

# IMPACT OF EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMES ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA



ज्ञान-विज्ञान विमुक्तये



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## 69. Empowerment Programmes on Rural Development

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Mahatma Gandhi's view that India lives in villages still holds well as nearly 70% percent of the population lives in rural India and almost 65 percent depends on agriculture and allied sectors for their livelihood. The development of these villages is the real development of country and village development can be the basis of country's progress. Hence, rural development has been an integral part of nation's socio-economic development and accorded the highest priority.

'Rural development' earlier implied agricultural development as village economy was largely dependent on the agriculture but now it is viewed closely as a strategy specifically designed to improve the socio, economic life of a specific group of rural people. The government of India has adopted several strategies and the approaches to rural development. This paper focuses some of these approaches and setbacks of Rural Development Programmes.

**The concept of rural development:** The concept of rural development encompasses a wide spectrum and it has been defined by different authorities in different ways. However, according to Katar Singh, "the term 'rural development' connotes overall development of rural areas with a view to improve the quality of life of rural people". Thus, rural development embraces all aspects of human life in the rural areas and development essentially is a dynamic process which transforms an economy and society from a relatively backward state to a more advanced state.

**Approaches to rural development:** There have been several paradigm shifts in rural development which were primarily in response to the changing economic and political environments. In the colonial administration rural development was a minor opus, but after Independence that rural development acquired a high-level priority and launched various schemes from time to time to accelerate the rural development.

The programmes have also undergone considerable changes over a period of time since the introduction of Community Development Programme in 1952 to the current scheme of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. There is a vast change in the design and implementation of various rural development programmes and the very approach towards rural development has evolved from structural reform strategy to rights based approach i.e. MGNREGS. **Structural Reform Strategy:** The basic aim of the structural reform strategy is to bring changes in the existing unequal socio-economic structures of the society, also called structural transformation, by way of land reform measures. This has mainly consisted of imposing the ceiling on land and distributing the surplus land to the landless to remove economic disparities.

However, the land reform measures have benefited more to the landlords and marginally to the landless. At present, in the context of liberalization process, the land reform measures were relegated to the background. The initiative of the governments in the recent times to liberalize land laws in order to promote large-scale corporate farming is an indication of this shift in the land reform policy.

**Multipurpose Strategy:** On the recommendations of Grow More Food Enquiry Committee, the Community Development Programme was started in the country on October 2nd 1952 on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanthi on an experimental basis. The efforts of the different communities are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic conditions. Thus, it is directed towards the upliftment of the poor in rural areas.

**Institutional Strategy:** In view of the need and urgency of the rural problems and to ensure participation of rural people in the development process, panchayat raj institutions has been launched.

Peoples participation for rapid rural development at the grass root level is essential. Hence institutionally, an attempt was made for the active participation of the people through the Panchayat Raj institutions. The creation of Panchayat Raj, with the aim of entrusting the authority and responsibility to rural people, is considered not only an innovation but also a revolution. On the recommendations of the Balwantraji Mehta Committee, the Panchayat Raj Institutions were established in the year 1959 in Rajasthan followed by erstwhile Andhra Pradesh.

**Sectoral Strategy:** There was a realization that improvement of the living conditions of rural people was absolutely difficult without an agricultural transformation. Hence, areas with favorable irrigation and climatic conditions were identified to introduce intensive cultivation and High-yielding Variety Programme all of which were part of Green Revolution Strategy for agricultural development. It involves the adoption of new practices, availability of credit and production inputs, training and education to farmers, storage and marketing arrangements which eventually contributed to the rapid increase in agricultural production.

**Target Oriented Strategy:** The earlier strategies, i.e. multipurpose, institutional, sectoral strategies could not solve the problems of the rural people. On the other hand, the green revolution strategy resulted in widening of the gap between the rich and poor. This compelled the Government to adopt strategies based on the target group approach. This approach is also known as Growth with Social Justice.

Thus the Marginal Farmers & Agricultural Labourers Development Agency (MFALDA) and Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA) were introduced. The basic objectives of these programmes were to make the existing occupations of the target groups viable with the support of credit and subsidy.

**Area Development Strategy:** In order to offset regional imbalances, Drought Prone Area Programme, Watershed Development Programmes, Desert Development Programme, were launched.

**Employment Generation Strategy:** Through this strategy, various wage and employment generation programmes were launched in the country with the main objective of generating additional gainful wage employment for the rural poor and landless. The Government of India evolved a strategy to provide employment to the landless labourers through a programme called "Food-for-work". The National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) and Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) were also launched for employment generation in rural areas.

Finally, the rural development trajectory has been entered into a right based approach. In a country where labour is the only economic asset for millions of people, gainful employment is

a prerequisite for the fulfillment of other basic rights – the right to life, the right to food, and the right to education. Giving a statutory framework to wage employment programmes based on the experiences, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was enacted to reinforce the commitment towards livelihood security in rural areas. The significance lies in the fact that it created a right based framework for wage employment programmes and made the Government legally accountable for providing employment to those who ask for it.

Thus, there are several other programmes too implemented on various names and these programs have been changed or merged into another similar programme which is a continuous process. However, in terms of design, objectives and operational strategy, most of these programs appear to be sound, but the rural scene does not seem to have materially changed and the majority of our villagers do not often get their basic needs satisfied even today owing to various setbacks. Setbacks of rural development programmes:

There are several reasons for either failure of the programmes or poor results. Some of the major barriers are being listed below:

1. Lack of Awareness, Accessibility, and Adaptability
2. Pilferages and leakages
3. Lack of proper coordination and over bureaucratization in the implementation.
4. Lack of empathy with the beneficiaries.
5. Delay in the selection of beneficiaries and implementation of the scheme.
6. Allocation of financial resources is inadequate
7. Lack of proper monitoring and evaluation mechanism
8. Absence of people's participation or involvement in the programmes

There could be several other issues which could impede the performance of the rural development strategies. However, if the drawbacks and problems associated with the rural development are removed it will accelerate the process of rural development in India. If all work together with complete devotion can surely lead to India's progress from village development as visualized by Gandhiji.

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