

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA: A QUEST FOR APPROPRIATE STRATEGY****Dr. D. V. Pawar***Vice-Principal and Head, Dept.**Rural Development in Deccan Education Society's Kirti College,**Dadar, Mumbai-400028.***I Introduction**

The concept as well as institutional structure of community development originated in the western hemisphere in general and in USA in particular. In the western context, the term community development implied the activities of people in the local groups and communities wherein the people the residents gather together over common specialized interest through which they found democratic expression for their energies and aspirations. Institutions such as community college, community research center and community hospital were among the manifestations of common specialized interests.

According to Cambridge Summer (1948), conference on African Administration "Community development is movement designed to promote better living for participants and if possible, on the initiative of community..... if the initiative is not coming spontaneously, by the use of techniques for arousing and stimulating it in order to secure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement."<sup>1</sup>

Ashridge Conference on social development (1948) define community development as "a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and initiative of the community"<sup>2</sup>.

In the context of the newly independent countries (NIC) of Asia and Africa, "community development embraces all aspects of governments activities in the field of improvement of agriculture, in the combating of soil erosion, the development of irrigation, the promotion of cooperation, development of livestock and forestry, better marketing, education, health and community activities... it is, in fact, modern concept of development administration"<sup>3</sup>

Community development is recognized as balance program for stimulating the local potential for growth in every direction reciprocal advance in both wealth and welfare, not on the basis of outside charity, but building on the latent vitality of the beneficiaries themselves, with minimum outside aid<sup>4</sup>. It denotes the process by which the efforts of people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities to integrate these communities into the life of the nation and to enable them to contribute fully to national process<sup>5</sup>. Community development is a technique adopted by many governments to recon their popular and to make more effective use of local initiative and energy for the increased production and better standard of living<sup>6</sup>.

Community development in the Indian context implies rural development activities undertaken by the government to reach people in villages, made effective use of local initiative and resources to increase agricultural production and thereby promote better standard of living for the rural poor.

In contrast to the western concept which encompasses every community-urban, semi-urban or rural, the Indian concept is confined to the rural segment due to the fact that more than 80% population, at the time of India's independence lived in rural segment. Community Development is essence, rural development implied. Community Development program launch in 1952 was meant to assist each village in planning and carrying out an integrated, multi phased family and village plan, directed towards agricultural increasing production, improving the existing village crafts and industries and organizing new ones; providing minimum essential health services and improving health practices; providing required educational facilities for children and adult education. Providing recreational facilities, improving housing and family living condition and programs for village women and youth.<sup>7</sup>

## II Background

India had self-sufficient village economy prior to the advent of the British rule. Exchange of goods and services was the basis of this economy. Mutual cooperation and harmony were the hallmarks of this traditional economy.

The foundation of the British rule in India was laid by the battle of Plassey in 1757. The process of destruction of the self sufficient village economy gathered momentum after the British acquired the Diwani i.e. the right to collect revenue in the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa from the Mughal Emperor Shaha Alam II by the Treaty of Allahabad (1765), concluded after the battle of Buxar in 1764. The Indian sub-continent came under the direct rule of indirect control by 1857, with a view to promote the industrial economy of England, the rulers of the East India Company and thereafter the British ruler systematically destroyed vibrant Indian economy. India became a passive agent of industrial capitalism, suffering all its ills and hardly any of its advantages. On attainment of independence in 1947, India inherited a stagnant, backward, depleted and dependent agrarian economy. The vibrant village and cottage industries were shattered and the skilled workers were rendered jobless and migrated to the agrarian sector, adding to the burden of population on land. The exorbitant, exploitative land revenues and vagaries of nature uprooted the peasantry as they were caught in the vicious debt trap, Thus more than 80% population that live in villages were poor and illiterate. Revival of village economy in general and agriculture in particular and to improve the lot of the rural poor were the priorities of the government of India and the rationale for the adaption of the community development and the national extension service program during the first five year plan.

### III Strategies of Rural Development

As already stated, community development implies rural development in India and that top priority was accorded to transformation of the rural agrarian economy by the policy-makers in the post 1947 period. The roots of the strategy of community- rural development can be traced back to the 'grow more food programme (1946) and Etawah pilot projects undertaken (1948) cause with the technical and financial assistance provided by the Ford Foundation. The American model of community development was experimented and the pilot projects were successful. Enthused by its success, Krishnamachari Committee on evaluation of GMFP observed that "agricultural improvement is an integral part of wider problem of raising the level of rural life. The economic aspects of village life cannot be detached from the broader aspects. Agricultural improvement is inextricably linked with a whole set of social problems ... that all aspects of rural life are interrelated and ..... no lasting results can be achieved if individual aspects of it are dealt in isolation".<sup>8</sup>

#### i) Comprehensive Development:

Krishnamachari Committee recommended community Development Programme, a scheme carrying all aspects of rural life. The Government of India accepted this recommendation and incorporated Community Development Programme, with a financial provision of 90 crore rupees, in the first five year plan. It was launched on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1952 in 55 community projects, each development block carrying about 100 villages. By the end of the first five year plan (1956), the entire rural area, comprising of 364 development blocks was brought under the preview of the programme. It was described as 'Magna Carta' of rural development which proposed to attack the five giants of hunger, poverty, diseases, equality and ignorance through self-help and governmental assistance.

In this most ambitious programme of rural development, the strategy of comprehensive development was put into practice. However, noble sentiments and high ideas by themselves are not sufficient. The community development failed to enthuse the local people for active participation..... The programme, instead of being people's programme became a government programme with varying degree of people's participation"<sup>9</sup>. There was absence of self-reliance and initiative<sup>10</sup>. It failed to develop local institutions and local leadership<sup>11</sup>. It was dominated by government officials that frustrated aspirations of the rural people as they were merely on-lookers which made them indifferent to the programme. The government officials failed to detect the 'felt needs' of the villagers as there was no avenue for local representation. The village level worker (VLW), the key functionary was neither adequately selected nor properly trained and was overburdened with development work in 8-10 villages. The programme gave more emphasis on welfare activities than on Economic Development. As a result, it

became a charity distribution activity<sup>12</sup>. The vague and unrealistic assumptions with deflection planning were according to Dr. Dubhashi, responsible for the monumental failure of the programme. This can be substantiated by the fact that the Ettawah pilot project succeeded as 64 crore rupees were made available for the pilot projects; whereas the planning commission allocated 90 crore rupees for a period of five years for 364 blocks. Owing to paucity of funds none of the envisaged objectives could be achieved. The study team under Chairmanship of late Balwantraj Mehta, in its report recommended administrative decentralization under control of elected bodies. It proposed that three tier structure of rural government at the village, block and district level be entrusted with the activities envisaged under community development programme. The Government of India accepted these recommendations in 1958. This paved way for the emergence of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the rural segment.

Panchayati Raj was an offshoot of the community development programme which has been institutional device for rural development for more than five decades.

ii) From comprehensive development to sectorial development :

The strategy of rural development shifted from comprehensive development to development of the agrarian sector. The rationale for the shift in emphasis was that the Indian economy is agrarian economy and agriculture being the main activity in the rural segment, agricultural development will result in rural development.

In 1960's maximum attention was laid to the development of agricultural sector. Intensive Agricultural Area Programme (IAAP) was launched in the select areas having potential for agricultural development. Agricultural research paved way for High Yielding Varieties Programme (HYVP). Thus shift in strategy paved way for 'Green Revolution' and India becoming self-sufficient in her food requirement.

However, the objective of rural development remained illusive as it benefited certain states like Punjab and the rich peasantry. It did not influence the lot of the rural poor nor did it contributed in substantial way to rural development.

iii) Shift to target-group orientation:

In 1970's, a score of programmes directed towards the betterment of the rural poor. This was strategic shift to poverty alleviation. There were too many programmes and due to the lack of coordination the objective of rural development by poverty alleviation could not be achieved.

iv) Shift to self-employment generation:

Towards the end of 1970's it was realised that poverty alleviation and rural piecemeal employment generation programmes were inadequate. It was decided to merge some of programmes into a single comprehensive programme. The strategic shift in 1980's was towards integrated rural development, with twin objectives of poverty eradication and employment generation in the rural segment.

Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDA) became national programme and the strategy of rural development in 1980's and early 1990's. The emphasis was on providing financial assistance and means of livelihood to the rural population living below poverty line (BPL). The limitation of individual centric strategy became apparent and the IRDP underwent a major overhaul in the form of the Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1999. It is group centric strategy and the BPL populace in the rural segment was encouraged to form self- help groups (SHGs) and undertake income-generating activities. It was proposed to lift the BPL population above poverty line with self-help, co-operative endeavor and financial assistance of the state.

v) The present strategy:

Dr. Muhammad Yunus, the founder of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, is acknowledged as the founder of the strategy of micro-enterprise, with micro-finance and micro-credit by the self-help groups (SHGs). This is emerging strategy of poverty reduction in India and the other developing countries. The SGSY, launched on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1999 acknowledged the role of the SHGs in poverty reduction. The policy-makers in India as well as International Development Agencies have acknowledged that the SHGs is viable instrument to achieve the objectives of rural development and an agency to get community participation in rural development programmes. The government and financial institutions provide credit to the rural poor who have raised Seed Capital by group savings. The NABARD has acknowledged the SHGs as an effective tool of micro-credit delivery for poverty alleviation.

Self-Help Group is a small voluntary association of not more than twenty BPL families in a locality. It is an informal and homogenous entity. While working for poverty reduction by adding to the income of the participants, it works to empower rural poor. The SGSY encourages the women and the weaker sections to form their SGSY training is provided by the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA).

The focus is on establishing a large number of micro enterprises paved on the ability of the poor and availability of goods and services locally. These activities are means of sustainable income generation. Beside this, the members of the SHSY actively participate in the other governmental programmes of rural development.

The spread of the SHGs in India is phenomenal. Their number increased to 69,59,250 at the end of 2009-10 and there by living 69,59,250 families/ households with employment and income-generating activities. Besides BPL families, the Above Poverty Line Families which are marginally better-off than the below poverty line families, too have been encouraged to form their SHGs. The APL SHGs, it seems, perform better than the BPL SHGs as most of their members are literate and more enterprising.

The SHG movement is rapidly spreading and seems to be a viable strategy of poverty alleviation, in other words, rural development.

#### IV Results

1. The development strategies are country-specific. The American Model of Community Development was unsuitable for India. The Community Development Programme, based on the American precepts was a monumental failure in India. The reason is that the USA has relative poverty; whereas India has absolute poverty. In addition, the poverty in India is chronic and cannot be done away overnight.
2. India has been striving hard to find an appropriate strategy for community development which, in the Indian context implies rural development. Rural Development meant comprehensive development to start with. Later it meant agricultural development and since 1970's it meant direct assault on poverty. The strategy of poverty alleviation changed from target group to employment generation to self-employment and ultimately the group-centric strategy of micro-finance, micro-credit and micro-enterprise through the formation and operation of the self-help groups of the rural poor.
3. Under the SGSY, the government encouraged the formation of the SGSY by the BPL households, with special emphasis on the women and weaker sections. Due to this, about 60% members of the SHGs are women. The participation in the activities of the micro-enterprises has added to the income of the rural poor and raised many of these households above poverty line. However, the success of the SGSY is limited as a large number of BPL households are outside the orbit of the SGSY activities.
4. The incidence of poverty was estimated to be less than 30% by the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> five year plan. However, in terms of absolute numbers, the quantum of the BPL households has increased. The increase in the BPL households is attributed to increase in population.
5. There is a wide substantial disparity in the SHGs activity. Whereas the SHGs activity is sustainable in states like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Odisha, Kerala and Maharashtra; it is negligible in

the north-western and north-eastern states. In fact these states are economically and industrially less developed and the large of the BPL households is in these states. This may be attributed to feudal nature of the society, larger number of illiterates and lack of development awareness.

6. In spite of its limited success, micro-finance, micro-credit and micro-enterprise through the SHGs appears to be a viable strategy of poverty alleviation and rural development. Much has been done and much more needs to be done to reduce, not eradicate poverty in India.
7. The limiting factors are illiteracy among the rural poor, selective approach of the NGOs, indifferent official machinery and half-hearted approach of the financial institutions. The skill training provided by DRDA is at the best inadequate and at the worst non-existent. Avenues for marketing of goods manufactured by the SHGs are inadequate. In the age of globalisation, those who can afford live in the urban segment and prefer-quality imported goods. They regard the goods manufactured by the SHGs as Sub-standard and, if at all they buy these goods, it is an act of charity.

## V Recommendations

Even today, about 70% population of India lives in the rural segment in spite of rapid urbanisation, industrialisation and globalisation. Mahatma Gandhi opined that India lives in villages and advocated constructive programme for making villages self-sufficient and self-reliant. We cannot make villages self-sufficient but entirely make rural poor households self-reliant by practicing 'one for all and all for one' by making SHGs movement for national reconstruction. The following are recommendations in this regard:

1. Generating awareness among the poor rural households about the potential benefits of practicing in the SHG activities. This task of mass-mobilisation should be taken on war footing in the government agencies, local NGOs and mass media. Efforts should be made to enroll every poor rural household in the SHGs, especially in the remote areas.
2. Spread of functional literacy to enable the SHGs to manage their day-to-day affair.
3. Special emphasis on skill-training by involving educational institutions and local NGOs and services of the trainers and resource persons.
4. Pre-active involvement of the local NGOs and personnel of DRDA in the formation of SHGs and providing guidance in selection of activities and managing day-to-day affair.
5. Doing away with the red-tape, procedural delay and distrust of the SHGs in disbursement of funds and subsidies for on-going activities and new activities.
6. Inter sectoral partnership involving government agencies, NGOs, private sector, educational and financial institution. The government agencies to mobilize SHG activities and the voluntary sector in formation and management as well as training. The private sector should put into practice the principle

of corporate social responsibility (CSR) by making available funds for skill training, tool-kits and generous grants for relatively successful SHGs. Financial Institutions should adopt a sympathetic approach in providing funds without delay. Educational Institutions in awareness campaign and training activities. The relatively well-to-do should patronize the SHGs.

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