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Vol XXVIII
No. 4

ISSN 0019-5014

CONFERENCE NUMBER

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1973

# INDIAN JOURNAL OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

INDIAN SOCIETY OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS, BOMBAY

# INTEGRATED AREA DEVELOPMENT : CONCEPTS AND ISSUES

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## INTRODUCTION

Though the importance of district level or grass root planning was recognized right from the First Five-Year Plan, spatial or area planning has remained a sadly neglected aspect of Indian planning. The pre-occupation of our planners was with macro-level sectoral planning. Consequently while rapid studies were made in several fields in aggregate terms, little impact was felt at the local level. The rapid industrial development of the major metropolitan centres failed to generate the trickling down process downward to the village level. The lack of integration between industrial and agricultural development programmes at the micro-level led to rural-urban dichotomy. It is only in recent years that attention is being paid to spatial aspect of planning to rectify the regional imbalances.

## II

## APPROACHES TO RURAL AREA DEVELOPMENT

During the past two decades several approaches for the economic transformation of rural areas have been tried like the Community Development Programme, democratic decentralisation, the Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP), and the recently developed growth centre approach for Integrated Area Development. A brief discussion of the salient features of these approaches will help in highlighting their main differences.

### *Community Development Programme*

The Community Development Programme was launched in 1952 to initiate the process of transformation of social and economic life of India's villages through a change in the outlook and methods of production of the rural population. The programme sought to bring about an improvement in all aspects of rural life and the activities included under it covered agricultural production, minor irrigation, education, health, road, construction and village industries. Taking the 'block' as a unit, the community development programme sought to provide for a uniform pattern of administration for development throughout the length and breadth of the country.

The community development programme was over-ambitious both in its scope and geographical coverage. Not unsurprisingly, it failed to fulfil the high hopes raised in the beginning. Without going into the various short-

comings of the programme, we would like to focus attention on the failures of the community development programme from the viewpoint of area development [1 and 5].*

In the first place, the community development programme was basically misconceived as it considered rural development in isolation. Urban areas fell outside the jurisdiction of the community development blocks. Thus the programme failed to integrate rural and urban development. Secondly, swayed by the Gandhian ideals of self-sufficient village communities, the architects of the community development programme accepted the village as the primary unit of planning. There is now a growing consensus that village cannot be a feasible unit for development planning. In a modern economy characterized by specialisation and multifarious linkages the village cannot be a viable economic unit. The size of the average Indian village is too small for the location of various types of services and productive activities. Moreover, planning for development of each of India's 5,60,000 villages presents insurmountable problems of communication and administration.

Another major failure of the community development approach was the neglect of the spatial aspect of rural development plans. No guidelines were evolved for the optimum location of economic and social services. Thus, the development of an hierarchy of settlement, which was to serve as the link between the village and the city, remained neglected.

Lastly, the strategy of community development programme was essentially global aiming at a uniform pattern of staffing and planning all over the country. Lack of an attempt to relate the block development plans to local problems and needs remains a basic failure of the community development programme to this day.

*The Intensive Agricultural District Programme*

The launching of the IADP during the Third Plan was in effect a recognition of the failure of the global approach to rural development inherent in the community development programme. The IADP was distinguished by two features—the package approach and concentration of efforts. The idea was to provide a package of improved inputs and services in selected districts which promised higher growth. That this approach has paid rich dividends is indicated by the ushering in of the green revolution in the countryside.

Though the IADP approach marked an improvement over the community development approach as far as it led to concentrated efforts, it also was not totally free from some of the limitations of the latter approach. The IADP programme like the community development programme was confined to agricultural development and did not try to integrate rural and urban development.

* Figures in parentheses refer to the bibliography given at the end of the article.

The recently introduced Integrated Area Development approach marks a significant departure from the earlier approaches to rural development as it seeks to introduce the spatial dimension of planning explicitly. The new approach is still in an experimental stage and requires considerable research in concepts and the techniques to make it suitable to the needs of the country. In the following section we shall take up some of the issues related to this approach for discussion.

## III

### INTEGRATED AREA DEVELOPMENT APPROACH[1]

Integrated area development planning can be defined as comprehensive planning for the economic and social development of a specified geographical area while the connotation of the term 'development' is well known the terms 'integrated' and 'area' require further elaboration. The term integrated development refers to two types of integration—functional and spatial. Functional integration means co-ordinated expansion of various social and economic services needed for the development of the area. Facilities like transportation, communication, banking, health, recreation, etc., have to be planned together. Functional integration is thus based upon the idea of complementarity between various sectors and is comparable to the 'balanced growth' approach at the macro-level. In this respect the integrated area development approach is somewhat similar to the community development approach which also aimed at multi-dimensional development of rural areas.

It is in the second aspect of integration, that is, spatial integration, that the Integrated Area Development approach marks a definite improvement over the earlier approaches to rural development. Economic growth from this viewpoint is visualized as taking place in a matrix of urban regions through which the space economy is organized. Spatial integration seeks to utilize the linkages between various levels of urban centres for the development of the region. This integration is to be achieved through rational locational decisions for the creation of necessary social and economic services. For instance a particular service, say, a school or a dispensary is to be located in a centre which can fully support it. Thus instead of viewing problems of rural and urban development in isolation, the integrated area development approach treats them as complementary to each other.

The term area cannot be so precisely defined. Sometimes, the term area is used interchangeably with the term region as both of them relate to a specified geographical space. Several concepts of region have been put forward like homogeneous regions, nodal regions, metropolitan regions, programming regions, etc. But it is not clear to which type of these regions an area corresponds. Others prefer to distinguish between region and area.

1. The concept has been elaborated in a number of articles included in Sen [5].

Possibly the term area is used to refer to a smaller spatial unit than a region whose boundaries may be more extensive. In this sense area planning becomes synonymous with local or grass-root planning. One solution is to define a development area in terms of what are called planning or programming area in terms of what are called planning or programming regions which refer to a specific geographical space for the development of which policy measures are introduced. This also does not help much as these planning regions may refer to any one of the various types of economic regions mentioned above.

*Districts as Planning Regions*

Most probably the thinking in the Planning Commission is to use integrated area development approach for district level planning. Some social scientists also take a similar view [5, Chapter 1 and 37]. There are indeed certain advantages in taking the district as a unit of area planning. Firstly, this will give us a manageable number of administrative units in the country for area planning. Secondly, there already exists an organizational set-up for the preparation and execution of development plans at the district level. Thirdly, most of the data needed for area planning would be readily available at the district level. Moreover, district is sufficiently close to the rural area to take into account local problems and aspirations. Sometimes contiguous districts form part of a homogeneous natural region. For instance, the Planning Commission has demarcated 61 'Resource Development Regions' comprising contiguous districts [3].

On the other hand it is naive to think that the economic regions would be co-terminus with district boundaries, which have their origin in historical and administrative considerations. Districts in India are far from uniform in their area and population. For instance, the area of districts in Uttar Pradesh varies between 2,531 sq. kilometers to 11,316 sq. kilometers and population from 1.50 lakhs to 33.64 lakhs. Often within a district areas distinctly heterogeneous in physical and economic features are to be found. Similarly polarization flows are not necessarily stronger within the boundaries of a district.

There can be no doubt that the district will remain an indispensable unit of administration and planning in the country. However, this does not mean that the present number and boundaries of the districts have to be maintained intact. An re-organization of districts to suit them for the purposes of regional planning is called for. This reorganization of districts will not only help in a more effective utilization of the nation's resources, but would also bring about significant administrative gains in the long run.

What should be the criteria for this re-organization ? This brings us back to the question of identification of area for integrated development.

The answer to this question, in our opinion, is directly linked to the strategy to be adopted for Integrated Area Development. Current thinking favours the growth centre approach for area development. For this approach the nodal region seems to be the optimum planning unit. A nodal region consists of a mode or centre (usually a large city) along with its area of influence called hinterland which is functionally related to the node.[2] The area of influence varies directly with the size of the centre. One can further conceive of these nodes as being organized in a hierarchy of ascending order rising from village level to metropolitan centres.

The demarcation of area for integrated development, in our opinion, should be based upon the concept of nodal region. The first step should be to identify the actual or potential node of the appropriate size, which will act as the focal point for the growth of the surrounding region. The techniques for the delineation of nodal regions are now quite well known.

The decision regarding the appropriate size of the growth centres is highly crucial for regional development. Towns of smaller size will fail to generate sufficiently strong growth impulses. Therefore, it would be a mistake to identify market towns with growth centres for area development as these would be intermediate centres with a population ranging from 20,000 to 50,000. Most of the regional economists favour urban centres in the range of 100,000 to 300,000 for regional growth [2, 6, 7]. The strategy should be to develop one urban centre of this size in each district. This is not to deny the importance of the market towns, which will act as service centres to surrounding villages. Indeed these market towns would be functionally connected with the district centre and help in transmitting the growth impulses originating there to the village level.

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2. For elaboration of the concept of nodal region see Richardson [4].