

INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT: POWER,

by

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Introduction.

Integrated development plans, were introduced as a new component of rural development in Sri Lanka starting from 1978. However, the rural sector, the largest component of the economy, had received wide attention in policy since independence. Starting with the efforts to develop and extend the administration and the social and economic infrastructure, the agriculture sector became a major consideration of policy. The effort may have been disproportionately weighted towards paddy and irrigated settlements. The creation of new settlements in the dry zone and the improvement of productive capacity of existing ones, was a major achievement. Over the years a large system to support the paddy component of the rural sector has emerged. Infrastructure, credit and extension services have been spread throughout the paddy growing areas. The tree crops have also received attention in services for production and output disposal.

The revival and restoration of capacity in paddy agriculture dominated over concerns for diversification of the rural economy. The agriculture based export sector began to show signs of structural weakness from the early 1960s. The external sector balance was straining the economy, food import needs were increasing while the export earnings, were not keeping pace after the collapse the commodity price boom at the end of the Korean War. At the same time the welfare programmes aimed at improving the living conditions of the poor, most of whom were rural, were widened in scope and coverage. The real values of the

programmes are expected to have increased in the decade of the 1960's. Although the potential for future growth may have been increased through support of a minimal standard of living, conversion of potential into realized growth did not occur at the pace required to generate livelihoods for a rapidly growing population. Unemployment grew rapidly and by the 1970's was at unsustainable levels.

Agriculture import substitution programmes were emphasized beginning in the early 1960's. These were expected to introduce a new dynamism to the rural sector. Indicators of well-being such as infant mortality, maternal mortality and life expectancy continued to improve. Living standards in the rural sector improved through direct interventions in the form of welfare measures. Pricing policies of agricultural products, however, may have had disincentive effects. Price controls may have prevented faster growth of the rural sector.

The institutional framework to manage the rural sector has been improved and developed substantially during the past few decades. Government ministries to promote rural development increased during the 1977-88 period. Efforts to deconcentrate administration were underway throughout the period. The non-government sector has grown progressively after 1978.

Integrated Development Plans and Transfer of Power to the Rural Sector.

The IRDP's were large scale efforts to promote the development of the rural sector. Today more than three quarter of the districts have such programmes. The scale, scope and span of the individual IRDP's are different. The programme devel-

opment is not the same in all instances. The identification of priorities and the development of the plan involved the district administration and the Regional Development Division of the Ministry of Plan Implementation. Funding in most instances was arranged with bilateral donor agencies. The plans were implemented with machinery set up at the district level. The individual donors had interests and commitments to particular modes of development intervention, preferences for some sectors and approaches. These found expression in the plans.

Should the development of the rural sector have imparted a new degree and dimension of social and economic power to the rural sector? It is not obvious that it should have occurred. Furthermore it is not clear that it did occur either.

How did the exchange relations between the rural and urban sectors behave? Have the rural development efforts made improvements in these aspects? The answers are not easy to derive in all situations. It may seem reasonable to expect that the efforts of the IRDP's should have imparted a greater capacity for the sector to absorb economic shocks transmitted from the external sector of the urban economy. Integration with the urban sector is bound to have introduced new vulnerabilities to some components of the rural sector while imparting new strengths and capacity to others. Did the IRDP's begin with a framework of goals regarding the distribution of economic power in the rural sector? The answer in the affirmative can be given in the case of many of the plans. Poverty had been an important issue to be addressed for almost all the IRDP's. The process of capacity enhancement and economic power distribution was conceived differently

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among the IRDP's. It would seem that a testable goal may not have been set at the start and that evaluations had not sought to measure performance in this dimension.

Performance and Evaluation

The evaluations of the various IRDP's have been elaborate and comprehensive in most instances. The technology for evaluation has improved with the exercise of integrated development. But are there important aspects which need to be more carefully assessed when evaluating rural development efforts? Is poverty, distribution of income, integration and diversification broad areas of performance that need and can be checked?

Let us ask one set of questions related to "integration". Have we considered the necessary and sufficient scales of intervention that would promote the desired levels of transformation in the rural sector? For example the poverty orientation of a IRDP may be conceived within a scope and scale that is small enough to be manageable but not large enough to perform one of the tasks of an IRDP. That is, to lead to rural transformation and growth which increases capacity for sustainable improvements in living standards.

The target group approach is vital to identify the vulnerable, the politically and economically weak or weakest and to design interventions to move them to a higher level. Charity is an old and tried method. Transformation which changes potentials and distribution of capacity resulting in reducing absolute poverty while improving distribution is a related but different task. Social welfare programme to assist the poor, share common characteristics with charity, but then all societies need

and have a component outside exchange, in grants, transfers and charity. The modes of transfer matter in terms of outcomes into the future.

Therefore do we need to evaluate IRDP's in terms of the balance between exchange and the grant-transfer components? Should additional evaluation criteria be used to evaluate the performance of IRDP's?

Participation: A realized Goal?

Many of the IRDP's have stressed the importance of participation of the intended beneficiary communities. Some have stressed the role of women in addition. Both are vital to the success of rural development, transformation and dynamisation. How is this to be done? What are the bounds of operation and what much dispute over it. The issue is the manner in which it is obtained, developed and enhanced. The creation of decision making units with the access and command over resources seems necessary at the outset. The process of creating such institutions seems to depend on the programmes that are to be implemented. The link between the "new" or revitalized institutions and the agencies that divert, direct or provide a variety of resources tends to set the limits to participation.

Organizing a village community, to identify projects to generate income and employment within the community, is common to most rural development efforts of the recent past. The political content of the local level institution is a function of the scale of the intended programme, the organizations that introduce the idea to the community and characteristics of the existing formations of power. If projects are small, they would not "disturb" the formations

and those with power, may even refrain from participating. If they are large or related to pivotal resources, for example land and irrigation, or if they are perceived to disturb the structures in the polity, society and economy of the community and the way it is oriented to the outside world, then the local elites may be compelled to participate in order to protect their interests.

Projects that provide high participation opportunities for youth, have been considered highly desirable. They are also necessary. The existing socio-political framework of these communities before the projects may have had high youth participation in the political system. This had become an important arena to develop networks and links that lead to employment and income opportunities. The scarcity of opportunity had resulted in a relentless search for the "distributional" networks and operating within them has become vital to obtaining a position in the queue for employment and income. The political system seemed to keep a close watch over the distribution of opportunity. The involvement of the political system appeared to be a function of scarcity of opportunity.

Have the IRDP's especially those that have stressed on participation, provided clues as to how it could be done leading to "creative and sustainable dynamism" in the rural sector? How much "friction" within a community is needed before it moves onto higher possibilities in production and material well-being?

What has been the sociology of participation in the IRDP's? Who tends to be attracted or induced to what and under what conditions? After all, significant parts of the

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polity, especially the youth, even though it may be temporarily, view interventions of the IRDP type as a palliative. Participation may be rejected because the programme intentions are limited to partial participation and transfer of power. Have these interpretations waned with the IRDP's? Recent events may not be an appropriate guide. However, the large scale programme to alleviate poverty that would be implemented in the near future, may do well to consider the IRDP models in order to calibrate implementation processes. The Janasaviya has the advantage that it is very large in scale and scope compared with the IRDP's. However, some IRDP's may not have yielded the necessary rural transformation because they were small in scope and weighted towards the grant component, and not adequately concerned with rural socio-economic transformation.

Participation is both necessary outcome and necessary input for successful rural transformation. What has been observed in some of the IRDP's indicates that generating it may not be as easy as establishing projects in remote places. Knowing that the latter cannot be achieved with ease, the challenge would be to promote participation at different levels that lead to possibilities of change in structures of power that are inhibiting more rapid advances in material well-being. Participation in conditions of material scarcity may have aspects that are not beneficial to a total community especially the politically and economically weakest.