

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural development can be defined in many different ways. At one end of the spectrum do business interests often use a definition. According to this perspective, rural economic development is defined as “activity relating to either industrial development or some form of economic growth in rural areas”. This is a narrow definition of rural development, a concept that implies progress, because economic growth alone can occur without regard to human development and welfare. At the other end of the spectrum lies the broader, more comprehensive definition. Rural development, according to Tootle, (n.d.) refers to goal-oriented economic activity designed to improve the quality of life in rural areas. It generally involves some type of structural change in a community or other geographic area (parish, state) that enables that economy to respond positively to rapid changes in the environment. This comprehensive approach to rural development provides the groundwork for increased equity and access to economic opportunities.

ELEMENTS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural development is sustainable when it is progressive and contributes to (rather than depletes) the resources on which it depends. Sustainable rural and economic development does not sacrifice the needs of the future for the needs of the present. Under this even broader definition, sustainable rural development can be perceived as activity that builds and maintains the following elements of an economic system:

- Agriculture
- Industry
- Workforce
- Physical infrastructure
- Human capital

- Social and civic infrastructure
- Natural, cultural and historical resource base

Major approaches to rural development

Before discussing rural development programmes in individual countries, it seems appropriate to identify the major, though not mutually exclusive, conceptual approaches that are behind them.

These may be categorized as follows:

- a) Paternalistic
- a) Technocratic
- a) Welfarist
- a) Radical/activist

The paternalistic approach

It is that approach which characterized many rural development efforts in the pre-independence era. The approach represents an attitude, which is sometimes carried over even in the most advanced rural development programmes. It was inherent to a considerable extent in the Community Development Programmes that were introduced in India and Pakistan in the 1950s. The main modus operandi was to induct a Government functionary in the village who would act as a “guide, philosopher and friend” of the villagers and was expected to familiarize them with modern and scientific ideas about agricultural and rural development with the presumption that whatever, if anything, they knew about farming practices was outmoded and needed to be discarded.

The technocratic approach

This approach is associated with such programmes that promoted the spread of the green revolution in the 1960s that are now seeking to introduce biotechnology and information

technology in agriculture. The main aim of such programmes is to increase the output of agriculture, often without much concern for institutional, distributional or environmental side effects. However, in recent years the latter set of concerns are becoming increasingly important and are beginning to receive greater attention thus engendering a more holistic approach. The Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDPs) adopted in many South Asian countries in the 1960s and 1970s can be regarded as following a largely technocratic approach, although some like the Comilla Rural Development Programme had many innovative elements.

The welfarist approach

This approach has always been a significant influence in the architecture and implementation of rural development programmes but has become more prominent in recent times because of the emphasis of the poverty alleviation objective. Ever since the beginning, the trend is to give increasing attention to the equity aspects of public expenditure programmes, including those for rural development. In rural development programmes this concession was made by changing their orientation initially towards “progressive” or middle farmers.¹⁹ More recently, such programmes have included limited land or tenancy reforms, in view of the fact that the growth-oriented strategies of the 1960s were unable to have a significant trickle-down effect increasing the access of the poor to public services, especially microcredit delivery to the poor.

Radical/activist approach

This approach relies on the redistribution of wealth (mainly through radical land reforms) and income (through reduction in inequality). It also relies on faster growth through the increased intensity and efficiency of labour. The main objective of the radical/activist approach is to achieve rapid social change and to redistribute political power from the landed rich to the small farmers and the landless that constitute the bulk of the poor. To This approach was based on the experience

of the first two decades of China. However, the Republic of Korea and Taiwan Province of China also adopted radical land reforms, despite their aversion to socialism. In general, the South Asian countries did not adopt this approach, although in some, especially India and Sri Lanka, land reforms were fairly radical. The radical rural development programmes aim at directly challenging the existing rural social order, rather than circumventing or appeasing it.