



CENTRE ON INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION POLICY BRIEF

AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is moving from a period of reconstruction into development phase. Comprehensive Rural Development has been identified as a core approach towards achieving the goal of the Afghanistan Compact Goal. Afghanistan is in the process of restoring and expanding the licit economy through the promotion of livelihoods free from dependency on poppy cultivation. Opium dominates the national economy. It accounts for one-third of estimated total GDP and 50 per cent of legal GDP. CIRDAP can advocate all successful models and practices on poppy reduction and elimination in the CIRDAP member countries through enterprise development etc. which can be replicated in Afghanistan.

The Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) was established in 1979 to assist national action and promote regional cooperation relating to integrated rural development in the region, and to act as a catalyst for related activities among its member countries.

In the Sixteenth Governing Council Meeting in Manila in 2007, there was a discussion on the changing context of rural development (RD) initiatives and the need to review past policies and to identify policy-level issues and concerns. Accordingly, the CIRDAP Governing Council decided to commission a series of country studies for reviewing past policies and identifying policy issues and concerns with which CIRDAP can engage itself further through strengthening several actors at national and regional level for information generation, policy development and regional cooperation. The country studies as suggested should examine the role of the CIRDAP link institutions and also the need and scope for other linkages. Subsequently, each of the member countries nominated a researcher to work on the country studies. The researchers decided that each country would examine the RD initiatives from the point of future opportunities for CIRDAP.

Twelve countries have submitted the reports out of 14 countries. The country reports vary substantially in nature. Southeast Asian countries, especially Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam, adopted market based reform policies much earlier than the South Asian countries. The focus in Malaysia and Thailand and now across all the Southeast Asian countries, was on the development of infrastructure, encouragement to foreign capital investment in manufacturing, and providing employment in organised enterprises as well as services catering to the market economy, tourism, restaurants and the like. The focus of development in the first four decades after independence in South Asia was quite different. It focused on the preservation of the rural economy, and attempted to increase employment opportunities in rural areas through public expenditure programmes, and essentially tried to maintain the rural character of these economies. The approach to poverty alleviation has thus been very different in the two regions. While South Asia focused on gains in agriculture and rural employment, Southeast Asia turned to commercialisation of agriculture and more market-oriented growth.

CIRDAP has published all the findings in a separate volume for each country. In this brief note, some of the important findings and policy issues for Afghanistan are highlighted.

Major Findings

Afghanistan is moving from a period of reconstruction into development phase. Comprehensive Rural Development has been identified as a core approach towards achieving the goal of the Afghanistan Compact Goal i.e. equitable economic growth, poverty reduction, employment expansion and enterprise creation, enhancing opportunities in the region and improving rural well-being of all Afghans.

Afghanistan ranks 173 out of 178 on UNDP, HDI-2004. Mortality rates are high about 165 per thousand while in least developed countries it is 99 and life expectancy is extremely low- about 44.3 years while in least developed countries it is 51 years. At the same time Afghanistan is vulnerable to natural disasters, mainly drought, earthquakes and flood. The various political changes and natural disaster situations make the scenario in Afghanistan more difficult to distinguish sharply between emergency, rehabilitation and development. Currently the reconstruction and development programmes are ongoing in one district while people in neighbouring districts are in desperate need of emergency assistance.

Inclusive rural development approach is a new concept in Afghanistan. A number of reconstruction activities are being implemented with the help of many development partners. The last few years experience in Afghanistan shows that the development projects have been widening gaps between the poor and the rich. Still large vulnerable groups and the ultra poor have been deprived of development activities. Inequality exists in geographical areas and among rural population. Afghanistan is seeking to develop a comprehensive strategy and/or targeted programme to cope with the problems of nomadic population. They live in the rural Afghanistan and are identified as most vulnerable and ultra poor population. Currently there are two national debates whether to rehabilitate nomadic back to their own normal lifestyle and let them contribute to livestock production or integrate and/or permanent resettle them in the rural areas of Afghanistan.

Policy Priorities

- Afghanistan is in the process of restoring and expanding the licit economy through the promotion of livelihoods free from dependency on poppy cultivation. Opium dominates the national economy. It accounts for one-third of estimated total GDP and 50 per cent of legal GDP. Afghanistan should take all out efforts to learn all successful models and practices on poppy reduction and elimination through enterprise development.
- Afghanistan requires learning from best experiences of inclusive rural development programmes of regional countries in order to revive the rural economy. There is a need to strengthen the capacity of the government to review, develop and formulate policies and provide capacity building to various stakeholders.
- Afghanistan Institute of Rural Development (AIRD) should be equipped with professional services, and policy inputs may like to gain technical support from CIRDAP as well as long-term partnership with CIRDAP link institutions.
- There is a need for developing a national rural development policy in Afghanistan.
- On the basis of Afghanistan nation building (NDF), local institutions have been created at village and district levels all over Afghanistan. Transforming these institutions as development institutions and/or as local governance bodies requires implementation of lessons learnt from Asia and the Pacific countries, and further study and research in the context of rural Afghanistan.
- In order to evaluate the rural development programmes in Afghanistan, an evaluation unit in AIRD needs to be established immediately.