

Rural Development to Strengthen Social infrastructure

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Abstract

The term '*development*' refers to "the process of (a general improvement in the levels of living, together with, decreasing inequalities of income distribution, and the capacity to sustain continuous improvements overtime. A great deal of literature is available on rural development, and strategy for rural development. But the basic theme of all such studies pertains to the question of development of India's rural community. The magnitude of the task of rural development with a view to alleviating poverty, eliminating unemployment, reducing inequalities and increasing productivity as well as consumption and literacy level, etc. demands organizational and institutional efforts on the widest possible scale. A location specific planning and intensive utilization of local resources are required for a more efficient implementation of development programmes in rural areas. In all these respects Panchayati Raj institutions have a significant role to play.

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The three primary goals of rural development are raising agricultural and rural productivity, raising community solidarity and institutionalization of equality. Rural development primarily implies generalized increases in rural labour productivity resulting in growing income, and rural employment opportunities sufficient to absorb large number of new entrants into the rural local labour force. Agricultural development is required for the simple reason that in most developing countries practically all the rural population depends on agriculture for employment, education, health and nutrition, consumption including food, housing, and such services as water supply, electricity, transportation, entertainment, police and fire protection, and so forth".

Rural development is a strategy, designed to improve the economic and social life of people in villages. It calls for the extension of the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek livelihood in the rural areas: the small and marginal farmers, tenants and the landless. It also involves optimum utilization of the natural and human resources of a given area for the enrichment of the quality of life of its population. Rural development constitutes a basic campaign for faster economic development.

The concept of rural development encompasses wider spectrum today. It is a process of modernization and mobilization of rural societies and its transition from traditional isolation to integration with national economy for faster economic development and welfare of common masses. Viewed thus, the objectives of rural development consist of improved productivity, increased employment and higher income for weaker sections as well as the minimum acceptable levels of food, shelter, education, health, etc., (b) a decreasing inequality in the distribution of rural income and in rural-urban imbalances in income and economic opportunities, and (c) the capacity of rural sector to sustain and accelerate the pace of improvements overtime.

Thus, the main aim of rural development is to break the vicious circle of poverty through economically better and improved production, reasonable distribution and better living standards and balanced development among the various sections of rural population. It is not to be defined merely in terms of economic outputs, or indicators like increase in agricultural income as social indicators of development cannot be ignored. Real rural development should always reflect improvement in the standards of living of the poor.

Indian experience and experiment of rural development reveals the utilization of a number of changing strategies. Realizing the utmost need for extension and development services in rural areas, in the post-independence period, the government of India has initiated a number of programmes so as to solve the chronic problems of the villages. Guy Hunter (1977) has rightly remarked that there may not be any other developing country in the world

which over the past 33 years has invented and, put into practice various measures in the field of rural development plans which spread over different fields like agriculture, industry, trade, commerce, education both general and technical, social welfare, transport, communications, etc. The basic objective behind all programmes implemented by the government of India was an integrated development of the farmers, the agricultural labourers and the rural artisans and to improve their standard of living by means of reducing poverty, raising productivity and increasing employment opportunities.

Rural development involves raising the socio-economic status of the rural population on a sustainable basis through optimum utilization of local resources, both natural and human. While external help is necessary, rural development can be achieved only when the rural people actively participate in the development process.

The essence of development is not in 'providing' but in 'promoting' the rural sector. The rural population should know how to sustain itself financially and gain economic independence. Therefore, the stress of rural development should be on self-reliance. Also, rural development should result in greater access to the rural population to goods and services.

Rural development is three dimensional in nature. As a method, it seeks people's involvement in all programmes. As a process, it seeks to modernize, through the application of science and technology, the traditionally - oriented rural cultures. Its major objective is to bring about improvement in the quality of life of rural people.

Rural development, which is much more than agricultural development, ought to take into account the existing local and area-wise resources and complementary links among them. There are various classes in rural India and sometimes the relations among them may be conflicting. These conflicts have to be resolved.

Rural development requires a vast infrastructure. Provision of this is not an easy task, because it has to be undertaken by the Government. Private investment in this area has been meager and continues to be so. But the trend of meagre investments in the rural sector is gradually changing in terms of economic sustenance. However, evolving an appropriate technology for rural development is no easy task. Such a technology has to simultaneously achieve the twin objectives of raising growth rates and stepping up opportunities of employment. The setting up of appropriate institutions and co-ordinating their activities are crucial to any rural development strategy. The potential of self-reliance in rural areas needs to be exploited in a planned manner.

A single approach to rural development would not be effective. In fact, rural development is the product of inter-action between various physical, technological, economic, socio-cultural, institutional and environmental factors. Indeed, the rural sector should experience the required changes so that it can join the mainstream of national development and contribute its share to economic development. It had been rightly said, "in the end, however, rural development should not be seen as package of specific needs but as a transformation of rural life and conditions".

The Indian Constitution provides to the States with all the powers and responsibilities for carrying out the process of rural development with particular emphasis on the agricultural development. These include agriculture, water supply, irrigation, drainage, soil conservation, health education, panchayats and agricultural credits, etc. In spite of the great roles assigned to the State Government for rural development through the provision of Constitution, Central Government still keeps dominant control over it. The various powers of taxation and other powers reduce the State's autonomy to negligible proportions.

Ram Reddy pointed out that "though the powers of Central Government are of co-ordinating nature, but it has extended itself to a far

better position in matters of powers and functions for rural development than the provision of the Constitution provides".

Still State and Central Governments share much powers and responsibility which has created confusion in the formulation and implementation of plans for rural development. As stated in the Report of Study Team on Agricultural Administration, Formulation of policies has become difficult due to accent on the autonomy of States in the field where powers, duties and responsibilities are intermeshed."

Besides, those involved in the decision-making and planning for rural development were not well-equipped with the rural knowledge. According to C.H. Hanumantha Rao "The plans are mainly the handiworks of three categories of persons - the national political leaders, the civil servants and numerous experts. But it is seen that these three sets of people have in themselves different ideologies concerning the rural development".

The political leadership is imbued with a spirit of reforms based on certain ideological premises whereas the bureaucratic machinery acts with its elitist behavior. Bureaucrats are not experts in the subjects on which they are given powers to formulate policies. Economists are, on the other hand, engrossed with the sophisticated economic models, which are unable to experience the political and institutional constraints. Similarly, organizational set up at the State level promotes great dichotomy between the formulation of plan and its execution and concerned with the formulation of policies. Higher level governments will not be able to carry out the rural development under the framework as designed by them, because in most of the cases, they are unable to identify the specific constraints in formulating a strategy of rural development. Thus the active participation of rural local organizations is essential, if the objectives of rural uplift are to be achieved within the framework of overall resource constraints and lack of enthusiasm on the part of State level planning machinery.

While analysing the role of the Central and State Governments, it has been observed that much success could not be attained in enhancing the

rural development for two simple reasons: They neither have an easy and direct accessibility to rural population, nor they are accountable to easily approach each individual villager separately, progress depends largely on the existence of an active organisation in the village which can bring the people into common programmes to be carried out with the assistance of administration.

It is a general consensus on the point that development strategies must always be framed with the aim of benefiting the rural people. According to Chaturvedi, Many in the administration feel that official machinery by itself is not suitable for carrying out these development programmes which call for a great deal of initiative and participation on the part of the people themselves.

Firstly, if the planning is done by the local authorities, local people should be consulted on a regular basis during the planning period. This will generate participatory process of the development and generate better information for decision-makers at the local level. Nevertheless, "The psychic dividends of the association of the rural people with the planning and development process are, however, the crux of the matter. This should help them to raise their rights beyond their village and treat it as part of widening developmental horizon. More importantly, this should also broaden their vision about the possibilities of growth. Their wings get touched with the desire of the sky. The more they participate in the process, the more self-reliant they would become to aspire and work for a future where man will blossom forth from "being" into "becoming."

Secondly, planning through the local organisations will make it easy for the identification of constraints which have retarded agricultural growth. Regional variations as well as the technological, economic, socio-cultural and environmental constrains check the operational suitability of the plans. Thirdly, planning for rural development at the grass-root level will lead them to adopt such investment and plan priorities, which will be most suited to

the specific needs of the local people. Owing to regional infrastructural variations, different areas have different benefit potentials.

Conclusion

Thus, Panchayati Raj institutions can play a great role in the-preparation of plans for rural development. It will ensure the co-operation of all the people in mobilising resources available at the local level and devising the best possible ways of using the resources to fulfill all the local needs and requirements. Mobilisation of resources is another factor which must not be ignored while planning for rural development. It is not only the setting of goals and priorities which are needed but also proper utilization of various resources—natural, financial and human to be integrated with it. The local institutions having knowledge of the available and potential local resources are in a position to mobilize them for rural development.

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