Rural Development
(SOME ASPECTS)

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On the basis of the revised population estimates, according to 1981 Census, the percentage of population below the poverty line in India in 1979-80 was computed to be 51.1% i.e. 339 million persons in absolute terms. The disaggregated figures for rural and urban areas were as follows:

Rural—272 million (53.3%)
Urban—66 million (43.0%)

A computation made from the data thrown up by the 32nd round of the National Sample Survey regarding status of unemployed, as it stood in March, 1980, for the age group of above 5 years showed that 15.36 million persons in rural areas and 5.38 million persons in urban areas were seeking and were available for work on daily basis, but were unable to get it. As a matter of fact, the daily unemployed status, as computed, might be a gross under-estimation as would be evident from the figure of 339 million people being below the poverty line. They were poor because they did not have gainful employment. The fact that only 20 million offered themselves for employment out of a probable figure of 100 to 120 million bread winners indicates that quite a substantial number might be under some economic duress, which prevented them from offering themselves freely in the
open labour market. However, this is a conjecture. Against this background, the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) stated: "From a general study of the problem, it has been observed that within the possible range of growth rates in gross domestic product for the Sixth Plan and the perspective period (1985-1995), a substantial reduction in poverty can be achieved only if there is a determined effort at a significant re-distribution of income and consumption in favour of the poorer sections of the population. It is, therefore, necessary that the growth strategy should aim at a significant re-distribution of income and consumption so that the percentage of population below the poverty line reduces to 30 in 1984-85 and to less than 10 by 1994-95" (p. 21, paragraph 3.20).

**Broad Strategy in the Sixth Plan**: It was in this context that the Sixth Plan set as its prime objective the alleviation of rural poverty and the main broad strategy adopted was that of assisting the households below the poverty line through an appropriate package of technologies, services and asset transfer programmes, including provision of additional employment opportunities to the rural poor for gainful employment during the lean agricultural season through a national rural employment programme. There were three broad components of the package of anti-poverty programmes being implemented in India under the Sixth Plan. These were:

(a) individual household and poverty group oriented programmes of income generation through asset and skill endowment and direct supplemental wage employment through public works;

(b) programmes of special areas to counter endemic poverty caused by hostile agro-climatic conditions and de-generation of eco-systems; and

(c) giving back-up support to the poverty groups by providing for social consumption and social services through the Minimum Needs Programme, which aims at improving quality of life and giving infrastructural support to programmes of poverty alleviation.

In the first sub-component would come the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Training of Rural Youth for