

# POVERTY ALLEVIATION THROUGH SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN RURAL, INDIA

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## ABSTRACT

India is home to the greatest number of impoverished individuals who reside in rural areas. Numerous rural-based programs covering agriculture, animal husbandry, roads, health, education, housing, employment, social and cultural activities, and food security were started with the help of the government and non-government organizations in an effort to improve the lot of the rural poor. A three-tiered rural local government system known as "Panchayati Raj" (Rule by Local Councils) was created in 1957. They were Zilla Parishad (district level), Panchayat Samiti (block level), and Gram Panchayat (village level). Decentralizing the decision-making process and promoting public involvement were the goals. The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was launched in 1979 with a focus on the weaker segments because the program was unable to meet the expectations of the rural poor.

The Planning Commission established the block as the fundamental building block for development planning in 1987. The District Planning and Development Council, which had broader societal representation, was given the responsibility of district-level planning. Through the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution, Panchayati Raj reforms were implemented to strengthen the Gram Sabha (village assembly) and enable micro-level planning. In an effort to mobilize the rural populace, the Indian government has also encouraged voluntary action. Over the past three decades, a number of non-governmental organization initiatives have had a major influence on development. For instance, encouraging sustainable livelihoods in a number of Indian states through wastelands development, dairy husbandry, water resource management, and other revenue-generating endeavors.

Cooperatives have been set up by farmers in a number of states to process milk, sugarcane, oil-seeds, fruits, and vegetables. Through competent administration and the use of contemporary technologies, these companies have restored economic stability and eradicated middlemen's exploitation. to support the Self Help Groups (SHGs), which are organizations made up of low-income families. India's efforts to promote sustainable rural development are aided by the government and political power.

**KEYWORD:** Poverty Alleviation, Sustainable Management and Natural Resources.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

India is now the world's largest democracy, having gained its independence 78 years ago. All citizens must have greater economic empowerment and a higher standard of living in order to maintain this democracy and freedom. Agriculture is the main source of income for more than 68.8% of people who live in rural areas. Most of these families spend more than 90% of their income on necessities like food, gas, and medical care. Since more than 35% of rural families live in poverty, addressing their issues is a national priority in order to guarantee social justice and improve their standard of living.

## PROBLEMS OF THE POOR IN INDIA

India is now the world's largest democracy, having gained its independence 78 years ago. All citizens must have greater economic empowerment and a higher standard of living in order to maintain this democracy and freedom. Agriculture is the main source of income for more than 68.8% of people who live in rural areas. Most of these families spend more than 90% of their income on necessities like food, gas, and medical care. Since more than 35% of rural families live in poverty, addressing their issues is a national priority in order to guarantee social

justice and improve their standard of living.

Another essential resource needed to improve agricultural output is water. Only 28% of the 169 million hectares of arable land are irrigated; the remaining portion is reliant on rainfall, meaning that only a single crop can be produced annually. About 40% of the cropping area is in low-rainfall areas, where there are only 40 to 50 days of work opportunities annually and crops typically fail twice every five years. Job opportunities have been further diminished by a decline in many traditional occupations and inadequate institutional infrastructures. As a result, approximately 90% of rural residents who lack sufficient land holding must find alternative sources of income in order to survive.

## 2. DEMOGRAPHY OF RURAL INDIA

currently lack a guaranteed source of drinking water for four to five months out of the year, and 70 to 75 percent of the water does not meet standards. Poor drinking water quality has a negative impact on health, and diarrhea is a major cause of infant mortality. In traditionally male-dominated Indian communities, women were suppressed until recently. The literacy rate among women in underdeveloped areas is as low as 20–25%, whereas the average in rural areas is between 50 and 65%. In the past, girls' education was viewed as superfluous, which had a negative impact on their quality of life. Illiteracy has also suppressed their development due to lack of communication with the outside world. They are slow in adopting new practices, which are essential with the changing times. Apart from lack of communication, social taboo has also hindered their progress.

Several vested interests, both local and outsiders have exploited this situation. The rich Numerous local and foreign vested interests have taken advantage of this circumstance. Because they feared they would not be able to find inexpensive labor to work on their farms, the wealthy landlords opposed any infrastructure development that would help the impoverished. Alternative financial institutions offering lower-cost credit that the impoverished needed were not welcomed by the local moneylenders. Under the guise of religion and divine power, the traditional healers advocated against modern medicine. As a result, the impoverished continued to accept their fate of living in the grip of the powerful. They favored a life of silence and repression and shunned conflict. Their way of life has been to hope for better days and to endure the worst. The primary source of income is agriculture, but. Most of them treated agriculture as a family tradition following age old practices and they adopted new changes only after observing the success of their neighbors. Over 56 of the rural families are landless and among the land holders, 2,5 Caror are marginal farmers, which are mostly owned by the poor families.

In addition to private properties, government and community-owned pastures and common lands are also utilized in a variety of ways, most notably for the gathering of fuel and fodder. About 10% of each village's total land has been set aside by the government for livestock grazing. All community members have unrestricted access to this land, which is owned by the Village Panchayat (Local Government). The community does not believe that it is their duty to manage the pasture, and the Panchayat has no authority over its use. Overexploitation and pasture depletion are the results of this. Village woodlots and community forests were in a similar state. Numerous diseases and pests are also present there. These wastelands' management to enhance the productivity can revive the supply of fodder and fuel, facilitate the percolation of rainwater and improve the agricultural production.

Despite being a vital input for crop production, the community largely ignores water. Rainfall, lakes, rivers, snow-capped mountains, and subterranean storage are the main sources of water. The community owns the other water sources, with the exception of small tanks and wells. However, the impoverished lack the means to use their share of these water resources, while vested interests and powerful lobbyists have been exploiting them for their own gain. In India, rainfall serves as the primary source of water for agricultural production. However, it is estimated that more than 65% of rainwater runs off, flooding the rivers, if proper soil and water conservation measures are not followed. Approximately 52% of the nation's total cropland is irrigated, giving farmers a have a tendency to use excessive water. In the absence of adequate training and demonstration, they believe that excess water can enhance their crop yields.

Another valuable natural resource that the poor own is livestock. Rural families typically keep one or two cows or buffaloes for milk, two bullocks for farming, and a few sheep, goats, and poultry for extra cash. The majority of impoverished families keep sizable herds and allow them to graze on communal lands despite the lack of fodder. Because there is a strong demand for milk, dairy husbandry has a bright future. However, the majority of significant cattle and buffalo breeds are genetically degraded, and 1,328 caror livestock are unproductive, placing excessive strain on forest resources, and being inaccessible to the rural poor.

As a result, the majority of our natural resources, including our forests, water, land, and livestock, are depleted and underutilized. With the use of suitable technologies and idle labor, it is possible to utilize these natural resources in a sustainable manner. In addition to having insufficient income to support themselves, rural residents also experience poor health due to malnutrition, a lack of vaccinations, and poor sanitation and hygiene. Approximately 70% of the potable water sources are contaminated, and more than 25% of villages lack a year-round supply of drinking water. Most illnesses are caused by drinking contaminated water, especially during the rainy season. The majority of the villages lack sanitary facilities and drainage. Remote villages are not served by medical or immunization services. Rural areas have a high rate of illiteracy, especially among women, with rates varying from 59.6 % to 60%. This has a direct bearing on the population growth, child health and education.

The majority of the impoverished believe that others can lead respectable lives. They lack faith in the competence of the development organizations tasked with initiating these projects, as well as in the suitability of the technologies. Poor farmers who have previously received financial aid from the government and other donor organizations are not sufficiently motivated or trained. Without meeting their perceived needs, they have been abusing these inputs for pointless ends or for survival alone, failing to meet the project's objectives. Many impoverished farmers have acquired "dependency syndrome" as a result of this process and now look to others to supply the resources necessary for their subsistence.

The majority of rural development initiatives are frequently carried out without sufficient planning. Sectorial development initiatives might not produce the desired outcomes if an integrated strategy is not used to address multifaceted, interconnected issues. Many of these initiatives lack adequate planning and resource mobilization in addition to the integration of multiple sectors. In contrast to industries, rural development projects are not carried out according to good management practices that take into account the necessary technologies, human resources, inputs, and marketing opportunities for the produce.

### **3. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

In India, the idea of community development dates back long before the country gained its independence. Rural reconstruction and uplift received a lot of attention even during the independence movement, which was led by Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation. He focused on a 19-point constructive program for full independence through honest and peaceful means. He frequently cautioned the leaders that only after the rural economy was bolstered and poverty was eliminated could they truly enjoy independence. In addition to promoting "khaki" (hand-spun and hand-woven cloth) and village industries, he also argued for social equality, economic equity, communal harmony, prevention of alcohol and drug use, sanitation, health care, education, and women's empowerment. The objective was to create profitable jobs in rural regions and enhance the quality of life (Gandhi, 1941).

Following India's 1947 declaration of independence, community development became a top priority. The Etawah Project began as a pilot community development initiative in 1948. Around 300 villages, or 30,000 people, were covered by each of the 55 Community Development Projects that the Indian government started later in 1952. This multi-project initiative, which spanned the entire nation by 1964, was designed to develop villages. Although this program had many facets, agricultural production was given primary attention because the regions chosen for project launch were either irrigated or had guaranteed rainfall.

Similar goals were set when the National Extension Service Project was started in 1953 with the intention of covering a wider area, including arid regions. Blocks of 150–300 villages were defined as manageable units for the start of community development programs in this three-year project. The project's goals and operations were periodically adjusted, but it persisted as a permanent multi-function extension agency in every block.

1114 blocks, encompassing 163,000 villages, were operational by the end of the First Five Year Plan (1952–57), and by the 1960s, the community development program had expanded to the entire nation. The program was distinguished by its comprehensive content, its primary goal of economic progress, its flexible programming, and the placement of a multipurpose worker at the village level. According to the plan, the main goal of planning is to create an environment where people can live comfortably and have equal opportunities for justice and growth (Sachidananda, 1988). In order to improve the lives of the impoverished in rural areas, the program addressed issues such as agriculture, animal husbandry, roads, health, education, housing, employment, and social and cultural activities. With the goal of promoting economic growth via cottage industries and agriculture,

An extension organization with a team of subject matter experts and village level workers (VLW) was set up at each block or revenue tehsil to carry out the multifaceted program. The organization was led by a Block Development Officer (BDO). It was anticipated that the VLWs would meet with the farmers and convince them to participate in different development programs. Eight Extension Officers, one each for agriculture, animal husbandry, panchayat, rural engineering, rural industry cooperation, social education, and women and child welfare, supported the BDO. Additionally, each block had a medical officer on duty with support personnel to offer medical assistance. Through the District Collectors, the Development Commissioner oversaw community development at the state level. The management of the community development program at the national level

There were no notable accomplishments between the 1950s and the middle of the 1970s, and poverty was about to rise. Over the years since independence, the Indian economy has slowed down in comparison to those in East and South East Asia. Feudal-colonial remnants were eliminated by the Land Reforms Act of 1956, but the laws' implementation did not assist the poor and landless in gaining land ownership, especially in North India. Although there were variations in the percentage of people living in poverty, the greatest increase was seen in the late 1960s and early 1970s (55%–69%), when rainfall was below average and monsoon failures lasted longer than a year. Even the agricultural development core program was unable to improve agricultural productivity improvement in the absence of education and infrastructural development was not sustainable.

### **PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS**

Five years after the community development program's inception, in 1957, the government established the Balvantrai Mehta Committee to recommend ways to remove barriers to program implementation. A three-tiered system of rural local government, known as "Panchayati Raj" (Rule by Local Councils), was suggested by the committee. They were Zilla Parishad (district level), Panchayat Samiti (block level), and Gram Panchayat (village level). The goal was to decentralize the decision-making process, move the decision-making center closer to the people, promote their involvement, and give local residents authority over the bureaucracy. However, not all of the people's and planners' expectations could be met by the Panchayati Raj. The dominance of socially and economically privileged groups was a primary cause. The other reasons were lack of harmony among the elected members due to political fractions and prevalence of corruption and inefficiency.

In the middle of the 1960s, agricultural production became the nation's top priority, and agriculture was given a clear technological focus. The central government circumvented the Panchayati Raj institutions by establishing autonomous administrative hierarchies to implement special programs during the Fourth and Fifth Five Year Plans (1969–74 and 1974–79). The Central Government directly funded and ran area development agencies like Command Area Development, Drought Prone Area, and Hill area Development Programs, as well as special programs like the Small Farmers' Development Agency (SFDA), Intensive Agricultural Areas Program (IAAP), Intensive Agricultural District Program (IADP), Tribal Development Agency (TDA), Marginal, and Small Farmers and Agricultural Laborers Development Agency (MFAL).

### **INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

In 1979, (IRDP) was introduced. Targeting the most vulnerable members of society—particularly those who are impoverished—and actively involving them in the execution of various programs was the express purpose of this initiative. There was a fantastic chance for people to take charge and build their economy with dignity, but prior programs concentrated on delivery methods that weakened independence. To assist the underprivileged segments of society, a number of sub-schemes were started, including Jawaharlal Rojgar Yojana (JRY), National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Training of Rural Youth for Self-employment (TRYSEM), and Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA).

The basic necessities of the impoverished, such as basic education, health care, water supply, roads, electrification, housing, and nutrition, were met by the government by the middle of the 1980s. When compared to general categories, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes had a higher percentage of the population living in poverty. Small land holdings, landlessness, or illiteracy were the main causes of this.

### **EMPHASIS ON PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION**

The impoverished have not benefited significantly from the numerous programs implemented for rural development in terms of maintaining their standard of living. Since the implementation of Panchayati Raj, the main issues have been the concentration of power and the lack of public participation in the development process. Despite being widely accepted as the only way to encourage public participation, which is the foundation of a democratic system, the system had led to conflict and division. This made Panchayati Raj reforms necessary, and in 1992 the 73rd Constitutional Amendment gave the PR institutions the authority to take on the role of

decentralized planning and development. Up until that point, the government apparatus handled every task, and the villagers had no opportunity to participate. Under this constitutional amendment, 29 items of development were transferred to PRIs. Agriculture, forestry and the environment, industries, infrastructure, basic necessities, social welfare, poverty alleviation, and asset maintenance are some of the sectors that these fall under. Taking into account the Gram Panchayats' inability to support micro-planning for development at the village level. It is suggested that the Gram Sabha (village assembly) be strengthened in order to make micro-level planning easier. The Gram Sabha can serve as a forum for the Gram Panchayat to discuss and finalize its annual plans. A forum like this can also decide which development programs should be implemented first. To guarantee their involvement in the proceedings and protect the interests of the general public, farmers' organizations, self-help groups, educational institutions, and other voluntary organizations can take the initiative to designate their representatives on the Gram Sabha (Hegde, 1999).

### **ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS**

Motivating impoverished families to ensure their active participation is a key factor in the successful implementation of rural development in India. People should be involved in the program from the very beginning of planning in order to guarantee their participation in the development process and to gain their confidence. Numerous creative pilot programs have demonstrated that many of the sensible recommendations made by even the poor can be readily implemented to yield positive outcomes.

In general, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), also known as voluntary organizations, concentrate their services and voluntary activities on addressing the issues that the general public faces or assisting them in overcoming obstacles. Human touch is the primary attribute of voluntary agencies. The program can be effectively implemented by organizations with a high level of professionalism and voluntarism. Greater success can be achieved through the commitment of the staff and volunteers, their interactions with the community, program flexibility, and creative problem-solving techniques. The government didn't acknowledge the importance of nonprofit organizations in assisting with rural development until the 1970s.

The Ministry of Agriculture established an autonomous organisation called the "Freedom from Hunger Campaign" with help from foreign donor agencies to aid the nonprofits engaged in rural development. The development has been significantly impacted by a number of non-governmental organisation activities over the past three decades. The widespread success of these programs has now prompted other state governments to introduce programs aimed at encouraging public participation, and a number of centrally sponsored programs have called for the creation of community-based organisations to organise and carry out the programs. Facilities for obtaining soft loans from banks and other financial institutions were established in response to improved prospects for encouraging self-employment through investments in microbusiness and agriculture.

### **STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Following point should be remembering for sustainable development**

- Using the resources and technology at hand, the development program should determine the issues and potential solutions.
- The agricultural development program should determine the resources that are available, including the land's quality, water supply, and weather, and choose the most productive crops.
- The project should find a suitable market where the produce's price recovery will be at its highest and provide a timely supply of finance and inputs. For many nonprofit organisations involved in rural development, this has been the secret to their success.
- There is a lot of room to implement different job-creation initiatives in rural regions. Agro-based and non-agro-based activities are the two categories into which the activities can be separated. Because most farmers have access to a variety of resources and abilities, it is simpler to create jobs in agro-based locations. In light of this, non-agro-based areas' employment potential should be explored, ideally following the start of agro-based activity. The production of crops, the use of high-yielding cultivars, the management of watersheds, the harvesting of runoff water, the reclamation of saline soil, the introduction of new production methods and improved tools, post-production processing of the produce, and marketing are all examples of agro-based activities.
- In addition to arable crops, other profitable industries with great employment potential, resilience to natural disasters, and high profitability include fruit crops, cash crops, sericulture, and apiculture.

- Forestation can be a good substitute for crop production on wastelands and marginal areas where it is not profitable. By producing commodities such as fuel, lumber, gum, rubber, wax, lac, fodder, and raw materials for paper, pulp, and ayurvedic medications, forests can produce monetary income. Additionally, by conserving soil and moisture, forestry can enhance crop yields while also enhancing the ecology and environment.
- The scientific breeding and management of cattle, buffaloes, sheep, goats, poultry, and pigs for their milk, meat, eggs, and wool, as well as the processing of these products, have a good chance of generating long-term, profitable self-employment.
- Agriculture and animal husbandry are interdependent, and farmers can earn a steady income from mixed farming.
- Creating the necessary infrastructure to market the produce would increase profitability even more. The development of fisheries is also possible in certain locations, such as along rivers, the coast, and reservoirs. On-agro based Employment Opportunities are very limited in rural areas. However, certain small scale units can be set by the Self Help Groups or by the community through cooperatives. Some of them worth listing are agricultural implement and hand tool production units, agro-service centers, food processing and packing, tailoring and garment making, handloom units, fiber extraction and rope making, handicrafts, carpentry, etc. In the absence of assured jobs in the industries, villagers will have to depend more on self-employment and the success of people's participation in such a programme, depends on the nature of the activities proposed.

**The criteria for the selection of suitable development are programmes dependent on the following factors:**

1. The participants' social acceptability;
2. The accessibility of external inputs and natural resources;
3. The ability to run the program without heavily relying on outside technology;
4. The participants' capacity for low-risk operations;
5. The produce's ease of marketing;
6. Economic viability and increased profitability;
7. A brief gestation period;
8. Year-round work. To sort out the above problems, we need to develop: -
  - In addition to organizing human resources, infrastructure is required to plan the supply of inputs, finance, post-production processing, and marketing of the produce.
  - Another significant agricultural bottleneck is an inadequate marketing network.
  - Farmers should be trained to quickly predict the demand for different commodities and take advantage of opportunities.
  - These organizations can help farmers with improved variety seeds, financing, and other essential inputs for maximizing their crop yields; there is good potential for market outlets to be established in order to reach the customers without requiring an excessive number of middlemen.

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