

Rural Development: An approach for poverty alleviation in India

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ABSTRACT

Rural development has gained global attention especially among the developing nations. It has great implication for a country like India where majority of the population live in rural areas. The present strategy of rural development in India largely focuses on poverty mitigation, better livelihood opportunities, provision of basic amenities and infrastructure through the programmes of wage and self-employment. The research paper overviews the roles and functions of the Government and its programmes for rural development in India.

Key words: poverty.

Introduction

Rural Development in India is one of the most important factors for the growth of the Indian economy. India is largely an agriculture-based country. Agriculture contributes nearly one-fifth of the GDP in India. In order to raise the growth of agriculture, the Government has planned several programs pertaining to Rural Development in India. The Ministry of Rural Development in India is the apex body for formulating policies, regulations and acts pertaining to the development of the rural sector.

Rural development in India has witnessed several changes over the years in terms of emphasis, approaches, strategies and programmes. It has assumed a new dimension and perspectives as a result. Rural development can be richer and more meaningful only through the participation of clientele of development. Just as implementation is the touchstone for planning, people's participation is the centre-piece in rural development. For the development it is important to solicit the participation of different groups of rural people, to make the plans participatory.

Aims and Objectives

Rural development aims at improving rural people's livelihoods in an equitable and sustainable manner, both socially and environmentally. The basic objectives of Rural Development Programmes have been alleviation of poverty and unemployment through creation of basic social and economic infrastructure, provision of training to rural unemployed youth and providing employment to marginal farmers to discourage seasonal and permanent migration to urban areas.

Role and function of the Government

The Government's policy and programmes have laid emphasis on poverty alleviation, generation

of employment and income opportunities and provision of infrastructure and basic facilities to meet the needs of rural poor. The introduction of Bharat Nirman, a project by the GOI in association with the State Governments and the Panchayati Raj Institutions is a major step towards the improvement of the rural sector. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 was introduced by the Ministry of Rural Development, for improving the living conditions and its sustenance in the rural sector of India. The Ministry of Rural Development in India is engaged in legislations for the social and economic improvement of the rural populace. The ministry consists of three departments viz., Department of Rural Development, Department of Land Resources and Department of Drinking Water Supply. The objective of the ministry is to encourage, promote and assist voluntary action in the execution of projects for the enhancement of rural prosperity and act as the national nodal point for co-ordination of all efforts relevant to rural development in its wide sense.

However, various ministries at the centre are engaged for the implementation of the programmes and schemes for the development of rural areas like Ministries of Agriculture, Health and Family Welfare, New and Renewable Energy, Women and Child Development and Tribal affairs etc. Apart from it, to strengthen the grass root level democracy, the Government is constantly endeavouring to empower Panchayat Raj Institutions in terms of functions, powers and finance.

Strategies and programs for rural development

The rural economy is an integral part of the overall Indian economy. As majority of the poor

reside in the rural areas, the prime goal of rural development is to improve the quality of life of the rural people by alleviating poverty through the instrument of self-employment and wage employment programmes, by providing community infrastructure facilities such as drinking water, electricity, road connectivity, health facilities, rural housing and education and promoting decentralization of powers to strengthen the Panchayati raj institutions etc. The various strategies and programs of the Government for rural development are discussed below:

Integrated Rural Development Program

(IRDP): This programme was first introduced in 1978-79. The aim of this programme was to provide assistance to rural poor in the form of subsidy and bank credit for productive employment opportunities through successive plan periods. Subsequently, Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Supply of Improved Tool Kits to Rural Artisans (SITRA) and Ganga Kalyan Yojana (GKY) were introduced as sub-programs of IRDP to take care of the specific needs of the rural population.

Wage Employment Programs: Wage Employment Programs have sought to achieve multiple objectives. They not only provide employment opportunities during lean agricultural seasons but also in times of floods, droughts and other natural calamities. They create rural infrastructure which supports further economic activity. It encompasses Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) etc. MGNREGA is not merely a scheme but it is an act of parliament. It aims at enhancing the livelihood security of the people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage employment in a financial year, to a rural household whose members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The objective of the Act is to create durable assets and strengthen the livelihood resource base of the rural poor.

Food for Work Program: The Food for Work program was started in 2000-01 in eight notified drought-affected states of Chattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Maharastra and Uttaranchal. The objective of the program was to provide food through wage employment. Food grains are

supplied to states free of cost. However, lifting of food grains for the scheme from Food Corporation of India (FCI) godowns has been slow.

Rural Housing: Initiated in 1985-86, the Indira Aawaas Yojana was the core program for providing free housing to families in rural areas. It targets SCs/STs, households and freed bonded laborers. The rural housing program has certainly enabled many BPL families to acquire pucca houses. The exposure of the beneficiaries is limited given the resource constraints. The Samagra Awas Yojana (SAY) was taken up in 25 blocks to ensure convergence of housing, provision of safe drinking water, sanitation and common drainage facilities. The Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) has extended its actions to the rural areas, providing loans at a concessional rate of interest to economically weaker sections and low-income group households for construction of houses.

Social Security Programs: Democratic decentralization and centrally supported Social Assistance Programs were two major initiatives of the government in the 1990s. The National Social Assistance Program (NSAP), launched in August 1995 marks a noteworthy step towards fulfillment of the Directive Principles of State Policy. The NSAP has three components: a) National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS); b) National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS); c) National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS). The NSAP is a centrally-sponsored program that aims at ensuring a minimum national standard of social assistance over and above the assistance that states provide from their own resources. The NOAPS provides a monthly pension of Rs. 75 to destitute BPL persons above the age of 65. The NFBS is a scheme for BPL families who are given Rs. 10,000 in the event of the death of the breadwinner.

Rural Development is the main pillar of Nation's Development. In spite of rapid urbanization, a large section of our population still lives in the villages. Secondly, rural India has lagged behind in development because of many historical factors. Though, the 11th Plan began in very favorable circumstances with the economy having grown at the rate of 7.7% per year in the Xth Plan period, there still exists a big challenge to correct the developmental imbalances and to accord due priority to development in rural areas. Ministry of Rural Development is implementing a number of programmes aimed at sustainable holistic development in rural areas. The thrust of these programmes is on all round economic and social

transformation in rural areas, through a multi-pronged strategy, aiming to reach out to the most disadvantaged sections of the society. The actual realization achieved during the Xth five year plan and the proposed target and strategy of the XIth five year plan have been highlighted and presented in Tables 1 and 2 respectively.

Conclusion

More than 60% of the Indian population lives in rural areas and most of the rural people depend on agriculture and agricultural related industries. So there is a great need to follow the effective rural development strategies for improving the quality of life in rural areas, self employment to rural people and raising profits to the farmers to improve the Indian economy. Although rigorous efforts have been initiated by the Government of India to alleviate poverty in rural India, there still remains much more to be done to bring affluence in the lives of rural people.

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