

## Revisiting Community Development

Based on the overview of the rural development in Pakistan in Chapter one, here we need to examine as to what are the real causes behind the ever growing and deepening mire of poverty and ask if we are really addressing the root causes of it through the generally failed rural development approaches. We also need to look at an alternative approach that builds on the positive points of the existing and past rural development programmes in Pakistan.

### 2.1 If poverty is the question...

...the answer is not in dealing with symptoms but addressing the root causes of poverty. Despite decades of development assistance received through a complex system of lending institutions, and various poverty alleviation programmes implemented through different NGOs, Pakistan remains in the grip of grinding and persistent poverty. During the past fifty years, approaches to development have varied, influenced by the prevailing geopolitical climate, shifting ideologies and ever-changing fashions in thinking about development and poverty alleviation. From modernisation theories to "basic needs"; from import-substitution to export-led growth; from technology transfer to sustainable development and participatory approaches -- there has been no shortage of models that shaped development and poverty alleviation planning.

What has not changed are the basic facts of poverty in Pakistan, where large numbers of people continue to live in conditions of absolute poverty. If poverty alleviation initiatives have indeed been a failure on the *large scale*, it is not because reaching the poor and securing for them wider opportunities has not been the focus of development, but because the development programmes have not rightly identified the *main causes of poverty* and then not tried to address them through an appropriate development approach. Instead, many programmes and their implementers have been treating the symptoms all along. From trickle down to targeting the poor approach can be more strengthened if it is directed after the real understanding of causes of the problem.

The simple idea, not always acknowledged when planning to alleviate poverty is that we need to know the underlying sources and social explanation of our poverty because policies even if targeted directly to the poor can hardly succeed unless they are directed at the root causes of the poverty and on a sustainable basis. And such causes vary from country to country and society to society. Any standardised approach through external programmes, without any phasing out strategy and bound to failure.

**Causes of the poverty problem:** There can be four major causes of poverty with the relative symptoms and needed approaches for alleviation of poverty in the respective category as given in the table given at the end of this chapter.

It is extremely important to differentiate between the types of change that is needed to come as a result of poverty alleviation efforts. The type of change required for addressing the root causes mentioned in category one and two is **FUNCTIONAL** based on *non-conflictual* approaches that need only consultative leadership. Whereas the change needed for addressing the root causes mentioned in category three or four is **STRUCTURAL CHANGE** and the approaches taken in this regard become somewhat *conflictual* in nature, demanding strong discipline and leadership shared by delegation of authority from base up. Moreover, this kind of approach would also need developing local institutions and a clear line of phasing out for the external programmes.

The irony is that everyone related to the development field in Pakistan fully understands that the root causes of poverty are those mentioned under category three and four but only to take a non-conflictual course and sustain their own life, the programmes have been designed on the pattern of addressing category two causes, which are only symptoms of the real causes in our case. We have wrongly attributed the success stories to maximum number of community organisations formed and micro-credit disbursed. The real questions to be asked for judging success of an external programme should be: Has it developed and enabled the local institutions to replace and carry out all the activities undertaken by it? Has it been successful in mainstreaming the functions from bottom up and downscaling the services from top down?

Types of services required for addressing the root causes under each category are different. First category simply requires **welfare** service; the second category needs **development**; the third **liberation**; and the fourth **transformation**. It is therefore naive to assume that by providing development service without any phasing out plans in sight, we would one day be able not only to eradicate the root causes of poverty -- exploitation,

domination, oppression, alienation and unequal distribution -- but also bring about transformation of the society.

Since the poor in Pakistan are naive, dependent, alienated and suppressed, they believe that the way things are is the only way they can ever be. There are signs of limited change and some awareness of inequality in sharing the fruits of independence. There are also some local actions to meet immediate needs, but some of the approaches -- like offering opportunities for advance of individuals and not properly developing communal responsibility, or regrouping people around local leaders who "take over" actions initiated by the community, or seeing politics only in terms of elections -- reinforces the present situation. Developing local institutions to fill the vacuum both at micro and meso level is necessary.

For transformation, we need to make the communities more articulate and aware of the root causes of their suffering; find aspects of cultural values, social norms and group capital with liberating messages; enable the people to break the culture of silence to speak only and honestly; gain skills by forming and running their own representative organisations; develop integrated regional support models which help groups analyse situation critically and plan action; pinpoint clashes between classes in society and within the organisation; support efforts to build movements to reflect on personal and organisational life; and replace not only external NGOs but also authoritarian structures with self-management and active participation at all levels from micro level up to the macro level at the top.

Unless the grassroots organisations develop into multi-level representative organisations and effectively link up with the local government and other actors at the macro-level, the piecemeal efforts would never lead us to change the exploitative ways. Its not only political corruption and other maladies that are exploiting the poor, it is also true for the community programmes who believe they have to stay forever to alleviate suffering of the poor. The present activities for poverty alleviation, for instance, can never force the government to fully disclose all public-spending provisions and make a commitment to protect social spending for the poor, or integrate poverty reduction measures into the macro-economic framework -- a local representative NGO in collaboration with the locally elected members to the Local Government can do so very effectively. They would also be able to provide the government with an opportunity to integrate social and economic policies or make necessary reform for ending social, political and economic inequalities.

The bottom line is that the way we analyse the problem of poverty affects our goals, and the kind of programme we develop to eradicate it. In the light of developments made in the past three decades, the government of Pakistan, NGOs and the donors must see and decide whether the **functional change** or **structural change** model is appropriate for eradication or alleviation of poverty in Pakistan, and adjust their policies accordingly. For bringing about structural changes, the government has already initiated the devolution of power plan. However, what we need at the moment is for the donors and development programmes to reflect on their social organisation process and the activities they have been undertaking so far. Once the goals and objectives are changed, the same activities can be undertaken in a slightly different way to achieve totally different results. The need of the hour, undoubtedly, is to rethink community development the way we carried out so far.

## **2.2 Rethinking Community Development**

Despite the array of development programs carried out in Pakistan since 1950s, non-government sector has largely failed to devise a strategy that helps poor people even after the end of the projects or programmes. As discussed in chapter 1 the result of many rural development programmes and projects is that some of these have formed thousands of community organisations but couldn't bring about a transformation that would address the social, economic and political inequalities that are keeping them poor. Others have helped the communities develop millions of dollars worth of infrastructure but without any capacity to sustain any concerted and continued efforts for addressing their poverty.

Looking at the worsening figures of people going below the poverty line, many have come to the conclusion that rather than sticking to the old guns, both the community development specialists and aid agencies must think of alternatives strategies. Much of the responsibility lies on the shoulders of aid agencies because for NGOs changing partners means different dances. NGOs who decided to follow aid money without paying attention to what this means for long-term benefit of the poor risk weakening their contribution to the development process. Now is the time to find out if the past two or three decades of providing aid involving millions of dollars, thousands of staff and countless projects, together with shifts in priorities, strategies and approaches have made any substantial impact on the scale of poverty in NWFP and rest of the country.

Direct and indirect sanctions, worsening economic status of the province, increased load of Afghan refugees on the available resources and other similar factors are leading to increased human deprivation and criminality, with increasing pollution and unsustainable use of natural resources even in the areas where some of the development organisations claim to have established thousands of community organisations. These disappointing realities add extra fuel to the debate about whether the principle of forming community organisations and delivering a few packages is correct and whether present priorities and practices will ever lead to real solutions. Disappointment also re-enforces the arguments of those who question if poverty reduction is the real purpose of international assistance.

A more critical appraisal of the aid system is one sign of the post two decades of extensive and intensive work of different NGOs and post-Cold War context, which has also brought a new agenda for government aid. Recognising the ground realities and overall context, some of funding agencies are trying to change themselves and the aid system overall; unfortunately, too many others believe that with no re-adjustment to their approaches, they can carry on as before.

Suggesting how to enhance NGO effectiveness, particularly of those dealing with larger issues like community development for poverty alleviation, calls for an approach, which is both critical and pragmatic, starting from an analysis of what they have to be effective at. Forming more and more community organisations? Disbursing ever more micro-credit? Raising statistics and playing with figures? Might be none of these, because compared to the time when the present poverty alleviation approaches were chalked out, poverty is now seen as a complicated condition. The poor were then identified as those who fell below some basic minimums. Subsequent shifts have broadened the understanding of poverty and acknowledged people's capability to fulfil valuable functions with society – like a person's access to and control over commodities, education, good health, social standing, influence over decisions and security. The exaggerated statistics of poverty alleviation programmes in no way can enable the poor to gain control in a rough sequence related to survival, well-being and empowerment.

The causes and symptoms of poverty are overlapping and confusing. It is vitally important for all aid agencies to reach an organisational decision about such causes, otherwise only the symptoms of poverty will be treated and that's what is going on in Pakistan. Impact of the development programmes will not be sustainable if causes are not tackled. What we are witnessing is that treating symptoms is actually reinforcing the causes of poverty by, for example, undermining people's motivation to act and to claim their entitlements or generate their own solutions. One sign of the inappropriate approaches to poverty is the NGOs inability to explain the cause(s) of the issues they are trying to address.

Since reducing poverty and eradicating marginalisation are complicated undertaking for all development actors, we have assumed formation of the village organisations (VOs) to be the best solution. The mere formation of these organisations at the micro level do not help the communities get out of marginalisation and social exclusion. Nor does it put the community in a position to sanction the behaviour of those with political or administrative authority. Correctly, identifying key linkages and addressing them in the right order or at the same time is virtually impossible for a single organisation. However, to address localised, situation specific reasons for poverty and marginalisation among social groups, formation of village organisation can be used as a first step in the formation of empowered and effective local institutions. Past efforts clearly indicate that VO formation is neither an end, nor it can be applied across the board in a standardised manner. It is naïve to assume a harmony or consensus model for addressing poverty as a local, provincial, national or global issue.

Notwithstanding the debate about VOs as means and ends, there is probably a reasonable consensus that functional purpose of development organisations is to foster socially just, sustainable economies with inclusive systems of governance that involve actors from the Micro to macro-level. We have assumed that only two stages of development action at the micro-level are sufficient. The first involves poverty reduction measures, which lead to the growth and functioning of micro-level organisation. There is no serious focus on sustainability of ways in which these measures are being taken and no consideration is given to the viability of the grassroots organisations. The second stage is a process through which these disparate grouping collaborate, associate and form other social structures with which they exert themselves and pursue their interests. This arena has being left at the mercy of its own momentum. There is not systematic and organisational effort to fill the institutional gap between the micro and macro-level. Without a proper, local institutional set up at the meso-level, communities would never be able to stimulate and facilitate the forming of some civic institutions, as well as strengthening their capacity to engage with the actors at the macro-level.

The aid agencies and development NGOs need to develop and promote *local* institutions both at micro and meso-levels because it is the poor and marginalized who produce their own development, not external NGOs. Moreover, for how long will the external and expensive actors keep on serving the thousands of VOs at the grassroots, and do we see any sustainable result of their decades long work without any signs of leaving the community alone. If external supported development initiatives are to be rooted and woven into the fabric of poverty-stricken regions, we need to adopt strategies, which build up local capabilities of multi-level local institutions, because it is their own efforts and life-long presence in their respective areas that actually produce development.

The fact should not suggest that governments and aid agencies have no role as providers of new resources, supports or guide once these meso-level institutions are developed. Simply, it must be local institutions, which embody what development is about and carry out their own development activities since they are both its means and ends. If an external NGO can bring and implement a development project to an area, why can't a local NGO do it more cost effectively for itself? A critical balance, therefore, has to be achieved to ensure that the external NGO withdraw as the local institutions become self-sustainable and effective. Getting this right through proper training and proper institutional maturity assessments is probably the most vital element in this process.

Without developing local and representative NGOs at the meso-level, external NGOs and aid agencies would never be able to bring empowerment in the micro-development process. Besides, this is very likelihood that material, economic or social gains of the current approaches will simply be lost to or exploited by better placed, meaning that structurally nothing will have changed, if the external development organisation kept on working without rethinking their approaches to community organisations and development as a whole. Most importantly, close collaboration among *representative* NGOs is a vital aspect of reforming the government in 'pro-poor' ways. Downscaling of services and devolution of power is meaningless without up scaling capacities of local institutions and mainstreaming functions from the grassroots up to the macro-level.

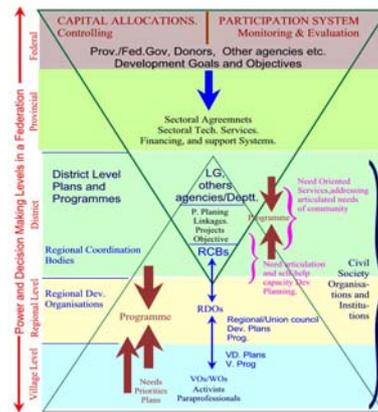
### **2.3 Understanding The Neglected Meso-Level In Grassroots Institutions.**

Decentralisation is one of the major themes within the ambit of the institutional reform in Pakistan. The reasons proffered for avoiding decentralisation, or the reasons, which can render decentralisation ineffective, are such that they can be converted into issues and resolved within the policy response. Some of the greatest fears are that decentralisation will only centralise authority at the district level, leave the provinces neglected as before and provide no better alternative for continuous participation of the grassroots in decision making. The government and NGOs can counter the argument for centralisation by addressing some of the core but neglected interlinked areas of the development and decentralisation process.

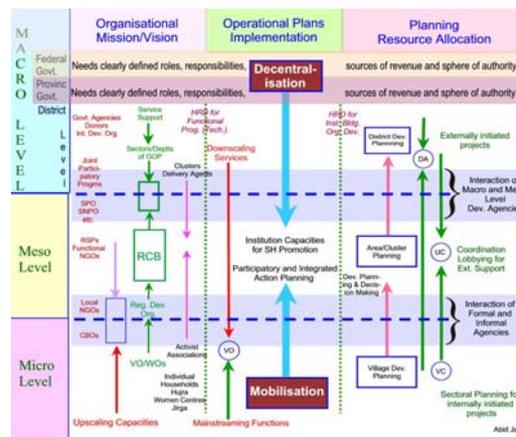
Strengthening of local government would certainly lead to improved delivery of services and changed relationship between the state and the people. However, decentralisation is a cross cutting theme which requires primary attention in institutional reforms at different levels. It can cause empowerment of the people provided roles and responsibilities of all the levels are identified and strictly followed. One of the most ignored levels of our federation is the provincial level.

The other even more neglected level – particularly in terms of rural development and community participation – is the meso-level. The policy makers and planners believe that reviving the local government tier of the federation would ensure access of the grassroots to the macro-level. Similarly, many community development programmes are under the serious misconception that they are the catalytic agents for linking micro to the macro-level. The fact, however, is that there is a broad, cutting or interface level between the micro and macro levels. It can rightly be called meso-level where the people can easily reach and participate in aggregation and articulation of their needs. Beyond the District, which is part of the macro level, people have no say in decision making at all.

In our government and development structures, the meso level remains like a mirage, where one sees something sometimes, but what one sees, never turns into reality. Occasionally the government comes in and prioritises some area for intervention but the meso-level never becomes as functional as it has to be for inclusion of the people in the process of development. The meso level gets weaker and weaker as one goes down the levels shown through the upper triangle in the given figure.



Instead of saying that the government will only create entry points where frame conditions for expanding self-help, or initiatives, are opened up and not restricted, the government has somehow assumed an artificial role -- like a socialistic system -- that it is going to deliver to each person, and each civil society member has a right to be served by the government. No one, however, can explain, how? Whether the government would do so in a frame condition or by directly going to people and asking them about their needs and priorities? Consequently, people too have developed the feeling that the government should deliver anything they need. This is the worst kind of dependency syndrome. Creating freedom of movement can only come with real organisation and institutionalising participation at all the three levels in a society. It needs institutionalising participation in the overall government system, not only participation at the Local Government level.



As is evident from the figure showing functions of different levels, decentralisation and mobilisation are two essential elements of the whole process. So far, NGOs make tall claims of mobilising the communities through participatory approaches. But the initiatives they have taken do not seem to be filling the meso-level gap. If externally supported development initiatives are to be rooted and woven into the fabric of our society – particularly majority of which inhabit in the rural areas – development of local NGOs of some sort is required. Grassroots or the community-based organisations (CBOs) are terms commonly used for the local entities made up of the people whose lives are to be enhanced by development efforts.

Participation can no longer be seen merely as a means of making infrastructure schemes or disbursement of credit more successful in reaching their objectives. If participation is to make a difference and contribute to sustainable development, a shift in perspective is required. We need to institutionalise participation at all possible levels as shown in the figures. Micro-level organisations are frequently initiated out of the projects' need for intermediaries at grassroots level. It is not very likely that these organisations will continue after the withdrawal of the community development programmes. Under these circumstances, even the most intensive training – let alone the eyewash efforts – will not have a great impact.

After training, the communities are supposed to take over the facilitation task from the programme. This points to the necessity of changes at higher institutional and political levels. The task facing the NGO and aid organisations, however, is to adopt strategies and methods for appropriate institutional arrangement, which build up the capabilities of CBOs for growing and forming meso-level organisations. Together they would give birth to sustainable, local institutions for development – mainly comprised of the primary stakeholders, who would actually produce development, not agencies. It is the poor and marginalized that

produce their own development, not external NGOs and aid agencies.

This fact should not suggest that NGOs and aid agencies have no role as providers of new resources, supporters or guides. Simply, it must be people who embody what development is about, since they are both its means and ends. We need to develop local institutions that could fill the meso-level and are able to takeover responsibilities of the external NGOs when they complete their project time. This is a problem with these NGOs and Rural Support Programmes (RSPs). They cannot go all the way down and then not try to build up a structure that the people can take over. This way they become kind of dictators on everything. The people can never get out of their clench. They can never reach maturity because they are dependent on the NGOs funding, interpretation and the packages they offer. The people are not involved in the decision making process. The donors stick with the PE & D, fund development of something, which the community ultimately has to adopt.

We need to institutionalise participation. This means, the bottom layer has to become involved in the system, which is not possible without the interface of the meso-level. Participation, like growth, happens in stages. The achievement of a specific stage leads to another. There is no short cut to the ultimate stage. The need is to institutionalise pluralistic networks. There cannot be one community development programme with set packages and a static approach that has to be applied to every community across the board. The government simply approves it, but does not assure the needed participation and integration to make these programmes sustainable. The civil service needs to change its stance towards society's bottom layers, most importantly by reducing the thresholds for inclusion of the poor or the institutions they create through development initiatives.

So institutionalising participation at the micro level is not sufficient. The need is to bring people into the policy-making decision process so that priorities are set the way they are needed. The macro-level should only provide the frame conditions for the local level and not get involved into minor decision-making process because it cannot oversee and standardise everything. This is the time to go for establishing stronger, local intermediary levels in systems for local government and national bureaucracy. Indeed, decentralisation offers many new opportunities to improve functions of different levels of federation, bureaucracy, NGOs and popular development action.

NGOs have to play a great role in developing and strengthening meso-level institutions. Of course, individual or micro-level is a basic prerequisite for mobilisation, commitment, and visualisation. But limiting all activities to micro-level is just like what we had in East Germany, Russia and other former Soviet Union states. They were basic democracy people but only in their village level. They had no chance to go beyond. This is the RSP kind of socialism with a lot of dominions and kings but when it comes to the next level they are again recipients.

The project or scheme mind-set imposes a linear way of thinking on cultures, which may have richer modes of understanding and the ability to grow beyond the micro-level. The packages offered by the community development programmes in most cases introduce an imbalance between tangible outputs and human processes towards development of sustainable institutions, with a strong bias towards the former because of donor expectations. Consequently, the packages introduce a mind-set that is predisposed towards an authoritarian style of interaction, which equates progress with disbursement and accountability with accounting of financial or material resources.

Moreover, the donor funding keeps the NGOs in a constant state of insecurity, inducing them to acquire projects for self-sustainability, over-riding the broad perspective of focusing on institutional development at different levels. In this uncertainty and insecurity, most of the programmes do not create appropriate conditions for community's to take over and fail to plan a phased withdrawal. The victims of such turbulent approaches to community development are the institutions at the meso-level that are essential and needed to be developed.

The question is that in the absence of any strategy to effectively link up the grassroots to the macro-level through strengthening of meso-level institutions, for how long would the outsiders come to brush communities' teeth. Instead of paying the outsiders to turn community into good recipients, the need is to help the communities learn brushing their own teeth. The government, as well as the NGOs have to follow the subsidiarity principle that calls the higher organisations to leave the functions and allow the lower organisations to take over the moment they develop competence and capacity.

We don't observe this subsidiarity principle in practice because the community development programmes

myopic packages remain the standard mode of operation. The convenient point of this strategy is that the packages and schemes cut complexity into bite-sized, manageable and fundable chunks. They are used as an alternate measure for achieving the overall mission, say poverty alleviation for instance. Not much sense can be made of organisational goals by simply adding up all the infrastructure schemes or credit disbursement. Projects can make sense in terms of a manager's tasks, but not in terms of an overall mission of lasting institution building at the grassroots that would sustain after the withdrawal of the community development programme and would serve as a strong link between the macro and meso levels. Despite many calls for reform, the same approaches still dominate because they also suit the administrative needs of donors.

To be effective, community development programmes must manage and organise in ways, which either neutralise or compensate for the developmental limitations of the basic tools they have to work with. The important challenge is to expand the organisational focus from poverty alleviation, health or sanitation to developing horizontal and vertical functional networks of local institutions with distinct roles and responsibilities at all levels. They have to balance between micro and macro and increasingly the intermediate levels of development whose importance has increased with the introduction and implementation of the government devolution plan.

With reasonable confidence, it can be said that community development programmes, which successfully organise and manage these factors will be more effective in producing sustainable impacts in terms of reducing poverty, ensuring continuous participation and ensuring social justice. Operational NGOs need to cast their eyes not just towards communities but also towards the structures in which their micro-work takes place and the level that helps connect the micro to the macro level. What the NGOs/community development programmes need to be concerned about is the link between its micro- and or macro-initiatives, and its own engagement to other organisations working at complementary levels.

Despite many efforts, very few NGOs link micro to macro through establishing and strengthening meso level organisations very well. There appear to be a few organisational obstacles standing in the way of effectively handing over responsibilities to the local, meso level, Regional Coordination Bodies for translating micro experiences into macro action and implementing macro strategies on micro level. In terms of causes, the first is the choice between long-term sustainability of the external, unrepresentative NGO itself and the self-reliance of the communities it works with. Handing over responsibilities means closing down offices and moving to new region. We don't observe this principle as long as the NGO can finance itself for continuing work in the same region, thus losing a focus on shifting control to the local organisations.

Secondly, micro-work with the poor people is situation specific, whereas the meso and macro work is driven more by building core capacities for coordination, lobbying, area planning and establishing institutional linkages that create access to key personalities and decision makers. The skills and programmes needed to deal with the disadvantaged are not the same as those needed to interact with the macro level sometimes in co-operation, other times in confrontation. For instance, how can a community development programme, claiming not to be involved in advocacy, build capacity of the meso level organisation in carrying out effective advocacy campaign, which creates peaks and troughs of work and makes significant demands on communication resources?

Two aspects of this discussion are very important: one, the external, development NGOs have to come up with programmes to link micro and macro level by strengthening meso level organisations, and two, the NGOs have to set a performance criteria for the conditions under which they will disengage. When it is not taken into account as part of the entry process – for example, in order to keep things open ended for self-perpetuation – seeds of dependency are sown, measures of performance do not set parameters for local learning, and continuity of resources becomes the guide for action and progress.

External resources will not be available forever to pay the external NGOs to keep on brushing community teeth. For NGOs to ignore this fact is plainly unrealistic. It also works against empowerment because it can lead to the creation of a new patronage system, which justifies sustaining the NGOs. Further, it constrains a NGOs ability to increase its coverage by moving to new areas, leaving the old ones to the meso level, local coordination bodies, as Pak-German Integrated Rural Development Programme has demonstrated in Mardan. This creates pressure for continual expansion, which is difficult to achieve without losing comparative advantages or flexibility.

In short, establishment of the meso level organisations with increasing maturity of the grassroots community organisations and withdrawal of the NGOs are the least understood and documented aspects of development work that needs urgent attention – particularly in the wake of government's initiated reform process. Even

revival of the Local Government would not be effective as long as there are no sustainable and functional meso-level local-NGOs, aggregating and articulating grassroots needs. In our case, disengagement of the NGOs is not thought through but results from funds running out, donor fatigue, transfer of staff or tiredness of the NGO, which may have lacked clear objectives of enabling the community to act autonomously and take over functions of the outsiders.

NGOs have a vital role to play in building capacity of the local institutions. It is only chalking out the exit strategy that can help them recognise the importance of the meso-level and look at withdrawal as a process of community graduation. This will shift the NGOs focus from achieving the targets (of completing fixed number of schemes and disbursing fixed amount of credit in a given time frame) to mutually agreed objectives and performance standards for local organisations ability to pursue other interests beyond the intervention – for example, by sustainable generation of benefits, access to other resources, involvement in the development of local policies and input into the translation of higher level policies locally without any NGOs assistance.

The start of the whole process of participation is always the most demanding phase, for both the beneficiaries and the development workers. However, only those groups reach the peak of participation, which surmount all the lower stages that have so far been totally neglected. Standardisation of approaches and community development methodology has been taken too far. To avoid dull, mechanistic application of techniques, community development programmes need to do a self-critical assessment and find out if they are institutionalising participation or the extended period of in funding has simply made it possible for them to stay on. The former is the case in most of our community development programmes, because there are no real performance criteria other than the ability to disburse according to budget. Staying for an unspecified time, usually until funding stops, without developing grassroots institutions (as mentioned above), is not good development practice, nor is it the way ahead.

## **2.4 Ways to real Empowerment.**

During the last couple of decades, the economic, political and institutional context for rural development in Pakistan has markedly changed with the general decline in economic recovery, implementation of IMF dictated adjustment policies, rolling up the local governments and mushrooming of civil society organizations. If it were up to the glossy progress reviews and progress reports of the rural development programmes, our rural areas would have been heavens on earth by now. This context creates new perspectives to address the urgent problem of extensive rural poverty, assess the past interventions and to put into place successful programmes of rural development for real community empowerment. While every particular region and social group needs its own specific programmes, there are a number of broad principles that can be derived from our past experiences. Based on the previous experiences in Pakistan, we need to explore approaches to successful rural development in the economic, political and institutional context.

There has also been considerable experimentation with a new participatory approach to rural development, grounded on the role of organizations in civil society that departs radically from the previous state-led integrated approach to rural development. But without giving the poor people the required political awareness and the much needed voice for articulating their concerns through their own representative non-government bodies as mentioned in 2.3, its impossible to think of their real empowerment or eradication of the root causes of their poverty i.e. social, political and economic inequality.

### **Programmes should be demand-driven:**

A few broad preliminary principles derived from our past experience suggest that demand-driven rural development should be crafted along the following principles:

- Start with a strong effort to organize poor households and communities at the micro-level and build them up to the meso-level. External NGOs can be particularly useful in this effort, provided they have an exit strategy and include the poorest and traditionally least-organized households in the set up of the local, representative organisations model, which in most cases they cannot if their focus is only on credit disbursement and recovery or delivery of standardised packages.
- As explained earlier, organize representative Regional Coordination Bodies (RCBs) or representative and local NGOs at **meso-level** with governance provided by representatives from community umbrella organisations, local traditional structures of leadership and organised communities at the grassroots, Local Government, and NGOs. These bodies would act as an interface between micro and macro level institutions as representative NGOs and would be charged

with the responsibility of setting broad priorities for seeking and disbursement of funds, and inviting organized communities to submit projects for funding. Superior access to local information for these representative NGOs would help them to channel resources to the poor while mitigating adverse selection, mismanagement of funds and moral hazards problems.

- External NGOs and technical assistance advisors (funded by each project) can be called upon by the meso and micro-level community organisations to help in capacity building, and organisational development.
- Grants and loans would be allocated on a competitive basis by the representative NGOs, inducing organized groups to make their demands more competitive by contributing local resources (for instance for the co-production of public goods and the maintenance of infrastructure) and offering guarantees of loan repayments and credible delivery of results.
- The representative NGOs can be regrouped to allow efficient dialogue at the macro-level with Federal Government and donors. This national forum would permit the definition of priorities consistent with the government's long-term plans and with donor priorities. It would allow beneficiaries to lobby for continuity of programme support and for access to additional assets by the organized poor. It would also allow for resources to be allocated in a transparent fashion and for accountability to be achieved by making fully public information on the allocation of such funds (*ex-ante*) and on the results achieved by use of these funds (*ex-post*).

Sustained government and donor commitment to rural development requires the organization of broad poor people coalitions that can lobby in support of this approach. Because governments respond to political pressures, poverty-related public expenditures need to compete with demands from other organized groups, which are backed by resources allocated to rent-seeking and, hence, more powerful than pro-poor coalitions that would save tremendous amount of money that is going in overheads and administrative expenses to outside NGOs.

Constitutive elements of a poor's coalition could include: political representatives of the direct beneficiaries, particularly through Local Government, with close relations to poor constituencies; those interests that are indirectly benefited by rural development through linkage effects such as entrepreneurs catering to the effective demand of the poor; individuals and institutions concerned with the negative social and political consequences of poverty; individuals and institutions concerned with the negative environmental consequences of rural poverty; institutions of a moral character motivated by altruism or proselitism; and international and national agencies concerned with poverty. Following these broad principles, which are to be adapted in each case to both the specific degree of organization of civil society and the proposed degree of decentralization and democratisation in local governance, rural development programmes through external NGOs should be:

- flexible in changing their approach according to the situation on the ground that the power bearer in a centralised office;
- decentralized towards organized groups of households and communities;
- participatory, to capture local information and resources and to achieve accountability of Local Government and their own self;
- demand-driven and differentiated to allow for asymmetrical information and the heterogeneity of and communities;
- strongly market-oriented to achieve smallholder competitiveness within the new economic and institutional framework;
- complemented by the effective construction of supportive civil society institutions in replacement of the downscaling of state services;
- based on a partnership between government and civil society to maximize complementarity between the initiatives of these two sets of institutions;
- working not only for organising communities into small groups but for establishing grassroots institutional structures that could be functionally linked to meso and macro-level organisations.

#### **Redefining role for the government:**

The Federal and Local Government need to perform the demanding task of catalysts in inducing the emergence of representative NGOs and in performing specific roles as part of this alliance, which only they can perform. Success in performing these tasks requires the devotion of resources to the strengthening of the public institutions involved, particularly at the local levels of governance where the types of expertise needed for participatory rural development are new and often lacking. Good governance and local, representative

institutions, not substitution of the state by agents of civil society, is thus a key to the success of this approach to rural development.

In particular, the government needs to continue fulfilling functions that are its unique realm: macro- and sectoral policy in support of rural development; the delivery of public goods and services; regulation of environmental effects; regulation of the competitiveness of markets and the enforcement of contracts; provision of information when it creates positive externalities such as new technology; assistance in access to assets for the poor; and welfare and safety nets for the poorest.

Decentralized governance can be quite effective in enticing civil society participation, more effectively responding to local demands from the organized bodies of the poor at meso-level and achieving greater accountability in governance. However, to be effective, the devolution of power requires a number of preconditions to which the federal government needs to contribute. These include: due representation of the interests of the organized poor; fiscal decentralization to endow these local administrative bodies with control over resources; and the training of local bureaucrats to perform technical functions in support of participatory rural development.

A functioning system of rural development, based on representative NGOs, thus needs good governance, even if the direct role of the state in these agencies may be subsequently downscaled as civil society gradually learns to assume more directly a number of functions that, initially or presently, only the state can fulfil. A high elasticity of supply response in the context of market liberalization and a greater role for civil society thus require a redefined, pro-active and efficient public sector as part of the new coalition with civil society on which rural development is constructed.

**Macroeconomic context:** A sound macroeconomic context is clearly necessary as it enables the removal of historical anti-agriculture biases created by exchange rate overvaluation, import substitution industrialization policies and direct taxation, which discourages investment and imposes a cruel tax on the poor. Macroeconomic contexts will continue to change beyond the phase of structural adjustment as domestic economy respond to international shocks and opportunities, go through the successive phases of business cycles and are affected by cumulative processes such as population growth and depletion of resources. For this reason, the correspondence between macroeconomic policy and rural development interventions is a process that needs to be adjusted continuously. This requires the ability to coordinate the making of macroeconomic policy with the making of rural development policy. In general, however, the branches of government where rural development is designed have little interface with the branches of government where macro-policy is made. This raises three important issues for successful rural development:

- the need for the branches of government responsible for rural development and the interests of civil society concerned with rural development to be part of a continuous dialogue with the branches of government charged with the making of macro-policy. If rural development is an important concern for government, opportunities for this dialogue to occur need to be explicitly provided;
- the need to find a meaningful location for rural development within the governmental structure which allows for both effective representation in this dialogue and effective service for implementation;
- in choosing this location, the need to separate rural development from welfare activities, so that the perceived likelihood of public transfers by rural households does not divert their energies towards rent-seeking, does not postpone private initiatives in new projects as they wait for public rents and does not tempt governments to use rural development programmes for short-term political gain.
- The rural development department should have a social mobilisation section and should be part and parcel of the representative NGOs to keep it in touch with the grassroots.

Successful rural development needs to focus on the reconstruction of civil institutions in support of an efficient smallholder economy. This includes a wide array of institutions which have been suppressed, or failed to emerge, by the preponderance of the state: credit unions, savings and loans associations; marketing cooperatives; organizations for the co-production with government of public goods and services, for instance for infrastructure and its maintenance or for research and development; water users' associations that can assume the direct management; and community organizations that can enforce cooperation in the management and improvement of common property resources such as grazing lands, forests and fishing grounds.

### **Insufficient control over income-generating assets.**

Anti-poverty programmes need to focus on mechanisms that increase the asset entitlement of the rural poor and eradicate the root cause of economic inequality. Disbursement of micro-credit alone is not the answer to this problem. For rural development, access to land and water and the nature of property rights over these assets are key issues that are far from resolved for a large share of the rural poor in Pakistan, and most particularly for the poorest. Although most poverty alleviation programme cannot afford to antagonize the influential people in the rural areas, solving this problem is a precondition for successful rural development programmes. In fact, this reopens the tremendously complex problem of land reform, a problem that needs to be placed high on the political agenda, and of the associated institutional reforms in support of competitiveness of the land reform beneficiaries. Where landlessness, non-viable farm sizes and uncertain property rights prevail, rural development effort – particularly agriculture based -- can succeed in reducing rural poverty without first addressing this question.

Yet, the record of land reform has in general been at best mixed, often leading to the expropriation of tenants and the worsening of rural poverty or to the modernization of large estates in response to threats of expropriation without redistributive gains for the poor. The four most difficult issues for successful land reform are:

- to organize powerful political coalitions in support of land redistribution in order to countervail the power of traditional landlords and local elites to derail the reform, even against the will of a progressive central government. These coalitions need to go beyond the direct land reform beneficiaries to include urban industrial and services interests, both producers and labourers, who see in increased domestic market size, reduced urban migration and greater political stability advantages to the reform;
- to restore the inverse relation between total factor productivity and farm size, based on the superior advantage of small farms in making use of self-motivated and partially captive family labour. This relation has often been perverted by the capitalization of agriculture occurring within a context of policy and institutional biases favouring large farms, such as tax breaks for wealthy landowners, privileged access to credit and to government services for commercial farmers and, in general, successful rent-seeking by larger farmers. Eliminating these biases through policy and institutional reforms is thus a precondition for the inverse relation to hold, itself a condition for the achievement of both equity and efficiency gains through land redistribution;
- to promote organizations among beneficiaries and to construct service institutions through which they can have efficient access to the financial services, input supply, marketing and extension that will help them achieve competitiveness after the reform. To be successful, land reforms must consequently go well beyond land redistribution and address extensive organizational and institutional reforms;
- to mobilize government support for the beneficiaries beyond land redistribution so they gain access to a redesigned infrastructure and to the necessary public goods and services complementary to private initiatives.

### **Need for highly differentiated solutions:**

Heterogeneity across the communities comes from highly varied asset endowments and highly varied constraints on performance such as differential access to markets, infrastructure, information and insurance. The result is a bewildering variety of (constrained) opportunities for the communities to design survival strategies, even while remaining poor within this exercise of choice. Instead of applying the same approach and same packages across the country, to design rural development interventions, this heterogeneity needs to be characterized and understood.

With a heterogeneous population, a policy or programme such as structural adjustment will have highly uneven implications across community types; at the same time, heterogeneity allows the design of differentiated interventions and the targeting of these interventions on particular segments of the rural poor. In facing up to heterogeneity, external rural development programmes must consequently be able to offer poor households a broad portfolio of options as opposed to looking for one solution to all situations and the focus should be on institution building rather than delivery of certain packages.

The devolution of power plan must ensure distribution of powers and continuous public participation in the development process. Mere elections is not the answer. The reason for this is that the planners are ignoring some basic elements of the development process either because of their myopic approach of floating in the macro level or utter disregard of the long-term interest of the suffering masses at the micro level. The government and non-government planners still have time to keep the following factors and processes in mind while planning any future strategy for effective separation of powers and continuous public participation.

In the present set up, NGOs are the first to come to mind with the term “community development.” Most of the external NGOs claim to be providing services at the doorsteps and “empowering” the communities. The question however is: how do we sustain any services and for how long these external NGOs have to be around for the same purpose? How the services can be sustainable if they are always from outside – donor initiated. Such services always come to an end and the systems are left alone. How do we get sustainable system the people can rely on even when the donor funding is ended? Now that the government is coming with the empowerment plans, we had to have an institutional structure at least in those areas where the community empowerment initiatives from the external NGOs are underway since decades – a structure that could somehow coordinate and provide services at the policy level and could continue certain services when the donor element is no longer there to do that. Here comes the question of sustainability and replicability.

When a project ends, it is argued that now the government has to own this process. So far, the government could not do so. The model the government has brought in now is an ideal model provided a few amendments are made to it to make it implementable in the given limitations of the power basis. We have a lot of theories, but the need is how to operationalise them in a situation where the government is not clear as what it wants to do, how the powers and roles of different layers of governance be defined and how the allocations would be made. The most important question is how to link Local Government to the grassroots and vice versa.

So far, no effort has been made to identify and separate the roles and responsibilities of the local, provincial and federal systems, which is a prerequisite for the smooth running of the Local Government. Moreover, the future effective role of the NGOs is also not clear yet. Economics is not only poverty and that’s why all of the new donor assisted programmes are looking into area planning, which is not only related to poverty, health or education, addressed by the NGOs in isolation. Area planning relates to the whole development of a region. Who is supposed to do all this? The sector ministries are not ready to go into these huge sector programmes, which would priorities core areas where they would go into fringe activities. Who is going to guide this process?

Sector services and local needs have to go together. Through the proposed system, the funding coming from the sector ministries should be tuned in to the local needs prioritised at the local level. Priorities need to come up from the village level to the Union Council level and then to the District. All this is not only very nice in theory but can also be made practical if the concerned authorities at the District and Provincial levels are given the required authority and allocation.

When it comes to development, the misconception on part of the planners is their identification of a homogeneous need and a standardised approach to deal with it. They make it somewhere and declare, for instance, “agriculture! we will get.” However, they do not specify, where and how they are going to address it. The plans are somehow aggregated somewhere at the macro level but usually it is the sector ministry which then disaggregates it according to those fixed allocations. The irony remains that they do not have the implementing levels at the meso and micro levels. How the fiscal allocations at the bottom level would be made is another question to be resolved by the devolution of power planners.

Budgeting and fiscal allocations are not a problem when the elections are programmes-based. At the micro-level, we need to have complete village level planning after aggregation of the local needs in participation with the grassroots. After re-aggregation of the identified needs at the meso level – union council, the nominated and elected members would then come up with a programme and do priority setting at the District levels. Ultimately, when budget is allocated to an item at District level, everyone at the meso and local-level would know exactly who will get it because the plan itself come up from the local level. As a result, the programmes would be implemented at local levels. Only a friction of the allocated funds would go to the higher level for doing the job that is not possible at the local level. But all this needs proper distribution of power, which should have been addressed by the government in the complex devolution of power plan.

Until now, all the elections have been privately dealt without any programme element in them. The contestants claim: "if you vote me I will bring you," without saying what. No one has ever done detailed planning and resource assessment. Actually there is no vision and no purpose other than getting power, which does not lead to real development without local planning. Here comes the role of external NGOs.

We have a representative system, which is needed when things are needed to be channelled down from the macro-level. And we have Activists or local leadership approach, which is important when things are needed to be brought continuously from the micro to the meso and up to the macro-level. Articulation through representation alone becomes meaningless because the needs are sidelined. In the activists approach the needs becomes the priority and the adjustment comes from the top.

Both systems have to go somehow side by side. We cannot say that the government should adopt bottom up approach. If both systems held on to each other, we will have opportunity for constant rolling planning, monitoring and evaluation. In the rolling planning, systems would evolve out of the experience and going through different cycle. The fixed, rigid long term planning has never worked for anyone because the planners, particularly in our case, cannot predict if the Americans would allow us to have the needed funds, or if there is going to be a flood, or what changes in the technology can bring an unexpected revolution. Planning can only be adjusted to the frame conditions when the options are analysed.

The actual meaning of the idea of devolution of power is that the community leaders would prepare options and their representatives would prioritise allocations to options. If the technical part of prioritising the options were done by the local leaders (activists), their political representatives would prioritise where the limited resources can be allocated. This way the process starts from the micro level and continuous participation of people at all levels is ensured.

The representatives would be under heavy pressure if they are from amongst the community activists and only if the activists are pushing for the community needs. The process for the activist approach has, thus, to be built up by the NGOs in a way that they are not needed in the communities forever. Added value from development approaches is the most important aspect in this regard.

How far these systems have added value to the lives of the people at micro-level. The army claims that it can give us the results although it is not formally mandated. We have results from the community activists who were also not mandated as such. On the other hand, the mandated representatives not only could not give us the results but also robbed us in the name of democracy, because they needed assistance of the community activists. The representatives cannot do anything by themselves. They cannot buy development. They can only promote development and assist other in their efforts by playing the role of aggregating the needs.

It is also wrong to assume that mobilisation is the job of external NGOs alone. The government is also doing social mobilisation. For instance, we ignore the added value of the Karakurum highway that the government has put into the economic life of communities in the northern areas. It would be wrong to attribute increase in the per capita income of the communities only to the efforts of development programmes. Mobilisation is actually done by both the sides. NGOs do mobilisation through HRD and government through development structures, systems, laws and regulations. Mobilisation by the NGOs is impossible in the countries where the governments have put restrictive laws on meetings, group formation, etc.

In short, the government has initiated a good process, which would enable the people to make their own decisions in the most opportune way. More than 70% of our population is living in the rural areas and the self-help work they have demonstrated is not only because the NGOs are paying them something. They are genuinely interested in clean drinking water; they are genuinely interested in their barren hills rehabilitated. For doing this they have identified certain options for development, because for the first time they were allowed to think about it. They were never offered this opportunity before. Now mobilisation is coming actually by the political decision to let people participate in their own issues. However, the government has to look into the seemingly minor aspects of the plans that might unravel the whole process if not taken care of at this initial stage.

The new system needs to give people constant decision powers, which is not possible without separation of powers in each tier of the government. It would become more tangible for the people if they can reach and make a representative responsible for neglecting the assigned responsibilities because the representative would no longer be dependent on someone in the next higher tier of the government to make a decision. Independent, localised system, in a direct communication distance of people, is the answer to bridge the communication gap and make the planning a routine effort.

## Conclusions

Reflecting on the above recommendations for participatory rural development in the light of government new initiatives for poverty alleviation and devolution of power, it seems to be an exercise in high expectations, but also in modesty; while it charts a new and exciting potential for rural development initiatives, it also serves to underscore how little is yet known about conducting effective rural development in the economic, institutional and political context that prevails in Pakistan as it tries to emerge from structural adjustment. It also leads to a better understanding of the fact that there is no unique solution and that much local innovation to the proposed participatory structures will be needed.

To succeed in this effort, this approach of linking the grassroots level with the macro-level through the meso-level organisations must be designed as a learning process, where each attempt is monitored in terms of achievements and failures and where the broad spectrum of agents involved in the programme are called to participate in assessment and in the drawing of lessons for the design and implementation of subsequent initiatives. It is these lessons that urgently need to be drawn and shared so that a new poverty alleviation and community empowerment science can emerge from the multiplicity of initiatives currently under way.

The Only solution is the development of self-sustainable, local and representative organisations governed by the elected and nominated community representatives, acting as Board of Directors or governors. Many non-government actors are active in the field of rural development in Pakistan these days. Without any intention to disregard or downplay efforts by other organisations, one has to admit the fact after a thorough analysis that **some rural development models faced an early failure** due to one or another reason, others **are being practiced with huge inputs** since long with a hope to empower the poor communities but **without any withdrawal strategy** and **no plans of phasing out** or directly addressing the **root causes of social, political and economic inequalities**. Everyone is rushing to form community organisations at the grassroots level.

The problem as discussed earlier is that the very important area of developing **meso-level institutions is being ignored** by many community development programmes. Most of them are working directly with the grassroots communities at the **micro-level**, hoping that they would get linked to the local government, line departments and donors at the **macro-level**. However, without an exit strategy and comprehensive policy they are not making any substantial progress on the road to good local governance.

**Some Programmes claim to be working with apex (or cluster) organisations without any groundwork at the grassroots level.** Nevertheless, such apex level organisations do not come into existence without extensive work at the micro-level. Still there is no concrete strategy of linking micro- and macro-level local institutions with the help of meso-level organisations. We need to develop **micro** and **meso-level local institutions** as effective actors for good **local governance and poverty alleviation**. The beauty of this model would be that would not phase out with the winding up of the external project or programmes. Instead they would turn into organised **representative organisation** with local staff for local development. In the presence of such **representative support programmes**, all the regional development activities – whether government, donors, or locally funded – would need not be carried out by **expensive external contractors**, intermediary bodies and **brokers organisations**.

Experience shows that 60-80% of the funds allocated by the donors or GOP are wasted on administrative expenses of intermediary organisations. **Local, representative institutions** developed to the capacity level of **external** NGOs would be extremely **cost effective** and **directly accountable** to the community. Being local – with local staff and resources -- even the little administrative expenses incurred on the programme would also directly or indirectly benefit the local population.

Main characteristics of this model would be:

1. developing **institutions** both at **the grassroots** and **meso level**;
2. developing **local, representative** NGO, working **locally** in a cost effective manner;
3. providing a **governance structure** to the Local NGO comprising of members from **the community at the grassroots** – it will make its programme **more aware and responsive to the community needs**, and also **more accountable** to the community;
4. **giving women** opportunity to represent women community members **on the board** of these representative NGOs;

5. Under the government's new devolution of power plan, making such models of rural development more effective for good local governance because unlike other programmes, this model would have the **flexibility** to not only **have the Local Government elected and non-elected officials on its BoD, but also to work in close collaboration with Local Government and other actors** interested in local governance for regional development;

The external NGOs implementing such a unique model of rural development should have a clear **exit strategy** and a blue print for **effective replicated** elsewhere **within 4-5 years** period. Consolidation and promotion of this model would **turn the focus from expensive external inputs** through external NGOs to building *local* human resources for managing *local development* and *local governance* on a sustainable basis.

	1	2	3	4
<b>Causes of Poverty</b>	Kind of circumstances that are beyond control of the government and local people, which can be <b>natural</b> and national <b>disasters</b> , etc.	<b>Lack</b> of education, opportunities, resources and adequate technology that may cause low standard of living;	Any kind of <b>exploitation, domination and oppression</b> from the top and alienation of the masses from the elites at the bottom	Inadequate structures and values leading to social, political and economic inequalities
<b>Goals and aspirations</b>	If cause of the poverty is some national or natural disaster, <b>the goal</b> simply becomes to relieve immediate suffering of the people.	If causes of poverty are those mentioned in category two, <b>the goals</b> become raising production, developing self-reliance and providing equal opportunities.	<b>The goal</b> to end the root causes of category three is to challenge and overcome the exploitative structure.	<b>The goals</b> to address the causes of poverty in category four are to build alternative economic, political and education structure that should convert growth into human development and poverty alleviation. In this case the inspiration comes from " <b>making the things a new.</b> "
<b>Service Programmes</b>	The <b>service programmes</b> in such cases are limited to famine relief efforts, establishment of refugee centres, care of the sick, children and disabled through establishment of clinics and provision of curative medicine.	For achieving these goals, the <b>service programmes</b> include technical training in: management, agriculture, home industries, income producing activities, health care, savings and credit and affirmative action.	The <b>service programmes</b> for category three are various grassroots movements, conscientisation programmes, revamping political parties and establishing various unions along with effective social mobilisation and organisation for social and political transformation.	Achieving these goals needs establishing systems to combine economic growth with a high degree of equity in the distribution of income and, more importantly, access to opportunities of production, health and education.
<b>Inspiration</b>	In this case the inspiration comes from the calls: " <b>help the poor charity.</b> "	Here the inspiration comes from " <b>Help people to help themselves.</b> "  <i>And we must keep in mind that in our case in Pakistan the root causes mentioned under category two have become the mere symptoms of the root causes mentioned under category three and four, and unfortunately, all our poverty alleviation efforts are concentrating on the goals to eradicate these symptoms.</i>	Here the inspiration comes from <b>denouncing evil and announcing good.</b>  <i>Again, the problem is that the root causes of our poverty are of category three and four, but the service programmes to combat those causes and achieve the goals are those that apply to category two.</i>	But there is no concerted effort in offering from the government and the donors to thoroughly invest in establishment of macro-level systems for greater redistribution of rewards from the market, based on the redistribution of assets and endowments in favour of poor.
<b>Type of Change needed</b>	<b>FUNCTIONAL</b> based on <b>non-conflictual</b> approaches that need only consultative leadership.		<b>STRUCTURAL CHANGE</b> and the approaches taken in this regard become <b>conflictual</b> in nature, demanding strong discipline and leadership shared by delegation of authority from base up. And all the contemporary poverty alleviation programmes avoid this approach due to their own vested interests. We need to develop viable, local and <b>representative institutions</b> from the grassroots up to the <b>meso-level</b> so that they may remain there after phasing out of the external programmes and projects.	