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THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURE IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Introduction : Agriculture plays different roles in rural development across developing countries. These roles can be shaped to address the challenges facing low-income communities and marginalized, under-served groups such as ethnic minorities, people living with disabilities, LGBTQ community, the elderly, women, and youths. Development in rural areas, up to a large extent depends on Agriculture, as it constitutes the prime source of livelihood and food for farmers and other villagers. But, the statement also hold true, the other way round, that is agricultural in a village also depends hugely on the infrastructure developments and scientific advancements in farming. Rural development still remains the core of the overall development of the country. More than two-third of the country's people are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood, and one-third of rural India is still below the poverty line. Therefore, it is important for the government to be productive and provide enough facilities to upgrade their standard of living.

• **What is Rural Development?** : Rural Development is a process of change, by which the efforts of the people themselves are united, those of government authorities to improve their economic, social and cultural conditions of communities in to the

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life of the nation and to enable them to contribute fully to national programme. Rural development is a term that concentrates on the actions taken for the development of rural areas to improve the economy.

- **Importance of Agriculture in Rural Areas :** As farming is the fabric of rural communities and its main economic activity, it plays an important part in rural development, even in countries where agriculture is of lesser economic significance because of land use impacts.

IMPORTANCE OF FARMING-

- In rural areas throughout the world, agriculture represents the predominant land use and a major component of the viability of rural areas. Farming and related activities make up the basic fabric of rural life, contributing significantly to the overall state of rural regions in terms of employment and business opportunities, infrastructure and quality of the environment.
- The degree to which farming represents a share of the rural economy, and hence its relative importance as a sector, determines its potential economic contribution to rural development. In India, farming is the primary economic activity of a region and support the vast majority of the population in employment. In such regions, it is clear that overall social and political stability is inextricably linked with the condition of the agriculture sector.
- However, in most economically developed countries, farming accounts for a relatively small part of a diversified rural economy, and in addition the significance of agriculture in terms of the proportion of national wealth and employment is, in most regions, in decline. This does not lessen the potential role of farming in rural development in those countries, but the contribution of alternative economic activities, which may offer durable prospects for employment and economic progress, should also be included.
- Since the contribution of farming to rural development in different countries varies to a great extent, policy responses need to be correspondingly distinguished, with the aim of maximising benefits to society.
- Support for rural development by means both of on-farm and non-farming activities for which the state of agriculture is nevertheless a critical factor.

ON-FARM ACTIVITIES-

- The maintenance of appropriate levels of farm employment is a key concern in countries where the greater part of employment is currently provided in the farming sector. Political and social stability could be especially threatened by changes in economic activity which produce sudden impacts on farming. Small and isolated economies, particularly those whose trade is dependent on a limited range of agricultural products, may be vulnerable to changes in global trading conditions. Even in those economically developing countries in

which one agricultural sector is considered efficient in global terms, rural society, which overall depends on many other sectors of activity may be at risk of serious upheaval from rapid change. In these regions, efforts to strengthen the farm sector could include investment and improvements in productivity, while assuring the management of consequent changes to rural employment patterns.

- The availability of labour can dictate the type of farming practised and in particular the extent of mechanisation. Those employed in farming may have skills which are not easily adaptable to alternative activities, even if the opportunities were available. Many societies have a need to avoid high rates of rural–urban migration and to manage structural change in rural areas without excessive disruption. Thus, even if production of a commodity were to be more efficient in another part of the world, a country should have the means to limit disruptive and potentially catastrophic changes to its rural economy.
- It is recognised that, in principle, increasing employment on farms can be achieved, in the short term, by increasing production: more labour is required to produce more output. However, over the longer term, this trend will be superseded by increases in productivity, resulting in the expectation of an overall and continual decrease in farm employment. While the trend for farm employment may be downwards, especially in developed countries, there are some exceptions illustrating the potential for the farm sector to be a buffer against unemployment in specific cases. In some central European economies undergoing rapid development in the 1990s, there was an apparent rise in the proportion of the population engaged in agriculture. This corresponded to a decline in industrial employment as the economy was adjusted to market forces and people migrated back to rural areas in search of economic security. However, the phenomenon should be seen as a temporary response to extreme circumstances.
- Some consumers are demanding food products which are produced using labour-intensive techniques. For example, organic farming, which relies on the non-use of synthetic inputs and annual rotation of crops and pasture, has been shown to require an increased level of employment owing to the greater amount of manual labour required. Organic products have been identified by some consumers as having more attractive characteristics than conventionally produced food and retailers are able to command a price premium.
- In societies which recognize the cultural importance of ensuring a balanced economic development throughout the territory, including in its peripheral areas, particular attention will have to be given to supporting the viability of the farm sector. Efforts to maintain or increase employment in areas suffering from structural disadvantages, such as remoteness and difficulty of terrain, where there may be little alternative activity to agriculture, should

inevitably focus on the farm sector. However, in rural areas where a diverse rural economy exists, employment and other rural development initiatives should examine all the alternatives to assess the most appropriate and durable options.

- Society may demand that farmers should manage their agricultural activities in ways which also provide environmental services to the community as a whole, such as minimising the risk of certain natural disasters, or cultural services, such as conservation of rural heritage. These points are discussed further in the European Commission's paper, "Agriculture's contribution to environmentally and culturally related non-trade concerns".
- Policies designed to promote the viability of the farm sector can include encouraging investment, training, applied research and appropriate technology, and policies to manage structural adjustment such as land reform and generational change. Rural development initiatives should bring together all those with a legitimate interest in proposals, including where appropriate partnership between the public and private sectors.

ANCILLARY INDUSTRIES AND NON-FARM ACTIVITIES-

- The farming sector will require ancillary industries to service and support the production activities. These enterprises are also a source for employment and economic development, although many are not located in rural areas.
- In peripheral areas, the quality of provision of essential services, such as health care and education, will depend on the level of economic activity and size of local population. These factors may be dependent on the relative prosperity of the farm sector, particularly in areas having few alternative sources of employment.
- Increased economic stability can be provided to the farm-based rural economy by encouraging the development of activities to add value to their production, such as processing of consumer products on-farm or in the rural areas. Farmers can also take greater control of their economic position through co-operative ventures or by selling to consumers directly through farm shops and markets.
- The farm buildings and land represent assets to farmers which can be used in diverse ways to develop non-farm income. Projects frequently cited in economically developed countries include educational initiatives to provide visitors to the farm with learning experiences and farm tourism.
- Improvements in infrastructure, notably communications networks, may increase the competitiveness of the farm and other sectors of the rural economy. Infrastructural investments can also facilitate the installation of new enterprises on farm sites, although such developments are not dependent on farming.

Contribution to Rural Development : Rural development is understood primarily in the

economic sense of the process of assuring a progressive improvement in economic security of people in rural areas. Rural areas are usually defined in terms of maximum population density, with figures varying from 150 to 500 inhabitants per square kilometre, depending on the structure of society.¹ While any economic activity in rural areas will have the potential to contribute to rural development, the particular roles farming may play fall into four broad categories:

- **Employment.** In countries whose share of overall employment in agriculture is at high levels, for example where farmers represent over 50% of the workforce, farming is likely to be the key economic activity determining the progress of rural development. With such a substantial proportion of the labour force engaged in agriculture, any policy which led to a swift and artificial reduction in employment could have disastrous consequences for the labour-force and dependants, leading to social and political instability.
- **Related economy.** The farm sector in every country supports a range of ancillary and service industries, generating economic activity in supply and distribution chains as well as processing industries. Where farming is the primary economic activity, the entire rural economy, including services such as health care, education and basic infrastructure, may depend on the profitability of the sector.
- In **remote and peripheral areas**, where society has identified a legitimate priority to prevent depopulation, farming is likely to be one of a limited range of economic activities possible to maintain the economic viability of the region.
- Throughout rural areas, farming may contribute to rural development by providing **environmental and cultural services** to society.
- **Objectives of Rural Development-**

The objectives composed by the government in the sixth five-year plan for rural development are:

- To improve productivity and wages of rural people
- To guarantee increased and quick employment possibilities
- To demolish unemployment and bring a notable decline in underemployment
- To guarantee an increase in the standard of living of the underprivileged population
- To provide the basic needs: elementary education, healthcare, clean drinking water, rural roads, etc. Improving the quality of life of the rural population.
- To improve the infrastructure of the rural areas.
- To reduce unemployment by providing opportunities for employment.
- To provide clean water, education facilities, electricity and proper communication.

- Closing the gap between local governing bodies and the Central administration for improved economic communication. Additionally, rural development aims to delegate executive powers to local councils to execute policies crafted by experts.
- Utilizing natural resources within a region to maximize economic benefits for the residents. This involves implementing crucial land reforms to enhance agricultural output and productivity for everyone involved.
- **Factors Affecting the Agriculture in Rural Areas :** To cultivate the soil, grow crops, and care for livestock is the art and science of agriculture. The **processing of plant and animal products for human consumption**, as well as their marketing, is included. Food and textiles are largely produced by agriculture.

Now, let's discuss the Factors Influencing Agriculture in detail-

- **Climate:** As you know, climate includes elements like temperature and precipitation which directly affect the crops. The amount of rain and temperature even decide which crops can grow in which places.
- **Irrigation:** Irrigating the crops is key, and having a decent irrigation system can do wonders for any crop.
- **Technology:** Having modern technology makes it easier to grow crops and care for them. For example, the invention of tube wells made irrigation much easier.
- **Type of Soil:** The soil type is crucial because different types of soil carry different nutrients and have unique properties that can help to grow different crops.
- **Agriculture And Rural Economy :** We promote sustainable economic growth in agriculture, the food industry, and in rural areas.

We are responsible for:

- agricultural policy
- rural land management, with the aim of reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- supporting locally-led development in rural communities
- preventing, controlling and eradicating animal disease in Scotland
- enhancing animal welfare
- providing scientific services and advice on agricultural and environmental matters
- **Components of Rural Development :** Social, economic and overall development of a rural area depends on a wide number of factors like agriculture, better planning, employment generation etc. We will discuss in brief some of the chief components of rural development below-

1) Employment Generation : Employment Creation is the main component of rural development. Though, in rural areas, agriculture sector is the largest employer. Therefore,

to generate employment opportunities in villages, there is a need to strengthen agriculture sector and also setup other industries.

2) Better Planning : Better planning must be done by the government, to boost up local economy of a village by employing development model conducive to its growth. A village economy largely depends on agriculture and hence any positive changes made in the latter will automatically improve the state of former.

3) Good Condition of Roads : Better road connectivity is a major sign of rural development which also improves the agriculture sector. Better roads and connectivity to urban trade centers mean that the farm produces reach the market early and fetch good price, hence, aiding in agricultural economy as well.

4) Modern Techniques : Introducing modern techniques in agriculture and allied industries will automatically improve the overall development of villages. Using genetically modified seeds and organic fertilizers for better yield will consequently lead to overall development of rural areas.

5) Basic Amenities : Availability of basic amenities like water and electricity is also a major component of rural development. It also improves crop yield by ensuring that the field never run dry even when the natural rain is scarce. Similarly, continuous electricity supply is also beneficial for agriculture.

Initiatives for Rural Development-

1) Five Year Plan : Beginning in 1951, the Government of India has been framing and implementing five year plan, after every five year, to improve the overall development of the country, primarily in the rural areas. Under the five year plan dams had been built, irrigation canals constructed, agricultural reforms introduced etc.

2) Increased Budgetary Allocations for Agriculture : Government has in the subsequent years increased spending on agriculture and related sectors in a bid to make them independent and self reliant. The money is spent on improving agriculture sector right from the production stage to marketing stage.

3) Good Road Connectivity : Good roads are the most significant symbols of rural development and also the most important one. They not only reduce the distance between villages and cities but also boost up the agricultural industry by providing fast and easy transportation.

4) Giving Agricultural Credit : Giving agricultural loans at reasonable rates to small and poor farmers will also aid in rural development. When a poor farmer is given credit to purchase fertilizers, farm equipments etc, it will consequently improve village economy and development.

5) Rural Job Guarantee Schemes : Rural job guarantee schemes like MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) which guarantees job on daily basis to rural population do a commendable job in improving the village economy. It provides job not only in agriculture sector but also in other fields such as road and building construction etc.

Conclusion :

The Indian economy is an agro-economy and depends highly on the agricultural sector. Despite just supporting the Indian Economy, the agricultural sector also supports the industrial sector and international trade in imports and exports. Although the contribution of the Agricultural Sector to the Indian Economy is reducing, it is the sector with the most number of people working in it around the country. A large proportion of the population lives in rural areas, and their development and contributions are extremely beneficial to nation-building efforts. Agriculture and related activities must be developed in order to provide gainful employment in rural areas and improve overall food production.

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