

Integrated Innovations in Development

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Using a conceptual framework Prof. Ranjit Gupta suggests ways to address poverty and development.

The challenges confronting the development of rural India are varied and complex. So are the problems impeding its development. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that numerous and varied approaches, strategies and programmes, both conventional and innovative, are underway in various parts of the country.

However, the search for innovations in development must continue because otherwise it is likely that we may get bogged down to doing more of the same, notwithstanding the changing complexity of the macro-micro interface. Therefore, it is desirable and important that along with existing models of development, attempts to explore, design, test and fine-tune alternative paradigms of development should continue—a paradigm that may accelerate the development of the rural economies in general and of the disadvantaged groups in particular.

This would involve experimentation and the patience to observe, learn and adapt. In well-established and growing organisations such as Pradan and DHAN Foundation, it would also demand the ability to take risks, commit and spare the required resources and create space to experiment with untested concepts and designs. The concept and the design to seed it need to be based on:

- The learning and strengths of the development models that have made significant impact in empowering disadvantaged groups, enabling them to become self-reliant, and democratic peoples' organisations (POs) such as savings and credit self-help groups (SHGs) of women and wetland farmers' associations (WFAs), promoted by PRADAN and DHAN Foundation. WFAs refer to the lift irrigated farmers groups or associations (LIFAs) in the case of Pradan and Tank Farmers' Association (TFAs) in case of DHAN Foundation.
- Application of science and scientific knowledge to foster technological change appropriate to rural economies in the context of rapidly changing macro environment. NDDDB's Amul at Anand and BAIF's Orchard or Wadi Development Programme in Bansda-Dharampur-Kaprada can be cited as examples.

COMPLEX OF DEVELOPMENT INNOVATIONS

Using these as the software and hardware of a system (as in computers) the design should aim at developing an integrated complex of development innovations or innovative thematic programmes, the foundations of which could be the existing thematic programmes that have enabled Pradan and DHAN Foundation to build

and sustain savings and credit SHGs of women and LIFAs and TFAs (or such POs, if differently named) to conserve, use and manage soil and water resources for cultivation.

The proposed design should aim at not only upscaling or locating the existing thematic programmes in existing or new rural locations but also on the support of these to introduce, try out and build at least two more thematic development innovations. These two would include improved dryland farming, including improved irrigated or wetland agriculture, and processing and marketing of selected farm or agro-products.

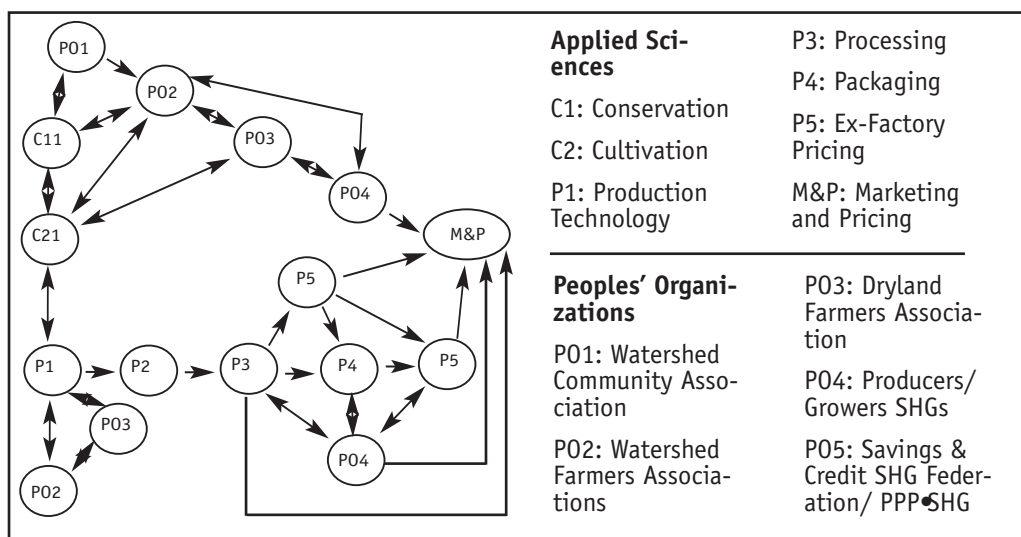
The two should be so placed that together they help promote the vertical integration of backward and forward linkages in agricultural production or natural resources such as silkworm rearing for silk production through and by building POs of participating stakeholders, including landless labour and POs such as Dryland Farmers' Associations or DFAS for procurement, processing, packaging and marketing of processed agro-products such as pickles, pulp and silk yarn and cloth. The term integrated is used here to imply that

the complex of four (or five) thematic programmes shall be so placed that they reinforce each other, thus making the whole larger than the sum of parts (see box).

To summarize, some of the challenges that the proposed framework or design seeks to address include the following:

- Building POs with emphasis on value-based (normative) enabling processes along with conservation and management of natural resources such as those available to rural communities and on which their livelihoods depend, with emphasis on the application of science and scientific knowledge to propel technological change appropriate to the context.
- Using the two concepts, 'small is beautiful' and 'big is bountiful', as two rings of a chain reinforcing one another and not as two irreconcilable concepts, which most development organisations (NGOs in particular) tend to view. We can cite examples of Lijjat Pappad and sugar co-operatives of decentralized sugarcane growers in Maharashtra.
- Promoting an anchor activity through

Vertical Integration of Backward-Forward Linkages Through Peoples' Organizations



the vertical integration of conservation of natural resources, production, processing and marketing of selected farm and off-farm produce in a block or watershed of 10,000 ha or more, offering reasonably high growth potential in the identified area. And in the process, release the forces conducive to generating vibrant rural economies in and around the identified area. The examples include BAIF and DHRUVA's Wadi Development Pro-gramme in Bansda-Dharamput- Kaprada, sugar co-operatives in Maharashtra and dairy co-operatives in Gujarat.

- ♦ Implicit in the third challenge is the challenge of making rain-fed agriculture rewarding and attractive, notwithstanding the vagaries of the weather.
- ♦ Finally, the challenge of designing and promoting an organizational model or system to face and manage the foregoing challenges, one that works and helps build a work culture that encourages and supports 'innovations in development' without interruption.

The examples of the 'complex of development innovations' illustrate at best one or two features of the proposed concept and design and not all the features as a whole, which is what is implicit in the framework outlined to address the five challenges as a whole through the proposed integrated complex of development innovations and innovative thematic programmes. Another point to note is that each of the examples cited has yet to attain full or fuller potential inherent in the model, even in the limited sense of being representative of some of the features of the proposed integrated complex.

Conversely, there is considerable scope and need for innovating the model under reference further. It will take time to evolve, stabilize and grow. It is not necessary to

mount all the four thematic programmes simultaneously right from the word 'go'. But the preparatory work to launch and seed these in selected locations has to be initiated simultaneously and sustained concurrently by a team of at least 4-5 development professionals. The team will also have to remain in place in the selected rural locations right from the preparatory stage to seeding, nurturing, evolving and building the integrated complex, say, for three to five years.

TAKING THE PLUNGE

Do I sound too ambitious, utopian and unrealistic? Perhaps yes. Surely no, as far as I am concerned. Indeed, as is my wont, I have taken the plunge along with a group of 13 graduating students of DHAN Academy's Programme in Development Management (PDM) to face the challenge upfront. All of them will graduate shortly and join the as yet amorphous body the Pradanites and DHANites call 'Development Professionals'.

I have taken them under my charge and am exercising them vigorously and rigorously to help them gain down-to-earth knowledge, insights, learning and skills during the past three months of their PDM. This they are doing through 9 projects linked with one another through a design I described as integrated complex of development innovations. They are based in two selected locations in two districts of Tamil Nadu and one location in Karnataka.

The set of nine projects for each of these locations will culminate with the preparation of a location-specific; three-year action plan. The three teams of PDM students will themselves prepare the respective plans. As soon as they graduate, each team will kick-start the arduous journey, to locate, implement, build and sustain the integrated complex of development programmes and innovations as explorers or pathfinders.