

“The Role of Universities in Rural Development”

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Abstract: *This paper deals with the role of universities in the process of Rural Development. This paper tries to define Rural Development, the problems and challenges involved in Rural Development. This paper then discusses the Eco system of Rural Development & the different roles needed to be played by universities; steps in the process of Rural Development & suggests a sustainable model for Rural Development making universities as the change centers.*

Key Words: *Rural Development; Universities Roles; Sustainable Rural Development Model; Roles of universities; Steps in Rural Development; needed changes to universities;*

When we observe the Economic Development process of any Developed Economy, we can easily deduce that the economic development process happens in two stages. First stage – Wealth Creation and the Second stage – the trickle-down effect of the social wealth creation, i.e. Wealth Distribution. Wealth Creation & Wealth Distribution should happen continuously & cyclically so as to maintain the balance of the society. Unfortunately, that is not happening all over the world.

World population crossed 7 Billion in 2012¹ and that of India’s population alone crossed 1.21 Billion² human lives. Latest World Bank reports show that a third of world’s poor lives in India. In 2010, World Bank stated, 32.7% of the total Indian people fall below the international poverty line of US\$ 1.25 per day (PPP³) while 68.7% live on less than US\$ 2 per day.

A study by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative using a Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) found that there were 650 million people (53.7% of population) living in poverty in India, of which 340 million people (28.6% of the population) were living in severe poverty, and that a further 198 million people (16.4% of the population) were vulnerable to poverty. 421 million of the poor are concentrated in eight North Indian and East Indian states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. This number is higher than the 410 million poor living in the 26 poorest African nations.

Since India moved to an open economy in 1991, an enormous amount of social wealth is created. India’s economy has grown very steadily over the past two decades. Despite significant economic progress, almost one fourth of the nation’s population still earns less than the government-specified poverty threshold of 32 rupees per day (approximately US\$ 0.6)⁴. The government & the existing mechanisms failed to bring down the trickle-down effect of wealth creation, i.e. Wealth Distribution, from Top to the bottom end of the Social ladder. As against the theories, Economic Liberalization in India has in fact, widened the Gap between the Rich & the Poor.

As an effect, two types of India came into existence within India. One, The Urban Landscape – India, that is poised & poignant with success stories, producing more no. of Millionaires & Billionaires every year; and the other, the Rural Land Scape – Bharat, that is striving very hard to produce at least a Dollar-a-day-wage for many.

Approximately, 65% of India’s population lives in Rural India⁵ and it is also estimated that about 78% of the total Indian poor lives in Rural India. Which only says - that about two thirds of the total population of India, are either staying away or not participating enough actively in the Economic Development process.

India cannot have a sustainable growth rate without the participation of the Rural India (Bharat) in main stream economic activity. Hence, Rural Development is the “**Need-of-the Hour**” for the overall & sustainable growth of India.

Rural development generally refers to the process of improving the quality of life and economic wellbeing of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas⁶.

¹ According to United States Census Bureau – 2012 Report

² India’s National Census programme – 2011 Report

³ Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) (An Economic measure of poverty)

⁴ Planning commission Report - 2011

⁵ Planning Commission Report - 2011

Rural development has traditionally centered on the exploitation of land-intensive natural resources such as agriculture and forestry. However, changes in global production networks and increased urbanization have changed the character of rural areas. Increasingly tourism, niche manufacturers, and recreation have replaced resource extraction and agriculture as dominant economic drivers⁷.

The need for rural communities to approach development from a wider perspective has created more focus on a broad range of development goals rather than merely creating incentive for agricultural or resource based businesses. Education, entrepreneurship, physical infrastructure, and social infrastructure all play an important role in developing rural regions⁸.

Rural development is also characterized by its emphasis on locally produced economic development strategies⁹.

In contrast to urban regions, which have many similarities, rural areas are highly distinctive from one another. For this reason, there is a large variety of rural development approaches used globally. For this same reason, it is impossible to create a generalized policy or programme for Rural Development by any government or Agency.

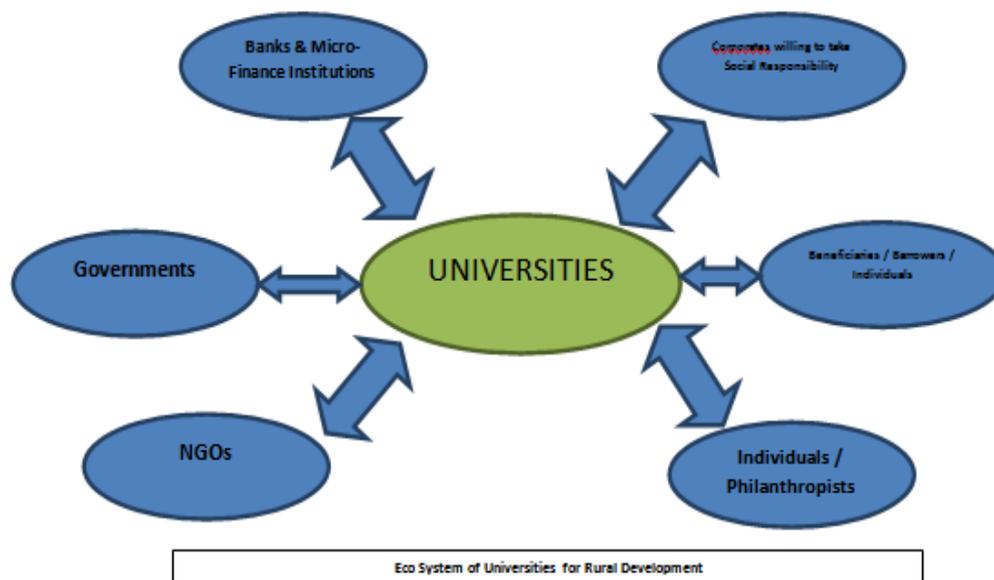
Rural areas (also called as pockets) differ significantly from one another demographically, economically, socially & culturally as well. So the solutions / models / strategies to develop rural areas cannot be generalized but, have to be custom made by understanding each of the rural pocket and examining its needs carefully, individually & separately. So, it is almost impossible for any government mechanism to take up this pains taking job of custom development and hence, is the significant & most important area where research bodies like universities need to interfere and take the onus on their own shoulders in order to build a stronger & sustainable economic growth.

In the ancient days, Indian Universities like Taxila¹⁰, Nalanda^{11,12} revolved round the society’s needs, highly patronized ‘the community living’ & worked as the agents of Change & Rural Development. With the introduction of British form of university education in India in early 1800s, universities, for the majority of the portion, restricted themselves to giving away degrees & building academics only.

Now, is the high-time for all our Indian universities & other research centers to think seriously, about the Rural Development & act swiftly in the nation building exercise. It is the role of the universities or research institutes, to bridge the GAP within the society whenever it arises, for what so ever the reason may be.

ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT:

The following picture depicts the eco system of universities for Rural Development.



⁶ Moseley, Malcolm J. (2003). “Rural development: principles and practice” (1. publ. ed.). London [u.a.]: SAGE.pp. 5. ISBN 0-7619-4766-3
⁷ Ward, Neil; Brown, David L. (1 December 2009). "Placing the Rural in Regional Development". *Regional Studies* 43 (10): 1237-1244. doi:10.1080/00343400903234696
⁸ Westport, Conn. “Rural development research: a foundation for policy” (1. publ. ed.). [u.a.]: Greenwood Press. 1996. ISBN 0-313-29726-6.
⁹ Moseley, Malcolm J. (2003). “Rural development: principles and practice” (1. publ. ed.). London [u.a.]: SAGE. pp. 7. ISBN 0-7619-4766-3
¹⁰ Also Known as ‘Thakshashila’ in some literatures; geographically now locates in Rawalpindi District of Punjab province in Pakistan
¹¹ Also known as ‘BuddhaNalanda’ in some literatures; Geographically now located 88kms south east of Patna in the state of Bihar, in India
¹² Taxila&Nalanda, Believed to be the World’s first universities, existed between 500 B.C. & 400 B.C. in India.

In this eco system of Universities for Rural Development, universities are supposed to play the following roles.

1. **Research Roles:** Universities are supposed to do extensive research on the society in order to find out the indifferences / inequalities between the different sub-systems of the society. Often, earliest predictions help in diverting forthcoming societal dangers & in abolishing certain bad practices that exist in the society in order to build a stronger nation.
2. **Coordinating Roles:** Universities are supposed to perform significant coordinating roles between the different sub-systems of the society in order to make them understand about the dangers of the present & Future and the ways of tackling them effectively, conveniently & successfully.
3. **Innovation Roles:** Universities are supposed to innovate solutions, where and when required, in order to bring the balance between various sub-systems of the society. Universities need do necessary research in order, to understand the root cause of any problem and need to invent custom-made solutions in order to address the problem satisfactorily, effectively & efficiently. Universities should not only limit themselves with the current problems but, should foresee the upcoming & future problems and, should be ready, with solutions, to tackle them too, successfully.
4. **Testing Roles:** Universities represent society in a smaller level. So, universities should use themselves as the social testing laboratories in order to check that the newly innovated / invented solutions / models / strategies work perfectly in sync with the proposed sub-systems of the society. It is the duty of the universities to do a prime testing before implementing anything on the society as a whole. Testing always gives options to fine tune & fool proof the solutions / Models / Strategies.
5. **Incubation Roles:** Some ideas / solutions sometimes require incubation facilities in order to develop a full pledged solution. Universities should create conducive atmosphere for incubate such solutions / ideas to a matured level. When rural cottage industries are being set-up, the initial problem will be of site or location problem. The entrepreneur may be able to start the work & production but may not be able to locate it to a place of his choice until his business reaches a certain stage. Incubation centers will help in growing such entrepreneurs by reducing their initial investment costs and thereby making their ventures profitable by an early period.
6. **Mediating Roles:** In Rural Development, often the inclusion of many organizations in achieving a particular goal may help the job done easily or may increase the effectiveness of the solution / model. In situations like this, universities must act as a ‘Mediating Agency’ in order to coordinate between one or more sub-systems (like N.G.O.s etc.) and to bring out the development successfully, effectively & economically.
7. **Venture Capital Roles:** The biggest obstacle in Rural Development or Entrepreneurship is raising the required funds. In any society there won’t be any dearth of funds but the only problem is sourcing them properly, channelizing them, distributing them & Recollecting them properly in order to safe guard the interests of all the involved parties is the big task.

One way, there are many philanthropists / people who are ready to participate in economic activity. The other way, people who are in desperate need of capital for earning their minimum livelihood & for developing their lives. Universities can act as a bridge between these two parties. In toto, universities must act as a Micro Finance agency without a profit motive. This is explained as the ‘Venture Capital Role’ of universities.

8. **Evaluation Roles:** In the process of Rural Development, Evaluation plays the most critical & important role. Evaluation role here means – continuous monitoring of implementing models / solutions on a timely basis in order to check the fulfillment of objectives in a continuous & time bound manner.

Besides this, universities should also do a continuous evaluation of government policies in order to check whether the fruits of the policies are reaching the specified target groups or not? Not only this but, should do a continuous evaluation of on-going or implementing projects (entrepreneurs) for both their successes & failures. If a model is found successful, after careful evaluation, the same can be repeated in some similar environment again. If a model is found failure, after careful evaluation, one can know the actual mistakes due to which the model went failure. So in both the ways, evaluation plays a key role in the

Rural Development process and hence universities should take this role very seriously, dedicatedly & aggressively.

9. **Training Roles:** The Rural Producers or Rural Entrepreneurs will have so many setbacks in their functional fields. One biggest obstacle usually will be the technology factor either in the stages of production or in the stages of supplying the finished product to the customer. There always exists a GAP between the industry / purchaser standard & the Rural Producer or Entrepreneur's standard on various issues. Universities, with their vast knowledge pool, should come forward and do their level best to bridge this GAP.

Universities can do this by the way of conducting regular workshops etc. in order to accustom the Rural Entrepreneurs to the modern (up-front) technologies or by training the Rural Entrepreneurs for new technologies in order to save costs & there by making their Rural enterprises more profitable.

10. **Facilitating Roles:** This is one more important step in the process of Rural Development. In most cases, Rural Producers / Entrepreneurs produce their products singly in Rural areas or in isolated dwellings. Many a producers may be producing a same product without the knowledge about the other producers. Universities should perform a 'Facilitating Role' in situations like this. Universities can act smart & create a database (Directory) of Rural Producers & their respective products in the initial stages.

In the later stage, by using this knowledge, universities can act as a facilitator between the producers and make them to act as a 'single unit in multiple destinations'. Each producer, by enacting singly will lose the power of the process of collective bargaining. Universities, by playing a 'Facilitator' role between all the producers / entrepreneurs, can make them to get the advantages of collective bargaining thereby achieving the cost advantage to their products and as a reaction can make their ventures more profitable.

STEPS FOR UNIVERSITIES IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT:

The following are the steps for the participation of universities in Rural Development.

1. **Research:** Do the required research to find out the problems which need to be addressed on the priority basis & their possible solutions, in case available from existing literature or knowledge.
2. **Coordinate:** Most problems, if not, some at least, can be solved by coordinating between the different sub-systems of the society. Try to find out whether the found problem has any solution / option like this.
3. **Innovate:** In case, no readymade or known solutions are available, invent a new solution / model / strategy in order to fix / solve the problem.
4. **TEST:** Once a new solution / model / strategy is invented, it has to be tested in order to know its suitability, Reliability, rate of success, Pros & cons etc.
5. **Incubate:** once testing of a solution / model / strategy is done, check whether it requires any initial breeding or incubation. If it is required incubate the process until it breeds till the required level of objectives.
6. **Mediate:** Finding out solutions / models / Strategies is easy when compared to the implementation / execution of the same. To do this, one may have required mediating all / some sub-systems of the eco system. Mediate with all the required sub-systems, make them to understand the process of implementation / execution and then proceed to the final execution of the process / programme.
7. **Venture Capital:** The biggest problem / hurdle in implementation of many a solution is the lack of key resources. Mediate between the Resources surplus eco system entities and pool them into a common resource pool. Then identify the most important or the neediest end users and provide them with required resources from the resources pool, so as to implement the solution / model without any failure due to the resources crunch.
8. **Evaluate:** once the required resources are provided and the system started functioning / producing, evaluate their performance / achievements eventually and compare them with the target achievements. Evaluate the reasons for success, failure & for problems / hurdles / gaps.
9. **Train:** Once the evaluation is over and the root cause for the problem is identified, then counsel / train the parties or the sub-systems associated with the process. Training is often required at many stages in the entire process of self-sustainability of the entities / units.
10. **Facilitate:** Facilitate all the sub-systems in order to achieve the advantage of collective bargaining.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT – WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE FROM UNIVERSITIES FRONT?

The following are the things needed to be done, on war footage, from the universities front, in order to successfully implement Rural Development measures or programmes.

1. **Set-up a Social Research & Testing Center:** This center will find out the problems or inequalities between the different sub-systems of the society / eco system. Then this will find out / invent all necessary solutions in order to solve the problems, test them, incubate them if necessary and finally creates an executable

model. This center should not only concentrate on today’s requirements but should also concentrate on future challenges too.

2. **Set-up a Social Coordination Center:** This center will coordinate between different sub-systems continuously & periodically. This center will solve many problems which can be solved through education / coordinating between the different sub-systems of the system.
3. **Set-up a Rural Development Center:** This will simply act as a Venture Capital Center for resources & also a coordinating center for NGOs etc. This center will execute emulated models given by the Research & Testing Center. This center will collect resources from the resources surplus sub-systems, pool them & pass them to the neediest entities in the system. Not only this, but also pools different delivery sub-systems, coordinates between them & guides them properly so as to reach the set goals accurately in a time bound manner.
4. **Set-Up a dedicated Entrepreneurship Development Center:** This center will initially recognize the needy people, register them, train them with some livelihood fetching skills and guide them to the Rural Development Center so as to start their own micro enterprises on their own. Once started, this center will guide the entrepreneurs in each stage from the production to the marketing to selling of the produce in order to make the entrepreneurs self-sustainable & to reach profit making stage at the earliest. This center will bridge the information / technology GAP between the producers & consumers or the producers & the producers. This center will also help each other in technology adoption and Transfer smoothly.
5. **Set-up a dedicated Skills Training Center:** This center will concentrate on the skills development or the skills enhancement for all the needed parties in the rural development eco system. This center trains people in order to earn them livelihood by means of some skill training etc.

CONCLUSION:

Universities should not remain side-ways of the society but are supposed to entwine completely with the society in order to absorb society into the university’s eco system. Universities should not remain isolated from the main stream society but are supposed to participate actively in Rural Building & Development exercise and thereby in Nations building exercise. Universities need to perform multi-tasking roles as discussed above in order to build a healthier & stronger Nation by all possible means. On the whole, universities should initiate change, emanate change & need to do all possible efforts in order to maintain the change in positive direction in society.

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