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CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Editors

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Community Development

The community development program initiated in 1950s intended to involve popular participation in rural development. It laid emphasis on the building of infrastructure in rural areas with the participation of rural communities. The CDP sought to promote rural development in a phased manner in different parts of the country.

Rural development is utilization, protection and enhancement of the natural, physical and human resources needed to make long term improvement in rural living conditions. It involves provisions of jobs and income opportunities while maintaining and protecting the environment of rural areas.

The community development programme was the first major rural development programme launched after independence in October 1952 with the following main objectives:

1. To secure total development of the material and the human resources in the rural areas.
2. To develop total leadership and self governing institutions
3. To raise the living standards of the rural people by means of rapid increase in food and agricultural produce, and
4. To ensure a change in the mind-set of people instilling in them a mission for higher standards.

The CD was conceived as an instrument to transform the social and economic life of the village community as a whole: cutting across cast, religious and economic differences. Initially, it covers 55 projects with a wide range of programmes for developing agriculture, animal husbandry, rural industries, education, housing, rural communication etc. It was, however, soon realized that covering the entire country under CDP was not possible due to shortage of funds and personnel. The National Extension Service [NES] was launched in October 1953 with a reduced number of personnel and more modest financial provision, so that development work could process on the basis of self-help efforts. The NES was initially launched for a period of three years with the provision of 4.5 lacks per bloc with stress on agriculture, animal husbandry, rural communication and social agitation schemes. After three years the blocks covered under NES were to be converted in to CDP blocks with the provision of 15 lacks for three years for more intensive development work in agriculture and other activities such as co-operation, health and sanitation rural industries, housing etc. It was presumed that the blocks covered in the first two phases would have attained the desired self-sufficiency and therefore, the quantum of special government grants could be reduced. The major contribution in financial and technical assistance came from the USA under sachem of technical cooperation. Funds were also drawn from the central and the state governments to meet the local expenditure on the implementation of the CDP.

Rural Development

The concept of rural development has gained a widespread appeal in recent years. This is largely a result of the way issues regarding development themselves began to be perceived. It is observed that the notion of rural development has been conceived in diverse ways by researchers, ranging from thinking of it as a set of goals and programs to a well-knit strategy, approach or even an ideology. This is a widely shared view that its essence should be poverty alleviation and distributive justice oriented economic transformation. On the basis of this view we may have the following as the primary objectives of rural development.

1. To increase productivity in rural areas and reduce poverty
2. To improve living standards by providing food, shelter, clothing, employment and education

3. To involve people in planning and development through their participation in decision-making and through decentralization of administration.
4. To ensure distribute justice and equalization of opportunities in the society.

The Main Achievements of the CDP Programmes Were as Follows

- For the first time an organized administrative set up was established at the National, State, district, block and village levels. It's developmental function were totally different from the revenue collection functions of the existing administrative machinery.
- Development was considered to be people centric.
- Due recognition was given to the importance of planning and interdisciplinary approach to development.
- Recognition was also given to recruitment of trained personnel and introduction of technical and technological inputs.
- It introduced modern technologies in agriculture with a view to demonstrating that they could perform better than traditional technology
- It resulted in the establishment of institutions such as agriculture credit societies, primary schools, hospital and dispensaries, maternity and child welfare centre etc.

Major Issues in Development

Development is a much debated subject. In fact there is no single well defined path towards development. Different countries and regions will have to take their own specificities into account in order to develop their societies.

The following are the major issues

Growth v/s Distribution

For a long time it was assumed that economic growth would be an engine that will lead naturally towards development. Consequently, little attention was paid to the question of distributive justice. One of the major outcomes of this situation was the trickle down theory, which stated that if there was sufficient growth everybody would benefit from it. India, during the first three plans, made heavy investments of capital and sought to take the country on to a new growth path.

Agriculture v/s industrial development

This has been one of the most important issues at stake in the debate on development. In India's own case, it was thought that rapid industrialization would lead the country to self-sufficiency. In the 1960, however, the country experienced severe food shortages that led to the realization that the agriculture sector could not be ignored. This led to increasing attention to this sector. New varieties of seeds and the use of fertilizers on a large scale led to an increase in agricultural production. However, it has now become clear that a balance between agricultural development and industrial growth will have to be maintained for genuine economic development.

Tribal Development

It is studied that India has the largest concentration of tribal profile anywhere in the world except perhaps South Africa. The tribal lifestyle is considered by the ecosystem. India, with a variety of eco systems, presents a varied tribal population throughout its length and breadth. The areas inhabited by the tribal constitute a significant part of the under developed areas of the country, according to the reliable sources nearly 15 percent of the total geographical area of the country inhabited by the prominent tribes.

During the British rule, villagers and the town were neglected. They did nothing for ameliorating the socio-economic condition of tribal people, except to the people in north-east region of the country. However after independence the new policy of tribal development and integration is initiated. The constitution of India has made definite provisions for the welfare and uplift of the tribal people through the country.

Major Issues in Development

It must be emphasized that there cannot be a single well defined path towards development. Different countries and regions will have to take their own specificities into account in order to develop their societies. This is one reason why development has been a much debated subject. In this section we will highlight some of the major issues, which have features in this debate.

Growth v/s Distribution

For a long time it was assumed that economic growth would be an engine that will lead naturally towards development. Consequently, little or no attention was paid to question of distributive justice. One of the major outcomes of this situation was the 'trickle down' theory, which stated that if there was sufficient growth everybody would benefit from it. India, during the first three decades, made heavy investments of capital and sought to take the country on to a new growth path. During the early 1970s, however, it was realized that the living conditions had not changed significantly for the better. It was then that the question of distributive justice assumed greater importance. The problem, however, continues to affect the developing countries as assets such as land and capital are concentrated in a few hands. This perpetuates the problem further and the question of distributive justice remains unresolved. The major result of this debate has been the realization that economic growth alone is not enough to lead a country towards rapid development. Growth by itself does not guarantee an improvement in the quality of life for the vast numbers of people. Therefore the state has to formulate policies and design instruments to ensure that development benefits flow to those categories of people who need most.

Agricultural v/s Industrial Development

This has been one of the most important issues at stake in the debate on development. In India's own case, it was thought that rapid industrialization would lead the country to self-sufficiency. If the 1960s, however, the country experienced severe food shortages that led to the realization that the agricultural sector could not be ignored. This led to increasing attention to this sector. New varieties of seeds and the use of fertilizers on a larger scale have led to an increase in agricultural production. However, it has now become clear that a balance between agricultural development and industrial growth will have to be maintained for genuine economic development. If the agricultural sector does not grow there may be sharp increase in the prices of food-grains that will affect the poor. On the other hand, industrial stagnation will mean that surplus labour from the agricultural sector cannot be usefully employed. Therefore, both agriculture and industry will have to grow so that the pace of development is fast enough to improve the living conditions of the people.

Capital v/s Labour Intensive Technologies and Development

You may have heard the term 'technology' being used quite often in debates pertaining to development. What is technology and what is its role in the development of a country and its people? Technology is the means by which goods are manufactured in an economy. Any goods, however crude or sophisticated, can actually be manufactured by several means. The development in technology is the process by which the manufacture of goods is made cheaper, faster and more efficient. What is the role of technology in development?

You may be aware of the fact that tractors, harvesters, etc. are being used on a wider scale now than a couple of decades ago. They are now used to perform many of the agricultural operations, which were hitherto performed manually using ploughs and other equipment; this change may be termed a technological change.

Now that you are familiar with this concept you must be able to appreciate that at any given point of time, we may have a number of technologies to choose from in order to produce the same goods. Cloth can be woven on traditional looms in your village or town, or it can be manufactured in the factories located in bigger cities. The end product is more or less the same, but the process of making it is different. What are the implications of these facts for the process of development?

An improvement in technology calls for investment to make this change feasible. Sophisticated technology, when it uses less labour, is termed 'labour displacing labour' and also less expensive. This is called 'labour intensive technology'. Capital intensive and labour displacing technologies are often expensive and call for large investments. Labour intensive technologies, on the other hand, have the advantage of being able to absorb the surplus labour in a developing country.

During the late 60s and the early 70s, a new trend of thinking on technology suitable to developing societies became popular. The question raised was that of 'Appropriate Technology'. It was said that developing countries should adopt technologies that were suitable for their own specific needs, situations and socio-cultural framework rather than copy the western technologies blindly. Thus, it was suggested that countries like India should use technologies that have evolved over many decades and adapt them to make the best use of their cost-effectiveness.

The choice between these types of technology, however, is not easy for a developing country. On the one hand, rapid increase in output is necessary to solve the problems of the people and, on the other, the problem of unemployment (thus created) accentuates the problem of poverty. A balance is, therefore, required so that both technology and living conditions of the people improve.

Centralization v/s Decentralization

This has been another major issue in the debate on development. Generally, it is agreed that development is a long-term phenomenon and, therefore, needs to be planned. While a certain degree of centralization is necessary to coordinate the efforts towards development, too much of centralization in the case of decision making powers can weaken the process of popular participation. In recent times, the need to devolve decision projects, which have limited local relevance. In recent times, the need to devolve decision making powers to the panchayats has caught the attention of policy makers in India. Important steps, including constitutional amendments, have been taken since the late 1980s to empower local level institutions. It is hoped that decentralization of the development process would also lead to greater accountability of those who are actually involved in the decision making process. Devolution of powers is very vital for development. This ensures that the administration is brought closer to the people. Consequently, there is greater accountability of planners towards those whom programmes and policies are meant to reach.

Urban v/s Rural Development

The vast majority of the population in India and other developing countries live in rural areas. There is a continuing influx of people into the cities looking for jobs as the rural economy is not been able to provide employment to them. It needs to be pointed out, however, that the problem of poverty, poor health and illiteracy is widespread in both rural as well as urban areas. The problem of rural poverty and unemployment is the crux of the problem. Without solving it, there cannot be genuine development. Hence, rural development has come to acquire critical importance. Sustained improvement in the quality of life in rural areas is likely to slacken the pace of large-scale migration of villagers to cities in search of jobs.

Respective Roles for the State and the Market

One of the most contentious issues in Economics has been the scope and extent of government intervention in the economy of the country. During the immediate post-World War II era, there was a near consensus among economists, for a variety of reasons, such as important developments in economic theory around the idea of 'market failure' (which had several dimensions), that governments have to play major roles in the economic sphere. Thus around the time India gained independence from the British, the need for planning had come to have wide acceptance in the developing countries for them to break free from stagnation and backwardness. The debate in our country at that time was not about the need for planning but about what kind of planning and quite a few alternative suggestions and frameworks were widely discussed. In the recent years, however, government intervention in economic spheres has come under much fire, particularly during the last couple of decades, and a sort of neo-liberal market orthodoxy – which insists that 'the market knows and does the best' – has become dominant. We cannot go into a detailed discussion of the reasons for such an extreme swing here, but it may be stressed right away that to a large extent such a swing is based on shaky theoretical foundation and faulty empirical associations. This will be briefly discussed, in the next section, with reference to Indian economic development.

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