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Integrated Rural Development : A Note*

The predominantly agrarian structure of the Indian economy, warrants significant emphasis on rural development in national planning. Although growth of agriculture and agro-industries have received adequate focus in the planning exercises, it will be interesting nonetheless to recapitulate briefly the varying phases through which the planning process has evolved in our country. In the first Five Year Plan, the emphasis was placed on multi-purpose projects, but was replaced immediately thereafter by stress on heavy industries in the second Five Year Plan. In the third Five Year Plan, apparently the awareness of considerable external borrowings and impediments in uninterrupted flow of external assistance, led to acceptance of self-reliance as the main theme of the third Plan. Thereafter, the realisation that agriculture ought to be accorded the highest priority resulted in greater emphasis on development of projects aimed at agricultural production, which culminated in the strategy of 'Integrated Rural Development' in the sixth Five Year Plan. This article mainly describes the connotation of the concept and highlights the basic framework required for its effective implementation.

2. *Approach design in the Sixth Plan* : Integrated Rural Development is thus the underlying theme for development of rural

areas in the current Five Year Plan period. The twin objectives proposed to be achieved through this approach are — (a) increase in production of agriculture and allied activities and (b) generation of gainful employment. This strategy is intended to focus attention on the significance of ensuring basic facilities such as communication, education, health and hygiene, along with efforts for increasing productivity of the land. It thus implies, an attempt for exploiting the local resources — both material and human — for overall economic development and welfare of the particular area. In the process, the emphasis has shifted from growth in general to growth in consonance with social justice, which demands assisting the weakest sections of the community, with due regard to the technology which will be more labour-oriented and less capital intensive.

3. Planning for rural development should necessarily start at the micro-level. This basic aspect which had been ignored in the past, has now emerged in the form of Integrated Rural Development Project (IRDP) planning at the block level. The main objective of IRDP in selected blocks is to provide full employment and better standard of living, through production oriented programmes, within a definite time frame, to the identified

* The article reflects the Author's personal views and should not be construed necessarily as the views or policy of the Management of the Organisation with which he is associated.

target groups consisting of small and marginal farmers, share croppers, agricultural labourers, rural artisans and persons belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Out of the total 5004 blocks in the country, 3000 blocks are already covered under special rural development programmes such as Small Farmers Development Area projects, Drought Prone Areas Programmes, Command Area Development Programmes, etc. sponsored by the Central Government. Of these, 2000 blocks have been selected all over the country for intensive development, the accent being on the weaker sections. With the proposed annual addition of 300 blocks outside the special programmes, as many as 3500 blocks would be covered under the IRDP by the end of 1982-83.

4. A number of schemes being implemented in the rural areas, pertain to crop husbandry, minor irrigation, animal husbandry, fisheries and forest development. Programmes for intensive development of crops like cotton, jute, oilseeds, sunflower, soyabeans and other cash crops also are in operation. Besides, pilot projects on soil and water management, special schemes relating to rearing or cross bred heifers, sheep production, grassland development, fodder development, mixed plantations in waste land and development of social forestry, including re-afforestation of degraded forests have great relevance to the betterment of the weaker sections. All these programmes which aim at enhanced production and generation of gainful employment, would be integrated under IRDP, so that the economy of the selected blocks receives the maximum spurt.

5. *Village Adoption*: Meaningful implementation of the specific programmes identified under IRDP, call for concentrated efforts in

cluster of villages, with active participation of Government machinery, financial institutions and voluntary agencies. The above strategy has been advocated, as the earlier experience of community development programmes, has brought into sharp focus that apart from financing production oriented activities, social services and basic welfare programmes must constitute an essential ingredient of the village adoption concept. As mentioned earlier, the Sixth Five Year Plan has reiterated the need for viewing rural development as an integrated project, covering essential basic social services. Integrated Rural Development Programme, from the planning approach, can be conceived as a conglomeration of village adoption scheme at the micro-level, a village being the nucleus of rural development. Village adoption implies financing by institutional agencies of production oriented activities for economic development of all persons pursuing diverse vocations in the village. Programmes oriented towards social welfare (e. g. drinking water supply, sanitation facility, etc.) which are outside the purview of normal banking activities but nevertheless constitute a concomitant of economic development, in its totality, are also to be considered in any scheme of village adoption. In the latter case, however, the assistance by social organisations and business houses is considered essential.

6. It will be pertinent in this context to narrate briefly the experience of the author in organising such programmes. Rural poverty in India is a phenomenon which has been persisting over the decades, inspite of ambitious State sponsored programmes for its eradication. It is thus not the dearth of schemes but the lack of dedicated leadership which has abated to growing rural poverty.

As a matter of fact, instances have been observed in some of the backward tracts of Maharashtra predominantly inhabited by Adivasis, where the tribal population are merely at the mercy of the local moneylender, whose interest is to ensure that the poor remain at the existing economic level. Efforts by institutional agencies to assist them in taking up a productive economic activity are often thwarted by the obstinate attitude of the self styled leaders, under whose dominance — bordering on serfdom — the tribals live. As the impressionistic study of certain villages revealed the subjugation of the tribals to the moneylenders, due to satisfaction by the latter of their basic wants, such as shelter, the appropriate strategy adopted in such situations was to persuade a social organisation to donate funds for providing the basic necessities of such persons. In the subsequent stages, it was not a major hurdle for the lending agency to provide credit for assisting them in activities such as acquiring bullock carts and milch cattle.

7. Role of Voluntary Agencies : Lack of rapport with the rural folk was mainly responsible for the failure of Community Development Programmes launched in the fifties. The key factor in any rural development programme, is the village level personnel entrusted with its implementation. There are several voluntary agencies in the country which have built up a cadre of dedicated rural development workers, capable of organising and motivating the villagers for effective participation in the projects. These agencies work as a catalyst bringing together the Government officials, research agencies, banks, business houses and the villagers themselves. The need to encourage such agencies in expanding their operational areas

need not be emphasized. This process will result in their trained and dedicated workers spreading in the interiors of the villages to work as change agents to bring about the social transformation of the rural areas.

8. Appropriate technology : The entire effort towards the betterment of the weaker sections is directly linked to the adoption of appropriate technology. In view of the generally low income level of the rural entrepreneur and his total environment, the technology for the rural areas should concentrate on the following factors.

a) Making available low cost tools which are simple to be operated by the common man.

b) Minimum reliance on power energy from external sources, as in at least 50% of the villages electricity or diesel oil may not be available.

9. Intensive farming which depends largely on capital intensive equipment like tractors, highyielding variety of seeds, chemical fertilizers and irrigation facility, can be practised by the affluent class of farmers. The small and marginal farmers, by and large, are unable to benefit from this technology. Promotion of an altogether different technology is required in agricultural as well as rural industrial sector, so as to create employment for people belonging to the weaker sections. Integrated rural development should essentially take care of developing the use of gober gas, solar energy, wind energy and various methods of increasing the mechanical advantage by means of pullies, levers, bearings, inclined planes, etc. A cheap technology would have to be developed and popularised in land preparation, irrigation, harvesting, processing, storage and transport. Research in these areas will have to be carried to the

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villages for gainful application. Sophisticated techniques used in developed countries for intensive agriculture, which requires for instance, 90 gallons of oil per acre of land cannot be conceived for application over large parts of India. There is imminent need for developing a technique which can benefit the masses, instead of helping only the well-to-do section. The scientists and technicians like agricultural engineers will have to play an important role in integrated rural development strategy. The most striking illustration in the evolution of right technology for rural areas, is the use of solar energy which is available in abundance in tropical regions for about 300 days in a year. A number of implements which can be energised with solar power have been developed and one of the remarkable inventions is the solar pump which can develop upto 25KV and could serve the needs of a fairly large village.

10. In the small and decentralised sector, apart from the traditional industries like pottery, oil extraction, hand made paper, leather and hide, new industries like making and maintaining gohar gas plants, preparation of special waterproof materials for house construction, solar cookers, water filters for providing clean and pure water for drinking, etc. need to be developed. Such non-farm jobs involving simple technology could absorb a large number of unemployed and under-employed persons in rural areas, checking their migration to the cities and towns and incidentally reducing the burden on agriculture.

11. *Conclusion* : The crucial role of the rural sector in national development is now an undisputed factor. The integrated approach to rural development in turn is the sine

qua non for the desired overall impact of all the programmes aimed to benefit the rural community. It is encouraging to note that the Government agencies, financial institutions and research and scientific organisations are now shifting the focus of their efforts to the villages and growing awareness has emerged at all levels, of the need to make concerted institutional efforts to bring the benefits of the technological development to rural areas. The concept of integrated rural development acquires greater significance as its thrust is not merely on augmenting production by intensive techniques, but equally on human welfare aspects like health, housing, sanitation, education, etc. The transformation of rural economy and the well being of rural community in this manner, is truly a gigantic task. Ad-hoc programmes in the nature of relief measures would hardly suffice to achieve this objective.

12. The process of overall development of rural areas could be cemented by the two-fold objective of (a) evolving a suitable need-based technology for being transferred to the rural areas and (b) developing appropriate tools and techniques as also new methods of marketing and training the rural population in their use. Rural development cannot be brought about merely by either legislation or public works. Primary significance should be attached to efforts to enlist the active participation of the people of the region in these programmes and impart in them a sense of involvement therein. The organisational set-up entrusted with planning and implementation of rural development programmes should be such as would effectively co-ordinate the activities of all the local official and non official agencies engaged in rural development.

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13. A major participant in this chain, is the credit institution. It would be a desirable arrangement to involve the latter in the block level plan at the formulation stage. Normally while preparing a Block Plan, assessment of local resources, felt needs of the local people, the entrepreneurial ability in the area, basic infrastructural facilities like availability of power, as also market outlet for the agricultural produce grown or the industrial products manufactured therein, need to be given due weightage. The block level plans formulated in this manner need to be incorporated in the District Development Plans for making such plans more realistic and meaningful documents. In a number of States, development planning is still confined to the district level.

Allocation of resources on block-wise basis does not conform to the tenets of ideal planning apparatus indicated above. A stage has arrived when this drill has necessarily to be observed in spirit, as observance of this exercise can alone render the proposed programmes bankable by observance of the twin tests of technical feasibility and economic viability.

14. Acceptance of such an approach will largely facilitate proper integration of district development plans with district credit plans required to be formulated by the lead banks. The collective efforts of the authorities and all the agencies operating in rural areas, could go a long way in fulfilling the national objective of rural reconstruction.