

Rural Development in a Fast Developing African Society: The Case of Mauritius

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Abstract

Title: Rural development in a fast developing African society: The Case of Mauritius Societies that are called modern are those where the states have encouraged a more holistic approach to development as both the urban and rural areas have been given much attention. Most of the African countries face the difficulties to go for a balanced development program mainly because of financial problem but also because of lack of commitment on the part of the state stakeholders to develop, design and implement appropriate policies for rural development. The challenge for most developing societies is to make judicious use of available scarce resources to cause development and modernity that satisfies all the inhabitants. In this paper the case of Mauritius, a fast developing African society, will be considered. The main objectives of the paper are to I. To take stock of the factors that have been taken by the Mauritius state, since its independence, to cause rural development and II. To discuss whether Mauritius is a success story regarding rural development. For the sake of this study, use of both primary and secondary data has been made. Books, government documents, information received from the Chief Regional Development Officer and Citizens' Advice Bureau officers and observation have proved to be very useful in writing this paper. The principal finding shows that Mauritius has resorted to the appropriate policies and the necessary implementation in achieving success in its rural development. However, the state needs to constantly review its policies and go for good governance to cope with new challenges so that the rural inhabitants are not left outside the mainstream of development.

Index terms— Rural, Rural development, Policies and State.

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1 I.

2 INTRODUCTION

ural development is the process of growth and progress of the rural economy and the improvement of welfare and well being of the local population. The improvement and modernization of the rural areas depend much on the state. Development of any society necessitates appropriate programs, policies and action for its success. State stakeholders like the government, private sector and civil society are usually bestowed

Author ? ? : University Of Mauritius with power to look after the welfare of the people in a country. The needs of the whole population have to be met. In this modern era, a holistic approach to development is required where the state caters for the needs of people living in both urban and rural areas. Therefore, the challenge for most developing societies is how available scarce resources can be used efficiently and effectively to cause development and modernity that satisfy all the inhabitants. All over the world, rural inhabitants enjoy less facilities and benefits than their urban counterparts. It is also true that within the rural areas some members are more fortunate and have much better lifestyles than the majority because of their class, caste, ethnicity and gender statuses. Although most countries, regardless of their level of development, face the dilemma of rural development yet this problem is more acute in Africa. The latter being poor because of the acts of ancient colonizers and mismanagement by political leaders is struggling hard since centuries to take off and develop. Looking at some of the modern infrastructures in the some of the urban areas of the African societies a first time European visitor to Africa might conclude that Africa is rich and comparable to his own society. However, travelling to the rural areas will reveal how far Africa is poor and needs help and donation in both kinds and cash from international institutions for combating absolute poverty.

Mauritius is an exception in Africa as it has made much socio economic progress and has therefore been able to a very large extent develop its rural areas where all the main stream facilities like clean water, access to free education, free transport for students and free health care amongst others exist and are enjoyed by the inhabitants.

The main objective of this essay is to find out the reasons behind the Mauritian success regarding rural development. The methodology used for this paper includes both primary and secondary data. For the purpose of the literature review, data have been drawn from books and government documents. Moreover, additional and relevant information was sought from the Chief Regional Development Officer who was contacted thrice on telephone to give his views and opinions on rural development. Two Citizens' Advice Bureau officers working in the rural areas were also called for information. Personal observation of the living conditions of rural inhabitants and regular sight seeing of infrastructural development in villages also helped to carry out this study.

The first part of this paper will deal with a definition of terms rural and rural development and an overview of the 'penetrative efforts' made by the Mauritian state in promoting socio-economic changes in rural areas since independence. In the second part there will be a description of youth culture and rural development. The roles and contributions of women in rural development will also be accounted for. Then follows, a brief explanation on the importance of good governance for proper management of rural development. Finally, a conclusion based on the study is stated.

3 II.

4 RURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Giving a universal definition to the term 'rural' seems to be very difficult. Definition of rural varies both in scale and philosophy according to Roberts and Hall, 2003. For the sake of this paper, rural will refer to villages and countryside in Mauritius regardless of population density and differences in traditional social structures. Rural development will mean the socioeconomic development and progress of villages and the countryside of Mauritius. Economic development refers to an improvement in the living standards that encompass material consumption, education, health, and environmental protection. On the other hand, social development refers socio-economic justice, that is fairness in income and occupational distribution, access to infrastructure like roads, electricity and clean water, preservation and respect for human rights, equal access to education, mutual understanding among members of different groups and peace and stability in society.

The overall goal of rural development is to increase the economic, political and social rights of all people in villages and the countryside. For development to take place, a society needs the input of all the different institutions of the state together with the cooperation of the population of rural areas. Rural development can be a success only when different stakeholders join hands and work responsibly. Good governance and transparency at all levels should prevail.

5 III.

6 AN OVERVIEW OF THE 'PENETRATIVE EFFORTS' MADE BY THE MAURITIAN STATE IN PROMOTING SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES IN RURAL AREAS

Mauritius has made much progress and development since its independence in 1968. The rate of economic growth has varied between 2 to 5 percent on an average during the past three decades. Successive governments have often called upon the population to join hands and work hard for the sake of economic development. The positive response from the population, both in rural and urban areas, has been beneficial for the country. The transformation of the country from a mono-crop based agricultural sector in the late 1960s and early 1970s to a modern information, communication and technologically based society at present, passing through the industrial phase frommidst 1980s till the start of the new millennium,is seen as a marvellous achievement by the population.

The first years after Independence were full of socio-economic problems. Poverty and unemployment were among the major problems faced by the country in the early 1970's.

The then government looked for help from international institutions.

The World Bank was approached. Consultation and high level discussions with the World Bank resulted into the formation of the first Four Years Plan 1971-1975 for Mauritius. This plan was adopted as a charter for socio-economic development. The World Bank gave both technical and financial assistance.

The Development Workers Cooperation was established with a view to provide employment and bring development in the country. However, it was noticed that there was an uneven and unbalanced development taking place in the country. Proper development could not reach the rural areas and that resulted in an uneven distribution of income. The government responded positively with corrective measures to do away with the pitfalls of unbalanced development. The World Bank helped financing rural development in Mauritius. A Rural Development Unit (RDU) was created in 1971 and it functioned under the aegis of the Ministry of Economic Planning. Together with a team of experts from World Bank, the RDU worked on a project to raise the quality of life of rural inhabitants. At the initial stage, on a pilot basis, 9 villages were provided with the necessary infrastructure like access to good roads, village councils, village markets, electricity, water, health centers and provision of social amenities.

The success of the project in raising the quality of life of the inhabitants was so visible that the development programs were extended to another 29 villages.

Given that the objectives of the first phase of rural development programs were achieved, the authority went on to design a second phase for rural development. The main objective, amongst others, was to improve the income of small farmers. The projects developed were the Arsenal Litchis Project, Riche Terre Cooperative project, access to credit loan facilities through the Mauritius Credit Bank, availability of funds from International Fund Agricultural Development (IFAD) and also there was the creation of appropriate schemes for small entrepreneurs. Highly productive cows from New Zealand and Anglo nubian goats were also distributed to some farmers with a 2012 ebruary F view to increase milk and meat production.

During late 1980,s, more particularly in 1988, the Rural and Development Unit (RDU) was restyled as National Development Unit (NDU) and the latter shifted to the Prime Minister's Office.

The government nominated Private Parliamentary Secretaries, who were elected members of the Legislative National Assembly, to manage the NDU.

In 1997, the government created a full-fledged Ministry of Urban and Rural Development with a view to bring development at the doorsteps of all inhabitants. The government motto for an integrated and holistic development 'putting people first' was given high priority on the national agenda.

The Mauritian States made tremendous penetrative efforts to reach people in rural areas since independence. The proper implementation and execution of the various policies and programs have been successful to a very large extent. However, still some improvements and efforts need to be done for rural population to enjoy and access benefits and facilities offered to urban inhabitants like good libraries and swimming pools, amongst others. Anyway, many social injustices have been addressed and corrected measures taken.

Inequality regarding access to infrastructures like good roads, clean water, availability of electricity, telephone services and satellites television between rural and urban areas have been considerably reduced.

The Mauritian Government now acts as a facilitator and coordinator to its population with a view to combat poverty and other social ills. After the 2010 election, the Ministry for Social Integration was created to look after the empowerment and integration of all people in the mainstream all inclusive development program for modern Mauritius. Under the aegis of the Ministry for Social integration, there are the Trust Fund For Vulnerable Groups and the National Empowerment Foundation. These two bodies are the main arms of the Ministry for combating poverty, providing necessary training for acquiring skills, imparting education and knowledge and giving financial assistance to poor families living in both rural and urban areas.

The various district councils are important bodies that have contributed enormously to the development of rural villages and countryside. Collection of garbages is regularly done to keep rural areas clean. District councils workers work in close collaboration with the central government to develop and design policies and projects to

improve the lives of rural inhabitants. Leisure and sport activities and competitions in various sports activities are often organised. The councils also deliver permits to inhabitants who are interested to carry out businesses.

Recently, the government, more particularly the Hon Prime Minister Dr Navin Ramgoolam, initiated the Equal Opportunity Bill which has already become an Act and has been given the appropriate Assent. The implementation of Act in the near future will boost up the morals of the whole Mauritian population as recruitment and promotions, amongst others, will be based on meritocracy. Consequently, recruitment and services provider agencies cannot discriminate between urban and rural candidates applying for a job or requesting certain services. Such measures will help to consolidate the Mauritian nation building as people will not only live and feel as mauritians but will also act as good patriots.

IV.

7 YOUTH CULTURE, EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Since its inception, UNESCO has stressed upon culture which impacts on development. Even the 1998 Intergovernmental Conference on cultural policy for development, held in Stockholm, rightly concluded that 'any policy for development must be profoundly sensitive to culture itself'. This shows that youth culture should be given its due and recognition by societies as it has its contribution in development process. Young people of any society, more particularly those of rural areas, are an important asset that should be exploited judiciously for rural development. No responsible society can ignore the potential of its younger population. Cultural values, beliefs and behaviour of the youths have an impact on development. With modernity, quite a large majority of youth of rural areas are having similar lifestyles as their urban counterparts.

Investment in education is important for there to be progress and modernity. Mauritius has invested much in education of its population. Primary education was free since its inception in Mauritius. Free secondary education was introduced in 1976 and tertiary education became free education in 1988. Free education is accessible to everyone. This measure has helped thousands of youngsters in both rural and urban areas to become learned, intelligent and professionals. Schools and colleges in rural areas have been given much facilities by the authority to provide quality education to the rural students. To further democratize access to education, the Hon. Prime Minister Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, has introduced free transport for all students in 2006. Some economists and upper middle class people defending the capitalists and their own vested interest were against the socialist measure. However, such a bold decision has been highly beneficial for poor families from both rural and urban areas. Besides, all students of the country welcomed the introduction of free transport.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has reached all inhabitants of the rural areas. Internet facilities are freely available in village councils and social centres. Both students and adults can make use of the computers. However, with high level of competition among Mauritian students and the relatively high level of wastage rate, mostly in rural areas, the Ministry of education had to review its system of education to meet the needs of the students and revisit its budget allocation for schools infrastructure, more particularly for those from rural areas. The recent government budget has made a provision of Rs 500000 per schools for infrastructural development. This measure has been saluted by all the school administrators.

To ensure continuous development and stability, the state is investing massively in tertiary education, research and development. The policy of the Mauritian government is to have at least one graduate per family. Some people are sceptical about the future of the graduates as to whether appropriate jobs will be made available to them. The government seems to have a different view. For them an investment in tertiary education would facilitate Mauritius to achieve its vision to become a 'knowledge hub' in the region which would have a higher and sustainable payback in future.

V.

8 WOMEN'S ROLES AND CONTRIBUTIONS IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Since 1970s, after the implantation of the Export Processing Zones (EPZ), the country has encouraged and invited both foreign capital and labour. At its infant stage of development, Mauritius relied on its local labour, particularly the reserved pool of labour, that is, women. Regarding capital for investment and skilled managerial expertise, the society had recourse to the Asian and European countries. Given that Mauritius had a guaranteed market for its exports due to the Lomé conventions and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the country easily got foreign direct investment to develop its manufacturing sector. The roles played by the Mauritian women in the development of the society, more particularly, in rural areas, are recognised by all stakeholders in Mauritius. The success of the EPZ goes to women's immense contribution as passive, docile and hard workers. They rarely complained about the poor working conditions and put in all efforts for the sake of productivity.

In the rural areas, many women were employed in the agricultural sector. They toiled hard in the sugar cane fields during the day and looked after the family in the afternoon. Their triple roles as formal employees in agriculture sector, mother at home and service providers to the community by paying regular visits to the sick relatives and assisting religious ceremonies have given a different but interesting dimension to rural development in Mauritius. Children and men have been socialised to respect culture and at the same time make development

happen and accept modernity. Consequently, rural inhabitants in Mauritius have a dual personality. Outside home, that is in the public places, they look like very modern and VI.

9 GOOD GOVERNANCE FOR PROPER MANAGEMENT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

All governments coming to power since mid 1960s have contributed in one way or the other for rural development. They have taken good decisions and implemented same for the best interest of the rural population. This partly explains as to why, according to the Mo Ibrahim Index for the last three years, Mauritius has been ranked on the top of the list in Africa regarding good governance. The state actors have all in one way or the other contributed to make available so many facilities and basic social amenities in all regions of the country. Even the private sector, in joint venture with foreign MNCs, through the construction of hotels in rural areas, have contributed to provide jobs and livelihoods to so many rural inhabitants. Due to their good governance, the various hotels in the coastal areas of the countryside have helped to keep the surroundings clean and beautiful. Although, the Mauritian state, particularly the district councils, has been able to control development in the rural coastal areas yet there is the feeling among the rural inhabitants that the fruits of development have been unevenly distributed. Therefore, there is the need for greater vigilance to track both foreign and local investors and businessmen mainly in the tourist sector who exploit both human and natural resources to make the maximum amount of profit. Policies should be designed and rigorously implemented to encourage investors in rural areas to spend their yearly mandatory 2 % corporate social responsibility tax for financing mainly the social development projects for the benefit of the locals in the region where they operate.

10 VII.

11 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Rural development in Mauritius has been a success story. However, continuous efforts to improve it further need to be carried out regularly by the state. Given the smallness of the Mauritian island, rural development has been facilitated by the different penetrative efforts, programs and policies well designed, responsibly implemented and monitored. The scenery of villages and countryside has been completely transformed since independence. Some villages have certain infrastructures and beautiful buildings that are not found in the so-called most developed urban areas. The lifestyles of many young developed by their lifestyles and at home they are very religious and pay much attention to various traditional rites and rituals. people in rural areas have become similar to those of 2012 ebruary F^{1 2}

¹Keywords : Rural, Rural development, Policies and State.

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