



Rural Development in India: Some Issues

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Abstract:

Development has become an essential objective for economic development Rural of any country. In India, 75 per cent population live in rural area and a majority of the population lives under the problems of poverty, unemployment and low standard of living. Therefore, rural development has been the main concern of our country. Before India came under the British Rule, Indian villages were having self-sufficient economy, but with the starting of the British Rule, this rural self-sufficiency and expertise were broken. Rabindra Nath Tagore was the pioneer of rural development of India starting activities at Shantiniketan. To increase welfare in rural areas several rural development programmes were undertaken from time to time after independence. They are known as employment programmes, area development programmes, minimum needs programmes and programmers of land reforms. But, these programmes had limited achievements. In future, rural development programmes must continue with greater thrust, technical skills should be provided to the rural youth, monitoring of these programmes must be sound, irrigation facilities should be increased, cent percent electrification should be generated, rural- urban connectivity should be established and successful completion of Sardar Sarovar Project should be done speedily. By such steps, feel good Factor will be seen in every corner of India.

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1. Introduction

Rural Development has become an important domain. Rural Development has become an established objective for formulating plans and programs for economic development of any country. In a predominantly agriculture based economy like India, where approximately 75% of the total population lives in rural areas and nearly 15% of the total national income is generated in the agricultural sector, rural development is a must for the sound economy of the country. A majority of the population lives in rural areas under the problems of poverty, unemployment, and low standard of living. Therefore, after independence, the ultimate objective of all planned development efforts are for the well-being of the masses and since the very beginning of economic planning (1950), rural development has been the main concern of our country. Development is no longer identified with a mere increase in national income or even per capita national income. The increased income should be so distributed as to result in a significant diminution of inequalities of income and wealth. The abolition of absolute poverty with minimum level of employment or remuneration to all, who seek employment, should be arranged. Public distribution of goods and services at lower rates for the poor – is also a step for development, as it increases welfare. Development is also expected to include the areas of health, education, roads, water, electricity, cultural values and welfare. By all these aspects, the standards of living improve. Thus, the purpose of development becomes the enrichment of the total quality of life. It is now recognized that development is not only the provision of opportunities for development, but also their actual utilization by the people for whom they are intended and involves the creation of the facilities necessary for such utilization. Development could be described as Sarvodaya or promoting the welfare of each individual. In our country, still 32% of the population is living below the poverty line, of which more than 80% are estimated to be living in rural areas.

Backwardness of the rural economy, unemployment and mass poverty can be mitigated by emphasizing and successfully implementing rural development programmes. A special favor towards rural development in our future economic plans is essential.

2. Historical Background of Rural Development

Before India came under the British Rule, Indian villages were having self-sufficient economy. According to the Industrial Commission of 1918, “when the Europe, the birth place of Industrial Revolution, was inhabited by uncivilized tribes, India was famous for the wealth of her rulers and high artistic skills of her craftsmen.”

However, with the starting of the British Rule, this rural self-sufficiency and expertise were broken. They had no programme for rural development. With a view to transform the Indian Economy, into a raw material generator and a market for British manufactured goods, industrialization was thwarted in India and only its stunted growth was permitted by the Britishers having supremacy on their colony. Indian cotton was bought at very cheap rate to manufacture cloth at Manchester and Liverpool textile mills and that foreign manufactured cloth was sold in India at a very high rate. The British made every effort to give a setback to traditional industries of India. The story of the manner in which the world-famous Dhaka Muslin Industry was destroyed by Britishers by chopping off hands of the weavers is tragic. Thus, the well known rural industries and handicrafts rapidly declined, and it hampered the rural development programme. The Indian village people became victims of stagnation and poverty, under the British rule.

Rabindra Nath Tagore was the pioneer of rural development of India, starting activities at Shantiniketan. However, the real efforts regarding rural upliftment were done by Mahatma Gandhi. He made so many efforts to revive village and cottage industries as a part of rural development. He discovered “Charkha” and made it popular as a part of the earning of the masses, which in turn became a part of the struggle for independence. Gandhiji wanted to create Indian villages as self-sufficient and for that; he made so many efforts to remove unemployment and poverty.

3. Rural Development Programmes during Post Independence Period

People living in the rural areas are facing three major problems. These are utter backwardness of the rural economy, widespread unemployment and massive poverty. Therefore, rural development Programmes were put in the Centre in our economic planning. There are some special characteristics of rural society, which give rise to the problem of rural development as distinguished from other kinds of development:

- (i) Dominance of agricultural land with uneven distribution of land and other relevant assets,
- (ii) Dominance in work of agriculture and allied activities,
- (iii) Dominance of self-employment and family labour among the land-owning working force,
- (iv) Dependence of rural income on seasonal factors, with uncertainty and big fluctuations in income,
- (v) Lower level of development factors in rural areas as compared to urban areas such as education, training, research, communication and information, banking services, electricity, transport facilities, etc.

4. Importance of Rural Development Programmes

Rural development Programmes have an important place in the Strategy for rural development. Co-operative, socialism, community development, land reforms, green revolution, cottage industries, minimum wages and population control are some of the efforts in the direction of rural development from the first five year plan. Special Programmes relating to rural development were lunched during sixth and subsequent five year plans.

1. Agriculture, the all-pervasive sector of the rural economy, has in the last fifty four years of economic planning, grown at a meager rate of 2.7% being just about a little above the population growth, it has not given rise to any significant additions to the living levels of the rural people. The large rain-fed area, constituting 67% of the total cultivated area, is yet without irrigation facilities. The few green revolution areas are beset with some serious problems as degradation of soil, water logging and salinity. With traditional inputs and old farming practices prevalent in the most of the regions, the productivity per hectare and per worker is very low in comparison with the advanced countries. The traditional industries in the rural areas are far from developed technologies. There is very little of diversification of industrial products. Like the farm activities concerned with a few crops, the non-farm activities are also confined to a few products. The service sector in rural area is very small with a little variety of services.
2. Indian rural areas are marked by unemployed masses, with increase at a speedy rate because of large annual addition to population. Most of the unemployed persons are in agricultural sector. The number of workers is larger than their requirement. In rural areas we see the disguised and seasonal unemployment.
3. As per the latest estimates of the Planning Commission for 1993-94, at least 37% of the rural population lives below the poverty line. These people are not able to meet fully their requirements for existence.

Due to above mentioned serious economic problems in rural areas, it was essential to implement rural development Programmes since the inception of Indian Economic Planning.

5. Some Rural Development Programmes

To increase welfare in rural areas, several rural development programmes were undertaken from time to time. They are known as employment programmes, area development programmes, minimum needs programmes and programme of land reforms.

5.1 Employment Programmes

Such type of programmes focus on the creation of employment. The unemployed are helped through financial assistance to purchase productive assets. There is also a provision for the acquisition of skills and training in selected jobs, so as to enable the unemployed to undertake work of various kinds on their own. The programmes, which provide these facilities, are the Integrated Rural Development Programme, the Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment Programme and the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas. Some programmes aim at the creation of wage-employment opportunities. The projects undertaken are those with high labour-absorption capacity. The projects chosen are such as roads, buildings, irrigation and flood control devices. Provision also exists for the creation of assets like social forestry, soil conservation and works benefiting the people belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Such programmes are known as the National Rural Employment Programmes and the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programmes. Another programme offering wage-employment is Employment Assurance Scheme. The scheme provides 100 days of employment to a maximum of two adults per family during lean agricultural season.

5.2 Area Development Programmes

Such types of programmes aim at reducing poverty caused by unfavourable agro climatic conditions like those associated with droughts, deserts, etc. The various programmes are Drought Prone Area Programme, Desert Development Programme, Hill Area Development Programme and Integrated Tribal Development Programme.

4.3 Minimum Needs Programme

This programme, launched in 1974, aims at providing access to people to certain basic services and facilities of social consumption in all areas up to nationally accepted norms. One set of elements

includes measures for the improvement of health services, housing, water supply, nutrition, sanitation and education. The public distribution system is also a part of this set. All these increase the living standards. Another set includes provision of roads and electrification of villages. These increase energy of various types. In short, the Minimum Needs Programmes aim at raising the standard of living as also the productivity of the rural people.

5.4 Programmes of Land Reforms

This programme envisages changes in the agrarian relations between the land and tiller of soil on the one hand and the tiller and the owner of land on the other.

5.5 People's Participation

Provisions have been made to secure people's involvement in the various programmes of rural development. The Panchayati Raj Institutions as also the non-government organizations are the two important agencies through which people have been empowered to make decisions regarding rural development. Mahatma Gandhi Guarantee Scheme National Rural Employment (MGNREGS)

In the recent years, U.P.A. government at the Centre made a commitment in its Common Minimum Programme, that it would immediately enact an Employment Guarantee Act. The draft proposed by the National Advisory Council envisaged legal guarantee to every household in rural areas for 100 days for doing casual manual work.

6. Critical Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes

Since 1951, Indian Economic Planning is working for the overall economic development of the country. Rural Development Programme is a significant part of that. During these so many years, there are limited achievements and unlimited shortcomings in this context.

6.1 Limited Achievements

In their primary objective of eradicating poverty, rural development programmes are successful to a reasonable extent. The number of persons living below poverty line has decreased. As a proportion of rural population, the decline is from 56.4% in 1973-74 to 37.3% in 1993-94. There is also an improvement in the lives of the poor in terms of more drinking water, sanitation facilities, housing facilities, literacy, health facilities, etc. There is also an increase in the work-opportunities of various types in both the farm activities and the non-farm activities. The total employment generated is considerable. There has been an increase in the physical assets like all-weather roads, minor irrigation projects, social forestry, schools, health centres, electricity projects, etc. These provide a useful support for agricultural and industrial sector.

6.2 Shortcomings

However, the achievements regarding rural development are important, yet these are very limited. These are far short of resolving the problems of rural India. The eradication of poverty, the primary objective of special programmes, is still a far cry, with about 35% of rural population below the poverty line. Most of the rural people still live a life of low standard. The incidence of poverty continues to be very high in the poor states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa. The rural people live in a backward economy with a high birth rate.

The implementation and the success of rural development programmes is also deficient in some respects. While the financial expenditure on these programmes are quite large, the results in physical terms have not been commensurate with the spending. Another aspect of the unsatisfactory performance of these programmes is the big leakages in their implementation. An evaluation of the ministry of Rural Development (For January-December 1992), shows that as many as 57% of the workers working under Jawahar Rojgar Yojana were non-poor. There is also wastage of expenditure.

A part of the expenditure never reaches the identified poor because of institutional laxity, political intervention and bureaucratic lapses.

There is little improvement even in the scope of the Minimum Needs Programmes. Take for example, the primary education. As many as 90% of the children have been enrolled. However, there have been heavy dropouts. The net result is very low literacy rate among the rural children. Rural Water Supply, Rural Health Services, Rural Electricity, Rural road, etc. services are not achieved for the most of the rural people. The so-called "Feel Good Factor" is not seen in the rural India.

7. Suggestions and Recommendations

1. Rural Development Programmes must continue with greater thrust. Preferential treatment in terms of higher budgetary allocations may be provided to the states, where the numbers of Below Poverty Line household per district currently are more than one lakh.
2. It is necessary to provide technical skills to the rural youth, so that they can get jobs. To develop technical skills among the potential rural youth, the increase in establishment of technical institutes will prove to be of great help.
3. For effective implementation of rural development programmes, it is imperative for the panchayats to have requisite strength of the trained staff. So, efforts must be made for the requisition of sufficient professionalized staff either from other departments or through new recruitment.
4. For monitoring the performance of rural development programmes, it is essential to activate the role-play of monitoring and vigilance committees.
5. While planning and implementing programmes of wage-employment, it is felt necessary that availability of skills among the local people and natural resources should be the guiding principle. This will be a step forward in the sustainable development of human skills and available natural resources.
6. Approximately 66% of the cultivated land is non-irrigated, major portion of the cultivated land is depended on rain and the rain is quite irregular in our country. Therefore, there is a need for increase in irrigation facilities. It will help to increase the employment opportunities and due to this, there will be welfare of the rural population.
7. The cent percent electrification all over the country is essential to support production activities at rural level.
8. The farmers and other entrepreneurs should be provided adequate credit in time. It will enhance production activities and the opportunities of employment.
9. People's participation in rural development programmes is essential. If the rural population possesses awareness for the development activities, the programmes regarding development and welfare would become successful. To increase awareness in the rural people, primary education should be given to all in actual terms.
10. Health services at the rural level must be improved. Most of the Indian villages do not have full time doctors or active primary health centers. By improving health services, we can increase efficiency and productivity of the people. Use of some local medicinal plants and ayurvedic medicines should also be done.
11. For the last 30 years, some environmental problems like pollution of air and water has taken place. To protect our environment, useful tree-plantation is necessary. In this nation-wide programme, we should take the help of rural unemployed people, so that they may get some work and earning.
12. It is very essential to connect the rural areas with urban areas. We can connect them by concrete roads and by electronic Medias. By proving urban amenities to rural areas, it would be easier to go in the direction of rural development.
13. The successful completion of Sardar Sarovar Project will a boost for rural development in Western India, as this project covers for states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and

Rajasthan. This project will be very much useful for the agricultural and allied activities in the rural areas of Western India.

8. Conclusion

India lives in village but not all the villagers are economically, socially and politically sound. The poor living in rural areas generally belong to the families of landless agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers, village artisans, schedule cast and schedule tribes. The survival cannot come from purely economic measures. The poor remain disconnected from market forces because they lack human capital, good nutrition, health and adequate education. Market forces operate in such a manner that further concentration of economic power takes place and the growth by passes those very people who deserve to be helped the most. As a result of this, the problem of abject poverty has grounded its roots in India in general and rural India, in particular. In view of this situation the need for undertaking poverty alleviation programmes in the overall formwork of development planning especially for rural area is felt. Rural development is an area which is critical to our very survival.

Personally, we feel that above-mentioned steps will be useful in rural development programmes. Whole-hearted efforts by the government and the people can create heaven on Indian earth. "Feel Good Factor" should be seen in every village of India.

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