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Strategies of Rural Development in Pakistan

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STRATEGIES OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN PAKISTAN

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The Islamic Republic of Pakistan covers an area of nearly 800,00 square Kilometers in the four provinces of Punjab, Sind, NWFP and Baluchistan. The total population of the country is estimated as 91.88 million with an annual growth rate of approximately 3 percent. The density of population is 115 persons per square kilometer whereas average per capita income is Rs. 4530./- based on current factor cost. More than 55% of the labour force is employed in agricultural occupations in about 45,000 villages located throughtout the country. A vast majority of the agricultural population consists of land-less farmers, tenants, and small farmers with fragmented holdings. This rural sector plays a crucial role in economic growth of the country since it provides food and fibre for the entire nation and accounts for about 70% of the export earnings. As such, the rural sector of Pakistan can very rightly be termed as the back bone of the country's economy.

After Independence, various approaches and programmes were formulated for improving agricultural productivity, providngs job opportunities to rural labour and for improving social and physical infrastructure of the rural areas. The problems of rural development and restructuring of village life gained more and more importance. Emphasis was, however, on increasing gross income of the poorer sections of society by adopting suitable commercial, industiral and labour policies. Rural Development as a concept received little attention since it was believed that the main problem was that of growth in farm production. Agriculture was seen as a sector concerned only with increase in crop yields. Consequently each agricultural development programme was restricted to only one or two aspects of rural life. For example, village Aid and rural works programme mainly concentrated on labour intensive

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projects for providing job opportunities to rural population. Agricultural Development corporation and other Crash food porgrammes laid emphasis on increasing agricultural production and ignored other aspects of rural life. Comilla approach had a wider range but revolved around Co-operatives and mainly depended on Government help and initiative. Although every effort, one after the other, was a step forward and was base on previous experience, yet these programmes could not produce the desired results and were ultimately dissolved/modified. The plight of the small and medium sized farmers remained little attended and only big farmers, who had access to these institutions were the real beneficiaries. The small farmers who had un-economical holdings, poor investment power for purchase of agricultural inputs and were living from hand to mouth, could not derive any appreciable benefit from the programmes. As a result these programmes failed to create the desired impact on the target-group i.e Rural poor. The major drawbacks experienced in such programmes had been the limited participation of people in the development efforts, non-availability of effective institutions for services and supply in the rural areas and lack of coordination between various functionaries involved at various levels. The main reasons for the lack of significant achievements are indentified as follows:

i. The institutions under local leadership were not encouraged.

ii. Planning was not done at proper level and people's participation was not kept in view.

iii. The programmes were formulated by the Government i.e. from 'top-down' rather than 'bottom-up' system. They failed to generate a sense of participation among the people, who by and large, were ignorant about the programme launched from top to down.

iv. System for the delivery of inputs, services and technology was based on the wrong assumption that the small farmer was not as productive as the big one with the result that it worked almost exclusively for the benefit of the privileged sector of the rural community.

v. Rural Development is composite enterprise, but agencies responsible for development both Government and private, operated in watertight compartments, resulting in single purpose isolated efforts.

vi. The administrative set-up of development departments did not have its roots below subdivision/Tehsil/Taluka headquarters,. For all intents and purposes, services of these departments were not available to the vast majority of the farmers, residing in the interior.

vii. The programmes were devoid of built-in mechanism for monitoring and evaluation to ensure effective implementation and accountability.

A study of the agricultural performance during the period indicates that agricultural production grew substantially in the late 1960's averaging 6% per annum. This growth slowed to a little over 2% per year in the early to mid 70's. A series of adverse developments including political turmoil in 1971 and 1972 a succession of floods and droughts during the period 1973-76 and a sharp increase in the price of imported oil since 1974, caused this disappointing performance. Institutional factors also contributed to this poor showing, mainly, weakness in agricultural supporting services, and worsening terms of trade for agricultural products. Agricultural production however registered a significant increase upto 7.3% during 1979-80 as well as in ensuing years. Much of this recovery could be attributed to favourable weather conditions and also to improved Government policies, which were mainly based on the following criteria:

i. Rural Development should form the core of the country's National Development plan with high priority to achieve the national objectives.

ii. All reforms in the rural sector should aim at creating, a structure which is conducive for organizing and strengthening the target group of farmers to improve their economic status.

iii. Local Government system with full responsibility for planning and development from village upwards with its centre of operation close to villages.

iv The imbalance between urban and rural development should be curtailed and it should be made complementary to each other.

v. Rural Dev. being inter-sectoral and multidimensional, the Government departments and private sector should work in close harmony under an organization to plan and implement the programme.

vi. Conceptual frame work and evaluation of a model/strategy for rural development should take into account the political, administrative, financial, technical socio-economic and cultural variables.

vii. Initial thurst should be on agriculture which is the main existing rural 'Industry' ' This will necessitate transfer of modern technology, provision of training facilities and strengthening the extension services.

viii. Rural Development programme should be carried out with full participapation of the people including woman and youth based on the criteria of self supporting acitivities, self-reliance and full accountability.

ix. Positive steps should be taken to institutionalise various systems affecting rural life.

Accordingly it was realized that in order to achieve any significant level of economic development it is imperative to accord special emphasis on the uplift of the rural poor and to divert the benefits of development efforts towards the small farmer's groups. The following objectives of rural development were therefore laid down:—

a. To stop the polarization of the rural society through agrarian reforms.

b. To provide a framwork of effective and viable rural insitutions so that the peasantry could benefit from new technology:

c. To maximise agricultural production, particularly of food grains, to make the country self-sufficient;

d. To obtain whole hearted cooperation and participation of the rural population in the development work.

e. To increase employment opportunities in the rural areas;

f. To provide comprehensive socio-economic services to the target group i.e. small farmers etc. at their door step;

The planning rationale for rural development in the country involved the translation of National Plans into a set of development Projects that will support one another. A realistic assessment of the inter dependence of the development Projects and their interaction with the Socio-economic conditions of the people can only be made on the basis of an analysis of the conditions prevailing in the locality. This essentially involves a Local Approach, which requires the active participation of the beneficiaries in planning and development, and the decentralization of certain categories of decision making powers at a considerably lower level. On the basis of this

approach the following criteria for operational strategy of rural development are proposed:-

i. Maximum participation of the people at village/group of villages level through organized institutional arrangements.

ii. Mobilization of human and material resources with greater emphasis on the former.

iii. Decentralization of decision making process, planning and execution.

iv. Effective delivery system to ensure that benefits and services reach the target group according to the felt needs.

v. Evolution of self-reliant and self-supporting institutions with built-in mechanism for monitoring and evaluation to ensure effective implementation and accountability . . . . . .

The underlying philosophy of rural development is that all aspects of rural life are inter related and no lasting results can be achieved if individual aspects of it are dealt with seperately. In the development process, economic growth and social change can be achieved only if the national objectives and targets are given regional bais as the regional aspects are largely the reflections of local needs and aspirations. Activities such as the provision of essential inputs and services, infrastructural and social development, the accompaying process of urbanization that this promotes at growth points in the rural economy, and the resulting impact of urbanization in increasing farm production are closely related and provide almost a cyclic pattern of development. The concept envisages an institutional arrangement from grass roots upward, whereby the needs of the rural community are identified

by the people themselves and met through process of integration of nation building departments and other agencies connected with the development of rural economy. This strategy involves creation of farmers councils at various levels and marakiz, wherein the members of the councils are working in collaboration with nation building departments on various rural development programmes. The creation of farmers gourps allows the small and medium sized farmers in identifying their problems, setting up targets, formulating plans, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the effects of development projects.

It is, however, important that rural development programmes must be formulated in accordance with the underlying philosophy of inter-relationship of activities. Essential services such as electrification, education, link roads, hospitals and transport from part of a broader framework leading to increased soical well being, a better quality of life for the farmers and an upgradation of skills. However, since rural development is primarily intended to reduce poverty, development programmes must be clearly designed to increase agricultural production and raise productivity. As demonstrated in the past, no significant increase in production can be achieved if rural development projects are designed to cater for one or two aspects of rural life only. The sevices and activities that must be included in any development programmes should include provision of agri-extension services, training of farmers, supply of agricultural inputs, supervised credit, supply of farm machinery, development of irrigation water systems, social welfare and participation of private sector.

The crucial factor in the strategy of inter-related activities, however, lies the effective coordination of the different services and the agencies responsible for them. Although essential, the integration of activities of various agencies, into a composite programme has been found to be quite difficult in the past. Individual constraints, varying procedures and poor communication are the primary factors

which hamper effective coordination between agencies which ultimately results in a break-down of the planned development strategy. To overcome this shortfall it is imperative to have a built-in coordinating body at the highest level possible in the operational strategy of the development programme. Most integrated development programmes have failed to achieve the desired results either due to complete lack of coordiantion or ineffective coordination amongst lower levels. A timely and complementary coordination of agencies involved should therefore, be accorded high importance in designing a development programme.

Another vital aspect in the formulation of a rural development programme is the identification and quantification of the available natural resources. The pattern of agricultural production and productivity of land and ultimately the economic welfare of the rural poor, is influenced by the availability of land and water resources. Past strategies for agricultural development have been primarily based on inputs intensive criteria wherein greater attention was paid to supply of increased inputs to the farmers, with the result that projects ultimately became uneconomical. It is a well known fact that the land and water resources of the country are quite limited and any rural development programme aimed at increasing agricultural production must give top priority to develpment and efficient use of existing resources. Such programmes would not only be more economical but would also be sustainable over much longer periods than costly inputs intensive projects.

A typical example of the afore-mentioned rural development strategy can be obseved in the On-Farm Water Management Programme. The OFWM Project aims at increasing agricultural production through effective water management techniques and practices. Previously, the strategy followed for development of water resources was through construction of massive dams and the exploitation of ground water resources through tubewells. This strategy was based on the assumption that increased water supplies would ultimately raise irrigation efficency to the desired level.

However, collossal water losses in the field irrigation system led to the development of OFWM strategy, which is the first of its kind in the country.

Basically the components of the OFWM technology involve the rehabilitation and remodelling of field irrigation systems, precision land levelling, training of farmers in Water Management techniques and demonstration of latest agronomic and irrigation practices. The Strategy for providing above services to the farmers is, however, unique since it involves the participation of farmers themselves in each and every phase of the development effort from initial planning stage to subsequent operation and maintenance. Representatives of farmers form Water Users Assocaitions which actively coordinate with the concerned department in the development work. The Associations identify their own irrigation problems under the expert guidance of the deaprtment and the farmers collectively participate in physical works through mobilization of their own resources. Monitoring of the development work is carried out by the farmers themselves and the Associations, which are registered under the Water Users Associations Ordinance 1981, are also responsible for follow-up operation and maintenance. In addition the farmers themselves also contribute nearly 50% of the total cost of rehabilitation of watercourse.

The above noted strategy for OFWM has found widespread acceptability as one of the most successful rural development programmes. The benefits of the project not only include direct benefits such as increased irrigation water, higher yeilds, increased croping intensity etc., but have also been contributed to many social benefits such as reduced labour, lesser litigations, sanitation and health etc. The OFWM Project not only serves to increase the agricultural production and productivity but also contributes significantly to the social & economic well being of rural prople. The rural development strategy of the On-Farm Water Management Project can, therefore, be considered as the strategy most favourable for the typical conditions of the country.