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## **RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA**

### **(A SPECIAL FOCUS ON PRE AND POST INDEPENDENCE ERA)**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people, the rural poor. Rural development can be defined in several ways, but for all practical purposes, it means helping the poor people living in the villages in their economic development. India is predominantly an agrarian country with 72 per cent (about 80 crores) of its population living in more than five lakh villages. Agriculture is the predominant livelihood occupation and the rural population largely consists of small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers, artisans and scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Prior to the independence in 1947, in India various individuals and institutions made experiments in rural development from time to time. Several experiments in rural reconstruction undertaken by official and nonofficial agencies in the past contributed towards new thinking about reorganizing the setup for rural development. The present paper to study systematic developmental activities in rural sectors in India.

**Key Words:** Rural development, livelihood, reorganizing.

#### **Introduction:**

India is predominantly an agrarian country with 72 per cent (about 80 crores) of its population living in more than five lakh villages. Agriculture is the predominant livelihood occupation and the rural population largely consists of small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers, artisans and scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. A large part of this rural population (more than 200 million) is still living below the poverty line and is the focus of rural development programmes. From the pre-independence era of Mahatama Gandhi, every government after the Independence of the country in 1947 has committed itself to rural development.

According to Ensminger (1974) rural development is a process of transformation from traditionally oriented rural culture towards an acceptance and reliance on science and technology. Lela (1975) defined rural development as an improvement in the living standard of the masses of low-income population residing in rural areas and making the process of self-sustaining. According to Agarwal (1989) rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people, the rural poor. Rural development can be defined in several ways but for all practical purposes it means helping the poor people living in the villages in their economic development.



The major objectives of the rural development programs are:

- To achieve enhanced production and productivity in the rural areas
- To bring about a greater socio-economic equity
- To bring about a spatial balance in social and economic development
- To bring about improvement in the ecological environment so that it may be conducive to growth and happiness, and
- To develop broad based community participation in the process of development.

### **Experiments in Rural development – Pre Independence:**

Prior to the independence in 1947, in India various individuals and institutions made experiments in rural development from time to time. The model village in Sunderban (Bengal) by Sir Daniel Hamilton in 1903, the Sriniketan experiment of Thakur Rabindranath Tagore in 1920, Brayne's Gurgaon experiment in 1921, Krishnamachari's Baroda Reconstruction Movement in early 1930s, Gandhiji's experiment in Champaran (1911) and Sevagram in 1936, and The Firka Development Scheme in Madras State in 1946 are a few prominent initiatives that had substantive bearing on the future rural development programmes. The information available on these early projects is scanty and is mostly based on the recollections of the social workers involved in these experiments.

### **Rural Development Programme - Post-Independence period:**

#### ***Etawah Project (1948-52)***

Several experiments in rural reconstruction undertaken by official and nonofficial agencies in the past contributed towards new thinking about reorganizing the setup for rural development. Albert Mayer's Etawah project of 1947-48 for Rural Planning and Development played a key-role and can be regarded as a forerunner of the Community Development Projects in India. After an initial period of trial and error lasting over a year and a half, an administrative pattern was evolved which, for the first time facilitated extension activities to percolate to the village level. The activities of different development departments were channelized through one common agency and the concept of a multipurpose Village Level Worker emerged.

#### **Grow More Food Campaign:**

An organized effort towards increasing the agricultural production was launched in the year 1947-48 and this was popularly known as the "Grow More Food Campaign". Under this programme additional staff was provided at the District and Sub-divisional (Taluka) levels but after a few year's experience it was observed that the system was not functioning properly and cultivators response towards the programme was very poor. Moreover, all the departments for rural development were working in isolation and reaching the people directly without any close coordination. The importance of coordinating the activities of the development departments was felt strongly. A committee was appointed to enquire about the working of this programme and suggest ways and means to improve it.



### **Community Development and N.E.S. Era (1953- 60)**

The National Extension Service was inaugurated on October 2, 1953, with a view to provide necessary manpower for the implementation of the community development programme. However, by the year 1956-58, it was felt that people's participation was not forthcoming as desired. An in depth assessment of the past experience led to the recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta committee and based on these recommendations democratic decentralization (Panchayati Raj) was introduced. The system consisted of three tiers of Zila Parishad at District level, Panchayat Samiti at Block level and Gram Panchayat at the village level.

Thus, there were three constituents in the administrative system at this stage:

- Panchayati Raj;
- Direct line staff, such as Collector, Block Development Officer, and VLWs, and
- Specialist staff, such as Extension Officers of different departments.

### **Intensive Agricultural Development Era (1960 onwards)**

A Ford Foundation Team (1959) in its report titled "India's Food Crisis and Steps to Meet It" urged selection of certain crops in certain areas for more intensive efforts. The team also recommended that the agricultural extension programmes should be based on local conditions, village production system and problems, and village potentials.

### **The Intensive Agricultural Area Programme:**

The mid-term appraisal of the Third Five Year Plan emphasized that much greater emphasis should be given to the development of scientific and progressive agriculture in an intensive manner and 20-25 per cent of the cultivated area of the country should be selected for intensive agricultural development. The IAAP, which came into operation in March 1964.

### **Integrated Rural Development Programme :**

The concept of an Integrated Rural Development Programme was first proposed in the Central budget of 1976-77. This programme was intended to 'assist the rural population to derive economic benefits from the developmental assets of each area. Though conceptually this programme was comprehensive in scope and sought to secure, through a process of block level planning, fuller exploitation of the local growth potential with a view to making an optimum impact on the local poverty situation. A number of programmes have been operating in the country aimed at improving the economic conditions of the rural poor. None of these programmes covered the whole country, though a large number of blocks in the country had more than one of these programmes operating simultaneously in the same area for the same target group. This territorial overlap combined with the different funding patterns of these programmes, not only created considerable difficulties in effective monitoring and accounting, it often blurred the programme objectives. In practice, therefore,



these programmes were reduced to mere subsidy giving programmes shorn of any planned approach to the development of the rural poor as an inbuilt process in the development of the area and its resources. It was, therefore, proposed that such multiplicity of programmes for the rural poor operated through a multiplicity of agencies should be ended and be replaced by one single integrand programme operative throughout the country. The programme was to be called the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). Of the 350 million people below the poverty line in the country, around 300 million lived in the rural areas, possessing little or virtually no assets. They needed to be enabled to acquire productive assets and/or appropriate skills and vocational opportunities and then backed effectively with services to increase production and productivity. If through special programmes of specific beneficiary oriented assistance this group could be brought above the poverty line a major impact would be secured on the overall economic levels of the country.

### **Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM):**

With the objective of providing technical skills to rural youths to enable them to take up self employment in the broad fields of agriculture and allied activities, industries, services, and business activities, the scheme of Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment was started on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1979.

### **Land Reforms in India:**

In India, nearly 60 per cent of the population is dependent on agriculture, the structure of land ownership is central to the well being of the people. The government has strived to change the ownership pattern of cultivable land, but has had limited success. The abolition of intermediaries immediately after Independence, in spite of its many well documented shortcomings and lack of implementation in certain parts of the country, was a significant achievement and covered close to 40 per cent of the cultivated area. These achievements notwithstanding, the lack of progress in the other components of the land reforms programme, viz., implementation of land ceiling laws, security of tenure to tenants and consolidation of land holdings, remains a matter of serious concern. Agricultural workers did not benefit from the abolition of the *zamindari*. The SC/STs, who constitute the bulk of the labour force, do not have either the assets or the skills to participate in the limited but emerging employment opportunities in different sectors of the economy. The problem is further compounded by the fact that though the contribution of agriculture to GDP has nearly halved from over 50 per cent in 1951 to around 25 per cent in 2000-01, a similar transformation of employment opportunities has not taken place. The number of people dependent on agriculture and allied activities has fallen only 12 percentage from 71 per cent of the population in 1951 to 59 per cent in 2001. The progress in tenancy reforms is still unsatisfactory. Tenancy laws in the states follow different patterns, as land is a state subject. Several states, including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa have either banned tenancy completely or have imposed such restrictive conditions that land leases are virtually impossible. Studies by the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration indicate that this has only resulted in concealed tenancy. It is estimated that over 34 per cent of land is operated under concealed tenancy in Bihar. The ban on tenancy, which was meant to protect tenants, has only ended up hurting



the economic interests of the tenants, as they are not even recognised as tenants. As a result, they are denied the benefits of laws that provide security of tenure and regulate rent. Since migration and feminization are increasing trends, land reforms that make tenancy legal and give well defined rights to tenants and to women are now more necessary than ever not only to reduce distress but also to increase agricultural growth.

The progress on the consolidation of land holdings has also been slow. Consolidation has to be a continuing process, but most states have stopped consolidation proceedings. As on 31 March 2002, consolidation of holdings has taken place only in an area of 66.10 million hectares against a total cultivable area of 142 million hectares. Land relations can have a major impact on agricultural productivity and production. Inequality in land distribution and insecurity of tenure etc., are often at the bottom of many forms of social discrimination and domination based on gender, caste, minority, and tribal affiliations. The National Commission on Farmers has placed the unfinished agenda in land reform first in its list of five factors central to the present agrarian crisis, and states “the first and foremost task of the National Policy for Farmers should be in the area of land reform with particular reference to tenancy laws, distribution of ceiling surplus land, attention to common property and wasteland resources and the consolidation of holdings. Following the conferment of land rights to women under the Hindu Succession Amendment Act (2005), the provision of appropriate support services to women farmers has become urgent. Joint Pattas are essential for women to get access to credit. Also, there should be stringent restrictions on the diversion of prime farmland for non-farm purposes.” More recently, initiatives of state governments have related to liberalisation of land laws in order to promote large-scale corporate farming. This is in sharp contrast to the policy environment soon after independence when land reforms were meant to provide ownership rights to small and marginal farmers on equity considerations. Though the pressure of population has led to sub-division and fragmentation of land holdings, thereby considerably weakening the case for further lowering of land ceilings, the need for effective implementation of the existing land ceiling laws cannot be over-emphasized. The Ninth Plan had laid strong emphasis on agrarian restructuring to make agriculture more efficient, leading to increased “output and employment”. However, progress on different components of the land reform package during the Plan has been limited.

### **Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana**

The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) was launched on 25 December 2000 as a 100 per cent Centrally Sponsored Scheme. The prime objective of the PMGSY is to provide connectivity to all the eligible unconnected habitations of more than 500 persons in the rural areas (250 persons in the hill and desert areas) by good quality all-weather roads.

### **Rural Housing**

To solve the problem of the lack of housing in rural areas, a programme called Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) was launched in May 1985 as a sub-scheme of



Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY). It was implemented as an independent scheme since 1 January 1996 and is the flagship programme for rural housing. The Indira Awaas Yojana aims at providing assistance to rural people below the poverty-line belonging to Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes, freed bonded labourers and non-scheduled castes/scheduled tribes categories for the construction of dwelling units and upgradation of existing unserviceable kutcha houses by providing grants-in-aid. From 1995-96, IAY benefits have been extended to widows or next-of-kin of defense personnel killed in action. Benefits have also been extended to ex-servicemen and retired members of the paramilitary forces as long as they fulfill the normal eligibility conditions of IAY. Three per cent of funds are reserved for the disabled persons living below the poverty line in rural areas.

### **Rural Drinking Water Supply Programme**

Clean drinking water is a basic necessity of life. Supply of clean drinking water in the rural areas has always been one of the highest priorities of the government. A Technology Mission on drinking water named “National Drinking Water Mission” (NDWM) was launched in 1986, which subsequently was rechristened as “Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission” (RGNDWM) in 1991 with three key objectives:

1. Providing safe drinking water to all villages,
2. Assisting local communities to maintain sources of safe drinking water in good condition, and
3. Giving special attention for water supply to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission (RGNDWM) adopts an integrated approach so that conservation and augmentation of water sources is interrelated with rural water supply schemes to provide sustainable supply of safe drinking water to the rural population. The Mission seeks to provide supply of 40 liters of safe drinking water in rural areas.

### **Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP)**

RLEGP was introduced from 15th August, 1983 with the objective of (a) improving and expanding employment opportunities for the rural landless with a view to providing guarantee of employment to at least one member of every landless household up to 100 days in a year and (b) creating durable assets for strengthening the infrastructure so as to meet the growing requirements of the rural economy. An outlay of Rs.500 crores to be fully financed by the Central Government was provided under this programme in the Sixth Plan. The implementation of the programme was entrusted to the States/UTs, but they were required to prepare specific projects for approval by a Central Committee.



## Conclusion:

The importance of ensuring, right from the start, the people's participation, not merely in the execution of the Community Development Project but also in its planning was emphasized as this is the very essence of the programme. The Community Development Programme made a provision for the setting up of a Project Advisory Committee, which should be as representative as possible of all the non-official elements within the project area. The Planning process in a democratic country can acquire fuller meaning and depth if the people not only associate themselves in planning for their development but also participate consciously in plan implementation. Experience suggests that the task of educating and mobilising the people in this direction is more effectively accomplished when it is institutionalised. Individual action though important can only be sporadic in nature, whereas institutionalised action can be distinctly more effective in mobilising local resources, articulating needs and coordinating the developmental tasks which are undertaken by the people. The following are some of the forms of institutionalised action. 1. Youth and Women's organisations operating at different spatial levels, particularly for promoting eco-development and environmental sanitation. 2. Voluntary organisations engaged in general developmental work in an area or on a specific activity like education or health or a combination of a few such activities. 3. Organisations of specific beneficiary or interest groups like self-employed women, or farmers or of people who have common economic interest such as marketing. 4. Organisation of the farmers living in command area of irrigation project catchment areas in the hills and watershed areas in un-irrigated regions into cooperatives for improving land and water management without affecting the individuality of holdings.

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