

Development of Kachchh, after the devastating earthquake in Gujarat

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Introduction

Since Independence, India has adopted the path of modernization and industrialization. As a result of this progressive approach, we have been successful in various branches of science and technology. The country has emerged as a force to reckon with in the field of information technology and has created a strong and dependable industrial infrastructure. On one hand, we have successfully developed metropolitan centers such as Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai and New Delhi. On the other, we are saddled with problems of backward regions, illiteracy and poverty. Millions of our citizens have not benefitted from the progress made by the country.

In following the path of rapid economic growth, we have created imbalances in terms of development. We ignored our own rich heritage of arts, crafts and economy. As a result, after 50 years of planned development, we still have large tracts of territory which are backward. The imbalances in development have led to continuous migration of people from the rural hinterland to metropolises and industrial agglomerations. Villages, small and medium-sized towns and cities in the hinterland have suffered as a result of lopsided development. People from backward regions have migrated to adjoining areas and the faraway metropolises such as Mumbai, Kolkata and Bangalore. It would be foolish to follow this unsustainable path of development in the 21st century.

An opportunity for moving towards the adoption of a more appropriate approach to development is offered by the case of Kachchh – one of the stagnating regions in Gujarat – in view of the need for its redevelopment after the recent earthquake in the area.

The whole world was shocked at the heavy death toll and unprecedented devastation in the villages and towns of Kachchh and other adjoining areas of Saurashtra and Gujarat. Relief materials and aid has poured into Gujarat from all over the country and the world. The confusion that prevailed in the early days of rescue and relief was largely due to lack of discipline and organization among ourselves. However, with time, the armed forces, community leaders and workers, non-governmental organizations, police, government officers and staff have been able to achieve a sense of order.

There is no doubt that the many shortcomings in implementation have to be identified and corrected without any further delay. Instead of blaming each other, we need to unite in the rehabilitation endeavor. What we require is an appropriate plan and program of rehabilitation and sustainable socio-economic redevelopment of villages and towns, and of Kachchh as a whole.

Choice of development path

First of all we have to decide on the path of development we wish to pursue. For this we should consult people and understand their needs, priorities and aspirations.

After visiting Kachchh during the last couple of months, I am convinced that the people of Kachchh are against the strategy of total relocation. They opine that their villages and towns should be rebuilt on the same location. They advise that relocation should be resorted to only where it is most necessary and it should be limited to that extent. They comment that it would be foolhardy to pursue mindless relocation of villages and towns. The program of clearing debris should have been taken up immediately after the rescue efforts were completed. We have lost two crucial months in discussing the issue of relocation. We should now take up the planning and redevelopment of villages and towns without any loss of time.

In Maharashtra, the earthquake of 30 September, 1993 destroyed 55 villages. These villages were relocated 2 to 3 km away from their existing *gaathan* as the government did not mobilize the equipment required for clearing the debris. Studies have shown that relocating villages was a major mistake, and the world has come to know of it. Therefore, instead of repeating the mistake, Gujarat should consider the long-term interests and have a perspective for the future before finalizing the rehabilitation policy and programs.

Rehabilitation of villages

Kachchh with its distinctive landscape and culture is a very special place. It has its own unique social and cultural identity. While planning for rehabilitation, planners, architects and engineers will have to consider the rich cultural and architectural heritage of Kachchh. Each village should be studied and surveyed in depth before evolving a plan and program for rehabilitation.

While planning for rehabilitation, it is of primary importance to have the active involvement of people, and their views and suggestions should be considered seriously. Rather than aping the urban model of rows of houses along roads and launching an offensive of mass construction, it is advisable to pursue the path of sustainable development. What we need is a sensitive and sensible program of rehabilitation. Each neighborhood (*vas*) and each home (*ghar*) like each village (*gam*) has its own character and image, which needs to be considered while designing earthquake-resistant new housing in rural and urban areas.

Basic services like water supply, drainage and sewage should be properly laid out. Water should be recycled to the extent possible, as water is a scarce resource. Adequate provision should be made for education, health care and social facilities in each village. The public offices, non-governmental organizations, bazaar, godown, etc. have been suitably located to create activity centers. There should be proper sports facilities.

Understanding urban issues

The world-famous Greek town planner, Constantinos A. Doxiadis, who was engaged in a long-term study of urban issues and trends, had said that urbanization is inevitable; therefore, it must be studied, researched and planned. He founded Ekistics, the science of human settlements including, naturally, urban planning and design. He had observed that we are not clear on what we mean by urbanization: to some it is nothing more than the constructed area of our cities; to others it implies management and administration within a stipulated boundary. He understood urbanization as a process and a system of human settlements. We often make the mistake of planning for urban areas within municipal limits. Urbanization covers a much wider area than what we consider as urban area.

Today, Bhuj, Anjar, Gandhidham, Bhachau and Rapar are seen as separate urban areas. But the process of urbanization in the 21st century is very different from that of the 20th century. These towns and cities have many linkages and various degrees of interdependency, which are all going to affect their pattern of development. It will also have an impact on the surrounding areas and villages. Therefore, we need to study these linkages and ensure that there is no adverse effect on their development. Rather than considering towns and cities as separate urban entities, we should conceive of them as a chain of human settlements. This will open up new creative possibilities.

Developing a new metropole railway line

Only recently Bhuj, Anjar, Gandhidham and Bhachau are linked by a broad gauge railway line. In fact, this line was to be inaugurated on 26 January, 2001 when the killer quake hit Kachchh and other parts of Gujarat. This railway line could be used to start a local inter-city service, which could become the backbone of the urban corridor. This will facilitate the development of a linear metropolis in Kachchh, like that of Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai. It could also act as a new metropole railway line for the regional development of Kachchh. An affordable mass transportation system could open up several employment and development possibilities for the citizens of

these cities and towns. Therefore, special attention should be paid to other villages and towns along the emerging urban corridor. The unique lifestyle and culture of Kachchh should be reflected in our plans and programs. At the same time, the spirit of the 21st century should be expressed in the form of appropriate, sustainable and innovative development.

Our cities and villages had a whole range of religious, social and cultural institutions. These have to be given due attention in the designing and planning of homes, neighborhoods and communities, which was sorely lacking in most of the urban development plans in the 20th century. In the current post-modern and post-industrial scenario what we need is a sustainable development strategy that is based on our culture, society and environment, which uses appropriate and affordable technologies and yet promotes innovation and social transformation, and most importantly ensures safety and security against earthquakes and cyclones.

Comprehensive regional development

During 1980-1982, the Government of Gujarat had an ambitious plan for making an industrial paradise in the state. As part of the industrial development and promotion strategy, a set of growth centers was identified in Kachchh. Bhuj, Anjar and Gandhidham were listed as grade "C" growth centers. Mandvi, Mundra and Bhachau were also added to this list. These centers were given special incentives and concessions for their development. As a result during the last two decades these towns prospered and new industries were developed in and around them.

We should consider the long-term program of regional development of Kachchh, while planning for the rehabilitation of villages and towns. A detailed study of resources, existing social and economic situation and infrastructure in the region should be carried out. While special sectoral programs like a drought-prone area program and arid and semi-arid area development programs have been implemented in the past, a comprehensive regional development strategy is yet to be conceived for Gujarat. As a result, Kachchh has remained a backward area. It is no wonder that the people of Kachchh are thoroughly dissatisfied with the current measures and are protesting.

While planning for the rehabilitation of old villages and towns, there should be provision for some newly planned human settlements too. This may be necessitated, as the old town centers, such as Bhuj, were too crowded and dense. New suburban or satellite townships may be required to be developed. The density in the town center will have to be reduced and the suburban density may have to be increased. This will require a new set of development control rules and building regulations. This new code should incorporate earthquake- and cyclone-resistant construction and technology. A special department should be created to ensure that this is strictly observed in implementation and construction. Programs of creating mass awareness about the issues of area, urban and rural sustainable development, and earthquake-resistant construction should be launched.

When Kandla port was modernized and linked with a broad gauge railway line and national highway, it provided Kachchh with immense opportunities for its development. However, these opportunities have not been fully utilized for regional development. The small and medium-sized ports of Kachchh can be further developed and integrated into the development process. Exports and imports can be promoted more intensively by development of integrated export promotion zones around these ports and cities. This is the most opportune time for declaring Kandla a free port, which has been demanded by

the local and state chamber of commerce for a long time. It is very crucial that these decisions have to be taken before the local industries and business firms decide to migrate to other greener pastures. Now is the right time for taking bold steps for the redevelopment of Kachchh.

The challenge of the comprehensive regional development of Kachchh could be successfully tackled by undertaking integrated urban, rural and area development plans. A comprehensive development plan must give due importance to human, social and environmental issues. Care should be taken to ensure that they do not degenerate into mere packages of physical infrastructure and mass construction, like many of the 20th century town planning schemes and infrastructure development plans. This would necessitate the establishment of a nodal regional and urban development board with adequate resources and powers. It must pursue the path of sustainable development, incorporating balanced rural, urban and area development. It must ensure all-round development of each and every section and community.

Conclusion

The prerequisites for the success of a sustainable development approach are:

- enlightened professional advice;
- determined administration;
- good governance; and,
- active and wholehearted citizen participation.

There is no doubt that if we follow the path of sustainable development, then Gujarat will emerge as a truly prosperous state. It is known the world over for its successful people and is famous as a beautiful place; now it will be known for its progress and achievements in the fields of planning and designing of human settlements.

Nature has provided us with a challenge and an opportunity to transform this earthquake-affected state into a new Gujarat of our dreams, whose seeds were sown during the Nav Nirman movement of 1974! Let us unite and join hands in this constructive and creative mission!