

F. CONCLUSION

The evaluations of most of the projects are premature. The remark of IFAD - "We are not in a position, at this stage, to comment on the implementation aspects of IFAD's projects, (Sagarmatha IRD is one of them) of which very few are half-way through" - is pertinent here. It will be indeed unfair to make any definite assessment regarding the success or failure of the IRDPs on the basis of these evaluations which were not only premature but are at the moment, outdated in most cases. Conditions have not been static. A lot of changes have occurred and these changes, according to progress reports, are generally positive and encouraging. (IFAD - Comparative Review, 1982)j.

The development process tends to change periodically. The Integrated Rural Development approach which came about in the 1970s with fanfare as a concerted attack on rural poverty is becoming hackneyed. So, a search is on for a change in approach. Ascribing the poor performance of the rural sector in the low income countries to the faulty strategy of integrated rural development, the tendency now is to revert back to a "better focussed" sectoral approach. Before faulting the integrated approach, it is necessary to objectively analyse the basic reason for poor performance of integrated rural development in the countries concerned. And this performance has to be examined in the context of overall development performance. If progress has been generally good with the exception of rural development projects, there may be some validity in this rethinking. At least in Nepal's case, it is not so - development performance in sectoral programmes has been generally far from satisfactory. The performance of rural development projects has not been worse than that of the agricultural sector programmes.

A mid-stream change in strategy at a time when decentralisation, the acknowledged tool for rural development, has just taken effect, would indeed be disastrous for Nepal. Steadfast adherence to the present strategy, which is beginning to work, is needed. It is hoped the donor agencies will appreciate the cross-roads in process Nepal has reached. It would not be an exaggeration to say that with grants for local development much limited and local resource generation yet to begin, what gives substance to decentralisation is the IRDPs and other multi-sectoral projects on rural development. Stopping the transfusion at this stage would amount to withdrawing the life support to this much-acclaimed process. It may be argued that by changing to a sectoral approach, the support is not going to be stopped. The argument sounds right, but any disturbance in the existing set-up in a country like Nepal where institutions are young and vulnerable will dislocate the entire process. Continuity and perseverance in the pursuit of the existing development strategy are what is needed at this juncture. The Basic Principles of the Seventh Plan (1985 - 90) have rightly adopted this approach, "What is needed is to direct our attention towards giving concrete forms to the objectives singled out in the current (Sixth) Plan and to the things referred to in its basic development policies, instead of talking about additional things and hunting for new catchwords in the course of the Seventh Plan period."

While the appropriateness of IRD in Nepal's development is well recognised, the need for more commitment on the part of HMG to this programme is obvious. First of all the NPC's active involvement in the IRD programme is essential. Besides providing a framework, it should be involved in project conception itself. The regional planning approach can come about only through the association of the NPC in project formulation. With respect to coordination, a nagging issue now, NPC's intervention could be helpful. The Colloquium referred to earlier could not arrive at a consensus on this issue. This disagreement in itself is an indication of the inadequacy of the existing arrangement. An objective assessment of the matter is called for. In short, the role of the NPC vis-a-vis the IRDP needs close scrutiny.

One clear lesson from the IRDP experience is that without the sectoral agencies' serious involvement and commitment, the project is bound to suffer in implementation. The tendency on the part of sectoral agencies to treat the IRD component as a second priority activity must change. While the imposition of a project, as is most often happening, should be avoided, once it is agreed to, the sectoral agencies should take their respective components as an integral part of their programme and accord them due priority.

Streamlining of administration and accountability is an urgent necessity. This is not just for the IRDP but for development activities as a whole. The erosion in the values of administration in recent years is a matter of deep concern. The foreign donors are apprehensive about it. The IRDPs with a multitude of micro-activities widely spread out, now being decentralised are most vulnerable to abuse and misuse. Serious efforts are called for to arrest this unfortunate trend and improve the situation over time. Legislation, of which there is plenty, cannot alone do the job. Strong moral commitment and integrity is required on a continuing basis. The present government was voted to power on a mandate, among other things, to fight inefficiency and corruption. It is therefore expected that the government will take concrete steps to improve administration.

Rural development is a complex phenomenon involving an interaction of economic, social, political and cultural factors. It is a difficult process in any developing country. Given the formidable physical constraints facing Nepal, it seems almost an insurmountable task. But with a 90 per cent rural population, Nepal has to grapple with it, however frustrating it may be. It is an unavoidable challenge.

The challenge offers an opportunity to alleviate the poverty of Nepal. No other project or programme contains as much potential to improve the lives of people who are virtually at the margin of existence. Let us not forget this humanitarian aspect while deliberating on rural development.