

Environmental Sustainability for Inclusive Rural Development in India

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Abstract - India's commitment to planned economic development reflects the government's determination to improve the economic condition of its people and an affirmation of the role of the government in bringing about this outcome through a variety of social, economic, and institutional means¹. India's First Five Year Plan (1951-56) was aimed at economic stabilization and investment in the agrarian sector. This Plan supported community development aimed at transforming the social and economic conditions of the villages. The Second Five Year Plan initiated structural transformation with an emphasis on heavy industrialization. The first two plans laid the foundation for development planning in India. At the centre of India's current development strategy is raising the rates of economic growth and enabling inclusion. Raising the rates of investment is a key driver to economic growth as well as structural transformation, and investing in infrastructure is expected to remove constraints to growth. Natural capital or environmental resources are an important complement to such planned investment in achieving development goals. In the above setting, this paper is structured to critically examine the rural development programmes to provide environmental benefits and also argued that there is a need of the hour to sustain ecological base for the future rural economic growth, which ensures the rural livelihood of the poor of the fragile regions of the country.

Keywords - Environment, Sustainability, Inclusive, Rural Development, Resources.

I. INTRODUCTION

India's commitment to planned economic development reflects the government's determination to improve the economic condition of its people and an affirmation of the role of the government in bringing about this outcome through a variety of social, economic, and institutional means¹. India's First Five Year Plan (1951-56) was aimed at economic stabilization and investment in the agrarian sector. This Plan supported community development aimed at transforming the social and economic conditions of the villages. The Second Five Year Plan initiated structural transformation with an emphasis on heavy industrialization. The first two plans laid the foundation for development planning in India. At the centre of India's current development strategy is raising the rates of economic growth and enabling

inclusion. Raising the rates of investment is a key driver to economic growth as well as structural transformation, and investing in infrastructure is expected to remove constraints to growth. Natural capital or environmental resources are an important complement to such planned investment in achieving development goals. The Planning Commission notes in its Approach Paper to the 12th Five year Plan that "economic development will be sustainable only if it is pursued in a manner which protects the environment. With the acceleration of economic growth, these pressures are expected to intensify, and we, therefore, need to pay greater attention to the management of water, forests and land². These concerns are reflective of the situation in other countries as well. Globally, environmental degradation expressed as loss of fertile soils, desertification, unsustainable

Forest management, reduction of freshwater availability and an extreme biodiversity loss rate does not leave enough time to the environment for recovery and regeneration. Nearly two-thirds of the services provided by nature to humankind are found to be in decline worldwide

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. A descriptive and explorative methodology is followed. The secondary data based on Various reports from Govt depts. And NGOs.
2. The published sources such as Web sites, periodicals and newspaper Reports are liberally used for the preparation of the paper.

Globally, economy-wide policy reforms designed to promote growth and liberalization have been encouraged with little regard to their environmental consequences, presumably on the assumption that these consequences would either take care of themselves or could be dealt with separately⁴. Such policies will limit growth and increase the risk to economic activity and human well-being. 'Given the fundamental uncertainties about the nature of ecosystem dynamics and the dramatic consequences, It would, however, be incorrect to posit growth and environmental sustainability as mutually incompatible. What matters is the content of growth i.e.the composition of inputs (including environmental resources) and outputs (including waste products). This content is determined by, among other things, the economic institutions within which human activities are conducted⁶.



Sustainable use of environmental resources can contribute to growth and stability. Global debates on green growth draw attention to the contribution of environmental resources to increasing the productivity of investment and to the effectiveness and longevity of the infrastructural investment. The elasticity of substitution between natural capital and other inputs is found to be low, which implies that it may be possible to compensate for the loss of natural capital with other capital inputs in the short run but not in the long run. Moreover, while direct economic benefits from environmental policies will accrue mainly over the long term, green policies can also contribute to short-term economic growth⁷. This strengthens the case for paying attention to environmental sustainability. There have been references in the literature on the contribution of natural capital to sustained and equitable growth⁸.

The UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Sustainability notes that there exists tremendous opportunity for a dramatic improvement in the lives of the rural poor, even while they move towards more sustainable production models. Resource users will need access to assets, technology and markets. Success will depend, in great part, on investment. Success will also depend on institutions and initiatives with the capacity to effectively coordinate efforts in priority areas of agriculture, land management and water⁹. The Schemes of the Ministry of Rural Development are well located to deliver green outcomes, i.e. to restore and enhance ecosystem services and natural capital.

There have also been extensive discussions in the literature on how to deliver on environmentally sustainable growth. Measures range from regulatory and institutional to market-based economic instruments. Reliance on market instruments alone will not deliver environmentally sustainable growth¹⁰, with the market being unable to generate pricing signals and green responses due to issues such as externalities, the 'public-good' nature of environmental assets, information asymmetry and agency problems and missing property rights. In particular, regulating or supporting services provided by ecosystems are difficult to define, measure, value and assign

The report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) presents strategies for inclusive rural development embodying the principles of environmental sustainability. It recommends measures needed to achieve green, including measuring and tracking, the use of incentives and the building of capacities. It also contains a number of case studies showing how green results can be achieved.

The report has examined six flagships Government of India (GoI) schemes, namely-Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme (MGNREGS); National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM); Integrated Watershed Development Programme (IWDP); Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY); National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDP) and Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA) to recommend

actions and measures to achieve greening outcomes. In specific, it looks at:

1. Improving quality and carrying of ecosystems including water in surface bodies, aquifers and soil profile and arresting degradation of natural resources.
2. Enabling sustainable livelihoods based on sustainable use of natural resources.
3. Strengthening ecosystem resilience to enable them to recover from extreme weather events and cope with climate change.

Reducing the ecological footprint of interventions through efficient use of energy, material, natural resources and increased use of renewable materials.

A. Inclusive Rural development embodying the Principles of Environmental Sustainability

The schemes of the Ministry of Rural Development are uniquely positioned to influence the decisions of hundreds of thousands of natural resource managers and to direct investment flows towards the innumerable initiatives that aggregate to the improved result of regenerating natural capital. The MoRD schemes can enable, across thousands of locations, the creation of community institutions for natural resource management; strengthening of the capacity of community institutions and field level government staff on natural resource regeneration; fostering innovative green solutions; and investing directly in regenerating natural assets using location-specific strategies. It is through concerted action by resource users and resource managers (individuals, communities, enterprises and governments) that green outcomes can be delivered by the rural development schemes. Natural capital is often valued and understood best at the local level, and local knowledge is essential for effective solutions. Communities need to be active supporters of the transition to sustainable development, asserting their rights and also fulfilling their responsibilities in terms of sustainable management of natural resources. Rural development schemes provide a strong opportunity to aggregate 'small initiatives' in several locations to improve natural capital on a macro scale. These self-governing institutions and their capacities will be key to the greater effectiveness of regulatory and market instruments in ecosystem regeneration and improving natural capital. Rural Development Schemes in India The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) spearheads the country's efforts to reduce poverty in rural areas. Until recently, its work was divided among three departments: (i) Department of Rural Development (ii) Department of Land Resources (iii) Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation. In July 2011, the Department of Drinking & Sanitation was converted into a separate ministry, the Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation.

The MoRD website states, "This Ministry's main objective is to alleviate rural poverty and ensure improved quality of life for the rural population, especially those below the

poverty line.” Towards this end, it sponsors scores of development programmes, big and small, influencing ‘various spheres of rural life and activities, from income generation to environmental replenishment.’¹⁴ A small number of programmes of the two ministries – MoRD and MDWS, however, account for a substantial share of the expenditure on rural development. Primarily, these include the following:

1. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS): This aims at enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage employment in a financial year to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. (Budgetary allocation in 2012-13: INR 33,000 billion)

2. National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM): The basic objective of the National Rural Livelihood Mission is to create efficient and effective institutional platforms for the rural poor that enable them to increase their household incomes through sustainable livelihood enhancements and improved access to financial services. It plans to cover 70 million households living below the poverty line (BPL) in rural India. (Budgetary allocation in 2012-13: INR 3,563 billion)

3. Integrated Watershed Development Programme (IWDP): The main objectives of the IWDP are to restore ecological balance in a watershed by harnessing, conserving and developing degraded natural resources such as soil, water and vegetative cover, and thereby help provide sustainable livelihoods to the local people. (Budgetary allocation in 2012-13: INR 2,744 billion)

4. Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY): This scheme provides financial grants to rural BPL families and the next-of-kin of defence personnel killed in action for construction of houses and up-gradation of existing unserviceable kutcha houses. (Budgetary allocation in 2012-13: INR 9,966 billion)

5. National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP): The goal of this scheme is to provide adequate safe water for domestic uses on a sustainable basis. (Budgetary allocation in 2012-13: INR 10,500 billion)

Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA): The Total Sanitation Campaign, now renamed as the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan, assists Gram Panchayats to achieve comprehensive sanitation coverage. (Budgetary allocation in 2012-13: INR 3,500 billion)

The major schemes listed above can potentially make a significant contribution to sustaining and regenerating natural resources and ecosystem services. Some examples are:

•A vast majority of the works under the MGNREGS are linked to water, soil and land. The list of ‘permissible’ works provide environmental services such as conservation of water, groundwater recharge, reduced soil erosion, increased soil fertility, conservation of

biodiversity, reclamation of degraded crop and grazing lands, enhanced leaf manure, fuelwood and non-wood forest products supply.

•Watershed Development programmes (IWDP) are focused primarily on ecological restoration by reducing soil erosion, increasing water storage (in-situ moisture conservation, surface water bodies and groundwater recharge), improving vegetative cover, particularly on fallow lands and strengthening related livelihoods. IWDP can also encourage sustainable natural resource use, particularly in watershed projects’ consolidation phase.

•Under NRLM, the guidelines for non-timber forest produce-based livelihoods under the Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) identify regeneration and sustainable harvesting of NTFP species as key objectives; similarly, increased soil health and fertility to sustain agriculture-based livelihoods is an objective under the sustainable agriculture component of the MKSP.

•The NRDWP guidelines have earmarked 20 percent of the NRDWP funds for the sustainability of water supply, including long-term source sustainability. If water supply schemes under NRDWP include components to ensure water source sustainability, NRDWP will have a significant green impact. The scheme, with its commitment to safe water quality, is expected to invest in water treatment facilities to address contamination. The scheme could further invest in the safe disposal of the sludge from such water treatment to augment green results.

•Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan- formerly the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC)- is by its very nature a green programme. In recent years, its scope has been extended beyond the eradication of open defecation to comprehensive sanitation. Due to this expansion in scope, ten percent of the project funds are earmarked for solid and liquid waste management. NBA, thereby, can ensure that such waste does not contaminate the water system.

III. SUMMING UP

It could be concluded that greening rural development depends on renewable clean energy, Sustainable farming practices, promoting sustainable tourism, ecological restoration in rural areas, social protection in respect of utilization of green resources and measures and dialogues on the promotion of rural greening economy. In India, greening rural development is essential for ensuring the environmental sustainability of economic growth, and rural development schemes can contribute significantly to conserving water resources, soil quality and biodiversity. Further, It is recommended that the measures needed to achieve green, including measuring and tracking, the use incentives and the building of capacities. It also contains a number of case studies showing how green results can be achieved.

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