natural resources like water, weather, biodiversity, geographical boundaries and human resources. Each cluster was to concentrate on product of specific field so that wealth generated will be circulated within the PURA Village. This programme was started in the year 2003 and has been in operation till today.
For the past seven years the process of rural development has been going on in these villages, but there was no study made on the progress of this programme. One of the PURA mission was to promote entrepreneurship among the villagers so as to have self sustainability and to be self supported through business. Another mission of the PURA Scheme was to provide enhancement to the villages through Knowledge Connectivity, Economic Connectivity, Electronic Connectivity and Physical Connectivity. In Knowledge Connectivity, the knowledge and skill related to agriculture activities and entrepreneurship ventures were imparted to the villagers to to make them aware of the technology revolution and innovation based agricultural projects. The key areas of the Knowledge Connectivity were the Skill Based Training, Entrepreneurship Development Programme, Rural Market Management, Government Policies and Schemes. As for Economic Connectivity, concern was to create jobs for the villagers through the training that has been given to the villagers and also to teach them the art of marketing. Cost effectiveness, demand and supply of products, harvesting and manpower utilisation were the main substance of the Economic Connectivity. Likewise, the Electronic Connectivity is concerned with exchange and disseminate of information technology required by the villagers through electrotechnology. Wi-Max Services, Telephone Services, Internet Services and Computer Usage are the key essential components of the Electronic Connectivity. Lastly, the Physical Connectivity involved road services, sanitation, water and electrical supply, which develop the environment of the villagers.

Hence, the study has posed the research question as to what has motivated the villagers to become entrepreneurs and the role of the supporting institutions in sustaining the entrepreneurship in the PURA Scheme villages. The theoretical part of the study constitutes a set of nine hypotheses which in turn led us to formulate the questionnaires in order to collect data from the villagers. The questionnaire is divided into two parts, first part was intended to collect their demographical variables, and second part of questionnaire to collect data on the PURA connectivity’s outcome. The second part of the questionnaires consists of sixteen questions, which were designed
to know the effects of the four distinctive areas, i.e Knowledge, Economic, Electronic and Physical connectivity. The sampling of the villagers was carried out by using the multiple stage random selection technique. The data collection was carried out using the structured questionnaires through schedule interview as most of the villagers were busy in the field work. Total of six hundred samples were selected for our study. The basic statistical tools such as reliability test, chi-square test and multiple regression analysis were used in evaluating the collected data. In addition, advanced statistical tools like Cross Tabulation Analysis and K-Mean Cluster Analysis were used in evaluating the cluster’s sentiment towards the PURA Scheme programme.

The chi-square test was used in this study to determine the significance of the relationship among the independent variables like age, gender, marital status, education, experience, income, period of skill based training, number of entrepreneurship development programmes attended by the villagers and the role of supporting institutions in maintaining the connectivity. The chi-square test reveals that the independent variable ‘income’ has the strongest significance for the villagers to become entrepreneurs. However, the data were further examined by using the Multiple Regression Analysis to find out the relationship between the independent variables i.e. income, experience, skill based training and entrepreneurship development. The result showed that deciding factor for a villager to become an entrepreneur was the income. In order to know the outcome of the implemented PURA programme, cross-tabulation analysis was used to determine the awareness and environment of the villagers in PURA Scheme villages. The result shows that seventy-five per cent of the population strongly agreed that the PURA Scheme implementation has improved their livelihood in their village. The K-Mean cluster analysis was used in knowing the popularity of the programme. The result revealed that the Knowledge Connectivity has scored the highest mean value which shows that the villagers have learnt and improved their livelihood through this connectivity.
In conclusion, the PURA Scheme is indeed a successful programme whereby significant changes have taken place in the villages. Improvement in road condition, has enabled the villagers to transport their harvested products in a faster time to the distributing centres. Increase in number of schools at all levels of education has provided the farmers’ children the choice of school to attend. Farmers have learnt to use modern technology for farming. Better water quality and electrical supply service have been established in the villages. This scheme has not only brought the changes to villagers but also opened up an avenue for many industries to set-up their operation in these rural areas as well. This has given opportunities for the villagers to get a business link and has also provided job opportunity for many school dropouts. The study on the entrepreneurship development at PURA Scheme village was interesting and enhanced our knowledge. The study of Entrepreneurship Development in PURA Scheme village has exposed the growth of rural economy that has not been explored. As on date, the PURA Scheme Villages that we have studied are comparable to the urban sector in terms of support and service. Periyar Maniammai University as the supporting institution has transformed the downtrodden villages into economically inspired villages.