

RURAL PROSPERITY

Ar. Pallavi Sharma¹, Prof.S.K.Gupta², Prof. Sangeeta Bagga Mehta³
Asst. Professor, Amity University Haryana¹,
Director, Amity School of Architecture & Planning, Amity University Haryana²,
Asso. Prof., CCA, Chandigarh³

ABSTRACT

Indian economy is dependent on agro based activities, despite of significant advancement in industrial development. A majority of population living in rural areas spend maximum part of the income in fulfilling their basic needs. It is necessary to ensure prosperity among the poor. Industrial development and adoption of modern technologies are likely to generate additional employment in urban areas and pay rich dividend to elite and rich investors. We need to address the problems of the poor to ensure social justice and better quality of life. Rural development also deserves priority for maintaining self-sufficiency in food supply. As the population is increasing, food security is under severe threat. No doubt, India has tripled her food production over the last four decades, to reach the present level of 195 million tons/year. However, with over 1.8% annual birth rate, our growing population is bound to raise the annual demand for food to 250 million tons by 2010 A.D. As food security is a pre-requisite for economic progress, agro-based rural development deserves attention. Rural Development is not only needed for ensuring food security but also to boost the Gross National Product of the nation. Fortunately, India has plenty of natural resources, idle labour, necessary technology and good market both in India and abroad. Presently, the people engaged in agriculture lack motivation and organizational strength at the grass root level. We need to act now, before it is too late.

Keywords: *Rural Prosperity, Infrastructure, Women Empowerment, Mismanagement.*

INTRODUCTION

In India, more than 70% of the population living in rural areas depends on agriculture for the fulfillment of their basic needs. A majority of families of rural areas spends their income on food. More than 50% of rural families are not able to meet their essential needs. Adoption of new technologies in rural areas will be able to generate employment and will also hinder migration to urban areas.

The Government of India has been giving priority to rural development. Government has launched several schemes for the upliftment and development of the rural areas. But due to the absence of well planned development programmes and inefficient delivery systems, most of the resources are not been beneficial to the rural society. It has been seen that only 25% of the rural families get benefitted by these schemes and rest 75% are not benefitted. As a result of it over all progress of rural areas is not satisfactory and poor continue to suffer.

PROBLEMS OF RURAL AREAS

There is a need to bring change in rural development programmes, as the strategies followed are not giving expected results. The committee responsible should be able to identify the problems of poor people and then only programmes should be designed for the betterment of the poor. Equal opportunity should be given to the poor sections as well as women. The programme should facilitate sustainable management of natural resources and protection towards environment and lead to better quality of life. The reason behind the non-development of rural is lack of knowledge of natural resources, confidence within themselves and afraid of adopting new techniques.

Shortage of Resources: Most of the rural families are dependent on agro-based activities for their livelihood, where land is the limiting factor. Many farmers are not getting optimum agricultural results, even with good quality land and assured source of water. Farmers should be motivated to adopt improved crop management practices which will result in satisfactory agricultural production.

Lack of Awareness: Due to lack of education, awareness and confidence, natural resources are very rarely used. As a result of this, various development schemes for sustainable use of resources are neglected. Around 70% of the rain water flows to rivers and sea, which causes flood and soil erosion. It is feasible to use natural resources with appropriate technology. For ensuring success, it is necessary to build a strong infrastructure at various levels to provide necessary services.

Most of the farmers are not confident about the ability and hesitate in participating development programmes. And also they are not convinced about the capabilities of the development agencies. Farmers lack in motivation and training. Few of the farmers are benefitted with financial assistance given to them by the government, but they fail to use it for fulfilling their targets and use the same for unproductive purposes. As a result, farmers have developed a mentality of dependency on government to provide them their livelihood. They have lost confidence in themselves as well as in the outsiders.

Mis-management: The reason behind the failure of rural development projects is lack of management. The projects are often implemented without proper planning. Mobilization of resources is one of the reasons. There has to be proper planning principles to manage the development programmes that will ensure the success of the programme like technologies to be used, labour, marketing, opportunities, etc.

STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The first step is to identify the problem, after that only options to solve the problems can be found. The agricultural development programme should identify the resources available such as weather condition, soil condition, availability of water, suitable crops for particular region. Time management is one of the factors on which success relies and also demand of the product in market. Availability of labour and their skills is an important consideration. Availability of labour is not an issue in villages, but motivation towards taking part in development programme is required.

Development of Infrastructure

We need to have infrastructure facilities, to solve the problems. Apart from mobilizing people, infrastructure is also necessary to organize input supply, finance, post production processes and marketing of the product. The marketing network should be set in such a way that there is minimum involvement of middlemen. Improved varieties of seeds can be used to attain optimum crop yields.

Agricultural Marketing Boards, Milk Co-operatives and Federations are responsible for providing marketing service, which are inefficient and politically oriented. Many of these cooperatives are incompetent and do not meet to present demands, due to mismanagement and ignorance. In the entire process, the main sufferer is the farmer. There are only a few Farmers' Organisations, Sugar Cooperatives, Milk Unions, Grape Growers Cooperatives, Apple Growers Cooperatives and Tea Growers' Association, etc. which are successful because of their professional approach in operating the business. Village level farmers can deal directly to business houses or trade outlets, for the development. Business house can play a significant role in strengthening market for the farmers.

Self Help Group (SHG) can be formed by a group of farmers; can provide services to other farmers. Men and women can form separate groups. These groups can serve others and share their knowledge

with them in development activities. They can provide their services in technical issues and market networking also. Several SHGs can have a joint venture with other organizations cooperative associations in organizing skill development programmes, production, marketing and other services.

Block level Voluntary Organizations plays a significant role in formation of the SHGs and Farmers Organizations and facilitate a close link between the SHGs and Gram Panchayats. NGOs are also working in villages for the upliftment of the villagers. These NGOs get financial aid from the government. They organize development programmes for the farmers and try to convince them for adopting new technologies. NGOs and SHGs can work together to arrange processing and marketing of the product. Training centres are also working under NGOs for the betterment of the farmers. Technology Development Institutions and Financial Institutions can have a close link with NGOs and SHGs to get effective results.

Zila Panchayat provides Agricultural extension services to the farmers. Gram Sevaks is an important link between Zila Panchayat and farmers. Zila Panchayat is not very effective as it is not easily approachable by the farmers. Agricultural extension services are presently being provided by the Zila Panchayat through Gram Sevaks. Technology transfer is very slow in backward areas. Financial support given by the Government through banks or cooperative societies has not been successful due to lack of motivation and awareness. These drawbacks can be eliminated to some extent with the involvement of SHGs, NGOs and local organizations.

Empowerment of Local People

The intention of Government is to empower the local governing bodies to promote micro level development. According to the 73rd Amendment Act, Gram Panchayat plays an important role in development programmes launched by the Government. The Gram Panchayats are expected to develop their plans with the participation of local bodies in Gram Sabha. The role of Gram Sabha is to monitor the progress of development programmes launched by Gram Panchayat and other organizations. Local people are the members of the Gram Sabha. This concept ensures the transparency in the dealings and progress.

Deep and active involvement of the Gram Sabha in various development programmes launched is necessary for better results. Villagers should be motivated to attend the Gram Sabha meetings. In most of the backward villages, the local people do not participate in Gram Sabha, and hence it may not be in the interest of the community. Therefore, various village level organisations such as schools, colleges, cooperative societies, banks, mahila mandals, youth groups, farmers associations, SHGs, NGOs and voluntary agencies should take part in the meetings as these institutions are expected to safeguard the interests of the community.

A good team work at village level in the form of Gram Sabha will be able to monitor the services provided by the Government. SHG can also monitor the attendance of the school teachers, Anganwadi and Health workers. Such groups have prevented vested interests from mismanaging the Gram Panchayats and have elected new members and therefore ensured transparency.

In Maharashtra, several farmers' groups involved in milk marketing are able to independently hire the services of veterinarians to avail of livestock breeding and health care services, while the farmers in many other states are still dependent on Government assistance for similar services. Such group activities are able to sustain the development programme without external assistance.

Thus, motivation and training of the target groups to build leadership through local organizations can play a vital role in poverty alleviation and sustainable development in India.

Income Generation Activities

The opportunity for employment generation in rural areas can be grouped into on farm and off farm activities. In early stage, the agro based activities cannot provide adequate opportunities for the landless. But subsequently, with the use of resources and enhanced productivity, demand for labour will rise and also employment opportunities for all. Job opportunities for ancillary services will also increase and the landless poor can take advantage of this situation, with improvement in agricultural production. Land based activities have limitations; hence it is advisable to initiate the development programme through on farm and off farm activities, simultaneously.

Before implementing any development programme, whether it is crop production, cattle breeding, forestry or kitchen garden or any such activities, it is necessary to estimate the expected benefits. The objective behind this analysis is to ensure that the families can earn adequate income to come out of poverty. If the development programme under implementation is not able to provide sufficient income to meet their basic needs, the beneficiaries may keep on looking for other opportunities.

Therefore, the main aim of any development programme should aim of helping the rural poor to come out of their poor life by using available natural resources and unemployed labour. As the quantity and quality of available natural resources varies from family to family, their priorities also vary. Therefore, it is preferable to undertake a micro level planning before undertaking various development activities. This planning should address all the problems of the families and the community.

Women Empowerment: Women represent almost 50% of the population. They have a responsibility of grooming children, procuring basic needs required for food and fuel. Women should be involved in all the development programmes right from the planning stage. To identify the problems and their solutions, participation of women in development programmes will be of great help to the society.

Protection of Environment: Use of natural resources and environmental protection is essential in all the development programmes, as these are critical for sustainable development. This is important because the primary objective of the poor is to earn the livelihood and the development programmes should be designed in such a way that the environment is not disturbed and also to ensure income generation activities.

Blending Development with Research and Training: For effective implementation of various development programmes, the development programmes are supported by applied research and training activities. It is realized that any development programme without research back up is outdated and any research programme without development and extension outlets is academic. Training of the field functionaries and farmers is essential for effective transferring of technologies from laboratories to the field.

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