

NEW FACE TO TRADITIONAL INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES OF RURAL ASSAM - AN EFFORT THROUGH TRAINING AND RESEARCH

Unemployment is a chronic economic problem almost common to each and every economy of the world. The problem of growing unemployment continued to be matter of great concern for Assam. In spite of having huge natural resources, the state's economy still largely remains backward and under developed, as these natural resources have not yet been thoroughly exploited. Against the backdrop of increasing poverty, slow pace of economic development and very high rate of population growth, the unemployment problem has assumed chronic and complex character in Assam. The problem has further been accentuated with the increase in the number of unemployed technical personnel in the state. Notwithstanding efforts made through successive state plans for generation of greater employment potential, the gap between gainful employment opportunities and fast growing labour force has continued to widen. Unemployment

is no doubt a national problem in India but the problem has assumed greater significance in Assam due to the economic backwardness of the state. Further, the incidence of unemployment is more pronounced in the rural areas since it characterised by under-employment or seasonal unemployment.

Unemployment is the cumulative result of many causes. Some of the causes are application of outdated technologies in the rural areas, lack of proper marketing system in the rural areas, inadequate development of capability for self-employment activity.

Application of Appropriate Technology

The economy of Assam is suffering from low level of technology and acute shortage of skilled labourers. Poor techniques and lower skills result in inefficient and insufficient production, which leads to poverty.

While the need for application of science and technology for rural development is becoming strong, several technologies have not reached the user population. Multiple causes are attributed to this. Limited and inadequate extension measures, lack of awareness, little innovation in the methods pursued for technology transfer, non involvement of technology user population in deciding the choice of technologies, failure to assess/

foresee the market acceptance of technologies and little incremental benefits perceived by user population are some of these. Lack of minimum infrastructure and poor logistics are the other constraints.

The experience in creating viable self-employment opportunities on the basis of increased productivity through specific S & T interventions suggests

that the demand for the technologies has to come from the user population. This is possible only through the process of people's participation in the identification and selection of the technologies. Such participation is a pre-requisite for channelling the feedback to the research and development institutions and technology transfer agencies. These are indeed the threshold level requirements for any development programme.

Technology empowerment of rural poor is widely recognised as a crucial element in strategy for poverty eradication. It is unfortunate that several technologies currently available at the R & D institutions are not known among user population. Very little information on technologies is available with the rural development workers. This lack of exposure is leading to the technology gap between user population and technology development institutions. Closing this technology gap should be on the top of the national agenda for poverty alleviation. The need for speedy promotion of useful technologies among rural people becomes significant in the context of continuous and rapid advances in the evaluation of technologies in the world today, particularly developed countries, leading to the technological divide.

Development of Technology for the primary sector:

Technology plays an important role in the promotion of income generating activities in the rural areas. There still exist ample scope for promotion of self employment activities in the agriculture and allied sector in Assam. Outdated technology both in terms of input,

machineries, managerial techniques etc. have made the income generating activity in the primary sector unproductive. Because of these reasons new generation feel reluctant to take up income generating activities in the primary sector. Demonstration of production and profitability of agriculture and animal husbandry sector through application of modern technology is essential. Appropriate technology will have to be identified for each of the key economic activity and demonstration units will have to be developed.

Self Help Groups & Technology transfer

The growth of self-help movement among the rural people in different parts of country is emerging as a very reliable and efficient mode for transfer of technology to user group population. Members of self help groups in backward areas have discovered for themselves that SHGs offer them organisational base, larger resources and access to modern technology leading to employment and income generation.

Income generating activity oriented capacity building

Capacity building of the rural people is an important step towards providing sustainable self-employment. The incidence

of Poverty and unemployment are the two basic twin problems of the rural areas of Assam. Besides the intervention in the shape of assistance under different projects & programmes, building technical and managerial capacity of the rural people particularly unemployed youth is an important facilitating factor in creating self-employment avenues in the rural areas.

State Institute of Rural Development has been taking certain interventions to enable the rural masses to develop their capacity,

knowledge, skill and managerial aspects in certain economic activities and thereby showing the avenues for income generation through self-employment in a sustainable manner. The thrust is on providing technical and managerial skill required for the development of agriculture and allied sector. Assam still has lots of scope for self-employment in this sector. A scientific and planned approach is required after proper identification of trust areas.

Capacity building:

Building the capability of the rural people to manage their own activities is a vital component in the entire development approach. Capacity building is a process of enhancing the knowledge, skill and attitude of the rural people to face future challenges and fulfil social commitments with the help of other actors in the society. Capacity building enhance the ability of the people and people's institutions to do what is required of them.

Capacity building is an effort to develop the following qualities among the rural people.

- a. Skill development.
- b. Ability to plan.
- c. To decide.
- d. To organise.
- e. To carry out activity.
- f. To deal with people/institution.

The SIRD has been making effort to build the capacity among the members of the SHGs/JLGs not only through training programmes but also through field level guidance and supervision as it has been observed that capacity of the members of the SHGs/JLGs cannot be built through a single training programme.

Training and research activities of the SIRD, Assam have been diversified and made them more people and practical oriented to build the technical and managerial capacity of the rural people.

Need for quality inputs: Lack of quality inputs can be considered as one of the main factors as to why we couldn't see durability of the assets acquired by the beneficiaries. That is why most of the beneficiaries couldn't have a sustainable avenue for their self-employment. The glaring example in this regard is animal husbandry sector.

Establishment of model breeding farms for the production of quality inputs to be provided to the swarozgaris and others in

the villages interested to take up self-employment through animal husbandry projects has become important. In Assam there is dearth of good quality milch cattle, poultry including duck, pig etc. Rural people living below the poverty line face immense difficulty in getting quality breed when they take up these activities for their self-employment. People living above the poverty line manage to get these inputs from neighbouring states investing extra amount, which is not possible on the part of poor families.

Horticulture is one of the activities in the state having promising profitability. In this case also unemployed youths and

farmers face the same difficulty of getting good varieties of seedlings and saplings. Poor families can't afford to bring these inputs from long distance incurring extra expenditure thereby upsetting the project prepared for their micro enterprises. Establishment of model nursery farms to provide hybrid varieties to the farmers of the villages in the centre can be created in every district. These model nursery farms will have the same facilities as mentioned in the case of animal husbandry.

Demonstration through activity clusters: SIRD have done field level experiments through development clusters of selected

income generating activities. Development of activity specific clusters for economic upliftment of SHGs has helped us to converge essential support services for the growth of the activities in a scientific manner. This has created demonstration for replication.

The SIRD has so far assisted around 100000 families through institutional credit amounting to Rs. 120.53 crores for development

of micro enterprises under the activities of improved agricultural activities with mechanization, poultry farming for egg and meat production, dairy farming, production of diversified handloom items, scientific management of piggery units, mushroom production in combination with other activities, cane and bamboo activities, marketing of rural products, village level computer centres, small industries etc.

Linkages with technical institutes: Development of selected income generating activities in the clusters in a systematic and scientific manner has become possible mainly because of the technical and academic support converged by the institute through establishment of linkages with specialized institutes situated inside and outside the state.