

Chapter 16

CONCLUSION AND POLICY DIRECTION

The idea of preparing a State Development Report (SDR) on Punjab for the period 2002-2007 and, thereafter, developing an overview in the form of Vision 2020, is an innovative initiative taken by the Planning Commission of India. The process of giving expression to this initiative has been educative and rewarding for all those who have participated, as contributors and even beneficiaries, benefactors and stakeholders, with whom we have had occasion to interact.

The above statement needs to be briefly elaborated by informing one and all that the contributors, numbering around 16, comprising the members of the faculty, had to undertake a rigorous exercise to go through the reports of the Planning Commission of India and of the State Planning Board, Punjab. The knowledge and insight acquired from these systematically prepared documents during the long span of 50 years was found very useful. This effort was further supplemented by studying a number of other documents pertaining to the process of both planned and non-planned development that had taken place in Punjab, in the context of national development. The exercise was further enriched by the knowledge, information and experience of the officials and experts working for the Government of Punjab, through intensive, as well as extensive, interactions with them extending over a period of time. This process concluded with the benefit of sharing the views emerging from these diverse interactions, on more than one occasion, with the Chief Minister of Punjab, who spent considerable time to ensure that the state benefits from such an indepth exercise carried out by CRRID. Involvement of the stakeholders, representing agricultural, industrial and service sectors, was perceived as equally important and a number of interactive meetings were organized at different places in Punjab and at Chandigarh.

This document has been specifically designed to be a referral point for those who are concerned with the processes of development in Punjab. Above all, this report was perceived as an attempt to provide a basic source of systematic information and practical analysis of each sector of development for researchers, administrators, beneficiaries, benefactors and stakeholders. It is proposed to continue with this exercise, even after the presentation of the final report to the Planning Commission, by the team of researchers who have contributed to it, by examining as well as analysing a number of researchable issues, which were left out of the scope of the report, partly because of the time constraint. The intention is to go into greater details and disseminate the findings by bringing out major publications on the different issues concerned. There are plans also to organize regional, national and international debate at home and abroad to enlarge the participation of concerned individuals, groups and particularly Non-Resident Indians, as well as institutions engaged in the study of the Indian perspective of development focusing on Punjab. This is how the long-term perspective of developing collaborative research to feed the process of bilateral development between states and societies shall get strengthened, for the benefit of all those striving to enlarge concerns

in the field of humanities and social science research, directed at promoting initiatives towards peace and co-operative development.

The present State Development Report on Punjab reflects several years' experiences and expertise gathered by the interdisciplinary team of researchers of CRRID, who have authored these chapters. They have worked on a number of research studies of a multidisciplinary nature over a period of time during the last two decades. These studies have a direct bearing on the State Development Report. Some of these are discussed below in support of the above statement.

The research programme at CRRID began with the study of the 'Impact of Plastic Industry on Rural Unemployment in Small Scale Rural and Household Industries'. It received the attention of no less a person than of the stature of Mr B Sivaraman, Member Planning Commission, who wrote an article based on the findings of this study. Further, the Government of India appointed a committee under Mr G V K Rao to examine the issue of the use of plastics in irrigation and agricultural sectors. The other study, which followed the earlier one, was on the 'Impact of Migratory Labour on the Rural Economy of Punjab'. It raised a number of researchable socio-economic, cultural and political issues, which continue to be debated even today. A short while later, a major programme of a multidisciplinary study on 'Communalism, Communal Violence and its Impact on Development and National Integration' was sponsored by the National Integration Council. It had been designed to conduct intensive as well as extensive field work in selected riot-prone and riot-free districts in seven states of India, namely, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The study evoked the concern of planners, administrators, scholars and public leaders from all walks of life, resulting in the formation of fresh policies by the State and the Central Governments for meeting the virus of communal violence. Unfortunately, like many other nationally important issues, the Government of India and the State Governments did not back up this programme. The same could be said about the Border Area Study undertaken by CRRID to understand the problems and prospects of the border areas of Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir and Rajasthan. The Kargil episode has proved that gathering of intelligence and its failure, resulting in a dialogue of shells, is not a substitute for supporting interdisciplinary research on border areas that brings out the aspirations, expectations, inadequate or slow development, hostility and other causations which find continuing and unabated expression in violence and counter-violence, of which innocent men, women and children are the ultimate victims. Although the study of the border areas, like our earlier studies, was enthusiastically commended and commented upon by the Government of India and others concerned with this programme, support for its continuity was not assured.

Viewed from the context of providing policy inputs, as part of the conclusion of the State Development Report, it is important to record here the need to strengthen the Panchayati Raj Institutions, set up under the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution, and institutions of local self government under the 74th Amendment. The importance as well as relevance of these institutions has been cited by Dr James D Wolfensohn, President, The World Bank, in his Foreword to *Entering the 21st Century: World Development Report, 1999/2000*, as under :

Localization is praised for raising levels of participation and involvement, and providing people with a greater ability to shape the context of their own lives. By leading to decentralized government where more decisions happen at subnational levels, closer to the voters, localization can result in more responsive and efficient local governance. National governments may use a strategy of decentralization to defuse civil strife or even civil war. However, when poorly designed, decentralization can result in overburdened local governments without the resources or the capacity to fulfil their basic responsibilities of providing local infrastructure and services. It can also threaten macroeconomic stability, if local governments, borrowing heavily and spending unwisely, need to be bailed out by the national government.

The step that needs to be taken by the government, without losing time and which is going to contribute substantially to development, is the diversification of agriculture. This is of paramount importance to Punjab. It is and shall continue to remain an agrarian state, with the development of small-scale industries as its backbone for its future progress. Improvement of the quality of rural life is achievable through the development of rural areas. It is deeply linked with the future growth, development and diversification of agriculture and small-scale industries. While agriculture needs diversification, small-scale industries need upgradation, both in terms of manpower and machinery, to capture the quality-conscious market at home and abroad. The other areas of priority are human resource development and information technology. The observations, recommendations, suggestions and findings of the authors of the report, based on both primary and secondary data, are comprehensive enough and does not bear repetition.

Another major area that needs a clear policy direction relates to generation of employment. The scope for this lies in developing co-operatives in the rural areas and decentralized training and manufacturing activities by upgrading the skills of available manpower. The most important untapped area for generating employment on the one hand, and ensuring success of the third tier of democracy on the other, is achievable by using the existing strength of teachers, after imparting in-service training to them, to train, in turn, the elected representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions and local self-governments. Such training is already being imparted, though in a limited way and at a higher cost, to enable the elected representatives prepare their micro-plans and ensure their implementation on the subjects transferred to them. The experience of the CRRID team, engaged for the past several years in research on the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions and the local self-governments and in the education and training of their elected representatives, has established the need to take a policy decision in this vital area of development, which will not involve any heavy financial burden on the state. Instead, this will be a major means of improving governance, employment creation, revenue generation and human resource development.

As already pointed out, practically all the chapters have provided conclusions and policy directions. It may, therefore, be appropriate not to lengthen the statement by avoiding unnecessary repetition.

Nevertheless, there are a few areas of priorities, which need to be looked into by the government. There is the urgent need to prepare a district plan for urban development, by involving elected representatives of local self-governments, officials, members of the legislative assembly and of parliament, and experts. Equally important is the preparation

of a similar plan for the Zila Parishad covering the rural population. Such participation in the planning process at different levels of the political system would go a long way towards the preparation of a well-conceived document for the government for pursuing its priorities and development. Further, it would also provide information and access to experience, to help generate the financial, human and infrastructural resources which are the constraints faced by the Government of Punjab.

It is in this context that the team of contributors and experts, which has prepared the State Development Report, has taken pains to identify untapped areas for raising these essential resources. This vital component of development has become a major challenge, when the market is going to be the decisive economic factor of progress. At the same time, the IT revolution provides access to requisite information and knowledge to strengthen human resources as the ultimate instrument of development. One can only hope that the State Development Report will contribute positively towards building a new Punjab equipped to face the challenges of new times.

In conclusion, it may be stated that Punjab has to develop a model of its own, based on its limited natural resources, abundant human resources, wide base of agriculture and small-scale industries and with many opportunities available in the field of Information Technology. All the potential that exists can be realized with the help of clear policy directions, which are required to be given to tap these resources. The greatest resource of Punjab is the native genius, skill and work culture of its people. Once this is mobilized, the sky is the limit.