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Nayak, Purusottam and Ray, Santanu

North-Eastern Hill University

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Human Development in North-East India: A Critical Appraisal

Purusottam Nayak and Santanu Ray

New Development Paradigm: UNDP's effort to measure Human Development through Human Development Index has often been regarded as the first operationalization of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (CA) which offers a comprehensive framework for conceptualizing human well-being and thereby, development. Sen views development as expansion of real freedom that people can enjoy for their economic well-being, social opportunities and political rights. From this strand the focus of development policies should precisely be the expansion of freedom or removal of major sources of *unfreedom* that people often face in their life – such as illiteracy, ill health, lack of access to resources, or lack of civil and political freedoms. After the publication of UNDP's first Human Development Report in 1990 several efforts have been made by different agencies to measure the achievements at global, regional, national, sub-national and even in district levels. There is a rich literature in Indian context also, which is devoted to shift the attention from income-based ideas to capability-driven development discourse.

North-Eastern States in National Context: India's north-east is a regional conglomeration of seven *small states* – Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura, and one *major state* – Assam. With nearly 8 per cent of national area the region as a whole offers home to less than 4 per cent of national population. However, the state of Assam alone accommodates over 68 per cent of regional population (Census 2001). As the region is characterized by wide-ranging variations and significant diversities in socio-economic conditions, ethno-political aspirations and geo-demographic realities any attempt to view the region as a homogenous unit in the context of developmental attainments would perhaps be deliberate and confusing. Taking the stock of secondary information from national and sub-national sources this article presents few features of human development in the states of the region, and draws some policy implications for each individual state to evolve an inclusive human development trajectory for the people of the region.

To assess the process of expansion of human capabilities in the states of the region two major reports are examined here – both undertaken by Central Government agencies: first, is the widely referred *National Human Development Report-2001* by Planning Commission of India in 2002, and the other is recently published *Gendering Human Development Indices: Recasting the Gender Development Index and Gender Empowerment Measure for India* by Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2009. The Planning Commission 2002 dealt with 32 numbers of States and UTs and worked out Human Development Index (HDI), Human Poverty Index (HPI) and Gender Parity Index (GPI) for all the federal units of the country for the years of 1981 and 1991. With a specific focus on gender issues Ministry of Women and Child Development 2009 measured HDI, Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measures (GEM) for all 35 federal units of the country for the years of 1996 and 2006. The scores and corresponding ranks in national context attained by the north-eastern states in different measures of development are depicted in Tables 1 and 2 respectively.

According to Planning Commission 2002 estimates four north-eastern states – Manipur, Mizoram, Sikkim and Meghalaya recorded higher scores in HDI as compared to national average in 1981 which reflected in their relative positions. After a decade all these states, except Meghalaya, could retain their performances over national score while Tripura joined in the list in 1991. Manipur and Mizoram – the best performers in the region in 1981 and 1991 respectively scored nearly 150 per cent of national score. In contrast, the measure of HPI which in general shows a positive association with HDI narrates altogether a different story. Only Sikkim in 1981, and Sikkim and Mizoram in 1991 could manage scores in HPI over national average. The scores in other states, especially in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, indicate an acute picture of deprivation. A simple comparison of the relative positions of the states in these two measures reveals the fact that the expansion of human capabilities in most of the states is not inclusive enough to achieve parallel positions in HPI. The other noteworthy feature in this regard is that the growth in human development scores during 1980s in most of the north-eastern states has widened urban-rural disparities. The growing disparities, even in better performing states in the region, often blur their achievements. Moreover, their achievements are mostly consumption-driven, which are mere outcomes of huge central devolution – not determined by the interactions of natural economic forces.

Table 1: Expansion of Human Development in North-Eastern States												
State	Human Development Index (HDI)				Human Poverty Index (HPI)				Gender Parity Index (GPI)			
	1981		1991		1981		1991		1981		1991	
	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank
Arunachal Pradesh	.242	31	.328	29	59.86	32	49.62	30	.537	28	.776	18
Assam	.272	26	.348	26	56.00	29	48.95	27	.462	32	.575	30
Manipur	.461	4	.536	9	50.82	21	41.63	21	.802	3	.815	3
Meghalaya	.317	21	.365	24	54.02	26	49.19	28	.799	12	.807	12
Mizoram	.411	8	.548	7	47.97	18	32.20	14	.502	18	.770	6
Nagaland	.328	20	.486	11	49.37	19	42.07	22	.783	16	.729	21
Sikkim	.342	18	.425	18	52.76	25	34.84	17	.643	23	.647	20
Tripura	.287	24	.389	22	51.86	22	44.89	24	.422	31	.531	29
All India	.302	-	.381	-	47.33	-	39.36	-	.620	-	.676	-
Best Performer	Chandigarh (.550)		Chandigarh (.674)		Chandigarh (17.28)		Chandigarh (14.49)		Kerala (.872)		Andaman & Nicobar Island (.857)	

Note:

- The Human Development Index is a composite of variables capturing attainments in three dimensions of human development viz. economic, education and health.
- The Human Poverty Index is a composite of variables capturing deprivation in three dimensions of human development viz. economic, education and health. These have been captured by proportion of population below poverty line, proportion of population without access to safe drinking waters/sanitation/electricity, medical attention at birth/vaccination and proportion living in kutcha houses, proportion of illiterate population and children not enrolled in schools, and proportion of population not accepted to survive beyond age 40.
- The Gender Parity Index is estimated as proportion of female attainments to that of male for a common set of variables. In original text the index is referred as Gender Disparity Index, however, considering the methodology involved Gender Parity Index (GPI) seems to be more suitable terminology.
- The ranks are assigned from the list of 32 numbers of States and Union Territories.

Source: Planning Commission 2002 [Compilation from Table: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4]

Following a different methodology Ministry of Women and Child Development 2009 brought out a report to update our awareness on gender aspects of human development for India and 35 States and UTs. So far as the HDI scores are concerned all the north-eastern states (except Assam in 2006) attained higher values as compared to national score. Nagaland in 1996, and Nagaland and Manipur in 2006 could manage single digit rank in the list of 35 numbers of federal units while Mizoram, Sikkim and Tripura are not lagging much behind. The deterioration of Meghalaya from 13th to 24th position during the decade is a great concern. However, the poor performance of the most populous state in the region – Assam needs a special attention. GDI reflects almost similar trend. The performance of the only matrilineal

state in the country does not bring any surprise as worrisome relative performance in HDI reflects almost parallel deterioration in GDI in Meghalaya.

State	Human Development Index (HDI)				Gender Development Index (GDI)				Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)			
	1996		2006		1996		2006		1996		2006	
	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank
Arunachal Pradesh	.549	24	.647	20	.544	23	.642	18	.307	30	.469	17
Assam	.543	25	.595	26	.523	26	.585	26	.313	28	.417	26
Manipur	.610	12	.702	7	.600	12	.699	6	.380	21	.418	27
Meghalaya	.595	13	.629	24	.592	13	.624	23	.231	34	.346	34
Mizoram	.618	11	.688	12	.612	10	.687	9	.312	29	.374	32
Nagaland	.653	8	.700	8	.626	8	.697	7	.165	35	.289	35
Sikkim	.582	16	.665	17	.566	17	.659	15	.300	31	.447	23
Tripura	.579	17	.663	18	.546	21	.626	21	.335	23	.382	30
All India	.530	-	.605	-	.514	-	.590	-	.416	-	.497	-
Best Performer	Kerala (.736)		Chandigarh (.784)		Kerala (.721)		Chandigarh (.763)		Goa (.494)		Delhi (.564)	

Note:

- The Human Development Index is a composite of variables capturing attainments in three dimensions of human development viz. economic, education and health.
- The Gender Development Index adjusts the average achievements in the same three dimensions that are captured in the HDI to account for the inequalities between men and women.
- The Gender Empowerment Measure focuses on gender inequality in three areas: political participation and decision-making power, economic participation and decision-making power and power over economic resources.
- The Ranks are assigned from the list of 35 numbers of States and Union Territories.

Source: Ministry of Women and Child Development 2009
[Compilation from Table: 4.5, 4.8 and 5.3]

The Gender Empowerment Measure focuses on gender inequality in three areas viz. political participation and decision-making power, economic participation and decision-making power, and power over economic resources. As such, the nation as whole has long been struggling to fulfill the agenda of women empowerment. All north-eastern states' records in this crucial issue have been simply miserable. Nagaland not only emerged as the worst performer – the rate of progress during the decade is equally disappointing. Meghalaya brings surprise by securing the second worst position in the country in empowerment measure. Manipur and Mizoram – the consistently better performers in HDI, GPI and GDI are also seriously lagging

behind in empowering women in their respective states. The promotion of 13 points by Arunachal Pradesh which was possible mainly due to the encouraging growth in the index value of *economic participation and decision-making power* during the decade has kept the hope alive for the entire region.

Focus on Intrastate Disparities: During the first decade of new millennium all north-eastern states, excepting Manipur and Mizoram, had brought out their publications of State Human Development Reports to assess the achievements, and to measure the deprivations within state boundaries. As the state-specific methodologies for estimating district level achievements in three different dimensions of human development vary significantly across the reports cross-state comparisons cannot be made directly. However, an analysis of intrastate disparities would be helpful to understand the development patterns in north-eastern states. Table 3 demonstrates the state-specific features of human development. A ready reference of Kerala would help to understand the relevant shortfalls in attainments. The range of scores attained by the best and worst performing districts vary significantly across the states. In Kerala the best performing unit stands at 103 per cent of state average while the poorest in terms of HDI score is no less than 97 per cent, accounting a gap of nearly of 6 per cent. In case of north-eastern states the gap is found widest in Assam (107 per cent), followed by Arunachal Pradesh (58), Meghalaya (51), Nagaland (46) and Tripura (17). Attainment-wise gaps across the states are also a concern. The coefficient of variation which is taken as the standard measure of dispersion across the cross-sectional units also points out that the states have to travel a long way to bridge up the deprivations within the states.

Conclusion: Human Development is not a mere event – rather, a process of sustainable expansion of human capabilities, for which a parallel expansion of economic opportunities for both sexes, for all sections, and for every corner of the society is equally important. Otherwise, the achievement will extend temporary gains. The State governments need to address these issues for evolving an inclusive, engendered, sustainable path of development for their respective states as well as the region as a whole.

Table 3: Intrastate Disparities in North-Eastern States

State	Data Reference	No. of Dist.	Range of Index Values across Districts				Coefficient of Variations Across Districts (%)			
			Economic	Health	Education	HDI	Economic	Health	Education	HDI
Arunachal Pradesh (2005)	2001	13	Dibang Valley: .942 Lower Subansiri: .191 State : .495	Papum Pare: .613 East Kameng: .306 State: .484	Papum Pare: .729 Tirap: .428 State: .566	East Siang: .660 East Kameng: .362 State: .515	43.25	17.56	16.72	18.37
Assam (2003)	2003	23	Kamrup: .573 Dhemaji: .026 State: .286	Jorhat: .664 Dhubri: .086 State: .343	Jorhat: .722 Dhubri: .454 State: .595	Jorhat: .650 Dhubri: .214 State: .407	76.63	45.42	12.22	28.00
Meghalaya*	2006	7	South Garo Hills: .513 Jaintia Hills: .194 Sate: .334	Jaintia Hills: .412 West Garo Hills: .150 State: .262	South Garo Hills: .834 Jaintia Hills: .427 State: .615	South Garo Hills: .544 West Khasi Hills: .336 State: .404	15.99	38.64	21.66	19.00
Nagaland (2004)	2003	8				Dimapur: .733 Mon: .450 State: .623				15.90
Tripura (2007)	2001	4	West: .26 Dhalai: .19 State: .25	West: .82 Dhalai: .74 State: .79	West: .77 Dhalai: .60 State: .72	West: .61 Dhalai: .51 State: .59	13.23	4.68	10.23	7.58
Kerala (2005)	2001	14	Ernakullam: .600 Malappuram: .490 State .562	Alappuzha: .868 Iddukki: .791 State: .827	Kottam: .963 Iddukki: .878 State: .930	Ernakullam: .801 Malappuram: .749 State .773	4.70	2.51	3.58	2.38

Notes:

*Since Government of Meghalaya (2008) does not provide separate district-wise index values for different dimensions (Components of HDI) we use the estimates of Nayak and Ray (2010) Government of Sikkim (2001) does estimate index values for the districts.

Source: Elaboration from Various State Human Development Reports.

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Professor Purusottam Nayak <nehu_pnayak@yahoo.co.in> is presently the Dean of School of Economics, Management and Information Sciences, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, India.

Dr. Santanu Ray <santanurayeco@yahoo.co.in> is at the Department of Planning and Statistical Cell, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, India.