

Critical analysis of rural development initiatives in Pakistan: implications for sustainable development

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Abstract

Short title: Critical analysis of rural development initiatives in Pakistan

In the global world poverty persists and dominates in rural areas. To develop rural people on sustained basis like other developing countries, in Pakistan many rural development programs were initiated during the last six decades but was terminated due to one or many reasons. The major concerns relating to the failure or termination of these programs were economic (well-being), social and environmental sustainability. In all the rural development programs focus was given increase in the production of agricultural farms and no emphasis was given to the non-farm income activities as well as environmental issues. Due to which poverty dominate and persists in rural areas, especially women and marginalized groups become more vulnerable. In this situation state should give special emphasis to environmental issues and rural non-farm income resources for sustainable development in the country.

Keywords: Rural development, sustainable development, rural development programs.

1. Introduction

1.1. Rural Development in Pakistan

Rural development is composed of a multiple series of interconnecting practices devised from negotiations between different social actors having command over different types of resources, interests, values as well as institutional capabilities (Long, 1997). It involves a number of concepts like equity, justice, participation and empowerment. Rural development focuses on the idea of people centered development (Al-Jayyousi, 2009). According to Ward *et al.* (2005), rural development is holistic and multi sector phenomenon. In broader sense there are three main components of rural development: (i) protect natural environment; (ii) social well-being of rural people; (iii) access to sustainable economic opportunities (Hosn and Hammoud, 2009). The three components of rural development: economic growth, environmental sustainability and equity in a society lead to sustainable development (Al-Jayyousi, 2009; Parris and Kates, 2003; Schnoor, 2003). The three main pillars of sustainable development are economical sustainability,

environmental sustainability and social sustainability (Kassie and Zikhali, 2009). Sustainable development requires economic efficiency, social justice, protection of human beings and ecological sustainability (Amiolemen *et al.*, 2012).

There exist a strong relationship between rural life and poverty as according to an estimate 75% of the total world poverty present in rural areas (De Janvry *et al.*, 2005). Like other developing regions of the world majority (65%) of population in Pakistan resides in rural areas and they depend on agriculture sector directly or indirectly (Government of Pakistan, 2011). In spite of their significant contribution in overall economic development of the country they are becoming more vulnerable to poverty (Ahmad *et al.*, 2004). Rural communities not only have less income but they also lack access to basic needs such as education, health, clean drinking water and proper sanitation (Hussain *et al.*, 2003). Rural people are relatively deprived in terms of household income, education, health and empowerment (Ali *et al.*, 2010). Due to the unavailability and access of the basic necessities of life, poverty in rural areas is

more evident than urban areas (Hafeez *et al.*, 2011). For uplifting the living standard of this huge (more than half) population and to reduce rural poverty the Government of Pakistan has launched many initiatives regarding rural development to upgrade rural life from time to time during different democratic and military administrations (Javed *et al.*, 2010; World Bank, 2007).

The main objective of this review paper is to critically analyze the objectives, strengths and weaknesses of rural development within the overall framework of sustainable development agenda.

1.2. Rural Development Initiatives in Pakistan

1.2.1. Village Cooperative Movement

Just after independence of Pakistan (in 1947) the Village Cooperative Movement was started under the umbrella and guidance of cooperative department through village cooperative societies. The main objectives of this program were to educate the members of respective cooperative societies regarding latest agricultural technologies and to provide agriculture inputs on credit. Although the cooperative movements was deeply rooted and penetrated among the farming community but on the ground the movement had not been able to achieve constant success in developing rural community on sustained basis. However in some areas where local leadership and staff of the cooperative societies was sincere, the movement has achieved good results in terms of providing farm inputs and agricultural technology to the small scale farmers at lowest level, i.e., village level (Luqman *et al.*, 2011; World Bank, 2003).

1.2.2. Village-AID

In 1952, a new program was started with the name Village Agricultural and Industrial Development Program (Village-AID) with the financial assistance from USAID (Luqman *et al.*, 2011). The main focus of this program was to increase the income of rural farm households by raising their farm production through improved farm practices and cottage industry. Creating a sense of self help among the rural communities and coordination among allied departments and establishment of small scale industries through village organization were also its main objectives (Soharwardi, 2009). The conceptual approach which was used in Village-AID program was paternalistic. The vision of this program was to train a Government functionary at village level as a guide or friend of the villagers and was expected to disseminate them with modern and scientific ideas about agriculture and rural development (Sobhan, 1968).

The most notable achievement of this program was its wide coverage in East as well as West Pakistan. The program covered about 24.64 million people in the development area (Sobhan, 1968). The main physical achievements were agricultural demonstration blocks, digging of canals, construction of bridges, construction and repair of schools and roads (Abbas *et al.*, 2009). The program also supported the rural communities in adapting improved agricultural practices in the rural development areas. The rural communities contributed also about 6% of total expenditure for the development of social sector through self-help activities (Sobhan, 1968). The plan enhanced the linkages between Government officials and the rural community (Choudhary, 2002). Although the program gained some success but, it had some failures or weaknesses as identified by the researchers like non-cooperation, jealousy and lack of coordination among allied department, weak structure, use of top down approach in administrative decisions and lack of trained technical staff (Davidson and Ahmad, 2003; Mallah, 1997; Muhammad, 1994; Waseem 1982).

1.2.3. Rural Works Program

After the end of Village-AID Program the Rural Works Program (RWP) was initiated in Pakistan with its main focus in East Pakistan. Initially, it was started in Comilla, in the East of Pakistan, as a small experimental project under the leadership of Akhtar Hameed Khan through Pakistan Academy for Rural Development. On the basis of its success the program was extended to West Pakistan from 1963-1984 (Abbas *et al.*, 2009). RWP was started under the Basic Democracies System (BDS) in 1959 (Luqman *et al.*, 2011). The main objectives of this program were to enable rural communities to participate in the development process to improve their socio-economic conditions; to provide employment opportunities for rural poor at local level; to develop rural infrastructure such as roads, bridges, water channels; and to create an effective basis of planning and development at the union council level.

The approach was purely technocratic in nature and the philosophy is the development of rural infrastructure through self-help basis. The program succeeded in opening vast areas for rural communities to larger markets and its linkage with the mainstream of development activities for upgrading the social consciousness and creation of spirit of self-help among rural communities for promoting democratic social structure (Abbas *et al.*, 2009). It also opened new opportunities for the rural poor to seek employment in neighboring urban industrial areas. The program strengthened the income of rural masses by increasing their purchasing power and stimulation of rural

economy (Mallah, 1997). The cost of the projects under RWP was much lower than those completed under other different programs (Chaudhary, 2002).

There were some weaknesses identified by different authors. The program in West Pakistan was biased in favor of providing political support. It also increased the inequality of rural income and didn't allow the participation of villagers in the preparation and implementation of development plans. Lack of accountability of members of union councils was also one of the main causes of its failure. Funds under RWP were used for political purposes not for community. Preference was given to small scale projects instead of large scale plans (Mallah, 1997; Muhammad, 1994; Waseem, 1982).

1.2.4. Peoples Works Program

With the separation of East Pakistan in 1971, new political Government of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) came into power in West Pakistan. The Rural Work's Program (RWP) was renamed as "People's Works Program (PWP)" and placed under the federal Ministry of Finance and Planning. The program was different from RWP in various aspects including its coverage of both rural and urban areas for infrastructure development schemes through participation of local people (Chaudhary, 2002). This program covered the construction of schools, roads, small dams, basic health centers and, it also providing facilities for cleans drinking water, women training centers, etc. The major objective of this program was to provide the maximum participation to people in planning and development of plans.

Among different rural development approaches being used during different regimes, technocratic approach was adopted in PWP. The vision of PWP was to provide physical infrastructure by organizing appropriate machinery for their proper utilization through the active participation of the community. This program only provided an attempt to ensure maximum participation of local people in the planning as well as execution of development projects. In spite of its some success, the program had some common weakness like irregularities in the choice of projects; their priorities and locations were determined by the politically influential people with little consider for the actual needs of the community; irresistible reliance on contractors rather than on project committees; preference was given to large projects; about 90% of them under PWP had no participation of local community (Abbas *et al.*, 2009) and extensive corruption and misuse of public funds (Khan and Khan, 2001; Sobhan, 1968).

1.2.5. Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP)

During early 1970s, the then newly elected government introduced a new program with the name "Integrated Rural Development Program" (IRDP) which resulted in establishing basic rural institutions. Agriculture graduates were recruited in agriculture department as frontline worker to run this program. Funds for rural development were managed and controlled by the local government department (Choudhary, 2002). Multipurpose cooperative societies were established under this program. The major objective of IRDP was to improve the social condition of rural people with the partnership of government officials and its proposed beneficiaries (Baig and Khan, 2006). Development of agriculture sector on sustained basis by providing storage, credit, transportation, and marketing facilities was also one of it's the main purposes. Technocratic approach was adopted under this program (Abbas *et al.*, 2009).

The program achieved some success but its impact on the rural community was insignificant (Davidson *et al.*, 2001). However, some of the positive points of this program were: i) integration of national building departments to improve the farming communities; ii) decentralization of staff of Government functionaries from district to union council level; iii) improvement in the delivery of agricultural information systems. The common weaknesses of IRDP was inability to address the real needs of landless poor and communities with small land holdings as major focus was given to large land holders. The response of line allied departments in providing services and technical staff was very poor. And non-cooperative behavior of concerned officials was another hindrance factor (Abbas *et al.*, 2009).

2. Rural development initiatives during 1990s

In 1991 "Tameer-e-Watan" program was launched with the participation of local elected members of National and Provincial Assemblies as well as Senators. Although the program was succeeded in improving the physical infrastructure but its overall performance was unsatisfactory. The main reasons behind its failure were corruption and change in the political environment in the country (Khan and Khan, 2001).

Social Action Program (SAP) was also initiated by the government of Pakistan during early 1990s with the financial assistance from international donor agencies (Azizi, 1999). This program was completed in two phases, but, due to the change in the political environment, the program was also ended and, a new program was started with the name "Khushal Pakistan Program" (KPP). Its aim was to provide basic social services to the people

at the grassroots level (Government of Pakistan, 2005). With the change in political regime in the country, the Devolution of Power Plan was introduced (in 2001) to uplift the economic status of rural people through pooling their resources and sources at grass root level (Zaidi, 2005).

3. Rural Support Programs (RSPs)

A framework of rural support programs (RSPs) has been established in Pakistan over the last few decades. The overall objective of the RSPs was to inspire and support of rural community in rural and backward areas of the country through participatory rural development approach and to alleviate poverty. The vision of all the RSPs is to expand opportunities for income-generation activities for poor and marginalized communities (RSPN, 2010¹). These RSPs are striving hard to improve the rural life and a positive impact on the socio-economic condition of rural community of the country (Javed *et al.*, 2006). Agha Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP) in Northern areas of Pakistan and National Rural Support Program (NRSP) in all over Pakistan are the successful examples of RSPs. In the Punjab province, Punjab Rural Support Program (PRSP) has taken many initiatives to provide job and income generation activities through Community Organizations (COs) to upgrade the economic conditions of rural community (Mansoor *et al.*, 2012; Riaz *et al.*, 2012). The important rationale behind the success of these programs is the identification and prioritization of specific local household or community needs or demands, which was not addressed in the previous rural development initiative (RSPN, 2010).

4. Discussion and analysis: implications for sustainable development

Rural development is a holistic and multi-sector phenomenon dealing with rural farming community. The main focus of the rural development strategies being used by the different development agencies is the rural poor. The central idea and concept of rural development is the process through which rural poverty is alleviated by sustained growth in the land productively and income of small farmer (Khan, 2006). In Pakistan, Rural Development remained the major focus of all the governments during different democratic and military regimes and efforts regarding rural development were started just after independence (1947). It is difficult to analyze the Rural Development Initiatives (RDI) different, being undertaken during different political regimes as they are different in terms of their approach, objectives, philosophy, and many other parameters. However the literature reviewed showed that all the efforts to upgrade the rural life

in rural areas remained fruitless and still large proportion of the rural society is living below poverty line (UNDP, 2011²). The rural development initiatives from 1950s to 1980s had focus on rural community development through sustained growth in agriculture. The programs during this period were introduced to promote the welfare and prosperity of rural community. On the other hand, the initiatives during 1990s and 2000s had more diverse agenda in terms of empowering poor people, especially women and other vulnerable and margined groups, the protection of the environment and natural resources and development of the potentials of the poor through increase access to educational and health services. The main thematic difference between these programs is that initiatives during 1960s were unable to have momentous trickle-down impact in increasing access to basic social services to the needy and poor communities. However, the rural development initiatives during 1990s and 2000s become successful in delivering equitable welfare services to the community through “*welfarist*” rural development approach instead of “*paternalistic and technocratic*” approach (Sobhan, 1968).

But for sustainable development it is necessary that all forms of development must be in according to the ecological balance without any harm to the nature (Al-Jayyousi, 2009). In the previous rural development programs no special reference was given to the protection of natural resources, e.g., land, water, forests, etc. Protecting nature and its resources (environment) is one of the major key elements of sustainable development agenda (Kates *et al.*, 2005; Parris, 2003). Like other developing and transition countries Pakistan may lacking suitable agricultural technology for fighting against environmental pollution (Amiolemen *et al.*, 2012). Mazzolli (2012) also synthesized that ecological balance and Human Development Index (HDI) are one of the well-known index for sustainable development. In South Asia including Pakistan during 1960s policy makers became fascinated with the green revolution, combining irrigation technologies, use of pesticides and high yielding hybrid varieties of staple food crops especially wheat and rice (Pingali and Rosegrant, 1994; Hussain, 1982). The increase in production under green revolution was not sustainable as in Asia the annual yield of rice sharply declined in 1980s and prices of pesticides, insecticides and herbicides, chemical fertilizers go higher. In spite of the increase in production in the green revolution era, poverty and hunger persists. Due to the use of chemical fertilizers, and pesticides the damage to the environment are dominant and intense which

¹ Rural Support Programme Network (RSPN)

² United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

is against the philosophy of sustainable development. Other than the environmental issues it also had adverse impacts on humans as well as on the health of other living things (IFPRI, 2009; Kassie and Zikhali, 2009; Ali and Byerlee 2002).

In acquiring sustainable development the concept of well-being of the community or improvement in the quality of life through economic and social sustainability is also very much important (UNDP, 2011). In all the rural development initiatives during the last 5 decades, there are many obstacles in improving rural life on sustained. Rural areas are less developed in terms of economic opportunities as well as lack of access to basic daily necessities of life. In all provinces there is great variation regarding poverty profile of rural communities. The impact of different rural development initiatives on poverty alleviation and in addressing the real needs and problems of the poor were minimal. Emphasis was given only on the large and medium land owners while the land less laborers, peasants had not given due importance in these programs (World Bank, 2007). Unfortunately all the programs/plans or initiatives were failed and terminated one after the other due to the political instability, corruption at different levels, use of top down methodological approach are some common reasons behind failure of all rural development initiatives (Lodhi *et al.*, 2006). Keeping in view the said discussion it is concluded that state should initiate those programs in which utilization of natural resources without harming the nature must keep in mind for sustainable development. Finally, the state should also focus on farm as well as non-farm income generation activities.

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