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Vol XXXIX
No. 3

ISSN 0019-5014

CONFERENCE
NUMBER

JULY-
SEPTEMBER
1984

INDIAN JOURNAL OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS



INDIAN SOCIETY OF
AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS,
BOMBAY

Planning for Rural Development

AN ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME IN SABARKANTHA DISTRICT OF GUJARAT

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The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) is the single largest anti-poverty programme currently underway in all the Community Development blocks in the country. It focuses on providing productive assets and employment to the rural poor for enabling them to rise above the poverty line once and for ever. Its target group consists of the poorest of the rural poor, *i.e.*, small and marginal farmers, agricultural and non-agricultural labourers, rural artisans, and craftsmen. It is proposed to cover 15 million poor families under IRDP at an average rate of 600 families per block per year over the Sixth Plan period. An investment of Rs.4,500 crores is expected to be mobilized during the Sixth Plan period for IRDP.

In Gujarat State, the IRDP was launched in 1978-79 in 100 selected blocks, extended to 103 blocks in 1979-80, and to all the 218 blocks from October 2, 1980, when it was extended to all the blocks in the country. The IRDP in Gujarat has been successful in achieving its physical and financial targets. Over a period of three years from 1980-81 to 1982-83, it had assisted some 3.95 lakh families, which is about 101 per cent of its target of 3.92 lakh families. Similarly, the State was able to achieve its financial targets also; in 1982-83, the actual expenditure on the programme was 99.80 per cent of the allocation. Of the total number of families assisted under the programme during 1982-83, about 41 per cent belonged to the Scheduled Castes (SC) and the Scheduled Tribes (ST). This proportion is markedly higher than their proportion in the total population of the State which was 25 per cent in 1981. The average amount of subsidy granted and of the term credit advanced per beneficiary during 1982-83 was Rs.798 and Rs.2,126 respectively. This yields a ratio of 1 : 2.66 between the subsidy and credit which is very close to the expected average ratio of 1 : 3.¹

These achievements of Gujarat State compare very favourably with the achievements at the all-India level. For example, the average number of beneficiaries assisted per block during 1982-83 in Gujarat was 796 as compared to the all-India average of 689, the actual expenditure was 99.80 per cent vis-a-vis 89.70 per cent for the country as a whole, and the average amount of term credit mobilized per beneficiary was Rs.2,126 as compared to Rs.2,066 for the country.²

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1. The figures reported in this para are taken from a document of Government of Gujarat: Annual Conference on Rural Development, 13-14 July, 1983, Agriculture and Forest Department.

2. The figures for India used in this para are taken from Government of India; Alleviation of Rural Poverty: A Continuing Crusade, Ministry of Rural Development, New Delhi, undated, p.6.

Within Gujarat State, the performance of Sabarkantha district has been very good. In 1983-84, the district ranked first in the State in terms of achievement of its physical targets. The number of beneficiaries assisted per block in the district in 1983-84 was about 150 per cent of the target and the rate of achievement in terms of financial targets was 112 per cent. Given this relatively good performance of IRDP in the district, lessons of its experience in general and with planning and implementation processes in particular might be useful for other districts within and outside the State. In this paper, we shall, therefore, attempt to analyse and evaluate the planning and implementation processes of IRDP in Sabarkantha district with special reference to its milch animal distribution component which accounts for more than 40 per cent of the total expenditure under the programme in the district.

PLANNING FOR IRDP

Under the IRDP, a Community Development block has been accepted as the unit for planning and implementation. Pending decentralisation of planning process, the block plan for IRDP is intended to include the schemes that are eligible for assistance under the programme.³ The IRD plan is intended to be a component of a comprehensive block plan which is supposed to be formulated as per the guidelines issued by the Planning Commission on the subject in December 1979. Generally speaking, however, block level planning has not been systematically done anywhere in the country. This is because the block staff as provided at present is inadequate and lacks expertise in formulating comprehensive development plans and projects. Even for the purpose of implementation, it would be necessary to supplement the existing block level machinery suitably. It seems that the provision of one additional extension officer (EO) and ten additional village level workers (VLW) per block under the IRDP is inadequate for the core planning and implementation functions. Under the present circumstances, the block level planning for IRDP in Gujarat is, of necessity, limited to the following functions.⁴

1. Identification of clusters of villages based on the availability of supporting infrastructure;
2. Identification of beneficiary families in each selected village on the basis of their land holding and their annual family income;
3. Identification of economic enterprises/schemes appropriate to the background, skills and preferences of the selected beneficiaries;
4. Identification of gaps in supporting infrastructure and basic needs of the selected clusters of villages;
5. Working out, villagewise, the requirements for various inputs, services, subsidy, and credit for the recommended economic enterprises and the infrastructural facilities; and

3. See Government of India: Manual on Integrated Rural Development Programme, Ministry of Rural Reconstruction, New Delhi, January 1980, p.6.

4. This and subsequent observations in this and the next section are based on a study entitled, "Impact of Distribution of Milch Animals under IRDP in Sabarkantha District, Gujarat", which is co-ordinated by the author.

6. Aggregating the village-wise requirements at the block level and putting them together in a document — the IRD block plan.

A District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) is responsible for planning and implementation of IRDP in each district of the State. The DRDA is an autonomous body established under the Public Trusts Act 1950 and the Societies Registration Act 1860. The DRDA functions under the guidance and supervision of the State Rural Development Department and the Commissionerate of Rural Development. The District Development Officer (DDO) who is also the Chief Executive and the Secretary of the District Panchayat is the Chairman of the DRDA. The Chief Executive of the DRDA is called Director who is normally a senior State Administrative Cadre officer. The director of the Sabarkantha DRDA is assisted by nine assistant project officers in various subject-matter areas. The Governing Body of DRDA consists of some 30 members including one local member of the Parliament, four members of the State Legislative Assembly, district level heads of various technical departments, representatives of banks, etc. At the block level, the DRDA operates through the Block Development Officer (BDO)/Taluka Development Officer (TDO) who is provided with one EO and ten VLWs exclusively for IRDP work.

As per the Manual on IRDP issued by the Ministry of Rural Reconstruction, Government of India in January 1980 (hereafter referred to as the Manual), the IRD village and block plans are to be based on the detailed plans of individual beneficiary households. The instructions and the format for conducting household survey are given in the Manual. The objectives of the household survey are to identify families below the poverty line and to help formulate production programmes for each beneficiary family with a view to raising its income above the poverty line. The household surveys are to be conducted in identified clusters of villages only and a sum of Rs.10,000 per block per year had been provided for the purpose. The surveys are intended to be conducted by trained VLWs/*talatis* or *lekhpal*s or school teachers under the guidance and supervision of DRDA staff.

In Sabarkantha district, detailed household, village, and block plans were not formulated as per the instructions contained in the Manual. This was due to non-availability of requisite manpower and expertise for the purpose. In actual practice, a simple six-step procedure, as described earlier, is followed. This is probably the best one could expect under the present circumstances.

At the district level also, the picture is not very different from the block level one. Although the Planning Commission's Guidelines for Block Level Planning provide for the constitution of a three-member planning team at the district level consisting of an economist/statistician, a credit planning officer, and a small and cottage industries officer, there is only one Assistant Project Officer (Statistics) responsible for formulating the district level IRD plan. A draft district IRD plan is prepared every year as per the guidelines issued by

the Department of Rural Development, Government of Gujarat. The guidelines are discussed in a district level staff meeting which is chaired by the DDO and attended by the Director and Assistant Project Officer of the DRDA, concerned technical officers of the District Panchayat, and the TDOs/BDOs of the district.

The draft district plan contains the schemewise physical and financial targets broken down by the talukas/blocks. The IRD plan is not integrated with the comprehensive district plan and hence the complementarities between the two are not taken advantage of. The harmonisation of targets set at the district level and those worked at the block level takes place at the block level. The draft district plan is revised, if necessary, in the light of the comments received from the TDOs/BDOs. The annual district IRD plans of all the districts in the State are reviewed and approved by a State Level Co-ordination Committee which is chaired by the Principal Secretary, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and includes as members all the heads of technical departments, chairmen of the DRDAs, representatives of banks and of the Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development.

To ensure proper planning, adequate supervision, effective implementation, and better monitoring and evaluation of IRDP, the Government of Gujarat took a pioneering step and established in November 1981, the Office of the Commissioner of Rural Development which is headed by the Secretary, Rural Development as its Commissioner. The Commissioner is assisted by one Deputy Commissioner, three Assistant Commissioners, and a number of technical officers/subject-matter specialists. The Government of India has since recommended this as a model for emulation by other State Governments in the country.

IMPLEMENTATION OF IRDP

Implementation of IRD plans involves the following steps:

1. Updating and finalising the list of the beneficiaries prepared earlier for planning purposes;
2. Supplying loan application forms to the selected beneficiaries and helping them in filling up the forms;
3. Scrutiny of loan applications and sanctioning of loans and subsidies;
4. Disbursement of loans and subsidies;
5. Helping the beneficiaries in acquiring the desired assets or in starting off the planned project;
6. Providing raw materials, inputs, facilities, services, technical information and training to the beneficiaries as per their requirements;
7. Arranging for a year-round and assured market at a remunerative price for the produce of the beneficiaries; and
8. Monitoring the progress of implementation and resolution of operational problems as and when they arise.

We shall now critically evaluate the implementation of IRDP, especially its milch animal distribution components with reference to these steps.

As per the Manual, final selection of beneficiaries is to be made by the VLW/*talati* concerned on the basis of annual family income as assessed through a household survey and using the *Antyodaya* principle. The annual income norm determined by the Government of India was Rs.3,500 in 1979 for a family of five members. The households having this much or less annual income form the target group of IRDP. Since the number of households in the target group in a block is usually higher than the target of 3,000 households over a period of five years, selection of beneficiaries from amongst the target group is inevitable. The selection process has to start by 'putting the last first' (*Antyodaya* principle) and then climbing up the ladder till the target number is reached. In actual practice, there are deviations from this procedure; some deliberate, others non-deliberate. In the absence of income generating norms for various economic activities, it is unreasonable to expect the VLW/*talati* to assess the family income of a beneficiary objectively. Hence, there is a lot of scope for arbitrariness and, therefore, corruption in the process of selection of beneficiaries. Besides, the annual income norm of Rs.3,500 needs to be revised every year to neutralise the effect of inflation. Unless this is done, many poor families, who are, in terms of their family income adjusted for inflation, eligible for assistance, are bound to be excluded. Furthermore, in spite of very clear instructions to this effect, gram panchayats are, in general, not being involved in the process of identification and selection of beneficiaries. We also observed during the course of our village visits in Sabarkantha district that many of the rural poor were unaware of the assistance available under the programme. There is need for publicising the various benefits available under the programme and for training and motivating the EOs and VLWs for implementing the guidelines faithfully.

Our interviews with a sample of 240 beneficiaries in Sabarkantha district revealed that the VLWs and EOs did a good job of supplying loan application forms to the selected beneficiaries, helping them in filling up the forms, procuring the necessary documents, getting the applications scrutinised by the TDOs/BDOs concerned and having them forwarded to the banks concerned. The loan application forms are supplied to the selected beneficiaries free of cost and the cost of procuring various supporting documents such as land ownership certificate, 'no dues' certificate, income certificate, etc., is only nominal.

Co-ordination between the DRDA and the banks involved in financing IRDP in the Sabarkantha district is very good, thanks to the District-Level Standing Committee which is chaired by the DDO and which includes, as members, the representatives of all the banks concerned. This Committee meets every month and reviews the progress of loaning and sorts out the problems in loaning operations in the district. The banks normally take about one month or so for scrutinising the applications and sanctioning the loans which is considered just about right and reasonable. There is a continuous dialogue between the banks concerned and the TDOs while the loan applications are processed. As a result of better understanding and co-ordination between the

DRDA and the banks, the proportion of applications rejected by the banks has been declining over time and was as low as 4.75 per cent in 1983-84.

As soon as the loans are sanctioned, the TDOs and the beneficiaries concerned are informed by the bank. The loanee is required to open an account in the local branch of the bank concerned. The amount of loan sanctioned and of the subsidy, which is sanctioned and released by the TDO, is credited to the loanee's account. There have been quite a few cases in which the amount of subsidy was released after two to three months from the date of sanctioning of the loan. There also have been a few cases where the subsidy was released before the loan was sanctioned. The loan is not disbursed in cash but the payment is made directly by a cheque to the person or agency from whom the beneficiary concerned purchased the asset.

The beneficiary is helped by the VLW/EO concerned in acquiring the desired asset. In the case of milch animals, a Purchase Committee consisting of an EO, a veterinary doctor, a representative of the bank concerned, the secretary of the village dairy co-operative society, and the beneficiary is supposed to identify and approve the animal for purchase by the beneficiary. But in actual practice, it is only the beneficiary who chooses and purchases the animal all alone. This is because it is only rarely that all the five members of the Committee are available for the job when required. This practice is prone to corruption in that the beneficiary may, with the connivance of the other members of the Committee, obtain a receipt from the seller for a higher than the actual amount paid and thus claim a higher amount of loan and subsidy and share part of the gain with the other members of the Committee.

So far as the provision of a package of necessary inputs and services and of assured market facilities is concerned, Sabarkantha district presents a good example. Through a tripartite agreement between the DRDA, the banks concerned and the Sabarkantha District Co-operative Milk Producers' Union (Sabar Union), all the beneficiaries of milch animal distribution scheme are required to become members of their village dairy co-operative societies (DCS). They are provided balanced cattle feed, animal health care and artificial insemination services at subsidised rates by the Sabar Union through the DCS, their milk is purchased by the DCS at a remunerative price which is based on the fat content of the milk, and the loan instalments are deducted from the milk bill of the beneficiary. This arrangement is working very well except that in many cases the amount of loan instalment deducted is markedly higher than that stipulated by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). There is need to find out whether this is being done with the consent of the beneficiaries or is being imposed on them. Also, there is need for imparting training in animal feeding, health care and management to those beneficiaries, especially tribals, who do not have any previous experience in rearing animals. The Sabar Union has, in collaboration with the DRDA and the district co-operative bank, recently started a commendable scheme of fodder production on the village gauchar lands for meeting the

requirements of landless and other poor beneficiary households. The fodder is sold at a subsidised rate.

Monitoring of the physical and financial progress in implementation of IRDP in the district is done through quarterly, and annual block level reports and monthly district level reports. Besides, the progress and problems of programme implementation are also reviewed by the TDOs/BDOs in the fortnightly meetings of the EOs and VLWs and the monthly meetings with the bankers and by the Director of the DRDA in the monthly meetings of the TDOs/BDOs and EOs and of the District Level Standing Committee which includes as members the representatives of various banks involved in financing IRDP in the district. At the State level, the Commissioner, Rural Development, reviews the progress and problems of IRDP every month in a meeting which is attended, among others, by the Directors/APOs (Statistics) of all the DRDAs in the State. Appropriate actions to alleviate the operational bottlenecks, if any, are taken in this meeting. The DRDA is now providing a family book (*Kutumb Pothi*) to each beneficiary family so as to use it as an aid to monitoring the family's economic and social development. This system of monitoring the progress of IRDP seems to be working fairly well and seems to be adequate for the purpose. However, there is need for setting up a system for monitoring the per capita annual income of the beneficiary households in the district as also in the State as per the proforma given in the Manual.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The IRDP, being the single largest anti-poverty programme currently underway in the country, needs to be planned and implemented professionally. The Manual on IRDP contains detailed guidelines for planning and implementation of the programme. The main task of the DRDA is to implement the guidelines faithfully by appropriately training and motivating the district, block, and village level staff and to bring to the attention of the State Government the operational and policy problems, if any, in the implementation of the programme. Although there is always some scope for doing things better, the IRDP in Sabarkantha district has, on the whole, been reasonably well planned and implemented. The establishment of the Commissionerate of Rural Development at the State level, the very effective and close liaison with the banks, the tripartite agreement between the DRDA, the Sabar Union, and the banks, and the programme of fodder production on village gauchar lands are the special strengths of IRDP in the district/State which the other States might like to build in their programmes.

There is need for updating the annual income limit of Rs.3,500 set for selecting programme beneficiaries and for determining income generation norms for various economic activities and using them to assess the family income. Whereas the former is the responsibility of the Government of India,

the latter falls within the purview of the State Government. There is also need for making the animal Purchase Committee functional, for imparting training in animal feeding, health care, and management to the beneficiaries who do not have any experience and skills in rearing milch animals, and for setting up a functional system for monitoring per capita annual income of the beneficiary households in the district.