

INTRODUCTION TO AGRICULTURE EXTENSION

RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

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The Concept of Rural Development

India is predominantly an agrarian country with 72 per cent (about 80 crores) of its population living in more than five lakh villages. Agriculture is the predominant livelihood occupation and the rural population largely consists of small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers, artisans and scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. A large part of this rural population (more than 200 million) is still living below the poverty line and is the focus of rural development programmes. From the pre-independence era of Mahatama Gandhi, every government after the Independence of the country in 1947 has committed itself to rural development.

Rural: As per the Webster's dictionary rural means "open land" and according to the United States census rural includes all persons living outside urban area and who live on farm. Agriculture is generally the main occupation in rural areas.

Development: It refers to growth, evolution, and stage of inducement or progress.

According to Ensminger (1974) rural development is a process of transformation from traditionally oriented rural culture towards an acceptance and reliance on science and technology. Lela (1975) defined rural development as an improvement in the living standard of the masses of low-income population residing in rural areas and making the process of self-sustaining. According to Agarwal (1989) rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people, the rural poor. Rural development can be defined in several ways but for all practical purposes it means helping the poor people living in the villages in their economic development. The major objectives of the rural development programs are:

- To achieve enhanced production and productivity in the rural areas
- To bring about a greater socio-economic equity
- To bring about a spatial balance in social and economic development
- To bring about improvement in the ecological environment so that it may be conducive to growth and happiness, and
- To develop broad based community participation in the process of development

Main Lines of Activity

The activities considered important for rural development can be divided into the Agriculture and related matters, Irrigation, Communications, Education, Health, Supplementary employment, Housing, Training and Social Welfare.

1. Agriculture and related matters: The programme includes reclamation of available virgin and waste land, provision of commercial fertilizers and improved seeds, promotion of fruit and vegetable cultivation, improved agricultural technique, supply of technical information, improved agricultural implements, improved marketing and

credit facilities, provision of soil surveys and prevention of soil erosion, encouragement of the use of natural and compost manures and improvement of livestock.

2. Irrigation: The programme include provision of water for agriculture through minor irrigation works, e.g., tanks, canals, surface wells, tube-wells, etc., the intention being that the agricultural lands be served with irrigation facilities.
3. Communications: The road system on the countryside to be developed to link every village up to a maximum distance of half a mile by feeder roads through voluntary labour of the villagers themselves. The main roads to be provided for and maintained by the State or other public agencies.
4. Education: The community projects to provide for social education, expansion and improvement of primary and secondary education. Vocational and technical training to be emphasised in all the stages of the educational programme.
5. Health: The Health Organisation to provide primary health in the Development Blocks and a secondary health unit equipped with a hospital and a mobile dispensary at the headquarters of the Project area and serving the area as a whole.
6. Supplementary Employment: The unemployed and the under-employed persons in the village community be provided with gainful employment to such extent as is possible, by the development of cottage and small-scale industries, construction of brick kilns and saw mills and encouragement of employment through participation in the tertiary sector of the economy.
7. Housing: Apart from the provision of housing under various schemes, provide demonstration and training in improved techniques and designs for rural housing.
8. Training: The training of farmers, village level workers, project supervisors and other personnel to be carried out for skill up-gradation and enhanced efficiencies.
9. Social welfare: Make provision for audio-visual aid for instruction and recreation, for organizations of community entertainment, sports activities and Melas.

Pre-Independence Experiments in Rural development

Prior to the independence in 1947, various individuals and institutions made experiments in rural development from time to time. The model village in Sunderban (Bengal) by Sir Daniel Hamilton in 1903, the Sriniketan experiment of Thakur Rabindranath Tagore in 1920, Brayne's Gurgaon experiment in 1921, Krishnamachari's Baroda Reconstruction Movement in early 1930s, Gandhiji's experiment in Champaran (1971) and Sevagram in 1936, and The Firka Development Scheme in madras State in 1946 are a few prominent initiatives that had substantive bearing on the future rural development programmes. The information available on these early projects is scanty and is mostly based on the recollections of the social workers involved in these experiments.

Post-Independence Rural Development Programme

Etawah Project (1948-52)

Several experiments in rural reconstruction undertaken by official and nonofficial agencies in the past contributed towards new thinking about reorganizing the setup for rural development. Albert Mayer's Etawah project of 1947-48 for Rural Planning and Development played a key-role and can be regarded as a forerunner of the Community Development Projects in India. After an initial period of trial and error lasting over a year and

a half, an administrative pattern was evolved which, for the first time facilitated extension activities to percolate to the village level. The activities of different development departments were channelised through one common agency and the concept of a multipurpose Village Level Worker emerged.

Assessment of Early Efforts

Looking at the efforts made before World War II in individual Provinces and States and the experience gained in later years in Sevagram in Madhya Pradesh, in the Firka Development scheme in Madras, in the Sarvodaya centres in Bombay, in Etawah and Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh and other centers, which are perhaps less well known, certain broad conclusions emerged. These were:

- i. When different departments of the Government approach the villager, each from the aspect of its own work, the effect on the villager is apt to be confusing and no permanent impression is created. The peasant's life is not cut into segments in the way the Government's activities are apt to be; the approach to the villager has, therefore, to be a coordinated one and has to comprehend his whole life. Such an approach has to be made, not through a multiplicity of departmental officials, but through an agent common at least to the principal departments engaged in rural work, whom it is now customary to describe as the village level worker.
- ii. Programmes that have been built on the cooperation of the people have more chances of abiding success than those, which are forced down on them.
- iii. While the official machinery has to guide and assist, the principal responsibility for improving their own condition must rest with the people themselves. Unless they feel that a programme is theirs and value it as a practical contribution to their own welfare, no substantial results will be gained.
- iv. Programmes largely dependent on expenditure by the Government, in which the elements of self-help and mutual cooperation on the part of villagers are present only in a nominal degree, are short lived. The essential idea should be the reduction of chronic unemployment, which is a feature of rural life—through the practice of scientific agriculture and cottage and small-scale industries.
- v. Advice and precept are of no avail unless they are backed by practical aids—supplies of seed and fertilizer, finance and technical guidance for solving the farmer's immediate problems.
- vi. Whatever the measures of the effort which the Government wishes to make, the best results will be gained if the programmes are pursued intensively, and practically every agriculturist family has its own contribution to make through a village organization.
- vii. The approach to the villager would be in terms of his own experience and problems, conceived on the pattern of simplicity, avoiding elaborate techniques and equipment until he is ready for them.

Grow More Food Campaign

An organized effort towards increasing the agricultural production was launched in the year 1947-48 and this was popularly known as the “Grow More Food Campaign”. Under this programme additional staff was provided at the District and Sub-divisional (Taluka) levels but after a few year's experience it was observed that the system was not functioning properly and cultivators response towards the programme was very poor. Moreover, all the departments for rural development were working in isolation and reaching the people directly

without any close coordination. The importance of coordinating the activities of the development departments was felt strongly. A committee was appointed to enquire about the working of this programme and suggest ways and means to improve it. The G.M. F. Enquiry Committee Report (1952) recommendations were:

1. The administrative machinery of the Government should be reorganised and equipped for the efficient discharge of the duties imposed on it under the new concept of India as a welfare state.
2. The best non-official leadership available should be mobilised for guiding the 60 million farm families in the villages in their effort to improve their own condition.
3. An Extension organization should be set up for rural work, which would reach every farmer and assist in the coordinated development of all aspects of rural life
4. The pattern of staffing should consist of a B.D.O., four technical officers and twelve VLWs for a Tahsil or Taluk, with an average of 120 villages.
5. The development activities at the District level will be under the Collector assisted by Specialists. The non-official side will consist of a District Board to which MPs and MLAs should be added as members
6. At the State level there should be a cabinet and a non-official board for facilitating joint action. The Development Commissioner should be in-charge of the entire rural development programme, and
7. The economic aspect of village life cannot be detached from broader social aspect. Agricultural development is, in every respect linked up with a whole set of social problems. All aspects of life are inter-related and no lasting results can be achieved if individual aspects of it are dealt with in isolation.

The Community Development Programme (1952)

As a result of G.M.F. Enquiry Committee Report as well as of Etawah Pilot Project and financial assistance from the Ford Foundation, fifteen pilot projects were started for community development. Subsequently, the Indo-American Technical Cooperation Agreement was signed in January 1952 and Community Development Programmes were organized on October 2, of the same year in 55 districts, aiming at the socio-economic transformation of rural people.

Community Development and N.E.S. Era (1953- 60)

The National Extension Service was inaugurated on October 2, 1953, with a view to provide necessary manpower for the implementation of the community development programme. However, by the year 1956-58, it was felt that people's participation was not forthcoming as desired. An in depth assessment of the past experience led to the recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta committee and based on these recommendations democratic decentralization (Panchayati Raj) was introduced. The system consisted of three tiers of Zila Parishad at District level, Panchayat Samiti at Block level and Gram Panchayat at the village level. Thus, there were three constituents in the administrative system at this stage:

1. Panchayati Raj;
2. Direct line staff, such as Collector, Block Development Officer, and VLWs, and
3. Specialist staff, such as Extension Officers of different departments.

National Extension Service

The Grow More Food Enquiry Committee, after examining the results of the campaign for increased food production stated that "No plan can have any chance of success unless the millions of small farmers in the country accept its objective, share in its making, regard it as their own, and are prepared to make the sacrifices necessary for implementing it. The lesson to be derived from the working of the G. M. F. programmes thus were that all aspects of rural life are interrelated and that no lasting results can be achieved if individual aspects of it are dealt with in isolation". This analysis led the Committee to propose the establishment of a "National Extension Organisation" for intensive rural work, which could reach every farmer and assist in the coordinated development of rural life as a whole.

Extension is a continuous process designed to make the rural people aware of their problems, and indicating to them ways and means by which they can solve them. It thus involves not only education of the rural people in determining their problems and the methods of solving them, but also inspiring them towards positive action in doing so.

Finally, it was pointed out that extension workers have to be supported effectively by research workers to whom they can bring their problems and whose results they carry to the people. Special arrangements are, therefore, needed to ensure the closest cooperation between extension and research.

In the second Five Year Plan document it was stated that the activities comprised within the community development and national extension service should be regarded as an integral part of a programme for improving all aspects of rural life. In the second place, the essence of the approach is that villagers come together for bringing about social change are assisted in building up a new life for themselves and participate with increasing awareness and responsibility in the planning and implementation of projects which are material to their well being. If the programme provides them with new opportunities, in turn, through their active participation in its execution, they give it a distinctive quality and enlarge its scope and influence. Self-help and cooperation are the principles on which the movement rests. Thirdly, the movement should bring within its scope all rural families, especially those who are "under-privileged", and enable them to take their place in the cooperative movement and other spheres in their own right. It is on account of these features that, national extension service and community development projects are regarded as the normal pattern of the welfare state in action.

It is necessary to stress that while the material conditions have to be assured, transformation of the social and economic life of rural areas is essentially a human problem. It is a problem, briefly, of changing the outlook of 100 million families living in the countryside, arousing in them enthusiasm for new knowledge and new ways of life and filling them with the ambition and the will to live and work for a better life. Extension services and community organisations are among the principal sources of vitality in democratic planning, and rural development projects are the means by which, through cooperative self-help and local effort, villages and groups of villages can achieve in increasing measure both social change and economic progress and become partners in the national plan.

The Nalagarh Committee Report (1958)

At the initial stage there was considerable confusion and conflict about the roles and responsibilities of the three units of the programme implementation set-up. An Agricultural Administrative Committee (Nalagarh Committee) was set-up in 1958 and it reported that technical departments like agriculture have not been developed to the extent they were required and, therefore, have not been able to deliver the goods as they existed under

unsatisfactory conditions of work. The committee concluded that a streamlined agricultural administration is an urgent necessity and the food situation of the country can be appreciably eased if positive steps are taken to achieve this objective.

Intensive Agricultural Development Era (1960 onwards)

A Ford Foundation Team (1959) in its report titled “India’s Food Crisis and Steps to Meet It” urged selection of certain crops in certain areas for more intensive efforts. The team also recommended that the agricultural extension programmes should be based on local conditions, village production system and problems, and village potentials.

The I.A.D.P.

Though the Community Development Programme created conditions for socio-economic transformation of rural people and adoption of modern practices for improving their farms, home and communities in an integrated manner, its impact on agricultural production was not felt. Under the Community Development Programme the production efforts and available resources were widely diffused over the entire country. It was, therefore, agreed that in the interest of increasing agricultural production quickly, pilot projects should be initiated in selected areas having favorable conditions for maximizing food production. In 1960-61, seven districts in the were selected for this and the programme was popularly known as ‘Package Programme’.

The Intensive Agricultural Area Programme (1964)

The mid-term appraisal of the Third Five Year Plan emphasized that much greater emphasis should be given to the development of scientific and progressive agriculture in an intensive manner and 20-25 per cent of the cultivated area of the country should be selected for intensive agricultural development. The IAAP, which came into operation in March 1964, also followed the package approach.

The High Yielding Varieties Programme and Multiple Cropping Programme (1966-67)

These two programmes constituted the two major planks of the new agricultural strategy under the Fourth Five year plan, which aimed at attaining self-sufficiency in food by the end of 1970-71. The Programmes were initiated in areas having necessary organization and facilities, which were considered essential pre-requisites to rapid agricultural growth.

Hill and Tribal Area Development

With a view to removing regional disparities, particularly in less endowed or disadvantaged areas like the hill and tribal areas, special sub-plans of development were introduced in the mid seventies. Special financial and fiscal concessions, credit on softer terms and subsidies were made available to under-developed areas to attract increased industrial investment. A Minimum Needs Programme was designed to secure to the rural areas within a reasonable time frame certain basic amenities in the field of education, health, drinking water, electrification, roads and house-sites.

Small Farmers Development Agencies (1971)

The Small Farmers Development Agencies (SFDA) programme, aimed at the target group of small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers, began in 1971 to assist persons specifically identified from this target group in raising their income level by helping them to adopt improved agricultural technology and acquiring means of increasing agricultural production like minor irrigation sources, and on the other hand, to diversify their farm economy through subsidiary activities like animal husbandry, dairying, horticulture etc.

Integrated Rural Development Programme (1976)

The concept of an Integrated Rural Development Programme was first proposed in the Central budget of 1976-77. This programme was intended to 'assist the rural population to derive economic benefits from the developmental assets of each area. Though conceptually this programme was comprehensive in scope and sought to secure, through a process of block level planning, fuller exploitation of the local growth potential with a view to making an optimum impact on the local poverty situation.

A number of programmes have been operating in the country aimed at improving the economic conditions of the rural poor. None of these programmes covered the whole country, though a large number of blocks in the country had more than one of these programmes operating simultaneously in the same area for the same target group. This territorial overlap combined with the different funding patterns of these programmes, not only created considerable difficulties in effective monitoring and accounting, it often blurred the programme objectives. In practice, therefore, these programmes were reduced to mere subsidy giving programmes shorn of any planned approach to the development of the rural poor as an inbuilt process in the development of the area and its resources. It was, therefore, proposed that such multiplicity of programmes for the rural poor operated through a multiplicity of agencies should be ended and be replaced by one single integrand programme operative throughout the country. The programme was to be called the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). Of the 350 million people below the poverty line in the country, around 300 million lived in the rural areas, possessing little or virtually no assets. They needed to be enabled to acquire productive assets and/or appropriate skills and vocational opportunities and then backed effectively with services to increase production and productivity. If through special programmes of specific beneficiary oriented assistance this group could be brought above the poverty line a major impact would be secured on the overall economic levels of the country.

Drought Prone Area Programme

The need for a Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP) was felt in mid seventies, from several considerations. The drought prone areas accounted for nearly 19 percent of the total area of the country and 12 percent of the population. Their overall productivity was low. There was frequent migration of the inhabitants along with their livestock. These areas are considered to be a continuing source of strain on the financial resources of the nation, by way of drought relief etc. The main thrust of the DPAP in the fifth Plan was to restore a proper ecological balance in the drought prone areas. The important elements constituting the strategy for such ecologically integrated development are listed below:

- i) Development and management of irrigation resources;
- ii) Soil and moisture conservation and afforestation;
- iii) Re-structuring of cropping pattern and pasture development;
- iv) Changes in agronomic practices;
- v) Livestock development;
- vi) Development of small and marginal farmers and agricultural labour through subsidiary vocations.

The main elements of the strategy of integrated agricultural development in drought prone areas are not the concern of one single existing department of Government but concern at least five main Departments namely, Agriculture, Irrigation, Animal Husbandry, Forestry and

Cooperation. There was a real danger that any integrated plan of development of a drought-prone area may flounder on the rock of departmentalism. To get over these problems it seemed necessary to opt for an organizational innovation.

Desert Development Programme

The Desert Development Programme aimed at checking further desertification of the desert areas and raising productivity of the local resources to raise the income and employment levels of the local inhabitants. The programme was implemented both in the hot and cold arid zones of the country. The emphasis was on arresting desertification through activities, which restore ecological balance, stabilises sand dunes, and facilitate soil and water conservation. Plantation of shelterbelts, adoption of water harvesting measures and development of pastures to sustain the livestock economy was to be vigorously pursued. Exploitation of the natural resources of these areas has to be closely linked to replenishment of these resources,

Watershed Development Programmes

The Ministry of Rural Development is administering the watershed programme to check the diminishing productivity and loss of natural resources. Projects are implemented by District Rural Development Agencies/Zilla Parishads (DRDA/ZP) through Project Implementing Agencies (PIA). PIAs could be a Line Department (of the State Government), Panchayati Raj Institutions or a reputed NGO. One PIA normally handles 10-12 watershed projects covering an area of about 5000-6000 hectares. The PIA is required to maintain a technical team of 4 experts called Watershed Development Team (WDT) and individual projects (500 hectares) are planned and executed by the local people living in the watershed area called the Watershed Association (WA) through an elected body called Watershed Committee (WC).

The Ministry has brought out a new initiative called Hariyali with an objective of empowering PRI's both financially and administratively in implementation of Watershed Development Programmes. Under this initiative, all ongoing area development programmes namely, Integrated Wastelands Development Programme (IWDP), Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) and Desert Development Programme (DDP) are to be implemented through the PRIs. New projects under the aforesaid area development programmes are being implemented in accordance with the Guidelines for Hariyali from 1 April 2003.

In the new arrangement, Gram Panchayats shall implement projects under overall supervision and guidance of Project Implementation Agencies (PIA). An intermediate panchayat may be the PIA for all the projects sanctioned to a particular Block/Taluka. In case, these Panchayats are not adequately empowered, then the Zilla Panchayat can either act as PIA itself or may appoint a suitable Line Department like Agriculture, Forestry /Social Forestry, Soil Conservation, etc., or an Agency of the State Government/ University/Institute as PIA. Failing these options, the ZP/DRDA may consider appointing a reputed Non-Government Organization (NGO) in the district with adequate experience and expertise in the implementation of watershed projects or related area development works as the PIA after thoroughly examining their credentials.

Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM) (1979)

With the objective of providing technical skills to rural youths to enable them to take up self-employment in the broad fields of agriculture and allied activities, industries, services, and business activities, the scheme of Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment was started on 15th August 1979.

National Social Assistance Programme and Annapurna (2002-03)

The National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) consisting of National Old Age Pension

Scheme (NOAPS) and National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS) was being administered by Ministry of Rural Development till the programme was transferred to the State Plan along with the Annapurna Scheme from 2002-03. The scale of central assistance under NOAPS is Rs.75 per month for providing pension to a destitute-aged 65 years and above. Under NFBS Rs.10,000 is being provided in the event of death of the primary bread winner of a family and under Annapurna Scheme 10 kg of food grains per month per person is provided free of cost to the beneficiaries. Number of persons to be benefited from the Scheme would be in the first instance, 20 per cent of the persons eligible to receive pension under NOAPS.

Land Reforms

In an economy where over 60 per cent of the population is dependent on agriculture, the structure of land ownership is central to the well being of the people. The government has strived to change the ownership pattern of cultivable land, but has had limited success. The abolition of intermediaries immediately after Independence, in spite of its many well-documented shortcomings and lack of implementation in certain parts of the country, was a significant achievement and covered close to 40 per cent of the cultivated area. These achievements notwithstanding, the lack of progress in the other components of the land reforms programme, viz., implementation of land ceiling laws, security of tenure to tenants and consolidation of land holdings, remains a matter of serious concern. Agricultural workers did not benefit from the abolition of *zamindari*. The SC/STs, who constitute the bulk of the labour force, do not have either the assets or the skills to participate in the limited but emerging employment opportunities in different sectors of the economy. The problem is further compounded by the fact that though the contribution of agriculture to GDP has nearly halved from over 50 per cent in 1951 to around 25 per cent in 2000-01, a similar transformation of employment opportunities has not taken place. The number of people dependent on agriculture and allied activities has fallen only 12 percentage from 71 per cent of the population in 1951 to 59 per cent in 2001.

The progress in tenancy reforms is still unsatisfactory. Tenancy laws in the states follow different patterns, as land is a state subject. Several states, including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa have either banned tenancy completely or have imposed such restrictive conditions that land leases are virtually impossible. Studies by the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration indicate that this has only resulted in concealed tenancy. It is estimated that over 34 per cent of land is operated under concealed tenancy in Bihar. The ban on tenancy, which was meant to protect tenants, has only ended up hurting the economic interests of the tenants, as they are not even recognised as tenants. As a result, they are denied the benefits of laws that provide security of tenure and regulate rent. Since migration and feminization are increasing trends, land reforms that make tenancy legal and give well defined rights to tenants and to women are now more necessary than ever not only to reduce distress but also to increase agricultural growth.

The progress on the consolidation of land holdings has also been slow. Consolidation has to be a continuing process, but most states have stopped consolidation proceedings. As on 31 March 2002, consolidation of holdings has taken place only in an area of 66.10 million hectares against a total cultivable area of 142 million hectares.

Land relations can have a major impact on agricultural productivity and production. Inequality in land distribution and insecurity of tenure etc., are often at the bottom of many forms of social discrimination and domination based on gender, caste, minority, and tribal affiliations. The National Commission on Farmers has placed the unfinished agenda in land reform first in its list of five factors central to the present agrarian crisis, and states "the first and foremost task of the National Policy for Farmers should be in the area of land reform

with particular reference to tenancy laws, distribution of ceiling surplus land, attention to common property and wasteland resources and the consolidation of holdings. Following the conferment of land rights to women under the Hindu Succession Amendment Act (2005), the provision of appropriate support services to women farmers has become urgent. Joint Pattas are essential for women to get access to credit. Also, there should be stringent restrictions on the diversion of prime farmland for non-farm purposes.”

More recently, initiatives of state governments have related to liberalisation of land laws in order to promote large-scale corporate farming. This is in sharp contrast to the policy environment soon after independence when land reforms were meant to provide ownership rights to small and marginal farmers on equity considerations. Though the pressure of population has led to sub-division and fragmentation of land holdings, thereby considerably weakening the case for further lowering of land ceilings, the need for effective implementation of the existing land ceiling laws cannot be over-emphasised. The Ninth Plan had laid strong emphasis on agrarian restructuring to make agriculture more efficient leading to increased “output and employment”. However, progress on different components of the land reforms package during the Plan has been limited.

Computerisation of Land Records

The Centrally Sponsored Scheme on Computerisation of Land Records (CLR) was started in 1988-89 with 100 per cent financial assistance on a pilot project basis in eight Districts viz.; Rangareddy (A.P.), Sonitpur (Assam), Singhbhum (Jharkhand), Gandhinagar (Gujarat), Morena (M.P.) Wardha (Maharashtra), Mayurbhanj (Orissa) and Dungarpur (Rajasthan) to remove the problems inherent in the manual systems of maintenance and updating of land records and to meet the requirements of various groups of users. It was decided that efforts should be made to computerise CORE DATA contained in land records, so as to assist development planning and to make records accessible to peoples/ planners and administrators. A decision was taken during 1997-98 for operation of the Scheme at the tehsil/taluk level for facilitating delivery of computerised land records to users and public at large. At present, the Scheme is being implemented in 582 Districts of the country leaving those Districts where there are no proper land records.

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana

The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) was launched on 25 December 2000 as a 100 per cent Centrally Sponsored Scheme. The prime objective of the PMGSY is to provide connectivity to all the eligible unconnected habitations of more than 500 persons in the rural areas (250 persons in the hilly and desert areas) by good quality all-weather roads.

Rural Housing

To meet the shortage of housing in rural areas, a programme called Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) was launched in May 1985 as a sub-scheme of Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY). It was implemented as an independent scheme since 1 January 1996 and is the flagship programme for rural housing. The Indira Awaas Yojana aims at providing assistance to rural people below the poverty-line belonging to Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes, freed bonded labourers and non-scheduled castes/scheduled tribes categories for the construction of dwelling units and upgradation of existing unserviceable kutch houses by providing grants-in-aid. From 1995-96, IAY benefits have been extended to widows or next-of-kin of defense personnel killed in action. Benefits have also been extended to ex-servicemen and retired members of the paramilitary forces as long as they fulfill the normal eligibility conditions of IAY. Three per cent of funds are reserved for the disabled persons living below the poverty line in rural areas.

Under the Scheme, allotment of the house is done in the name of the female members of the households or in the joint names of husband and wife. A minimum of 60 per cent of funds is to be utilised for construction of houses for SCs/STs. The ceiling on assistance for construction of new houses has been increased from Rs.20,000 to Rs.25,000 per unit for the plain areas and from Rs.22,000 to Rs.27,500 per unit for the hilly/difficult areas with effect from 1 April 2004. The upper limit in respect of conversion of kutchha houses into semi-pucca houses (upgradation) has also been increased from Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 12,500 per unit from the same date and up to 20 per cent of IAY funds can be utilised for this purpose.

As construction of houses for the rural poor is a significant activity of asset creation in rural areas and contributes substantially towards the concept of Bharat Nirman, this has been included as one of the six components of the 'Bharat Nirman' Programme. Under this programme sixty lakh houses are to be constructed for rural BPL families during a span of four years beginning from 2005-06.

Rural Drinking Water Supply Programme

Clean drinking water is a basic necessity of life. Supply of clean drinking water in the rural areas has always been one of the highest priorities of the government. A Technology Mission on drinking water named "National Drinking Water Mission" (NDWM) was launched in 1986, which subsequently was rechristened as "Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission" (RGNDWM) in 1991 with three key objectives:

1. Providing safe drinking water to all villages,
2. Assisting local communities to maintain sources of safe drinking water in good condition, and
3. Giving special attention for water supply to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission (RGNDWM) adopts an integrated approach so that conservation and augmentation of water sources is interrelated with rural water supply schemes to provide sustainable supply of safe drinking water to the rural population. The Mission seeks to provide supply of 40 liters of safe drinking water in rural areas.

Food for Work Programme

A Food for Work Programme was initiated in 1977-78, aimed at creation of additional employment in rural areas on works of durable utility to the community, with the use of surplus food grains available in the buffer stock for payment as wages. Beginning somewhat haltingly, the programme gained momentum in 1978-79 when over 12 lakh tonnes of food grains were utilised creating 372.8 million man-days of employment.

Poverty Alleviation Programme

The focus in the 6th Plan was on the alleviation of rural poverty and it was emphasized that an increase in the productive potential of the rural economy was an essential condition for finding effective solutions to the problems of rural poverty. At the same time, recognising constraints that limit the scope for higher growth rate in medium-term, more direct means of reducing the incidence of poverty and destitution would have to be employed. The hard core of poverty is to be found in rural areas and the poorest sections belong to the families of landless labourers, small and marginal farmers, rural artisans, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and socially and economically backward classes. Households below the poverty line require to be assisted through an appropriate package of technologies, services and asset transfer programmes. The strategy and methodology for accelerated rural development to be

followed was as follows:

- Increasing production and productivity of agriculture and allied sectors;
- Resource and income development of vulnerable section of the rural population through development of the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors;
- Skill formation and skill upgrading programmes to promote self and wage employment amongst the rural poor;
- Facilitating adequate availability of credit to support the programmes taken up for the rural poor;
- Promoting marketing support to ensure the viability of production programmes and to insulate the rural poor from exploitation in the marketing of their products;
- Provision of additional employment opportunities to the rural poor for gainful employment during the lean agricultural season through a national rural employment programme (NREP);
- Provision of essential minimum needs; and
- Involvement of universities, research and technical institutions in preparing a shelf of projects both for self-employment and NREP and in preparing strategies for the scientific utilisation of local resources.

The 7th Plan viewed the poverty alleviation programmes in the wider perspective of socio-economic transformation in the country. In view of this it was felt that while the present strategy of direct attack on poverty through specific poverty alleviation programmes is justified on account of insufficient percolation of benefits to the poor from overall economic growth, it should be appreciated that the strategy of direct attack on poverty cannot be sustained and would not yield the desired results, if the overall growth of the economy itself is slow and the benefits of such growth are inequitably distributed. For one thing, the resources and the capabilities needed for running such programmes cannot be generated in the system unless the economy itself is buoyant and there is a sustained increase in output. Secondly, the demand for goods and services produced by the poorer household enterprises rises significantly in response to the overall increase in incomes in the country so that the viability of these household enterprises depends critically on the sustained increase in national income. The programmes for poverty alleviation should thus be regarded as supplementing the basic plan for overall economic growth, in terms of generating productive assets and skills as well as incomes for the poor.

The success of the anti-poverty strategy can be gauged from the decline in poverty levels from 37.27 per cent in 1993-94 to 27.09 percent in 1999-2000 in the rural areas. This decline in poverty has, however, been uneven. Haryana, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Rajasthan experienced a sharp reduction in poverty levels (a drop of more than 12 percentage points between 1993-94 and 1999-2000). Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu also registered significant reduction in poverty (8-12 percentage). However, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh have shown virtually no reduction in poverty levels. In fact, these are the states where the absolute number of poor has actually gone up between 1993-94 and 1999-2000. At the beginning of the new millennium, 260 million people in the country did not have incomes to access a consumption basket, which defines the poverty line. Of these, 75 per cent were in the rural areas.

National Rural Employment Programme (NREP)

The problem of employment in rural areas is mainly of seasonal unemployment and underemployment. Fuller employment opportunities for the rural work force need to be found within the agricultural and allied sectors themselves, through intensification and diversification of agriculture based on expansion of irrigation and improved technology. However, the very dimensions of the problem called for a multi-pronged strategy aiming on the one hand at resource development of vulnerable sections of the population, and on the other, provides supplementary employment opportunities to the rural poor, particularly during lean periods, in a manner which at the same time contribute directly to the creation of durable assets for the community. It is necessary to view employment as an indivisible component of development and ensure that both in concept and implementation, employment and development become catalysts of each other, and the benefits to the community from the limited resources available are maximised.

Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP)

RLEGP was introduced from 15th August, 1983 with the objective of (a) improving and expanding employment opportunities for the rural landless with a view to providing guarantee of employment to at least one member of every landless household up to 100 days in a year and (b) creating durable assets for strengthening the infrastructure so as to meet the growing requirements of the rural economy. An outlay of Rs.500 crores to be fully financed by the Central Government was provided under this programme in the Sixth Plan. The implementation of the programme was entrusted to the States/UTs, but they were required to prepare specific projects for approval by a Central Committee.

Jawahar Rozgar Yojana / Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana

The NREP and RLEGP were merged in April 1989 under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY). The JRY was meant to generate meaningful employment opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed in rural areas through the creation of economic infrastructure and community and social assets. Initially, the JRY also included the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) and the MWS. Both these schemes were made into independent schemes in 1996.

The JRY was revamped from 1 April 1999 as the Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY). It now became a programme for the creation of rural economic infrastructure with employment generation as a secondary objective. The 60:40 wage labour/material ratios in the JRY was relaxed. The programme is implemented by the village panchayats and provides for specific benefits to SCs/STs, the disabled and the maintenance of community assets created in the past. Since inception it has generated 27 crore man days of employment each year (on an average).

The 8th Plan took a note that the rural poverty is inextricably linked with low rural productivity and unemployment, including underemployment. Hence, it is imperative to improve productivity and increase employment in rural areas. Moreover, more employment needs to be generated at higher levels of productivity in order to generate higher output. The fact remains that after 40 years of planned development about 200 million are still poor in rural India.

Employment Assurance Scheme

The Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) was launched on 2 October 1993 covering 1,778 drought-prone, desert, tribal and hill area blocks. It was later extended to all the blocks in 1997-98. The EAS was designed to provide employment in the form of manual work in the lean agricultural season. The works taken up under the programme were expected to lead to

the creation of durable economic and social infrastructure and address the felt-needs of the people. The scheme prohibited construction of buildings for religious purposes, monuments, memorials, welcome gates, panchayat buildings, government office buildings and buildings for higher secondary schools and colleges. It also provided for maintenance of assets created in the past under the scheme. Initially, the scheme was demand-driven but from 1999, resources were allocated to states based on the incidence of poverty.

The EAS is a centrally sponsored scheme, with the Centre providing 75 per cent of the funds and the states 25 per cent. The Zila parishads and panchayat samitis were the implementing agencies.

Though the creation of community assets has important spin offs for rural poverty and development, the impact of these programmes on employment and income has been limited. The universalisation of the scheme severely eroded its basic objective of providing assured employment in areas of extreme poverty and chronic unemployment. Allocations were based on a fixed criterion that did not specifically provide for regionally differentiated needs. This led to a very thin spread of resources across the country.

In spite of their many shortcomings, wage employment schemes have proved beneficial in some respects. They created much-needed rural infrastructure. The programmes are self-targeting in nature since only the poor come to work at minimum wage rates. The various works undertaken created demand for unskilled labour and exerted upward pressure on wage rates. The programmes have played a major role in protecting consumption patterns of the rural poor during natural calamities.

Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)

On 1 April 1999, the IRDP and allied programmes, including the Million Wells Scheme (MWS), were merged into a single programme known as Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY). The SGSY is conceived as a holistic programme of micro enterprise development in rural areas with emphasis on organising the rural poor into self-help groups, capacity-building, planning of activity clusters, infrastructure support, technology, credit and marketing linkages. It seeks to promote a network of agencies, namely, the District Rural Development Agencies (DRDA), line departments of state governments, banks, NGOs and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) for implementation of the programme. The SGSY recognises the need to focus on key activities and the importance of activity clusters. The programme has in-built safeguards for the weaker sections. It insists that 50 per cent of the self-help groups must be formed exclusively by women and that 50 per cent of the benefits should flow to SCs and STs. There is also a provision for disabled beneficiaries. The programme is credit driven and subsidy is back-ended. The credit and subsidy ratio is pegged at 3:1. The subsidy is fixed at 30 per cent of the project cost subject to a maximum of Rs.7,500 per individual beneficiary for those in the general category and 50 per cent of the project cost subject to a maximum of Rs.10,000 in the case of SCs/STs. In the case of group projects, the subsidy is 50 per cent of the project cost subject to a ceiling of Rs. 1.25 lakh. Funds under the scheme are shared between the Centre and State Governments in the ratio of 75:25.

The focus of the programme is on establishing a large number of micro-enterprises in rural areas based on the ability of the poor and potential of each area, both land-based and otherwise, for sustainable income generation. The subsidy allowed under the SGSY is 30 per cent of the total project cost, subject to a ceiling of Rs 7,500 (for SCs/STs and disabled persons subsidy limit is 50 per cent of the project cost subject to a ceiling of Rs 10,000). For Self-Help Groups (SHGs), subsidy would be 50 per cent of the project cost subject to a

ceiling of Rs.1.25 lakh or per capita subsidy of Rs.10,000, whichever is less. There is no monetary ceiling on subsidy for minor irrigation projects for SHGs as well as individual swarozgaris.

The SHGs may consist of 10-20 members and in case of minor irrigation, and in case of disabled persons and difficult areas, i.e., hilly, desert and sparsely populated areas, this number may be a minimum of five. Self Help Groups should also be drawn from the BPL list approved by the Gram Sabha. The SHGs broadly go through three stages of evolution such as group formation, capital formation through the revolving fund and skill development and taking up of economic activity for income generation.

Selection could be made up to 10 key activities per block based on local resources, occupational skills of the people and availability of market so that the Swarozgaris can draw suitable incomes from their investment. Under SGSY each block should concentrate on 4-5 selected key activities and attend to all aspects of these activities in a cluster approach, so that swarozgaris can draw sustainable income from their investments. The scheme lays special emphasis on development of swarozgaris through well designed training courses tailored to the activities selected and the requirement of each swarozgari. SGSY is being implemented through the District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs), with active involvement of panchayati raj institutions, banks and NGOs. It is financed on 75:25 cost-sharing basis between the Centre and the states.

Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana (SGRY)

Given the complementarity of the JGSY, EAS and Food for Work Programme, all of which aim at the creation of employment opportunities in the rural areas, they were revamped and merged under the new Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) scheme from September 2001. The basic aim of the scheme continues to be generation of wage employment, creation of durable economic infrastructure in rural areas and provision of food and nutrition security to the poor. The amalgamation of the earlier schemes has led to an augmentation of resources for this programme. The works taken up under the programme are labour-intensive and the workers are paid the minimum wages notified by the states. Payment of wages is done partly in cash and partly in kind – 5 kg of food grains and the balance in cash. The Centre and the states share the cost of the cash component of the scheme in the ratio of 75:25. An allocation of Rs. 3750 crore was made for the programme in 2001-02.

National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP)

The "National Rural Employment Guarantee Act" (NREGA) was enacted in September 2005 and brought into force w.e.f. 2 February 2006 in 200 most backward districts with the objective of providing 100 days of guaranteed unskilled wage employment to each rural household opting for it. The NREGA marks a paradigm shift and stands out among the plethora of wage employment programmes, as it bestows a legal right and guarantee to the rural population through an Act of Parliament and is not a scheme unlike the other wage employment programmes. The ongoing programmes of Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) and National Food for Work Programme (NFFWP) have been subsumed in NREGA. The NREGA would cover all districts of the country within five years. The focus of the Act is on works relating to water conservation, drought proofing (including afforestation/tree plantation), land development, flood control/protection (including drainage in waterlogged areas) and rural connectivity in terms of all-weather roads. Each district has to prepare perspective plan of 5 years with a bottom up approach deriving from the needs of the local community. Provision for due representation in such committees for SCs/STs, women has also been made. At least 1/3rd of the beneficiaries are to be women. The Act will be

extended to the entire country over a five-year period. Unlike employment programmes in the past that were supply driven, bureaucracy controlled, and suffered from large leakage including misuse of funds arising from false muster rolls and poor project design, this is demand driven, based on a legal right and requires PRIs to select projects relevant to the needs of the community.

Self-Employment Programmes

Self-employment is promoted through many schemes by many different departments. Besides an array of programmes for village and small-scale enterprises, there are special schemes for scheduled castes and tribes. As far as Rural Development is concerned, the present strategy for promotion of self-employment in rural areas relies mainly on formation of self-help groups to empower rural communities and enable them to take up economic activities. Many other departments in government also have schemes that provide assistance to self-help groups but guidelines vary in scope, content and implementation mechanisms thus creating overlap and inefficiency.

Development of Woman and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA)

As it was noticed that the benefits under the IRDP were not flowing to women in adequate measure, a programme for Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) was introduced in September, 1982 in 50 districts on a pilot basis with a view to increasing their income and also to provide support services needed to enable them to take up income-generating activities.

Gender and Land Rights

So far, the strategy of land reforms has not given any cognizance to the existing gender inequalities in land inheritance laws and ceiling laws. In most regions of the country, women constitute a disproportionate number of poor. They are also more dependent on agriculture for a livelihood than men, as men shift to non-farm employment. Also, it is estimated that 20 per cent of the rural households are de facto female-headed. Yet, very few women have titles to land and even fewer control it. Hence, ensuring women's effective command over land will be one of the new priorities of the Ninth Plan.

Mahila Utahan and Child Development Yojana

1. Bhagyashree Child Welfare Policy for girl child, Rajrajeshwari Mahila Kalyan Bima Yojana for women, Janashree Bima Yojana for Labour in Unorganised Sector, Khetihar Mazdoor Bima Yojana for agricultural labours and Shiksha Sahyog Yojana for education allowance to poor children.
2. Decentralization and devolution of powers, funds and functions to the Panchayati Raj Institutions with mandatory reservation for women.
3. Balika Smridhi Yojana
4. National Maternity Benefit Scheme
5. Stree Shakti (TPP – 2004): The programme launched in 2004, covers micro financing. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, Balika Smridhi Yojana, Kishori Shakti Yojana and Women Participation in Panchayats, municipalities, state legislatures and Parliament.

Community Development and Panchayati Raj

By the beginning of the fourth plan Community Development Programme that started in 1952 covered the whole country and the next step was that of attempting to weld together Panchayati Raj and Community Development programme. This objective followed from the

acceptance of the recommendations of the Study Team of the Committee on Plan Projects (Balwant Rai Mehta Committee). The three-tier Panchayati Raj system, together with its modifications in different States, thus set the pattern of local development administration.

Democratic decentralisation, symbolised by the establishment of Panchayati Raj institutions at the village, block and district levels in the wake of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report (1958) was a natural extension of democracy at the national and state levels. Transfer of authority to and sharing of the state functions and responsibilities with the local communities and geographical units was considered crucial to the whole process and meaning of development. Besides having a better appreciation of local needs and capability of eliciting local participation in the formulation and implementation of their plans called for a new administrative culture and a faith in the capacity of our people to take decisions and execute them and to consider decentralisation of State's power and functions to these institutions not only as a means of development but an end in itself.

Panchayati Raj Institutions are in existence in almost all the States and UTs but with considerable variations in their structure, mode of election, etc. In 14 States/UTs, the three-tier system exists, while four States have two tier and nine states/UTs have one-tier system. In Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, a large part of Manipur and some other hilly areas of North-Eastern States, these institutions are established in accordance with the traditions and customs of the village. At the end of the Seventh Plan, there were 2,17,300 Gram Panchayats, 4525 block Panchayati Samities and 330 Zila Parishads in the country. The tenure of the elected bodies is between 3 and 5 years.

To revitalise the Panchayats, a Constitution Amendment Bill (Constitution 72nd Amendment Bill, 1991) was introduced in Parliament in 1991. The Constitution Amendment Bill itself provides for, inter-alia, a 'Gram Sabha' in each village, constitution of panchayats at village levels, direct elections in all States to Panchayats at the village level and intermediate levels, reservation for scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes in proportion to their population and reservation of not less than one-third of the seats for women, fixing tenure of five years for local authorities, and holding elections within a period of six months in the event of super session of any such authority. The State legislatures are required to devolve powers and responsibilities on the panchayats for preparation of plans for economic development and social justice and for implementation of development schemes.

Delivery Mechanism

Poverty alleviation programmes have been designed to address different facets of rural poverty. Micro credit-linked programmes provide a package of services including credit and subsidy to set up micro enterprises. Wage employment programmes address the issue of transient poverty. Besides, schemes for infrastructure development and provision of basic services contribute to the well being of the rural people. Successful implementation of these programmes requires an appropriate policy framework, adequate funds, and an effective delivery mechanism. Past experience shows that the mere availability of funds is not likely to eradicate rural poverty. Nor is the design of the rural development programmes, no matter how refined, a sufficient condition. The success of these programmes ultimately depends on the capability of the delivery system to absorb and utilise the funds in a cost-effective manner. An effective and responsive district-level field machinery with a high degree of commitment, motivation, professional competence and, above all, integrity has been recognised as one of the prerequisites for successful implementation of anti-poverty programmes.

An effective delivery system has to ensure people's participation at various stages of the

formulation and implementation of the programmes, transparency in the operation of the schemes and adequate monitoring. International experience shows that greater functional and financial devolution to local governments results in higher allocation of resources for social sectors and more efficient use of resources. Such trends in social spending have been witnessed in many Indian states as well.

The gram sabhas in most states have been entrusted with only ceremonial functions. The power and functions of gram sabhas need to be enlarged by giving them effective powers of implementation and monitoring of developmental plans. Social audit of all development programmes by the gram sabha should be made mandatory. The committee system adopted in many states to facilitate a more participative decision-making process in the panchayats should be incorporated in the State Panchayat Acts. The powers entrusted to a gram sabha in a Scheduled V area could be extended to gram sabhas in non-scheduled areas as well.

Administrative and financial devolution by the states to the PRIs remains an area of major concern. The Constitution has placed onerous responsibilities on PRIs. They require financial resources to discharge the tasks assigned to them and emerge as viable institutions of self-government. Financial devolution is also desirable as the control of investment decisions by local communities leads to better utilisation of scarce resources. Panchayats would need greater powers of taxation and avenues for non-tax revenue. States could provide matching grants to panchayats to take up specific projects. Apart from the funds that flow to panchayats for centrally sponsored and state sector schemes, untied grants could also be provided to the PRIs. The PRIs need to raise resources from the local community and end their dependence on government funds. The functional domain of the PRIs can be enlarged only if they pay adequate attention to their resource base.

The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act provided for the constitution of District Planning Committees (DPC). However, the Constitutional provision on DPCs is rather weak as it provides for the preparation of only draft Plans by the DPCs. State governments have not given adequate attention to the DPCs and the Government of India's guidelines on district planning have not been fully operationalised. DPCs should be set up and its functionaries must be trained in the basics of planning. The gram sabha/panchayat should be associated with the preparation of village development Plans based on the felt needs of the people. These Plans should be integrated with the panchayat samiti and district-level plans to make the grassroot planning process a reality.

The voluntary sector has witnessed a phenomenal growth in the country in the last 20 years. These institutions have played an important role in community mobilisation, providing technical support to the community for developmental projects, especially in the areas of health and education. It has been clearly established that where panchayats, community organisations and user groups have worked in close cooperation, people have benefited immensely from developmental projects initiated either by the government or the communities themselves. People's organisations, whether in the form of an NGO or a group of experts, provide expertise and competence to the panchayats that they otherwise may not possess. However, in many places, the emergence of Constitutionally-mandated PRIs has led to a conflict of interest as both voluntary organisations and these institutions occupy the same space. The voluntary agencies have to recognise that PRIs are institutions of governance and must work in close cooperation with them. The PRIs, for their part, have to recognise the critical role that voluntary organisations can play in enhancing their capabilities.

The delivery of programmes would improve only if the PRIs emerge as strong players in the social and economic life of the country. NGOs and other civil society organisations can facilitate the evolution of PRIs as institutions geared to promote the well being of the rural

poor.

People's Participation—the Crux of the Programme

The participation of the people in the planning and execution of rural schemes is an essential feature of the movement and it is observed that where a correct approach has been made on behalf of the administration the people have come forward readily to play their part.

The importance of ensuring, right from the start, the people's participation, not merely in the execution of the Community Development Project but also in its planning was emphasized as this is the very essence of the programme. The Community Development Programme made a provision for the setting up of a Project Advisory Committee, which should be as representative as possible of all the non-official elements within the project area.

The Planning process in a democratic country can acquire fuller meaning and depth if the people not only associate themselves in planning for their development but also participate consciously in plan implementation. Experience suggests that the task of educating and mobilising the people in this direction is more effectively accomplished when it is institutionalised. Individual action though important can only be sporadic in nature, whereas institutionalised action can be distinctly more effective in mobilising local resources, articulating needs and coordinating the developmental tasks which are undertaken by the people. The following are some of the forms of institutionalised action.

1. Youth and Women's organisations operating at different spatial levels, particularly for promoting eco-development and environmental sanitation.
2. Voluntary organisations engaged in general developmental work in an area or on a specific activity like education or health or a combination of a few such activities.
3. Organisations of specific beneficiary or interest groups like self-employed women, or farmers or of people who have common economic interest such as marketing.
4. Organisation of the farmers living in command area of irrigation project catchment areas in the hills and watershed areas in un-irrigated regions into cooperatives for improving land and water management without affecting the individuality of holdings.
5. Religious, social or cultural organisations or clubs (Rotary. Jaycees. Lions etc.), which often undertake developmental activities in selected areas.
6. Professional organisations or educational institutions, which take up study, research and social action programmes as part of their professional or social commitments.

Involvement of Voluntary Agencies

There is a good deal of voluntary effort in India, especially in the field of social welfare. The tendency so far has been to equate the work of voluntary agencies with only welfare activities and charity work. There has been inadequate recognition of their role in accelerating the process of social and economic development. These agencies have been known to play an important role by providing a basis for innovation with new models and approaches, ensuring feedback and securing the involvement of families living below the poverty line. Therefore, serious efforts have been made to involve voluntary agencies in various development programmes, particularly in the planning and implementation of programmes of rural development. Voluntary agencies have developed expertise and competence in many non-traditional areas to plan their own schemes instead of expecting Government to do so. More specifically, the role of voluntary agencies in implementation of development programme is:

1. To supplement government effort so as to offer the rural poor choices and alternatives
2. To be the eyes and ears of the people at the village level
3. To set an example. It should be possible for the voluntary agency to adopt simple, innovative, flexible and inexpensive means with its limited resources to reach a larger number with lesser overheads and with greater community participation
4. To activate the delivery system and to make it effective at the village level to respond to the felt needs of the poorest of the poor
5. To disseminate information
6. To make communities as self-reliant as possible
7. To show how village and indigenous resources could be used, how human resources, rural skills and local knowledge, grossly under-utilised at present, could be used for their own development
8. To demystify technology and bring it in a simpler form to the rural poor
9. To train a cadre of grassroots workers who believe in professionalising volunteerism
10. To mobilise financial resources from within the community with a view to making communities stand on their own feet
11. To mobilise and organise the poor and generate awareness to demand quality services and impose a community system of accountability on the performance of village-level government functionaries

The programmes and areas in which the participation of voluntary agencies can be of great help for better implementation of anti-poverty and minimum needs programmes are:

1. Integrated Rural Development/Landless Employment Guarantee Programme
2. Implementation of land ceiling and distribution of surplus land
3. Enforcement of minimum wages to agricultural labourers
4. Identification and rehabilitation of bonded labour
5. Development of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes
6. Supply of safe drinking water: repair and maintenance of water supply systems with community support
7. Afforestation social forestry, development of biogas and alternative energy sources (solar and wind energy, improved chulas }
8. Promotion of family planning
9. Primary health care; control of leprosy, TB, blindness; preventive health programmes using village resources
10. Programmes for women and children in rural areas
11. Innovative methods and low-cost alternatives in elementary, primary and middle school education for children, adult education and non-formal and informal education
12. Consumer protection: promotion of cooperatives
13. Promotion of handicrafts and village and cottage industries
14. Promotion of science and technology

15. Legal education
16. Rural housing: improvement of rural slums
17. Environmental and ecological improvement, and
18. Promotion and encouragement of traditional media for dissemination of information.

CAPART

The Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) is an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Rural Development, which was set up in September 1986, as a supporting and funding agency to the voluntary organisations. Its primary objective is to promote voluntary action through community participation and to propagate appropriate rural technologies for the benefit of rural masses.

The Path Ahead

INTEGRATED development of rural areas is one of the abiding tasks before the Government of India. Addressing the challenge of unemployment in the rural areas of the country is central to the development of rural sector for ameliorating the economic condition of the people. Wage employment is provided in rural areas under National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) whereas self-employment is provided under Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY). Besides, generating employment these wage employment schemes also ensure creation of durable assets in rural areas. Initiatives are also taken to build and upgrade the basic rural infrastructure through various schemes. Under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) construction and upgradation of rural roads are taken up to ensure rural connectivity. Similarly basic amenities for housing, drinking water and toilets, etc., are provided under Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY), Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP) and Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) to enhance the welfare and well being of the vulnerable sections of rural population. Area Development is encouraged through Watershed Programmes to check the diminishing productivity of wasteland and loss of natural resources.

The policy planners recognize that one of the major challenges of the 11th Plan will be to reverse the deceleration in agricultural growth from 3.2% observed between 1980 and 1996-97 to an average of around 2.0% subsequently. This deceleration is the root cause of the problem of rural distress that has surfaced in many parts of the country and reached crisis levels in some. Low farm incomes due to inadequate productivity growth have often combined with low prices of output and with lack of credit at reasonable rates, to push many farmers into crippling debt. Even otherwise, uncertainties seem to have increased (regarding prices, quality of inputs, and also weather and pests) which, coupled with unavailability of proper extension and risk insurance has led farmers to despair. This has also led to widespread distress migration and a rise in the number of female-headed households in rural areas. A second green revolution is urgently needed to raise the growth rate of agricultural GDP to around 4%. This is not an easy task since the actual growth of agricultural GDP, including forestry and fishing, is likely to be below 2% during the tenth Plan period. Doubling the growth of agricultural GDP to 4% per annum will improve rural employment conditions by raising real wages and reducing underemployment.

The divide between urban and rural India has become a truism of our times. The central government has already adopted a multi-pronged strategy to reduce this divide in its various dimensions. For example, the Bharat Nirman programme addresses gaps in rural infrastructure and covers irrigation, road connectivity, housing, water supply, electrification, and telephony; the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) attempts to ensure

a social safety net as it provides guaranteed employment in rural areas and at the same time has the capacity to build rural infrastructure especially if resources from other programmes are pooled in; the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and National Rural Health Mission are ambitious programmes for providing elementary education and primary health services respectively. All these programmes indicate the priority being given by the Government to Rural Development and are meant to give a new hope to rural India.

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