

Rural Works Programme (1962-1972)

After the disbandment of the Village Aid programme, the Rural Works Programme was initiated in Pakistan with its primary focus on East Pakistan. It was initially started in Comilla as a small project but culminated as a major experiment in rural development under the charismatic leadership of the late Akhtar Hameed Khan. The choice of Comilla was particularly appropriate for undertaking self help projects of rural infrastructure, such as the construction of protective walls and tube wells, since Comilla was subject to flooding in summer and water shortage in winter, allowing the growing of only one crop which was inadequate for subsistence. The close association of the rural community with the staff of the Comilla Academy also provided the opportunity for mutually beneficial interaction between the staff of the Academy and the local farmers. On the basis of the highly successful Comilla experiment, the Rural Works Programme was extended to West Pakistan from 1963 to 1984. From 1963 to 1968, the Programme enjoyed the support of the President, but thereafter it suffered from the change in leadership and other adverse political developments. The Programme was organized under the auspices of the central Ministry of Finance and Planning, with each provincial government being responsible for project organization and execution. The Programme was directed to undertake labour-intensive projects, create and improve rural infrastructure and mobilize local resources, manpower and leadership. It was nowhere as successful as Comilla. Although the Rural Works Programme in the then West Pakistan was much less successful than in East Pakistan, as both its conceptualization and implementation were highly flawed, it made an impressive contribution to the development of local infrastructure. About 60,000 projects at an average cost of Rs. 5,700 each were constructed with the communication sector receiving the largest share of about 38 per cent, education 21 per cent and health and sanitation 16 per cent. About 700 miles of metalled roads were constructed,

2000 miles of roads repaired and 6000 miles of unmetalled roads were constructed under the Programme. Roads under the Programme were constructed at approximately half the cost of standard highways. The provision of mandi (market) to village road was made for 92 per cent of the wheat crop and 23 per cent of the cotton crop. However, lack of planning created a paucity of funds for repair. Mobilization of local resources was not adequate and measures to levy taxes in times of economic prosperity were not undertaken. The Rural Works Programme was, however, largely motivated by political considerations. It provided legitimacy to the military government of Ayub Khan by giving the impression of reducing interregional disparities between East and West Pakistan, through somewhat larger expenditures in East Pakistan. On the other hand, its programmes in West Pakistan were biased in favour of elements providing political support to the regime. The strong emphasis on road construction through capital-intensive methods apparently benefited large farmers producing a marketable surplus and led to a further increase in the inequality of rural income.

Achievements

Despite these limitations, the Rural Works Programme did succeed in opening up vast areas of rural Pakistan to larger markets and linked the villages directly with the mainstream of development activity. It also opened up opportunities for the rural poor to seek employment in neighbouring urban industrial centres. It also helped in the raising of social consciousness and the spirit of self-help among rural communities and in promoting a more egalitarian social structure. The latter was done through the formation of local level committees that encouraged popular participation and fostered confidence among the people in the successful completion of the project.

The Basic Democracies System (BDS)

Phased in 1959, this system was designed to bring together both the elements of community development and political development, especially at the local level. The government administrative and development tiers were organized into five levels where the union council, a group of 3-5 villages, was the lowest tier (Muhammad, 1994). The councils undertook a variety of social and economic development work in their respective areas. The problems tried to solve by union councils were in the realm of education, infrastructure, agriculture, and sanitation. The BDS went a long way in developing awareness and building local leadership among the rural masses.

The BDS also met the same fate as its predecessor program. In 1970, the change in the government abolished the BDS and introduced a new programme known as 'Integrated Rural Development Program' (IRDP).

Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP)

In early 1970, once again due to the change of political scenario and the problems with the previous development strategies, the government decided to try a new development approach - - the IRDP. Development of agriculture was the central force behind this program. Moreover, the IRDP was created as a subsidiary of the Agriculture Department, its leadership was heavily drawn from the agricultural department, and all frontline workers recruited to run this program were agricultural graduates. On the other hand, Local Government Department controlled rural development funds. This dichotomy in modus operandi not only resulted ample tension between the two agencies, but also created frustration among the workers of this newly launched program. The IRDP staff, using their professional skills, started a campaign to enhance agricultural productivity, which had a tremendous impact on crop yields. Its one of the principal functions was to integrate the functioning of various line departments and facilitate farm service delivery to the farmers at one

point. This coordinating role could not be accomplished successfully for hard departmental boundaries. Subsequently, in 1978, the IDRPP was subsumed into the Local Government Department and turned into a routine bureaucratic agency (World Bank, 2003).

Inputs at farmers doorstep Programme

In an effort to improve agricultural productivity during the latter years of the IRDP, the government assigned extension personnel to deliver agricultural inputs such as improved seed, fertilizer, and pesticides to farmers. The government provided substantial subsidies to the farmers in an effort to encourage the use of inputs deemed essential for increasing agricultural production. The extension personnel succeeded in popularizing the use of agricultural inputs, resulting in a significant increase in agricultural production (Axinn and Thorat, 1972). Thus, 'For the first time crop production grew about 6 or more percent per year, which is a very high rate of growth' (Davidson et al., 2001). Although there was an increase in agricultural production, this approach nevertheless had the unintended consequence of turning extension workers from agents of change into sellers of agricultural inputs, and the highly specific assignment left them little time to carry out educational programmes for the farmers. The approach also proved costly and ultimately paved the way for the privatization of agricultural inputs and phasing out of the subsidies borne by the Government (World Bank, 2003). The Inputs at Farmers' Doorsteps approach was replaced in 1978 with a new system of extension known as the Training and Visit system.

Peoples Works Programme (1972-1983)

With the separation of East Pakistan and the coming into power of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in West Pakistan, the role of the Rural Works Programme had to be transformed to take into account the changed political situation. However, in terms of formal structure, there was very little change except that the Programme was renamed the Peoples Works Programme and placed under the Federal Ministry of Finance and Planning. The projects under the Peoples Works Programme covered road construction,

school buildings, small irrigation dams, drinking water facilities, dispensaries, industrial schools for women, tree planting, adult education centres and cottage industries, etc. The emphasis was on the provision of physical infrastructure without organizing an appropriate machinery for their proper utilization through the active participation of the community. The hardware/software linkage was again missing as in the case of the Rural Works and Village-Aid programmes. The story of tube wells without electricity, schools without teachers and dispensaries without staff and medicines was repeated all over again. As a result, the Programme was riddled with irregularities in the choice of projects, determination of priorities and locations by politically influential people with little regard for the needs of the community, overwhelming reliance on contractors rather than on project committees, and preference for large projects as well as widespread corruption and misuse of public funds. The impact of the People Works Programme on the alleviation of poverty and in addressing the problems of the poor were, as in the previous rural development programmes, minimal. As in the previous cases, the thrust of the Programme was least on projects such as the development of land, irrigation facilities, veterinary facilities, which would have benefited the small farmers and the landless.