

## A. INTRODUCTION

Rural development has been one of the principal components of Nepal's development plans. The Village Development Programme (VDP) initiated in 1952 constituted the first attempt. After almost ten years of operation it was terminated and a new programme called Panchayat Development was introduced. As the resource allocation for the programme was meagre, it was limited in scope. A few other projects were undertaken in this sector during the 1960s. However, a real push for rural development came in the late 1970s with the launching of a number of Integrated Rural Development Projects (IRDP) with substantial assistance from multilateral and bilateral aid agencies.

Eight IRDPs are in operation, covering twenty-three of the seventy-five districts of Nepal. They are: (1) Integrated Hill Development Project, (2) Rasuwa/Nuwakot IRDP, (3) Karnali-Bheri IRDP, (4) Rapti IRDP, (5) Koshi Hill Area Rural Development Project, (6) Mahakali Hills RDP, (7) Sagarmatha IRDP, and (8) Dhading District Development Project. A few of these projects have completed or are about to complete their present term and are slated for the next phase, while some of them are mid-way in implementation.

Performance of the IRDPs has been less than satisfactory; evaluation reports portray a bleak picture. With ten years of experience, HMG is still baffled by the implementation problem. Experimentation has been going on particularly with the coordination structure. The pace of implementation has not improved significantly. It is a matter of concern to both HMG and the donor agencies. Some donors are raising doubts about the project approach itself and even thinking of alternatives. HMG is however, convinced that it is the right approach, difficult as it is to implement. It is HMG's thinking that decentralisation efforts, presently being pursued seriously, will solve most of the problems. The donor agencies are also well disposed to this new development and are watching with cautious optimism. The rural development sector is at a critical juncture institutionally.

This study is opportune at the time. Existing evaluation studies of IRDPs are confined to particular projects, so a review of the overall situation is needed. This study is directed towards that end. Though essentially based on secondary information, it has taken note of current developments. Also the interviews with the concerned authorities constitute an important input to the study. The seminar held at ICIMOD on May 28, 1985, to discuss the draft report of this study provided valuable information and suggestions. In light of these facts and also the evaluation findings, the study attempts to address the important issues, the fundamental one being the very approach of IRDPs.