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RURAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES AND RESPONSIBILITY OF LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT ON MGNREGA

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ABSTRACT

Various developmental programmes have been taken up by government with a vision for rural development. Despite planned efforts for rural development expected target seems to be very far in one sense. The problems of poverty, illiteracy, erosion, environmental degradation, pollution, unemployment, hunger, starvation, death, mass migration, inequality, etc. prevail in rural India, in the context of India's effort for rural development.

KEYWORDS: *Starvation, Death, Mass Migration, Inequality*

INTRODUCTION

As a term 'Rural' fundamentally means an area where people live in a non-urban style and majority people engage in agriculture and allied activities. 'Development' refers to improvement in the standard of living where equality of income is increasing along with the developing capacity of the people to sustain continuous improvements. In other words, development implies change that is desirable (Bulbuli, 2015). There are at least three basic elements which are considered to constitute the meaning of rural development. They are as follows (Tripathi, 2000): **Basic Necessities of life:** People have certain basic needs, without which it would be impossible for them to survive. The basic necessities include food, clothes, shelter, basic literacy, primary health care, and security of life and property. **Self-respect:** Every person and every nation seeks some sort of self-respect, dignity or honour. Absence or denial of self-respect indicates lack of development. **Freedom:** In this context, freedom refers to political or ideological freedom, economic freedom and freedom from social servitude. As long as society is bound by the servitude of men to nature, ignorance, other men, institutions and dogmatic beliefs, it cannot claim to have achieved the goal of 'development'.

Integrated rural development has been defined by Sharma and Malhotra as a systematic approach aiming at total development of the area and the people by bringing about the necessary institutional, attitudinal changes and by delivering a package of service through extension methods to encompass not only the economic field, i.e., development of agriculture, rural industries, etc., but also the establishment of the required special infrastructure and services in the areas of health and nutrition, education and literacy, basic amenities, family planning, etc. with an ultimate objective of improving quality of life in the rural areas (Sharma and Malhotra, 1977). Thus Rural Development can be defined as integrated development of area and the people through optimum development and utilization (and consideration when necessary) of local resources – physical, biological and human and by bringing about necessary institutional, structural and attitudinal changes by delivery of a package of service to encompass not only the economic field, i.e., agricultural, allied activities, rural industries, but also establishment of required social infrastructure and service in the area of health and nutrition, sanitation, housing, drinking water, literacy, with ultimate objective of improving quality of rural poor and the rural weak. Thus, rural development means to the process of improving living condition (Tripathy, 2000).

Objective of the study

This paper attempted

- To understand various schemes of rural development programmes undertaken by government of India
- To examine the developmental schemes that focus of socio economic development
- To review the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since independence, Government of India has undertaken various strategies for the all-round development of the rural areas in the Five-Year Plans. During the First Five Year Plan the Government of India launched the Community Development Programme (CDP) on 2 October, 1952. Under this programmes the first 55 Community Development Projects were inaugurated (Mukta, 1995). With the passage of time, more and more such projects were developed and at the end of the first plan about 5,028 Blocks were developed to cover almost all villages of the country. The CDP could not make much headway as it failed to entrust the villages into the spirit of self-help, self-reliance and cooperative effort. Till the 5th plan, various strategies for agriculture development like High Yielding Varieties Programme (HYVP) and the Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP) had been taken to yield best results out of these (Rajakuttet *et al.*, 2002). Since the sixth plan onwards, various strategies for self-employment, rural housing and wage employment have been introduced. Among these strategies Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY), Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) are the most notable ones (Jamge, 2002).

Housing is one of the basic requirements for human survival. For a normal citizen owning a house provides significant economic security and status in society. IAY was initially a sub-scheme of Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) and there after it

became a part of JawaharRozgarYojana (JRY) (Indira AwaasYojan, 1988). Since January 1996 it has been implemented as an independent scheme for rural housing and thereby providing them one of the basic necessities of human life. The objective of Indira AwaasYojana is primarily to help construction of dwelling units by members of Scheduled Castes/ Schedule Tribes, freed bonded labourers and also non- SC/ST rural poor below the poverty line by providing them with grant-in-aid (Ugra, 1995). Swarnjayanti Gram SwarozgarYojana (SGSY) was undertaken in 1 April 1999 by restructuring the existing schemes namely, Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM), Development of Women & Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Supply of Improved Toolkits to Rural Artisans (SITRA), Ganga KalyanYojana (GKY), Million Wells Scheme (MWS) (Swarnjayanti Gram SwarozgarYojana, 1999). Firka Development Scheme: The Firka development scheme emphasized the attainment of the Gandhian ideal of “Village Swaraj” by bringing about not only the education, economic, sanitary and other improvements of village along with the revitalization of the spirit of people and to make them self-confident and self-reliant. The scheme involved close co-ordination with the various government services like agriculture, irrigation, industries, medical and communication departments. In 1953-54 the scheme was merged with the National Extension Services (Sahu, 2003).

Rural Development Programmes in Plan Period: According to Census Report 2011, 68.84 per cent of the total population of India still lives in villages which are characterized by massive poverty. India started her planned economic development through Five Years Plans in the year 1950-51. The economy of the country is dominated by the rural and traditional economic sectors. But the productivity of these sectors is not satisfactory. The existence of massive unemployment and poverty is the common feature of Indian economy in general and rural economy in particular (Tewari, and Sinha, 1988). Community Development Programme (CDP): The Community Development Programme was launched on 2nd October, 1952 during the First Five years plan. The first 55 Community Development Projects were inaugurated throughout the country where each project was having 3 Development Blocks. With the passage of time, more and more such projects were developed and at the end of the Fifth Plan about 5,028 Blocks were developed to cover almost all villages of the country (Vasant, 1993). National Extension Service (NES): One year later of Community Development Programme, in 1953, the Government of India launched another programme of rural development known as the National Extension Service. This programme had similar aim with the Community Development Programme (Raju, 1999). Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP): In the year 1960, on the basis of the report of the Ford Foundation Team known as “India’s Food Crisis and Steps to Meet it” a significant feature took place and a new programme known as “Intensive Agricultural District Programme” based on the principles of concentration and better management of resources and efforts in potential and responsive areas with assured water supply was introduced (Das, 2007).

Intensive Agricultural Area Programme (IAAP): Intensive Agricultural Area Programme (IAAP) was launched in 1964-65 in order to bring about a progressive increase in the production of main crops in selected area by an intensive package approach i.e. the use of inter related factors physical, social and institutional-in-strategic combination which were likely to exert an impact on agriculture production (Laxmi and Venkata, 1999). High Yielding Varieties Programme (HYVP): The High Yielding Varieties Programme (HYVP) was launched in the country from the kharif seasons of 1966-67 as a major plank of new agricultural strategy under the economic

planning system. The basic objective of the programme was to attain self-sufficiency in food by the end of 1970-71 (Ibid). Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA): The schemes to ameliorate the small and 'sub marginal' farmers and agricultural labourers were sanctioned during 1970-71 but in most cases the programmes only began to be implemented during 1970-71. To administer the programmes, two new agencies the Small Farmers Development Agencies (SFDA) and the Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Agency (MFAL) were set up as corporate bodies (Maheshwari, 1995). Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Development Agency (MFALDA): The Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Development Agency (MFALDA) was set up along with SFDA on the recommendation made by Rural Credit Review Committee (1969). The focus of the attention of MFALDA agency was to identify eligible marginal farmers and agricultural labourers to be covered by the project, to investigate their problems, to formulate economic programmes for providing gainful employment to them, to promote rural industries, etc. (Ibid).

Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP): Drought Prone Areas in India are marked by degraded environment with soil erosion, water and moisture stress and lack of adequate protective cover which resulted in damaged crops, low soil productivity and scarcity of fodder and drinking water. All these adversely affect the living standard of the people which demands ameliorative action. Hence, a special programme named Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP) was introduced in 1970-71 in the country. Cash Programme for Rural Development: This Programme was sponsored by Central Government and implemented through the agency of state government in April, 1971 for a period of 3 years. The objectives behind this scheme were – (a) direct generation of employment for 1000 persons, on an average, continuously over a working season of 10 months in a year in all rural districts of the country (Uday, 1987). Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDA): The characteristic of economic backwardness of tribal population has always been the centre of attention among policy makers and planners of the country. Though from 1st to 3rd Five Years Plans different efforts were taken for the development of tribal people but these efforts did not bring about substantive change among the majority of the tribal population (Venkata, 1988).

Modified Area Development Approach (MADA): Article 46 of the Constitution of India enjoins up on the state to promote with special care the educational and economic interest of the weaker sections and in particular scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. A new programme called Modified Area Development Approach (MADA) was launched in 1978-79 for the all-round development of the tribal who are outside the Sub-plan areas (Jamge, 2002). Command Area Development Programme (CADP): The Command Area Development Programme (CADP) was introduced in the country in 1974-75 with a view to realise a fast and optimum utilization of the irrigation potential created in the major irrigation projects. The basic concept of this programme was to set up agriculture production, create additional employment opportunities and boost up level of income in the rural areas (Maheshwari, 1985). 20-point Programme: The 20-point Economic programme was announced on 1st July 1975. The prime concerns of this programme were – (a) to ensure social Justice (b) to relieve unemployment (c) to eradicate poverty (Mathur, 2000).

Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP): The sixth plan proposed to integrate multiplicity of agencies for providing rural employment such as Employment Guarantee Scheme

(EGS), Small Farmers Development Agency, (SFDA), Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Development Agency (MEALDA), Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP), Command Area Development Programme (CADP), Desert Development Programme (DDP) etc.(Laxmi and Jaya, 1999).DWCRA: The programme of Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) aims to improve the socio-economic status of the poor women in the rural areas through creation of group of women for income generating activities on a self-sustaining basis (Dhar, 2008).National Rural Employment Programme (NREP): The National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) replaced and restructured the Food for Work Programme in October 1980. NREP was a centrally sponsored scheme implemented with 50:50 sharing basis between the Centre and the states. This programme was conceived as wage-employment programme. The main objectives of NREP were- (a) generating additional gainful employment opportunities to the extent of 300-400 million man-day's as per year for the unemployed and underemployed persons in the rural areas (MRD, 2000).Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP): The Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) was launched on 15th August, 1983 with the objective to generate gainful employment opportunities, to create productive assets in rural areas and also for the improvement of overall quality of rural life. In 1989-90, the RLEGP and NREP were merged with JawaharRozgarYojana (Maheshawari, 1995).

Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY):It was launched on 28th April, 1989, by the then Prime Minister Late. Rajiv Gandhi. In the programme all the existing rural wage employment programme were merged into JRY. The NREP and RLEGP were merged within the single umbrella. The main features of JRY are- (i) The JRY has set a target for reaching every single panchayat (Vithal, 2001).National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP): This multi-dimensional programme was launched by 15th August, 1995 for the poor old age pension, family benefit in case of death of the bread earner and maternity benefit. It is a centrally sponsored programme with 100 percent central funding and it is intended to ensure that social protection to the beneficiaries throughout the country (Publication Division 1998).Rural Group Life Insurance Scheme (RGLIS): The Government of India had launched a new scheme, namely Rural Group Life Insurance Scheme (RGLIS) on 15th August, 1995 in order to provide life insurance coverage to the rural poor of the country. The objective of the scheme is to promote social insurance in the rural areas with the active involvement of the Panchayat and to partly alleviate the distress caused by the death of the bread earner among the rural poor (Economic Survey, 2002-03).Indira AwaasYojana (IAY). It was launched during 1985-86 as a sub-scheme of RLEGP. IAY thereafter continued as a sub-scheme of JawaharRozgarYojana (JRY) since its launching in April, 1989. IAY was de-linked from JRY and made an independent scheme with effect from 1st January 1996. The Indira AwaasYojana (IAY) is a flagship scheme of the Ministry of Rural Development to provide houses to the poor in the rural areas (Krishna, 1980).Swarnjayanti Gram SwarozgarYojana (SGSY):It was launched on 1st April, 1999 by restructuring the existing schemes namely Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM), Development of Women & Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Supply of Improved Toolkits to Rural Artisans (SITRA), Ganga KalyanYojana (GKY), Million Wells Scheme (MWS) (MRD, 1999).

Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY): Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) has been restructured with effect from April 1999, and has been renamed as Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY). This is basically a wage employment programme. The primary objective of JGSY is creation of demand driven village infrastructure including durable assets at the village level to enable the rural poor to increase the opportunities for sustained employment. Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY): It was launched in September 2001. It is to provide wage employment in rural areas and also food security, along with the creation of durable community, social and economic assets. The scheme is being implemented on a cost sharing ratio of 75:25 between the Centre and the states (Chattopadhyay, 1985). Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY): It was launched on 25 December 2000 as a 100 percent centrally sponsored scheme. The primary objective of PMGSY is to provide all weather connectivity to all the eligible unconnected habitations in the rural areas. It is targeted on village level development in five critical areas i.e., health, primary education, drinking water, housing and rural roads with the overall objective of improving the quality of life of people living in the rural areas (Economic Survey, 2002-05). Food for Work Programme (FFW): It was initially launched on February 2001 for five months and was further extended. The programme aims at augmenting food security through wage employment in the drought affected rural areas in eight states. The centre makes available appropriate quantity of food grains free of cost for each of the drought affected states as additionally under the programme (Dhar, 2008). Annapurna: The Annapurna Scheme came into effect from 1 April 2000 as a 100 percent centrally sponsored scheme. It aims at providing food security to meet the requirement of those senior citizens who though eligible for pension scheme under the NOAPS, are not getting the same. Food grains are provided to the beneficiaries at subsidized rates of Rs. 2 per kg of wheat and Rs. 3 per kg of rice (Gopal, 1997). National Food for Work Programme (NFFWP): It was launched as Centrally Sponsored Scheme in November, 2004 in the 150 most backward districts to generate additional supplementary wage employment with food security. States received food grains under NFFWP free of cost. The focus of the programme is mostly related to works relating to water conservation, drought proofing (including afforestation and tree plantation), land development, flood control / protection (including drainage in waterlogged areas) and rural connectivity in terms of all-weather roads (Deb, 1986).

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA): It was implemented from 2 February 2006 after passing of the NREG act in the parliament in September 2005. The act was notified in 200 districts in the first phase with effect from 2 February 2006 and then extended to additional 130 districts in the financial year 2007-08. The remaining districts have been notified under NREGA with effect from 1 April 2008. National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in the year 2009. This is for the first time a job guarantee scheme has been introduced in the country for the social economic upliftment of the rural folk (Operational Guidelines, 2008). This scheme was notified in 5th September 2005 by the government of India. And, it came into being in 2th February 2006. It was introduced in phased basis. In the first phase, 200 districts were assigned to take up the scheme. In the second phases, 130 districts were included in 1st April 2007 and further it was extended to different districts of the country from 1st April 2008 as a third phased. It is the biggest poverty alleviation programme in the world in terms of the capacity in employing peoples and the economic sanctions to create rural assets. It is started with an

initial outlay of Rs. 11,300 Crore in the year 2006-07. Article 39, the right to work enshrined in the Directive principles of state policy in the constitution of India is realized by the people under this Act (Devkanta, 2020). It has a set of striking objectives and goals that involve both the approach and outcomes of community development. The scheme further aims at strengthening decentralization and deepening the process of democracy by making grass root level democratic institutions, such as Panchayati Raj Institutes (PRIs) as the principal implementer of MGNREGA with greater accountability in governance for better results (Kabita, 2017). It is an environment friendly government sponsored scheme which aims at the creation of a clean environment through various undertaking works like plantation works, perennial works (plantation of fruit trees), and renovation of drainage for agricultural purposes etc. To acquaint the MGNREGA functionaries with the new provision mentioned in the operation guidelines 2013, the Minister in accordance with the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) & Panchayati Raj (PR) conducted Ten Training of Trainers Programme (TOTs). It created State Resource Teams (SRTs) to develop an expert/trainers in the subject matters of MGNREGA implementation in the States. Among the ten programmes, seven were conducted at NIRD and PR, Hyderabad and three at North East Region. For Manipur the training of SRTs was conducted during the period 08-10 January, 2014. It was the eight TOTs at NIRD and PR, Guwahati. State MIS officers, Accountant, State Institute of Rural Development-Faculty (SIRD), State Nodal officer, Social Audits and training Coordinator attended the training programme. (Ghosh, 2009).

Critical assessment and findings

- Currently, MGNREGA wage rates of 17 states are less than the corresponding state minimum wages. Various judgements have upheld that the MGNREGA wage rate cannot be less than the minimum agricultural wage rate of the state. Fund transfer delays even in the processing of signed, for which the Management Information System (MIS) does not calculate compensation. Despite the order of the Supreme Court and initiatives and GO (Government Order) by the Union Ministry of Finance, no provision has yet been worked out in the MIS for calculation of full wage delays and payment of compensation for the same (Debmalya, 2018).
- Besides, the ministry withholds wage payments for workers of states that do not meet administrative requirements within the stipulated time period (for instance, submission of the previous financial year's audited fund statements, utilisation certificates, bank reconciliation certificates etc.). The increase in corruption and weakening accountability has roots in the excessive dependence of implementation of MGNREGA. It has also painted a picture that is far from the truth on the ground. One needs to think about delinking the implementation of MGNREGA from real-time MIS (Ibid).
- There are a huge number of unemployment allowances being shown in the MIS currently. But inaction from the Central government in ensuring payments of the same has shown that the government wants to use the MIS as per its convenience and is not honouring its own database. Genuine job cards are being randomly deleted as there is a huge administrative pressure to meet 100 per cent Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) implementation targets in MGNREGA (Ibid).

- A real-time MIS-based implementation and a centralised payment system has further left the representatives of the Panchayati Raj Institutions with literally no role in implementation, monitoring and grievance redress of MGNREGA schemes. It has become a burden as they hardly have any power to resolve issues or make payments (Ibid).
- The over-centralisation of the scheme has completely depoliticised the implementation of MGNREGA and local accountabilities have been completely diminished. MGNREGA could be a tool to establish decentralised governance. But, with the administration almost dictating its implementation, it is literally a burden now for the people and especially for the local elected representatives (Ibid).
- The governments always use the bottom-up people's planning strategy to gain political mileage but never honour local priorities while implementing the schemes. Further linking MGNREGA to construction of PradhanMantriAwasYojana (PMAY), individual household toilets, anganwadi centres and rural 'haats' have been destroying the spirit of the programme and gram sabhas and gram panchayats' plans are never honoured (Ibid).

CONCLUSION

The above analysis reveals that various strategies have been adopted by the Government of India for rural development in the plan period. The above mentioned strategies can be broadly grouped as development of agricultural, area development, wage employment, self-employment and basic necessities of life. But these strategies failed to function properly throughout the country due to various reasons such as frequent changes of programmes, illiteracy and ignorance of the common people, political interference and bureaucratic attitude etc. These strategies are expected to bring tremendous changes in the development of rural people in India but it still presents a dismal picture while looking into the implementation of the schemes in various states. In spite of these strategies adopted by the Government of India for the economic upliftment of rural people, poverty is still having a strong hold in the rural areas. It is basically an agro based state in which almost all the villages demonstrating both homogeneous and heterogeneous features of rural life (Thaha, *et al.*, 1992). Keeping aside all the diversified features, the Government of the state as well as the Centre has made attempts to bring progressive changes in the villages by adopting different strategies. The ridiculously low wage rates have resulted in lack of interest among workers in working for MGNREGA schemes, making way for contractors and middle men to take control, locally.

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