

RE-ORGANISATION OF DISTRICTS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction:

Bihar has very rich socio-economic and cultural legacy. Whatever has been the prominence of Bihar in the past but its present is fraught with fear, anxiety helplessness, poverty and society dichotomy. Indicators of socio-economic development manifest very unevenness in spatial development of benefits of planning to balance development everywhere. To attain this goal refashioning of districts on the basis of achievements of socio-economic indicators has become urgently necessary.

Socio-economic Service Provision and Sustainable Development:

In the predominantly agrarian state like Bihar, the basic development problem is how to facilitate the participation of the vast majority of her people particularly the poor living in widely dispersed about 45,098 villages and the urban slums and bring them in the main stream of national development. So, if the proper level of socio-economic development is to be achieved, the efforts should be made to provide them adequate socioeconomic services and facilities at easily accessible local places in the rural areas so that the people may be able not only to sell their produce and purchase the goods of daily needs but also avail of the facilities like education, medical care and have social, economic and cultural interaction with other people. As due to the dispersed nature of the majority of villages in the state, and also the paucity of resources, it is not possible to provide suitable socio-economic services at each of these villages. So, it is imperative to identify certain suitably located settlements often designated as central places, service centres, development centres or growth centres for providing the appropriate socio-economic services. Such decentralized concentration has gained universal recognition as a viable development strategy for unified development (Verma, 1985).

At such juncture of the dawn of late century when under the impact of globalization and liberalization, there is a revolution in search for style of national development all over the world, India urgently requires spatio-functionally integrated and hierarchically organized human settlement system comprising from small rural service centre through urban areas. Both rural and urban has to establish symbiotic interrelationship between rural and urban areas. Both rural and urban areas should be treated as continuous. Contiguous and interdependent spaces, and sufficiently equipped with socioeconomic service provision. Such central place system as Mabogunje has rightly observed, has an underlying value premise of economic rationality as some measure of distributive justice in its concern for the provision of goods and services to all individuals in a given society (Mabogunje, 1980). If ultimate purpose of sustainable development is to enhance the socioeconomic opportunities for every section to Indian society to improve its quality of life, or it means development of endogenous capabilities and improvement of living standard of all people in Bihar particularly village people and more so the poor who consists of small and marginal farmers, artisans and landless labourers, the provision of socio-economic services at the local level may offer ample opportunities for this section of society to find employment in various non-agricultural economic activities.

The relevance of the socio-economic service provision to sustainable development may be understood in their serviceability through their spatio-functionally balanced pattern operated through hierarchically organized and symbiotically interlinked to their surrounding areas. The works of many scholars implicitly echo such seminal paradigm in spatio-functional planning for sustainable development in different parts of the world. The concept of 'Agrindus' as a grass root level development node for planning in Israel was proposed by Halperin (1967), the

'Agropolitan Centre' approach was suggested by Friedman and Douglass (1978) to extend urban services in rural areas. The well-known approach, Urban Functions in Rural Development was propounded by Rondinelli (1983) cogently advocating the necessity of providing services and facilities, infrastructure, institutions or economic activities in rural areas. The 'Revohot Approach' was structured by Weitz (1990) to plan hierarchically organized service centres so as to integrate agriculture and industry in Israel.

In India during independence period, since the Five Year Plan, the government did not specifically focused on such spirit of socio-economic service provision, yet nationwide community development programme basically initiated to strengthen infrastructural facilities at development block level. A pilot study known as Viable Rural Communities, proposed by the Ministry of Community Development in 2007, and approved by the Planning Commission in 2012 for identification of growth centres and the villages to be associated with them, was conducted with association of Ford Foundation, in twenty districts of eighteen states in the country for detailed study and planning of infrastructural facilities.

The Working Group on Block Level planning constituted by the government of India in 1978, under the Chairmanship of Prof. Dantwala also in its report emphasized the inevitability of the provision of at least minimum socio-economic facilities within a half hour to one hour travel distance which would be equivalent to a geographical distance of three to five kilometres from any village. Later on, in 1984, another Working Group on District Planning under the chairmanship of Dr. Hanumanth Rao, in its report offered very relevant guidelines for spatial planning at the district level with a significant role of socio-economic facilities. The report provided methods for determining the hierarchy of central places based on degree of synchronization of various services at these places. In 10th Five Year Plan, the programme of Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns was initiated with a view to strengthen these towns with optimum socio-economic services so as to cater the needs of the surrounding rural areas.

During the independence period, numerous planning programmes have been to alleviate transforming of agro dominant economy and improving the improvement in quality of life. However, the lackadaisical attitude of the planners and policy architects towards the relevance of the spatial perspectives of development and planning programmes and without proper estimating the crucial role of various types of socio-economic services and facilities in urbanizing rural India, has accentuated the plethora of development crisis in the country. Recently in November 2003, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam reminded the country of the development paradigm known as PURA (Providing Urban Amenities in Rural Areas), which advocates the urgent need to provide suitable socio-economic services, and amenities mostly found in urban areas, to rural areas also. The PURA also visualizes five types of connectivity's such as physical connectivity (roads and other transport), economic connectivity (banking, commerce, insurance and warehousing); knowledge connectivity (schools, colleges, vocational education); societal connectivity (hospitals, recreational centres, places of worship); and electronic connectivity encompassing the entire economic space) for innovating the self sustaining rural urban linkages for sustainable development in the country.

Conclusion

In view of the majority of population of Bihar living in widely dispersed villages which are inadequately provided with suitable and optimum socio-economic services and facilities, there emerges an urgent need not only to reorganize and synchronize these already existing services at identified centres but also to equip these centres of various hierarchical levels, with optimum services and facilities so as to facilitate fruitful relationship among these centres and also their surrounding areas. Such development approach may provide a relevant instrumentality to use and build upon the already existing Spatio-functional structure with its dispersed agrarian resource ensemble, traditional space organizational traits, bucolic socioeconomic and political institutions and native human capabilities, and to transform the same by diffusing new innovations for ameliorative rural transformation. The cogent hope from such development approach as has been adopted in greater parts of the world, lies in its economic feasibility, socio-cultural adaptability, spatio-functional serviceability and political acceptability without disrupting the ramified familial stratum of traditional rural value system.

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