

Policy Making in India for Rural Development: The Contextual Limits to Quantitative Approaches

V. M. Rao

Quantitative Approaches to Public Policy –
Conference in Honour of Professor T. Krishna Kumar

Held in conjunction with the
Fourth Annual International Conference on Public Policy and Management
Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB)

9-12 August 2009



School of Business and Management
Queen Mary, University of London
London, United Kingdom



Indira Gandhi Institute of
Development Research
Mumbai, India



Centre for Public Policy
Indian Institute of Management
Bangalore, India

<http://www.igidr.ac.in/pdf/publication/PP-062-07.pdf>

Policy Making in India for Rural Development:

The Contextual Limits to Quantitative Approaches

V M Rao

Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore

1. Introduction

Being peripheral to the mainstream economy, the rural communities have benefitted very little from the growth and development occurring in the 'shining' enclaves in India. After six decades of Independence, agricultural growth remains anemic, farmers are trapped in poverty, the Poor prefer urban slums to stagnant villages and the rural communities lack basic facilities like schools and health centres. In a word, the policy making for rural development has largely been ineffective though, along with marketisation, technological change and politicization of the masses, the policies for rural development have opened up the rural communities which are now confronted with new opportunities as well as risks. 11th Five Year Plan gives ample indications that agricultural and rural development will demand far more resources and higher priorities than in the past.

However, more resources and higher priorities for agricultural and rural development can become effective only if the current weaknesses in policymaking are identified and corrected.. My observations on this theme are based on my experience as a researcher of processes of rural change. Improving quantitative approaches to policymaking needs coming together of three groups: The experts who generate tools for quantitative analysis; the users of these tools ranging from those at the high-end to those confining themselves to simple-minded tables; and, policy makers and implementers. My attempt in this paper is to point out the development and societal contexts and the features of these groups which limit the usefulness of quantitative approaches to policymaking. The plan of the paper is as follows: Section 2 describes the complexity of processes linking the strategy and policies with the development goals and their implications for improving the role of quantitative approaches to policymaking. Section 3 outlines the societal setting in which the three groups mentioned above operate and interact. Section 4 describes areas which need attention to improve the scope and usefulness of quantitative approaches to policymaking for rural development.

2. The Development Setting: Many Slips between Policies and Goals

The strategy and policies for rural development are in the nature of interventions in rural communities—to provide resources, infrastructures and development services—to achieve development goals. It is useful to divide the full range from policymaking to achievement of goals into two phases. The first phase consists of policy making, translation of policies into concrete programmes, targets specified for the programmes and the actual outcomes. The assessment of this phase needs to be in terms of these targets and outcomes. The second—and more critical—phase is the response of rural communities to the outcomes of programmes, the

benefits derived by them and the enduring improvement in status and life style resulting from the programmes cumulatively over time. Such enduring improvement will depend not merely on the outcomes of individual programmes but, even more, on the total impact of mutually inter-linked and reinforcing package of programmes.

Let me elaborate the framework outlined above with an illustration. Consider the goal of providing food security to the rural poor. The two phases of policymaking to achieve this goal are:

First Phase:

Formulation of Strategy, Policy, Priorities and Time Frame

Designing of the Programme with eligibility criteria, targets, subsidy etc.

Putting in Place Infrastructures, Personnel and Procedures

Targets?

Supporting Policies

Outcomes?

Second Phase:

Response from the Poor?

Situational Constraints?

Linkages with Other Goals?

Achievement of Food Security?

What are the implications of this framework for the contextual limitations on quantitative approaches to policymaking? This needs looking at this framework from two points of view—policymaker's and quantitative researcher's. A policymaker would find himself in a fairly familiar and manageable situation so long as he moves through the first four steps in the first phase. He would actively look for help from quantitative researcher to find out why targets are not fully achieved. There is a question mark against targets to indicate that taking the first three steps does not guarantee achievement of targets. Targets refer to intended first set of results of a policy like expenditure incurred, beneficiary coverage and extension to new areas and groups. In the case of food security, these can be subsidies disbursed, number of poor covered by PDS, increase in the number of Fair Price Shops (FPSs). This research area could be regarded as having been fairly adequately covered by collaboration between the policymaker and quantitative researcher leading to fruitful research and better achievement of targets. I distinguish between targets and outcomes reserving the latter term for features which are critical in ensuring the benefits of a policy. In the case of food security, the outcomes would include easy and dependable accessibility of FPSs, adequate availability of food grain stocks with them, good quality of food grains and subsidy large enough to make food grains economically accessible to the poor. There is a question mark against outcomes to indicate that achievement of targets does

not ensure that outcomes are satisfactory. Outcomes are also affected by other policies. For example, policies for agricultural and food grain growth, trade policies, policies for income support like employment generation would all have a bearing on the interface between outcomes and the actual impact on the poor. My impression is that the research area between targets and outcomes and linkages among policies is still to be adequately explored. The quantitative researcher is active but I doubt whether the policymaker has really any time or interest in looking beyond targets. It may be mentioned here that recently Planning Commission brought out a massive annual report on outcomes of programmes. The exercise was abandoned the very next year as, apparently, it turned out to be too complex to manage! I am afraid that much of research in this area circulates among the academics but is neglected by the policymaker.

As regards the second phase, it covers a complex and only partially charted area in which policy outcomes get processed into achievement of development goals. All the steps in this phase—response from the poor, situational constraints and the status of linkages among goals-- carry question marks indicating that they are not amenable to control, regulation or prediction by the policymaker. In fact, a common feature of Indian development scenario is that even when programmes achieve or even over-achieve the targets, the corresponding goal remains as distant as ever. For example, regarding food security, the subsidies have increased substantially over recent years and the government claims that they have adequate stocks of food grains for distribution, but hunger and malnutrition persist widely and India is nowhere near ensuring food security to the poor. This is the case with other critical goals like universalisation of school education, health for all etc. One clue is that goals have to be achieved as a package and not singly. For example, food security needs employment/income security, institutional credit to meet basic consumption needs etc. Development is indivisible—either the whole package is achieved or none of the goals at all! Hence, it is of utmost importance that the policy maker and the researcher take up the challenge of exploring the area covered by the second phase. I believe that single disciplines like Economics would find their theories and models inadequate to cope with the complexity of processes in this area. Academics not only tend to be confined to single disciplines but they also choose narrow areas of specialization within single disciplines. They usually operate with quantitative approaches specific to their areas of specialization. It would not be unfair to assume that the academics would find the area covered by the second phase difficult to penetrate and colonize. Without help from academics, the policymaker will be even more hesitant to venture beyond their familiar territory of playing with targets. However, quantitative approaches to policymaking would add little of value if they retreat from the area of the second phase.

I offer two guesses about how to begin exploration of the area of second phase. One line of investigation could be to pursue the outcomes of a single policy as they move through the second phase towards achievement of the policy goal. This would still need taking into account linkages among policies and goals besides response from the poor and situational constraints. The second line is to look at the system as a whole focusing on development as a package of goals. The emerging phase of globalization makes the system vulnerable to shocks originating outside as shown by the current recession emanating from the developed countries. The writing on the wall is clear. Even the giants like General Motors and Citibank beg for help! Another recent development in developing countries like India is political agitations which suddenly erupt resulting in widespread interruptions, destruction and breakdown of law and order for long periods. An even more worrisome trend is that only a dozen or so determined individuals aided

by high-tech can challenge the policymaker at the highest level and compel him to yield. It is obvious that the system as unstable as the one which is emerging now makes effective implementation of policies for development, democratization and better governance infinitely more difficult than in the past. A keen observer of Indian scene has come out recently with the following assessment:

“Having many parties in power at the centre is in one respect a reflection of democracy's deepening, a product of the representation of groups and regions previously excluded from government. At the same time, the satisfaction of so many different interests leads to short-term rent-seeking rather than to rational policy. Smaller parties covet the most lucrative ministries, and the larger parties, simply to stay in power, are obliged to concede these to them. Like the 14 others that preceded them, the Indian elections of 2009 will be marked by colour, intensity and a mass involvement of individuals in democracy unmatched elsewhere in the world. But unless governance itself becomes more transparent and accountable, India will continue to be plagued by corruption and inefficiency of a scale unacceptable in a modern state presuming to speak for and serve the people” (India: Democracy's dance , Ramachandra Guha, BBC News Website, March 2, 2009)

To conclude this section, I give below two recent perspectives on hunger in India.

“ the decline in calorie consumption in rural areas is associated with a steady downward drift of calorie Engel curve...it would be difficult to attribute the decline in calorie consumption to declining per capita income, or to changes in relative prices” (Food and Nutrition in India: Facts and Interpretations, Angus Deaton, Jean Dreze , Economic and Political Weekly, February 14-20, 2009, Vol XLIV, No. 7, pages 42 to 65). This is a typical perspective from an academic which misses the seriousness of the problem of hunger.

Compare this with the perspective of activists who trace the widespread incidence of hunger in India to the structural features of the system.

“The experience of chronic hunger in distant villages as much as on city streets is one of intense avoidable suffering; of self-denial; of learning to live with far less than the body needs; of minds and bodies stymied in their growth; of the agony of helplessly watching one's loved one's - most heartbreakingly children - in hopeless torment; of unpaid, arduous devalued work; of shame, humiliation and bondage; of the defeat and the triumph of the human spirit. Such high levels of hunger and malnutrition are a paradox, because they stubbornly survive surging economic growth and agricultural production which outpaces the growth of population (although it has worryingly stagnated in recent years). The riddle deepens because the State in India runs some of the largest and most ambitious food schemes in the world. The persistence of widespread hunger is the cumulative outcome of public policies that produce and reproduce impoverishment; of failures to invest in agriculture especially in Central and Eastern India and for rain-fed and small farmers; of unacknowledged and unaddressed destitution; of embedded gender, caste, tribe, disability and stigma which construct tall social barriers to accessing food; but in the last analysis it is the result of a profound collapse of governance (A Special Report on the Most Vulnerable Social Groups and their Access to Food, Eighth Report of the Commissioners of the Supreme Court, New Delhi, September, 2008)

3. The Societal Setting: Policymaker, Administrator and Researcher

The characterization of the system given above is incomplete in an important respect. “Policies that produce impoverishment” and “tall social barriers...a profound collapse of governance” do not just happen when the society sleeps. They come into being because the few privileged in the society obtain disproportionate control over resources and the rest suffer from severe deprivations. This can happen, as India shows, even in a functioning democracy. One feature which may make a difference in the medium and long run is that trickle-down from growth and growing political awareness and mobilization among the vast numbers suffering from deprivation could build up pressures in both economy and polity for more equitable sharing of resources and benefits of development. Until these processes gain enough strength and spread, the system will remain stuck at the stage described in the Report quoted above. The advocates of excellence who believe that a hundred incorruptible people, if given an opportunity to rule, will solve all problems show profound ignorance of how societies change, develop or disintegrate. Corruption needs to be eliminated. Incorruptible people are invaluable assets. However, overcoming India’s problems is a far tougher task than one which a few clean and determined people of “excellence” can tackle. Incidentally, such people hardly carry a tag by which they can be identified. The point is that our problems need to be traced to systemic features and not to actors who would seem to be responsible if we do not look at the actors in the context of the societal setting in which they operate.

We should view the policymakers and researchers from this perspective. Three groups need to be considered—politicians who are at the apex; senior administrators who provide expertise and organize and supervise implementation and monitor achievement of targets and outcomes; and researchers who carry out evaluations and, also, carry out independent academic analyses of the system and policies as a watchdog taking care of national and societal interests. These three groups are not mere collection of individuals functioning independently of each other and each guided by his own norms and criteria for behavior. In fact, the groups are closely networked and hierarchical with a strong sense of group identity and pride. They have numerous links with global networks, have strong motivation for upward mobility. They also function as lobbies to protect their interests and improve their status. It is equally relevant to note that three kinds of distances intervene between them and rural areas and community—physical, life style and cultural. Few among them might have lived in villages or have active links with those in villages, leave alone the rural poor. This makes for alienation and poor capacity for rapport with the rural areas and communities. When these groups are placed in the broader political context sketched by Ramachandra Guha—“Having many parties in power at the centre is in one respect a reflection of democracy’s deepening... At the same time, the satisfaction of so many different interests leads to short-term rent-seeking rather than to rational policy.. unless governance itself becomes more transparent and accountable, India will continue to be plagued by corruption and inefficiency of a scale unacceptable in a modern state” (see above)--, it becomes clear that they would be severely handicapped in policymaking for rural development because of the broader political context and, also, their own biases and shortcomings. In fact, it is these groups which defeated Gandhi whose vision for rural India was based on fundamental structural reforms like land reforms, cooperative village management and Panchayati Raj Institutions to empower the poor. The interesting point to note is that most members in these groups would not approve the way policymaking functions. There are also rebels who register their protest. However, despite

these attitudes of members, the groups continue to operate the way they do and, still, retain the loyalty and support of enough members to sustain and even enhance the power wielded by the groups. A little reflection will show that the Indian democracy has many such instances. For example, everyone agrees that cities like Bangalore are caught up in an irreversible process of explosive construction activities, severe traffic congestion and spreading and deepening pollution of air and water. Yet they remain helpless witnesses without any credible move to heal the city.

I give below three propositions indicative of serious weaknesses in policymaking for rural development and its implementation, monitoring and evaluation. I treat the three groups—policymaker, administrator and researcher—as one combined entity called policymaker for this purpose.

* Policymaking for rural development needs an extensive, reliable and periodically updated data base. This is particularly important given the distances separating the policymaker from rural areas and communities. The position in this respect is unbelievably sad for a developing country in which village and agriculture ought to be at the centre of policymaking.

* Database:

i) Consider the database for land. The evaluations of land reforms carried out in mid 1950s and 1990s have pointed out glaring weaknesses, unreliability and carelessness in updating records. The database continues to be in the same state even today. If one goes by this database, there is no scope for any substantial redistribution of land. On the other hand, villagers can readily identify those with large ownership evading the law with the provisions existing within the law itself! Recently, a minister in the Union government publicly called the land records as garbage!

ii) As regards irrigation, the present irrigated area is only about a half of the potential estimated by experts. I have yet to see any concrete plan about when the full potential will get utilized. Meanwhile, there are persistent gap between irrigation statistics given by the two different ministries of the Government of India! If half of the irrigation potential remains unutilized after six decades of development planning in a country suffering from periodic severe droughts, the policymaker would indeed have a lot to explain.

iii) Regarding human development, consider the following observation by Deaton and Dreze.

“There are serious gaps in India’s nutrition statistics, and even the most basic nutrition trends are far from clear....Effective action requires..regular and reliable large-scale surveys to monitor the nutrition situation at the district level at intervals of two or three years at most” (Food and Nutrition in India: Facts and Interpretations, Angus Deaton, Jean Dreze , Economic and Political Weekly, February 14-20, 2009, Vol XLIV, No. 7).

* Perspective:

There are numerous clues that the policymaker’s perspective extends only up to providing a modest measure of relief to rural communities and not their development. The wide range of programmes with ambitious targets do give the impression of development as the goal of policy making. But reading between the lines indicates that the policymaker treats the rural poor in exactly the same way as we as individuals treat the beggar. We do not ask the beggar how he was

reduced to his present state nor what he will do tomorrow. We indulge in a bit of charity in giving alms to the beggar without any intention to help him acquire a better status. This is how the employment programmes and PDS work. The policymaker proudly announces the amounts spent and the poor who benefitted, but there are no arrangements at all to ensure food security and employment security to the poor. Let me cite another clue. Elimination of poverty needs to be identified with attainment of economic viability and political empowerment. Yet, in practice, crossing of poverty line based on the calorie norm is the most quoted magic number identified with poverty elimination! The policymaker has no better norm nor a more adequate accounting of reduction in poverty.

***Reach:**

The thrust of policies for rural development depends on the targets achieved and outcomes of numerous schemes implemented in pursuance of these policies. Since the schemes are implemented in an uncoordinated manner and their outcomes vary widely, the combined thrust delivered by them to the second phase would be far too modest to achieve the development goals. This is true of even the United Nations Millennium Development Goals which are unable to achieve the modest target of reducing hardcore poverty by half by 2015. This has three implications. First, elites by their own efforts cannot reach development to rural areas and communities. Second, the changes that we see in rural areas and communities are attributable not so much to policies as to other factors like 'trickle down', spread of markets, growing rural-urban linkages and breakdown of "self-sufficient villages". Third, the reach of the policies improves substantially where local leaders and activists organise people for development, institutions like panchayats and self-help groups get activated and the poor come together to demand their due. Improvement in the reach of policies depends crucially on the spread of these processes at the grassroots. It is only fair to recognize that these processes are now confined to a few pockets. A word of caution. If political mobilization of the poor gains momentum without active panchayats and SHG to channel their energies into productive endeavors, the result would be explosive naxalism and disruptions in development.

***Countering Vulnerability:**

Observers from the developed countries view the prospects for developing countries like India with a noticeable measure of pessimism. We may not agree with them, but one must admit that placing the developing countries in the emerging global context does bring out their vulnerability to tsunami like shocks and reverses. Consider the following observations:

* A recent study of income inequality in the world by Branko Milanovic (2002) of the World Bank (*Economic Journal*, January 2002) brings alarming tidings. We give below the main findings of the study from a summary that appeared on the BBC news website on January 17, 2002.

"Global inequality is rising fast -- increasing by around 5 per cent in the five years between 1988 and 1993... The gap is so big that the richest one percent of people (50 million households), who have an average income of \$24,000 earn more than 60 percent of households (2.7 billion people)

at the bottom of the income distribution....During this period, the average yearly income (US\$ real PPP) of the top one percent of the population increased by 20 percent and that of the top 10 percent by about 15 percent. The average yearly income decreased for the middle 50 percent, bottom 10 percent and bottom 5 per cent of the population....The biggest source of inequality is the difference between the income of people in the five major economies (USA, Japan, Germany, France and Britain) and the poor in rural India, China and Africa”.

*** It is worth taking a serious note of the following assessment by Professor Partha Dasgupta of Cambridge University in England:**

“The Indian sub-continent and sub-Sahara Africa – two of the poorest regions of the world which make up around a third of the world’s population—have really become poorer over the past decades... If the decline of natural capital is included under a new measure –which the report dubs wealth per head—traditional insights into poverty reduction are turned upside down, It reveals that sub-Sahara Africa, Bangladesh, Nepal and India are all heading into deeper gloom and poverty” (“World sinks into deeper poverty” BBC website, June 8, 2001).

****** Growing world population will cause a “perfect storm” of food, energy and water shortages by 2030, the UK government chief scientist has warned. By 2030 the demand for resources will create a crisis with dire consequences, Prof. John Beddington said. Demand for food and energy will jump by 50% by 2030 and fresh water by 30%, as the population tops 8.3 billion, he told a conference in London. Climate change will exacerbate matters in unpredictable ways, he added” (BBC News Website, 19, March, 2009). Most of this population increase will take place in developing countries like India.

India has a strong, modernized and growing mainstream economy. It has also adequate scientific and technical talent to deal with the vulnerability to global forces and trends. However, it would remain seriously exposed and vulnerable to these groups when a large part of its population and resources remain outside the development process. Improving policymaking for rural development is important not only because of the poor conditions of rural areas and communities, but even more because the totality of Indian polity, economy and society will remain seriously vulnerable so long as the policymaking for rural development remains as short-sighted and ineffective as now and the policymaker remains as unconcerned as he has been over the post-Independence period.

4. Concluding Observations:

When policymaking functions smoothly and effectively, the researcher need not look beyond his conventional role of carrying out quantitative analyses and giving expert advice. The initiative remains with the politicians and senior administrators. But, when policymaking for rural development is as hopelessly ineffective as it is now in India, each of the three groups should have a careful look at the policymaking system as a whole. My attempt here is to describe a few broad areas which the individual researchers and the profession of quantitative economists as a whole may keep in mind while considering the ways to improve the policymaking for rural development through more extensive and intensive quantitative approaches. It is best to start

with the leading institution engaged in India in developing and applying quantitative approaches to the wide range of development policies being implemented in India including those for rural development—Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR). While recruiting/promoting academics to senior positions, the institute evaluates them using the following criteria:

“research on development issues from a broad interdisciplinary perspective”

“furtherance of development, social welfare and inputs into decision making”.

These criteria are taken from the guidelines laid down by the Institute. I must mention that these guidelines also emphasise the need for dissemination of research to academic community, general public and policymakers. In the light of these criteria, I suggest a few areas exploring which would be of help in improving quantitative approaches to policymaking for rural development. The purpose is to provide only illustrations with which a systematic preparation of an agenda can begin.

* Understanding Rural Change:

Villages are undergoing change at a pace too fast to allow rural people to have enough time to adjust. Traditional livelihoods are disappearing. Old bondages and relationships are breaking down leaving an institutional vacuum. Urban linkages are growing and becoming strong. Markets are spreading making the rural people vulnerable to shocks from outside. The positive changes like improvements in infrastructure and amenities and other development programmes are relatively weak as compared to negative externalities. The enterprising and educated people leave villages making it difficult to ground development activities. These changes vary widely across villages as between, say, large villages and small and dominant caste villages and those where most belong to disadvantaged groups. It is a formidable challenge to develop quantitative approaches to capture rural change so that the villages can be made development-oriented, more responsive to development interventions and to acquire motivation and ability to take development initiatives on their own.

* Linking Development Strategies with Development Goals:

I have already described above the many slips between formulation of development strategies and achievement goals. At the moment, the stages beyond achievement of targets of development schemes remain neglected. Monitoring is mostly backward-looking in the sense that its focus remains on comparing the present with the initial benchmarks. It is important to have forward-looking monitoring which brings out the gap between the present and the goal. It will be a useful exercise to check whether we have the norms required to evaluate achievement of goals. We seem to miss the paradox which prevails in many of the development areas where the schemes routinely ‘succeed’ but the goal remains as distant as ever. This is true of such basic ingredients of development like universalisation of school education and access to safe drinking water. I am sure if we make progress in understanding rural change, quantitative approaches to help policy formulation, implementation and monitoring could improve dramatically.

* Creating Data Bases:

There is a serious imbalance in India between the data quality and availability at the aggregate national, state and district levels and those below the district at taluk and village levels. Understanding rural change depends on correction of this imbalance. The major correction depends on activation of PRIs, particularly at the GramPanchayat (GP) level. If GP becomes fully functional as the third tier of the government, it will have to collect, use, update and maintain data on households, individuals, village resources, infrastructures and development schemes. Until GPs become functional, the data availability at the ground level will remain poor. Another promising source which has remained neglected so far is the field investigations carried out by researchers in universities and social science research institutions. These investigations are now an important and growing part of social science researches with their findings making valuable contribution to policy analyses. Computers now make it possible to develop systems and procedures for storage and retrieval of the various kinds of field materials like survey data, profiles, case studies, Focus Group Discussions etc. which form an invaluable source of data, information and insights on rural change. Sooner this is done, better would it be as another major step, besides activation of GP, towards creation of a database for understanding rural change and exploring the dark areas between formulation of development strategies and achievement of development goals.

*** Constructive Dialogue with the Policymaker:**

Good progress has been achieved in India in institutionalizing dialogue between the researcher and the policymaker. I can say on the basis of personal observation that institutes like ISEC, IGIDR, CESS have played a leading role as policy advisers. The number of policymakers as highly trained as researchers is increasing. It is common now for academic seminars and conferences to have policymakers as participants and contributors. And, yet, it cannot be said that the communication between the two is free and without barriers. It is possible that the policymaker tends to be condescending towards the researcher. He is often polite rather than receptive. The researcher, on his part, complains that his studies collect dust on the shelves in the policymaker's chambers. If there is improvement in the areas noted above, it will increase the scope for more frequent and more substantive dialogue between the two. A caution which the researcher has to take is that his feedback is specific and 'actionable' and is presented in a language and mode easy for the policymaker to comprehend. Pontification on virtues like better coordination and stricter enforcement of norms can only irritate the policymaker without making him any wiser about how to achieve these virtues! Apart from researcher—policymaker interaction in the context of sponsored studies, the profession could also consider organizing larger meetings between researchers and policymakers to review important policy areas to locate research gaps and priorities. The success of quantitative approaches to policymaking lies in reaching a stage when the policymaker actively seeks research support because of the help he got in the past.

*** Can the Physician Heal Himself!**

A point of concern is that the reward system prevailing in the profession favours narrower and narrower specializations leading formation of small groups with their own scriptures, gurus, jargon and strong sense of identity. The large weight attached to publications in western journals has the effect of orienting these groups towards research issues, themes and priorities prevailing in the developed countries which are appropriate for their conditions but not necessarily for ours. These groups and their work need all encouragement as it places India in the world map. But the

profession must also consider ways to reward those who work on domestic policy issues and use data which do not permit sophisticated modeling. Whenever such work lends significant support to policymaking, the profession must recognize its contribution in a manner to provide encouragement and incentive to researchers who do such work. Consultancies do help in this direction, but the best minds respond more to recognition than only to monetary incentives. While the reward system is important, there are dimensions remaining outside its reach. The best contribution of a researcher will be realized when the researcher functions not as a narrow specialist but as a social science observer with a broad perspective and a deep sense of commitment to values like human dignity, equity and social justice. This transformation must come from within the researcher. There is no sure way of bringing it about from outside.

Note:

This paper is an alert from a user of findings from quantitative researches. During my studies on sustainability of agriculture, reduction in poverty and rural change, I notice serious gaps in data and analyses. Even more worrisome, researchers themselves seem to miss the gravity of the present situation in India. The paper draws on the findings and insights from my recent writings listed below.

Book:

Poverty Reduction in an Elite-driven Democracy, Institute for Human Development and Daanish Books, New Delhi, 2005

Papers:

Institutional Reforms for Poverty Reduction: Current Status and Prospects, in Oxford Handbook of Poverty in India: Perspectives, Policies and Programmes, (ed) R Radhakrishna and Shovan Ray, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005

The Elusive Goal of Empowerment: A Review of the Emerging Phase in Poverty Reduction, in India in a Globalising World: Some Aspects of Macro Economy, Agriculture and Poverty, (ed) R Radhakrishna, S K Rao, S Mahendra Dev, K Subbarao, Academic Foundation, New Delhi, 2006

Unorganised Workers: Deprivations, Social Security Needs, Policy Implications (Jointly with D Rajasekhar and J Y Suchitra) Economic and Political Weekly, VOL. XLI No.19, May 13, 2006

Putting the Cart before a Non-Existent Horse (Jointly with D Rajasekhar and J Y Suchitra) , Economic and Political Weekly, VOL. XLI, No. 32, August 12, 2006

A Self-Help Group Model for Farmer Insurance, Economic and Political Weekly, VOL. XLII, No.10, March 10, 2007

Making Safety Nets Effective for Hardcore Poor, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XLII, No. 33, August 18-24, 2007

Sustainability of Indian Agriculture: Towards an Assessment, eSS Working Paper, eSocialsciences, August, 2007

The Emerging Poverty Scenario, Indian Economic Journal, 55(3), October-December, 2007

Rural Communities in a Globalising World—Vulnerabilities, Opportunities and Prospects, The Indian Economy Review 2008, Vol. V, Quarterly Issue, 30th September, 2008, IIPM Think Tank, New Delhi

Farmers' Distress in a Modernising Agriculture—The Tragedy of the Upwardly Mobile: An Overview, in Agrarian Crisis in India, ed. D Narasimha Reddy and Srijit Mishra, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009

Agricultural and Rural Development: Preparing for the Challenges Ahead (jointly with K C Hiremath), in Changing Contours of Asian Agriculture: Policies, Performance and Challenges, Essays in Honour of Professor V S Vyas, ed. Surjit Singh and V Ratna Reddy, Academic Foundation, New Delhi, 2009.