

E. ANALYSIS OF EVALUATION

The evaluation studies reviewed above are not uniform. While some are focussed on a few areas, some are comprehensive. This difference may be partly due to the different scopes and objectives of the evaluations, or the different stages of project implementation. Except in a few cases, most of the findings and recommendations are based on general observations and not empirical fact. Of course, in projects of this nature with social and political dimensions, quantitative assessment is difficult. Interviews are one basis of assessment. And they are not always dependable. Personal observation constitutes the key instrument in most evaluations. Such an observation involves the risk of being influenced by personal bias and preconceived notions. The aforementioned evaluations cannot be assumed to be free from this shortcoming.

Despite the differences in approach and presentation, and the biases, there is some commonality in the findings and recommendations. None of the evaluations have rated the whole project as a failure. Certain components have been noted as successful or unsuccessful. One common recommendation of all the evaluation studies is the continuation of the project concerned. The only exception in this regard is the Rapti IRD Evaluation which has put some conditions for continuation of the project beyond the present project term. A common observation, also shared by the Rapti Evaluation, is the need for a long-term perspective for rural development. Ten to fifteen years have been suggested as a reasonable time frame for donor assistance.

Emphasis on people's participation constitutes another common feature. The gap between the profession and practice of this strategy has been clearly brought out in most evaluations. Hence stress has been placed on associating the local institutions - district and village Panchayats, user's committee, local private sector and non-governmental organisations at the local level - in planning and implementation. Decentralisation has been viewed as an essential prerequisite for this purpose. The Decentralisation Act and Rules have therefore been very well received. However there is a note of scepticism in regard to implementation. That may be the reason why the Rapti Evaluation has put forth full implementation of this legislation as one of the conditions for extension of the project.

Lack of "commitment" of HMG to integrated rural development has been noted in almost all the studies. Ineffective functioning of the Coordination Committees, lukewarm support of most line ministries and central agencies, and difficulties in getting necessary personnel have been attributed to this factor. The Rapti Evaluation has been forthright in pointing this out - "Without HMG commitment and performance over the next two years, the major investment of Rapti Project resources would not likely be beneficial over the long-term and the project should be terminated at that time". While other evaluators have not been as direct they have also considered political support as a prerequisite for integrated rural development.

Some commonality is noticed in an investment approach. High investment in facilities and infrastructure has been depreciated. Emphasis has been placed on a "simple, low-cost and labour intensive" ap-

proach to implementing projects. Most evaluations have recommended more investment in productive sectors which would directly help in increasing the income of the people in the project area. In view of difficulty in coordination, some have suggested confining the project to a few key sectors.

Degradation of the environment threatening the life-support system in the hills has been highlighted in most studies. Measures undertaken to arrest this trend have been considered inadequate. To quote the KHARDEP Mid-term Review Report, "Progress in the forestry activities under KHARDEP has been promising but the scale of the effort has been small in relation to the magnitude of the need to increase fuelwood and fodder production, and help conserve watershed."

Creation of off-farm employment to release the pressure on farming activities has been, according to most evaluations, much below the target. More action has been called for in this regard. Development of community forestry along the lines of the Community Forestry Project aided by the World Bank is one of the suggestions. Controlled grazing and pasture management constitutes another recommendation.

Regarding organisation, paucity of trained manpower, fast turnover of staff, and lack of motivation among the field staff, are the common findings. Timely disbursement of funds is another problem with most projects. These constraints are not peculiar to IRDPs only. They are general problems in development administration. According to most evaluations, the need for the office of the coordinator on the existing scale has been questioned in some projects, while the KHARDEP Mid-Term Review has suggested strengthening the coordinator office with professionals to assist in district planning.

The role of foreign experts is one critical area elaborately covered in the evaluation reports. Most evaluations have doubted the effectiveness of expatriates. The predominant role played by them in some projects has drawn critical remarks -- it has relegated the local institutions to a passive role and rendered people's participation a farce. The Nepalese evaluators in particular have been very critical. The cost of these experts apart, the relevance of the expertise to the Nepalese rural situation has been questioned. This more or less reflects the views of the Nepalese authorities. While it may indeed be an extreme view, there is a consensus on the need to cut down on the number of experts attached to projects, and to prepare the counterparts to take over.

Comprehensive though most evaluations are, a few basic aspects seem to have been overlooked. First, even after about ten years of operation and with eight IRDPs ongoing, enough effort has not gone into developing a meaningful framework for formulating an Integrated Rural Development Project. Each project is conceived and formulated in an ad hoc way. The donor agencies generally set the terms of reference and the consultants develop the project within those parameters. While there cannot be or should not be a rigid project format, there is a need for a basic framework. The Integrated Rural Development Policy of the Sixth Plan is too vague to serve as a guideline. The NPC is the appropriate agency to undertake this task. In this exercise, the active

association of the concerned sectoral agencies is imperative. Consultation with the major donor agencies would be helpful. Such a framework would need periodic revision. The adoption of a framework will help to ensure some consistency in the IRDPs.

Unlike the IRDPs in India which are totally target-oriented (helping the households below the poverty line), the Integrated Rural Development Projects in Nepal are essentially area development projects. As such they should have given more attention to the spatial dimension of development. As Nepal is committed as to regional development strategy, lack of consideration of this aspect is surprising. It may be due to the dwindling enthusiasm of the NPC in the regional development approach after its abortive attempt to try out the growth axes and growth points strategy through the Regional Intensive Development Programme, as reflected in Sharma's remark, "The basic principles of the Sixth Plan do not reflect the euphoria of the regional approach reminiscent of the past." With such an array of the IRDPs and more incoming, the regional development strategy could hardly be ignored. In order to achieve "self-propelling" or "self-sustaining" development, a common objective of the IRDPs, planned development of a hierarchy of growth centres with strong linkages is an essential requirement. The provision of rural or service centres in the IRDPs has not been envisaged in this light. (Sharma, 1979).

Lack of consideration of regional strategy is perhaps the reason for the neglect of the urban sector in the IRDPs. It is acknowledged that "rural areas without access to urban centres and services cannot prosper" and "those without access to fully functional and efficient (urban) centres are denied their full development potential." In the case of Nepal most urban centres have scarcely developed. Without complementary development of the urban areas, the rural development process cannot make much headway. It may be appropriate to point out that neglected as the urban sector has been in the national development programme, the conference of the Pradhan Panchas of the Town Panchayats held in Jhapa in January 1983 drew the attention of HMG to the need for the simultaneous development of the urban and rural sectors and establishment of a strong linkage between the two. In response to their representation of this valid demand, HMG has of late taken note of it and the Seventh Plan seems to pay some attention to this aspect. The Basic Principles of the Seventh Plan state, "Concrete steps will be taken to make rural development and urbanisation complementary to one another." It is encouraging to note that the Rapti IRDP, though belatedly, has given some attention to the urban sector. (Rondinelli: Spatial Analysis for Regional Development).

The de-emphasis on infrastructure suggested in most IRDP evaluations seems to run counter to the achievement of the objective of self-sustained development. While investment in overhead and administrative facilities needs to be kept as low as possible, the development of rural infrastructure of modest standards cannot be minimised. "The study of a Taluka in India by Sudhir Wanmali shows: "Increases in agricultural productivity do not take place without the timely development of key rural services." The provision of transport, marketing and rural infrastructure, the study points out, "encourages private sector to grow in the countryside, thereby

facilitating the broader processes of rural socio-economic development." The cases of Punjab and Haryana offer an outstanding example. The much-emphasised investment in productive sectors thus needs complementary investment in rural infrastructure.

The location of the IRDPs is one point which does not seem to have been fully appreciated. Since the basic objective of these projects is to reach the poor, and poverty is at its worst in the hills and mountains, the choice has naturally fallen on northern hilly region. Their formidable physical constraints apart, these areas have limited infrastructure for development; odds are heavily loaded against the projects to begin with. Proper account has not been taken of this factor in project formulation. Following conventional project approach, a five-year time frame has usually been adopted and activities squeezed into this period irrespective of the environment. The Mahakali IRDP with its headquarters located in Patan then approachable by a STOL aircraft only is a typical illustration. The evaluators, while indulging in highlighting shortfalls, do not seem to recognise this inherent weakness during project formulation.

Another weakness in project formulation which the evaluations have overlooked is the fact that some of the constraints, particularly those of the socio-cultural nature, are not manipulable in the short-run. Formulating a project on the assumption that the government will do away with such constraints make it unrealistic to start with. The IFAD evaluation has rightly remarked, "It is always possible to seek certain assurance from a country as a pre-condition for the loan effectiveness. One should not, however, expect that a country will change the basic tenets of its development strategy for the sake of one project." Some of the recommendations of the evaluations in respect to such constraints clearly belong to the category of pious wishes. The crux of the matter is that a project will have to live with some constraints and due consideration should be taken note of them in its formulation. This may call for a longer time frame, more modest investment, de-emphasis on certain components, or complementary investment in some important sectors. In other words, a flexible non-conventional approach to project planning as opposed to a standardised project formulation is needed.

The need for internal resource generation has been pointed out in some evaluations. But no clear suggestion has emerged except the reinstatement of the Panchayat Development Land Tax (PDLT). The self-sustained development process is inconceivable without augmentation of internal resources. In the project formulations, no serious thinking about it is evident. Let alone the financing of further development programmes, the operation and maintenance of the completed projects and services has not been seriously considered. The implicit assumption is that HMG will take over and continue the programmes. R/NIRDP is a glaring example of the fallacy of this assumption. The Decentralisation Act has recognised the need for internal resource generation. However, there is a need for in-depth study of the possibilities for internal resource generation and incorporation of this aspect into the project itself. Since the scope of internal resources is limited in many areas, for initial assessment of necessary financial support after the termination of the project is needed.

Since grants and soft credit are being liberally provided in development assistance to Nepal, and IRDPs are no exception, not much thought has gone into using credit in financing rural development. Thus credit constitutes a small part of the investment -- with the incorporation of the SFDP component it is on the increase. The possibility of increasing the share of credit in total investment under IRDPs deserves some exploration. Such a strategy will help internal resource generation and eventually, the process of self-sustained development.

An IRDP is a multi-sectoral project implemented by respective sectoral agencies. However its formulation is usually done by consultants with heavy donor input of ideas and priorities, the consultations with the concerned sectoral agencies being generally an observance of formality. In absence of active involvement of the sectoral agencies in project formulation, the capacities of these agencies are seldom properly assessed. Whatever manpower and organisation are required of an agency is assumed available and is sometimes agreed to in writing by the government. But in most cases, it does not come forth according to projection, and the concerned agency is usually blamed for lack of cooperation or commitment to the project.

While the latter is also a factor to reckon with, in many cases there is simply no capacity of the agency to cope with the additional burden, overstretched as it is with its direct programmes. For example, the Department of Agriculture has an ambitious programme of agricultural extension in the Terai region (with the conclusion of the agreement on Second Agricultural Extension and Research Project under negotiations with the World Bank the Terai districts will be all covered). On top of this, it is expected to supply additional junior technicians (JT) and junior technical assistants (JTA) and other supporting services to the hill districts where the IRDPs are concentrated. This matter is becoming serious because it is not one or two IRDPs which are making demands on the sectoral agencies, but eight with more coming. The observation of the Colloquium referred to earlier about "the need for strengthening the capabilities of the concerned sectoral agencies" is apropos. The need for an assessment of trained manpower and organisational capacity required for IRDPs and their supply at the macro-level seems urgent.

The communication gap is another aspect which has not received adequate attention in the evaluations. While some have pointed out the lack of knowledge about the project among the people living in the area, no suggestions have been offered to bridge the gap. Apart from the lack of information, misinformation is a common phenomenon in most projects. High expectations and aid dependency syndrome are the product of such misinformation. Another gap in communication is among the projects themselves. There is little exchange of information and experience among the projects. Though meetings of the donor agencies of the IRDPs have been occasionally organised, there is no evidence of benefitting from each others' experience. Interaction among projects should be promoted.

The greatest weakness in the IRDPs, overlooked also by the evaluations, is, however, the question of how to involve the poor in the development process. While people's participation has been advocated

as a strategy in almost all the IRDPs, there is no elaboration of how to achieve it, except passing mention of associating the District Panchayat in the selection of projects. Rural communities are not homogeneous in Nepal, as in most developing countries. The dominance of the rural elite aside, the division among the poor themselves and their dependence on the rural rich, inhibit them from taking part in the development process. In order to ensure their participation, the rural poor need to be organised, with the help of a motivator as in the case of the SFDP. Only through an organised group can the poor assist themselves. SFDPs have already proved it. Most IRDPs have a SFDP component. But its adoption is not so much a recognition of the need to organise the poor in the project area as an accomodation of a successful component. The reason for this is the tendency to ignore the political aspect of development, sensitive as this issue is.

Rural development can hardly afford to be apolitical. Explaining why development efforts of the past have neither given results in material nor human terms to the majority of people in the Third World, P. Wignaraja, Secretary General of the Society for International Development (SID) asserts, "The past development efforts are in fact anti-rural." He, along with many researchers in the field, thinks that the current development process, even with social justice built into it, is still an economic exercise which assumes a conflict-free social framework for change. It is now increasingly accepted that sustained improvement in the lives of the poor is possible only through empowering them to confront those who are reaping the benefits of development. This calls for intervention of a political nature. Fortunately for Nepal, with a broad-based political system committed to decentralisation, there is ample political space to manoeuvre. Current efforts toward decentralisation provide unique opportunities. The organisation of the beneficiaries as provided for in the Decentralisation Act and Rules would make a good entry point to organise the poor for their genuine participation in the development process.