

Chapter 12

The Way Forward

Meghalaya may be considered to be a case of unfulfilled potential in many ways. The rich natural resource base of the state has been sub-optimally utilised. Therefore, the challenge ahead is to harness the resources to the full potential and more importantly, to bring the fruits of development to the people, especially the poor and the powerless.

This Report brings out the fact that achievements in the sphere of human development have been mainly urban centric. The rural and remote areas remain under developed and large numbers of people in these areas still do not have access to basic health care facilities and proper schools. Lack of rural infrastructure development, limits the opportunities for better livelihood. Further, the existing system of governance needs reforms to improve the delivery mechanism.

In the struggle for enhancement of human welfare, the challenges ahead are many. The Report offers the following areas of action and suggestions to achieve the objective of human development.

The Report emphasizes on the urgent need to provide more physical, social and economic infrastructure in Meghalaya during the Eleventh Plan period to ensure balanced regional development. This would, however, require massive investment in a mission mode approach by the Central Government including the Planning Commission.

Meghalaya had achieved a growth rate of 6.2 percent in the Ninth Plan. The growth rate for Meghalaya has been 5.6 percent as compared to 7.6 percent for the country as a whole during the Tenth Plan. The main reason is the inability of our infrastructure, particularly power, to sustain and support a high level of growth. The overall projected growth for the country during the Eleventh Plan is pegged at 9 percent. In the case of Meghalaya, it has been fixed at 7.3 percent, comprising growth rates of 4.7 percent in agriculture, 8.0 percent in industry and 7.9 percent in services. This would imply that, at the end of the Plan period, Meghalaya will lag even further behind the other States of the country. Our industry sector can grow much faster provided ample policy support and thought is given to it. In this connection, the North East Industrial & Investment Promotion Policy, 2007 is a commendable step and an innovative and promotive State Policy would go a long way to catalyse the process.

The 11th Plan document prepared by the Planning Commission has rightly identified remoteness, poor connectivity, hilly and inhospitable terrain, poor infrastructure, sparse population density, shallow markets, lack of skill and problems of law and order situation as special problems of the North Eastern Region. Besides Power, Connectivity [both Roads and Information & Communication Technology (ICT)] is a key requirement. Of the total of 5782 villages in Meghalaya, 2762 villages, comprising 48 percent of the total, have a population of less than 200. These small sized villages are scattered through out the State. As such, the cost of providing physical and social infrastructure like roads, electricity, health care, primary education, potable drinking water, etc. is very high as compared to other states in the country. This calls for high allocation of resources including manpower and higher cost norms for improving the social and physical infrastructure in the state. This may be redressed through additional plans and programmes and capacity building of existing manpower.

The Planning Commission approved the 11th Plan size of Rs. 9185 crore for Meghalaya. However, in view of the limited resources and financial position of Meghalaya, the state needs more

Central Assistance so that the projected Plan outlay of Rs.9185 crore can be achieved during the 11th Plan period. The State also needs to re-invigorate its financial resources.

While taking into consideration the approach to the 11th Plan and national priorities as decided by the Government of India, Meghalaya has accorded the following *priorities* during the Eleventh Plan period:-

- Power generation, transmission, grid connectivity and rural electrification.
- Agriculture and allied sectors, with strong emphasis on horticulture including post harvesting management and processing.
- Roads and Bridges for ensuring better connectivity.
- Sericulture & Weaving for generation of income and employment to the women folk.
- Tourism infrastructure and tourism services.
- Trade with Bangladesh and creation of infrastructure for the same.
- Decentralization of planning and involvement of the people in the development process.
- Social services like education, health, water supply and nutrition.
- Poverty alleviation and employment generation in rural areas through Rural Development Programmes.

Given the existing lag of development, the strategic importance of the region vis-à-vis the progress and preparedness of neighbouring countries in respect of economic infrastructure, the necessity to prepare and leverage economic benefits of the Look East Policy which the region would like to be the main partner and get mainstreamed, higher commitments of resources, dedicated task force and improved capacity, is most urgently required. Any further delay in respect of mobilization and action on the ground in the matter of infrastructure may prove costly.

The Vision 2020 document for the North Eastern Region prepared by the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP), New Delhi on behalf of the North Eastern Council (NEC) has identified five basic deficits confronting the North Eastern Region which includes (i) a basic needs deficit; (ii) an infrastructure deficit; (iii) a resource deficit; (iv) a two-way deficit of understanding with the rest of the country; and (v) a governance deficit. To overcome these deficits, the document stressed on the need for a complete change in the planning process and suggested the following strategies- (i) participatory development strategy; (ii) capacity development strategy; (iii) augmentation of infrastructure, particularly connectivity and transport infrastructure including intra-region connectivity; (iv) significant increase in the Central Government's allocating for infrastructure in the region including efficient use of funds; (v) transforming of governance by providing a secure, responsive and market friendly environment.

The Vision 2020 document has also stated that there is a need for acceleration in the growth of most of the North Eastern states if they are to catch up the per capita GDP of the country by the year 2020. The document has estimated that Meghalaya needs to grow at an average of 10.96 percent in terms of its Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) and 9.72 percent in terms of its per capita GSDP during the period from 2007 to 2020. To achieve the above growth rate of 10.96 percent in GSDP over the period from 2007 to 2020, the staggered phasing is estimated at 8.75 percent during the 11th Plan, 11.35 percent during the 12th Plan and 14.25 percent during 2017 to 2020. Similarly to achieve the growth rate of 9.72 percent in terms of per capita GSDP, the staggered phasing is 7.47 percent in the 11th Plan, 10.10 percent in the 12th Plan and 13.11 percent during the 13th Plan. Therefore, massive central investment in physical, social and economic infrastructure is required for a faster

rate of development in the coming Plans. The Planning Commission and the Government of India require to take note of such needs of the North Eastern Region and of Meghalaya, in particular. The document has estimated Rs. 13.4 lakh crore investment in the region for catching up with the rest of the country. Meghalaya, perhaps, would require about Rs. 1.3 lakh crore upto 2020 (about 10 percent of the requirement of NER) to catch up with the rest of the country.

For Meghalaya, inclusive growth would mean catching up with the rest of the country, on one hand, and on the other hand, addressing intra state disparity in infrastructure and human development index across districts and communities.

Besides the growth targets mentioned earlier, the other **monitorable targets during the 11th plan period for Meghalaya** are as indicated below:

- Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) to be brought down from the level of 56 to 26 per 1000 live births by the end of the 11th Plan.
- Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) to be brought down from the level of 402 in 2007¹ to 100 per 1,00,000 live births.
- Total fertility rate to be brought down from 4.6 to 2.6.
- Sex Ratio (0-6 Years) to be improved from the current level of 973 to 981 by the end of the 11th plan.
- Anaemia among women (15-49 years) to be brought down from the current level of 63.30 to 31.70 by the end of the 11th plan.
- Malnutrition of children (0-3 years) to be brought down from the current level of 37.9 to 19.00 by the end of the 11th plan.
- Drop out rate in elementary education to be brought down from the current level of 62.26 percent to 31.63 percent by the end of the 11th plan.
- Literacy rate to be improved from 63.31 percent (2001 census) to 87.61 by 2011-12. Male and female literacy rate in percentage terms to be improved from the 2001 level of 65.43 and 59.61 to 87.61 and 87.35 respectively by 2011-12. Gender gap in literacy to be brought down from 5.80 in percentage terms in 2001 to 0.50 by 2011-12.
- Further we need to bring down the level of poverty by 10 percentage points from 48.9 percent in 2002. The State Government also plans to generate additional employment providing work opportunities to 1.50 lakh people per annum and facilitate employment generation.
- Besides, the flagship programmes and Bharat Nirman aim, among others, to (i) connect all habitations with a population of above 500 by 2009 and those with population above 250 by 2012, (ii) provide electricity to all villages and connection to all BPL families, (iii) provide safe drinking water for all by 2009 and ensure no slippages, (iv) provide full sanitation coverage of households by 2010, (v) provide rural housing and (vi) connect every village by telephone and broadband by 2012, (vii) provide irrigation to 14.93 thousand hectares.

¹Birth and Mortality Survey, 2007.

For achieving human development, the Report recommends new **social interventions** as indicated in the 11th plan document which highlights important aspects of development which must be pursued by us, such as

- ❑ providing one year pre-school education for all children;
- ❑ expand secondary schools with provisions of hostels and vocational education facilities;
- ❑ expansion facilities for higher and technical education and launching skill development programmes;
- ❑ provision of emergency obstetrics care facilities within two hours travel from every habitat;
- ❑ ensuring adequate representation of women in elected bodies and providing shelter and protection to single women;
- ❑ restoring environmental health and launching rainwater harvesting measures.

The state should also strive for enhancement of the level of human well being which include creation of essential infrastructures, provision of educational avenues including diversified training for skill development, generation of employment opportunities, extensive health care, adequate attention for women and children welfare, improvement of environment, and provision of safe drinking water supply and sanitation.

North Eastern Region, in general and Meghalaya in particular, is an ecological hotspot and rich in biodiversity. There is a need to establish and strengthen and bio-resources planning, development and regulation efforts in the state. The mandate, scope and organizational support for Bio Resources Development Centre at Shillong may be enlarged.

There is a need to understand the vulnerabilities of farmers and a social security system for the farmer needs to be evolved. User-friendly insurance instruments covering life, assets, production and marketing for all crops as suggested in the 5th Report of the National Commission on Farmers should be launched. There is a need to bring all kind of insurance schemes for rural areas under one umbrella scheme as a mission mode action plan.

Generation of employment, particularly in the rural areas should be one of the state's top priorities. For Meghalaya, we see great potential for creation of jobs in the rural areas in the field of post harvest management, agro processing and tourism. There is a need to increase employment in non-agricultural sector and rural non-farm sector with development of clusters around towns/market centres. Learning from experiences gained from the implementation of the Self Help Groups (SHGs) and watershed based approach on livelihoods under North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Programme and Livelihoods Improvement Programme assisted by International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), it is important to cover all areas of the State under livelihood improvement programme with adequate investment and appropriate institutional mechanisms. Reforms of planning and development structure by converging programmes may see better outcomes. There is an urgent need to upgrade skills of our youth to enable them to stand on their own feet. A skill development mission for the rural areas may be evolved and supported.

The 'Rural Business Hubs' approach recommended by the National Commission on Farmers should be implemented to improve the livelihood opportunities in rural areas. Various agencies, both Central and State, concerned with the development of agriculture, animal husbandry, fishery, sericulture and weaving, plantation crops, forestry, medicinal herbs, etc., should meet at a common forum for an

integrated approach to livelihood development in our villages. The Backward Region Grant Fund should be implemented meaningfully. The National Agricultural Development Programme (NADP) and Integrated Border Areas Development Plan need meaningful preparation and implementation.

Environmental concerns of wanton exploitation of natural resources must be addressed through meaningful action plans and sustainable natural resource management.

Participation of the people at the grassroot level in planning process has made a beginning through the implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in the state. The government of Meghalaya has evolved a system of **village employment councils** consisting of both elected representatives at the village level and the traditional heads of village and tribal institutions in these councils. This will ensure the participation of village people in the formulation, execution and monitoring of plans locally, in a democratic manner. The government may plan to expand the concept for people's participation in planning and development as envisaged in this Report.

Both for addressing the issue of poverty and for addressing the demand side of agriculture, all districts of Meghalaya have been now covered under National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). The entitlement norms under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) should be liberalized and pulses should be added to the basket of commodities supplied through TPDS. The Mid-Day Meal Programme should be extended to cover private schools in tribal areas.

The augmentation of the standards of public services like education, healthcare, water supply, sanitation, housing, etc. requires significant commitment of additional resources by the government. Branches of good quality schools should spread to our blocks and villages. Good quality model schools need to be established in each Block of Meghalaya. One Central school/Navodaya Vidyalaya or equivalent with hostel facilities should be set up in each Block for tapping and promoting available rural talent in Meghalaya.

Further, we need more specialized seats for our in-service doctors who will provide better health service. Besides, there is need to have recognized Local Medical Practitioners (LMPs) or barefoot doctors through approved courses and appropriate institutions.

Summing up, development of infrastructure; improvement of health care services; increasing the number of quality schools and skill development centres; developing alternative and sustainable models and means of livelihood; and participatory development strategy are major areas that should be given top priority and utmost importance for promoting human development in Meghalaya. The real challenge, however, is to bring the benefits of development to the backward and poor sections of the society, especially in the remote rural areas. Reforms in governance are a must to enable and ensure the participation of the poor to enhance quality of life and to derive the fruits of development in the State.