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Human Development Reports on North-East India: A Bird's Eye View

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Abstract

The paper is a brief account of findings of various human development reports published either by UNDP or Govt. of India or by individual state governments on the states of northeast India. The findings reveal that achievement of northeastern region is quite reasonable in comparison to all India average situations in respect of human development indicators for both the sexes but it has miserably failed in bringing commensurate economic growth. There exists wide spread disparity of socioeconomic achievements across different states and from urban to rural areas. In spite of being a tribal belt and in some cases having matrilineal society women are to be at par with that of men. If the problems of poor economic growth, overall development and gender disparities are not properly addressed the region may fall into the trap of vicious quadrant instead of moving to a virtuous one.

Introduction

UNDP for the first time took initiative in preparing human development report at the global level in 1990. Since then it has been a regular exercise to produce reports on an annual basis, of course, with emphasis on different themes. Similar such exercises have also been undertaken by various countries including India with the help of UNDP. The National Human Development Report (NHDR) is an outcome of the Central government in this regard (GOI, 2002). Subsequently, five out of eight northeastern states have joined the race in producing human developments reports for their individual states at different point of time in the current decade.

National Human Development Report 2002

The NHDR provides us information about the status and growth of human development in different states in the country including the states in North-East India. However, data for the northeast are somewhat outdated. Though report was published in 2002 it could not provide data on human development for the northeast including few other smaller states in the country beyond 1991. The report reveals that the region comprising of the eight states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim (the last to be included in the region) and Tripura, constitutes a land surface of 262,230 square kilometers where a population of 38.9 million belonging to different ethnic and cultural groups inhabits. Topographically the region is a

mixture of hills and plains. While Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim are almost entirely hilly, about four fifths of Assam is plain. Manipur and Tripura have both plain areas and hilly tracts. The hills account for about 70 per cent area and accommodate about 30 per cent of population of the region and the plains constituting the remaining 30 per cent of area hold about 70 per cent of its population. Wide variation in altitude coupled with abundance of rainfall has given rise to wide variations in climatic conditions within the region which in turn has endowed the region with rich bio-diversity. The richness of bio-diversity of the region is almost matched by its ethnic diversity. The region is a meeting place of large number of races, creeds, cultures and languages. The impingement of the diversity of physical and cultural environment is naturally found in the organization of economic life of the people of the region.

According to the report the HDI value during 1981 in the region varied from the lowest figure of 0.242 in Arunachal Pradesh to the highest of 0.461 in Manipur as against national average of 0.302. Similarly in 1991 the lowest and highest figures were 0.328 (Arunachal Pradesh) and 0.548 (Mizoram) as against 0.389 at the national level. Some of the states in the region in this regard were much ahead of India. However, there was a yawning gap between urban and rural areas. The rural-urban disparity index varied from the lowest figure of 0.113 in Manipur to the highest of 0.234 in Tripura in 1981. The situation did not improve much in 1991. Instead it got deteriorated in Meghalaya. Contrary to popular perceptions, the status of women in the region was far from being on an equal footing with that of men. Particularly gender disparities were consistently very high in Tripura and Assam and varying widely from one state to another. It was lower in four states, namely, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Sikkim in the year 1981 as compared to all India average situations. In 1991, however, five states such as Manipur, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland went ahead of the country.

The UNDP (2003) in its human development report devoted for the first time an entire chapter to the region and reiterated the same findings as observed in NHDR. It reported that in the recent past the area in which the region seems to have done better than the nation as a whole is the social sector and more particularly in the spread of literacy. Though the region somewhat lagged behind the country in terms of literacy during seventies, by the beginning of the twenty first century it surpassed the average national achievements in this regard. Individual states such as Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur and Nagaland marched ahead of the country average, Assam more or less kept pace with the national average, and starting from relative backwardness in 1971, by

2001 Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh closed gaps with the country average. Considering that Arunachal Pradesh had a literacy rate of only 11.30 per cent in 1971, the attainment to 54.34 per cent by 2001 constitutes a huge progress in just three decades. Besides, female literacy in the region surpassed the corresponding female literacy rate in the country. The infant mortality rate came down well below the country average in all the states of the region barring Assam. While identifying yawning gap between urban and rural areas in human development, the report mentioned that educational, health care and other welfare services were heavily concentrated in the urban areas. Though the region achieved significant progress in literacy, it was “marred” by rural-urban disparities, inter-district variations and a high dropout rates in schools. Barring Manipur, the dropout rate in schools exceeded 60 per cent. A striking feature of the health sector was that there was a wide inter-state disparity. For instance, while Mizoram had just a single nurse for every 22,000 persons, it was 5353 persons in case of Assam. The incidence of rural poverty was far greater in the region. More than 39 per cent of the rural population was living below the poverty line. The report also busted some popular myths of higher status of women in the northeast, particularly on their education and empowerment.

State Human Development Reports

During the last few years human development reports in the region have also been prepared for five individual states like Sikkim (GOS, 2001), Assam (GOA, 2003), Nagaland (GON, 2004), Arunachal Pradesh (GOAP, 2005) and Tripura (GOT, 2007) with the sponsorship of UNDP and the Planning Commission, Govt. of India whereas for the other three states like Manipur, Meghalaya and Mizoram (3-Ms), the reports are yet to be published.

Sikkim Human Development Report 2001

Sikkim is the first state in the northeast to produce state human development report. According to the report it is a landlocked state being bounded on the north and north-east by Tibet, on the east by Bhutan, on the west by Nepal and on the south by the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. It became the twenty-second state of the Indian Union in 1975 and recently it has been included as the eighth and last state in the North Eastern Region of India with a population of 5.4 lakhs according to 2001 Census. The state has a mixed performance in the area of development and growth. The Per Capita Net State Domestic Product in real terms in the state witnessed a substantial increase, i.e. from Rs. 1571 in 1980–81 to Rs. 9472 in 1995–96. Infant mortality rate dropped from 60 in 1991 to 51 in 1997. Literacy rates went up from 7 per cent in

1951 to almost 70 per cent in 2001. In 1998–99, as against the national average of 47 per cent, only 21 per cent of children below 3 years were malnourished—the lowest among all the Indian States and Union territories.

Physical indicators of the quality of life suggested reasonable provisioning of many basic amenities in the state. According to the National Family Health Survey-II over 80 per cent of households had electricity as against 60 per cent in the country. Almost 85 per cent of households had drinking water as against 78 per cent in India. Close to 73 per cent of households had a toilet or latrine facility as against 36 per cent for the whole country. It had a HDI value of 0.532 as against all India average of 0.563 in 1998. Though the state has recorded several significant gains in human development there is still much ground to cover in terms of ending human poverty and deprivations.

Despite relatively high levels of per capita income, the proportion of population living below income poverty had gone up from 36 per cent in 1987–88 to 41 per cent in 1993–94. There was, however, a large disparity in the prevalence of income poverty between rural and urban areas. In 1993–94, for instance, only 8 per cent of the urban population lived below the poverty line as against 45 per cent in rural areas. In 1998–99, 61 per cent of women and 77 per cent of children below 3 years of age were reported to be suffering from anemia. Progress on the industrial front had been constrained by many factors including lack of appropriate infrastructure and trained manpower. The benefits of growth and human development in the state had not been equitably distributed across districts. Although the economy is dependent on agriculture, food production declined during the period from 1996–97 to 1997–98 and the technology used was often obsolete. The service sector, particularly health, education and eco-tourism has a huge potential to absorb the workforce of the state through employment generation.

Assam Human Development Report 2003

A close examination of the report of Assam reveals that in spite of abundant natural resources, the state is lagging behind the rest of the country and the gap is increasing. Per capita income of the state during independence period was only marginally less than that of the average for the country. In 1998 per capita income for the country was over 1.8 times that of Assam. Industrial diversification and growth were constrained by the inadequacy and quality of complementary infrastructure, the geographical isolation of the region, and the lack of well developed markets.

There is also inter-district inequity. The per capita income of the district with the highest income is more than three times that of the district with the lowest per capita income. In 1994-95, seven districts accounted for nearly half of the State Domestic Product and the remaining sixteen districts contributed to the other half. Kamrup district contributed almost a fifth of the state's GDP originating in the tertiary sector, and over a sixth of state's GDP in the secondary sector. At the other end of the scale, the North Cachar Hills district contributed only one per cent of the state's GDP in the secondary sector, and about 1.5 per cent in the primary and tertiary sectors.

The incidence of unemployment, measured as a per cent of the labor force, has been increasing, and is higher than that in the rest of the country. The primary sector continues to dominate the sectoral composition of workers although the share has been declining. The substantial increase has been in the tertiary sector. Throughout the state the rate of work participation for men is higher than that for women. The female work participation rate is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. While female marginal workers are almost negligible in urban areas, a sizeable proportion of women in the rural areas participate in work in a marginal capacity. The per cent of women workers in the primary sector actually increased during 1971-2001, indicating that more women are now entering the work force in the agriculture sector. Unemployment increased during 1983-2000, both in rural and urban areas. The unemployment per cent in urban area was extremely high, 9.8 per cent in 1999-2000, and as much as 20.5 per cent for women.

Assam has an extremely high proportion of its population living in poverty. Despite a decline in the proportion, more than a third of its people are below the poverty line. The per cent of poor in the state is the highest (36.03 per cent) among the seven states of the North East. There is a rural-urban divide; two out of five people in rural areas are likely to be under the poverty line, while in urban Assam, the incidence is less than one in ten. Rural poverty is much higher (40.04 per cent) than urban poverty (7.47 per cent) in 1999-2000 and the incidence of rural poverty is higher than the all India figure of 27.09 per cent.

There are several positive features of the education sector, and its development over the last two decades. There has been impressive growth of the elementary education. This is reflected in the significant increase in the number of primary and middle schools, the number of

teachers at the primary and middle levels, in enrolments and in improved school infrastructure. Enrolment in schools, measured by gross and net enrolment ratios has increased.

Assam has been moving towards the attainment of the goal of 'health for all'. The State Government has emphasized not only the adequate provision of primary health care, but education and awareness of health issues, dissemination of information on prevention, hygiene and healthy practices, food security and nutrition, safe drinking water and good sanitation, maternal and child health and family welfare. People in the state now live longer than their parents did, and health profiles have improved. Yet, health indicators in the state reveal inequity – between districts, between income and other groupings. There is a rural – urban divide, and a gender gap reflected across almost all indicators. Life expectancy at birth (LEB) is below that of the country as a whole, and is one of the lowest amongst major Indian states. In the 1970's men could expect to live longer than women. This has since been reversed; women can now expect to live longer than men. This is a trend that began to take place initially in urban areas, but is now true of rural areas as well. There is still a very significant gap between the LEB for rural and for urban areas. There is rural – urban gap and a gender gap here too; males have a better chance of surviving beyond forty years of age.

Nagaland Human Development Report 2004

According to the report, Nagaland emerged as a state out of the Naga Hills district of Assam and NEFA province in 1963. Nagaland is a land of diverse tribes, systems of governance, cultures, and variety. The state has been confronting insurgency on a continuous basis, committing much of its scarce resources to administrative and related expenditures.

The NSDP of Nagaland has shown an increase from Rs. 10,547 lakh in 1980–81 to Rs. 57,898 lakh in 1990–91 (at constant 1980–81 prices) and further to Rs. 223,042 lakh in 2000–01 (at constant 1993–94 prices). The per capita income also increased from Rs. 1361 in 1980–81 to Rs. 5520 in 1990–91. During 2000–01, per capita income was Rs. 11,473 (at constant 1993–94 prices) as against Rs. 10,306 for the country as a whole.

There has been a phenomenal increase in the levels of literacy in the state. Literacy rate which was 20.4 per cent in 1961 increased to 67.11 per cent in 2001. However, against a national increase of 21.39 per cent during the period from 1991 to 2001, the state witnessed an increase of only 8.86 per cent. A positive aspect of the state is the increase in the female literacy, which was 13 per cent in 1961 but steadily increased to 39.9 per cent in 1981 and further to 61.92 per cent

in 2001. Women literacy rate and the enrolment rates for girls in the state were higher than the national average.

Despite various challenges the indicators for health in the state are impressive. The positive achievements are improving sex ratios, absence of female foeticides and low maternal mortality rate. There are almost no cases of malnourishment among women and children. The life expectancy at birth were calculated at 73.4 years, way above the national average of 62.3 years, and much closer to the figures in developed countries. Infant mortality rate at 42.2 per 1000 was also much better than the national average of 68 per 1000 live births. Similarly, under-five mortality rate, per 1000 live births, was 63.8 as against the national figure of 96. In terms of maternal mortality rate, the state's figure of less than 1 per 1000 live births, against the national average of 5.4, was much closer to the figures in developed countries. However, the total fertility rate at 3.77 has been a cause for concern.

The HDI of the state was estimated to be as high as 0.62 as compared to 0.472 for the country as a whole in 2001. The state's good performance and ranking can be best understood by looking at the constituents of the indices and the factors that influence them including literacy, health status and income levels. The state has consistently maintained a reasonably good GDI of 0.7 and above in comparison to the national average of 0.6. However it is witnessing wide variations in terms of HDI across districts. HDI was estimated to be highest in Dimapur (0.73) as against the lowest figure of 0.45 in Mon district.

Arunachal Pradesh Human Development Report 2005

Arunachal Pradesh, according to the report, had a primitive economy with a low level of development and meager infrastructural facilities at the time of independence of the country; however, the people living in the state did have enormous traditional skills which have been passed down through the generations. During the beginning of 1970s, the per capita income was 63.38 per cent of the per capita national income and by the end of that decade it was increased to 75 per cent. During the 1980s the state moved faster than that that of the country as a whole. By the beginning of the 1990s, it surpassed the national average and from 1991-92 to 1995-96, it continued to remain higher. After 1995-96, however, the growth of income slowed down. In 1999-2000, it stood at 84.64 per cent of the national average. An examination of the relative per capita Net District Domestic Product (NDDP) showed substantial variation across districts. The per capita income of Lower Subansiri was less than half of the richest district, Dibang Valley.

A poverty estimate made by the Directorate of Rural Development of the state showed that 54 per cent of families in rural Arunachal Pradesh were poor in 1992-93 which increased to 78 per cent in 1997-98. The estimates also showed a high degree of inter-district variation in both the periods. In 1997-98, East Kameng had the lowest incidence of poverty (49 per cent) while Upper Subansiri recorded a poverty ratio as high as 97 per cent.

In the beginning of the 20th century, the state did not have a single school. The first school was established in Pasighat in 1918, and the second in 1922 at Dambuk. At the time of Independence, there were only three schools in the entire state and that too only up to the primary level. In 1951, as many as 67 Lower Primary (LP) schools were set up including one middle school. The big spurt in the expansion of schools was during 1981-91 after which the growth has been more gradual. The literacy rate increased from 25.55 per cent in 1981 to 54.34 per cent in 2001. In spite of a steady increase in literacy, it remained low as compared to the national average of 64.80 per cent. The rate varied from the highest of 34.94 per cent in Lohit district to as low as 9.39 per cent in East Kameng district. In East Kameng and Upper Subansiri districts the female literacy rates were as low as 3.52 and 6.48 per cent respectively. During 1991-2001, enrolment in middle and secondary schools doubled, and in the primary schools it went up by a little over 50 per cent.

Though health status of the people in the state improved it was not been able to keep pace with the spread of literacy or the growth of income. There were no estimates available for life expectancy during 1950-51. It was estimated to be 54.05 years in 2000 which was not only 9.25 years less than the national average but also being one of the lowest in the country and 4.56 years less than that of the neighboring state Assam. People who lived in districts situated in the upper hill ranges had lower life expectancies than those who lived in districts located in the plains and plateaus. The state had an infant mortality rate (IMR) of 77 per 1,000 live births as against 14 in Kerala and 75 in Assam. Though IMR did not vary between sexes, considerable inter-district variation existed. Kurung Kumey had the highest IMR of 133 as against the lowest of 53 in Lower Dibang Valley.

The HDI for the state for the year 2001 was estimated to be 0.515 and the education index, health index and income index were respectively 0.566, 0.484 and 0.495. Considerable variations in the levels of human development were observed across districts. East Siang district had the first rank with an HDI of 0.660 as against the lowest of 0.362 in East Kameng.

Variations across districts were more acute in terms of income index followed by education and health index.

The GDI for the state was estimated to be as high as 0.529. GDI rankings of various districts in the state followed a similar ranking pattern as HDI implying the fact that the districts having relatively better HDI did better in GDI and the districts with relatively lower HDI values had higher gender inequity. East Siang was ranked first as against the East Kameng which was ranked at the bottom in terms of both HDI and GDI rankings.

Tripura Human Development Report 2007

The latest human development report among all the N.E. States is that of Tripura. The report observes that it is a land-locked state of three million populations of which 31 per cent are tribal people. Overcoming the odds inherited by the state caused by the Partition of the Country on the Eve of freedom, the people of the state experienced significant progress in the social, economic and political spheres. The state made substantial progress in the expansion of literacy and schooling in the 1990s. In 2001, it witnessed a literacy rate of 73 per cent as against 65 per cent in the region and 63 per cent in India. Among the N.E. states, Tripura ranked second after Mizoram, and its rank improved during 1991-2001.

Estimates showed that in 2001, life expectancy at birth for males and females in the state was 71 years and 74 years respectively. In terms of life expectancy, attainments in the state were higher than the national average, which was 61 for males and 62.5 for females. There was, however, inter-district variations. Women in West District lived five years longer than women in Dhalai; men in West District lived four years longer than men in Dhalai. Infant mortality rate in the state was as high as 52 as against 30 in Manipur and 57 in India in 2005-06. IMR instead of declining increased from 44 in 1998-99 to 52 in 2005-06. District-level estimates indicated that Dhalai had the highest IMR followed by South, North and West Districts. IMR for girls in Dhalai district even was lower than the all-India IMR.

In 2001-02, the per capita income of the state was Rs 18,759. In terms of access to resources, the average person in Tripura had fewer resources than the average person in India. The growth record of incomes, however, has been remarkable. The compound annual growth rate of NSDP was 5.2 per cent in the 1980s and 6.7 per cent in the 1990s. In fact, in several years, the annual rate of growth of SDP exceeded 10 per cent. Moreover, when India had a growth rate of NSDP of 5.5 per cent during 1993-94 to 2002-03 it was 8.3 per cent in Tripura.

All the districts showed a good performance in terms of growth rates, although with variations, being lowest in Dhalai (6.1 per cent) and highest in North District (7.9 per cent).

The estimated HDI for the state was 0.59 in 2001 and following the classification used by the UNDP, the achievements correspond to the 'medium' level. The estimated value of GDI was 0.56. The ranks of the districts in terms of GDI and its components were similar to the ranking of districts with respect to HDI other than in terms of the 'equally distributed income index'. West District, which ranked first in terms of the income index, ranked second in terms of the equally distributed income index. The noteworthy feature of these estimates is that the HDI and GDI for the state were higher than the corresponding values for India. Among the N.E. States, Tripura shared third rank with respect to the HDI and fourth rank with respect to the GDI. The state ranked second with respect to the education index and fourth with respect to the health and income indices.

Conclusion

The findings reveal that achievement of northeastern region is quite reasonable in comparison to all India average situations in respect of human development indicators for both the sexes but it has miserably failed in bringing commensurate economic growth. There exists wide spread disparity of socioeconomic achievements across different states and within, and from urban to rural areas. In spite of being a tribal belt and in some cases having matrilineal society women are to be at par with that of men. If the problems of poor economic growth, overall development and gender disparities are not properly addressed the region may fall into the trap of vicious quadrant instead of moving to a virtuous one.

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