

A THEORETICAL OUTLOOK SUBSISTENCE AGRICULTURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

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The continuous degradation of the natural resources have led to the cry for the protection of the environment. For those dependent on subsistence and marginal agriculture, migration in search of wage employment is a regular feature. This has led to less attention being paid to their own lands and consequently declining productivity. The potential for their lands to produce at much higher level undoubtedly exists. Development workers (government and NGOs) and activists point this out while mobilising this disadvantaged group in their quest for a decent and sustainable livelihood.

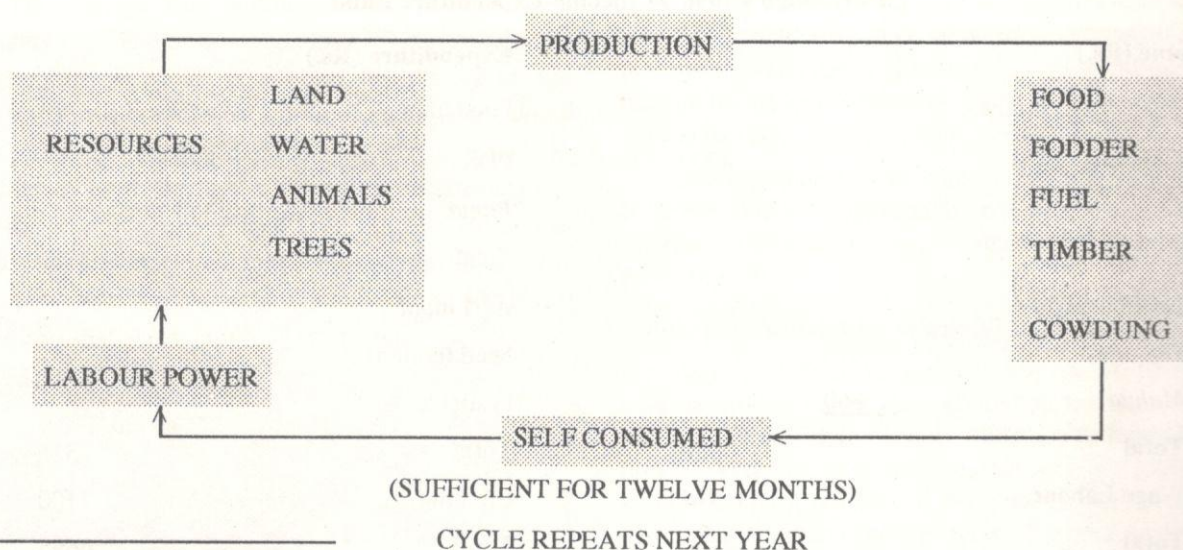
Funds, (like those provided for watershed development, forestry, pastureland development etc.) provide an incentive for persons to remain in their village and provide labour for the development of their own and/or common lands. However these funds are not sufficient to break the cycle entirely, though in some places, success stories exist. The scarcity of these funds as well as their availability for a limited period, is leading to an increasing demand to evaluate the effectiveness of the funds being utilised with special reference to the weaker and disadvantaged sections of society.

Evaluations to date have generally picked on one or the other facet of the problem, highlighted the attempts to tackle it and noted the success or failure of the attempt. To facilitate uniformity in approach and also appropriate cross references between different project locations, it is essential that we grasp the underlying purpose behind an intervention.

In order to get an understanding of the above, a theoretical construct of the dynamics of subsistence agriculture is being attempted below.

To begin with let us take an example of self reliant, self sufficient agriculture. At subsistence level, it implies that the produce is not for the market but for self consumption.

The labour power and animals of an individual family is used on his own land, to produce food, fodder, fuel and cowdung (basic necessities). These products are self consumed. Food and fuel to replenish the strength and health of man, fodder for the animals, cowdung to renew the fertility of the soil, timber for housing, farm implements etc. The cycle repeats itself the next year.



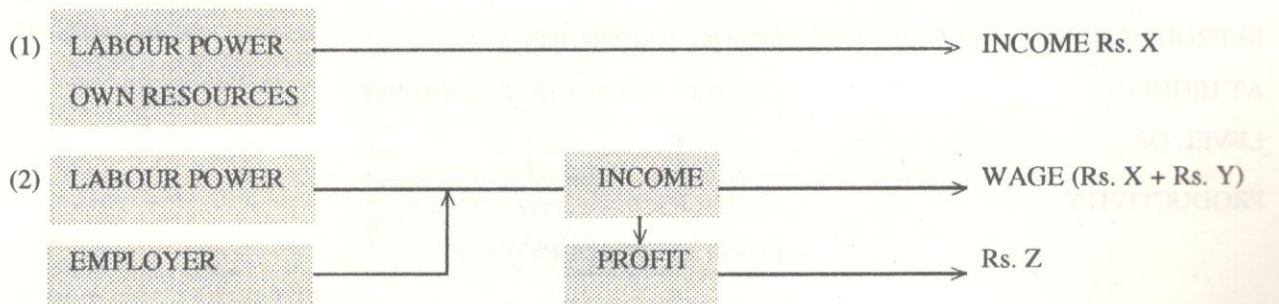
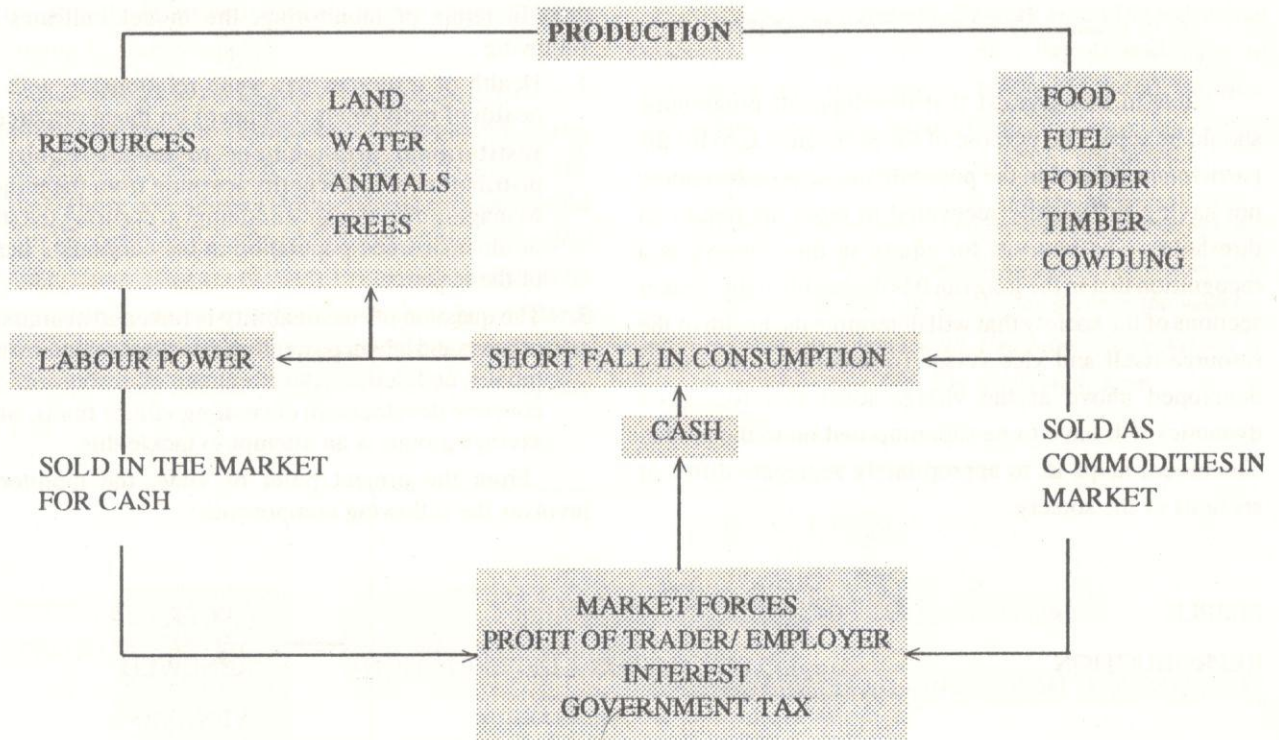
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From experience we however know that this continuous and repetitive chain is constantly being broken. This is because sufficient is not being produced for the family to survive for twelve months. Family members sell their labour power in order to meet their cash requirements, some of the produce is also sold in a crisis situation.

Both from the produce and the labour power of the individual, the market forces extract a surplus. The farmer pays a higher rate for the grain he purchases from the market compared to the rate at which he sells his own grain. The employer of the labour power of the farmer, pays the farmer only a part of what this farmer produces for him by the use of his labour power, else there is no point in employing him. The reason why the farmer/labourer agrees to this condition is because his own assets do not provide him with the wherewithal to generate even the wage he

gets. Considering that he gets an income of Rs. X/- on his own land, his wages on the other hand are Rs. X + Rs. Y ie. an additional amount of Rs. Y even though it is a wage. The total produce of the wage labourer was however Rs. X + Rs. Y + Rs. Z with Rs. Z being either rent (*Batai*), profit or interest (credit of bank or *bania*) depending on the nature of the capital.

Due to lack of sufficient employment opportunities outside, we often have a case where there is a shortfall in meeting consumption requirements. In the case of the family members, this implies being half starved or fully starved with the women bearing the worst brunt. In the case of the animals this results in free grazing on land which has little or no fodder. There is a depletion in their health until the next monsoon (if they survive). In the case of the land, it means that the nutrient status, repairs and maintenance requirements cannot be maintained.

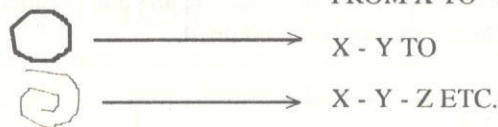


Reference 5

In order to keep production at the same level, we need to produce sufficient to meet self consumption and depreciation requirements. An additional amount will be required for further upgradation in the productivity levels. In the case of a shortfall in production, we have to face the problem of lower and lower productivity levels leading to a vicious cycle and consequent degradation of the land.

(1) PRODUCTION
AT LEVEL X

(2) DECLINING
PRODUCTION
FROM X TO



It is in this context that development programme should be seen. The purpose of the programme is to lift the participants related to the possibility of relapse (economy not having sufficiently recovered to cross the minimum threshold). The concern for equity in this context, is a recognition that in the long run it is the health of the weaker sections of the society that will determine the health of the resource itself and vice versa. To understand the model developed above at the village level therefore class dynamics will have to be superimposed on to the model. The model helps us to appropriately segregate different sections of the society.

1. Those that are in the vicious poverty trap.
2. Those that are around the self subsistence level. There can be a range from comfortable to dicey in case of drought, sudden calamity, high expenditure requirement etc.
3. Commercial agriculturalists. (There are numerous levels but these have not been described in this model).

The pulls and pushes of different segments, as this relates to common activity, common assets like land, have been described to a limited extent in two earlier notes (Fodder Development a Theoretical Discourse, Discussion with Rajkaran Yadav and Bhurelal on 13.1.97).

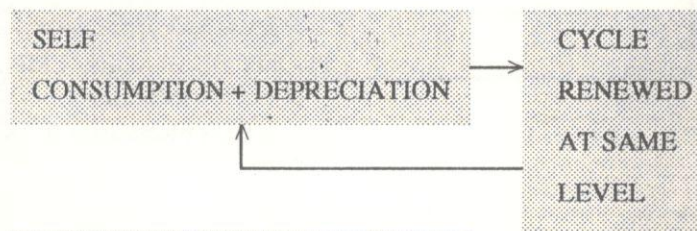
The model describes the flow of events at subsistence and below subsistence levels. A project that is successful in countering below subsistence farming upto subsistence level can be understood in the model itself. However those that have moved into the realm of commercial farming cannot be adequately captured within the model described.

In terms of monitoring, the model indicates the following :

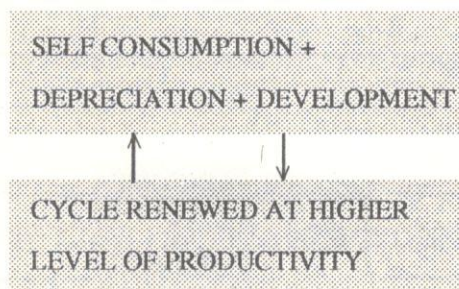
1. Health of resources has some relationship with the health of individuals dependent on those resources.
2. Institutional arrangement to ensure equity in distribution of the benefits accruing from the project. Managing disputes are an attempt at ensuring the stake of the concerned population in the continuing health of the resource.
3. The question of sustainability is linked to availability of funds and labour power for protection, maintenance, repairs and further development of resources. The concrete development of creating village funds, small savings groups is an attempt to tackle this.

From the project point of view, the monitoring involves the following components :

SIMPLE
REPRODUCTION



REPRODUCTION
AT HIGHER
LEVEL OF
PRODUCTIVITY



The diagram delinks the external agent (government, NGOs etc.) from the internal players by the question of sustainability. The need for the intervention is arrived at because of the lack of an adequate productivity level to meet the requirements of the local population (as compared to existing known potential of the resource). An external agency can delink itself (honourably) if this productivity level can be achieved or maintained without the need of an external impetus from outside (subsidy - funds and skilled manpower). It must be mentioned here that banking, commercial operations (paying for the services of skilled manpower) is not considered external in the present context. This is because it is considered that a project that can pay the prevailing market rate (interest for loans, salary or consultancy charges for personnel) can attract funds without a problem. Those that cannot do so face difficulty in attracting funds (cheap money, grants etc. being in scarce supply).

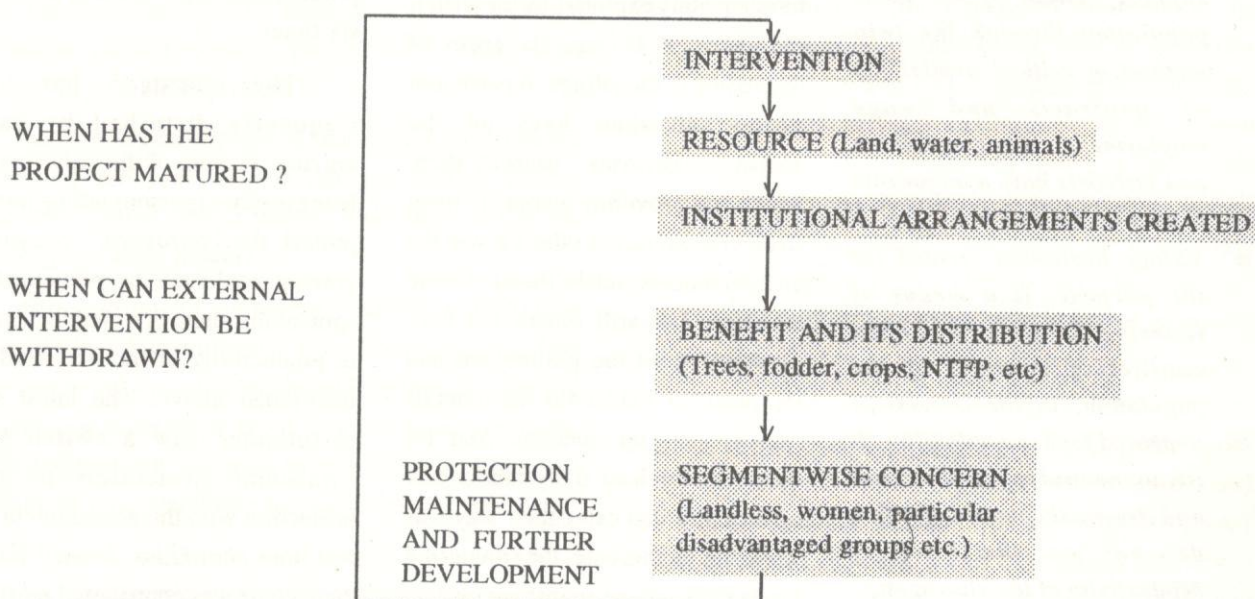
The attempt to tie up funds for specific activities is therefore an attempt to ensure funds for key activities that are essential to the overall health of the economy (resource). These activities by themselves do not generate the market rate of profit and hence cannot attract individual funding. There is always pressure to use such tied funds for more profitable activities which is sought to be countered by having a dynamic and active institutional arrangement, which will ensure that the overall interests of the majority are met.

The mechanism evolved is an additional demand on the time of the individual. To what extent an individual will give his or her time for such an activity will be related (in the present context) to the type of additional benefits he or she expects from it besides the question of having a voice in the decision making process, a question related to the gain from speaking and potential loss of employment opportunities due to the interests of a powerful party being affected.

The interest of an individual in any institutional arrangement therefore can only be sustained in the long run when this is linked to his or her own long term health (developing and maintaining an increasing standard of life). This question is linked to the overall development process and not merely an individual resource within the system. This essentially means that development workers or activists in the course of their work around an individual resource or village (groups of villages) will have to develop an understanding of the deeper social, political and natural processes related to it.

Acknowledgements

- This method draws heavily on the Marxian method analysis
- Project experience from various locations over a number of years has been taken as a basis for deriving the model.
- Intensive discussions with Depinder Singh helped to conceptualise raw data into a schematic form.



* Model developed by Hardeep Singh through discussions in SPWD.