



International Relations Conference on India and Development Partnerships in Asia and Africa:
Towards a New Paradigm (IRC-2013)

Development Journalism: A Catalyst for Positive Change

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Abstract

The importance of development journalism in a developing country like India can seldom be overemphasised. It assumes special significance today with the Union Government's renewed focus on development through such crucial programmes as Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT), the National Food Security Act and the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act. While these programmes were launched by the Manmohan Singh government, the Narendra Modi government has decided to continue them with some changes. As development journalism is a purveyor and catalyst for positive change, the researcher intends to examine the three big ticket programmes which are expected to be game changers in transforming rural India. Stories that inspire confidence about the creative potential at the grassroots will also be examined. Some of the innovative development programmes which need media attention and replication in the country include the PURA Connectivity Experiment in Tamil Nadu and the Narendra Modi government's Rurban Mission; Dr M.S. Swaminathan Foundation's Fellowship Programme; the Synergy Mission by Baba Balbir Singh Seechewal; and the Oswal project of the Wardhaman Group in Punjab's Bathinda district.

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Peer-review under responsibility of Symbiosis International University (SIU).

Keywords: Cash transfers; Food security; Game changers; Rurban Mission; Innovative programmes; Media attention

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1. Introduction

The importance of development journalism in a developing country like India can seldom be overemphasised. For students of journalism and the media as a whole, it assumes special significance today with the Narendra Modi Government's renewed focus on development through such crucial programmes as Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT), the National Food Security Act and the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act.

Development journalism is derived from development communication. Earlier, this was practiced by extension agricultural workers in India and the Philippines. They used to disseminate information on new agricultural methods to farmers during a period of land reforms. Indonesia and Malaysia followed suit. Today, development journalism is not confined to agriculture alone: it has become a compendium of activities.

Clearly, in the light of increasing importance of the media – print and electronic – as also the social media, there is a need to give adequate attention to this important branch of journalism for rural transformation: whether DBT will help Below Poverty Line (BPL) families in lieu of subsidised food, fertilizer and fuel; whether the beneficiaries of the job scheme in a particular hamlet have received job cards in time without having to grease the palms of the officials; whether the people of a particular city or town will get continuous power supply in the summer; whether residents of a village will get clean and potable water; whether womenfolk in a remote hamlet will ever be relieved of the shame of using open toilets; and whether sanitation and sewerage facilities will improve in towns and cities. Moreover, as crores of public money are allocated under various schemes and spent by the authorities, the people do have the right to know how these funds are spent and how these schemes are implemented.

2. Methodology

The methodology adopted by the researcher in this paper is primarily historical-analytical. The writer has perused both primary and secondary sources. While research books and official reports constitute primary sources, secondary sources consist of editorials, articles and news reports in reputed newspapers such as *The Times of India*, *The Economic Times*, *The Hindustan Times*, *Mint*, *The Indian Express*, *The Hindu*, *The Telegraph*, *The Statesman* and magazines such as *India Today* and *Outlook*.

3. Findings

(i) Development journalism holds the key to good governance. The big ticket programmes will release new forces in society and the media, by covering them, can help ensure rural transformation; (ii) Development journalism has the potential of influencing the decision-making process and imposing necessary checks and balances in the implementation of state and Centrally-sponsored schemes; (iii) Information is power. Development journalism helps journalists exercise their right to know how various developmental plan programmes are being executed and how the taxpayers' money is being spent; (iv) Editors give primacy to development reports only when they have a corruption angle. This attitude must change for the better. The media should celebrate success stories and help replicate them elsewhere; (v) The government needs to popularise its schemes much better. Villagers need to have easy access to banks if cash transfers (or the DBT) are to succeed; (vi) The Land Acquisition Act has not addressed the farmers' problems adequately; (vii) The Chhattisgarh Food Security Act, with its focus on nutrition, has an edge over the National Act; (viii) The media is expected to be critical of the government's policies and programmes. However, it has no right to play a negative role; (ix) Instead of acting as an adversary to the government, the media should work together with the government for the common good; (x) A well informed and participatory citizenry is sine qua non of a healthy and vibrant democracy.

3. Agent of Social Change

Development journalism has no fixed boundaries or parameters. Yes, it is an instrument of social change. It is different from conventional journalism inasmuch as it makes development journalists participant observers in the execution of a particular programme. It also gives them equitable access and participation to wider audiences, across diverse communities (Loo, 2009). Development journalism, like conventional journalism, does not depend on official press releases, even though the journalists concerned would need to peruse them carefully for an objective

evaluation of a scheme under scrutiny. The former is a step ahead of the latter because a development journalist is a participant observer of any given programme. The journalist concerned not only lives and interacts with the villagers but also watches, say, the execution of a scheme, from a ringside view and as they (the villagers) experience. With the practical insight a development journalist gains, he/she would be able to make a fair and dispassionate analysis of the scheme. It is for this reason that a development journalist is said to have the power and capacity to influence the decision-making process.

Development journalism does not simply cover news stories about rural India. While the issue of reporting rural India is a major component, development journalism *per se* is a lot more. Essentially, it is a form of journalism that covers news about socio-economic issues that are often neglected by the mainstream media, highlighting these issues and helping find solutions for them to promote growth and development. Conventional journalism, however, has a very sharp focus on the major happenings of the time, on keeping up with breaking news as it happens. In the process, many important issues get neglected, which is where development journalism comes in. Compared with conventional journalism, development journalism is about more than just chasing a particular story. It focusses on an issue, reports about it, and then returns to it to keep track of the progress.

Development journalism is often equated with social activism. There is indeed a subtle distinction between the two. In a developing country like India, where most people are blinded by the glory of the growth story, there is an imperative need for an activist kind of development journalism to open people's eyes to the problems still lurking in the shadows. Unfortunately, development journalism has not received the attention it deserved either by the print or the electronic media in the country. Thanks to the Chhatera experiment spearheaded by Mr B.G. Verghese, the then Editor-in-Chief of *The Hindustan Times* in the sixties, the print media had amply demonstrated how a newspaper's resolve and pro-active role can help transform an underdeveloped village in Haryana close to New Delhi and improve the quality of life of the people in many spheres of activity (Verghese, 2010). Sadly, no newspaper has hitherto replicated or carried forward an experiment of that dimension elsewhere. Part of the problem lies in the typical mindset of the newspaper editors, including the mandarins of the marketing department. Experience suggests that even when reporters, after due clearance, do stories on development, they are either spiked or kept in the queue for future use on a lean day.

4. Not A Dry Subject

There is an erroneous impression that development journalism is a dry subject, evoking little interest among the readers. On the contrary, it encompasses a wide range of issues at the Centre and in the States. Any policy or programme of the government aimed at improving the socio-economic condition of the people will automatically fall into this category. As there are cases of large-scale irregularities in the identification of beneficiaries, it is the media's duty and responsibility to examine these lapses and comment whether the fruits of these schemes have really reached the deserving lot and served the intended purpose.

Interestingly, a piece on development journalism – be it for a daily news page or a feature page – is likely to hit the bull's eye only when it has a corruption angle. Going a step further, its chances of getting a prime slot in the next morning's city edition will be brighter if a people's representative – corporator, MLA, MP or a Minister – is involved in the corruption directly or indirectly. Admittedly, such reports do have greater news value as the elected representatives are accountable to the people for their actions and for every pie that they spend from the national or state exchequer. However, corruption alone should not be the only theme of development stories. To be fair, every story should be treated on merits and keeping in view the larger public good. If the people of a particular village are suffering from acute water crisis, this deserves to be given utmost attention. For, it is only through coverage of such stories that a newspaper or a magazine will be fulfilling its principal duty to inform and educate the masses in public interest as also bringing it to the attention of the government for redressal at the appropriate level.

Undoubtedly, such reports do attract the government's attention and influence the decision-making process in finding a solution to the problem. However, development reports will have to be well-researched. The reporter concerned should also include in his/her piece the views of the government officials and the people's representatives. For instance, if the people are facing the problem of a bad road and their genuine demand for repairs has fallen in deaf ears, a report of this nature should be exhaustive enough to include the conduct of the contractor, the people's representative and the officials involved together with the manner in which the funds were used on the project. It is only when the facts are right that it would be easier for the newspaper concerned to fix accountability

on the guilty for irregularities.

There is no dearth of data for development journalists. They can make best use of both primary and secondary sources. Research books, reports of the Government of India's Departments of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Planning Commission and institutions such as Mussoorie's Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Hyderabad's National Institute of Rural Development or Centre of Good Governance constitute the primary sources. Secondary sources comprise editorials, articles and news reports in reputed newspapers such as The Hindu, Mint, Times of India, Economic Times, The Hindu Business Line, Business Standard, Financial Express, Hindustan Times, Indian Express, The Telegraph, The Statesman, The Tribune and magazines such as Frontline, India Today and Outlook.

This chapter covers three case studies – the Direct Benefit Transfers, the Land Acquisition Act and the National Food Security Act – to highlight the tremendous importance of development journalism. These cases exemplify the immense opportunities available for journalists to serve the country with missionary zeal and a spirit of sacrifice. It also deals with briefly four innovative programmes that inspire confidence about the creative potential at the grassroots which need media attention. These are, the PURA Connectivity Experiment in Tamil Nadu, Dr M.S. Swaminathan Foundation's Fellowship Programme, the Synergy Mission in Punjab's Kali Bein rivulet by Baba Balbir Singh Seechewal; and the Wardhaman Group's Oswal Project in Punjab's Bathinda district. The chapter also examines the Modi Government's decision to rechristen PURA as RUBRAN (which is in vogue in Gujarat).

5. Direct Benefit Transfers

The Manmohan Singh Government launched the DBT scheme on January 1, 2013 in 51 districts. It was subsequently extended to 44 more districts. This was seen as a big game-changer for the UPA government in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections in April 2014. That this programme (as also a few others) did not help UPA get votes to return to power for a third term is altogether another story. Nonetheless, the fact that the Modi Government has decided to continue the DBT scheme speaks volumes for the merits of the programme.

Apna paisa, apna haath me (your money in your hands), quipped a government official on a popular TV channel after the scheme was announced. Under the scheme, Rs 3,200 is credited to the bank account of each below poverty line (BPL) family with Aadhar card every month. Families with Aadhar card, entitled to subsidies, pension, scholarships, etc., get money directly in their bank accounts. The beneficiaries have the option of claiming the cash subsidy at designated bank branch, by using a cash card. With the Centre's plan to transfer over Rs 4 lakh crore annually to the people, the DBT is expected to surpass all other development programmes, including the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), launched by the Centre since Independence.

The DBT is aimed at plugging leakages, eliminating wastage, controlling expenditure, enhancing efficiency and facilitating reforms. However, its implementation is not going to be easy and smooth. There are insurmountable hurdles, each one of which can be an issue for investigation, analysis and interpretation by development journalists. If the DBT will be applicable only for the holders of Aadhar card issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), one doubts how many beneficiaries would derive benefit of the scheme. It is only in 20 districts that the people meet the criteria. To what extent will the beneficiary be the correct person though the bank, the gas retailer and his oil company are engaged in verification? Moreover, it is feared that the Aadhar number does not help if the beneficiary has shifted to a different place, say, from Pune to New Delhi. Similarly, while the bank in an urban area can do the linking of the Aadhar number and the corresponding bank account easily, it will be difficult for the micro ATM in a village or the post offices which are expected to offer micro banking services (Rao, 2013).

Moreover, most BPL families have no Aadhar numbers and bank accounts – the two most critical links. According to a World Bank survey on financial inclusion, only 21 per cent poor families have accounts in formal financial institutions. Even in a place like Delhi, without administrative support, opening a bank account is very difficult for the poorest (Bhattacharya and Pritchett, 2012).

Experts have raised questions over the DBT's modus operandi in the absence of a comprehensive evaluation of the scheme. These questions range from the manner in which the beneficiaries are targeted to keeping out those that should not benefit. In its present form, the system does not eliminate touts and corruption, extra costs in getting forms filled and in being identified as a beneficiary. Admittedly, though Aadhar, the micro ATM and the DBT are all innovative technological measures to help beneficiaries and check corruption, the government has apparently not considered the marriage of technology with human understanding. Technology cannot succeed if it does not understand human problems. Things may get complicated once the micro ATM (Anytime money) and other bank

branches have to deal with the reimbursement of subsidies on food grains, kerosene and so on. The number of customers, most of them being villagers, will be many times larger. Referring to the success story of Brazil's cash transfer scheme, the *Bolsa Familia*, Guy Standing, an expert on basic income cash transfers, suggests that the Government of India would do well to roll out the scheme "slowly and systemically, learning practical lessons in the process", without rushing through it. This is particularly important because the scheme involves "vast spending". (Standing, 2012).

If the DBT scheme is to succeed, there is need for a fairly sophisticated financial delivery mechanism and accounting and implementation capability. The UPA government was not skeptical of facing any problem in implementing the scheme once the necessary systems were put in place. According to Dr Montek Singh Ahluwalia, the then Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, since Aadhar penetration is quite high in Gram Panchayats, the District Collectors would be able to have a defined list of beneficiaries, who also have a bank account because of the possession of Aadhar numbers. The Reserve Bank of India has made it clear that anyone with an Aadhar number can be certified by an electronic KYC (know your customer) and hence they need not be certified by the actual production of a card. Dr Ahluwalia allays apprehensions over the demolition of the existing architecture and the creation of a new one while making a case for the new gateway. He says, whatever system is put in place, it will be a common architecture based on the UIDAI with the biometric identity (Law, 2012).

The importance of cash transfers increased further after the government's decision to cover the MGNREGA. The job scheme was initially not included in the DBT as post office accounts were not interoperable and could not be migrated to the Aadhar-linked payment system. Of the 86 million MGNREGA bank accounts, more than half are in the post offices. The Department of Posts is in the process of implementing the core banking solution to make the 150,000-strong post office network interoperable or at par with normal bank accounts in terms of access. According to official sources, the inclusion of the MGNREGA in cash transfers would add around 19.4 million people to the list of existing beneficiaries across 26 government welfare payments, mainly pensions and scholarships. The crucial linkage is expected to check corruption and make access to wages easier for the workers in the scheme (Mint, 2013).

Even as the Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas decided to provide subsidy to liquefied petroleum gas cylinders (for domestic cooking gas) on the basis of the Aadhar cards from November 1, 2013, the Supreme Court of India's ruling that Aadhar cards can only be issued to those with proven Indian nationality and that these cannot be made mandatory for accessing public services and subsidies has dealt a crippling blow to the Aadhar scheme. Apparently, it was a setback to the government's plans to transfer cash and subsidies directly into bank accounts of beneficiaries. It was feared that the verification criteria as laid down by the Supreme Court would prove to be a tough task because only a small part of the population has proof of nationality such as a passport. Following the Supreme Court order, the then Union Petroleum Minister M. Veerappa Moily said that Aadhar cards cannot be made mandatory for LPG subsidy.

The then Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram told the Lok Sabha on August 16, 2013, that only 9.62 per cent of beneficiary accounts for schemes under the programme, other than cooking gas subsidy, were linked to Aadhar. The figure was about 50 per cent for LPG subsidy transfer, much beyond Aadhar coverage of about 75 per cent in the 20 districts where the targeted cooking gas scheme began on June 1, 2013 (*The Times of India*, 2013). The UPA government's decision to bring forward legislation on UIDAI to accord it statutory status also merits attention.

6. SIMC Study

The students of Master of Mass Communication (Journalism), Symbiosis Institute of Media and Communication, a constituent of Symbiosis International University, Pune, had done a survey on some important programmes including the DBT scheme through Aadhar card in January 2013. The two-day survey was conducted in Maharashtra's Satara district under the leadership and guidance of Dr Dileep Padgaonkar, R.K. Laxman Chair Professor, Faculty of Media, Communication and Design, Symbiosis International University. Many villagers told them that the government had announced the DBT in a hurry and without providing proper banking facilities in the villages.

Chetna Gala Sinha, founder, Mannadeshi Mahila Sahakari Bank, Rehamatpur village near Satara, was skeptical of the success of the scheme. She pointed to the problem of access and said that the banks were too far from the villages and it would be difficult for the people to travel long distances to avail themselves of the benefit. She said that the banks should be opened in the villages instead of marketplaces which were far off (Agarwal *et al.*, 2013).

Another point that came to the fore during their interaction with the villagers was the lack of publicity. Most people were unaware of the benefits of the scheme and the issuance of Aadhar cards at various distribution centres. As a result, they did not visit the centre at a local school at Rehmatpur for a whole month when these cards were being issued. Moreover, there were instances where women did not know how to operate a bank account.

Pradeep Lokhande, Director of Pune's Indian Institute of Political Economy, and Founder, Rural Relations, a non-government organisation, says that since the people of Satara district were unaware of the details of the scheme, the government should popularise the scheme. "The villagers are illiterate, lack education in financial operations and hence are reluctant to participate in the cash transfer scheme", he said.

7. No Change in Scheme

It augurs well that the Narendra Modi government has, in principle, decided to continue the DBT scheme. Currently, the government is said to be examining ways in which the system can be made more efficient. Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has said that an expenditure management commission will recommend possible changes to DBT. The Prime Minister took a detailed meeting on this issue recently.

According to Mr Jaitley, the Centre may link some of the schemes such as DBT to Aadhar, after incorporating some amendments so as to make Aadhar a purely "citizen-linked programme" (Hindustan Times, 2014). He said though some people expect the DBT to bring down 20 to 30 per cent of the cost, "this is an issue wide open" (Times Now, 2014).

Meanwhile, Reserve Bank of India Governor Raghuram Rajan has made a strong pitch for DBT to reduce leakages in the system. Delivering the 20th Lalit Doshi Memorial Lecture in Mumbai on August 11, 2014, he said the DBT scheme "will give the poor the choice and respect as well as the services they had to beg for in the past. It can break a link between poor public service, patronage and corruption that is growing more worrisome over time" (Economic Times, 2014).

He said if there is evidence that cash transfers were misspent, some portion could be given in the form of electronic coupons that can be spent by the specified recipients only on food, education or healthcare. At the same time, he made it clear that direct transfers should not be seen as a "universal panacea" (Economic Times, 2014). It would be interesting to watch how this scheme will take shape in the months to come under the new dispensation.

8. The Land Acquisition Act

Parliament's enactment of the Right to Fair Compensation, Resettlement, Rehabilitation and Transparency in Land Acquisition Act on August 29, 2013, is a defining moment in the world's largest democracy. The comprehensive land acquisition Bill has been in public domain for over two years. Now that it has been enacted, it is bound to usher in new forces in rural India. There will be a lot of activity in the villages. And the media, including journalism schools, cannot lose sight of this most important development in rural India. Surely, development journalists need to follow the enforcement of the legislation on a day-to-day basis, update knowledge, get their facts right and do editorials, articles, features and news reports.

The progressive Act that allows states to adjust features according to their needs and policies has ushered in a new era for takeovers and compensation long stuck in the claws of a 119-year-old British-period legislation. States can also impose their own restrictions on acquisition of multi-crop land and improve the compensation and resettlement package, but cannot lower it below what the Central law offers. According to the original law, 80 per cent of land owners and people dependent on land for livelihood must give consent for land acquisition for private industry and public private partnership (PPP) projects. Under the new law, for private industry, consent of 80 per cent landowners and people on government assigned land will have to be taken. For PPP projects, consent of 70 per cent landowners and people on government assigned land must be taken. The government will retain land ownership in PPP projects. States are free to increase the consent provision.

The Land Acquisition Bill, drafted by the Manmohan Singh Government, has gone through four phases: the Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation and Settlement Bill, 2011; the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, 2012; the Group of Ministers' decision to water down the Bill by incorporating the provision that the consent of 66 per cent owners will be enough for go-ahead; and the final one that increases consent to 80 per cent. First, the compensation scheme in the 2011 Bill, which sought to replace the Land Acquisition Act, 1894, mandates land acquisition at six times the market value in rural areas and twice the

market rate in urban areas. It is only when 80 per cent of the people affected by a project give their consent for land sought by private companies, the land acquisition can start. This exempts acquisition by the government for official use. If a project does not take off even after five years of its launch, the land should be returned to the owners. It abandons the land-for-land principle. It bars acquisition of multi-cropped irrigated agricultural land. Acquisition for “public purpose” is to be defined by the bureaucracy on a case-by-case basis. Compensation and rehabilitation should have reference not to the nature of the project but to the nature of impact. If farmers are uprooted from their land, experts say that the government must help them practice farming elsewhere and it should not expect them to become weavers, carpenters or traders (The Telegraph, 2013).

Secondly, the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, 2012, combines land acquisition with resettlement and rehabilitation. A practice well established over the world, its most important provision is the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) to make development just, inclusive and participatory. SIA will include three things: an assessment of whether the proposed acquisition serves public purpose; an estimate of the project affected families (PAF); and the extent of the land to be affected by the acquisition. Significantly, SIA, under the 2012 Bill, seeks to study the social costs of the project vis-à-vis its benefits. It will ensure that the views of its affected families are assiduously recorded and included in the SIA report. The SIA report will be done only after public hearings to be held at the affected area, after adequate publicity about the date, time and venue of the hearings. The report will be evaluated by an independent multi-disciplinary expert group comprising two non-official social scientists; two representatives of panchayati raj institutions; two experts on rehabilitation; and a technical expert in the subject relating to the project. If the expert group gives an adverse report, the project will be abandoned. However, if it gives the go-ahead, the Bill seeks to protect the interest of PAFs. These are inclusive of 100 per cent solatium; compensation for land losers will be twice the market rate in urban areas and 2-4 times the market rate in rural areas. The state governments are to determine the precise scale (Ghatak and Ghosh, 2011).

The 2012 Bill provides for strict timelines to complete resettlement and rehabilitation: six months for the SIA process; and 35 months for the land acquisition process. It provides for full payment of compensation within three months; the monetary part of relief and rehabilitation to be paid within six months from the date of the award. In case of irrigation or hydro-power projects, Relief and Rehabilitation has to be completed within six months before submergence. The government will have to put in place a transparent and flexible set of rules and regulations and to ensure its enforcement that protects the interests of land and livelihood losers in every instance of large transfer of land.

Thirdly, there was a twist to the draft Bill following the Group of Ministers’ decision to water down the legislation. Earlier, it was envisaged that in all private or PPT projects, acquisition will need the consent of 80 per cent of land losers. The Union Rural Development Ministry has diluted this consent clause to two-thirds or 66 per cent of landowners to acquire a patch of land for private/PPP projects while acquisition in tribal areas would be possible only with the approval of local institutions of self-governance. The amended consent clause formed a crucial part of the legislation because it had been a “sore point” in the Union Cabinet, with some ministers voicing fears that it could hamper acquisition and impede industrialisation. Former Union Ministers Kamal Nath, Anand Sharma and C.P. Joshi differed on certain projects being kept out of the purview of public purpose. Former Defence Minister A.K. Antony had been maintaining that the Government should not acquire land for private projects and step in for PPP projects only if unavoidable. There was also resentment against the provision of Social Impact Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment before acquisitions, but they were retained in the draft.(Shah, 2012).

And finally, the new law saw the light of the day in August 2013 due largely to the efforts of former Union Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh. Having justified efforts to arrive at a consensus, he said that vital concerns of all stakeholders had been addressed in the new legislation. The government has been forced to adopt the ‘middle-path’ after talking to farmers, activists, industry, states and political parties. He ruled out any forcible acquisition of land. He said the urgency clause had been redefined, restricting it to only national security and defence while no land could be required without written consent in other cases. Though farmers are in distress, the former Minister explained that they could seek justice both from authorities that would be set up in every state and the judiciary. On lease options for farmers who don’t want to sell their land, the decision would rest with the states concerned. The law sets three conditions for retrospective application. It would apply if no award has been given under the old law, if 50 per cent farmers have refused to accept compensation and if possession has not been taken of the land acquired (The Telegraph, 2013).

9. Proposals For Change

The contours of this Act are bound to change following the Narendra Modi Government's proposal to bring about major changes in this progressive piece of legislation. The Centre is reportedly mulling over repealing some provisions relating to the consent clause and for social impact assessment and rehabilitation and resettlement of the project affected families.

Union Rural Development Minister Nitin Gadkari has reviewed the Act at a high power meeting with Vandana Kumari Jena, Union Land Resources Secretary. He has asked Ms Jena to prepare a report for the Prime Minister. He has already commented that while the Modi Government would protect the interest of the farmers, it will not let industrialisation to lose its pace.

Later, Mr Gadkari chaired the All-India Revenue Ministers' conference in New Delhi on June 27, 2014. While BJP-ruled states advocated an "overhaul", those ruled by the Congress, including Haryana and Maharashtra, sought changes to make it "practical". They dubbed the present law as a hurdle in acquisition and industrialisation. For instance, though states like Odisha and Maharashtra used to be a magnet for investors, due to land acquisition policies, private companies are opting out of them. Many highway projects worth Rs 60,000 crore, too, have been stuck for the same reason. It is feared that the SIA clause making 80 per cent consent of Gram Sabhas mandatory for land acquisition has put off the acquisition process by nearly two years (Economic Times, 2014).

The 19 suggestions made at the conference are indicative of the kind of changes the Revenue Ministers want in the legislation. Here is a summary of the suggestions made at the conference:

- The Consent Clause [Section 2(2)] should be re-examined, as ownership of land vests with the government in PPP projects. The consent clause should be removed from PPP projects. Alternatively, consent requirement may be brought down to 50 per cent.
- Definition of 'affected family' [Section 3(c)] needs to be re-examined as it is very elaborate and includes 'livelihood losers' working in the affected area for three years prior to acquisition of land and whose primary source of livelihood is affected. The Act provides for Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R) benefits to the affected families. Hence, the provision is likely to be misused in the absence of clear criteria for determination of affected families.
- Posers of 'Appropriate Government' [Section 3(e)] which are with the Central Government should be delegated to the Union Territories.
- Mandatory Social Impact Assessment (SIA) study (Sections 4 to 9) should be done away with; and SIA should be confined to large projects/PPP Projects as it may delay the acquisition process.
- The provision to safeguard food security (Section 10) by development of 'culturable wastelands' in lieu of acquisition of 'multi-cropped irrigated land' needs to be amended as States like Delhi, Goa, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand do not have any wasteland for the purpose.
- The Retrospective clause (Section 24) which stipulates that land acquisition proceedings would lapse in case compensation is not paid or physical possession is not taken should be modified. Payment of compensation as per New Act to the persons specified in Section 4 notification under old Act leads to increased burden on the State exchequer. The provisions of Section 24 need to be amended as it is leading to litigations.
- The litigation period or period of stay / injunction should be excluded while calculating the prescribed time limits for completing various proceedings under the Act e.g. Section 24(2), Section 25.
- Section 26 should be re-examined as determination of market price of land based on 'agreements to sell' will lead to speculation in land prices. As such, at present the compensation paid is higher than market value in Himachal Pradesh, Lakshadweep, Kerala, etc.
- In Section 30(3), the date from which an amount of 12 per cent of market value is to be given, should be calculated from date of preliminary notification under Section 11 and not from Section 4 notification which deals with SIA study as stipulated in the Act presently.
- It also contravenes Section 69 (2) of the New Act which deals with determination of Award by authority and stipulates calculation of 12 per cent of market value from date of preliminary notification under Section 11.
- Under the Urgency Clause (Section 40), the powers to determine 'any other emergency' should also be exercised by the state government concerned. At present, urgency clause is restricted to "the defense of India or national security or for any other emergency arising out of natural calamity or any other emergency with the approval of Parliament".

- Section 46 stipulating R&R obligation in case of private purchase beyond limits specified by the state government should be deleted.
- The jurisdiction of Authority (Section 51) should be restricted to dispute resolution only and not be on determination of award.
- Penalty Provisions (Sections 84-90) including imprisonment of 6 months extendable to 3 years or with fine of with both for the government servants are too stringent and may lead to harassment of civil servants.
- Section 101 dealing with return of unutilized land to the original land owners or heirs should be deleted.
- The clause specifying sharing of 40 per cent enhanced cost with original land owners (Section 102) when the land is transferred on higher consideration should be deleted as it leads to disputes.
- Under Section 104 of the Act, a formula for calculating 'lease amount' may be given, as a formula has been prescribed for calculating compensation value.
- There should be threshold for R&R entitlements in Second Schedule and infrastructural amenities in Third Schedule.
- Under Second Schedule, the provision of 'land for land' should be re-examined. State Specific Acts dealing with land acquisition should be included in the Fourth Schedule exempting the enlisted Acts from provisions of the new Act (Indian Express, 2014, and counterview.org, 2014).

Meanwhile, the Modi Government's proposal for changing some provisions in the Act, the possible dilution of the consent clause in particular, has evoked mixed reactions. Many NGOs and farmers' associations have voiced concern over the plight of farmers. A note prepared by the Gujarat Lok Samiti, Gujarat Khedut Samaj and Gujarat Sarvodaya Mandal infers that the Centre is "poised to roll back the hard won victories and mete out injustice to the farmers, the Dalits, the Adivasis, the landless poor, in its over-enthusiasm to please its corporate masters."

In an article, "Give 1013 law a fair chance", former Union Minister Jairam Ramesh and Muhammed Khan, former Officer on Special Duty, Union Ministry of Rural Development, made a forceful plea to the government to implement it in letter and spirit. Allaying apprehensions on the SIA provision, they stressed the need for a transparent public process before any acquisition begins. This process will facilitate a thorough inquiry to ascertain whether acquisition is at all necessary, they averred (Indian Express, 2014)

Professor Amartya Sen, eminent economist, does not buy the argument that fertile land should not be acquired by the government for industrialisation. Referring to his stand on Nandigram and Singur in 2007, he says the prohibition of the use of agricultural land for industries can be ultimately self-defeating because industrial production may generate more valuable products than what agriculture could do. To buttress his argument, he cites examples of global cities such as Manchester, London, Munich, Paris, Pittsburgh, Shanghai and Lancashire all of which came up on fertile land (Indian Express, 2014)

Chandrajit Banerjee, Director-General, Confederation of Indian Industry, in his article, "Revisit and review", says that the Act, in its present form, "freezes land acquisition by imposing lengthy procedures and high costs". Having maintained that the new Act has virtually made land acquisition impossible, he says the effort should be to ensure the transfer of land to the requiring body within two years. He says the various administrative procedures, multiple public consultations for environment and forest clearances, lengthy and detailed negotiations and the setting up of several authorities and groups together with the flow charts will take at least five years if the schedules stipulated in the Act are followed (Indian Express, 2014).

10. The Rajasthan Bill

At a special session of the State Legislative Assembly on 15 September, 2014, Rajasthan superseded the Central Act and passed its own land law, called the Rajasthan Land Acquisition Bill. It will become an Act after it gets the President's assent. The Bill, said to be "business-friendly", sought to make the process of acquiring land easier while enhancing the quantum of compensation for the owners. The compensation would have to be awarded within two years of the notification failing which the entire proceedings for land acquisition shall lapse. Interestingly, project-affected persons can take resettlement and rehabilitation amount on a monthly basis. (Dhar, 2014). Surprisingly, the Rajasthan law has no provision for social impact assessment at all. Moreover, while the percentage of consent of landowners has been reduced if the land is acquired for public private partnership projects, it has been totally done away with for core infrastructure projects such as roads, pipelines, railways, communication, ports, airports and

bridges.

A top official of the Union Ministry of Rural Development is reported to have said that keeping in view the reactions for and against the Act, the Modi Government will try to strike a balance between the original land Bill of 1894 and the 2013 Act. Whatever the final decision of the Union Government, development journalists have got an opportunity to write about the various facets of the law. They should visit villages, meet all stakeholders and write whether the Act in its present form and the impending changes would really help all the stakeholders on the ground. Journalists have a special responsibility to focus on the problems and finding solutions to them (The Economic Times, 2014).

11. The Food Security Act

The National Food Security Act enacted by Parliament in August 2013 was another historic legislation passed by the then Government headed by Dr Manmohan Singh. Food security implies legal entitlement to cheap grains and millets. The Act provides for food security in human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity. The National Food Security Bill could not be passed earlier because of the disruption of Parliament by the Opposition parties. President Pranab Mukherjee promulgated an ordinance in July, 2013, on food security. Subsequently, it was ratified by Parliament (Government of India, 2013). According to the Act, two-thirds of the country's population or 800

million people will get subsidised rice, wheat and cereals. It provides for 5 kg of food grains per person every month: rice at 3 per kg, wheat at 2 per kg and cereals at 1 per kg. It will cover 75 per cent of the rural population and 50 per cent of the poor in urban India. Every pregnant woman and lactating mother shall be entitled to a meal, free of charge, during pregnancy and six months after the child birth, through the local Anganwadi. Children, too, between six months and six years of age, will get free meal through the local Anganwadi. For children studying up to Class VIII and within the 6-14 age group will get one mid-day meal, free of charge, every day, except on school holidays. Every school and Anganwadi shall have facilities for cooking meals, drinking water and sanitation.

The Act provides for reforms in Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) such as doorstep delivery of food grains to TPDS outlets; end-to-end computerisation of transactions at all levels to prevent diversion; transparency of records; introducing schemes such as cash transfer, food coupons to targeted beneficiaries in lieu of their food entitlements. The eldest woman, who is not less than 18 years of age in every eligible household, shall be the head of the household for purposes of issuance of ration cards. There will be a grievance

redressal mechanism at the district level regarding non-distribution of entitled food grains or meals. The Act provides for State Food Commissions in every state. It will consist of a Chairperson, five other Members, and a Member-Secretary (in the rank of a Joint Secretary to the Government). At least two members shall be women and one member shall belong to SC/ST. The Chairperson and members will have five-year tenure or up to 65 years, whichever is earlier. They are eligible for reappointment. The State Food Commission will have all the powers of a civil court while trying a suit under the Code of Civil Procedure. The Bill provides for individual roles and obligations of both the Centre and the states.

Interestingly, the National Food Security Act had been criticised by no less than former Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar as an "over-populist scheme that could knock the government's finances". (Samanta, 2013). Fiscal burden and cost sharing is a major problem. As half the cost is to be borne by the states, state Governments such as Odisha, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra (the last two are ruled by the Congress) have pointed to the fund crunch. The extra burden on the food subsidy would be about Rs 20,000 crore, while food grains requirement is expected to be 61.23 million tonnes. The total food subsidy to cover expenditure for the Food Security law is expected to be Rs 1.3 lakh crore. Dr M. S. Swaminathan says, unless we develop and introduce methods to ensure effective political and farmer participation in implementing the Food Security law, we will not be able to overcome the problems faced by the public distribution system (PDS) in some places arising from corruption in the distribution of entitlements (The Economic Times, 2012).

There is also the question of state autonomy. Several states have questioned the very legitimacy of the food security scheme. Rajasthan did not want social audit of the PDS implementation and functioning of ration shops by the Centre. Maharashtra did not want National and State Food Commissions as they run parallel to existing arrangements such as the State Consumer Redressal Commission, State Human Rights Commission, etc. Madhya Pradesh said such commissions will add to the existing bureaucracy and render the department meant for this job superfluous. Bihar wanted an Identification Commission on the lines of the Election Commission of India to

undertake the process of identification and listing of beneficiaries to ensure transparency. Moreover, most states have asked the Centre to refrain from interfering in matters like qualifications, methods and terms of appointments of district level grievance redressal machinery. The Bill did not specify investments required for augmentation of the storage and freight capacity given that the Railways are already overstretched. The Centre is yet to spell out the coordination mechanism for smooth implementation of food security.

More to the point, the Chhattisgarh government, which is a step ahead of the Centre for having enacted its own Food and Nutrition Security Act, wanted the empowerment of the National Food Commission to hear the state government's complaints and pass appropriate recommendations to the Centre. (*Outlook*, 2013). A number of suggestions have been made to strengthen the impending legislation particularly in the context of the Chhattisgarh Food Security Act. One, the national legislation should not be confined to food security alone. It should be linked to nutrition security as well. For instance, iodised salt, grams and pulses and edible oil should also be added so that it would be a total package. Two, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Raman Singh differs with the quantity of food grains and the methodology for implementing the Centre's package. While the Centre says a person should be considered as a unit, he says, not a person but the entire family should be considered as a unit and each family should be given 35 kg rice or wheat. Three, while the Central law ensures supply of only 5 kg food grains per person, the Chhattisgarh Act, passed by the State Assembly in December 2012, gives right to avail oneself of 35 kg of food grains to each eligible family. And four, the system should be made more broad-based by including landless farmers, physically challenged persons and widows in the list of beneficiaries.

12. Delay in implementation

Encouragingly, the Narendra Modi Government has decided to implement the Act, though it is not clear whether it will make changes to incorporate the nutrition element in the Act on the lines of the Chhattisgarh model. Though the Food Security Act came into force on July 5, 2013, as per the law, state governments were required to implement it within a year, i.e. July 4, 2014. According to Union Food and Civil Supplies Minister Ram Vilas Paswan, following a high power meeting chaired by the Prime Minister, state governments have been told to let the Centre know whether they intend to implement the Act in toto or they have any concerns. "We do not want any confrontation between the Centre and the states", he said (Ibnlive.com, 2014).

As of now, only five states – Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra – have fully implemented the Act. Only five states – Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar – have partially executed it. The Chandigarh Administration also falls in this category. Consequently, the Centre has extended the deadline for its implementation by three months through an executive order (The Statesman, 2014).

The implementation of the law would raise the Centre's food subsidy bill by Rs 25,000 crore. The annual grain requirement would rise by 6-8 million tonnes from the current level of 55 million tonnes. The Centre would continue to provide food grains allocated to states which have already implemented the Act. Mr Paswan said that he will visit all states and meet Chief Ministers for the speedy implementation of the Act. "the poor should not be left in the lurch in the absence of a decision by states", he said (Indian Express, 2014).

The coming months will be a challenge for development journalists as they need to keep tabs on the progress of these schemes and how these are being handled by the Modi Government. Food security (or land acquisition or cash transfers) is an area which cannot be left to the journalists of pink papers or economics writers alone. It is the duty of development journalists to take up issues that are of direct concern to the common masses.

For instance, when an expert like Dr Swaminathan raises concern over food output to meet the challenge of food security, it becomes a national issue which needs to be picked up by all newspapers and not just pink papers only. He feels that owing to dwindling agricultural lands, India had tapped only 50 per cent of its production reservoir. It can produce 500 million tonnes of food grains in the next 20 years to meet the increasing population.

For this, he wants the Centre and the states to come out with comprehensive land use and land acquisition policies. Otherwise, he fears that prime agricultural land would be converted into real estates to the detriment of the agricultural community in the country. There is an imperative need for the government to help "produce more and procure more", he says.

13. The PURA Experiment

The Provision of Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (PURA), under the Union Ministry of Rural Development, is a unique experiment in spatial integration. It takes care of the problem of governance in a hinterland where the capacities of a municipality or that of a panchayat are non-existent (Debroy, 2012). Propounded by former President Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, PURA connects 10-15 villages and a town via a 30-km Ring Road. It connects 100,000 or more peasants in a circular community that can be crossed in 30 minutes travel time via a high speed circular highway. Interestingly, PURA was conceptualised when it was observed that in general a city generates remunerative jobs in the non-farm sector whereas the same population distributed over a number of villages cannot do so. This was possible because cities have a larger market due to higher road, rail and telecommunication connectivity (Dhar and Sen, 2006). The two illustrations on the connectivity and a habitat alongside a Ring Road, as presented below, signify the importance of PURA.

The Periyar PURA complex in Tamil Nadu is a big success story. A cluster of 60 villages near Vallam in Thanjavur district has all the three important types of connectivity – physical, electronic and knowledge.

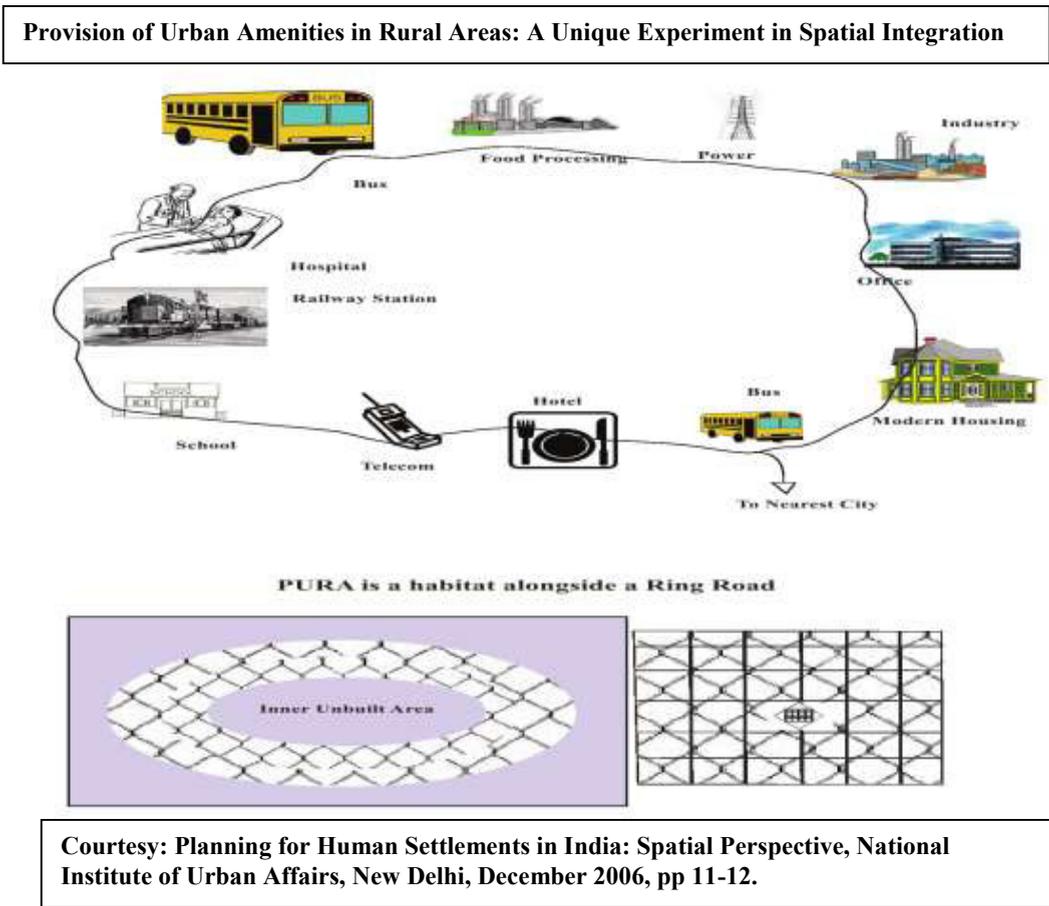


Fig. 1: Provision of urban amenities in rural areas: A unique experiment in spatial integration

Remarkably, the Women’s Engineering College is the centre of activity that provides the electronic and knowledge connectivity.

Moreover, the healthcare centres, educational and vocational training centres – from primary to the post-graduate level – have resulted in large-scale employment generation with the active support of as many as 850 self-help

groups. Over 200 acres of wasteland has been developed into cultivable land with innovative water management techniques such as contour ponds and watersheds for storing and irrigating the fields (Kalam, 2006).

Dr Kalam's exhortation to the media to cover such schemes in public interest was laudable. Experts, planners, technocrats and scientists hailed PURA as a feasible proposition and called for its extension to as many states as possible by entrepreneurs, educational administrators and philanthropic institutions in close cooperation with the respective government agencies.

14. It's now RURBAN

The Narendra Modi Government has rechristened PURA as Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission as part of its policy to replicate the Gujarat model at the national level to provide urban amenities in rural parts of the country. In the Union Budget 2014-15, Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has made an initial allocation of Rs. 100 crore to Rurban Mission.

The Union Ministry of Rural Development will closely follow the Gujarat model while preparing the roadmap for implementation of this mission. "It will look at the cluster of villages holistically and do the resource mapping as well as gap analysis to come up with a framework for the new scheme to be delivered through a convergent pool", according to a top official of the Ministry (The Economic Times, 2014). In Phase I, Union Rural Development Minister Nitin Gadkari has launched the Rs 100-crore mission in two states – Sangli and Buldhana districts in Maharashtra and Warangal district in Telangana. Complimenting PURA's achievements, he said the Rurban Mission will be modelled on the best practices of the PURA scheme (Press Information Bureau, 2014).

The Rurban Mission is expected to address the challenge of migration from rural to urban areas. According to Union Finance Secretary Arvind Mayaram, in the 1990s, the rate of migration was 20 per cent. If this is not checked, Indian cities will not remain livable by 2032, he cautioned. He said urbanisation of rural areas is a must and every state government should be asked to create a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) for effective implementation of this mission (Press Information Bureau, 2014).

Union Rural Development Secretary L.C. Goyal wants credible convergence of ideas and schemes to take the Rurban Mission forward and alleviate poverty (Press Information Bureau, 2014).

Though it was a good scheme, PURA was limited in nature. Barring sanitation projects a few states, the scheme never took off to its full potential because of lack of convergence between various ministries. There was also no political will on the part of both the Union Government and respective state governments to widen its base and implement it.

The UPA-II Government (2009-14) re-launched it as a Central sector scheme during the remaining period of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan. PURA was being implemented under public-private-partnership (PPP) between local executive bodies like the Gram Panchayats and private sector partners with support from the Finance Ministry and the Asian Development Bank, which provided technical assistance. During 2013-14, the Centre had allocated Rs 50 crore to PURA (The Economic Times, 2014).

Now that the Modi Government has launched the Rurban Mission on the Gujarat pattern at the national level, it would be worthwhile for development journalists to examine the Gujarat experiment comprehensively. The focus should be on not only examining success stories but also identifying the functional loopholes in its implementation so that those in charge of the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission learn lessons and implement it properly.

15. Farmers as Fellows

The M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in Taramani, Chennai, has been playing an important role in promoting sustainable farming technologies among farmers with the help of other farmers. For this, the foundation is setting up farm schools where the farmers can learn farming techniques from other farmers who have already implemented them successfully. In all, the MSSRF has set up five farm schools – two in Tamil Nadu and one each in Maharashtra, Kerala and Odisha. The one in Maharashtra was inaugurated at Takarkheda village in Arvi Block in Wardha district in July 2013. According to Dr Swaminathan, the farm school is based on the idea of "land-to-land" where a successful farmer shares his technology with fellow farmers from the area (Shrivastav, 2013).

The season-wise training and demonstration programmes in these farm schools help farmers, who cultivate same crops, in various ways: imparting knowledge and honing skills of farmers through land-to-land approach;

transferring technology and innovations among farmers to help them overcome the risks and challenges associated with agriculture; and spreading awareness on production practices related to food crops that have high nutritive value. Treating farmers as fellows and granting them fellowships is altogether a new concept propounded by the MSSRF and such experiments need to be encouraged and promoted by the media in national interest. Dr Kalam is of the view that journalists should interact with such grassroots social reforms and highlight their core competence, dedication and experience in serving rural communities which can become a model for our youth to follow.

16. The Oswal Project

The Oswal Project of Wardhaman Group is a classic example of how the cooperative movement of farmers, scientists, trainers and industry helped achieve a record cotton output at Nava Pind village in Punjab's Bathinda district. Significantly, in 2002-3, the cotton output rose from 450 kg per acre to 950 kg per acre at reduced investment. The net return per acre in the village rose from Rs. 2400 per acre to Rs 17,000 per acre (a seven-time increase in return). There is an imperative need for replicating this model in other cotton growing regions in India. It will also offer employment opportunities to the youth. (Kalam, 2013)

17. The Synergy Mission

Baba Balbir Singh Seechewal, popularly known as the “ecological saint” in Punjab, is not one of those ubiquitous Babas who do kar seva in religious shrines for cash and clout. On the contrary, inspired by Guru Nanak, he has been pioneering innumerable community development projects of which the cleaning up of the Kali Bein rivulet is one. Though the villagers of Muktranwala consider the Bein river as their lifeline and an important source of water for agriculture, it had been a picture of woeful neglect. The Punjab Government's Drainage Department and the Punjab State Pollution Control Board did little to clear the blockages created by a bund along the Beas which, in turn, blocked the source of the Bein. Villagers, mostly farmers, had complained to the government against the encroachments, silt deposition and wild growth across the Bein, but in vain.

It was against this background that Baba Seechewal spearheaded efforts to clean up the Bein which was sewage-polluted and infested by snakes. When he started the work, hardly 50 villagers joined him. Soon it rose to 5,000 a day. With liberal help from NRIs, the villagers manually removed hundreds of tonnes of water hyacinth. Simultaneously, farmers, with their tractors, dredged out the silt from the bottom to widen and deepen the Bein's course. Newspapers such as *The Tribune* and *The Indian Express* gave wide coverage to Baba Seechewal's ecological crusade. While the Baba's work has been lauded far and wide, *Time* magazine featured him as one of the ‘heroes of the environment’ (Singh, 2008).



Fig. 2: Baba Seechewal near the Kali Bein rivulet. Photo courtesy: Ek Onkar Charitable Trust, *Time*, 24 September, 2008.

The Green Hero

1. Baba Seechewal, a pioneer in community development, has facilitated “creative synergy” between the state, environmental and spiritual movements to save resources such as water and air.
2. The scale of cleaning up the river was gigantic – volunteers cleared the riverbed of water hyacinth and silt, and built river banks and roads alongside the river.
3. As the riverbed began to be cleared, natural springs revived and the river began to fill up. Since then, trees and flower plants have been grown along its banks and fishing has been banned to preserve biodiversity.
4. What was once a filthy river is today a beautiful picnic spot.

18. Conclusion

The preceding analysis shows the importance of development and how journalists can become partners of development. Indeed, by covering the developmental activities of the government – at the Centre and in the states – the media can become an effective partner in tasks of nation building. The media – print and electronic -- should give adequate coverage to every aspect of success of the states and the nation, particularly in rural areas. The emphasis should be on adequate media coverage of these reports and concerted efforts for replicating them elsewhere so that the fruits of development reach every nook and corner of the country.

There is an erroneous impression that development is the exclusive sphere of the government at the Centre and in the states. True, the government has the funds and it is the ruling party's responsibility and onerous duty to formulate and implement the policies and programmes and honour the people's mandate in a functioning democracy like India. However, development should encompass a much larger public sphere that would encourage people's participation in governance. For one thing, people recognise that it is their right and responsibility to closely involve themselves in the development process. For another, the media cannot keep itself detached from development which is people-centric. The media is, thus, a part and parcel of the development process. In essence, development and journalism are inextricably intertwined and go hand in hand.

True, every discipline has its ups and downs and Indian media is no exception. The increasing menace of paid news, especially during elections, is subverting democracy. The concept of freedom of press is under threat from both the government and the corporate sector. Some good stories don't see the light of the day due to political and corporate interference. Corporatisation of the media seems to have compromised editorial independence and press freedom. The state of affairs in the journalism industry leaves much to be desired: unfair contracts, insecurity of tenure, internal censorship, taming of upright journalists and the increasing marginalisation of the exalted position of the Editor. Those who refuse to kow tow to the political masters and publish reports inconvenient to them or the influential corporate lobbies are peremptorily sacked.

If the Fourth Estate has to perform its duty freely and fearlessly, it should be allowed to perform its mandated role in the world's largest democracy. Journalists are peoples' eyes and ears; they should focus on the hard questions, understand the issues and seek out the right answers from the powers that be. The media, while being skeptical of the government's policies and programmes, need not necessarily be negative in its approach, focus and orientation. Instead of acting as an adversary to the government, the media – print and electronic -- ought to work together with the government for the common good.

Note: This paper has been revised and updated in the light of new Indian Govt.

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