



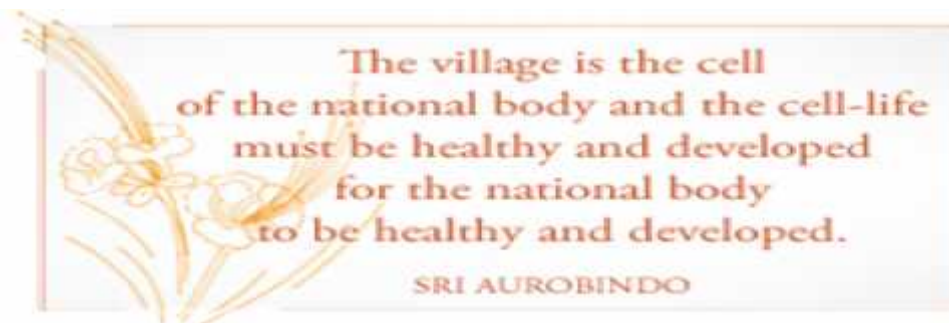
21ST CENTURY RURAL INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

In 2011, looking back at the first decade of the 21st century – 2000-2010 -we strongly believe that this decade indeed can be called – India’s Decade of Development. We elaborate why. Going forward however, India will face enormous challenges in the areas of rural development, urban sustainability, national infrastructure, and human capital and population. India will add hundreds of millions of people to the urban economy in the years and decades ahead. India’s cities need to be safe, efficient, pleasant to live in, supported by infrastructure (water, sewerage, electricity, transport, etc.), able to create jobs which are globally competitive, etc. Briefly put, India needs a revolution in sustainable urban planning. Sustainable cities mean: walk able, mix used areas, public transport, urban planning, public health and other services, and climate resilient especially coastal cities. To be able to create large scale job opportunities will mean solid systems of education-apprenticeship, vocational training, etc., perhaps along the German lines that link schooling with early labor-market entry. On the national infrastructure front, inter-city rail upgrading, sustainable and secure energy, watershed management (river-linking to the extent that this is a sound and safe concept), dams policy, fiber connectivity nationally, ports and airports, etc. India will also need an integrated, life-cycle, population scale vision of human capital accumulation. This includes: Population stabilization and early childhood development, especially to overcome the scars of under-nutrition, which may be India’s greatest plague. On the education front, education for all with improvements in quality of education (to improve teaching and learning outcomes) and education-to-job linkages will be critical. Manpower for skill and occupational needs in the next twenty years will be high as the economy urbanizes, modernizes, and becomes more service-sector oriented. India is moving from the phase of market reforms (1990-2010) to the new era of sustainable development. The priority now must be not only on growth, but on the triple bottom line of growth, equity/inclusion, and environmental sustainability. The sustainability challenge will occupy India and the world for decades, not just for years. All countries face the challenge of adapting to ongoing climate change, managing growing water scarcity, protecting endangered ecosystems and species, etc. As one of the worlds’s most crowded country, India faces this challenge more urgently than others.



Introduction

As we’re past the first decade of the 21st century and two decades since the process of India’s economic reforms began in 1991, it is a good time, we think, to assess what the above mentioned goals achieved; new goals that need to be set and the challenges that remain to be addressed with suitable strategies. Hence we first look back at the last ten years and then look forward to next twenty. In short, we believe that with a much more focused approach towards the agricultural sector and agro-based industrialization in rural India; the implementation of India’s unfinished reform agenda with a key focus towards policy, institutional and governance reforms in general and in particular reforms that would help make India a much more improved platform for labor-intensive manufacturing production; and substantially higher public spending in areas, such as health and education, that over the next twenty years, India can and will continue to grow at high rates of economic growth which can be far more inclusive than what it has been over the last two decades.

While we have noted that large public investment programs in a number of critical sectors have been put in place over the last decade, however, this does not by any means imply that all these programs are delivering what they are supposed to deliver. Some of the key shortcomings in governmental programs especially in the fields of service delivery in health and education for example are: lack of effective management systems for implementing programs leading to very little, if any control and oversight which in turn leads to grossly lacking accountability. The system does not call for an explanation and/or punish



non-performers and similarly does not reward those who perform well. We've seen the same weaknesses in the National Rural Health Mission Bajpaiet. al. (2010) water-and-irrigation programs, etc. These programs are vital, but their successful implementation requires the building of new systems approaches that transcend the severe limitations of the current bureaucratic arrangements. The Millennium Village approach, in which targeted interventions are managed through a rigorous systems approach - with dedicated cross-sector teams, new IT tools designed specifically for management, aggressive monitoring, tracking, systems design, etc. -- is to our mind enormously relevant in the case of India.

Rural Development

There is an urgent need for a second green revolution since the first green revolution has run out of steam, and has been eaten up by population increases, and significantly enough has caused massive environmental side effects, including water and pollution. The second green revolution should in our view include: agriculture R&D, shift to central and eastern U.P./Orissa/Bihar, more efficient pricing and use of water, fertilizer, and electricity and up scaling rural agroindustry, including supply chain management, etc. We discuss this in greater detail in sections below on agriculture led growth and agro based industry. Furthermore, India needs to take urgent account of climate change and its likely adverse effects on Indian agriculture and food security unless compensating (adjustment) measures are taken.

Urban Sustainability

India will add hundreds of millions of people to the urban economy in the years and decades ahead. India's cities need to be safe, efficient, pleasant to live in, supported by infrastructure (water, sewerage, electricity, transport, etc.), able to create jobs which are globally competitive. Briefly put, India needs a revolution in sustainable urban planning. Sustainable cities mean: walk able, mix used areas, public transport, urban planning, public health and other services and climate resilient cities especially those on the coast. Cities must be able to create jobs. This means solid systems of education-apprenticeship, vocational training, etc., perhaps along the German lines that link schooling with early labor-market entry.

National Infrastructure

This includes inter-city rail upgrading, sustainable and secure energy, watershed management (river-linking to the extent that this is a sound and safe concept), dams policy, fiber connectivity nationally, ports and airports, etc. This should also include connectivity with neighboring countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, etc.)

Human Capital and Population

India needs an integrated, life-cycle, population scale vision of human capital accumulation in the country. This includes: Population stabilization (demographic trends projected by UN - India reaching 1.7 billion) Early childhood development, especially to overcome the scars of under-nutrition, which may be India's greatest plague. The education for all scheme should urgently call for improvements in quality of education and education-to-job linkages. Manpower needs for skill and occupational needs in the next twenty years are going to be high as the economy urbanizes, modernizes, and becomes more service-sector oriented.

Time Scale

India is moving from the phase of market reforms (1990-2010) to the new era of sustainable development. The priority now must be not only on growth, but on the triple bottom line of growth, equity/inclusion, and environmental sustainability.

The sustainability challenge will occupy India and the world for decades, not just for years. All countries face the challenge of adapting to ongoing climate change, managing growing water scarcity, protecting endangered ecosystems and species, etc. As one of the worlds's most crowded country, India faces this challenge more urgently than others.

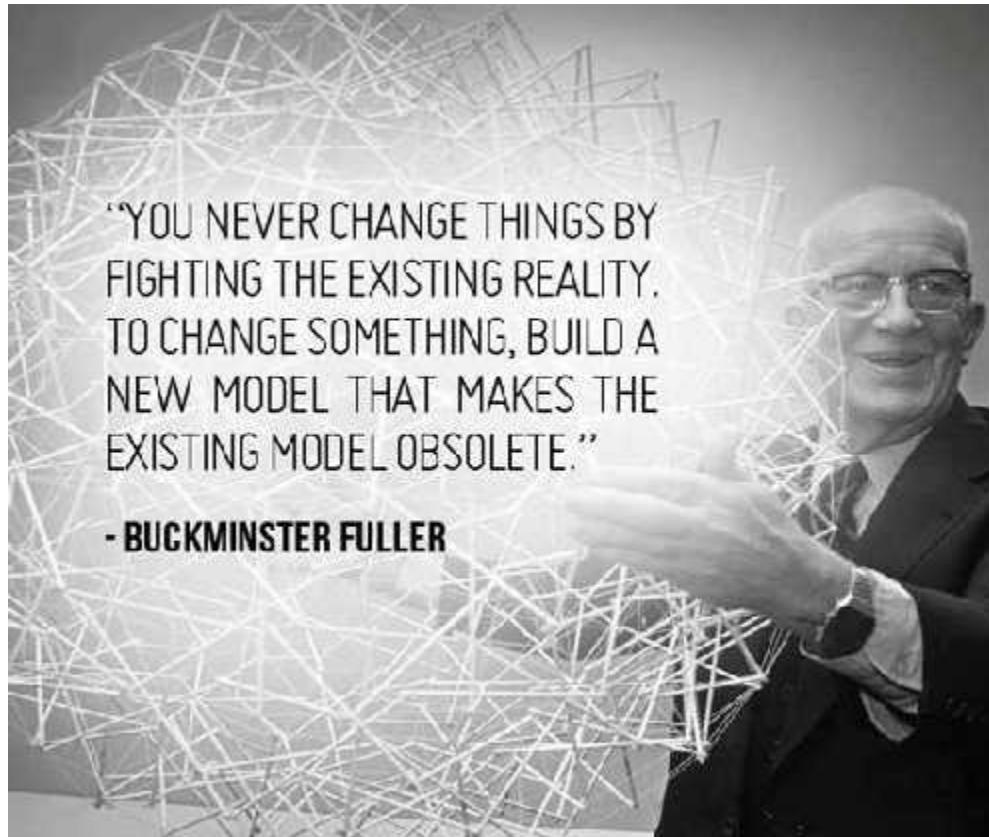
India's growth and development strategy needs to focus on one key requirement – to create tens of millions of jobs year-on-year. To be precise, India needs to create 16 million new jobs every year, a herculean task by any standards. 50 percent of India's population is below the age of 25 and more than 65 percent is estimated to be below the age of 3510. It is expected that, in 2020, the average age of an Indian will be 29 years, compared to 37 for China and 48 for Japan.

Conclusion

Things have not remained the same in last few decades or even centuries. The social fabric has acquired completely new dimensions. The rural India is considered less powerful and important than urban but yet situation is not entirely bleak. Thanks to the efforts of government, NGOs, social welfare organizations and many such institutions, there has been a drastic improvement. Many private corporate bodies have also taken a keen interest in improving the economic status of rural areas and the results are extremely encouraging.



In a broad sense, we believe, growth strategies for large landlocked and laggard states, such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Assam and the other north-eastern states, (Group I states) an agriculture-led growth strategy is called for (with an urgent need to bring about a Second Green Revolution in these states) along with a major push to help set up agro-based industries. For coastal states, such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, (Group II states) a strategy that focuses on vigorously promoting labor-intensive manufacturing, both for the domestic market as well as exports is called for to create large scale employment opportunities.



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