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## AN APPROACH TO INTEGRATED AREA DEVELOPMENT

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India's own food supply has been steadily on the increase since the inception of First Five-Year Plan, almost keeping pace with her population growth. Till the end of Third Five-Year Plan agriculture could be seen largely as the contribution of enterprising individual farmers throughout the country. These farmers could adopt the available results of agricultural research to their individual situations. The responses of improved germ plasm, evolved until then for inputs, like irrigation and fertilizers were rather moderate with the result that the majority of low income farmers either rejected the agricultural extension recommendations or adopted them at a low key in piecemeal. The earlier record of agricultural development was largely the product of additional labour, land and capital used in a traditional manner. Given this situation growth on the food front could hardly meet the needs of planned development.

For planned development, one should decide concentrating on the activities in micro environments, and observing the difficulties involved in introducing new techniques in a particular area. As such, each small area-based unit of rural development planning be regarded as the most influential factor for integrated approach to area development. Only through such activities continuing over a large number of small area units could there emerge a series of integrated area development schemes, serving as an effective indicative plan.

With the realisation that the small farmers, agricultural labourers and other rural people did not benefit from the process of economic development to the desired extent, the Integrated Area Development Scheme (IAD), popularly known as the Page Scheme was introduced. The Scheme aims at improvement in agricultural technology, and encouragement of subsidiary activities.

*Concept*

The concept of integrated area development has gained significance only during the last few years. Generally it refers to the integration of all economic and social activities influencing behavioural actions of the masses, viz., business, education, health, etc.

The integrated area development scheme need be designed to enable the weaker sections of the rural population to benefit from the economic growth and development in this sector. It should aim at assisting the farmers in making the maximum productive use of their holdings and generating employment for the non-farm population by undertaking horticulture, livestock raising, dairying and creating infra-structure, which in turn would help maximum exploration of the agricultural potential in the area. The effort should be directed towards generating larger incomes by channelising credit, improved inputs and farming activities, and technical know-how into these practices.

The integrated area development relates to the appropriate location of the said activities for the balanced economic and social development of the region. The idea of an appropriate location by definition has to be selective. The selective and appropriate locations are the two relevant situations in the present economic context. Handicapped with fewer resources for all services and development programmes, it is necessary to have quick returns to investments for strengthening capital supply.

While selecting the area, following important factors deserve emphasis:

- (i) There is dominance of labour and small farmers in the area;
- (ii) The area has access to consuming centre;
- (iii) Areas near forests or mining centres; and
- (iv) Infra-structure of institutional agencies.

The Indo-German 'Integrated Agricultural Development Project' which started in early 1963 for the district of Mandi (Himachal Pradesh) is an experiment in rural development of an area—a complete district. The lessons of this project would be directly relevant to hilly districts having identical agro-climatic conditions. The project was undertaken with following objectives:

- (a) to achieve a rapid increase in the level of agricultural production,
- (b) to diversify the cropping pattern so as to include production of cash crops, and
- (c) to encourage a pattern of mixed farming which would be more remunerative to the farmers and increase the supply of protein food for the population.

To ensure the success of the project, the strategies adopted were:

- (i) enlarged extension machinery and winning the confidence of the farmers,

- (ii) identification to best suited technology to the area concerned,
- (iii) provision of necessary infra-structure, and
- (iv) provision of necessary institutional support to make the adoption of new technology a success.

In principle, these projects have to be designed in such a way that they may assist in providing food and employment not only to the existing population of 560 million people but to 630 million people, projected by the year 1981. The requirement of cereals, pulses, and sugar and jaggery would increase to 159.9 million tons by 1981.\*

The integrated area development mostly deals with the development of the backward areas. In this context, it is pertinent to differentiate the backward areas from the rest on the basis of economic disparities and present infra-structure.

#### *Concept of Backwardness*

If we consider the existing pattern of resource utilization in an area as guidelines in formulating a development plan then the areas located distantly from the centres of economic activities may remain under-developed for a longer period. Basically, three things are important while isolating the backward areas: (a) range of agronomic activities, (b) general infra-structure available to the rural areas, and (c) implementation of national policies relating to conservation and efficient use of soil, water and other natural resources. The infra-structure in the rural areas is mainly concerned with transportation, markets and credit facilities.

In so far as the problems of areal backwardness is concerned the question of resource endowments may be involved and also factors such as, man-land ratio, quality of land, availability of irrigation system, soil and water management, public utilities, institutions, adaptive research, education and training of extension workers and inputs, particularly credit for farm people.

In the process, it is logical to describe which are the backward areas. Referring to the preceding paragraph, the areas which are not in a position to produce economic yields, with inadequate and undeveloped infra-structure, non-viable cultivation units which in turn fail to get net incremental income, incapability to repay borrowed capital, fairly low cost-benefit ratio, and with inadequate educational facilities and civic amenities, may be categorised as 'backward'.

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\* Proper assessment of future requirements should also consider export needs in the case of sugar.

*Indicators of Development*

When we talk of economic and social backwardness, it is imperative to evolve certain indicators of development to distinguish the backward areas from the rest. Generally, one may consider an area as 'backward' where the per capita income of the people is much below the poverty line and people are unable to maintain the bare minimum living standards, spending hazardous life. Socially and culturally too, they completely lack in education and adaptability, making them unaware of fast sociological and economic changes in the world. Rather, people of the backward areas are not capable of thinking of their prospects, economic and social progress and resign themselves to fate. Life is miserable because of poor wages and fairly low agricultural yields with absolutely no other employment opportunities and absence of proper educational system. Institutional infra-structure is nowhere present in the area, and even farmers face problems of much serious nature regarding soil conservation, irrigational water, fertilizers and better seeds, extension services and transportation. People are unaware of subsidiary occupations and supplementary enterprises.

In brief, following indicators may be evolved as to distinguish between backward and non-backward areas:

- (i) per capita income of the area in question,
- (ii) size of agricultural holdings,
- (iii) average yields of the area,
- (iv) wage rates,
- (v) institutional infra-structure,
- (vi) subsidiary enterprises to supplement incomes,
- (vii) educational facilities and existence of extension services,
- (viii) government participation in promoting agricultural sector and allied small scale industries, and
- (ix) people's own attitude and determination towards self-help and developmental programmes in the area.

Such indicators, as discussed above, are important in assessing the area for such demarcations and their economic worthiness. As a matter of fact, all backward areas (keeping aside the technicality involved to designate any area as 'backward') possess the characters of very low per capita income and low repaying capacity, uneconomic agricultural yields, poorly paid labour force and disguised unemployment, absence of infra-structure in the area, government's negligence in investing for promotional programmes and above all, people's own inactiveness towards the positive change for economic and social upliftment.

Regions like hilly or tribal, desert or drought affected area, river irrigation command area and areas with heavy pressure of population on land along with 20 to 30 per cent landless workers need special attention and be given priority under the Integrated Area Development programme since such areas face serious problems of social and economic backwardness.

It is very essential to frame a suitable unit to start with the Integrated Area Development. Obviously, there is no single method which could be applied for the country as a whole having diverse social and economic conditions. The 'micro-level planning' is best suited under such programmes. At the lowest level, the village provides the raw material for planning, but with its small population and meagre resources it is too small a unit for development. The block also may not serve as a suitable and ideal unit of planning because it does have the bearing of factors of local nature and probably would fail to serve as guidelines for the district or the State planning. A district would be most appropriate unit as it will depict the clear picture of the region regarding its economy and resources.

The suitability of micro-level planning (district level) be regarded in terms of:

- (i) its containing the local socio-economic system as a whole, and
- (ii) its concern with the effective integration and handling of the facts generated through such micro-level studies.

All this is needed for the formulation of sophisticated techniques and more efficient mechanisms for obtaining facts. Only through such planning procedure may we proceed towards a genuinely practical approach to integrated area development.

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