



CHALANGES AND OPPURTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Rural India comprises more than 70 percent of the country's population, but its share in the total national income is less than 50 percent. This is because rural sector is characterised by low income levels, poor quality of life and a weak human capital base. Although India has grown economically faster, the performance in the reduction of poverty, unemployment and economic disparity has remained poor. The phenomenon of Rural Development is becoming more complex despite technological advancement, availability of recourses as well as continued efforts from the pre independence period. Rural Development has a long history in India. There are various approaches like philosophies, policies, programmes, enactments, methodologies, strategies, and experiments etc are to be studied and analysed to understand the Rural Development. Present paper highlights the points like history, analyses of challenges of Rural Development, suggestions and opportunities to gain self employment for the rural families in India.

INTRODUCTION

A society can be classified as rural based on the criteria of lower population density, less social differentiation, less social and spatial mobility, slow rate of social change, etc. Agriculture would be the major occupation of rural area. Lifestyles in rural areas are different than those in urban areas, mainly because limited services are available. Government services like schools, fire departments, libraries etc may be distant, or unavailable. Utilities like water, sewer, street lighting, and garbage collection may not be present. Public transport is sometimes absent or very limited people use their own vehicles, walk or ride an animal.

Rural Development is a process of bringing change among rural community from the traditional way of living to progressive way of living. It is also expressed as a movement for progress. Rural development has always been an important issue in all discussions pertaining to economic development, especially of developing countries. In the developing countries rural mass comprise a substantial majority of the population. Although millions of rural people have escaped poverty as a result of rural development, a large majority of rural people continue to suffer from persistent poverty.

The socio-economic disparities between rural and urban areas are widening and creating tremendous pressure on the social and economic fabric of many developing economies. These factors tend to highlight the importance of rural development. The policy makers in most of the developing

countries recognize this importance and have been implementing programs and measures to achieve rural development objectives. For India rural development has an integral part of nation's socio-economic-political development. The problem is not merely one of development of rural areas but of the development of rural communities to dispel ignorance and poverty and create self-reliant and self-sustaining healthy modern little communities.

Rural development is a dynamic process, which is mainly concerned with the rural areas. These include agricultural growth, putting up of economic and social infrastructure, fair wages as also housing and house sites for the landless, village planning, public health, education and functional literacy, communication etc. Rural development is a national necessity and has considerable importance in India because, about three-fourth of India's population live in rural areas, thus rural development is needed to develop nation as whole. Nearly half of the country's national income is derived from agriculture, which is major occupation of rural India. Around seventy per cent of Indian population gets employment through agriculture. Bulks of raw materials for industries come from agriculture and rural sector. And growing disparity between the urban elite and the rural poor can lead to political instability.

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The history of sustainability traces human-dominated ecological systems from the earliest civilizations to the present. This history is characterized by the increased regional success of a particular society, followed by crises that were either resolved, producing sustainability, or not, leading to declaim.

Rural development has never been a new concept for India because even in the famous epics and dramas like Ramayana and Mahabharata the instances of rural governance in terms of welfare of the people, justice to the people have been made. Gandhi was one of the biggest actor who has contributed towards the field of rural, his experiments as well as inspiring thoughts have always been the source of inspiration, for the actors involved in rural development. He states that "I know that the work [of making an ideal village] is as difficult as to make of India an ideal country. But, while it is possible for one man to fulfil his ambition with respect to a single village some day, one man's lifetime is too short to overtake the whole of India. But if one man can produce one ideal village, he will have provided a pattern not only for the whole country, but perhaps for the whole world."

In 1920 when Mahatma Gandhi entered to Indian public life rural development received popular support with the concept of Gram Swaraj, Swa Desi, Khadi, Safai, Shram Dan etc Mahatma Gandhi also designed a programme for rural development which included khadi, promotion of village industries, eradication of untouchability, provision of basic and adult education, prohibition, women's upliftment, and propagation of the national language. Gandhiji was translating these ideas into action at Warda in Sevagram. Along with the freedom movement the volunteers were engaged in rural reconstruction programmes all over the country.

Rabindranath Tagore set up Srinikiten Institute of Rural Reconstruction in 1921 with the aim of making the rural population self-reliant and self-respectful. This initiative is popularly known as Sriniketan Rural Reconstruction Programme. Tagore's experiment in small area of a few villages aimed at both economic as well as social development of the rural community. Government of India Act 1935, which conferred autonomy on the provinces in a sphere of activities which included, among others, all the ingredients of rural development. Kishan Sabha under the leadership of the Communist party worker Mrs. Godavri Parulekar in 1945 fought for Adivasis rights against landlords, moneylenders and contractors. As a result, the Minimum Wages Act was brought under enforcement in Forties to safeguard the interests of Adivasis working for forest contractors and plantation owners.

It is found that whatever approaches, methodologies, priorities, strategies which are being adopted today for rural development are not new but are refined forms of inheritance of rural development practices of pasts. Wage employment, self employment, entrepreneurship, self -help, community mobilization, reconstruction, credit, voluntary effort, legal provisions, social actions, everything that we find today as part of rural development were there in past also.

Rural areas are facing major challenges today which arise mainly from globalisation, demographic change and the rural migration of young, well-trained people. Policies for rural areas aim to contribute to recognising and making use of strengths and opportunities. Liberalized trade regimes as well as more integrated and consumer driven agricultural and food markets are globalising rapidly and driving innovations, forcing farmers to adapt or lose out. Poor farmers do not have the capacity face the cut throat competition and hence they are bound to perish. Environmental concerns are also considered and integrated during the planning phase of programmes of measures to support rural areas. A large share of policies targeted at land use in rural areas serves to promote agro biodiversity and environmental measures in agriculture.

Access to services and infrastructure is generally available nationwide (drinking water supply, sewage treatment, mail, telecommunications, transport). The quality of these services, however, differs from region to region. One field which needs improvement is sewage treatment where, for economic reasons, the number of decentralised systems is growing. The call for nationwide access to broadband in the field of IT and telecommunications creates new challenges. Furthermore, employment opportunities are not always sufficiently available in rural regions.

The real scenario is that rural India is faced with multiple developmental challenges like rural peoples traditional way of thinking, poor understanding, lack of confidence, poor awareness, existence of unmet needs and personal ego. Low level of education to understand developmental efforts and new technology, Poor access to education, resulting in low literacy and unemployment of the youth. Education of girls was felt to be unnecessary in the past and this has seriously affected their quality of life. Illiteracy has also hindered their development due to lack of communication with the outside world. They are slow in adopting new practices, which are essential with the changing times Low literacy rate, particularly among women having adverse effect on their skills development, employment productivity, family welfare and education of their children.

Increasing population which causes severe pressure on natural resources and the environment. Depleting natural resources, resulting in insecurity of food and employment. Pollution of the environment and climate change, are causing shortage of clean drinking water and creating adverse impact on agricultural production. In agriculture field rural people come across Lack of expected awareness, knowledge, skill and attitude, Unavailability of inputs, Poor marketing facility, Small size of land holding, Division of land and Unwillingness to work and stay in rural areas.

Rural people also have Poor infrastructure facilities like water, electricity, transport, educational institutions, communication, health, storage facility etc. Poor health status due to lack of clean drinking water, hygiene, sanitation and drainage facilities, inadequate health care facilities, leading to high child mortality and morbidity, loss of labour productivity, economic loss, indebtedness and poor quality of life. The rate of infant mortality in rural India is marginally higher than in the cities on account of poorer access to safe drinking water, sanitation and health care support. They also have Unfavourable economic condition to adopt high cost technology, Underprivileged rural industries, leadership among the hands of inactive and incompetent people, mollified interest of leaders and biased political will.

The administrative problems are also affecting the rural development, Earlier, majority of the programmes were planning based on top to bottom approach and were target oriented. But Political interference, Lack of motivation and interest, Unwillingness to work in rural area and improper utilization of budget are the major issues. Rural people also have binding of social and cultural problems like cultural norms and traditions and conflict within and between groups, castes, religions, regions, languages.

After independence government of India has taken major steps to develop rural India like Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes (MGNREGS), National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), Integrated Water Development Programme (IWDP), Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY), National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) and Nirmal Bharat Abyan (NBA) etc.

The first organized effort to solve the problem of rural India was made through the Community Development Programme in the year 1952 and National Extension Service in 1953. On the completion of first five years of the CDP, the planning Commission appointed a high-ranking study committee headed by Balwant Rai Mehta, Chief Minister of Gujarat. This team pointed out both positive results and inadequacies in the implementation of the programme. This committee recommended Panchayati Raj.

The study team made a significant recommendation with implementation of a programme. According to it there should be effective administrative decentralization for the implementation of the programme. The decentralized administration was to be placed under the control of selected and integrated local self-government system ordinarily of 3 levels bodies from village level to block level and then to district level. This democratic decentralized system was named as “Panchayat Raj”. The philosophy of Panchayat Raj is deeply steeped in tradition and culture of rural India and is by no means a new concept. Panchayati Raj Provided a system of self-governance at the village level. Panchayati Raj

Institutions is the grass-roots units of self-government – have been declared as the vehicles of socio-economic transformation in rural India. Effective and meaningful functioning of these bodies would depend on active involvement, contribution and participation of its citizens both male and female. The aim of every village being a republic and panchayats having powers has been translated into reality with the introduction of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system to enlist people's participation in rural reconstruction.

“Rural areas face several new opportunities and challenges which call for appropriate rural development policies and a more effective use of scarce financial resources.” After independence in all the five year plans for rural development many programs are introduced. Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment: TRYSEM was introduced to provide technical skills and to upgrade the traditional skills of rural youth belonging to families below the poverty line. Its aim was to enable the rural youth to take up self-employment ventures in different spheres across sectors by giving them assistance under IRDP. Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas: DWACRS an exclusive scheme for women was launched in the IRDP, as a pilot project, in 50 districts. Under DWCRA, a group of women are granted assistance to take up viable economic activities with Rs. 15,000 as a one-time grant to be used as a revolving fund. Experiments in some States to form women's thrift and credit societies first, and then start them on economic work were successful. Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP): This was a totally centrally financed programme introduced in 1983. While most of the objectives and stipulations under this were similar to those of NREP, it was to be limited only to the landless, with guaranteed employment of 100 days. Moreover, there was earmarking of funds specifically for certain activities- 25 per cent for social forestry, 10 per cent for works benefitting only the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes and 20 per cent for housing under Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY). Jawahar Razgar Yojana (JRY): JRY was launched with the primary objective of the programme was generation of additional employment on productive works which would either be of sustained benefit to the poor' or contribute to the creation of rural infrastructure. During 9th five year plan Sub-schemes of TRYSEM, DWCRA, SITRA and GKY were merged into IRDP.

National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP): The National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) came into effect from 15th August, 1995. This programme had three components: namely (i) National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS); (ii) National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS); and (iii) National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS) which are targeted at people living below the poverty line.

Self Employment Programmes: the coverage of beneficiaries in the Ninth Plan was considerably lower than the coverage under SGSY. The formation of self-help groups by itself contributes to the empowerment and economic well-being of the poor by improving their collective bargaining position. The Banks were involved in the planning and preparation of projects, identification of activity clusters, infrastructure planning as well as capacity building and choice of activity of the SHGs.

Guaranteed Wage Employment: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act: MGNREGA is introduced as one of the major step in the direction of inclusive growth. Workfare programmes have been important programme interventions in India and elsewhere in developing

countries since long. These programmes typically provide unskilled workers with short-term employment on public works. They provide income transfers to poor households during periods when they suffer on account of absence of opportunities of employment.

CONCLUSION

Rural development is not a charity programme and its objective is to raise the capacity of producing more crops, better crops, variety crops, greater output per unit of input and higher quality of output. It is concerned with creation of increased incentives for putting more efforts and investments for raising efficiency per worker. Therefore education, information, training, research, and application of research are within the range of rural development. After independence the rural development has taken shape of well planned professional shape from voluntary kind of approach. It has become government affair with taking place in planning by planning commission. A large number of rural facilities have been built under various programmes over successive Plan periods. However, they have degenerated either due to their initial faulty design and construction, or lack of maintenance. Though government of India as taken several steps to solve the rural development problems, to get the 100 percent result each and every person should be educated.

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