

Planning for the Development of Backward Districts

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Planned development in India has been based on the notion of ensuring balanced regional development. Given the enormity and diversity of the country this was an important objective in the planning exercise. The devolution of funds to States was based on a formula that gave weightage to population and income levels in order to build in equity in central assistance to the States. Over time, we find that inequality between regions has grown rather than diminished. Even today the problem of uneven development in the country is a cause for concern. Therefore, the objective of balanced regional development continues to have primacy.

Economic and social development in India is generally analysed at the State level. However, many States have an area and a population larger than many countries of the world. These States also include distinct regions with well-defined physical, economic and social characteristics. As a result even a State level analysis does not capture different development strands operating in the State. Over time there has been a shift in focus from the State as a whole to the district as a unit of planning. Though in many cases, districts also encompass fairly large areas and population with diverse characteristics, it is the most appropriate level for planning purposes, as it forms the core of the

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administrative structure through which the planned development programmes are implemented.

Analysis of backwardness in the country indicates that even in relatively richer States, there are districts which rank poorly on all indicators of development. Similarly, in poorer States, there are districts with very high development indicators. For example, disparities exist and levels of social attainment are very different even within States. This is clearly reflected in the Human Development Reports being prepared at the State level with disaggregated data. For instance, when we consider the Human Development Index (HDI) of Maharashtra while it is 1.00 for Mumbai it is as low as 0.21 for Ghadchiroli.¹ In fact, most of the districts of Marathwada and Vidarbha have very low levels of attainment. This brings out sharply that despite the same policy regime at the State level, performance levels are very different, which could be attributable to historical factors or natural resource endowment. This is the reality despite the fact that Maharashtra has a very high per capita income and is one of the developed States of India. It is hoped that the focus of planned development in Maharashtra would move towards policies and strategies that could promote the development of districts which are lagging behind. One of the reasons for low level of development in these areas is the fact that even though large tracts in Marathwada and Vidarbha are drought prone, yet sugarcane, which is very water intensive, is widely grown. The production of sugarcane is lucrative because of the assured market and price. However, policy intervention is required to facilitate crop diversification away from sugarcane into horticulture and other crops that require less water.

The example of Maharashtra clearly highlights the need to focus on districts for development intervention. Over the years, several Committees have identified backward districts, but with different objectives. The indicators of backwardness reflected the concerns that prompted setting up of these committees to identify the districts for special attention. The Committees have either followed an index based approach for identification or have specifically identified areas with structural variables that lead to under development. Perhaps, the first attempt was made by the Committee on Dispersal of Industries, which examined the issue of industrialization of rural and industrially under-developed areas through development of small and medium industries. However, a major initiative for industrialization of backward regions was taken up in 1968 and 1969 when two groups were set up by the Government of India. The *Pandey* Committee was entrusted with the

task of identification of backward areas.² The *Wanchoo* Committee went into the question of fiscal incentives to industries that were to be set up in the backward areas.³ The *Pandey* Committee's recommendations were rationalized by the Planning Commission and three categories of backward districts were identified. On the recommendations of *Wanchoo* Committee tax concessions and investment subsidies were provided to the industries set up in the identified backward districts.

The evaluations of industrial incentives policy and its impact on industrial development of backward areas indicate that many backward districts benefited from the promotional policies initiated by the government. However, the growth was largely confined to backward districts of Maharashtra, Punjab and West Bengal. The backward districts of Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and North-East continue to be industrially backward. State governments have also come out with industrial policy resolutions that provide many incentives for industries that are set up in the backward regions. In spite of these efforts, large parts of the country continue to be industrially backward.

The promotional policies continue in the liberalized era as well. However, there is now a general consensus that industries get set up in areas which have good infrastructure including electricity, communication facilities and connectivity to the main industrial centers. Prevalence of an industrial culture with a disciplined labour force is also an imperative. The availability of reasonably good social and educational infrastructure helps in attracting technical and managerial personnel necessary for running industries. In the absence of these enabling conditions, investment subsidies and fiscal concessions fail to generate industrial growth. Hence, the need to create the necessary enabling environment in backward areas for attracting industrial investment which is location specific.

Again in the context of the formulation of the draft Fourth Plan, backward areas were identified and classified into five categories: desert areas, chronically drought affected areas, hilly areas including border areas, areas with high concentration of tribal population, areas with high density of population with low levels of income and employment. Subsequently, in 1978, the *Sivaraman* Committee,⁴ which was set up on the development of backward areas, recommended that the block be the primary unit for identification of backward areas and that these should be situated in drought prone, desert, tribal hill, chronically flood affected areas and in coastal areas affected by salinity.

The drought prone areas and desert areas have been covered by specific schemes since the 1970s. Initially, 54 entire districts and parts of another 18 contiguous districts were identified as drought prone. Later in 1977-78 desert districts were identified and a scheme introduced specifically for it. The emphasis under these programmes was on soil conservation, land shaping and development, water conservation, afforestation and pasture development. These activities are inter-related and together impact favourably on the environment.

In 1994-95, these programmes were reviewed by the *Hanumantha Rao* Committee⁵ and a new criteria for identification was placed forward. The districts were to be identified based on moisture index. The unit of identification was the block. Based on this criterion new blocks were identified. The report also indicated that the Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) and the Desert Development Programme (DDP) had failed in their objectives largely because of ad hoc and poor planning, lack of people's participation and poor coordination between different agencies undertaking the works. The strategy recommended was the adoption of a watershed approach in order to harmonize the use of land and water resources and to plan for the development of the areas in a way that appropriate cropping patterns including cultivation of fodder, fuel wood, social forestry, horticulture along with agriculture would be made viable. *In situ* water conservation was the major focus with construction of appropriate structures to ensure this. People's participation was to be at the center of the development strategy. It was recommended that watershed associations comprising of all adult members of the watershed be formed and a functional watershed development team be selected from amongst these to follow the planning and implementation of watersheds.

The *Hanumantha Rao* Committee report⁶ was accepted and very detailed guidelines were issued to the States for implementation. The watershed approach has now been adopted not only for the DPAP and DDP districts, but also for other areas which are rainfed and for wastelands. Several States like Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have embarked on massive programmes for the development of arid districts under watershed guidelines. The watershed programmes for regeneration of degraded lands are a means of ensuring livelihood opportunities and food security for the rural poor. However, it is not confined only to the land owning class. The new paradigm envisages a social and community based approach with focus on equity and the active participation of people including women and vulnerable groups.

There are innumerable success stories with pioneering work done by NGOs. By way of illustration a few of them are cited in Appendix-1.

Other special area programmes were also introduced over the year. The Hill Area Development Programme (HADP) is being implemented in designated hill areas since the Fifth Plan. These include two hill districts of Assam, Darjeeling district of West Bengal and Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu. 12 districts of Uttar Pradesh, which were also covered under the programme are no longer covered since these form the newly created Uttranchal State. The objective here is to ensure ecologically sustainable socio-economic development of hill areas keeping in mind the needs of the people there. The Western Ghat Development Programme (WGDP), is in existence since 1974-75. It covers the areas with an elevation of 60 meters above sea level. This programme is being implemented in 161 Talukas in 5 States, namely, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Goa. Here too, the objective is to preserve and restore the ecology. Emphasis is on watershed development with greater people's participation.

For the development of tribal regions and scheduled tribes, who represent 8 per cent of the population, the concept of a Tribal Sub-Plan was introduced in 1973-74. It was felt that there was no system to ensure flow of funds under various Government programmes to these areas, which were commensurate with the size of the tribal areas and that of the tribal population. Within the total State plan, funds are earmarked for the development of tribal areas, and a sub-plan is prepared for the socio-economic development of scheduled tribes. The development of agriculture and allied sectors, forestry and infrastructure, both social and physical, remains a priority even in these areas. Despite the special dispensation, tribal areas are still somewhat inaccessible and the level of development is lower than in the adjoining areas. Tribal population living in these areas is still exploited, particularly, as they suffer from alienation of land. While in some States the tribal areas have been somewhat developed, it has not really achieved the objective that was set up initially.

The *EAS Sarma* Committee,⁷ which submitted its report in November 1997, was given the task of identifying 100 most backward and poorest districts in the country for preparation of a special action plan for infrastructure development in these districts. It was agreed in the Committee that the criteria would have to include direct indicators of human deprivation as well as indirect indicators, which pertain to the quality of the life of the people. The most direct indicator of deprivation

is poverty. However, districtwise data on poverty are not available, but they are available on a regional basis. All districts falling within a particular region were allotted the poverty ratio of the whole region on a uniform basis. Other aspects of deprivation were also included. For education, the ratio of literate females to the number of females was used as a measure of educational deprivation and in the case of health it was the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR). Indicators of both social and economic infrastructure were also included in the exercise. Weights were assigned to these indicators other than the poverty ratio.

Thereafter, a sensitivity analysis was undertaken with different weights assigned to the poverty ratio relative to other indicators. The results showed that of the 100 most backward and poorest districts in the country, 38 were in Bihar, 19 in Madhya Pradesh and 17 in Uttar Pradesh. This shows that the concentration was only in three States. However, this scheme was never operationalised.

One of the primary concerns of development has been achievement of universal primary education. While, education is in the State list under the Constitution, Central Government too has initiated several programmes for providing additional financial resources to the States for construction of school buildings, hiring of teachers, teachers' training and educational aids. In 1994 a new programme called the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was launched with the objective of operationalising the strategy of achieving universal primary/universal elementary education through district specific planning. Again the focus shifted to districts that were lagging behind. This programme was launched in 42 districts over 7 States, but later it was extended to others. At present, it is spread over 176 districts in 15 States. There are possibilities of its further expansion. Under the newly introduced Sarv Siksha Abhiyan, the approach is to plan at the district level with the focus on girls, SC/STs, working children and others out of school. It is envisaged that there would be greater people's participation. This has been fairly successful in terms of the number of new schools, appointment of teachers, higher enrolment levels including that of girls, and improved overall performance.

Population stabilization is another of the major concerns at present. Here too, there are substantial differences among States. While some States like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have attained replacement levels of fertility, Andhra Pradesh has also shown remarkable fall in fertility. During 1990, the decadal growth rate of population has shown a decline in most States except Bihar, which has shown a substantial

increase. Therefore, the challenge lies in facilitating a demographic transition in areas where population is still growing rapidly. The National Commission on Population (NCP) was set up in 2000 to review, monitor and give direction to the implementation of the National Population Policy. The major goals to be achieved include:

- Universal access to quality contraceptive service in order to lower the TFR to 2.1 by adopting the small family norm by year 2011.
- To reduce the IMR to below 30 per 1,000 live births and a sharp reduction in the incidence of low birth weight (below 2.5 Kg.).
- Universal immunization of children against vaccine preventable diseases.
- Reduction in MMR to less than 1 per 1,000 live births.

The NCP has ranked all the districts of the country based on a composite index.⁸ Eranakulam district of Kerala recorded the highest composite index value of 88.40 while Balrampur district of Uttar Pradesh recorded the lowest composite index value of 25.05. 168 districts had a value of less than 46 and the majority of these were in Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan followed by some districts in Madhya Pradesh and the Northeast, and 157 districts had a value of 67.3 or more. These were largely in the State of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Goa, parts of Punjab, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

Most recently, a Task Force⁹ was set up by the Ministry of Rural Development to identify backward districts where there was need to have a programme of intensive public works so as to generate wage employment for the poor in lean agricultural seasons. As is common knowledge we have been implementing wage employment programmes for long. However, by covering all districts in the country, resources get spread thinly without making any adequate impact on the incomes of the poor. In 1993, an exercise conducted in the Planning Commission identified 120 backward districts for taking up intensified wage employment where there was a concentration of the poor and the under-employed. The index of backwardness adopted for this purpose gave 50 per cent weightage to rural SC/ST population in the district and 50 per cent weightage to inverse of per capita agricultural labour productivity. Further, adjustments were made to include districts in which there was a high number of blocks covered by the drought prone areas programme, and the commercially and industrially advanced

districts were excluded. The intensified Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) was launched in 1993-94 with additional funds flowing to each of the identified 120 backward districts. However, over time the scheme was universalized. Therefore, it was felt that there was a need to review the list of backward districts as the problem of poverty and under-employment needed better targeting. There is out migration from backward districts due to unavailability of employment, especially, during lean agricultural seasons and therefore, it is necessary to provide greater employment to people at least within their own districts so as to arrest the problem of internal migration, which exacerbates the problem of the poor causing hardship and distress.

Several parameters were considered for the selection of backward districts by the Task Force which submitted its report in May 2003. Finally, the index of backwardness was based on three parameters with equal weights to each; (1) value of output per agricultural worker, (2) agricultural wage rate, (3) percentage of SC/ST population in the districts. These were found to be the most robust parameters available for the district level. Poverty ratios and unemployment rates are available only on the basis of the NSSO with each region comprising of several districts. While 447 districts were ranked, the Task Force suggested that wage employment programme be concentrated in 150 backward districts which form the core of the under developed areas. These districts fall largely in eastern and central India, namely, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhatisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Orissa.

Meanwhile the Planning Commission formulated a new scheme with the objective of putting in place “programmes and policies with the joint efforts of the Centre and States which could remove barriers to growth, accelerate the development process and improve the quality of life of the people.” The Rashtriya Sam Vikas Yojana as it has been named has three components, namely, (1) backward districts initiative, (2) special plan for Bihar, and (3) special plan for the undivided Kalahandi, Bolangir, Koraput (KBK) districts of Orissa. Under the backward districts initiative, it has been decided to cover 100 districts. These have been selected from the list prepared by the Task Force 2003. The number of districts allocated to each State is based on the incidence of poverty. The list of backward districts selected is given in Appendix-2. The main objective of the scheme is the holistic development of these backward districts characterized by low agricultural productivity and under development.

It is proposed to provide Rs. 15 crore per year to each of the districts for a period of three years. This is by way of supplementary resources in order to meet some of the critical gaps in the physical and social infrastructure. The modalities include the preparation of a district plan as per guidelines issued by the Planning Commission from time to time, to identify the constraints to the growth of the district in order to remove them and to build institutional capabilities to plan and implement programmes of human and social development in order to alleviate poverty and improve the living condition of the people. The focus would be on employment through agriculture, horticulture, drought proofing, minor irrigation and building of social and physical infrastructure like health and educational facilities and rural roads. The role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) would be critical with the support of NGOs and other community based organizations. People's participation would be an integral part of the entire process from plan formulation to implementation and monitoring.

The analysis so far indicates that the core of backwardness in India lies in the central and eastern parts of the country with isolated pockets of backwardness even in some of the developed States of the country. The programmes and schemes enumerated in the paragraphs above have sought to address the question of lack of development. A large proportion of these districts fall in the tribal belt of the country. Tribal sub-plan has been an important instrumentality for directing resources to the development of these regions. The governments allocative mechanisms both on the non-plan and on the plan side have tended to favour the backward regions in the formula adopted for allocation of funds. Yet, backwardness persists. Clearly, some major ingredients for development have not been addressed. The RSVY is an attempt to understand these characteristics of underdevelopment and provide solutions that would catalyse the development process in these backward regions. A district plan and an area plan covering 8 districts are discussed in some detail in the paragraphs that follow in order to highlight the kind of planning and interventions that would be required for the development of a backward district.

District Mandla of Madhya Pradesh¹⁰

Mandla is predominantly tribal with the tribal population residing largely in the hilly and forest areas. The district is largely rural, over 90 per cent of the people reside in rural areas. In the past, these tribes depended on the forest for their livelihood, but in recent times, this

access has become restricted. Collection of minor forest produce provides employment for only about 50 days in a year and it contributes about one-tenth towards the household income. Agricultural land belonging to tribals is undulating and small holdings are subjected to severe soil erosion. Agriculture is primitive and crop yields are poor. Even the animals are genetically inferior and the minor forest produce does not have a market. The tribal women are even more impoverished with little education. Despite the progress that State of Madhya Pradesh has made as compared to other States in India the levels of attainment are not comparable to those of other States. The district of Mandla is characterized by even worse social and economic statistics.

We all know that several Government schemes operate for agricultural and rural development, social infrastructure and connectivity. Yet some places are by-passed in the process of development. Mandla epitomizes how the process of growth can leave large communities untouched by developments around them.

Therefore, the central issue is how to raise the income of the poor through greater employment and by ensuring sustainable livelihoods. The sectors that need to be tapped are traditional with emphasis on increased agricultural productivity, improvement in livestock, development of forest with greater access to NTFP. Given the out-migration of male workers there is feminisation of poverty and the burden falls on women. Therefore, one has to improve their work situation. Educating the tribals, especially the women and improving the physical infrastructure are imperative. It is common knowledge as to what needs to be done. It has been suggested under the project that land improvement, more irrigational facilities, improved inputs, genetic upgradation of cattle, pigs and poultry and marketing facilities, horticulture development, promotion of inland fishery and sericulture need to be promoted. Forest based activities could provide non-farm employment, for instance making rope out of grasses, processing forest produce like bamboo and munj, processing fruits and seeds like amla, jackfruit, chironji, lemon, mangoes, etc. and allied activities like bee keeping, honey extraction, sericulture, etc. However, there is need to build capacity and upgrade skills, in order to make those participating in the rural non-farm sector, more productive. Furthermore, infrastructure both physical and social, needs to be built up.

The Project that has been prepared for the development of Mandla district has identified the specific works that would need to be taken up and the cost implications of the work. In most of the sectors, existing

schemes provide funds for the very activities that have been identified as central to the development of the district. But it is necessary to ensure that all the available funds do not remain on paper, but that they are actually utilized during the course of the year. The funds provided under the RSVY would only bridge the gaps that exist. However, very specific interventions would have to be made in order to break the vicious circle of poverty and backwardness. Forward and backward linkages would have to be ensured for the development of any of the identified activities. For example, in the case of horticulture, it is necessary to provide planting material, technical guidance and marketing tie-ups. Again for the development of dairy, it is necessary to forge the necessary linkages and ensure that the milk is collected and sent to the chilling plant. But interestingly, in Mandla the chilling plants have become dysfunctional because of the insufficient supply of milk. The economics of working a composite dairy unit needs to be worked out and implemented.

However, an assessment of implementation of various programmes in the country suggests that inadequacy of funds is not the major bottleneck to the development of a district; proper institutional mechanisms and efficient delivery are required. It is hoped that in the Mandla experiment, greater people's participation will be forged through the PRIs, who have been given administrative and financial powers in Madhya Pradesh. In addition, some very good NGOs also operate and their assistance should be sought in bringing about greater people's participation through advocacy and awareness campaigns. Also Self-Help Groups, User Groups and Joint Forest Management Committees should be formed and strengthened so that they can ensure better development of the area.

The project has identified what needs to be done. Agriculture receives primacy with focus on land improvement and watershed development. Details have been spelt out. Value addition in Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) is required with markets tied up. Forestry related employment generating activities are suggested. While, under normal schemes these activities should be possible, clearly there is need for better planning and implementation so as to impact on the livelihoods of the poor.

KBK Districts of Orissa¹¹

The Kalahandi, Bolangir and Koraput (KBK) districts in the South Eastern part of Orissa have been a focus of Government and Civil

Society initiatives over the years. The KBK districts were reorganized in 1992-93 into 8 districts, viz, Kalahandi, Naupada, Bolangir, Sonepur, Koraput, Nabrangpur, Malkangiri and Raygada. The region has diverse geographical and topographic features. Many districts have vast stretches of hill tracts and over 50 per cent of the area is under forest. Land in the upper reaches is very poor due to soil erosion. However, the valley regions are highly fertile. The tribals, one of the most marginalized sections of the society inhabit the higher slopes while the upper castes own most of the cultivable land in the plain areas. The KBK districts have high incidence of poverty, low levels of literacy, high degree of morbidity and preponderance of ST population in most blocks of the districts.

The KBK region acquired prominence in the national discourse in the 1980s due to reports of starvation deaths. This prompted the Government to evolve a comprehensive programme for eradication of poverty from the KBK region. Area Development Project for Poverty Termination (ADAPT) was taken up for implementation in eight tribal blocks in Kalahandi and 7 blocks in Koraput in 1988. The basic objective of the programme was to provide livelihood opportunities to the people through increased agricultural productivity. Irrigation infrastructure, extension services for high value crops, development of dairy and fishery and afforestation projects were taken up. However, the programme was terminated in December, 1989 as it was felt that the projects were not sustainable in the long run. It was felt that people's participation was necessary for long-term sustainability of these initiatives.

Once again, attention of the Government was directed to the persisting poverty and destitution in the region. These were addressed under the Long Term Action Plan (LTAP) for KBK launched by the Government in August, 1995. The strategy adopted under the LTAP was to pool financial resources available under different programmes and implement projects for rapid development of the region. The LTAP had a seven-year project life (1995-96 to 2001-02). After a review in 1997-98, the State Government prepared a Revised Long Term Action Plan (RLTAP) which is currently under implementation (1998-99 to 2006-07). The RLTAP has a total outlay of Rs. 6061.83 crore. Major part of the resources come from Central Sector and Centrally Sponsored Schemes in agriculture, horticulture, watershed development, afforestation, irrigation, health, drinking water, emergency feeding programme, welfare of SCs/STs and rural connectivity. In addition,

additional Central assistance to the RLTAAP is provided by the Planning Commission to fill the critical gaps which cannot be covered under the existing schemes of the Government.

A distinguishing feature of the RLTAAP is the institutional arrangement that has been put in place for development of the area. An Administrator of KBK, a senior level Government official, has been appointed by the State Government. The office of Administrator has been vested with enhanced financial powers to sanction projects under the RLTAAP. The Divisional Commissioners of the region have been designated as Deputy Administrators with well-defined financial powers. The Government of India has also impressed upon the State Government to post dynamic and committed officers to the region and provide extended tenures to the Government functionaries. A Standing Committee of the Parliament and a Committee of Secretaries in the Government of India periodically review the progress under the RLTAAP.

The International Development Financial Institutions have also funded projects for poverty alleviation in the KBK region. Department of International Financial Development (DFID), United Kingdom has supported the Government of Orissa in taking up Watershed Projects in Western Orissa which also include four districts in the KBK region. These projects emphasise inclusion of the marginalized sections and a greater role for women in planning and implementation of projects. Many other agencies have also taken up projects or supported the Government to take up projects for provision of shelter, health facilities and other services to the people in the area.

The KBK has been and continues to be one of the most poverty stricken regions of the country in spite of these initiatives. The various programmes initiated by the Government have not been able to make any major dent on the poverty in the region. Evaluation studies point out that the structural parameters that perpetuate poverty among STs in the region have not been addressed by the Government programmes. Encroachment of tribal land and restrictions placed on access to the forest resources, which have created hardships for the tribals, have not been addressed. Productive land in the plains have been bought by the migrants from other States. Tribals have been pushed to the fringes of forests which are degraded due to the increasing pressure on them. Tribals, who form the bulk of the poor in the region, own small parcels of degraded lands. The asset base of the poor in the region is extremely weak. The sectoral programmes that seek to enhance productivity of the

land, help people largely in the plains while the bulk of the poor occupy the hill-tops and hill-slopes. The conventional irrigation schemes do not help these segments. They also suffer from low human capital. The literacy rate in the region is one of the lowest in the country. In the absence of human capital, land remains the only source of livelihood for the tribals and lands that they occupy are scattered, small and degraded. The people in the area are caught in a vicious circle of poverty which can be broken only by greater access to productive land resources and improvement in human capabilities.

In conclusion one can say that decentralised development and planning is required at the district and sub-district levels to ensure participation of all areas and communities in the process of development. The Government has evolved schemes to deal with the problem of 'backward districts' defined in different ways, depending on the cause of backwardness. A composite index comprising social, economic and physical indicators of development may be too cumbersome and may still leave problems unresolved. Hence, it is best to take up specific issues based on local condition, for action. The Constitutional Amendment Act provides an appropriate framework for decentralized planning and development. In respect of 29 items, elected local bodies/panchayats are responsible for planning and implementation of programmes of economic growth with social justice. Through the institution of DPCs, district plans are to be prepared from below, articulating the priorities and felt needs of the local people. Therefore, district as a unit of planning and development is a reality today. However, it is important that line departments work under the overall supervision of the panchayats. We hope in the next decade we would be able to mainstream the backward districts of today into the general development framework.

Appendix - 1

Watershed Development in Ralegaon Siddhi

Ralegaon Siddhi Project, covering four watersheds in geographical area of about 892 hectares in Maharashtra, is one of the success stories. In a total project outlay of Rs. 112.75 lakh, the State Government contributed Rs. 52.75 lakh, Rs. 47 lakh was borrowed from banks, Rs. 11 lakh was put together by villagers through shramdan and the remaining Rs. 2 lakh was raised from other sources. Result of the initiative: a series of checkdams, bandharas, and nullah bunds have been built at strategic locations. All these increased the infiltration of harvested water and recharged ground water. Today Ralegaon Siddhi has two percolation tanks, thirty nullah bunds, eighty-five wells, and eight borewells all of which are viable right through the year. Farmers now grow two or three crops every year including fruits and vegetables. All the soil and water conservation structures were built through community action. The villagers have stopped grazing their animals on common lands; instead, they have switched to other ways. To take care of equitable distribution of water, they have formed associations or pani puravatha mandals. The success story owes much to leadership of Sri Anna Hazare who turned a once poverty stricken Ralegaon Sidhi into a self-sufficient village. It is the people's participation that gave it the element of sustainability.

Johad – Watershed in Alwar District of Rajasthan

Responding to an impending water crisis, people at Alwar acted jointly to revive a traditional technology to restore the ecological balance of the region. It was simple enough; they used 'Johad' a form of tank in which the locals stored water for lean seasons in years gone by. Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS), a voluntary organization, brought the village community together to build 2500 Johads in 500 villages in 8 blocks of Alwar district.

The gram sabha (i.e. village community) was responsible for selection of the site, construction and maintenance of Johads and also controls the use of water from it. Villagers contributed 70-90 per cent of the cost in cash, kind and labour, TBS mainly paid for hiring skilled labour and to buy cement, iron, diesel etc. Their involvement has given the villagers a sense of ownership and ensures maintenance of structures.

Johad is constructed in a place that receives maximum run-off for water harvesting. The size of Johad is based on an anticipated quantity of run-off. Its shape is dictated by the flow of water and its pressure. The Johad initiative has fulfilled the need for water to drink and for irrigation purposes, and restored ecological stability by increased recharge of ground water. It has increased food production, helped in soil conservation, increased the level of water in wells, increased biomass productivity and even converted two seasonal streams Aravri and Ruparel into perennial rivers. Women in the village, no longer have to go through the drudgery of long, long walk, pots on their head, to fetch scarce water.

**Integrated Micro Watershed Development Programme of
N.M. Sadguru Water and Development Foundation in
Gujarat Village**

Thunthi Kankasiya is a tiny village of Gujarat, its inhabitants all tribals. Being remote, the sleepy village had hardly had any development activity for long. That was until 1991. Then, groups of villagers approached 'Sadguru' with their problem; how to undertake land and water related activities in the village. Their first and foremost demand was to bring River Machhan water to their village to meet the need for drinking water and irrigation. Thus began a major watershed initiative which involved conserving soil and water. In the last six years, as their efforts grew in intensity, the experiment left a considerable impact on the socio-economic milieu of the village.

In 1998, almost the entire village population was brought above the poverty line with average household income a tidy Rs. 35,620 per year vis-à-vis Rs. 9,000 in 1991. Agriculture production is up to 4,000 kg per hectare per year as against 900 kg per hectare in 1991. A high migration rate of 78 per cent to 80 per cent has become a trickle of 5 per cent; and its duration – once up to none months – is just a two month period. In 1998-99, there were 2,00,000 trees and more in a village which barely had 50 odd trees when the experiment was launched.

Drinking water shortage is a thing of the past, with 21 perennial wells where water is available at 30 feet against more than 100 feet earlier. There is constant recharging due to watershed intervention. The village has electricity, roads, health sub-centre and a three room school building. Thunthi is not the only one of its kind. There are more than

300 such tribal villages across the borders of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh falling under Mahi basin and Mahi macro watershed. They all have witnessed similar transformation under the Sadguru integrated micro-watershed development approach.

This transformation has been brought about with full involvement and participation of the local people in the form of Watershed Association, User Groups, Self-Help Groups, Irrigation, Management Committees and the like.

All-Woman Watershed Committee in Madhya Pradesh Village

Gauraiya is a multi-case village 25 kms from Sagar District in Madhya Pradesh. This area was characterized by barren land and a feudal set-up. Traditionally, the task of fetching drinking water from far flung places fell on women.

The turning point came in 1977 when an all-woman Watershed Management Committee was formed, headed by Sita Bai. This initiative under Rajiv Gandhi Watershed Management Mission has paid unexpected and rich dividends. The village now gets assured water supply through pipes throughout the year. The area under cultivation has almost doubled and the average farm produce trebled in three years. Women's self help groups planted 5.5 lakh trees on community and Government land. Social fencing by women volunteers has also ensured the survival of 90 per cent of those trees. The improvement in soil quality and underground water levels has also led to regeneration of nearly three lakh teak and two lakh bamboo trees planted four years ago.

Gauraiya women have also organized seven mahila bachat samooths (women's self help groups) with impressive bank savings ranging from Rs. 15,000 to Rs. 25,000.

Jagriti, a self help group of harijan women, plans to go in for cattle rearing, while some other groups have taken up a Government contract to supply porridge and dal to 150 aganwadis in adjoining villages under the mid-day meal scheme.

In Gauraiya women lead and men follow. It is the change in the gender relations brought about by the empowerment of women that makes the story of Gauraiya stand apart.

Appendix – 2

Rashtriya Sam Vikas Yojana: Backward Districts Initiative List of Districts

Sl.	States	Name of the District
1.	Andhra Pradesh (5)	Adilabad, Mahbubnagar, Warrangal, Chittur, Vizianagaram
2.	Gujarat (3)	Dangs, Dohad, Pnchmahals.
3.	Haryana (1)	Sirsa
4.	Karnataka (4)	Gulburga, Bidar, Chitradurga, Davangere
5.	Kerala (2)	Plakkad, Wynad
6.	Madhya Pradesh (9)	Mandla, Barwani, West Nimar, Seoni, Shahdol, Umaria, Balaghat, Satna, Siddhi.
7.	Maharashtra (9)	Gadhchiroli, Bhandara, Gondia, Chandrapur, Hingoli, Nanded, Dhule, Nandurbar, Ahmednagar.
8.	Punjab (1)	Hoshiarpur
9.	Rajasthan (3)	Banswara, Dungarpur, Jhalawar
10.	Tamil Nadu (5)	Tiruvannamalai, Dindigul, Cuddalore, Naggapattinam, Sivgangai
11.	Uttar Pradesh (20)	Sonbhadra, Raebareli, Unnao, Sitapur, Hardoi, Gorakhpur, Banda, Chitrakoot, Kushinagar, Fatehpur, Barabanki, Lalitpur, Mirzapur, Jaunpur, Hamirpur, Jalaun, Mahoba, Kaushambi, Azamgarh, Pratapgarh.
12.	West Bengal (8)	Purulia, 24 South Parganas, Jalpaiguri, Midnapur West, South Dinajpur, Bankura, North Dinajpur, Birbhum
13.	Chattisgarh (4)	Bastar, Dantewada, Kankar, Bilaspur
14.	Jharkhand (6)	Lohardagga, Gumla, Simdega, Saraikela, Singhbhum West, Goddha
Special Category States		
15.	Assam (5)	Kokrajhar, North Lakhimpur, Karbianglong, Dhemaji, North Cachar Hills
16.	Arunachal Pradesh (1)	Upper Subansiri
17.	Himachal Pradesh (2)	Chamba, Sirmaur
18.	Jammu & Kashmir (3)	Doda, Kupwara, Poonch

19.	Manipur (1)	Tamenlong
20.	Meghalaya (1)	West Garo Hills
21.	Mizoram (1)	Lawngtlai
22.	Nagaland (1)	Mon
23.	Sikkim (1)	North Sikkim
24.	Tripura (1)	Dhalai
25.	Uttranchal (3)	Champavat, Tehri Garhwal, Chamoli
Total		100

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Endnotes

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9 Based on District Plan received in the Planning Commission under the Rashtriya Sam Vikas Yojana

10 Based on information available in the Planning Commission

11 Based on information available in the Planning Commission

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