

Sustainable Rural Development and It's Changing Dimensions: Conceptual and Contextual Issues

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Concept of Development

The concept of 'development' is a subject to various theoretical interpretations and empirical observations. Although the topic 'development' has been regularly studied by scholars and academicians from different angles and perspectives, the detail study of development is somewhat, paradoxical. If development is viewed as human aspiration for attainment of conditions, necessary for self-development, the idea may be traced since the beginning of human civilization. On the other hand, as a political ideology or as an academic discourse development has more often than not been considered as a twentieth century and more specifically a post-second world war phenomenon.¹ In usual dictionary interpretations, development means an act or process of developing or being develop, growth, progress, a significant consequence or event, a sequential occurrence of various changes. A concerned view will definitely admit that all the meanings are related to changes. So, development actually denotes some efforts accompanied by change in mindset in all affairs of human beings. Therefore development can be defined as a process of change from an existing situation to the better and desired position. Generally the term development implies a change that is desirable. But point to be noted that sometime not all changes lead to development whereas all manifestation of development can be traced to some change somewhere. Development is both a cause and consequence to change. Katar Singh,² describes the term development as a set or vector of desirable societal object or a development index, which does not decrease over time. Some of the objectives that are usually included in the set are, (a) increase in real income, per capita (economic growth); (b) improvement in distribution of

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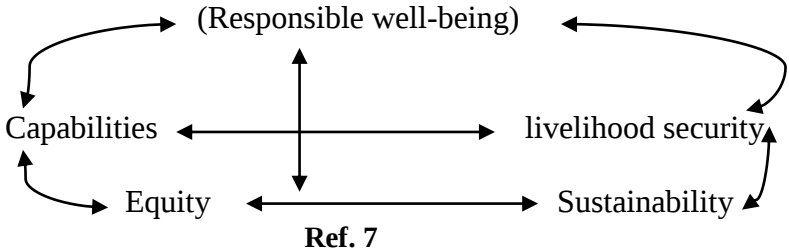
income (equality); (c) political and economic freedom; and (d) equitable access to resources, education, healthcare, employment, opportunities and justice.

So development is another name of melioration. In the present context of a highly uneven world, a better-life for most people connotes the fulfillment of the basic needs: adequate food to maintain good health, a safe healthy place to live in, affordable services available to everyone and these are can be provided with dignity and respect. Durgesh Nandini, rightly opines that development includes economic and social factors, natural and cultural values as the basis for the development of human personality.³

In this context the radical version of development is fundamentally different from the more conventional “economic growth”, which can be achieve producing more, good and services on the one side of the national account GDP- and a larger total income on the other GNI. It does not mean economic growth can remove the poverty or social and economic inequality. Most of the cases we have seen economic growth functions in the most basic sense, to channel money and power to the already rich and famous. Development does not recognize it. If growth merely concentrates wealth in the hands of a few, it is not development. Development is interested not so much in the growth of an economy but rather the conditions under which production occurs and results that follow from it. Development means starting change at the bottom rather than the top.⁴ The discourse of Human Development in development thinking redefined the concept of “development” in terms of human development and enlargement of people choice. It stressed that the most critical choices that people should have include the options to lead a long and healthy life, to be knowledgeable, and to find access to the assents, employment and income needed for a decent standard of living.⁵ Prof Anil Kumar Jana has summerised the nature of development very preciously. According to him, development is a positive change in social, political, economic and cultural spheres of life of the majority without involving violence and social crisis. It is a multidimensional process involving radical changes in social structures, popular perceptions and political institutions as well as

economic growth through removal of inequality and eradication of poverty⁶. Besides these it includes the improvement in education, health care and the innovations in techniques of cultivation.

According to Chambers, “The objective of development is well-being for all. Livelihood security is basic to well-being. Capabilities are means to livelihood and well-being. Equity (the poor, the weak, vulnerable and exploited should come first) and sustainability is needed to be good, conditions, and change must be sustainable-economically, socially and environmentally.



Rural Development:

Like “development”, rural development is also a comprehensive and multidimensional concept. Before I explain the different connotation of rural development, I would like, express the meaning of ‘rural’. A. R. Desai has identified some special characteristics of rural world, which are, (a) occupation – totality of cultivators and their families. (b) Environment predominance of nature over anthrop-social environment, direct relationship to nature, (c) small communities, (d) the density of population is very low, (e) rural communities are more homogeneous in racial and psychological traits, (f) Territorial, occupational and other forms of social mobility of the population are comparatively less intensive. (g) Predominance of personal contracts and relatively durable relations⁸. Like him P.R. Bose and V.N. Vashists explains that the term ‘Rural’ means an area characterized by non- urban style of living, occupational structure, social organization and settlement pattern. Rural is essentially agricultural; its settlement system consists of villages, socially it connotes greater inter- dependence among people, more deeply rooted community life and a slow moving rhythm of life built around natural phenomena; and

occupationally it is highly dependent on crop farming, animal enterprises, tree crops and related activities like plantation, agricultural, modern dairying, sheep rearing and a host of others which require industrial organization but are agricultural in the sense that they pertain to plant and animal life.⁹ So rural development is touching all aspects of rural life including agricultural development, literacy, health, sanitation, improvement in communications, rural housing, rural industry, animal husbandry etc; thus we say rural development means to process of improving living conditions, providing minimum needs, increasing productivity and employment opportunities and developing potential of rural resources. Rural development is the strategy to improve the social, economic, natural and technological atmosphere of rural population. Michel Todaro has mentioned the basic objectives of rural development in a concise way- a) Improvement in level of living including employment, education, health and nutrition, housing and a variety of social services, (b) Decreasing inequality in the distribution of rural incomes and in rural urban balances in incomes and economic opportunities; (c) The capacity of rural sector to sustain and accelerate the pace of these improvement.¹⁰ The following timeline on changing ideas of rural development help us to understand the changing themes of rural development in different country and also helps to reveal the nature of rural development:

1950 → Modernization, dual economic model, “backward”
↓ agriculture, community development, lazy peasants.

1960 → Transformation approach, technology transfer,
↓ mechanization, agricultural extension, growth and role
↓ of agricultural, green revolution (start) rational peasants.

1970 → Redistribution with growth, basic needs, integrated rural
↓ development, state agricultural policies, state-led credit,
↓ urban bias, induced innovation, green revolution
↓ (continued), rural growth linkage.

1980 → Structural adjustment , free markets, getting prices right,
↓ retreat of the state, rise of the NGOs, rapid rural
↓ appraisal (RPA), Farming System Research(FSR), Food
↓ security and famine analysis, Rural Development as a

process not product, Woman in Development (WID), poverty alleviation.

1990 → Micro-credit, participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), actor-oriented Rural Development, stakeholder analysis, rural safety nets, Gender and Development (GAD), environment and sustainability, poverty reduction.

2000 → Sustainable livelihoods, good governance, decentralisation, critique of participation, sector-wide approaches, social protection, and poverty eradication.¹¹

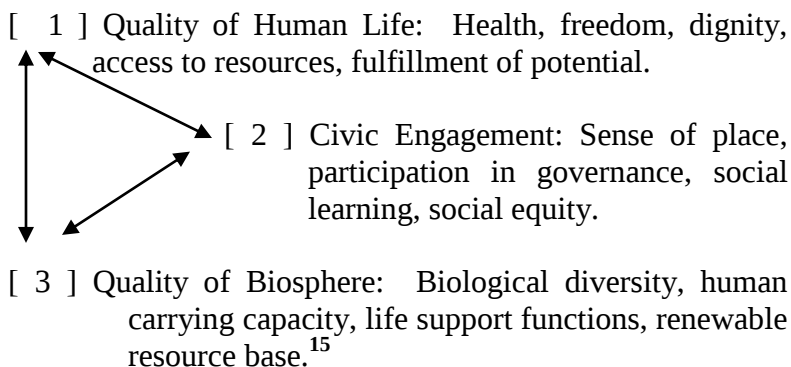
The approaches and strategies of rural development depend on ideology, political; structure and requirements of the nation. So the meaning of rural development varies across regions, societies, cultures and ecologies. In the Indian context, rural development may be perceived as the development in the fields of agriculture, cottage industries, housing, food, health, employment, education, communication, grass-root democracy, people's participation, environment protection and collective upliftment of all sections of rural society.

Sustainable Rural Development

The concept of sustainable development is a direct attempt to resolve the tension between economic growth and environmental protection. Basically it emerges from the discourse of environmental politics. The core philosophy of sustainable development is the reconciliation of economic growth with environmental justice. Sustainable development was given a broader social meaning in "Our Common Future", published by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987), and commonly known as Brundtland Report. After that it has been taken up by almost every international institution, agency and NGO. The most widely used definition taken from the Brundtland Report, is that, "sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own need." It contains the two key concepts of needs and limits. The concept 'needs' demand that overriding priority should be given to the essential needs of the world's poor, both North and South. Poverty and unequal distribution of resources are identified as

major causes of environmental degradation. Secondly the concept, of ‘limits’ recognise that the current state of technology and social organisation imposes limits on the ability of the environment to meet present and future needs, so we must moderate our demands on the natural environment and restrain our unjustified demands from nature. As a policy paradigm it shifts the notion of traditional environmentalism which only focuses on environment protection. This new idea is much concerned with economic and social development as it is with environmental protection. It involves a process of change in which core components of society resources, investment, technologies, institution, consumption patterns – come to operate in greater harmony with ecosystem.¹² According to James Meadowcroft, ‘sustainable development was not formulated as either a logical construct or an operational maxim – but rather as a potentially unifying political meta – objective, with a suggestive normative core’. As this core has been passed down in the international process extending through UNCED to its follow ups, ‘it has been understood to embody ideas about promoting human well-being, meeting the basic needs of the poor and protecting the welfare of future generation (intra –and inter generational justice), preserving environmental resources and global life support system (respecting limits), integrating economics and environment in decision making and encouraging popular participation in development process.¹³ The WCED, has identified five, core principles of sustainable development, which are equity, democracy, the precautionary principle, policy integration and planning. According to Anil Agarwal, “Sustainability, thus demands the creation of a political order in which firstly, control of natural resources rests to the maximum extent possible with local communities who are dependent on those resources; and secondly, decision-making within the community is as participatory open and democratic as possible. The more this happens, the more we will move towards sustainable development”.¹⁴

The following figure depicts the model of sustainability, in which the interrelationships three basic components are emphasized.



It is mentioned earlier that, the notion of sustainable development has changed the whole dimension of rural development. Sustainable rural development therefore, is the only means to achieve a measure of inter – generational equity, as we have failed to achieve till date growth and distribution for the rural poor. This entails sustained efforts to raise the quality of life of rural poor. It aims to reach the genuine stake holders with long term perspective. Sustainable rural development means the rural development which is guided by the principles or the strategy of sustainability. Sustainable rural development can be defined as basically the development which meets the need of present generation of rural people without compromising the capacity of future generation to fulfill their own needs. It aims to maintain a delicate balance between the human need to improve life styles and feelings of wellbeing. Sustainable rural development is accountable to the poor, and hence it should ensure that the poor have adequate access to sustainable and secure livelihood.

Contextual Issues in Development

Before listing the set of contextual issues of sustainable rural development in India, it will be very useful to discuss the indicators of sustainability. There are some specific indicators, which are needed to address for achieving the goal of rural sustainable development. Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI) Project Report has given emphasis on the following serial indicators i.e. i) percentage of population living below poverty line, ii) unemployment rate, iii) nutrition status of children, iv)

mortality rate under five years old, v) infant mortality rate, vi) percentage of population with adequate sewage disposal facilities, vii) population with access to safe drinking water, viii) population of primary healthcare facilities, ix) children have the equal opportunity to reach grade five of primary education, x) adult literacy rate, xi) immunization against infectious childhood diseases, xii) life expectancy at birth xiii) ratio of average female wage to male wage.¹⁶ So sustainable rural development requires policies and projects to be designed and implemented in such a way that social and economic improvement and empowerment not only take place but also sustain resource management and minimize the environment degradation, reducing poverty and discrimination by generating employment opportunity and improving living standard of rural people is the key. Former UNO Secretary– General Mr. Kofi Annan have identified some priority areas for action, i.e. water and sanitation, energy, health, agriculture, biodiversity and ecosystem.

So far we have discussed about the sustainable rural development from the western oriented idea of it. But one thing we should keep in our mind that when we are trying to conceptualise the very idea of sustainable rural development, we should remember that our country has long and rich history of sustainable rural development. The eminent writers and thinkers like Gandhi, Rabindranath and Swami Vivekananda had all being actively involved in what we termed as sustainable rural development. Though, it must be admitted that they were less theorist and more activist, who undertook long term programme of rural reconstruction for the upliftment of the rural poor. The roots of the sustainable can be found in their thinking and writing. They also tried to maintain balance between human need and ecology. So we had our own paradigm of sustainable rural development. Their concept of sustainable rural development is more relevant in Indian context, than, the theories emanated from the west.

Rural Development: Gandhi, Tagore and Vivekananda

Mahatma Gandhi had a deep concern for sustainable development. His “Sarvodaya” ideology highlighted welfare for all not only all humans, but also the entire creation. He built a indigenous model

of rural development. Prof Jana, have identified Gandhiji's notion towards sustainable rural development by pointing out the following major areas – i) Labour intensive, diversified, individual and cooperative farming supported by cattle-based economy to ensure food supply, conservation of social and maintenance of animal and plant life, use of animal waste for production of compost and prevention of pollution to ensure cleanliness. ii) Development of cottage and other village industries as ancillary to agriculture. iii) Maintenance of ecological balance so as to ensure interdependence and symbolic relationship among man, animal and plant. iv) Full utilization of village resources like land, cattle capital, machinery through organisation cooperatives to minimize costs and accomplish possible goals. V) Protection of natural resources to ensure sustainable development.¹⁷

Tagore is hailed as a versatile genius who left his remarks also in the arena of human development. Kumkum Chattapadhaya, argues that, Tagore's concept of rural reconstruction plan was based upon a effective realization of the village needs and priorities which we gradually comprehended as he came in close contact with the villagers. His vision was to enable the villagers to help themselves and taken up the leadership of the village on their own shoulder. This was a programme of self help or self assurance.¹⁸ Today what we termed "local needs to be met locally" or "efficient use of local resource" is also emphasized by him. The goal of self reliance was basic to Tagore's scheme of rural reconstruction. He stressed on the united awakening of rural folk to generate and support the process of sustainable development. He wanted to work directly with the peasantry and help them upgrade their skills and methodology of work to improve overall productivity. Tagore understood the enormity of the need but he was determined to begin work to ensure better livelihood for the rural folk. His objective of rural reconstruction was to generate education and training in economic and social aspects- which included awareness of health and hygienic and total development through cultural orientation. He stressed on the united awakening of rural folk to generate and support the process of sustainable development. The lab-to-land approach that was emphasized since the mid 80s was only a reflection of Tagore's ideal of carrying

technology to the villages and properly equipping them so that agricultural production and productivity and revival of agro-based and cottage industries could great a boost.¹⁹ Both Tagore and Gandhi wanted the self governing power of the panchayats and to involve the common people in the discourse, planning and to take part in the development process. They continuously tried to unify men as a complete unity because an alienated individual is but a powerless fragment. Gandhi continuously raised his voice for the fulfillment of their needs.

Swami Vivekananda has given a pragmatic approach towards this issue. Though he had no occasion to prepare a detailed scheme for the country's rural re construction, but he has a vision to uplift the down trodden of rural Indian. To him fate of nation depends upon on the condition of the masses. Swami Vivekananda's model of rural development, which we are trying to construct, has its roots in his ingenuity. Swami Prabhananda, has pointed out Swamiji's ideas of rural development by mentioning following points.

- a.) The real nation, those who lived in the cottages, has forgotten their manhood, their individuality. Their lost manhood and individuality were to be restored through development programme.
- b.) Swami Vivekananda extolled the glory of human nature. There is scarcely any treasure in this world more valuable than human beings. We have to be aware of this truth as soon as possible and make the best of it collaboratively as well as individually to ensure all-round growth and development of the human world.
- c.) To strike a balance between the individual and the society, ensuring the health of the body polity and providing equal opportunities for individual growth.
- d.) Swami Vivekananda held that ignorance, inequality and desire were at the root of all human miseries. The problem of inequality leading to special privileges demands our attention. The approach for eliminating privileges should not be strifes between the 'haves' and the 'haves not' but by compelling the 'haves' to help the 'haves not' to rise socially, economically and spiritually.

e) Swami Vivekananda repeatedly expressed the principles of self reliance. To him, all the wealth cannot help one little Indian village, if the people are not taught to help themselves. Rural development programmes must seek a maximum share of self help and self reliance on the part of the rural population.

f) In Swamiji's diagnosis the degradation of women was one of the major causes of India's downfall. It is not possible for a bird to fly only on one wing. Likewise a society is not making progress by neglecting its womenfolk. Swamiji very correctly said, "the best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women."²⁰

United Nations Organisation (UNO): Sustainable Development Goals

Now if we pay our careful attention on the resolution taken by UNO on 17 Sustainable Development Goals in replace of 8 (eight) Millennium Development Goals for the next fifteen years, 2015-2030, we will find they have also emphasized on the above mentioned issues. Solution to climate change is now being addressed through multiple approaches – reducing emissions, improving capacity of the poor to face climate change and increasing sequestration of atmospheric carbon dioxide and also the approach of equitable development among the countries. The seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set for 2015-2030 are as follows:²¹

1. End poverty.
2. End hunger.
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well being.
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education.
5. Achieve gender equality.
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and

10. sustainable industrialisation, and foster innovation.
11. Reduce inequality within and among countries.
12. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
13. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
14. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (taking note of agreements made by the UNFCCC forum).
15. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
16. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss.
17. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
18. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Issues in Sustainable Rural Development

After discussing the long background of India's own vision of sustainable rural development and also the UNO's recent perspective on sustainable development goals, it may not be difficult to draw the basic contextual issues of it. Third world country like India, where agro rural segments constitutes the bulk of the economic and the socio polity, both the contextual and the policy parameters of development have necessarily tended to deviate from the western development paradigm. Considering the unique aspect of Indian socio-political nature; it must be admitted that here sustainable rural development is multidimensional phenomena. The important issues of sustainable rural development are follows:

1. Agricultural, land, soil and water management.
2. Access of opportunities for work and for poverty reduction.
3. Health, hygiene and sanitation.
4. Secure universal Education.

5. Woman and child development.
6. Participation in decision making and village planning.
7. Improvement of rural communication and rural infrastructure development.
8. Environmental planning.

There are large numbers of issues of sustainable rural development in India. But it is not possible to take and examine all of them in limited time bound research. Priority should be given according to their importance. According to researcher the above mentioned issues are very relevant to our contemporary time and without which development is not possible. As the main aim of this article is to deal with issues and different dimensions of the sustainable rural development, confined only to the same.

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