## Module 21: Rural Livelihood – I

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<td>Summary</td>
<td>There are several factors influencing one’s livelihood. Working on each of these determining factors is the key for securing livelihood for all. Sustainable livelihood is the greatest challenge for all the stakeholders. Securing essential livelihood for all the citizens is the fundamental responsibility of the state government. There are several government schemes to secure meaningful livelihood for all the rural populations in the country.</td>
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MODULE 21: RURAL LIVELIHOOD – I

1 Introduction

Livelihood is the basic concern for all living beings. It is one of the basic rights of humans. Livelihood is the primary condition for human survival. Livelihood is both the means and ends in life. It is the means for happy and successful life. As an end, it is the chief motivator for the youth. Career and occupation are synonyms to livelihood. Livelihood can be operationally defined as an economically and socially meaningful and productive engagement or occupations in life. There are occupations in the organized and unorganized sectors, public and private sectors, and government and non-governmental sectors. Occupations are generally classified as service, business, agriculture and allied occupations, trades and crafts. Service can be in corporate sector, and government, semi-government and non-governmental sectors. Service can be regular or temporary. Self employment or setting up of own small scale business or enterprise is another important occupation in the unorganized sector. It is the primary objective and purpose of education and training.

There is marked difference between rural, urban and tribal livelihood. There is maximum variety and novelty with regard to urban livelihood options, while there are limited options with regard to rural and tribal livelihood. Livelihood options in the urban areas are often regular, skilled, highly specialized, organized, formal, flexible, industrial and economically more productive than those in the rural areas. Urban options are mostly in the secondary (industrial and manufacturing) and tertiary (service and trade) sectors. Livelihood options in the rural areas are primarily agriculture and allied occupations. They are often seasonal, irregular, unorganized, informal, and economically less productive than those in the urban areas. Rural urban migration can be explained as movement of people from rural areas to urban areas in search of better livelihood options.

There is little difference between life and livelihood in the tribal areas. Tribal livelihood options are traditional and often fixed. Tribal occupations are generally nomadic and pastoral. Their livelihood options are related to food gathering while the rural livelihood options are related to food production. Several nomadic and pastoral communities get settled with agriculture and allied occupations in rural areas and become rural communities. Tribal communities generally
live in harmony with nature. Their life cannot be separated from their occupations. Their economic life seldom rises from subsistence level to commercial level. They do not produce anything surplus so that they would increase their wealth, personal income or profit. Wealth generation is not their priority.

In contrast with tribal occupations, urban occupations and to some extent the rural occupations are focused towards generation of wealth, income and profit. Commercial production is the priority in agricultural as well as manufacturing sectors in rural and urban areas. Increasing the agricultural and industrial productivity and transportation and trade of the surplus production to needy people across the world constitute the organized economic activity providing with regular job opportunities for the people. Such an economic cycle creates formal livelihood options in primary, secondary and tertiary sectors. Sustainability is always an issue with regard to commercial production both in agriculture and industrial sectors.

There are several factors influencing one’s livelihood. Working on each of these determining factors is the key for securing livelihood for all. Sustainable livelihood is the greatest challenge for all the stakeholders. Securing essential livelihood for all the citizens is the fundamental responsibility of the state government. There are several government schemes to secure meaningful livelihood for all the rural populations in the country.

2 Rural livelihood

Rural livelihood is the engagement of rural population in various economically productive occupations. The hallmark of rural livelihood is agriculture and allied occupations. Major livelihood activities for rural population are cultivation of food and cash crops, fish farming, cattle rearing, dairying, food processing, wood industries, organized plantation activities such as rubber, tea, cashew, coffee, cardamom, pepper etc. It can be seen that there is a gradual and increasing urbanization and industrialization of rural livelihood. There are several emerging occupations in the rural sector, such as, rural transportation, rural communication, rural health and education sector, rural infrastructure, export oriented organic farming, horticulture, floriculture etc. Increasing the rural and urban connectivity, such as, rurban projects offers new avenues of rural livelihood.
There is close connection and collaboration between rural and urban livelihood. Knowingly or unknowingly we are following an urban model of economic development. While the government announces the smart city project, we should not forget that new towns and cities emerge from developed villages. Every village is in a process of transformation to city. There is constant rural urban as well as urban rural migration of skilled as well as unskilled people. Therefore, there is a common consideration for non agricultural occupations in both rural and urban areas. In the context of urbanization of rural areas, division of nonagricultural occupations in the rural and urban sectors is arbitrary and unreasonable. What can be called typically rural livelihood is the agricultural and allied occupations.

Accepting the basic premise that, rural livelihood is what rural populations do, rural livelihood can broadly be grouped into agricultural and non agricultural activities. Non agricultural activities are similar to what urban populations are engaged in. Agricultural and allied occupations are typical of rural livelihood. There is a large number of people who are engaged in agriculture and allied activities like cattle rearing, fish farming, dairying etc. Landless people constitute the vast majority of rural mass who are engaged in agriculture and allied occupations. When we discuss about rural livelihood we should exclusively think about the agriculture and allied occupations.

Rural livelihood is related to rural development. Rural livelihood is just one key component of rural development. Rural development considers all the agricultural and non agricultural livelihood options. In ideal situations, rural and urban development considerations are similar or ideally developed villages are similar to the ideally developed cities and towns. It is a challenge to distinguish rural and urban development factors. When we consider rural livelihood independent of rural and urban development, we need to concentrate on purely agricultural and allied occupations, the factors influencing their promotion and the consideration for the sustainable rural livelihood.

3 Factors of rural livelihood

There are several personal, social, economic, cultural, religious, geographical, climatic and ecological factors that affect rural livelihood. These factors are important considerations when we have to promote sustainable livelihood. We need to work with each of these factors to
procure, protect and promote the right combination of rural livelihood options. It has been clarified in the previous section that rural livelihood refers exclusively to the agricultural and allied occupations. Even if rural people are engaged in non agricultural occupations such as, service sector, business, industrial and manufacturing occupations, health, education, communication, construction and infrastructural development sectors, they should be distinguished from rural livelihood in the exclusive sense. These are typical urban livelihood options and constitute the components of rapid rural urban transformation. For a meaningful discussion on rural livelihood, we need to segregate those rural populations who are engaged in urban livelihood from those rural populations who are engaged in typical rural livelihood. All the factors discussed in this section are concerned with exclusively rural livelihood in the agriculture and allied sectors.

3.1 Personal factors

Most important factor in rural livelihood is personal interest and motivation. The recent trend in India is a fascination for urban livelihood. Seldom can we find educated and qualified manpower engaged in agricultural and allied occupations. Unless the rural population is sincerely interested in continuing cultivation, dairying, cattle rearing, fish farming and other allied occupations, rural livelihood options cannot be protected and promoted. These occupations constitute the primary economic activity. People show a gradual trend of shifting from primary sector to secondary and tertiary sectors of occupations. This shift is generally considered as sign of economic progress. In order to protect a nation’s economic stability, we need to reverse this false trend. We need to convince the people that investment and engagement in the secondary and tertiary sectors at the cost of the primary sector is harmful to the nation and its people. Government has to take measures to increase the personal interest, motivation, knowledge, skills and attitude of the people to turn towards primary sector and practice sustainable forms of agriculture such as organic farming, export oriented organic horticulture and floriculture. There are highly profitable agricultural and allied activities which will in the long run, stabilize our economy and economic growth. We need to leave behind the myth that increasing share of economy in the secondary and the tertiary sectors is the sign of economic progress. Increasing share of national economy in the secondary and tertiary sector is the indicator of national dependency on other people and nations.
for its survival and development. On the other hand, increasing share of primary sector in the national economy is the indicator of self reliance, independence and sustainable progress.

3.2 Social factors

Social factors constitute the demographic, gender, family, educational, caste and class factors. Often the rural livelihood is not the matter of personal choice, but a social obligation. One’s social and demographic factors influence their particular livelihood options. There are traditional and household occupations, caste based occupations and socially imposed rural occupations in the agricultural and allied sectors. Government and civil society organizations have to take special care in dealing with these social factors that influence rural livelihood. There are both positive and negative impacts of social factors. Positively, these factors provide with social stability and collective responsibility. Negatively they conflict with individual aspirations, interests, abilities, talents and motivations. Maintaining a judicious balance between social change and social stability is the most challenging task in dealing with rural livelihood.

3.3 Economic factors

Inheritance of wealth and the land resources in the rural areas is an important factor in rural livelihood. There is a vast majority of landless agricultural labourers who are engaged in rural livelihood options. They fluctuate between rural and urban livelihood seasonally. Since most of the agricultural operations are seasonal by nature, they have no other option that shifting from one occupation to another. Since they seldom own rural resources such as land and cattle, they have limited opportunity in the agriculture allied engagements. They prefer to migrate seasonally to urban areas and engage in non agricultural, unskilled occupations such as construction, domestic labour, daily wager, and casual labour in the industrial and manufacturing houses. Securing productive assets to the rural mass is a challenge for the civil authorities dealing with rural livelihood.

3.4 Cultural factors

Cultural factors in the rural areas are mainly concerned with caste factors. Other cultural factors are linguistic and regional considerations. These factors have indelible impact on one’s livelihood options in the rural areas. Cultural factors play the same role as that of social factors
with regard to rural livelihood. Rural livelihoods for many are culturally determined and the individuals have limitations in the choice of a desired occupation. The government and civil society organisations have challenging task to deal with all the cultural factors that interfere with the people’s livelihood options.

3.5 Religious factors

Religion is another important cultural factor which has significant influence upon rural livelihood. Certain occupations are considered meritorious from certain religious perspectives and certain others are considered undesirable. Religion sometimes interferes with the personal, social and national interests and the civil agencies as well as the government face great challenge to deal with such religious forces while dealing with rural livelihoods.

3.6 Geographical factors

Geographic factors include the type of soil, availability of water, distance from the sea and the height from the sea level. All these factors affect all the agricultural and allied activities. They are the major considerations while dealing with rural livelihood. The government and non-government agencies working in the rural sector have to take due consideration of all these geographical factors while designing new projects for protecting and promoting rural livelihood options. Conservation of soil and water is the chief geographical consideration in the context of rural livelihood.

3.7 Climatic factors

Climatic factors include the possibility of monsoon rainfall, wind, cyclone or flood conditions, severity of winter and summer etc. Climatic conditions are related to geography of a particular village. Therefore, geographical and climatic factors are often considered together and they have significant impact on rural livelihood. Climatic conditions are often beyond human control and we need to adapt to such conditions. Rural livelihood options have to take due consideration of all the climatic forces. For example, the cropping pattern, rotation of crops and farming schedules have to be in accordance with the climatic factors.
3.8 Ecological factors

Ecological factors refer to the environmental impacts of rural livelihood. It is related to the sustainability of the rural livelihood. Rural livelihood should not affect the ecological balance or endanger the environment. They should not pollute, water, air and soil resources. People need to engage in such economic activities that would protect the environment or inflict minimum damage to the natural resources. From ecological perspective, tribal livelihood options are most eco friendly and the urban livelihood options are the least eco friendly. Rural livelihoods are sometimes eco friendly and sometimes ecologically harmful. Deforestation, soil erosion and water contamination (due to the use of pesticides) are often cited as harmful impacts of agricultural and allied activities. Farmers need to be taught about organic farming and the ways and means to practice rural livelihoods in harmony with nature. This is related to the sustainable rural livelihood.

4 Sustainable rural livelihood

Sustenance and sustainability are the key issues of rural livelihood. Sustenance is related to the survival of rural mass who are engaged in rural livelihood. People cultivate crops just for their own consumption and they merely survive on such activities. Sustenance is the hallmark of tribal livelihood. Generally all the rural and tribal economic activities at the level of sustenance are sustainable. When the economic activities in the rural areas rise from the level of sustenance to surplus generation or profit making or commercialisation, there arises the question of sustainable livelihoods. In order to increase the production, the farmers engage in large scale farming, using chemical fertilisers, insecticides and pesticides. All these measures damage the soil and water bodies and in the long run such kind of farming becomes unsustainable. The land loses its productivity. The water bodies become poisonous. The farmers will become victims of incurable illness. We need to discourage unsustainable rural livelihoods. Commercialisation of agriculture should be encouraged only under organic farming conditions. Let the agriculture and the allied activities primarily be at the sustenance level. It is the fundamental right of the rural mass. At any cost, the rural livelihoods should not be unsustainable. It could be commercial provided it is eco friendly or organic and sustainable.
5 Summary

Livelihood is the economically productive activity with the primary objective of sustenance and survival of people. People engage in one or the other or a combination of economic activities with the purpose of survival. Livelihood is every citizen’s fundamental right. There are marked differences between urban, rural and tribal livelihoods. Rural livelihoods are related to agriculture, dairying, cattle rearing, fish farming and other allied occupations. There are personal, social, economic, cultural, religious, geographical, climatic and ecological factors that influence rural livelihood. The primary consideration for rural livelihood is environmental sustainability.