



Established - 1978

RURAL DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION OF PAKISTAN (RDF)

SPECIAL BULLETIN

NGO in consultative
status with Economic
and Social Council of the
United Nations.

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People-centered, action
oriented, Self reliant,
environmentally sustainable
agricultural and rural deve-
lopment to alleviate poverty.

FEATURES

- Pakistan Rural-Poverty

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PAKISTAN RURAL-POVERTY

Poverty has remained Pakistan's legacy. Its quantum has not decreased but has deepened over the years. Pakistan's main problem of poverty is concentrated in its more than 45,000 villages. The real challenge of alleviating poverty, therefore, lies in developing the rural sector. The country side is primarily a land of small farmers and landless labourers who form a specific group, namely the rural poor. About 35 percent of the rural population is living below subsistence level where social services are extremely inadequate.

Pakistan's economy, security, solidarity and integrity is based on its rural sector which presents a dismal and gloomy picture of poverty, ill-health, alarmingly low rate of literacy, mal-nutrition, high population growth, poor social and physical infrastructure, low production and productivity, unemployment, absence of people's institutions and massive exploitation and abuse of poor by feudal lords and petty government officials.

Pakistan enfolds the famous land of Indus valley civilization and is blessed with an ideal climate and vast alluvial plains along with a network of river system capable of stimulating the highest level of agricultural production.

Pakistan's economy derives its strength from the agricultural sector. It would not be wrong to say that the very safety, security, solidarity and

the future of this country, to a large extent, depends on its villages. Therefore, rural development becomes the heart of the problem of Pakistan's economic development.

Pakistan was far ahead of India in almost all sectors of development, particularly in agriculture, in early years of partition. India started a balanced approach towards rural and urban development by giving due priority to the rural sector and by focusing on its infrastructure, electrification, village tube wells and subsidies on inputs, as required by the small farmers.

Recently, the Ambassador of Republic of Korea, Dr. Song Jong-Hwan recommended that Pakistan should adopt his country's Saemaul Undong (New Village Movement) which was the first step towards prosperity in Korea. He said; Saemaul Undong is a community-based rural development program aimed at improving the basic living conditions and environment, whereas later projects concentrated on building rural infrastructure and increasing the income of the poor's lot. He said that Korea, despite its limited resources is now considered to be one of the top economies in the World.

In rural development, all aspects of rural life are inter-related and no lasting result can be achieved if individual aspects are dealt in isolation. Therefore, the rural development should combine the objectives of growth, employment and income redistribution through dependable institutions which must allow the benefits of modern technology to reach the weakest section of the rural population.

Since rural development is intended to reduce poverty, it must be clearly designed to increase the production and raise productivity by adopting the time tested integrated rural development approach

by selecting the production areas of 50-60 villages with a will to improve the socio-economic status of the target group, the rural poor. The initial thrust should be to increase the agricultural production and productivity by intensification, diversification and commercialization of the Agriculture based on sound physical, organizational and institutional infrastructure. The rural development depends on sustained growth as rural income is primarily derived from the agriculture and it has the capacity to meet the cost of any development programme.

In Pakistan, a number of rural development programmes were launched and implemented so as to increase its agricultural production and productivity and with the noblest intentions of creating abundant job opportunities in efforts to improve the social and physical infrastructure in rural areas. Unfortunately, the most important element which remained overlooked was the human development. The successive governments have launched well publicized programmes such as Village-AID in the 50s, Basic Democracies System in the 60s, Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) in the 70s, and the Prime Minister's Five Points Programme in the 80s. However, the beneficiaries of all these programmes were the big influential farmers, who already had an access and patronage from the Governments while the small farmers who form the major part were almost by-passed and neglected.

While formulating the concept of the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), all shortcomings were taken into consideration. This programme remained operational with full political will and commitment for seven years during 1972-1979. Thereafter, with sudden change of the government, the IRDP also met the same fate and was rolled back without any cogent reasons and evaluation.

Unfortunately, in Pakistan, it has almost become a tradition of rolling back the Rural Development Programmes started by the previous governments, as soon as government changes. This has happened in the case of Village Aid, Basic Democracies and the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) too, although the IRDP was a time tested programme duly approved, and applauded by the International Community and UN organs.

These programmes did not create the desired impact because of the following reasons:

- ❖ Lack of political will of the Government to translate its promises as made in their manifestos into action particularly the land reforms. In the name of national development, political or economic power remains concentrated in the hands of those who control the national governments. This proved counter-productive.
- ❖ Perpetuated highly colonial type centralized and top-down planning and development system without any meaningful participation of the people at the grass-root level.
- ❖ Lack of local resource mobilization both human and material at the local level. This is because of absence of local government system and people's institutions including NGOs/CBOs.
- ❖ Lack of continuity in the programmes. Instead of implementing the programmes, the governments in power demolished and dismantled the programmes launched by the previous government for political reasons.

To sum up, one can say that a little emphasis was placed on integrated rural development and most of

the Government programmes were run for single purpose, with isolated efforts as imposed by the political leadership from above with non-participation of masses – whose problems were to be solved. It lacked steps towards evolving a leadership – from grass roots to upward levels with inadequate attention towards true village researched formulation and a true implementation of the programmes on principles of self-reliance, self-support and accountability coupled with lack of its proper supervision, follow-up, research, evaluation, lack of continuity in monitoring each programme.

Rural development is a colossal challenge. No government, howsoever, affluent it may be, can handle it without participation and mobilization of its human and material resources. It may require change in the power structure, adjustment or decentralization of the administrative system and creation of grass roots people's organizations backed up by full political commitment and people oriented marshal decisions.

Pakistan's future lies on its rural sector where majority of our population lives. Therefore, steps should be taken to develop the rural sector on priority basis. The present policy of giving handouts to farmers maintains political parties vote bank. This is counterproductive. Aim should not only emphasis on improvement of poverty alleviation, but strategies should be formulated in order to promote poverty eradication. The answer lies by taking the following steps to eradicate poverty.

- ❖ Improving the rural infrastructure, all villages should be connected by rural roads.
- ❖ Villages should be provided electricity and gas, with subsidized rates for their tube wells.

- ❖ Modern technology should be introduced for pre and post harvest, particularly for small farmers which should be provided at their doorsteps.
- ❖ Growth centres should be established for every 10 union councils which should work for marketing of produce, establishment of small and medium sized industries to create jobs for rural people and thus to arrest rural population migrating to cities.
- ❖ Arrangements for storage and marketing.
- ❖ Arrangements for setting up of agro-based industries using local raw materials.

- ❖ Encouragement of local leadership.

Pakistan being agrarian economy is based on its rural sector. While planning and developing urban and rural sector, priority should be given to rural areas so that small farmer who is backbone of our economy is benefited and thus the production and productivity improves leading to higher GDP.

Let us hope and pray that the present government implements the local bodies program and revive IRDP with full political commitment to reduce rural poverty.

N.B.

The subject will be debated in due course of time.

