

Norman Uphoff, Milton J. Esman and Anirudh Krishna. *Reasons for Success: Learning from Instructive Experiences in Rural Development*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998. Paperback. Indian Rs 250.00. 233 pages.

Given the demographic realities in the developing world, it is not possible to solve the problems of poverty in these countries following the neoclassical model of economic growth. Since the majority of people are ruralites in these countries, the focus should be on rural development directly rather than on waiting for the benefits to trickle down to the rural poor. What is needed is to improve the quality of life and productivity of the small-holders or landless whose livelihood is based on natural resources which are depleting and require urgent attention. More options should be available for the rural people in their own area.

In the last two decades, a large number of broad-based programmes for the uplift of the deprived in the rural areas have been launched. Some of these have been successful in achieving their objectives. The purpose of *Reasons for Success* is to extract the experience of a few of these successful initiatives for the benefit of others. The authors have reviewed 40 cases in detail to highlight various factors playing a significant role behind the success of these programmes. The cases discussed are from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, with a special focus on South Asia. The majority of the case studies selected for review in this volume were first presented in *Reasons for Hope* (1998).¹

Rural development is basically meant to improve the productivity, well-being, and empowerment of the rural poor. Any programme seeking these objectives can only be successful and sustainable when it has the capacity to incorporate new information, ideas, or instructions in accordance with the changing social, economic, political, and environmental circumstances. In other words, the process of learning plays an important role in the rural development process. Replication of successful projects is not the solution. The ideal is to learn from one's own mistakes for long-term success. No doubt, it is a slow process, but with the gain of knowledge and experience and dedicated personnel a point can be reached where work can be accelerated productively.

Furthermore, success is not simply to satisfy the basic needs but to build local capacities for mobilising and managing resources. This way satisfied needs and hopes of the local people will be sustained and flourished. In this context, the communities should be galvanised and enabled to manage and multiply the available funds from other sources and to raise funds from their own efforts.

The 'learning' and the 'assisted self-reliance', besides being the process, are also the objectives. To achieve these requires competent leadership—committed personnel

¹*Reasons for Hope: Instructive Experiences in Rural Development*, eds. by Anirudh Krishna, Norman Uphoff, and Milton J. Esman. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998.

from the bottom to the top. What is demanded from the leadership is to empower the

local people to make decisions; and to initiate and help shape productive roles for them rather than playing these roles personally beyond a certain period, for the sake of long-term progression and growth. Evidence has suggested the importance of 'how the initiative is taken' to achieve planned objectives, and to strengthen long-term leadership as well as active membership within rural communities.

For effective participation of the rural people in these programmes, systems of local organisation are needed which are suitable to the project and the capacity of the local people. Organisational structures and roles should be designed to support the processes of participation that mobilise people's ideas, physical assistance, and management.

In the programmes analysed in this book, much emphasis has been laid on operational routines, provision of incentives, delegation of responsibility, management of finances, and information systems. In other words, management, planning, and implementation of different tasks with efficiency, reliability, and effectiveness played a major role. In most of the programmes empirical testing and consultation were greatly emphasised for the formulation of any procedure and criteria.

How to deal with the donors' support is another important feature discussed in the context of successful programmes. Instead of totally rejecting external funding, most of these programmes were launched entirely from external funding before they became self-reliant organisations. The point made throughout is that the management of resources is more important than the source of funds.

Generation of knowledge through the transfer of technology and training is also very important to improving the productivity and well-being of the rural people. On the basis of experience, it is emphasised in the volume to include training as a continuous process to raise the quality of human resources by sharing new ideas, concepts, techniques, methodologies, and skills. Information technology is also accentuated as another important tool to take more benefit from available resources and to affect the behaviour of both villagers and officials.

The book as a whole is concerned with the programmes that benefit, in one way or another, individuals, families, and communities. The point made is that rural development is a low-cost option as compared to economic development programmes made to alleviate widespread poverty. In conclusion, four criteria are identified as goals as well as norms for evaluating rural development: resource mobilisation; scaling up and expansion, to benefit larger numbers; diversification; and continual innovations to enable rural people to have more control over their situation and futures. In the light of the successful experiences, at the end, the authors are optimistic about the new millennium if more attention is given to the miseries of the rural poor.

This volume is indeed a great effort to apprise the students of rural development that success is dependent more on ideas, initiatives, and strategies than on financial

sources. Thus, the authors' in-depth review of so many programmes is appropriate. This well-documented and comprehensive volume is an excellent resource for those engaged in rural development activities.

Afia Malik

Pakistan Institute of Development Economics,
Islamabad.