

## ADMINISTRATIVE AND ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Administrative and organizational issues in rural development cannot be discussed without reference to the objectives and scope of rural development (RD), in whatever ways it is defined is obviously a massive and highly complex endeavour. This should not, however, be interpreted as an effort to develop the rural areas autonomously and as a closed system. Rural Development has to be planned and pursued within a national development model subsuming the inter-dependent and interactive growth of both rural and urban areas.

Before focussing on the nature of RD policy, it is worthwhile taking a look at the evolving rural scenario to identify the bright spots as well as the black ones. On the brighter side, foodgrains production has been increasing steadily and there is today an accumulated buffer stock of nearly 19 mt. In 1960-61 the country was producing 82 million tonnes (mt.) of foodgrains which rose to 121 mt. in 1975-76. Food import has stopped and some exports are bringing in exchange earnings. The areas under high-yielding varieties rose from 9.20 million hectares (mha) in 1968-69 to 26.00 mha in 1973-74.

Basic inputs such as water, credit and fertiliser are being augmented to cope with rising demands. During 1960-61 to 1973-74 gross irrigated areas grew at an annual compound rate of 3.18 per cent. Net irrigated area rose from 24.7 mha in 1960-61 to 31.5 mha in 1971-72. Minor irrigation potentials are

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being steadily increased through tubewells and dugwells, and speedy energization with the help of rural electrification. Adoption of new agricultural technology is reflected in the steady rise of fertiliser use. From a paltry 306 thousand tonnes in 1960-61 it rose to 2.8 mt. in 1973-74 and the estimated use in 1977-78 came to 4.3 mt.

The role of credit in agricultural development hardly needs any emphasis. Institutional credit contributed to only about 3 per cent of the total credit requirement in 1950-51. The contribution rose to 16 per cent in 1960-61. On the eve of the Sixth Plan, the figure is placed at around 40 per cent. According to current calculations, total credit outflow from cooperatives and other institutional sources by the end of 1983 is expected to be over 7,500 crores, which on an average, works out to about 19 crores per district. The availability of institutional finance on such a large scale, works out to about 19 crores, which, on an average works out to about 19 crores per district. The availability of institutional finance on such a large scale outside the state budgetary resources is a totally new factor in the structure of the rural economy.

This is obviously a very encouraging picture of rural economy. Apparently it might look quite rosy; but there are very many black spots and nagging weaknesses which are indicative of a deep malaise afflicting the rural sector. The rural population grew from 298.5 million in 1951 to 438.8 million in 1971. The percentage variation in the last two census decades is around 21 per cent. Since 1951 census, rural population continues to account for more than 80 per cent of the total population which shows meagre siphoning off to urban areas. Agriculture continues to be the major source of livelihood of majority of the total national workforce. Strangely enough, in spite of the development of the large scale manufacturing and infrastructure sectors, the share of agriculture in the total workforce has not diminished at all. It was 73 per cent in 1961 and 73.8 per cent in 1971.

The employment situation in the rural areas has been deteriorating fast as new entrants annually join the labour force and there is virtual non-implementation of the minimum wages provision. In India, one characteristic feature is the preponderance of the unorganised sector which sustains most of the

total workforce (91% in 1971). In the unorganised sector, again, it is agriculture which absorbs most. The employment scene being what it is, one can imagine the gripping crisis in the rural economy. To quote the draft Sixth Plan:

The number of landless agricultural workers increased by about 19 million during the decade 1961-71. The share of landless workers in the total unorganised workforce increased from 18 per cent to 24 per cent. This fact reflects several tendencies which should cause concern namely, growing population pressure in the rural areas, lack of opportunities for non-agricultural work, and the proletarianisation of small farmers, artisans and women workers, as a result of eviction and/or technological displacement. Since the landless agricultural labour population bears the largest incidence of rural poverty and employment on increase in its size reflects the correlated increase in poverty and unemployment.\*

Rural poverty, under the circumstances shows no sign of abatement. There are various estimates available of the people below the poverty line calculated on different basis. The Draft Sixth Plan calculations based on recommended nutritional requirements puts the poverty figure at 47.85 per cent of the total rural population in 1977-78. This is no doubt alarming especially in the light of the fact that the nation has by now passed through five national plan periods.

Land which is the basic productive asset in the rural areas continues to be in the possession of an influential minority of landed elite. As the Draft Sixth Plan points out, out of about 2 mha of land declared surplus, hardly about 25 per cent has been distributed. The ceiling laws have not been seriously enforced in many instances. Nor have the tenancy regulations followed the national guidelines. As the plan document affirms: "A more equitable distribution of land resources through land reforms has consistently been a major political objective since Independence. But the will to implement this policy has been sadly lacking all along." Without a redistributive land

\*Draft Five Year Plan, 1978-83, Vol. II.

reform, it is difficult to envisage any other policy that would have quick impact on the rural economy and reduce poverty to a great extent in the shortest possible time. Rural Development thus assumes more a political complexion than an economic one.

*RD defined:* Rural development in our context has necessarily to be basically oriented towards reduction of poverty in rural areas. The Sixth Plan has also reinforced the view as the document observes: "The aim of agricultural and rural development will be growth for social justice achievement of full employment in the rural areas in a period of ten years and removal of poverty." This would mean mobilisation of resources and their allocation specifically to ameliorate the living conditions of the low-income population in the villages. A balance has to be struck between provision of productive and welfare services to the target group. Conditions have to be created for clientele participation in the development programmes so that 'felt needs' are satisfied and the benefits actually reach the target group. An important requirement is to see that the activities taken up are backed up by necessary skill and administrative organisation and capacity. The development programmes are not an one shot job. These need to be sustained and fostered through popular participation and mobilisation of supplementary local resources.

#### CHANGING POLICIES

The strategy of rural development has shifted gradually from macro concerns to micro or area based and clientele-specific development. Table 1 gives a clear picture of the shifting policy scenario.

In 1952 started the Community Development Movement which was very general in scope and not specifically production oriented. As an officially sponsored and government administered programme, the community development movement had its internal contradictions which had to be resolved by the introduction of popularly elected panchayati raj institutions in 1957. The grim food situation in the subsequent years triggered a search for directly production oriented programmes.

This led to the formulation in the early sixties of a number

TABLE I

## EMPHASIS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

<i>Years</i>	<i>Comprehensive</i>	<i>Specific Productivity</i>	<i>Clientele Area</i>	
1952-60	Community Development	—		
1960-69	—	IADP, IAAP HYVP	—	Better Areas
1970-77	—	RIP	SFDA ITDP MNP	DPAP CADP DDP
1978	IRD	—	—	—

of programmes such as Intensive Agricultural District Programme and Intensive Agricultural Area Programme which were designed to accelerate agricultural production in selected regions that were naturally endowed with good soil and irrigation facilities. With more and better inputs, and greater intensity of extension work faster growth was actually achieved in these areas. The efforts to augment production were helped fortuitously by the availability of Mexican high-yielding variety seeds. The cumulative result of all these efforts was the phenomenon which came to be characterised as the 'Green Revolution'. In the seventies, the emphasis shifted to the target group approach. Productivity movement was sought to be balanced by an egalitarian concern. A number of clientele specific programmes were launched to improve the economic conditions of small and marginal farmers and the landless agricultural labour. Special programmes were conceived for the 38 million tribal population who had virtually been left out of the development process earlier. In 1974, another special programme was launched for the development of the chronically drought affected areas. If the earlier programmes were meant for the poorer 'people' the drou-

ght prone areas programme was meant for the poorer 'areas'—the marginal landscape representing the arid and semi-arid areas where living has traditionally been difficult for human, cattle and plant population.

In addition, a variety of special programmes has been launched in recent years to deal with specific areas and problems such as command areas, hill areas, desert areas, rural industries, rural artisans, rural employment and so on. Besides, projects have been specially formulated to develop specific crops like sugarcane, cotton and pulses. In the field of animal husbandry also there have a number of schemes for cattle and dairy development sheep, and wool development, etc.

Looking back one can therefore sum up that the tendency in recent years has been to concentrate on *specific* problems and try to deal with them directly. This has produced some good results because of concentrated attention and pointed thrust in planning and implementation. But at the same time, the specificity approach has led to a process of sub-optimisation in rural development. This has spawned multiplication of programmes, projects and agencies, each of which has tended to become a world unto itself. At the field level, activities in any sector generally repercuss on other allied sectors. Physically also, projects have geographical spill over effects. Hence, vital linkages need to be established between programmes and projects and their areas of operation to get maximum pay off from investments.

#### INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT (IRD)

The current trend is to define 'rural development' in comprehensive terms embracing economic infrastructural and civic development with special reference to removal of distribution and unemployment. Elaborating the concept of IRD, the Draft Sixth Plan observes:

Experience of various rural development programmes in the earlier plans has shown that a mere project approach or a sectoral approach is not adequate to lead to an overall development of the area and distribution of benefits to local population, particularly the weaker section of the society. The distribution of unemployment and poverty and the potential

for development of agriculture and related activities very widely from region to region and also within regions. Different areas in the country are to different levels of development and have varying degrees of potential depending on local endowments. The efforts will now be to make the programmes area specific and utilise the local endowments for growth, for social justice and full employment. It will, therefore, be necessary to plan for integration of various programmes and establish appropriate linkages for optimal utilization of local endowments consistent with the plan objectives, local needs and environmental balance.

The Plan looks at IRD as an instrument of intervention in the problems of the target group comprising small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers and rural artisans. The approaches followed in the on-going special programmes like SRDA, DPAP and CAD which are broadly area development programmes are proposed to be utilised according to their relevance in particular areas to the objectives of employment generation and increased production.

Under IRD comprehensive block level plans are contemplated for production and employment generation, and for the development of infrastructural facilities and social services. The block plan will be tied up vertically with the district plan and the state plan. The district plan will take into account the block plan and give the necessary district level supportive infrastructure. It is at the district level that the problems of coordination between departments, institutions and organisations will be sorted out.

The new dispensation called the IRD is comprehensive enough to include everything under the sun. Production, employment generation, development of infrastructure and social services, removal of destitution all are included in it. How can such a comprehensive approach be also made target group specific remains an unanswered question.

#### DANTWALA COMMITTEE AND MEHTA COMMITTEE

The Dantwala Committee on Block Level Planning has just reported on the mechanics of block planning in support

of the new strategy of rural development.

The Committee identified the following critical functions in support of decentralised planning at the block level:

- (i) preparation of local resources inventory;
- (ii) analysis of prevailing levels of development and identification of potential for further development and constraints in development;
- (iii) formulation of programmes and projects and establishment of their spatial and temporal linkages;
- (iv) Local manpower planning for fuller utilisation of human resources;
- (v) preparation of an inventory of funds available from various sources such as district budget, institutional source and the private sector;
- (vi) monitoring and evaluation of plans and projects and their modifications in the light of feedback data.

The Committee has not favoured block planning exercise from the block level itself. The planning function for the blocks in the district will be undertaken by a peripatetic planning team located at the district level under the overall supervision of the District Collector. Recommendations have been made to equip the planning cell with an interdisciplinary team of experts so that necessary planning skill would be specially inducted to do the technical planning exercise. Two important issues which the committee have touched upon are the role of Panchayati Raj in block planning and people's participation.

The Committee's reservation about panchayati raj institutions is clear from the following observation:

Our (second), reservation about the role of the Panchayati Raj institutions in the formulation of micro level plans arises from a widely shared view that the weaker sections of the rural community do not feel that their interests will be fully protected under the Panchayati Raj institutions. A stronger version of this feeling is that the leadership of the Panchayati Raj institutions acts as a 'gatekeeper' and prevents the flow of benefits for the weaker sections of the rural community. This is hardly surprising in the given

context of the inegalitarian structure of the rural economy. Unless and until adequate safeguards are provided against the likelihood of the dominance of the Panchayati Raj institutions by the vested interests, giving them a decisive voice in the preparation of micro-level or grassroot plans, one of its major objectives namely, removal of poverty, exploitation and unemployment will not have much chance of being realised.

On people's participation the Committee has been equally forthright. The suggestion is to consult the people on micro-level planning after analysis of data and information has been completed and a broad plan frame drawn up to quote the Committee:

It is well known that the public is not a harmonious entity; in reality it comprises groups with conflicting interests. Take as an illustration a plan of minor irrigation. If it is proposed in the interest of improving assets distribution to deploy a larger than proportionate share of the available underground water for the small and marginal farmers, will the non-beneficiary group ungrudgingly acquiesce in the decision. Participation by the beneficiary group may result in non-participation—varying from non-cooperation to civil or not so civil resistance—by the (richer) non-beneficiary group. It is not difficult to surmise in whose favour the summation would be. Briefly, if we wish to plan for the weak, the plan may have to be imposed from above and cannot be a product from below in which the below is dominated by the rich and the strong.

The Dantwala Committee's views about Panchayati Raj poses an organisational dilemma. Planning would then be a bureaucratic-technocratic exercise. The assumption here is that the bureaucrat and the planner know the public interest best and superior technical skill and bureaucratic authority are adequate resources for plan formulation. That planning itself is essentially a process of choosing between alternatives and therefore essentially political is not recognised by the Committee. Legitimation of planning and its implementation depend

on political support.

On this issue the Asoka Mehta Committee on Panchayati Raj institutions and the Dantwala Committee seem to be clashing. The Mehta Committee have rightly pointed out that the Panchayati Raj institutions had a raw deal in the hands of the State Governments. The political will was missing to decentralise power. The institutions were starved of financial resources and bypassed on many occasions where special purpose agencies were created to undertake development programmes. Since the economically weaker sections are numerically in a majority in the rural areas, the democratic process built in within the DR institutions is expected to throw up vocal and assertive leadership from these sections in course of time. The imbalance in political power in rural India has to be corrected politically. Instead of weakening Panchayati Raj and pushing it out of development programmes, the system, as the Committee pleaded, should be revamped and fully involved in the development process.

It was perhaps injudicious to set up the two committees about the same time with overlapping terms of reference. Planning being a continuous process needs a durable organisational niche. It is an amalgam of technical skill and political will. The organisation entrusted with planning has to have both. Technical efficiency is important no doubt, but for a country that has just come out of the traumatic experience of a brief spell of authoritarianism, political efficiency is expected to assume much more significance.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE AND OPERATIONAL CONSTRAINTS

The two committees mentioned above have raised a number of organisational and administrative issues in rural development. If reduction of poverty and unemployment are to be pursued seriously as national objectives, a fresh look at organisation and administration is urgently called for.

One important issue in this connection is what can be called *area-function dichotomy*. At the field level where development programmes are executed, multiplicity of functional departments and agencies has led to virtual balkanisation of the field. Admittedly, new programmes and massive investments lead to

the creation of new units and specialisms. What has happened, however, is that over the years the functional agencies dealing with irrigation, animal husbandry, forestry, etc., have grown in scale and complexity and carved out their independent areas of operation. At the ground level, functions have their natural interdependences. In the absence of horizontal coordination, the operations of a number of functional agencies move on in isolation from one another which is dysfunctional from the point of view of optimisation of investments and detrimental to the interest of the client-the farmer, who has to run around for his needs.

Functional insularity is further reinforced by departmental verticalism. Each department is an empire into itself starting from the Secretariat-Directorate to the field.

The problems of the area as a whole and the linkages that need to be established to solve them go by default in this kind of organisational arrangement. The organisation becomes more inward oriented serving its own interests distinguished from the interest of the client and the area.

To allow field organisation to operate effectively, decentralisation of authority within a broad policy frame is an absolute necessity. There is a lot of spurious decentralisation all around; actually the field organisation has to look to sanctions and approvals upward almost at every step which is frustrating for field administration and dysfunctional for the activities in progress on the ground. One of the reasons for this state of affairs can be traced to the dichotomy between status and task in our administrative system. While tasks are pushed down to lower operational levels, authority rests with the higher echelons. So schemes and projects have to be referred to higher levels for clearance, as these are the status levels in the organisation. Operations during times of emergency like flood or famine have revealed that centralisation of authority is neither necessary nor desirable, and the field level can undertake many of the activities without the formalism of central clearance.

Another important feature is the proliferation of special programmes accompanied by special *project organisations*. Programmes like DPAP, SFDA, ITDP and CAD have been built in arrangements. The special organisations around the programmes have a nucleus staff, but they depend mostly on the

regular line departments for the execution of projects. Experience shows that this kind of project organisation has neither the planning skill nor the implementation machinery. These organisations exist for funding purposes mainly and often find it hard to get their work done through the regular line departments who do not like, in general, to submit themselves to the discipline of the project organisation. In consequence, the project set-up tends to become an island into itself. It does not mesh up with the larger organisational outfit at the field level and cannot become very effective as a result.

Beneficiary oriented organisations like SFDA and ITDP face a peculiar *problem of 'leakages'*\* in the sense of spill over of benefits from target groups to non-target groups. Wherever the beneficiary is identified on the basis of size of holding, authenticity of land record is of paramount importance. In the absence of proper land records, the formal beneficiary may be a wrong person for entitlement of project benefit. The leakages through spill over effect may not always be susceptible of correction. More imaginative benefit-cost appraisal at the project formulation stage may help to some extent. Administrative vigilance at the implementation stage is required to plug the loop-holes in operations as far as practicable.

Special organisations for target groups like small and marginal farmers and landless labour have not been fully organisational planning is needed. The small farmer has hardly any real access to the input supplying organisations which are usually controlled by the big farmer. Government extension agencies are also heavily tilted in favour of the former. Due to lack of access to organised marketing, the small farmer is again denied reasonable price for his product. Between sowing and harvesting, he has to depend for survival on non-institutional sources for consumption expenditure.

For all these considerations special organisations for the rural poor may be necessary to specially attend to the intractable problems of poverty. This kind of organisation would then be a single point of reference for the client and it might

\*C.L.G. Bell and John H. Duloy, "Rural Target Groups", in Hollis Chenery, *et al.*, *Redistribution with Growth*, OUP, 1974.

be possible to evolve a package programme to meet the production and marketing needs of the small and marginal farmers.

For the landless and the marginal farmer, wage earning is a dire necessity. Proper enforcement of the legislations regulating wages becomes important in this context. Planned public works programmes and off-farm jobs in the field of animal husbandry and dairying and related areas may help in generating additional income outside the traditional farm sector. Here also organisation of such works on continuing basis assumes considerable importance.

The Dantwala Committee suggested the creation of "community grain gola" for the landless and the marginal farmers. It can be operated on the basis of the small savings of the rural poor themselves coupled with the programme of additional employment and income during the succeeding years. This might reduce their dependence on the village money lender and the big farmer and help them to gradually stand on their own.

Wherever indigenous local crafts have been surviving, organised efforts are needed to revive the crafts and improve earnings from this source. Training and demonstration to improve skill, institutional financial support, assistance in procurement of inputs and marketing the products may go a long way in not only rehabilitating the traditional crafts but also generating additional income. Public organizational support is badly needed in this sector of the rural economy.

#### PEOPLE'S ORGANISATION

Rural development for the rural poor has far too long been considered as the bureaucrat's burden. Administrative and procedural changes and institutional innovations have taken place from time to time. But the impulse for change has generally come from inside the closed society of administration. The beneficiaries have been looked at as dumb recipients and not active participants in the change process. Hence change is not always comprehended and internalised by the villagers.

The primary need is, therefore, to organise their thoughts in order that they are able to interpret the rural reality and become conscious of their rights and privileges. A kind of

'cultural revolution' has to be induced to initiate what Friere calls the 'conscientization process'. At the cognitive level, this process will lead to better understanding of many of the redistributive and welfare legislations that affect the interest of the rural poor.

At the political plane, people's organisations consisting of the target group population need to be encouraged. It is only through organised strength that the rural poor can hope to increase their capacity to resist exploitation, articulate demands and find a way out of the poverty trap.