



A SPATIO – TEMPORAL ANALYSIS OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES AND REDUCTION OF POVERTY IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

With the increasing population, demand for basic needs has been steeply rising during the past five decades in most of the developing countries. The growing populations need food, clothing, shelter, fuel and fodder for their livestock. In India, over 60-70% of the people are living in rural areas who neither have adequate land holdings nor alternate service opportunities to produce or procure these commodities. In the absence of adequate employment opportunities, the rural people are unable to generate enough wages to sustain their livelihood. As a result, 40% families, who earn less than Rs.11,000 per annum are classified as poor. Apart from lower income, rural people also suffer from shortage of clean drinking water, poor health care and illiteracy which adversely affect the quality of life. Presently, about 25% of the villages do not have assured source of drinking water for about 4-5 months during the year and about 70-75% of the water does not meet the standard prescribed by WHO. Poor quality drinking water is adversely affecting the health and diarrhea is an important cause of infant mortality.

Traditional Indian communities being male dominated, women have been suppressed till recently. 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 suppressed 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. Apart from lack of communication, social taboo has also hindered their progress. Several vested interests, both local and outsiders have exploited this situation. The rich landlords did not want any infrastructure development, which would benefit the poor, because of the fear that they would not get cheap labour to work on their farms. The local moneylenders did not want alternate financial institutions to provide cheaper credit needed by the poor. The traditional healers canvassed against modern medicine under the garb of religion and divine power. Thus, the poor continued to live in the clutches of the powerful, accepting it as their destiny. They avoided confrontation and preferred to live a voiceless and suppressed life. Tolerating the worst and hoping for better days has been their way of life. It is a vicious cycle and development programmes to address their livelihood improvement and food security can help them to come out of this cycle.

PROBLEMS OF LIVELIHOOD

In India, although the contribution of agriculture to the Gross National Product (GNP) is around 35%, in the absence of employment opportunities in industrial and service sectors, over 85% of the rural income is generated from agriculture, who spend about 75% - 80% of their earnings on food. Agriculture is the major source of livelihood but most of the illiterate farmers have not been successful in cultivating their land economically. They have been treating agriculture as a family tradition, following age old practices and adopted new changes only after observing the success of their neighbours. Over 12-15% of the rural families are landless and among the land holders, 69% are marginal farmers with less than 1 ha holding (17% of the total land) and about 21% are small farmers with 1-2 ha holdings (34% of the land). Thus about 90% families own less than 51% lands, with a per capita holding of 0.19 ha. Out of the 147 million ha agricultural lands, about 60 million ha are located in arid zones, which are mostly owned by the

poor families. As the chances of crop failure on these lands is very high, the farmers generally do not invest in external inputs like improved seeds, fertilisers and plant protection measures and end up with poor crop yields, even during normal years.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Water is a critical input for human consumption as well as for crop production but grossly neglected by the community. Major sources of water supply are rainfall, lakes, rivers, snowy mountains and underground storage. Except wells and small tanks, the other sources of water are collectively owned by the community. However, the powerful lobbies and vested interests have been taking advantage of these water resources for their own benefits, while the poor have no means of utilising their share. This has been accelerating the economic imbalance between the small and large landholders.

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 28% of the total cropping area in the country are 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.

FOREST

Forests have been providing many direct and indirect benefits to rural communities. As against the recommended 33% of the total geographical area to be placed under forest cover, only 22% land is under the Forest Department in India. Out of this area, over 50% land is devoid of vegetation due to over-exploitation and biotic pressure. As a result, the existence of over 80 million tribals, who were dependent on forest products for livelihood has been threatened. Ill-effects of deforestation are evident in the form of shortage of fodder, fuel, timber, non-wood forest products and medicinal herbs. The indirect losses in the form of soil erosion, deepening of ground water table and reduction in green cover are far more serious. Deforestation has been directly suppressing agricultural production, which is yet to be realised by a major section of the rural society. Like community wastelands, the forests are under the ownership of the Government but these precious resources cannot be protected unless the local communities come forward to conserve it.

Poor productivity of the land and livestock and inefficient use of forests are the causes of seasonal employment in villages. Small farmers have work only for 100-120 days for growing one crop in a year, which is not adequate to sustain their livelihood. Hence, they have to struggle to earn additional wages by working in irrigated areas or migrate to urban areas. The migration pattern varies with the region, opportunities and socio-economic status of the families. The poorest

families, particularly the landless and marginal holders owning poor quality land tend to migrate with the entire family. Many tribal families migrate to cities as construction workers and return at the onset of the rains. Such migrations severely affect the quality of life, due to poor health, lack of education and social pressures leading to erosion of moral values.

This situation can be termed as mental poverty or psychological poverty. Thus it is necessary to fight mental poverty through motivation, awareness and capacity building before initiating any livelihood activities.

BAIF's Approach

BAIF Development Research Foundation (formerly registered as the Bharatiya Agro Industries Foundation) is a voluntary organisation, established in 1967, as a Public Charitable Trust. Considering the challenges in rural areas, BAIF has set its mission to create opportunities of gainful self-employment for the rural families, especially disadvantaged sections, ensuring sustainable livelihood, enriched environment, improved quality of life and good human values. This is being achieved through development research, effective use of local resources, extension of appropriate technologies and upgradation of skills and capabilities with community participation. BAIF is a non-political, secular and professionally managed organisation, presently operating in 12,000 villages in India.

Family as a Unit for Development: BAIF considers poor rural family as a basic unit for development. This provides an opportunity to identify the target families who require different types of support to come out of poverty. Generally most of the community development programmes consider village as an unit of development where the well to do and influential sections of the society dominate over the poor and exploit the benefit to the maximum extent. Thus such development projects may often create a wider gap between the rich and poor within the community.

Focus on Quality of Life: The overall goal of BAIF is to ensure better quality of life, through promotion of various development activities related to livelihood, health, literacy and moral development. Starvation being the most serious form of poverty, livelihood programme was considered as a priority but it was soon realised that good health and education are basic needs even for taking up livelihood activities. With generation of income, good moral values are also essential for happiness. Excess money, without strong moral education has been distracting the youth towards unproductive and unethical activities. Hence, BAIF is emphasising on blending livelihood programme with education, health care and moral development activities. The essential components of moral development are - willingness to take part in community development, non-violence, de-addiction from alcohol, drugs, narcotics and gambling, respect for women and concern for environmental protection. These components are generally acceptable to the community, irrespective of their religious and ethnic backgrounds, which have brought about a significant change in the attitude of the target communities.

Assured Livelihood: While promoting various development programmes, the primary goal is to help the target family to come out of poverty, with in a shortest period. The dairy development programme has a gestation period of 3-4 years, till the newly born calf comes into milk production. In land based development programmes the gestation period may vary from 2 to 6 years, depending on the type of farming systems practiced by the farmers. In case of arable crop production, the gestation period is short due to short rotation crops while the fruit and tree crops take 5-6 years to generate income. While promoting these income generation activities there are two critical factors which affect the success of the programmes.

CONCLUSION

Lastly the programme should be well planned to generate substantial income to enable the participating families to come out poverty. Generally small farmers having poor quality land and livestock may not be able to earn substantial income with only one intervention. Hence multi-disciplinary programmes have the advantage. Similarly, small interventions such as kitchen garden, vermi-composting, homestead horticulture in isolation will not help the poor. These interventions can be helpful as a part of an integrated programme.

The other important aspect is to provide support during the gestation period. Many of the poor who do not have any resources even to procure their daily ration, are likely to neglect their development work, if no support is available in the form of assistance or wages to ensure their food security. Hence different short term income generation activities need to be designed till the income starts generating from the major interventions.

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