



Review Article

## Rural Development : Issues and Challenges

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### Abstract

Rural development has fascinated the visionaries and statesmen in the 1950s. Since that period many programs and projects have been undertaken by several countries for the development of their areas. Despite the apparent rosy picture there are still several areas in the rural development that need to be looked into. To understand why the rural development efforts have not succeeded in achieving the desired results, it is essential to find out the basic issues and contemporary challenges and take corrective measures accordingly. Rural development refers to the structural change in the socio-economic situation to achieve improved living standard of low income population residing in rural areas and making the process of their development self-sustaining. As rural development is essential for the improvement of quality of life among the rural people, utmost care should be taken for improvement of living standard of the rural masses through concerted efforts in achieving a balanced rural development. This paper is an attempt to focus on the issue and challenges to design some potential strategies for rural development.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic, Balanced Rural Development, Rural areas, Dimensions of Rural Development, Programs for Rural development, Rural Community, Self-help group (SHG), Sustainable agriculture.

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### Introduction

Rural development is one of the important aspects of the country's economic prosperity. Almost all poor people in the world live in rural areas and rely mainly on agriculture and allied activities for their livelihood and overall welfare. Therefore, rural development is the most necessary to improve their standard of living. Rural development refers to structural changes in

the socio-economic situation that improve the living standards of the low-income population living in rural areas and become self-sustaining. Therefore, rural development talks about improving the standard of living of the rural masses. Rural areas suffer from poverty, the most vulnerable part of the population being women, children and the elderly. (1)



As rural development is essential for the improvement of quality of life among the rural people, utmost care should be taken for improvement of living standard of the rural masses through concerted efforts in achieving a balanced rural development. In order to understand why rural development endeavors have not succeeded in achieving the desired and expected results, it is essential to look below the surface to dig out real problems areas and take corrective measures accordingly.

**Objective** - The main objective of study is on structural aspects of development administration, implementation details of various rural development program and their impact on beneficiaries. (2)

**Research Methodology** - The study is theoretical in nature and the required material for the study is collected through secondary sources i.e., books, journals, reports .

### **Rural Development: A Conceptual Analysis**

At present there are six major flagship programmes implemented to develop rural areas by the Ministry of Rural Development like the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes (MGNREGS) , National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) ,Integrated Water Development Programme (IWDP),Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) and Nirmal Bharat Abhyian (NBA) .

The important issue here is has their programmes brought about a marked improvement of lives of rural people? The real scenario is that rural India is faced with multiple developmental challenges. The critical ones include:

- **Population:** Increasing population which causes severe pressure on natural resources and the environment.
- **Natural Resources:** Depleting natural resources, resulting in insecurity of food and employment, compelling about 40% of the rural population to live in poverty.
- **Pollution:** Pollution of the environment and climate change, are causing shortage of clean drinking water and creating adverse impact on agricultural production. (3)
- **Education:** Poor access to education, resulting in low literacy and unemployment of the youth. While the average literacy rate in rural areas is around 50-65%, it is as low as 20-25% among women in backward areas. 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.
- **Health:** 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 labor 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. Urban India has 15 times the number of beds and four times the number of doctors per capita compared to rural India. Not only is there an acute shortage of medical personnel, but doctors and medical workers are absent 40 per cent of the time in rural public health facilities. (4)

- **Infrastructure:** Poor infrastructure for receiving timely information on development opportunities, market

demand and prices for agricultural commodities, new technologies, forward and backward linkages, credit facilities and development policies of the government.

- **Globalization:** Liberalized trade regimes as well as more integrated and consumer driven agricultural and food markets are globalizing 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.



Rainfall is the main source of water for agricultural production in India. However, in the absence of adequate soil and water conservation practices, it is estimated that over 65% rainwater runs off, flooding the rivers. About 30% of the total cropping area in the country is under irrigation, where farmers have a tendency to use excessive water. In the absence of adequate training and demonstration; they believe that excess water can enhance their crop yields. Moreover, as the water charges are fixed on the basis of the area covered under irrigation instead of on the quantity of water supplied, farmers do not want to restrict the use of water. As a

result of poor soil and water conservation measures, the average yield of food crops in India is only 1.9 tons/ha as compared to 4.0 tons/ha in China. Due to excessive use of water for irrigation, over 9.00 million ha fertile lands have turned into sodic and saline wastelands, thereby posing a serious threat not only to food security and employment generation but also to community health, biodiversity and the environment. (5)

Rural development involves multiple steps which not only includes the change in economic structure but also include change in human behavior and social structure.

However, rural development will only be sustainable if it can adopt all the five dimensions through their parameters:

- Economic Dimensions
- Political Dimensions
- Human Dimensions
- Science & Technology
- Resources & Environment

### **Level of Infrastructure Development**

Development of physical as well as social infrastructure plays an important in the overall advance of the rural economy by directly contributing to employment generation and asset creation. Improved network of physical infrastructure facilities such as well-built roads, irrigation, rail links, power and telecommunications, information technology, food storage, cold chains, market-growth centres, processing of produce and social infrastructure support, viz., health and education, water and sanitation, and veterinary services and co-operatives are essential for the development of the rural economy, especially in the era of liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG). (6)

### **Indigenization of Social Research**

Most of our learning in the higher institutes is based upon hypotheses, concepts and theories evolved by western scholars including rural sociologists, which has limited application to our rural development. In the context of rural development, indigenization of concepts and theories are essential for understanding and resolving the issues that confront state governments, Panchayati Raj Institutions and stakeholders. This calls for Indigenization of social science research, particularly relating to rural areas. Such an approach, if adopted in

social science research, is likely to provide solutions to problems of bringing about rural transformation at a faster pace.

### **Corporatization of the Rural Economy:**

Corporatization of the rural economy becomes more relevant in the changed globalized system, where market requirements of quality produce have to be met. The entry of the corporate sector will also help the farmers to diversify crops from wheat and rice to other crops. This can be done by providing awareness about quality inputs and their judicious use, ensuring their crop procurement, refrigeration, carrier, grading, cleaning, packing, branding and also helping in research and extension.

### **Formation of a Globalized or Model Village**

A model village is perceived as a village having all modern physical and social infrastructure facilities. A model village will facilitate human resource development through better education, health and training and generate employment avenues both in secondary and tertiary sectors. Initially funds for infrastructure building will have to be mobilized from government as well as non-government sources, such as non-government organizations, international funding agencies, non-resident Indians (NRIs), religious Institutions and other sources besides the village's income from its own sources.

Consequently, for the maintenance and sustainability of public services, user's charges could be levied according to the social and economic position of the households. According to the concept of a globalized village, each village will be connected with modern information

technology for better dissemination of information. This type of a village will have the potential of producing human resources catering to national as well as international requirements. (7)

### **Role of NGOs and SHGs**

Voluntary social services have been an integral part of the socio-cultural and religious ethos of our society from ancient times. The objective has been to increase human capacities by promoting non-economic factors such as education, health and nutrition, which in turn would speed up the process of economic development. The role of NGOs is both co-operative and complementary to the state. The existence of NGOs assumes importance in the context of rural settings, as living conditions have deteriorated. State-NGO partnership alone cannot resolve all the socio-economic problems; hence it has to be in co-ordination with all agents of social change, i.e., the state, local self-governments, the corporate sector, academics and civil society groups.

**NGOs** can play a significant role in strengthening local self-government by facilitating interaction and co-operation with state departments and also acting as catalysts to effectively implement various departmental schemes. The role of voluntary agencies in the development of rural areas can be to supplement efforts of government for the upliftment of the poor and needy disseminate information about development schemes and programmes of the government to rural people; make people aware of the consequences of female feticides and imbalance in sex ratio; mobilize financial resources from the

community; help in up gradation of skills of rural youths for self-employment opportunities; facilitate the formation of self-help groups and micro-finance; ensure protection of women and children's rights and abolish ills of child labor; and, make available technologies in a simpler form to the rural poor.

**SHGs:** When individuals, on their own initiative, act in a conglomeration to meet their individual and common needs with the primary focus on self-reliance, it can be called a Self Help Group (SHG). The benefits of self-help groups are based on cooperation rather than competition. They provide benefits of economies of scale, cost effective alternatives for different financial services, collective learning, democratic and participatory culture and a firm base and platform for dialogue and co-operation. SHGs develop from a common binding force, common need, interest and concern, especially for the rural poor. It is this common binding force, which makes SHGs function more efficiently. The effectiveness of SHGs would be considerably enhanced if a symbiosis could be worked out between them and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The key to this is the integration of SHGs with the democratically elected and empowered panchayats.

### **Rural Development: Issues**

A number of issues are associated with the rural development programs and strategies. A proper identification and solution of the issues are required for chalking out a rural development action plan. Here some focus on three basic issues having prime importance. (8)



### **Top-Down Approach Vs Bottom –Up Approach**

This issue is basic one. The word ‘development’ as highlighted during 1950s with the demise of colonialism throughout the world. This period is also identified as the period of emergence of third world developing countries where rural misery was high. Hence, a growth –oriented approach of development was adopted. It led to the think that development means just creation of infrastructure for economic development. As result rural areas were provided with everything from outside. But this top-down approach has failed to achieve development according to needs and relevance of rural local circumstances. The need of the hour is bottom up approach, where village is at the centre of prosperity and the whole development process can be carried out by taking the village like brick by brick with a Midas touch. (9)

#### **(i) Development of the village Vs Development of the Villagers**

Villages in developing countries like India have no doubt developed but not the standards of villagers. The idea behind the issue is that the focus of rural development has been on creating

infra like road, rural electrification, installation of hand pumps etc. . But the real development and prosperity will be in a distant dream if the human resource not integrated properly. In rural development program, both the development of the villages and villagers must be targeted.

#### **(ii) Target Fulfillment Vs quality Fulfillment**

This issue is very peculiar to the countries belonging rural development, poverty alleviation and employment generation programs, which targeted beneficiaries/ families/ villages, incur heavy expenditure, they have failed in bringing desired impact. Hence his target fulfillment syndrome must be addressed, where emphasis has to be put on the quality and effectiveness of the work done.

### **Rural Development : Challenges**

Like issues challenges are also manifold. While issue needs solution, challenges need confrontation. The challenges identified here are in fact tools of rural development. But those have becomes challenges due to their complex nature. The main challenges to rural development are:

### **Investment for Agriculture Growth**

Agriculture is the main economic activity in developing countries and it is a viable tool for rural development. But sluggish growth rate and poor investment has made this area the most important one. Therefore modernization of agriculture is one of the greatest challenges to the developing countries. To support the rural poor farmer's government can never avoid agricultural subsidy and on the other hand massive wave of industrialization has eroded the public investment in agriculture. Hence the challenges are to restore the agricultural investment to its pristine glory side by side maintaining the status quo of subsidies.

### **Public-Private Partnership**

Rural development program suffer due to crunch of money . Private sector hesitate to invest money in the rural sector as they think that the venture may not be profitable .Forging of public private partnership effectively is a challenge to rural development . (10)

### **Community Participation**

Rural development and people's participation should go together and both these component are highly essential. Community participation rural development refers to the development of rural area so as to improve the living standard of rural masses through the active participation of rural /local community rather than involvement of local individual.

### **Potential Strategy for Rural Development**

- Government should involve the rural community to identify their own problems and solve that problem.

- Government should provide adequate training facilities to the rural youth to make efficient skilled labour in rural areas.
- There must be sufficient business opportunities or job facilities for the rural masses.
- Involvement of NGOs and civil society organization in rural development programs.

### **Conclusion**

The spirit of India lives in villages and only by changing the face of rural areas, we can hope for a better future for the state and nation as a whole. If we have to meet the target 9% annual growth of GDP then it is essential to sustain an annual growth of 4% in the agricultural sector. This is important for ensuring that growth is more inclusive. Although agriculture contributes only 19% of India's GDP, it is the main source of income for 58% of the rural population.

Agriculture has significance on food security and prices of goods and therefore on money wages. Further, agriculture has a strong multiplier effect because of its impact on rural income, demand and its supply of raw materials to several industrial sectors. The inter link between agriculture and industrial sector is so strong that if there is a 1% fall in agricultural growth, it will pull back industrial growth and GDP by 0.52%. If sustainable economic development has to be achieved it is essential that rural development must be a priority. For rural development modernization of agriculture is the most important requisite. This will lead to improvement in the economic conditions of the rural masses. The increased purchasing power of the rural

masses will provide larger market for the products of the manufacturing sectors. It is essential to Greening rural development which refers to a variety of activities that regenerate and conserve the natural resource base, innovate and use clean materials, technologies and processes to create environment-friendly products, livelihoods, enterprises and jobs. India will grow only when rural India marches in tandem with the urban India.

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