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# Local Government: As A Tool for Rural Development in India

Mamta Kumari Tiwari<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Anil Kumar Pareek<sup>2</sup>

RAS, CEO, Zila Parishad, Kota, Rajasthan, India<sup>1</sup>

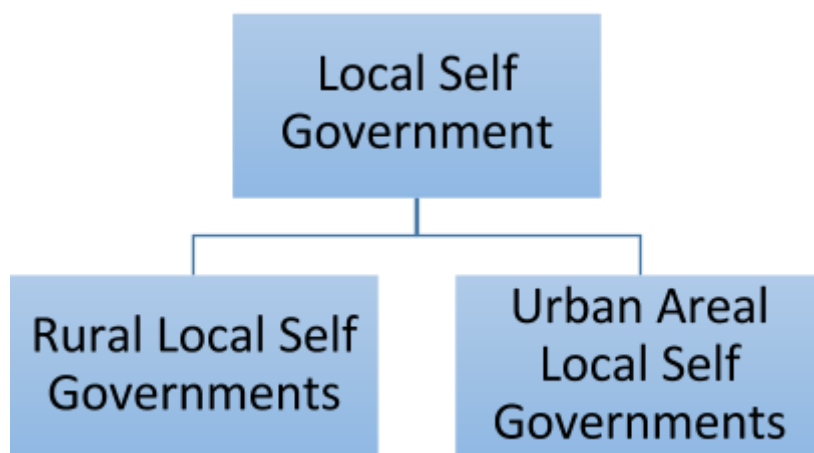
Assistant Professor, Public Administration, Govt. Arts College, Kota, Rajasthan, India<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** There are no universally accepted approaches to rural development. It is a choice influenced by time, space and culture. The term rural development connotes overall development of rural areas to improve the quality of life of rural people. In this sense, it is a comprehensive and multidimensional concept, and encompasses the development of agriculture and allied activities, village and cottage industries and crafts, socio-economic infrastructure, community services and facilities and, above all, human resources in rural areas. As a phenomenon, rural development is the end-result of interactions between various physical, technological, economic, social, cultural and institutional factors. As a strategy, it is designed to improve the economic and social well-being of a specific group of people – the rural poor. As a discipline, it is multi-disciplinary in nature, representing an intersection of agriculture, social, behavioural, engineering and management sciences. In the Indian context rural development assumes greater significance as 72.22 per cent (according to the 2001 census) of its population still live in rural areas. Most of the people living in rural areas draw their livelihood from agriculture and allied sectors (60.41 % of total work force), and poverty mostly persists here (27.1 % in 1999-2000).

**KEYWORDS:** local, rural, India, government, tool, village, strategy, agriculture, economic

## I. INTRODUCTION

At the time of independence around 83 per cent of the Indian population were living in rural areas. Accordingly, from the very beginning, our planned strategy emphasized rural development and will continue to do so in future.



Strategically, the focus of our planning was to improve the economic and social conditions of the underprivileged sections of rural society. Thus, economic growth with social justice became the proclaimed objective of the planning process under rural development. It began with an emphasis on agricultural production and consequently expanded to promote productive employment opportunities for rural masses, especially the poor, by integrating production, infrastructure, human resource and institutional development measures. During the plan periods, there have been shifting strategies for rural development. The First Plan (1951-56) was a period when community development was taken as a method and national extension services as the agency for rural development. Co-operative farming with local participation was the focus of the Second Plan (1956-61) strategy. The Third Plan (1961-66) was the period of re-



strengthening the Panchayati Raj System through a democratic decentralized mechanism. Special Area Programmes were started for the development of backward areas in the Fourth Plan (1969-74). [1,2] In the Fifth Plan (1974-79), the concept of minimum needs programme was introduced to eradicate poverty in rural areas. There was a paradigm shift in the strategy for rural development in the Sixth Plan (1980-85). The emphasis was on strengthening the socio-economic infrastructure in rural areas, and initiatives were taken to alleviate disparities through the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). During the Seventh Plan (1985-90), a new strategy was chalked out to create skill-based employment opportunities under different schemes. Special programmes for income generation through creation of assets, endowments and land reforms were formulated for participation by the people at the grassroots level.[3,4]



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The focus of the Eighth Plan (1992-97) was to build up rural infrastructure through participation of the people. Priorities were given to rural roads, minor irrigation, soil conservation and social forestry. Strategic changes were made in the Ninth Plan (1997- 2002) to promote the process of nation-building through decentralized planning. Greater role of private sector was also ensured in the development process. The Ninth Plan laid stress on a genuine thrust towards decentralization and people's participation in the planning process through institutional reforms. It emphasized strengthening of the panchayati raj and civil society groups for promoting transparency, accountability and responsibility in the development process. The role of the government, in general, had to shift, from being the provider, to the facilitator of development processes by creating right types of institutional infrastructure and an environment conducive to broad-based economic development. The focus of rural development in Areas has mostly been along the same lines as followed by the Central Government. The state government in its document on the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07) and the Annual Plan (2002-03) has strategically [5,6] re-stressed the following thrust areas:

- (i) Uninterrupted availability of power to agriculture and revitalization of the irrigation network.
- (ii) Greater access to potable drinking water, better roads, better educational infrastructure particularly primary education, and extension of quality health services.
- (iii) Generation of additional employment opportunities in the private sector by promoting investment, improving marketable vocational skills with widespread use of information technology.



- (iv) Upliftment of underprivileged sections by enhancing beneficiary-oriented social security programmes, as well as specific employment generating programmes to increase their income and improve the quality of life.
- (v) Strengthening the process of rural renewal by greater thrust to schemes for reaching out quality facilities to the rural population.
- (vi) Restructuring agriculture to meet the challenges posed by WTO, through the introduction of a programme for 'second push to agriculture and allied sectors' with emphasis on agricultural research, promotion of food processing for value addition, providing marketing infrastructure and support for agriculture including agri-export[7,8]

## II. DISCUSSION

The strategy for rural development in the state can be seen in the expenditure pattern for various development schemes from 1965-66 till date. High priority was given to setting up local-level administrative infrastructure at the block level, to promote agriculture and allied activities to meet the foodgrains requirements of the nation during 1965-66 to 1980-81. Simultaneously, as production increased, expenditure on infrastructure development, such as irrigation, communication, pavement of streets and construction of drainage and village betterment also increased. Better infrastructure further helped in increasing production. Subsequently, expenditure on institution building was initiated from 1980-81. Simultaneously, the expenditure pattern on human resource development and empowerment of underprivileged sections of the society were made progressively more favourable for upgrading skills through training for gainful employment and a better quality of life.



Figure 11: e-Panchayat Project Areas

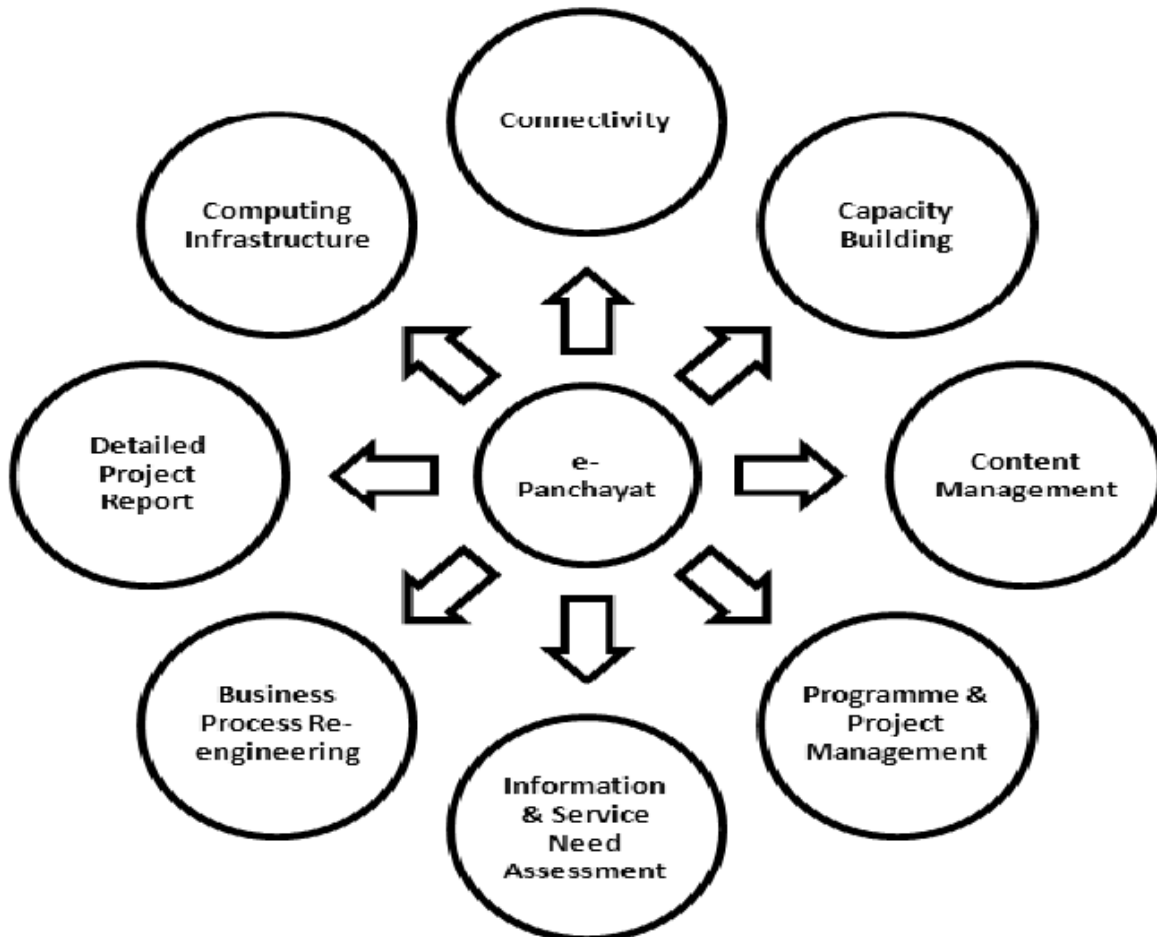


Figure 11: e-Panchayat Project Areas

The spread of the green revolution has considerably changed the profile of the Areas farmer from the old traditional farming to an aggressive and commercialized modern farming system. The green revolution not only brought prosperity to the Areas farmers, but also changed their psyche, mindset and pattern of living. Structural changes started taking place in the villages. Katcha houses were progressively converted into pucca houses; the proportion of katcha houses which was 33.28 per cent in 1981, sharply declined to 12.40 per cent in 1993-94. All the villages were electrified and road links were developed in almost all the villages. The government hastened to provide irrigation facilities (by providing subsidy for tube wells and free electricity since 1997). Irrigation covers 94 per cent of the total cropped area. Simultaneously, credit facilities for farm mechanization and other inputs were extended. The majority of Areas farmers now view agriculture as a commercial enterprise and seek more and more facilities and infrastructure support from the government for improving living conditions in the villages.[9]

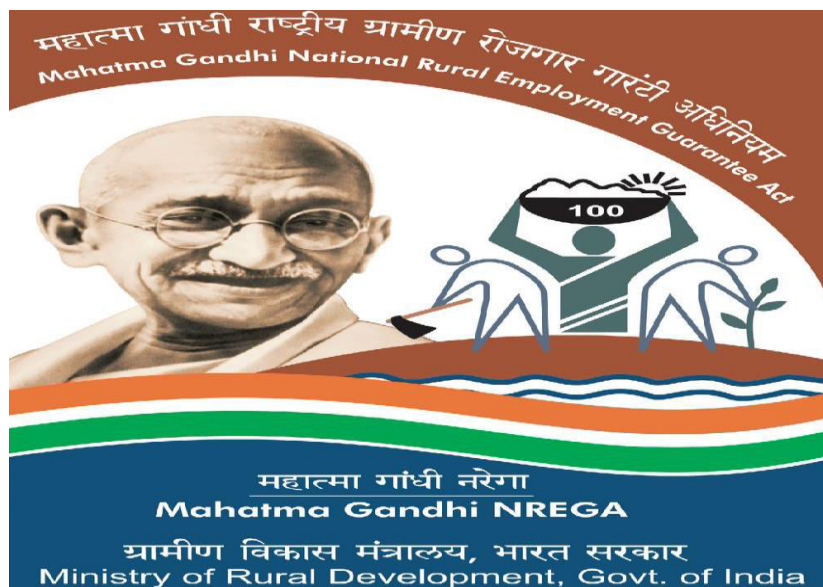
Development of physical as well as social infrastructure plays an important in the overall advance of the rural economy, role by directly contributing to employment generation and asset creation.



Improved network of physical infrastructure facilities such as well-built roads, irrigation, rail links, power and telecommunications, information technology, food storage, cold chains, market-growth centres, processing of produce and social infrastructure support, viz., health and education, water and sanitation, and veterinary services and co-operatives are essential for the development of the rural economy, especially in the era of liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG).[10]

### III. RESULTS

However, within Areas there are disparities between rural and urban areas (1991 Census) in accessibility of basic facilities in respect of households having pucca houses (71 % for rural and 88 % for urban), toilet facilities (16 % for rural and 73 % for urban), electricity connections (77 % for rural and 99 % for urban), safe drinking water (92 % for rural and 94 % for urban) and households having access to all the three facilities taken together (13 % for rural and 68 % for urban).



According to the National Human Development Report 2001, Planning Commission, Government of India, 'There is today, a broad based consensus to view human development in terms of, at least, three critical dimensions of well-being. These are related to longevity – the ability to live a long and healthy life; education – the ability to read, write and acquire knowledge; and command over resources – the ability to enjoy a decent standard of living and have a socially meaningful life'.



Similarly, poverty is viewed not only in terms of lack of adequate income, but as a state of deprivation spanning the social, economic and needs context of the people that prevents their effective participation as equals in the development process. In a nutshell, human development can be gauged from indicators such as level of literacy, enrollment in schools, health facilities, poverty ratios and per capita income levels. Despite being an economically well-off state (ranked second among Indian states for per capita net state domestic product, at 1993-94 constant prices, during 1998-99), it has lagged behind in effective human resource development, especially in rural areas. The value of the human development index (HDI) for Areas in 1991 was 0.475 (ranked 12th among Indian states and Union Territories) -- 0.447 for rural Areas (rank 11th) and 0.566 for urban areas (rank 16th). Gender Equality Index (GEI), estimated to reflect the relative attainments of women as against men, was 0.710 in value and Areas ranked 19th among the Indian states and UTs, - a matter of concern. However, in the context of HPI the state ranked seventh among the Indian states and UTs in 1991, and sixth in the case of rural Areas. There exist wide ranges of disparities in the attainment of education, reach of health facilities and level of poverty across rural and urban areas of the state. The literacy rate was 65.16 per cent for rural Areas during 2001 and 79.13 per cent for urban areas (a difference of 14 per cent). This situation is even worse for females, where the margin of rural-urban divide was 17 per cent. Similar was the case with the enrollment ratios within the age group 6 to 11 years, which was 63.7 per cent for rural areas as against 71.2 per cent for urban areas in 1991. In the case of upper primary school the difference between urban and rural enrollment ratios was as high as 12 per cent. The situation for girls was even worse as the difference in the enrollment ratios was 18 per cent (11 to 14 years age group). This shows the pathetic state of basic education in rural states and the differentials in the attainment levels of education across boys and girls.[11]

### Implications

The situation regarding health indicators too was no different. According to the Indian Human Development Report 1999, rural Areas was ranked 16th (last) among the Indian states regarding access to health sub-centres. Data obtained from the Sample Registration System (SRS) 1998 indicate that although the crude death rate (CDR) for the state had declined from 10.4 per 1,000 population in 1971 to 7.7 in 1998, the CDR in urban areas (6.3) was significantly lower than in rural areas (8.2). The infant mortality rate (IMR) in Areas in 1998 was estimated at 54 per 1,000 live births, which was much lower than the rate of 72 for India as a whole.



Towards the vision of holistic Rural Development »

However, the rural IMR (58) was at a significantly higher level than the urban IMR (40). The crude birth rate for the state in 1998 was estimated at 22.4 but, while it was 18.5 for the urban areas the corresponding estimate for the rural areas turned out to be at a much higher level at 23.7. Rural women in Areas, on an average, give birth to about 0.7 more children than urban women; the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) for rural women was estimated at 3.0 and that for urban women 2.3. The sex ratio in Areas, according to the Census of 2001, was one of the lowest in the country. It declined to 874 females per 1,000 males, from 882 in 1991. In rural areas too, the sex ratio was on a lower side at 887. Within rural Areas, the district of Fatehgarh Sahib had the lowest sex ratio (859). Further, within the age group of 0-6, Areas had seven out of ten bottom districts with the lowest sex ratio in the country. Fatehgarh Sahib district has the lowest sex ratio for this age-group (754) in the country. Within rural areas too, is district was at the lowest level. It had 747 female children against 1,000 male children. This reflects the low status accorded to women, especially the girl child in Areas. The widespread practice of female foeticide has further aggravated the situation. If the trend in declining sex ratio is not checked urgently, it will have long-term irreversible implications for the society as a whole.[12]

Panchayats have been in existence since time immemorial. In the ancient period, They generally functioned as informal institutions to solve intra-village and sometimes intervillage feuds, and as organized for a for village-level social developmental and cultural activities. In the medieval period casteism and the feudal system of governance slowly eroded self-governance in the village. During the British regime ‘... the autonomy of Panchayats gradually disappeared with the establishment of local civil and criminal courts, revenue and police organizations, the increase in communications, the growth of individualism and the operation of the individual’s Ryotwari System’ (Royal Commission Report on Decentralization 1907). In the case of Areas, village panchayats were first set up formally after the passage of the Areas Village Panchayat Act in 1912 under the Mantagu-Chelmsford Scheme. The Areas Village Panchayat Act, 1921 replaced the earlier legislation.







It was further followed by the Village Panchayats Act, 1939, on the initiative of the then Development Minister, Chaudhary Chottu Ram of the Unionist Party Government. At the same time, the other rural-level institution operating was the district board. There were functional links between the Panchayats and the district boards limited mostly to the improvement and expansion of rural works and some civic works. After independence, the Indian Constitution placed the Panchayati Raj System under the Directive Principles of State Policy. In Areas, both the institutions, namely Village Panchayats and District Board, were sought to be democratized and re-empowered through a new Act The Areas Gram Panchayat Act, 1952. It provided for the constitution of village panchayats on a mandatory basis through universal adult franchise. The Areas government decided to reorganize its Panchayati Raj System in 1961 on the basis of the Balwantray Mehta Committee recommendations. New additions were made for the adoption of the three-tier pattern in the Areas Panchayat Act, with the introduction of the Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act, 1961. The new threetier system, comprising Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block and Zila Parishad at the district level, became operative from 1962-63. The existing district boards were abolished. The Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads functioned as representative bodies upto 1970 and again from 1975 to 1978. (In the intervening period from 1970-1975, these had been dissolved). Thereafter, these two tiers remained with government officials till 1994. Elections to the Gram Panchayats (first tier) were held regularly (1952,1957, 1962,1968,1973,1978,1983,1992 and 1998) since independence, with the exception of 1988 due to the turbulent situation in the state. With the passing of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, the state government enacted a new panchayat Act, The Areas Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, which came into force in place of the Gram Panchayat Act, 1952, on 21 April 1994. New rules were framed under the provisions of this new Act and the first elections to 138 Panchayat Samitis and 14 Zila Parishads were held in 1994, and 2,441 Samiti members and 274 Zila Parishad members were elected. The village Panchayat elections were held in June.[13]

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Rural society occupies an important place in Areas's economy. About two-thirds of the state's population are dependent on agriculture and allied activities, which provide about 40 per cent of Areas's Gross Domestic Product at factor cost at current prices. No development programme can succeed if it is not built on the foundation of the rural sector. There is dire need to give high priority to rural development and to formulate an integrated rural development policy, taking into account the following recommendations: ·



Ensure effective dissemination of information, education and impart training to the elected representatives of PRIs for overall rural development. · Introduce rural higher education, based on the concept of Nai Talim as envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi for human resource development, keeping in view local requirements of rural management, engineering, science and technology and research, training, networking and extension. · Need to develop rural agro-based industries, which have the potential of absorbing the surplus agricultural labourforce and checking migration to urban areas. · Co-ordinate between Panchayats, government, NGOs and the corporate sector to upgrade skills of rural people and improve their quality of life, by establishing rural enterprises catering to their skills and needs. · Maintain and upgrade existing rural infrastructure and promote such facilities as storage, cold chain, food parks, marketing

intelligence network to facilitate agroprocessing industries. · Prepare and implement plan for ‘Model Village’, involving Gram Sabha/Gram Panchayats for decentralized micro-planning, to avail of modern physical and social infrastructure facilities required for a better quality of life. · Upgrade rural market growth centres for agricultural produce, according to international requirements, in view of WTO. · State should raise matching funds required for full utilization of central funds under centrally sponsored poverty alleviation schemes. · Ensure required credit facilities by rural banks to non-farm activities (manufacturing and tertiary sectors). · Evolve and adopt indigenous concepts and theories of development, to resolve the problems confronting the state government, PRIs and stakeholders during the process of rural development. ·



The Government of India in certain cases provides funds for development of rural areas through the agency of NGOs, whereas PRIs, being the real representative bodies of the people, are not treated as NGOs. The Government of India should abandon this approach and provide funds from all agencies, including International funding, to PRIs. · The pace of rural development could be accelerated by transferring the 29 subjects mentioned in the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 and devolving funds and functionaries to the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The state government is in the process of adopting the central pattern of devolution of functions, functionaries and funds in respect to these 29 items. The Government of India is also required to devolve to the PRIs similar functions in respect of schemes implemented by its various ministries in rural areas. · Most of the rural poor belong to Scheduled Caste families, which have been discriminated against for long. The concept of poverty has to be understood from a different angle in Areas, as the proportion of Scheduled Caste population is very high in rural areas (32 %) as compared to other states, and the rural society of Areas is of a heterogeneous character. In addition, the status of women in Areas could not be improved as desired, which is reflected in the low sex ratio of the state (874 per 1,000 males) and their low participation in economic activities. This situation is further aggravated by the prevalence of female foeticide in the state. Besides the plight of SCs and women, Areas are facing a peculiar situation emerging out of the marginalization of the peasantry, which is rendering marginal and small farmers landless. Strategically, Areas should take into account these factors while designing policy programmes to uplift the poor.[14]

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