

4.2 Role of Universities for Rural Development (1998)* *- Experience of & Expectations from Indian Universities*

1. Abstract:

An ambitious project as in China concentrating on "Poverty Alleviation through Education" of the poverty stricken area in remote parts of the country is also a need of all the developing countries in the world, more particularly from Asia. The idea that a University should play an important role in regenerating rural area in the modern fast developing and changing scenario is being tried out in India also. It is increasingly expected that the university system as a depository of knowledge and expertise in various faculties of knowledge can play a centre-stage role, particularly in the new information society that is emerging. This paper written for the Regional Meeting concentrates on giving the ideas, concepts and programmes followed by the Indian Universities in extending knowledge/education in achieving rural development. It also gives authors' perspective of the Rural Development (RD) process for empowerment of the people for achieving sustainable development in the Indian local context (Maharashtra); and ends with comments and recommendations on the various issues raised for the Meeting.

2. Indian Scenario :

Modern Indian system of higher education evolved during the British colonial rule was a copy of the then British London University. It mainly concentrated on preparing the educated elite to serve the British rule in India. After independence, the universities started facing the pressures of high expectations from the masses and from those classes of society who were traditionally not in education. Slowly the 'class' nature of education changed to 'mass' nature. However, the structural changes needed to accommodate such a transformation were slow to come up. Besides, the adoption of a typical system of examination, which relied mainly on three-hour written performance once in a year determined the curricular content and specific methodologies of education (mainly chalk and talk) circumscribed the attitude of student and teachers. One of the major landmark in the development of the university education in free India was the report of Education Commission (1964) which tried to link education with development. Subsequently the University Grants Commission of India, an agency established to promote the higher education and regulate its standards, adopted a policy frame in 1977 making extension the third dimensions of the higher education, teaching and research being the other two. The policies adopted on the basis of Education Commission's report and the programmes implemented were reviewed in two documents "Challenge of Education : A Policy Perspective (Ministry of Education, GOI, 1985) and University system and extension as the Third Dimension (Report of the Review Commission appointed by the UGC, 1985). The first stressed the need of linking educational programme with social development, which included economic development. It emphasizes the change, rather

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than status quo as the watchword for successful living, and the education as the tool for achieving the change. The second report observed that the non-formal education activities carried out by the universities like adult education, continuing education, population education, environmental education, community education, national integration, legal literacy, rural

development, science for the people, etc. have not been able to pervade all sectors of university system. The Report has made some far-reaching recommendations, some of which related with the theme of the paper are:

- i) transforming **adult/continuing education** movement into a life-centered learning process;
- ii) spread of extension work among all disciplines of studies,
- iii) evolving an area-based non-sectarian community approach,
- iv) developing adult/continuing departments/centres as a separate inter-disciplinary faculty for non-formal education,
- v) encouraging students to opt for a semester to work in adult education programmes for preparing project report in lieu of one of the optional papers in every subject,
- vi) organising mass campaign by involving the students and the teachers in special literacy camps for creating environmental support and people's awareness, and
- vii) introducing new audio-visual technologies for rapid spread of new knowledge in every sphere of life, particularly of new knowledge in science and technology with a view to inculcating a scientific temper.

Traditionally the formal Indian University system has been an insular system dominated by the social elite. It was also expected that the various extension activities will get integrated with the auricular teaching and learning in various faculties and disciplines making education development oriented and dynamic. The policies, programmes and various institutional mechanisms and instruments were employed to extend the outreach of education to people. However, it has yet to go a long way to achieve good linkage between education and socio-economic development of the people.

3. Agriculture Universities :

Agriculture was one of the faculty in the formal universities. In seventies, a policy was adopted to establish one agriculture university in every major state of India. The purpose was to allow the universities to have more focused mechanism to extend their research and developmental activities lab to land and farmers. It also enabled the agriculture universities to work closely with Extension Departments of the State Governments.

Agriculture universities are carrying out functions related to agriculture, veterinary, fisheries and allied fields. The universities have played an important role in making Indian self-supporting in food grain production and in increasing yield of milk/horticulture etc. India is now one of the top country in the world in milk production. The green and white revolutions have really helped India in eliminating the country's dependence on import of food grains and agro-products.

The Indian agriculture universities are established on the pattern of landgrant universities of America and had quite a good influence of the American education system during the initial stages of development. They have adopted their activities to the needs and requirements of the people and environment.

Extension activities of the agriculture universities are essentially :

- 1) To offer educational programmes at lower levels (certificate/diploma) to those who have either passed or failed in completing school education.
- 2) To offer entrepreneurial education so that they offer to farmers agriculture services and expertise.
- 3) To work closely with the Government extensions developments and train then- field workers regularly in latest techniques/varieties developed by agriculture university scientists.
- 4) To promote, inform and encourage farmers to adopt new high yielding varieties by organizing group meetings/conferences and also by closely working with those who are ready to experiment.
- 5) By having a part of students auricular work, during the last year of the degree programme to be done in a village just like internship for medical students.

4. Open Universities :

India is having one national and seven state open universities. The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has recently established an Extension Centre to help its Schools in offering education through distance mode to those who are illiterate/semi-literate or less-educated. The programmes are carried out in close collaboration with the Government Departments or the organisations/institutions interested in offering training to their identified target groups. Following are some of the programmes being offered by IGNOU :

- 1) Training and education of village level representatives in using their rights and authorities in developing the village (Panchayat Raj Programme). This is being organised in collaboration with the Central and State Govt. departments.
- 2) Training of tannery workers in using modern techniques and methods. The programme is jointly developed and delivered by the University in close collaboration with the Central Leather Research Institute, Chennai and Association of Small Scale Leather Industries.
- 3) Training and certification of construction workers who mostly are unskilled or semi-skilled workers. The programme is being developed in collaboration with the Construction Industries Development Council established by Government of India and construction industries.

There are some other programmes under development in IGNOU like Youth in Development, Women empowerment, Science for People, training of auxiliary nursing midlives, etc.

The Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University at Nashik (Maharashtra) offers courses in horticulture, industrial/technical and vocational skills to the less-educated persons. Some of these courses in industrial and agricultural skills are approved and supported under the State Govt. Schemes of Training of Rural Youth in Self-employment (TRYSEM).

5. UGC Programme in Rural area related courses.

The UGC is promoting a programme of restructuring of the first degree programme of the formal universities and colleges by introducing in the conventional discipline curriculum the foundation courses appropriate to the modern times, and applied courses including technical and vocational courses. Recently, the UGC has introduced quite a large number of agriculture and rural development related courses under the component of applied courses. Memorandum of Understanding has also been signed with Indian Council for Agriculture Research to co-operate in the implementation of about 10 programmes related to rural area development.

6. Observations :

- i) **System Integration** : The formal universities have accepted and institutionalized teaching and research as their major functions. Most of the colleges affiliated to the universities are teaching institutes and hardly carry out any research since they lack in research facilities. Further, the pressure of numbers has increased teaching workload of the teachers. The university system give esteem and prestige to the research and teaching. The extension in the formal universities, however, has remained still a marginal activity even though quite a large number of students and teachers are involved in it. Many programmes undertaken by the UGC have yet to get appreciable success in terms of coverage and their integration with main-stream activities.
- ii) **Academic Recognition** : The nature of the extension activities is quite different from the campus based teaching and research. The later has well defined norms for assessment; teaching in terms lectures delivered, courses covered and students taught; and research in term of funds attracted and papers published. However, no such norms have so far been evolved for successful extension activities. Hence, at the time of promotion to a higher position or giving academic recognition in the university system, teacher working in extension always suffers. This is also a major reason for remaining this activity marginal.
- iii) **Rigidity of the evaluation and teaching-learning methodologies** : This has also greatly contributed in not allowing extension to integrate with mainstream activities. It is, therefore, necessary to evolve for extension education, different teaching-learning tools along with measures of their successful use. This may enable extension to get integrated with teaching and research.
- iv) Agriculture Universities have participated extensively in outreach activities related to extending agri-sciences and agro-technology. Their experience could be of value to the other universities, formal and open, in evolving measures for successful extension activities.

7. New Paradiems in Development:

Government has recently adopted a new Information Technology (IT) Policy. The policy has

disallowed the restrictive and monopolistic practices of the public and Government enterprises. Taxes on Computers, and network related hardware have been reduced substantially and software development and export is promoted. The policy allows private providers to offer internet services and cable TV providers to link their cable facility to the interest. All these measures have generated extensive activities, many of these with commercial motivation, in providing latest IT facilities and services to customers.

Within a few years, we expect that internet services and facilities may reach everywhere, costs to the user will also get reduced progressively. Computer density and network outreach may increase substantially. With many communication satellites going in the sky either in the geocentric orbits or in the low orbits, the bandwidth problem may get solved. Interactivity of higher types would then be available at relatively lower costs. Thus the IT development, which has become now a global process, would create national and international communication networks that could be effectively used for educating and training on a large scale.

We are witnessing convergence of tele-communications and computers on a single platform Direct-to-Home (DTH) TV, server-based network communications are becoming interactive enough to allow

- distributed or virtual class-room for lecturing, training, educating, conferencing, etc.
- dissemination of information about all developmental activities including education and training.
- One-to-one/many and many-to-many communication allowing group interactivity.

Without going into the details of the functions that could be allowed on internet, we may conclude that information/learning/teaching resources would be made accessible to anyone, anywhere, anytime by eliminating the distance (death of a distance!) and also the intermediaries. Creation of this scenario gives rise to different ways of working, learning, teaching, managing, entertaining, etc. in fact it affects all walks of life and work of individuals and society.

The task before the universities is to evolve new paradigm of educating and managing the programmes. The major challenge is to develop content, and activities compatible to the internet environment and access to knowledge to all. This process should empower the people with information, skills and capabilities to use them effectively in their own situations. Many such experiments are being carried out, more in localised, face-to-face situation. With the support of instructions, expertise and interactivity over the internet, the process could be changed substantially. The networks are expected to create a new culture of collective and collaborative working and learning. Hence partnerships and cooperative/collaborative working for mutual benefit is going to be the key to the future development.

One of the model of development of rural people we are experimenting with incorporates partnership of four sectors :

1. The people and their village level institutions.
2. The Government Developments in charge of promotion of developments in rural areas.

3. The Non-Government / Voluntary Organisations / Groups working with the people.
4. Intellectuals /experts/ educationlists offering their expertise and services to the people.

The part of India where we work (Western India) abounds with voluntary group activities in various sectors of development such as education, health, watershed development etc. All such groups could, in principle, work collectively on a common platform created by an autonomous institution like University without endangering the identity and independence of NGO/Voluntary Group. We are at present engaged in developing such a networked partnership. The focus of the activities is the groups of people at the village level. Self-help groups for various social, economic and cultural activities are formed, and the peoples institutions at local level are strengthened. They need appropriate modernizing inputs and education in using knowledge at the local level for better productivity, utility and enrichment. Information Technology can strengthen such activities in a completely different way; people could be empowered with information, skills and confidence in their capabilities so that they can use the resources available to them to their best advantage.

8. Comments:

In the light of the existing programmes described above and the likely use of internet in linking people and places, we may offer comments on various issues raised for the Meeting.

i) Direct Contribution by University :

Students and teachers of the university can work directly with the people as a part of their curricular activities. Their contribution would be in finding the effective and efficient ways of using knowledge of science and technologies in enriching various aspects of life and work of the villagers. They may undertake/participate in activities such as

- literacy/post-literacy programmes
- best use of village land and water resources for agriculture, forestry, etc.
- awareness and confidence development in the people. Traditional knowledge and expertise of villages could be strengthened and used in modern context.
- transfer of latest techniques and technologies for better utilisation of human and natural resources.
- cultivation of 'scientific temper'
- development and strengthening of peoples institutions.

ii) Institutional Reforms Necessary.

Following changes could be undertaken:

- Extension should be made an integral and inseparable part of all disciplines and faculties.

- Working with the people/institutions/organisations and participating in teaching /training programmes for the benefit of the people should also be the methodology of the teaching-learning process.
- Changing curricula to incorporate localization of universal knowledge through applications, field work, projects etc.
- Develop different tools and techniques for assessing success of a student in achieving development and the quality & expertise s/he has added to such activities.
- Establish decentralized university system by developing village level extension centres and linking them through internet with the main campus of the university.

iii) Frame Conditions by the Government:

Since universities are created, promoted and sustained with the State support, it will be essential to make appropriate changes in the mandate of the university and also in promotional policies of the Government. In particular, it is essential.

- to make appropriate changes in the Act of the university to enable universities function in a different way.
- to recognise/approve different achievement criteria and promotional norms for funding and promotion to higher positions. .
- to evolve development based criteria for admission of students for higher courses and for placement in jobs.

iv) Conditions in Rural Areas.

The process of urbanisation is a phenomena associated with , industrial society. The information society will need best of the both to be combined (Rurbanization = Rural Urbanization) for promoting decentralised/distributed institutions. To promote such a scenario, it will be necessary to establish in rural areas.

- community learning centres having multimedia learning facilities.
- single window system accessible to villagers in offering all developmental information and knowledge inputs through internet.
- network system linking various community centres, university departments, experts, etc.
- extension centres for students and teachers along with facilities of living and working. The goal should be integration of living-working-learning and empowering individuals and community.

v) Linkage of Universities ^ Knowledge network

No single university in the world can claim to have all the best expertise on a single campus. In fact in the process of globalization, best of expertise and experts could be linked through networks (knowledge network) and made accessible to every learner. The

UNESCO goal for Education for All (EFA) and Learning Without Frontiers (LWF) could be realised when global knowledge network gets created and made accessible to all. The global network should promote, besides sharing knowledge globally,

- sharing of 'best practices' and success stories of various communities/people.
- promoting traditional local/folk knowledge

vi) Advantages in serving rural areas directly :

Advantages in the process is obviously to promote new paradigm of education for sustainable development, and be most appropriate to the emerging learning society. The system will have disadvantage when asked to compete with existing traditional structures and practices.

vii) Benefits to rural population :

Rural areas will be able to get over the disadvantage of isolation and will be able to enter into third millenium society as learning society along with the rest. The mechanisms of distributed university created would slowly educate the people through developmental processes. It will generate and perpetuate the process of empowerment.

viii) Difficulties and successes in rural development:

The existing university system and development programmes often work on what could be called 'doner model'. Those who "have" try to 'give' to rural people without realising their needs, requirements and aspirations. This model needs to be changed. Proper motivation and aspirations need to be created amongst the people by appropriately educating them. The people, the user of knowledge . should be able to demand finally what they need. Well educated community with : easy access to the knowledge resources will inevitable try to apply the knowledge to the local environment and, in the process, create new information. When appropriate levels of education are reached, the people themselves will be the generator of knowledge and would cease to be only receivers. Development of ; such a learning society is the goal of any community, society and nation. The process of this transformation is quite slow and painful.

References

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