

CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

The issues

Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation have been on the national policy agenda for more than 50 years. The importance of reduction in poverty and provision of other basic needs has been emphasised in all the five-year plans since independence particularly since the Fifth Five Year Plan. Despite efforts made over the past few decades, rural poverty in India continues to cause concern. The anti-poverty programmes have been strengthened in successive years and poverty levels have come down from 56.44 per cent of India's population in 1973-74 to 37.24 percent in 1993-94. However, the number of rural poor has more or less remained static, which has remained around 244 million people. The adverse effects of such a heavy incidence of poverty on the country's development are obvious. In this context, the self-employment programmes assume significance for, they alone can provide income to the rural poor on a sustainable basis.

Earlier the multiplicity of programmes (IRDP, TRYSEM, DWCRA, SITRA, GKY) being viewed as separate programmes in themselves, resulted in a lack of proper social intermediation and absence of desired linkages. To rectify the situation, the Government decided to restructure the self-employment programmes. A new programme SGSY was launched on 1st April, 1999. This program covers all aspects of self-employment such as organisation of the poor into self-help groups, training, credit, technology, infrastructure and marketing. This programme aims to develop a large number of micro-enterprises in the rural areas, building upon the potential of the rural poor. The emphasis is given on the cluster approach, in which 4-5 key activities will be identified for each block based on the local resources. Another programme Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY) has also been restructured and streamlined as a comprehensive version of the erstwhile JRY. The primary objective of the JGSY is one of creating a demand driven community village infrastructure. This comprises

building up durable assets at the village level and thereby enables the rural poor to enhance their opportunities for sustained employment. The secondary objective is the generation of supplementary employment for the unemployed poor in the rural areas, particularly during the lean seasons.

In the past, where poverty levels were much higher in developing regions, the environmental degradation was not much pronounced. Now that poverty levels are declining significantly in percentage terms, it does not sound appropriate to attribute environmental degradation to poverty. Evidently, there are other factors at play, which deserve one's attention.

Development *per se* has a seamy side in terms of environmental degradation. Development projects may be environmentally destructive. There are cases of destructive development, which aggravate poverty and contribute to environmental degradation at the same time. In spite of many instances of the possibility of conflict between development and environment concerns, growing regions cannot ignore negative externalities, which will aggravate poverty in the same region. The evaluators of Government, Research Institutions, Universities, and individuals have adopted some yardsticks to quantify the positive aspects of various rural development and poverty alleviation programmes, to the neglect of the negative aspects. By then the perception of planners was of a limited focus, and issues of environmental concerns did not surface much in evolving the methodologies of evaluation. It has been rightly contended that a large number of studies on Rural Development are mechanical in nature, committed to mere collection of facts and figures and their presentation relate to positive externalities of the various programmes. Such studies fail to analytically outline and unfold the integrated functioning of the village economy from environmental perspective (See Review of Literature). Now it is increasingly realised that a holistic study of a village development is a prerequisite to tackle the problem development and environment.

Hence, it is warranted to probe into the impact of the Rural Development programmes at various levels from environmental perspective. For example, the introduction of chrome tanning in the tanneries of North Arcot District of Tamil

Nadu, shrimp farming in the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu, conversion of natural forests and grazing lands used by the poor to industrial plantation, industrial water pollution in Tirupur in Tamil Nadu, development of micro-enterprises in the rural/tribal areas viz. rearing of pigs, cows, goats; over exploitation of groundwater, over use of fertilizers and pesticides, etc. may create adverse impact on environment which will create further unemployment and poverty. Every development projects may have some negative externalities – which can be taken care of, if the additional income generated by it is large enough to provide for minimisation of the adverse effects and for compensating / rehabilitating the people deprived by it. Environmental degradation has a tremendous human cost. It hits the poor directly. In this context, it is justified that the poverty alleviation needs a new orientation / conceptualisation from environmental perspective.

In the context of the creation of assets for the benefit of the poor, the Common Property Resources assume of crucial importance. CPRs help sustain their livelihood, particularly of poor women. Many studies have brought to light that access to CPRs by the poor is diminishing, cutting them off from a key physical and cultural resources. There is overwhelming evidence in India that CPRs have been and remain crucial resources for the poor and provide substantial benefits to the poor during the lean season. Recent studies and literature reviews from India show that gathering and use of CPRs is largely women's and children's work and show that exclusion of the poor from CPRs is common in India. There have been several causes behind the erosion of CPRs, much to the suffering of the poor. The cumulative process of their inter play has resulted in a gradual, but systematic exclusion of the poor from CPRs. The factors such as liberalisation, commodification, marketisation, agricultural intensification, and the elites increasingly cornering CPRs previously used by the poor, have brought in this situation. Slowly, the traditional management of CPRs has been replaced by new form of community management, accentuating the miseries of the poor on the one hand, and the environmental degradation on the other. At this juncture, the researchers have been prompted to study the issues of Common Property Resources in regard to their rights to the people, and their implications for the poor households.

Tamil Nadu is the southern most State in Indian subcontinent. The total geographical area constitutes about 130 lakh hectares. The population of Tamil Nadu in 2001 is 6.05 per cent of the country's population. The decadal growth of population in the State continuously declined from 22.3 per cent in 1961-71 to 11.19 percent in 1991-2001. However, the density of population has steadily increased from 316 persons per sq. km. in 1971 to 478 persons per sq. km. in 2001. The level of poverty in Tamil Nadu is 35 per cent during 1993-94, which could not be appreciated. In view of the facts stated above, the present study would focus the emerging issues in Tamil Nadu with special reference to Rural Development in environmental perspective.

Plan of the Study

Plan of the study entails an outline of the remaining chapters. The next chapter presents the review of literature and research design. The third chapter portrays profile of different agro-climatic zones in the State of Tamil Nadu, which helps to examine various development issues. The fourth chapter aims to highlight the social, demographic and household environment of the surveyed households. Income, expenditure and indebtedness of the surveyed households are given in chapter five. The functioning of SGSY and its impact is presented in chapter six. The seventh chapter brings to highlight the issues of employment generation and area development programmes (JRY / JGSY / EAS / DPAP) and its externalities. The chapter eighth focuses on rural housing. Ninth chapter describes the various success stories in implementation of rural development programmes in the State of Tamil Nadu. An assessment of rural poverty and environment is portrayed in chapter ten. Eleventh chapter summarises the broad conclusions of the present study. The last chapter gives some specific recommendations in restructuring the rural development programmes with a perspective of sustainable development in the country.