

Promoting Rural Development in Border Disturbed Regions of India through inclusive growth in Agriculture by using Open and Distance Learning technologies (ODL).

Key words:

Rural revitalization,
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
Conflict zones,
Agriculture, Nutrition security,
Border areas,
Rural Development,
Open and distance learning (ODL).

Abstract:

Rural Population living in areas on or near borders of countries often face inequality in terms of access to better livelihood opportunities as well as assured food and nutrition security. Their challenges are further escalated because of their locations in high security zones where there is a perception of threat or conflict. The development and prosperity of the rest of the country is not always reflected in these regions. While the reasons for such disparity can be many, there is a need to take stock of the ground realities to develop strategies to include such regions in the development agenda of the country and the world.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of reducing inequality and attaining zero hunger are to be achieved by 2030. According to the Global Food Policy Report 2019, these can be achieved by Rural Revitalization through transformation of our Food and Agriculture system. Population near the International borders of India mainly live in villages and therefore supporting Agriculture and Rural Development would be key to transformation of such villages at the borders. Further, the use of distance learning technologies would be the most efficient way for leveraging growth in these locations without compromising security concerns.

The paper draws attention to the vulnerable population living in the villages along the International borders of India and proposes revitalization of these rural areas by focusing on increasing access to technology, best practices, trade opportunities etc in agriculture and farm enterprise available in the country by using distance learning technology. Collaboration with Security forces at the borders is proposed for connecting with the population through ODL mode. The paper underlines the need to understand the context within which any intervention will need to operate in these areas for creating a sustainable framework that could consistently support and empower these villages.

Introduction:

The rural population living in villages situated along the international borders of a country are in a unique situation due to their location. These border villages may not necessarily be in a conflict zone, but due to their location they are in a zone where security preparedness is high and the population is vulnerable due to the threat perception, restrictions in movement and sometimes due to influences from across the border. The Government of India views this border population as a strategic asset to the country and an important element to maintain border security. Therefore all out efforts are made to improve social and economic infrastructure to ensure that people of the villages along the international border continue to live there. As citizens of our country, it is important that they be included in the development taking place in the rest of the country, and so there is a need to explore initiatives which can be taken to specifically reach out, connect, support and empower such populations alienated due to locational disadvantage.

Since the border areas are essentially rural having farming communities, it is felt that supporting Agriculture and rural development in such regions, particularly through the use of distance learning technologies, will result in leveraging growth without compromising security concerns. Use of ODL will increase access of these villages to technology, best practices, trade opportunities etc in agriculture and farm enterprise available in the country.

Rural revitalisation and mitigating conflict are some of the key factors identified by the UN and IFPRI for attaining the SDG's. Towards attaining this end, and to draw attention to the vulnerable populations living in the borders, the paper defines the various components which need to be brought together for a sustainable impact on rural wellbeing and food security in these regions.

Background:

India is moving ahead with policy initiatives and development projects, and is being recognized as one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Along with the various new projects, schemes and policies being declared by the government, emphasis is also on inclusive development thereby making sure that the benefits arising out of these initiatives are sustainable and accessible to all. The government has a network to reach out to the last taluka of the country, and has systems in place to reach every individual, however, the border areas of our country may see lower interventions of the developmental initiatives. Ensuring development of border villages poses a greater challenge as compared to implementing developmental initiatives in the villages situated in the mainland. This may be due to threat perception, and also partly due to security concerns which restrict free passage and visits to these regions since International borders of a country are often viewed as potential areas where conflict and/or migration is a possibility. This being a concern worldwide, every country's border security puts processes and infrastructure in place as preventive measures against conflict in these regions. For mitigating conflict and migration, FAO-IFPRI joint brief 2017 identified the role of agriculture and rural development wherein it is brought out that interventions to sustain Agricultural livelihoods and improve food security could weaken some of the drivers of conflict including motives that may lead individuals to support or join armed groups or engage in illegal activities.

A United Nations report found that conflict and climate change were key factors holding back countries' progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Further the 2019 Global International Food policy report proposes Rural Revitalisation (IFPRI report 2019) as the most practical way to achieve the SDGs as focusing on the needs of rural areas and addresses many persisting and growing challenges.

It is in this context that empowering rural population in villages near the borders of our country by promoting Agriculture and farm enterprise is thought of as a subject of this paper, and ODL is the method of choice for reaching unreached population at difficult locations. It is felt that there is a need to undertake a study of the ground requirements and accordingly to inter connect the hubs of technology, policy and knowledge existing at the national level to the last individual on the ground using ODL technologies so that they are equal stakeholders in the countries progress. Outlining a sustainable framework for this purpose that would consistently support vulnerable populations and empower them would be a valuable contribution towards wellbeing of the country and attaining the SDGs.

International Borders: Global concerns and India's policy, programmes for its border districts.

In the recent years conflict within and between countries, leading to migration and distress at international borders has been an area of concern globally. Protracted conflicts around the world have been a main cause of a rise in global hunger (FAO-IFPRI joint brief 2017). Rural areas are bearing the brunt of these conflicts with rural population being most severely affected. (FAO et al 2017).

According to the UN's International Migration report 2017, the global level of forced displacement across international borders continues to rise. By the end of 2016, the total number of refugees and asylum seekers in the world was estimated at 25.9 million representing 10.1 per cent of all international migrants.

The population near the International borders of India mainly live in villages and therefore supporting Agriculture and rural development would be key to transformation of such villages at the borders. The villages at the international borders of India have been given special status and the Government of India has been implementing the Border Area Development Programme (BADP) as part of a comprehensive approach to Border Management.

The main objective of the BADP is to meet the special developmental needs and well being of the people living in remote and inaccessible areas situated near the international border and to saturate the border areas with the entire essential infrastructure through convergence of Central/State/ BADP/Local schemes and participatory approach. At present the BADP is implemented in 396 border blocks of 111 border districts in 17 States of India viz, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal, which constitute the major land borders. Under BADP, border villages are defined up to 50 Km from the international Border.

Among the developmental work being undertaken under BADP, in Agriculture and allied sectors, the following are promoted- (i) Animal Husbandry & Dairying (ii) Pisciculture (i) Sericulture (ii) Poultry farming/Fishery/Pig/Goat/Sheep farming. (iii) Farm forestry, horticulture/floriculture. (iv) Construction of irrigation embankments, or lift irrigation or water table recharging facilities (including minor irrigation works). (v) Water conservation programmes (vi) Social Forestry, parks, gardens in government and community lands or other surrendered lands including pasturing yards. (vii) Veterinary aid Centers, artificial insemination Centers and breeding Centers. (viii) Area specific approach keeping in view the economy of Scale – Backward-Forward integration. (ix) Skill development training to farmers for the use of modern/ scientific technique in farming.

Village wise physical and financial progress of projects implemented under BADP is monitored by the State Government concerned. Funds released (Central share) to the 17 States during the financial year 2017-18 are as follows:

Sl. No.	State	Released 2017-18 (Central Share)
1.	Arunachal Pradesh	154.14
2.	Assam	56.00
3.	Bihar	46.00
4.	Gujarat	31.73
5.	Himachal Pradesh	35.00
6.	Jammu.& Kashmir	198.89
7.	Manipur	27.56

8.	Meghalaya	36.56
9.	Mizoram	46.00
10.	Nagaland	40.04
11.	Punjab	28.00
12.	Rajasthan	116.00
13.	Sikkim	28.01
14.	Tripura	65.07
15.	Uttar Pradesh	38.00
16.	Uttarakhand	31.00
17.	West Bengal	122.00
TOTAL		1100.00

Focus on Agriculture and Farm enterprise:

Agriculture plays a vital role in India's economy. 54.6% of the population is engaged in agriculture and allied activities (census 2011) and it contributes 17.4% to the country's Gross Value Added for the year 2016-17 (at current prices). (Min of Agri and Farmers welfare, India ANNUAL REPORT, 2017-18)

Most of our population in rural areas has Agriculture (Animal husbandry, Horticulture etc) and farm oriented enterprise as the means of sustenance, therefore activities supporting Agriculture and rural development are naturally the focal point for any intervention for empowerment of rural communities. The Prime Minister Sh Narendra Modi has set a goal to double farmers income by 2022-23 which is central to promote farmers welfare, reduce agrarian distress and bring parity between income of farmers and those working in non agricultural professions. (Doubling farmers' income, Rationale, Strategy, Prospects and action Plan 2017, Ramesh Chand, Niti Policy Paper No1/2017 Niti Ayog.). A range of measures are therefore underway and the issues which can impact farmers income have been identified as increase in agricultural productivity, diversification towards high value crops, increase in crop intensity, improving terms of trade for farmers, as well as shifting cultivars to nonfarm activities. These initiatives being undertaken in a time bound manner is sure to impact the farming community and it is important that the rural communities at the border villages are included in the process.

For the villages at the borders of our country, the focus has to be on how the target population can get access to information, knowledge and opportunities available in the sectors prioritised under BADP. In Agriculture sector, accessibility to technology and inputs, direct connectivity of farmers with mandis and scientists, getting right price for produce through eNAM etc are benefits being enjoyed by farmers, cultivators, traders of our country. Farmers groups are being formed across the country for collective benefits, and scientists and technical professionals are increasingly interfacing with stakeholders of Agriculture. Specialized organizations have been set up by Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers welfare to particularly focus on reaching these benefits to farmers and farm enterprise. These benefits should also reach the farmer at the borders of the country.

Understanding the context:

In view of conditions prevailing at the disturbed regions, an assessment of other parameters is necessary for identifying farm interventions and suitable distance learning tech/methods which are *possible* in the particular location. The key to designing any intervention in the border /high security and disturbed zones would be 'understanding the context'. Selecting an intervention and the method of its delivery (implementation) would have to be based on different parameters as compared to a peace zone. There needs to be an understanding of the impact of the disturbance, the coping strategies, constraints, vulnerabilities and available resources, and what would best meet the livelihood needs of the people under such circumstances so that any intervention carried out provides increased economic opportunity and access to resources.

Security forces as partners in this process:

Collaboration with Security forces at the borders is proposed for connecting with the population through ODL mode. Given the disadvantages of location, security concerns and sometimes conflict in these regions, the security forces would be best placed to understand the most effective and suitable option among the ODL technologies/methods which would bring about the best results on ground.

Since humanitarian work is routinely undertaken by the security forces, having them as partners in implementation be a win-win situation. They then would be the agents of change who would be empowering people to better means of productivity, income and prosperity, and would thus generate goodwill for the security forces among the local population.

Using Open and Distance Learning for interventions in difficult locations:

DL tech and methods are important tools to access areas where security is of concern. Appropriately packaged information and awareness and training capsules can be well transmitted through electronic or other media, thereby avoiding any security sensitivities or manpower requirements at the location of the target groups.

Discussion and observations:

Creating a framework to connect Agriculture and Rural development institutions, experts and knowledge base in the country to the locations under study by the use of Distance learning technology is being proposed since it is felt that interconnecting the hubs of technology, policy and knowledge existing at the national level to the last individual on the ground using ODL technologies will make the marginalised population equal stakeholders in the countries progress.

Such a framework can be used for Identifying regions at the borders and adjoining areas where interventions as defined in this study can be useful and possible. A study can identify the kind of interventions in Agriculture which are possible keeping in mind not only the agroclimatic conditions but also the security environment. This need assessment of these regions can form the basis for creating or implementing targeted programs for the benefit of such population.

Open and distance learning universities could extend their reach and provide an opportunity to enhance learning. This is being thought of especially in view of the fact that it is the mandate of an ODL university to reach out to populations which have been alienated and marginalized.

It is also felt that many professionals from premier institutions would want to contribute to the betterment of these areas, but no avenues are available for them at present to connect to the population. Given an opportunity large number of experts would volunteer to reach out and contribute in the process. The power of connecting through ODL will through up enormous possibilities.

Conclusion:

The proposal for promoting Rural Development in Border Disturbed Regions of India through inclusive growth in Agriculture by using Open and Distance Learning technologies(ODL) to reach inaccessible locations has far reaching impact on rural well being and nutrition security of the people at the borders of India, but also has larger implication with respect to conflict management, border security, migration , illicit border trade as well as insurgency. Experts of Agriculture Science , those working with the government and Distance learning organizations and Security agencies will have to come together to make this intervention possible. Once successfully implemented, this could be a model for intervention in any disturbed areas in the country to transform them.

References:

- ANNUAL REPORT, 2017-18 Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Government of India, Krishi Bhawan, New Delhi-110 001, page 195.www.agricoop.nic.in)
- Border Area Development Programme (BADP)
guidelines:https://badp.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/Guidelines_badp.pdf
- Dev of Border Villages, 2019, PIB-- <http://www.pib.nic.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1562714>

- Doubling farmers income, Rationale, Strategy, Prospects and action Plan 2017, Ramesh Chand, Niti Policy Paper No1/2017 Niti Ayog
- <https://badp.mha.gov.in/hashtag>
- International Food Policy Research Institute. 2019. 2019 Global Food Policy Report. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute. <https://doi.org/10.2499/9780896293502>
- Miriam Jordan 2019, More Migrants are crossing the Border this year. What's changed?, New York Times, March 5, 2019
- United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). International Migration Report 2017: Highlights (ST/ESA/SER.A/404).