

### **Disparity in Socio Economic Development in North East India**

Regional disparities especially in socio economic development are a ubiquitous phenomenon across India. India's North Eastern region (NER) comprising the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura is a poorly developed and tribal population dominated region in India. In spite of having some similarities in life style of majority of the population and a common Mongoloid origin, sharp differences exist in the status of socioeconomic development. Disparities whether inter regional or intra regional are partly due to resource endowments and partly due to policy frameworks and execution. NER though blessed with abundant natural resources for industrial and social development but have not been utilized to their full potential. The region is also a vantage entry point for the South East Asian markets. The resource rich North East with its expanses of fertile farmland and huge talent pool could turn into one of India's most prosperous regions. But due to poor infrastructure and connectivity, unemployment and low economic development, law and order problem we believe that market based solutions may not work here. If we throw light on the HDI estimates across the state it becomes more evident. Among the low ranked states of our country, the cluster of states in North East India (NEI) is the main considering issue. The socio economic status of seven states of NE India is as diverse and as heterogeneous as the varieties of tribe found in this region. The region stands way below in comparison with rest of India in socio economic indicators.

The socio economic and political settings of the north-eastern region bear direct linkages and fit in the order where the tribal form of society and economy occupy the vantage positions. The demographic profile of the region is characterized by high birth rate, high level of population growth induced by migration and the young age structure of the population composition. The other less typical demographic characters are low level of urbanization, the prevalence of agricultural occupations and the plurality of languages and vernaculars.

Regional disparities in development are a ubiquitous phenomenon across both developed and developing countries. Disparity, inter- regional and intra- regional, is partly due to resource endowments and partly due to policy framework and execution. There are pockets of highly developed centres in countries with poor resource endowment as much as underdeveloped areas in countries with strong resource endowments. The initial works on disparity upheld the view that differences in income level across countries or within regions in a country led to development disparity. But over the years, the spatial studies revealed that income by itself was not a sufficient measure of disparity<sup>1</sup>- rather it was often misleading. It was seen that mere income level did not portray the real picture – a high per capita income and a high inflation rate meant low real income and hence low disposable income at hand, on the other hand, a low money income with no inflation meant a higher real income.

In India, the northern and the western regions of the country are fairly developed, the eastern region, especially the north-eastern region, remains the most backward. Besides inter regional differences, there is also intra-regional disparity among the states of northeast India. The nature and extent of place-to-place variations in resource endowments and regulations therefore need to be explored. An understanding of the space hence not only helps in making

a pragmatic assessment of the resource endowment but also the steps required for canalizing the same to desired lines for socio-economic development of the region. Though per capita income and population below poverty line have not got satisfactory result but the satisfactory performance of literacy rate provides a good pool of educated human resources in the region. All the states of NEI have different developmental prospects and resources to support their effort in contributing to the regional as well as national economy.

In spite of ample natural and human resources, the north east region of India that consists of seven states is still lagging behind as compared to many states of India. People of these states are deprived in different socio-economic indicators. Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) value is highest in Assam but, inequality among the MPI Poor is high in Meghalaya. In 2011-12, BPL population was highest in Manipur (46.7 %) followed by Assam (40.9 %) and Arunachal Pradesh (37.4 %) exceeding the all India level (29.5). It was observed that inequality is high in growth rate of population (%) (among demographic indicators), Sanitation Facilities (among the indicators of economic conditions), Rail Density (among indicators of infrastructure), Average Years of Education, Per Capita Monthly Expenditure (Rs) and Population Below Poverty Line. Analysis of access to basic amenities, namely, drinking water, toilet facility and electricity reveals the existence of wide state-level variations. Inequality in access to electricity is highest in urban sector as compared to the rural sector among the three basic services. Among the states of NER, the maximum average deprivation in the basic facilities is located in Meghalaya and the most Socio-Economic deprived state is Nagaland. Thus, it is recommended for consistent and balanced development approach, expansion of capability, improvement in infrastructure and diversification of agriculture across the seven states of North East India.

As per 2011 census, Sex ratio is highest in Manipur (992) followed by Meghalaya (989) and Mizoram (976). Percentage of population live in rural area is highest in Assam (85.92) and lowest in Mizoram (48.49). Infant Mortality rate (Total) recorded highest in Assam (54) followed by Meghalaya (47) and Mizoram (35). It is lowest in Manipur (10). A majority of India's population does not have access to sanitation facilities in their dwellings and lacks sanitation facilities. As per Census of India, if a household has access to drinking water supplied from a tap or a hand pump/tube well situated within or outside the premises, it is considered as having access to safe drinking water. Millions of people in the country suffer from water borne diseases on account of lack of access to safe drinking water. It is the poor who suffer from higher prevalence of diseases compared to the rich. Sanitation Facilities are high in Mizoram (91.91) followed by Manipur (89.30); but, lowest in Arunachal Pradesh (61.97). Similarly, Sources of Drinking Water in rural (Tap and Tube well) records highest in Arunachal Pradesh (91.0) followed by Assam (71.7) and Tripura (71.1), but lowest in Mizoram (19.4). Education is considered as a means to enhance capability, overcome constraints, enlarge choices, and power to cope with resilience for standard of living. It bridges the gaps in communication, and encourages people's participation in social and political life. The educational attainment has its positive impact on the people's wellbeing and changes the perceptions, aims, means and ability of an individual as well as community. It is the determining factor of formation and application of new technologies. It lowers infant

mortality rates, improves the health of children and women; empowers weaker sections of society, increases social mobility and political freedom. Mizoram is the state with highest literacy rate (91.33). Literacy rate of all north eastern states overcomes the all India level (74.04) except Arunachal Pradesh (65.38) and Assam (72.19). Among the NE states, shares of services to Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) are high. Next are industry and agriculture & allied sector. It is evident that Shares of Agriculture & allied sector, industry and services in GSDP are highest in Arunachal Pradesh (31.6), and Mizoram (59.8) respectively among the N E states. In case of Infrastructure, Assam is leading ahead among the NE states. Access to electricity is a basic amenity and an index of industrialization. The economic backwardness of the state is evident from her low per capita income. Per capita monthly consumption expenditure (PCMCE) is considered to be a better measure of economic wellbeing of people than that of per capita monthly income measure for many obvious reasons. Per Capita Monthly Income is highest in Arunachal Pradesh (2272.58) and lowest in Assam (1398.50). In contrast, Per Capita Monthly Expenditure is high in Nagaland (1094.88) and lowest in Tripura (578.91).

Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) value is highest in Assam (0.316) followed by Meghalaya (0.307) exceeding the all India level (0.283) and lowest in Mizoram (0.094). Inequality among the MPI Poor is high in Meghalaya (0.248) followed by Arunachal Pradesh (0.237) overcoming the all India level of inequality (0.234). In 2011-12, BPL population was estimated at highest in Manipur (46.7 %) followed by Assam (40.9 %) and Arunachal Pradesh (37.4 %) exceeding the all India level (29.5).

There are a wide disparity in different levels of Demography, Health, Economic conditions, Infrastructures, Education and Standard of living in NE India. It was observed that inequality is high in growth rate of population (%) (among demographic indicators), Sanitation Facilities (among the indicators of economic conditions), Rail Density (among indicators of infrastructure), Average Years of Education, Per Capita Monthly Expenditure (Rs) and Population Below Poverty Line. In 2012, Arunachal Pradesh reports the highest average per capita floor area at 195.1 sq.ft. followed by Assam (143.9 sq. ft.) and Manipur (129.2 sq.ft.); and lowest in Meghalaya (90.1 sq.ft.) in rural areas. But, inequality in rural areas is highest in Mizoram (0.164) followed by, and Assam (0.147); and lowest in Manipur (0.078) in 2012. In 2012, the average per capita floor area in the rural sector is the highest in Manipur (169.8) followed by Arunachal Pradesh (134.2); but inequality is concentrated in Sikkim (0.198) followed by Tripura (0.172).

In 2012, Sikkim reports the highest availability with 0.800 percent of households and Manipur reports the lowest availability with 0.091percent of households having access to drinking water in rural sector. But inequality in rural sector is high in Manipur with 0.352 concentration index value and lowest in Assam (0.041) and Meghalaya (0.040). But, in urban sector Sikkim which has highest percent of households (0.961) having access to drinking water, also suffers from high level (0.692) of inequality. Similarly, percentage of households having access to drinking water is the lowest in Manipur with lowest level (0.278) of inequality.(See Table 7). Nagaland is the highest performers with 0.990 percent of households reporting access to toilet facilities and Arunachal Pradesh is the worst performer

with 0.603 percent of households reporting access to toilet facilities in 2012 (rural sector). In contrast, inequality is high in Manipur (0.413) and low in Arunachal Pradesh (-0.005) and Meghalaya (-0.198). Percentage of households having access to toilet facilities are the highest in Manipur (0.976) with lowest level (0.451) of inequality in urban sector in 2012. (See Table 8).

In 2012, Nagaland is the best performer state (0.997) with highest inequality (0.514) in terms of electricity connections. On the other hand, Arunachal Pradesh is the lowest performer state (0.667) with lowest inequality (-0.100) in rural sector. Percentage of household having access to electricity is high (1.00) in Mizoram and Sikkim. Inequality is also high in Mizoram (0.998). Here, the availability of electricity is measured based on households having electricity connections, without considering the actual supply of electricity to households due to lack of data. Analysis of access to basic amenities, namely, drinking water, toilet facility and electricity reveals the existence of wide state-level variations. Access to the basic amenities is concentrated in the rich states and inequality is more in the urban sector as compared to the rural sector. The basic services are unequally distributed, particularly in the rural sector as compared to urban areas. There are fluctuations in inequality over the years in the three basic services. Inequality in access to electricity is highest in urban sector as compared to the rural sector among the three basic services.

Among the states of NER, the maximum average deprivation in the basic facilities is located in Meghalaya (0.6009) followed by Assam (0.5387). The average value of the facility deprivation index is least (0.353) in Sikkim, which implies that the state has minimum deprivation in basic facilities. In the entire NER, the least deprived state in terms of Socio-Economic conditions is Mizoram and the most Socio-Economic deprived state is Nagaland. The states included in the high level of socio-economic deprivation category are Assam and Meghalaya. Remaining six states are included in the moderately deprived category. No state has been found in low level of socio-economic deprivation.

In spite of ample natural and human resources, the north east region of India that comprises eight states is still lagging behind as compared to many states of India. People of these states are deprived in many socio-economic indicators of development. It is an important input to the production process and raises the productivity of other sectors. Analysis of access to basic amenities, namely, drinking water, toilet facility and electricity reveals the existence of wide state-level variations. Access to the basic amenities is concentrated in the rich states and inequality is more in the urban sector as compared to the rural sector. The basic services are unequally distributed, particularly in the rural sector as compared to urban areas. There are fluctuations in inequality over the years in the three basic services. Inequality in access to electricity is highest in urban sector as compared to the rural sector among the three basic services. In the entire NER, the most Socio-Economic deprived state is Nagaland. Thus, it is recommended for consistent and balanced development approach across the eight states. 'Human development' (that is, wellbeing of people as an ends of development) should be focused in place of 'human resource development' (where human beings merely are considered as a means to a greater output and treats people as "human capital"). Initiatives should be taken to expand capabilities 15 (opportunity freedoms) and to support people's

agency (process freedom) among weaker sections of backward regions. Government should focus on economic infrastructure (transport, communication and energy), social infrastructure (education, health, housing, water supply, sanitation), and diversification of agriculture, such as diversification of crops (shifting from single cropping system to multiple cropping) and diversification of productive activity (divert resources from farm to non-farming activities like livestock, fisheries etc.).