

## **NORTH-EAST INDIA AND ITS RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

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*The paper discusses the features of North-east India and its strategy for rural development, as offered by government. On the first hand, we specifically highlight its pros and cons; that is with respect to its biodiversity, pace of development, nature of the economy, agricultural practices, tribal composition, strategic location, human development, poverty, unemployment and immigrants. On the other hand, we highlight the pros and cons of different rural development programmes of North-East, which are categorically grouped under three heads such as wage employment programme, self-employment programme and infrastructure development programme. The paper finds that these ongoing developmental programmes have lack of quality implementation. Hence, it finally suggests that the concerned governments have to follow the seven-fold action plan of Lalit Mathur Committee to restore the quality implementation of rural development programmes in North- East India.*

In independent India, the eastern Himalayan and Brahmaputra valley of the Indo-Myanmar frontier comprising of seven sister states namely Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland and Meghalaya is identified as a single geographic unit and socio-economic identity. The political process and administrative convenience legitimized this region as "north-east India" (Shimray, 2004). These seven states, along with Sikkim, have a prime place in India's geo-political system (Prabhakara, 2004; Naik and Singh, 2003). The north-eastern region is surrounded by foreign territories like Bhutan, Tibet-China, Burma, and Bangladesh on the north-south and the east except for a long narrow passage in west which connects the region with West Bengal and the rest of India (Ali and Das, 2003). North-east India occupies an area of 255180 Sq. K.M., comprising of about 8.06% of total geographical area of the country, and account for about 4% of country's total population (See Table 1).

The important features, which distinguish these states from other states of the country, are difficult terrain and mountainous periphery, inaccessible areas, high seismic activity (Saikia, 1981), inadequate infrastructure, sparse population and socio-economic backwardness (Pradhan, 2005). The linkage of this region with rest of India is not up to the mark. About 98% of the borders of the north-east India are international borders and only two per cent of the region is connected to India, pointing to the north-east's tenuous geographical and political connectivity to the Indian mainland (Upadhyay, 2006). Hence it affects the internal trade and resulting in determination of income earning opportunities at local people (Agarwal, 2003). The economy of this region reflects its backwardness with 56% of workers, out of 10614290 workers, engaged

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in agriculture as per census 2001. The region is also industrially very backward. The contribution of this sector to per capita net state domestic product is being less than three per cent in all the states except Assam and Manipur, where it is 12% and 8% respectively (Umdor and Panda, 2007). The poverty level in the region among the highest in the country with the percentage of population below the poverty line in the states ranging from 29% to 36%, compared to all India average of 26% (See Table 2). Most interestingly, about 88% of its population is still located in rural areas and rural poverty remained high and undiminished during 1987-2000 in contrast to most other parts of India (Ningombam, 2007). Therefore development of north east India depends upon its rural development. But the critic says that rural development in the north-east India is not up to the mark. Hence the backdrop of this paper is to examine the features of north-east India and its rural development strategy.

**Table 1**  
**Geographic and Demographic Indicators of North Eastern States**

<i>Items</i>	<i>NER</i>	<i>NER1</i>	<i>NER2</i>	<i>NER3</i>	<i>NER4</i>	<i>NER5</i>	<i>NER6</i>	<i>NER7</i>	<i>NER8</i>	<i>India</i>
Area (in Sq. Km.)	262276	78523	10492	22327	22429	16579	21087	83743	7096	3166290
Percent all-India	8.06	2.48	0.33	0.70	0.71	0.52	0.67	2.64	0.224	–
Forest coverage (in %)	65.0	27.41	57.7	78.64	42.23	21.60	75.11	63.0	45.0	–
Population (in million)	39.01	26.6	3.19	2.39	2.31	1.99	0.9	1.09	0.54	102.7
Percent all-India	3.79	2.59	0.31	0.23	0.22	0.19	0.09	0.11	0.53	–
Per cent of urbanization	27.8	11.1	15.3	27.5	18.6	17.2	46.1	12.8	11.1	27.8
Population growth <sup>1</sup>	23.75	18.85	15.74	30.02	29.84	64.41	29.18	26.21	33.0	21.34
Density of population <sup>2</sup>	149	65	304	107	103	120	42	13	76	324

*Note:* NER: North Eastern Region; NER1: Assam; NER2: Tripura; NER3: Manipur; NER4: Meghalaya; NER5: Nagaland; NER6: Mizoram; NER7: Arunachal Pradesh; NER8: Sikkim; <sup>1</sup>: Percentage of population growth in between 1991-2001; <sup>2</sup>: Density of population is measured per Sq. KM.

*Source:* Economic Survey, Government of India; Census of India; and Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, Mumbai.

The remainder of this paper is organized into six different sections including the earlier introduction. Section II discusses the features of NER. Section III discusses the rural development strategy in NER. Section IV highlights the present scenario of rural development in north-east India. Section V examines the impact assessment of rural development in the north-east. Section VI follows with the conclusion and policy implications thereof.

### **Features North-eastern Region (NER)**

In this section, we examine the basic features of NER, which includes its strengths and weakness.

#### ***Biodiversity***

The north east India is well known for its rich biodiversities. The region is full of mineral resources, rich in tourism with a contribution of human, natural, cultural and ethnic

beauty, heritage sites, beaches and deep forests. About 65% of the land area in the region is under good forest, making it one of the greenest areas in our country, besides the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Singh *et al.*, 2005; Dutta, 2002; Mitra, 1998; NEC, 1995). The region is also full of hydro-energy resources like the Brahmaputra, Ganges, Irrawati, Mekong and many major rivers (Gogoi, 2004). The region is characterized by undulating topography, wide variations in altitude, rainfall, temperature and soil conditions. The climate is typically monsoonic, with about 85% of the total annual rainfall occurring during the rainy season. The average maximum temperature during the rainy season is 30 degree Celsius and average minimum temperature is 14 degree Celsius, with a maximum and minimum of 20<sup>o</sup> C and 8<sup>o</sup> C respectively, during the winters (Bhat and Sachan, 2004).

It is blessed with natural beauty, wild life and very famous for its exotic flora and fauna. Out of the 925 varieties of orchards available in India, over 600 can be grown in the region due to its favourable climatic condition. In fact, approximately 200 varieties are unique to this region and 60% of these are ornamental in nature with high demand at the international markets. It is also ideally situated to produce spices and herb. Moreover, the forest of this region offers a vast array of aromatic plants, which can be used in the aromatic industry for manufacture of perfumes and incenses. In fact, there is an increasing international trend towards nature perfumes and room fresheners. With proper planning there exists scope for establishing aromatic industry in the region. The north east India is defined as the hidden treasure of India. According to Tony Howard, if India was the jewel in the crown of British Empire, the remote North East of that country is its Hidden Jewel (<http://www.indianetzone.com>).

### ***Pace of Development***

The pace of development of NER usually differs from hilly to plains. The Brahmaputra valley is economically active area in the region. Though the region is diverse and heterogeneous in nature, it is also treated as homogeneous in one sense. This is because the region has lack of social stratification, which has not found in other parts of the country. The level of development in NER again differs among the seven sister states with respect to their resource endowments, level of industrialization, level of agricultural modernization and the availability of socio-economic infrastructure facilities (Pradhan, 2005).

With response to its current socio-economic profile, it is observed that there is diverging experiences among these seven sister states. Some state has achieved tremendous progress in some aspects and failed in other aspects. The reverse is, however, happened in other states. For instance, Mizoram is very successful in reducing its poverty (19.5%) and gender equity but it is not so successful in reducing its women's crime and private decision-making. Similarly, Nagaland is very successful in reducing her crime against women and health (anemia) but it is not so successful in reducing her poverty (See Table 2). Hence the region is pushed down their relative position vis-à-vis other states and sharpened inter-state disparities. It is, however, true that in a region having different states with different resource bases and endowments must

have a dissimilar growth path over time. The presence of regional disparity in the north east India is now a matter of serious concern among the policy makers and researchers.

**Table 2**  
**Socio-Economic Indicators of North Eastern Regions of India**

<i>Items</i>	<i>NER</i>	<i>NER1</i>	<i>NER2</i>	<i>NER3</i>	<i>NER4</i>	<i>NER5</i>	<i>NER6</i>	<i>NER7</i>	<i>NER8</i>	<i>India</i>
HDI		0.362	0.434	0.455	0.436	0.515	0.552	0.411	0.411	0.472
Literacy Rate	65.72	64.28	73.66	68.87	63.31	67.11	88.49	54.74	69.68	65.38
IMR	42	78	49	25	52	15	23	44	52	71
Sex Ratio	937	932	950	978	975	909	938	901	875	933
Poverty Ratio	33.5	36.1	36.6	28.5	33.9	32.7	19.5	33.5	36.5	26.1
GDI	0.676	0.575	0.531	0.815	0.807	0.729	0.770	0.776	0.647	0.676
IDI	86.37	104.4	92.85	83.5	77.6	89.89	84.49	71.89	83.01	100
PCNSDP	9391	6122	9664	7445	9905	11674	10505	9401	10415	10754

*Note:* HDI: Human Development Index; LE: Life Expectancy Rate; IMR: Infant Mortality Rate; GDI: Gender Development Index; IDI: Infrastructural Development Index; PCNSDP: Per capita net state domestic product and other notations are already defined earlier.

*Source:* Economic Survey, Government of India; Census of India; and Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, Mumbai.

### ***The Economy***

The economy of NER is mainly rural based and agrarian in nature (Srivastava, 1998; Nayak, 1997). It has large inaccessible areas with sparse population and inadequate infrastructure (Naik and Singh, 2003). In the industrial base, the scenario is not at all encouraging. The existence of industries as well as the shares of fixed capital, invested capital, net value-added and the number of workers in the industrial sector of NER, in contrast to all-India position, have declined over the years (Mohan, 2003). The region is characterized not only by a weak industrial base, but also one having an enclave type of industrial sector, in the form of tea plantation, petroleum and plywood. All these industries are dependent on exhaustible resources. The manufacturing sector barring Assam is very small. Industrial investment in the region is one of the lowest in India, mainly because of low-income level of the people. Again there is absence of investment from outside because of many well-known factors like extortions, insurgency, and disliking by the local populace to the outsiders, and the absence of local entrepreneurship to take up the challenges and risks involved in production and marketing (Agarwal, 2003).

The central and many state governments of the region are trying very hard to attract capital from outside. Their efforts have not been fully successful so far. It has been observed that the capitalist entrepreneurs and multinational corporations are not very keen to set up the industries except a few proposals in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Therefore, the question of marginalization of the smaller ethnic groups residing in the peripheral areas and the reckless and unsustainable exploitation of their natural resources does not arise. The north-east region of the country is going to task for the

foreign investment most but there is no possibility of its smooth flow due to various well known reasons (Kumar, 2002). The failure of the government sponsored industrialization in almost all the states of the region, as evident from the mounting losses of the PSUs particularly in Assam, Tripura and Nagaland, have convinced us about need for a new approach. We must find new ways to boost up the commodity producing sectors of the north-eastern economy. Probably a renewed emphasis on agricultural and agricultural related industrialization may resolve the conflict between equity and efficiency in the region (Bhattacharjee, 2002).

Agriculture, on the contrary, seems to be backbone of NER (Swaminathan, 1996). About 80% of its population depends upon agriculture and agriculture employs nearly 68% of total workforce of NER. The region offers scope for cultivation of a wide variety of agricultural crops such as rice, wheat, other cereals, millets, tubers, bananas, squashes, beans and leafy vegetables. However among the diversified crops, rice is most predominant one in the entire region (Krishna, 2005); this is because of its diversities in topography, altitude and climatic conditions. One of the most backwardness of this region is that the agricultural products are mainly sold in the local markets and that is mostly in the form of primary produce without having significant value-addition. It is to be noted that land is one of the most critical resources of NER economy; hence, its availability and management is a pre-requisite for agricultural development. But the critics say that size of land holdings is very small in the region and that affects the mechanization of agriculture. On the contemporary, subsistence farming is very predominant in the region and that does not bring any commercial surplus.

### ***Agricultural Practices***

Agricultural activities dominate over industrial activities in the north-east with shifting cultivation being the common practice in the tribal areas (Sachdeva, 1998). Usually there are two agricultural practices found in the region such as settled agriculture and shifting cultivation. Both are predominantly traditional in nature (Ganguly, 1997; Agarwal, 1996; Ramakrishnan, 1993). The high yielding varieties (HYV) programme, viz. the use of seed-fertilizer technology, have been substantially successful in irrigated valleys and have not been touched in the hill zones. Moreover the overall coverage of HYV programme is very low in the region, which is due to slow pace of agri-infrastructure (Mahajan, 1996) and non-availability (timely) of modern agricultural inputs (Nayak, 1997). The consumption of chemical fertilizer is also relatively low in the region and that is mostly due to defective fertilizer distribution system, lack of fertilizer supply, inadequate transport, storage and credit facilities and the predominance of primitive techniques of production (Agarwal, 2003; 1996). So far as the performance of agriculture is concerned, the region is comparatively very low in contrast to other parts of the country. However a holistic approach to agricultural development depends upon its research and development in the agro-processing and marketing area (Singh *et al.*, 2005). There is also need of the development of horticulture and floriculture, where seed-fertilizer is not suitable (Mohan, 2003).

### *Ethnic Setting and Tribal Composition*

North East India is the homeland of a large number of ethnic groups (Dev, 2004), who came from different directions at different historical times. These groups belong to different historical times and belong to different racial stocks, speak different languages and have varied social-cultural traditions. The region has been occupied by different streams of the Mongoloid people, who came from the north and east at different periods. The Australoids came to this region before coming of the mongoloids, who partially or fully absorbed the Australoid strains (Das, 1970). The physical features of different tribes of north east India suggest that the Australoid elements are present in some of the tribes. It has been stated that long ago one section of the Indo-Mongoloids spread over the whole of the Bramhaputra valley, North Bengal and East Bengal (now Bangladesh) giving rise to various tribal groups in habiting this region (Chatterji, 1974). The diverse Mongoloid groups in course of time settled down in different crystallized into distinct entities, which are referred to as tribes today (Bhagabati, 1988; 1992).

The migration of people from ancient to present time and from various directions to north east India has significantly contributed towards the growth of ethnic diversities. Besides the tribal groups, a few other non-tribal groups have also come into existence as a consequence of prolong interactions between the cultures of the migrants and those of the indigenous people. Now the region is very complex with respect to tribal composition. There are 145 tribal communities of which 78 are large each with a population of more than 5000. They constitute around 12% of the total tribal population of India and 25.8% of the total population of north east India. The percentage of tribal population again varies significantly across the states of north east. Except Assam (about 13%), all other states are well above 30% of tribal population (See Table 1). The major tribes of this region are khyntriams, pnars, garos, mizos, karbis, mishings bodos, khasis and jaintia (Bhatt and Sachan, 2004). It is to be noted that except the missing who primarily live on the Banks of Brahmaputra and its major tributaries, all other groups are spatially widely distributed. The spread of Hinduism, invasions of different outside rulers at different historical periods, integration of the north eastern region with the rest of India in the nineteenth century and migrations that took place as late as the last century have resulted spectacular social, cultural, economic and political transformations in the region (Shimray, 2004; Ali and Das, 2003).

### *Strategic Location*

The north east India has strategic location in our country in terms of its international border. It has a common border with four foreign countries, namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar (Naik and Singh, 2003). This unique locational feature is not found in other landlocked states of India, even those that share international borders. The region is, however, internally locked, which is because of lack of easy access to their neighbors and extreme difficulties of mobility even within their own states (Prabhakra, 2004). The region has enough scope for regional cooperation. But critics says that trading between these countries with India is very limited and has taken place mainly through sea routes, which is several hundred times longer, costlier and

time consuming. Hence an ongoing effort of conducting trade pacts with neighboring countries could boost the exports of our country.

The region is gateway to Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), which is one of the fastest growing potential markets today and has proximities to the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries for growing international trade through South Asian Free Trade Area (SAPTA). Besides, the country has an ongoing regional cooperation, namely, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand- Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC). The cooperation has six identified areas such as trade and investment, energy, fisheries, tourism, technology and communication and transport for cooperation. Of these, first four sectors are among those where the region can have a good competitive advantage (Mohan, 2003). It is believed that one of the ways to remove its economic backwardness is through establishing the mutual cooperation among themselves and also through extensive bilateral trade with these six areas by taking full advantage of their geographical proximity. In this connection, it is suggested that a very substantial investment in infrastructure to improve connectivity of the region with the rest of India and with neighboring countries. Attention also needs to be paid to connectivity within the region and between villages and the main routes (Nathan, 2005).

The region is endowed with rich natural resources such as oil-based plants and natural gas and agro and forest-based products. This provides huge scope for oil based industries like agar wood oil, turpentine oil, cinnamon leaf oil, citronil oil, lemon grass oil and so on. These oils are particularly useful for cosmetics, varnishes and rubber. There are at least 120 known medical plants are available in the north-east India. A Well-planned utilization of these resources can be used for the promotion of medical plant based drugs and pharmaceutical industries. The region is blessed with variety of silkworms, mulberry, muga, tussar and eri. The silk fabrics of NER are already well known and fetch relatively high prices. The region is also full of mineral resources such as coal, limestone and dolomite along with hydro-energy resources. The region has a scope for varieties of food processing industries, which is due to its large-scale agricultural production and the availability of other forest based products. But this could be possible, if there is proper development of infrastructure in the region (Pradhan, 2005).

### ***Human Development***

The level of human development, which represents an average achievement of a state/ region with respect to education, health and command over resources, is substantially high in north east India. But it is not uniform across its states. While it is significantly high in Mizoram (0.552), Manipur (0.455) and Nagaland (0.515), it is somewhat low in Arunachal Pradesh (0.411), Sikkim (0.411) and Assam (0.362). There is also yawing gap between urban and rural areas. Human development in the rural areas of north east has been consistently lower than that of the urban areas. The rural-urban disparity index varied from a lowest figure of 0.113 in Manipur to the highest figure of 0.234 in Tripura. Contrary to popular perceptions, the status of women in the region is far

from being on an equal footing with that of men. Particularly gender disparity has been consistently very high in Tripura (0.531) and Assam (0.575); however, it was lower in Manipur (0.815) and Meghalaya (0.807). In short, the extent of gender disparity has been varying widely from one state to another state in the region (NHDR, 2001). Most interestingly, literacy percentage of NER, as per 2001, is quite high in the region, ranging from a low of 54.74% in Arunachal Pradesh to a high of 88.49% in Mizoram, as against country's average of 65.38%. Again female literacy is also substantially high in all states of NER except Arunachal Pradesh (44.2%) and above than that of country's average (Mohan, 2003). The health status of the region with respect to Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) is also better than that of all India. However the sex ratio of all the north east states is very close to all India average. While sex ratio is substantially high in Manipur, it is lower in Sikkim (See Table 2).

### *Poverty and Unemployment*

The region is very backward because of its high incidence of poverty and unemployment. Poverty exists both in the form of income as well as non-income like lack of skill, education and empowerment. The level of poverty is very low in Mizoram and Manipur only. The other states, however, have high incidence of poverty and above than that of country's average. There is also variation in rural-urban area (Ninagombam, 2007). While the level of poverty is high in rural area, it is low in urban area (Naik and Singh, 2003). Though the incidence of poverty in the north-east has exhibited a downward trend, it is substantially low in contrast to other states of the country.

The growth rate of employment has been declined in all states of north-east India except Assam during the period 1993-94 to 1999-2000 in contrast to 1983-84 to 1993-94. On the contrary, the incidence of unemployment was also higher than that of country's average of 2.3% during the period 1999-2000 (Mohan, 2003). This is because of various factors such as lack of infrastructure, low industrialization, lack of agricultural modernization, lack of empowerment and the militancy problems. It is believed that an adoption of appropriate strategies by the government in the area of employment generation may provide fruitful solution to poverty, unemployment and other socio-economic problems.

### *Immigrants*

It is substantial true that migration into north-east, in particular to Assam and Tripura, is on a considerable scale within a short span of time especially after independence and is a continuous process till today (Agarwal, 1994; Sebastian, 1986; Roy, 1970). It is observed that the estimates of the number of illegal migrants in Assam alone varies from 4-5 millions to 10-14 millions (Hazarika, 1992). However some authorities feel that the extent of illegal migration from Bangladesh to Assam and other north eastern states are grossly exaggerated in public debate (See Upadhyay, 2006). With the vast area of international boundaries, infiltration of people is very natural from the neighboring countries and has become very difficult to stop them. Fallout of this massive



influx of population has been that the region has opened up to radicalism and to a network of fundamentalist campaigns, which have access to arms and easy connections to sanctuaries across a porous international border. A new “front” has emerged to plague governance and peace in the north east and its ethnic and religious composition makes it difficult to comprehend and address. Islamic militant activities have begun to proliferate in the region with an agenda, which has religious fanaticism and division as important coordinates.

Usually people from neighboring countries come to north east for better means of living. But they are more or less uneducated and unskilled and hence, absorbed in agriculture and related sectors. It simply aggravates the pressure on agriculture and their only livelihood alternative is shifting cultivation in the catchments area, which causes environmental degradation (Bhaumick, 2003). Hence land encroachment by immigrants and the refusals of persons from outside the region to invest in productive jobs are at the basis of unrest. Sometimes, the conflict is around jobs, for instance, the Assamese-Bihari tension for 2000 railway jobs in November 2003 but in most cases it is around land, which is source of economic substance (Fernandes and Pereira, 2004) In saying that land and jobs are the basis of the conflicts, one can not simply the issue by calling it economic alone. The economic component is crucial but one cannot ignore the fact that, land and forests is the centre not only for the tribal economy but also of the culture, religious ethos and identity of tribals.

Given their symbiotic relationship with the land and the close link between natural resources and culture, the ethnic groups view the land shortages also an attack on their identity. Thus, they view conflicts around land as defense of their culture, identity and livelihood (Acharya, 1990). Generally the conflicts began with attacks on the outsiders and slowly turn into ethnic conflicts within the regions (Fernandes, 2004; 2005). In short, increased population through immigration caused serious impact on productive resources and the availability of needs of life (Hussain, 2004). It resulted in a phenomenon that is visibly reshaping and transforming the demographic, ethnic, linguistic and religious profile of large part of the region (Hazarika, 2000).

To summarize, the above-mentioned features of NER economy reflect that the states of north-east India are more or less backward and are due to various socio-economic factors. On the one side, the states of north-east India have several advantages, which have not yet exploited properly, and on the other side, the states of NER have their disadvantage too, which could not overcome yet despite several measures undertaken by respective state governments and also by the central governments. It is noted that the region is rural based and hence, its economic development by and large depends upon its rural development.

### **Strategy of Rural Development in NER**

The term ‘rural development’ represents a process of progressive improvement in economic securities of the people in the rural areas. That is with respect to increasing income and employment opportunities in the rural areas. Rural economy usually

consists of farm economy and non-farm economy and therefore, rural economy's development (or rural development) depends upon the development of both farm economy as well as non-farm economy. In fact, both are very interdependent to each other. The lack of one leads lack of other and that resulted overall degradation of rural development. The advocates of agriculture-led growth theories also visualize the importance of rural non-farm sector for stimulating agricultural growth through inter-sector linkages. Modern agriculture is based on strong forward and backward linkages with industry and other non-agricultural sectors, some of which may partly available in the rural areas themselves (Mellor, 1976). Similarly the converse is also equally true. That is the prospects of non-farm growth also critically hinges on the performance of agriculture (Hazell-Haggblade, 1990).

Farm economy consists of agriculture and its allied like animal husbandry, fisheries, poultry and forestry. On the contrary, non-farm economy comprises full spectrum of economic activities in the rural areas which are not directly associated with farm activities but can represent a very important part of rural income and employment and thus, raising the living standards of the rural population. These include mining, quarrying, manufacturing, utilities and construction, trade, transportation, communication and banking (Lanjouw and Lanjouw, 2001). So far as the development of farming economy is concerned, there is need of agricultural modernization, diversification (specific stress of commercial crops, horticulture, medicinal and aromatic plants and floriculture), strengthening capital formation, agro-processing, post-harvesting management, growth of agri-infrastructure and must be integrated with non-farm sectors.

The growth of non-farm economy, on the other hand, depends on industrialization, modernization, urbanization and growth of socio-economic infrastructure in the rural economy. In addition to above, there is need of stress on: natural resources management, information technology, biotechnology, exports, women's participation, synergizing the efforts of governmental and non-governmental agencies and different programmes and policies of the government (Nongkynrih, 2005). In the subsequent section, the paper just highlight the major ongoing rural development programmes in the north east and their status thereof. As you know the Ministry of Rural Development (Government of India) plays a key role in the development of rural economy in the entire country, including the north-east economy. The Ministry has many programmes under implementation and these programmes can be put into three broad groups, viz., wage employment programmes, self-employment programmes and infrastructural development programmes (Ningombam, 2007; Naik and Singh, 2003). The brief outlines of these programmes are as follows:

#### ***Wage Employment Programmes***

Under the wage employment programmes, Sampoorna Gramin Yojana (SGRY), Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGRY) and Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) are most celebrated one. These programmes are mostly for the rural poor at the village, block and panchayat levels respectively. In fact, JGSY and EAS have been merged

with the SGRY in the year 2002. The primary objective of SGRY is to provide additional wage employment opportunities to the rural poor and so provides them income securities, food securities and nutritional securities.

The secondary objective of this programme is creation of durable community, social and economic assets as well as infrastructural development in the rural areas. Most importantly, wage employment programmes (including SGRY) are self-targeting in nature; that means these programmes are generally open to all poor, who are in need of wage employment and willing to work at a prescribed minimum wage. These programmes are envisaged to give preference to women, including SC/ST and parents of child labour withdrawn from hazardous occupation.

### ***Self Employment Programmes***

Under the major ongoing self-employment programmes, Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) is major one. It includes the restructuring of erstwhile Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and its allied programmes along with Million Wells Scheme (MWS). The primary objective of SGSY is to assist the poor, who are selected for assistance under the programme, through bank credit and subsidy to take up sustainable self-employment. Assistance can also be provided to individual poor or/and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of poor. The programme is different from the earlier programmes in terms of its focus on approach to poverty alleviation and the strategy to capitalize on advantages of group lending and also overcome the problems associated with multiplicity of the programmes. The SGSY has been conceived as a holistic programme for development of micro enterprises in rural areas. It is a credit-cum-subsidy programme and credit is a critical component along with subsidy is considered to be least. This covers all aspects of self-employment such as organization of rural poor into SHGs and their capacity building, planning of activity clusters, infrastructure build-up and technology, credit and marketing support. The programmes also envisage involvement of various agencies such as banks, Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs), Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), Grass Roots Organizations (GROs) and other semi government organizations in its implementation.

### ***Infrastructure Development Programmes***

Under the infrastructural development programmes in the rural areas, SGRY plays a critical role. Its basic objective is to create rural infrastructure like rural transport (roads), power, housing and sanitation. There are two other programmes, viz., Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP) and Central Rural Sanitation Programmes (CRSP), which are meant for safe drinking water and better hygienic living in the rural areas. Another such programmes for rural infrastructure development in the rural areas are Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), Bharat Nirman, and Provision of Rural Amenities in the Rural Areas (PURA) model (See Pradhan, 2006). Among them, PMGSY is very popular in north eastern states. It is a 100% centrally funded rural development programmes. Its aim is to provide all weather road connectivity with all unconnected habitations with population above 500 persons in the rural areas.

Additionally there are also the availability of other infrastructure developmental programmes such as Integrated Watershed Development Projects (IWDP), Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) and Desert Development Programme (DDP). The latter two are, however, meant for watershed development in drought prone and the desert areas and not under the implementation in north-east India. There are rural housing schemes like Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana (PMGY), Gramin Awaas (GA) and Credit-Cum-Subsidy Scheme (CCSS). Under these schemes, rural families having annual income up to Rs. 32000 are provided assistance, which comprises subsidy up to Rs. 10000 and loan up to Rs. 40000, for the construction of their houses. The Samagra Awaas Yojana (SAY) is another component of rural housing and is a comprehensive scheme for integrated provision of shelter, sanitation and drinking water. The scheme, at present, is under implementation in one block each of 25 districts of 24 states and one union territory.

There are also innovative scheme for rural housing and habitat development component of rural housing for promotion and propagation of innovative technologies, materials and methods for cost effective and environment friendly habitat development on a project basis. It could be mentioned that up to Ninth Five Year Plan, the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) was also an important programme, which was implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development with components of Old Age Pension, National Family Benefit Scheme (for assistance to a poor family in case of death of main bread winner of the family) and National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS).

### **Present Scenario of Rural Development Programmes in NER**

In this section, we highlight the present scenario of rural development in the north-east India. During Ninth Five Year Plan, the total central allocation available to the north-east states under various rural development programmes was Rs. 4164.03 crores (See Table 4). Against this, the states were able to avail Rs. 3647.96 crores, which was at a satisfactory 87.6% level of central allocation. The opportunities are available to other states, except Assam, Manipur and Meghalaya, to utilize more than 80% of the available funds, which can be broadly considered as satisfactory keeping in view the difficult situation in these states. Table 3 represents the state-wise details of funds available and utilized by the states during the Ninth Five Year Plan under various rural development and poverty alleviation programmes. A comparable physical achievement is attempted with the available information from 1999-2000 to 2001-02 under some major rural development programmes (See Table 5). It is observed that only 50% of the targeted dwelling units could be constructed under the Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) and similarly under Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), the aggregate achievement is 70% of the target. Under Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP), the achievement was about 87% of the target and is fairly satisfactory. At the state level, these programmes are very satisfactory only in Assam, Manipur and Meghalaya. This is probably due to better management by the concerned state governments.

**Table 3**  
**Selected Gender Disparity indicators: North-Eastern states**

States	Demographic, Survival Factors			Health: Anaemia		Education	Rural Female Work Participation			Private Decision Making	Crimes against Women		
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	k	L	m
Mizoram	19.5	971	932	12.8	35.2	4.6	31.7	44.0	73.2	64.2	26.4	176	1
Manipur	28.5	961	981	7.1	21.7	18.2	30.8	25.3	43.3	28.6	59.0	29	3
Nagaland	32.7	975	899	9.7	27.8	9.9	21.6	44.1	69.4	17.3	17.8	11	5
AP	33.5	961	888	11.9	50.6	19.8	40.9	31.0	70.0	46.8	46.4	148	7
Meghalaya	33.9	975	974	29.9	33.4	5.7	49.3	41.8	78.9	46.5	40.7	25	2
Tripura	34.4	975	947	16.3	43.0	16.1	12.8	7.3	51.2	27.4	37.7	98	6
Assam	36.1	964	956	26.5	43.2	15.9	15.9	15.1	65.1	13.2	40.0	138	8
Sikkim	36.5	986	858	23.8	37.3	15.3	19.8	24.1	60.2	38.2	69.8	56	4
All India	26.1	927	934	16.7	35.0	24.5	32.8	29.9	51.6	31.6	41.1	127	—

Note: A: Below Poverty Level; B: Child Sex Ratio; C: Sex Ratio above Six Years; D: Severe and Moderate Anaemia (in %); E: Mid Anaemia (in %); F: Gender Gap in Literacy; G: Rural Female Work Participation Rate (in 1993-94); H: Rural Female Work Participation Rate (in 1993-94); I: Involved in Decisions on Own Health; J: Freedom to Go to Market; K: Freedom to Decide about Own Earnings; L: Recorded Cases per Million Population; M: Composite Gender Rank.

Source: Krishna, 2005.

**Table 4**  
**State-wise Central Allocation, Release and Utilization of  
 Funds under Various Rural Development Programmes during the Ninth Plan**

$X_1$	$X_2$	$X_3$	$X_4$	$X_5$	$X_6$
AP	369.1	326.65	561.27	462.93	82.48
Assam	2352.23	1936.63	3258.21	2256.33	69.25
Manipur	279.82	192.74	321.65	210.67	65.50
Meghalaya	279.41	238.88	416.86	326.45	78.31
Mizoram	161.70	174.83	250.88	224.32	89.41
Nagaland	251.89	246.27	373.43	330.41	88.48
Tripura	352.85	400.05	599.37	557.09	92.95
Sikkim	117.03	131.91	209.03	168.54	80.63
Total	4146.03	3647.96	5990.70	4536.74	75.73

Note:  $X_1$ : Name of the States;  $X_2$ : Central Allocation;  $X_3$ : Central Release;  $X_4$ : Total Available Funds;  $X_5$ : Total Funds Utilized;  $X_6$ : Percentage of Utilization; AP: Arunachal Pradesh; and all figures are in crores.

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

It is to be noted here that an important area of concern for the states of north-east is that their inability to avail the entire amount of the central government share under various programmes. The aggregate position of availing the central share of funds under various programmes appears to be fairly satisfactory. But the programme-wise position of north-eastern states appears somewhat different. Table 6 shows the position of availing central share of funds by the individual north-east states under some major programmes during 1999-2000 to 2001-02. The figures reflect that most of the states

are not able to avail the entire central share under the various programmes. The status of Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) again appears to be precarious in all the states of north-east except Tripura and Sikkim. The performance of Assam, Manipur and Meghalaya needs to be substantially improved in these decisive poverty alleviation programmes. Among them, Assam being the largest state in terms of central allocation share and this is substantially true under all the rural development programmes.

**Table 5**  
**State-wise Physical Targets and Achievements under Various Rural Development Schemes in North Eastern States During 1999-2002**

X	IAY		SGSY		JGSY		EAS		ARWSP	
	T	A	T	A	T	A	T	A	T	A
AP	0.14	0.12	0.00	0.06	0.00	21.08	31.99	51.19	2.41	0.81
Assam	3.21	1.32	0.00	0.46	0.00	472.4	689	427.2	38.38	36.75
Manipur	0.15	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.64	34.4	13.67	3.52	1.39
Meghalaya	0.22	0.09	0.00	0.11	0.00	31.22	48.99	20.23	2.48	1.85
Mizoram	0.05	0.05	0.00	0.05	0.00	10.42	7.38	16.69	4.29	5.60
Nagaland	0.14	0.17	0.00	0.07	0.00	25.41	46.86	44.4	2.83	1.60
Tripura	0.31	0.33	0.00	0.44	0.00	69.39	78.24	80.96	4.34	3.63
Sikkim	0.03	0.04	0.00	0.05	0.00	10.08	10.95	12.85	1.51	0.58
Total	4.26	2.13	0.00	1.25	0.00	646.67	947.8	667.2	59.76	52.21

Note : X: Name of the States; IAY: Indira Awas Yojana; SGSY: Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana; JGSY: Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana; EAS: Employment Assurance Scheme; ARWSP: Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme; T: Targets; A: Achievements; and all figures are in lakh rupees.

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

**Table 6**  
**State-wise Central Allocation and Releases under Major Rural Development Schemes in North Eastern States During 2001-2002**

X <sub>i</sub>	IAY		SGSY		JGSY		EAS		ARWSP	
	CA	CR	CA	CR	CA	CR	CA	CR	CA	CR
AP	20.36	18.89	5.79	2.97	11.81	10.67	11.52	21.24	117.9	70.93
Assam	445.0	306.18	150.3	69.9	306.9	172.8	299.2	234.7	200.8	138.8
Manipur	22.22	8.37	10.07	1.57	20.58	10.46	20.05	13.11	40.25	8.22
Meghalaya	30.87	15.91	11.29	2.39	23.06	17.32	22.47	15.56	46.03	37.92
Mizoram	7.47	7.23	2.61	1.85	5.34	6.03	5.19	9.19	32.53	35.66
Nagaland	22.64	20.17	7.75	3.47	15.81	14.29	15.41	13.75	34.74	32.69
Tripura	43.98	48.05	18.19	19.7	37.15	40.01	36.20	35.92	47.12	59.80
Sikkim	4.73	4.57	2.88	2.87	5.90	6.68	5.77	9.77	22.55	26.76
Total	597.3	429.4	208.9	104.7	426.6	278.3	415.8	353.2	541.9	410.7

Note: CA: Central Allocation; CR: Central Releases; all figures are in crores rupees; and other notations are already defined earlier.

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

In response to Prime Ministers Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), which is meant for the development of rural roads, the available information suggest that the states of NER are able to avail 96.12% of central allocation (Rs. 268.49 crores out of Rs. 279.12 crores) in the year 2000-01. However, in the subsequent year, they availed 146% (Rs. 309.63 crores against original allocation of Rs. 270 crores) of the central allocation. The utilization of available fund during the two years was reported to be 89.71% and 58.78% respectively. With regards to the physical progress of PMGSY is concerned, available information suggests that a concrete picture is yet to emerge for a meaningful assessment of the achievements (Naik and Singh, 2003).

### **Impact Assessment of Rural Development Programmes in NER**

The Ministry of Rural Development has recently initiated an impact assessment exercise of its programmes in each district by assigning studies to independent agencies. The districts are being covered by the studies in stages. In this context, some studies were also carried out in north-eastern states and the report indicated that the impact of these rural development programmes are mixed. The studies have taken note of the direct benefits of the programmes like IAY and ARWSP and assets created under EAS and JGSY. The benefits under NSAP, shows some positive impact on the standard of living of the rural poor. However, the continuation of bureaucratic management of the programmes is still there in spite of emphasis given by the Ministry to involve people in their implementation. The other problems are lack of awareness among the people about the programmes, lack of transparency in their management and implementation, involvement of middleman and contractors and the flow of benefits to ineligible cases. In short, there is mixed reactions (in terms of benefits and failures) of rural development programmes in north east. In the benefits side, the following few instances are as follows:

- There is improvement in housing and other sanitary facilities under IAY.
- There is increase of income of selected beneficiaries. This is reported that an increase of monthly income by Rs. 300 per month due to EAS.
- There have been sourcing of drinking water from wells prior to benefits under ARWSP.
- There is reduction of poverty. It is reported that beneficiaries have crossed the poverty line due to wage employment and self-employment programme and benefits under IAY.
- All in all, the beneficiaries, because of the all rural developmental programmes, have better access to health and educational facilities, improvement in the quality of life and have developed greater self-confidence and security in life including improvement in economic status and social reorganization.

Simultaneously, the same impact valuation studies also revealed that quality of implementation of programmes has not been up to their potential and could be seen from the following instances (Naik and Singh, 2003):

### ***Impact Evaluation of Tinsukia district of Assam***

There is lack of transparency and involvement of the people in the implementation of the programmes and their lack of awareness. The impact of EAS in terms of generating wage employment for the rural poor in the time of distress has reduced over the years. The total employment generated was reduced from 2.08 lakh man-days in 1998-99 to 0.18 lakh man-days in 1999-2000. One important reason for this is EAS was earlier a demand driven programme with block-wise entitlement of fund. From 1999-2000, it becomes allocation based reducing the district share of central fund under the scheme. The other reason was inability of the district to avail the central share. This is probably due to weak government or lack of governmental interest in the state. During 1999-2000, the district was able to avail only Rs. 47.01 lakh against Rs. 58.78 lakh i.e. 79.98% of the central funds under EAS. Further, the district is not able to utilize the available funds under major rural development programmes like EAS and JGSY. The other problems are lack of record/account of works undertaken under SGSY, lack of practical support to beneficiaries under SGSY (i.e. in terms of technology, promotion of products, marketing, etc.), lack of transparency in the selection of beneficiaries, and there is also involvement of middle man in selection of beneficiaries and construction of IAY houses.

### ***Impact Evaluation in West Garo Hill District, Meghalaya***

The Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAPs) have limited coverage for BPL families. Regrettably, except some rural development programmes, investment through other regular department is not visible here. Therefore, the process of economic growth is negligible. Investment in basic infrastructure is also very poor. Furthermore, there is concerted attempt for developing marketing network and also the middleman continue to exploit the rural producers primarily taking advantage of the transport bottleneck. In such a situation, the expectation of any tangible result from the poverty alleviation programmes is not satisfactory.

### ***Impact Evaluation in Dhalai District of Tripura***

There is lack of rural infrastructure. A sizeable proportion of villagers do not have any facilities of high school or adult education centers. Similarly facilities of health, credit, transport and communication are not present in majority of the villages. The same remarks are obtained from impact evaluation in Zunheboto district of Nagaland. However, it is believed that these programmes can have better impact, if there is proper monitoring in each and every plan. Proper use of funds and material benefits given to beneficiaries under any scheme must be ensured to make the scheme successful.

### ***Issues raised by States***

While the scenario attempted above might briefly summarize the problems and prospects of all rural development and poverty alleviation programmes, the States in the NE region have their own version of the problem, which they encounter in implementing these programmes. There are many issues, which are being raised by



the states frequently. It would be worthwhile to take note of the issues relevant to rural development programmes are as follows: First, the state-matching share against the central share under various programmes should be reduced from existing 75:25 to 90:10 between the center and the state.

Second, there should be relaxation in the guidelines, particularly under the self-employment programme of SGSY, as per the situations in the region. The issue of inability of the NE states to mobilize adequate resources and provide matching grant against the central releases is being raised again and again. Accordingly, an Inter-Ministerial Committee was constituted in 2002. The resolution of the rural development ministers stated that owing to poor resource base and very low capability of resource mobilization the committee reiterate its earlier demand for sharing of funds between the centre and state on the basis of 90:10 and not 75:25. The Inter-Ministerial Committee felt that considering their special category status, and the decision taken in the Ministry of Textiles (Ministry of Textiles have agreed to 90:10 basis of sharing of funds between center and state under their programme), there is a case for agreeing to the change in the funding pattern from 75:25 to 90:10. However, this could be equally applicable to similarly placed states in other parts of the country as well. The matter in this respect is reportedly under examination by the Government of India. The committee has also taken note that it is the problem not because of lack of resources but absence of meaningful programmes, which urgently needs to be addressed.

The committee recommended State Specific Approach for all development programmes and reiterated the immediate need for formulation and implementation of composite and integrated projects, which build upon the base of an existing resource. The Committee re-emphasized the need for adequate interaction between different agencies and organizations dealing with development of NE region as well as their coordination with the state governments of the region. Some other important recommendations of the committee relevant to rural development programmes are as follows:

- Building, strengthening, mainstreaming and utilizing Village Community Organizations (VCOs) in rural development programmes.
- Proper and careful formulation of programmes, development of awareness about the programme and transparency in their implementation.
- There is need of focused, imaginative and determined interventions in transportation and marketing.
- Evolving an effective monitoring mechanism for better implementation of schemes.

The Ministry of Rural Development is understood to have taken/is taking appropriate action on the recommendation of the Committee, keeping in view the requirement of these states. One important instance, in this respect, is relaxation of size of the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) under the SGSY to five members in difficult and sparsely populated areas (as against 10 to 20 persons prescribed earlier) and restoration

of provision of stipend to trainees under the SGSY. Furthermore, to ensure specific initiatives to north-east states, a North Eastern Cell (NEC) headed by officer of the level of Joint secretary has been set up in the Ministry of Rural Development, to coordinate, review and monitor all rural development programmes in the region.

## CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The problems of north-eastern states are by and large composite and complex. Problems relate to both restoration of peace and order as well as stepping up of pace of development. In fact, they are complementary to each other in the region. Therefore rural development programmes can have a significant role in the region. Area Specific Project Approach can be an appropriate long run solution to the problem. Accordingly, it has also to be an important item for formulation and implementation of development agenda in the north-east region during current and the subsequent Five Year Plans. Meanwhile the basic issues that need to be addressed should relate to how to improve the quality of implementation of on-going rural development and poverty alleviation programmes. The review of the progress of the programmes and impact evaluation studies that have been attempted earlier together with the benefits that one derives from the Lalit Mathur Committee would suggest a seven-fold action for bringing about improvement in the quality of implementation of these programmes, which are as follows (Naik and Singh, 2003):

### *Efforts for Utilization of available funds*

There is immediate need for north-eastern states to gear up their field level implementing agencies for better utilization of the funds so as to enable each state to avail the entire central share of funds under each programme in time. The system of quarterly targeting prescribed by the Ministry of Rural Development for utilization of funds can be handy and should be adhered to each state immediately. Involvement of Non-government Organizations (NGOs) with established reputation in specific areas may be useful to the states to step up the implementation of the programmes.

### *Timely Release of State Matching Share*

The states need to have adequate budgetary provision to provide state matching grant against the central share of funds under each programme. Inability by state to avail entire central share of funds under various programmes is very often attributed to their inability to provide the matching grant.

### *Awareness Development among the People*

Development of awareness among the people about the programmes is an important area, which needs immediate attention. Awareness is an important weapon to curtail possible irregularities by the implementing agencies. It is also essential to have intensive campaigning and dissemination of information about the programmes through

electronic media (radio and TV) in local language and through conventional and non-conventional systems like advertisement in vernacular newspaper, local songs, dance, drama, poster, display on boards, etc.

#### ***Involvement of People/Village Community Organizations***

People(s) involvement is another important area for improving the quality of implementation of the programmes. The north-eastern states have special attribute in terms of organizations of Village Communities along with tribal traditions, which can present a unique and remarkable opportunity for peoples' participation and development of the area. Such organizations should be encouraged and activated with adequate support, wherever necessary.

#### ***Convergence of the efforts of the Organizations/Agencies/Departments***

Implementation of related and complementary programmes in isolation has proved in time that achievements can never be optimum. On the other hand, there are recurring instances of complete failure of such programmes because of isolated implementations. It is, therefore, highly essential that there have to be a convergence of such programmes both at the agencies/organizations/departments as well as implementation level in order to optimize their achievements and impact.

#### ***Transparency in Implementation***

Besides these awareness campaigns, as indicated earlier, peoples involvement in the implementation is an important tool to ensure transparency in implementation of the programmes. The selection of the beneficiaries, to be truly effective, ought to have the mandate of Village Communities towards this goal, it is essential to activate the village Community Organizations (VCO)/Gram Panchayats/Gram Sabha to approve the selection of beneficiaries. People should be aware of the schemes and their guidelines. Important details of schemes and all beneficiaries selected should be displayed prominently at the office of the VCO/Gram Panchayats as well as Block office. Details regarding estimated cost and material and wage components etc. including progress should also be displayed at each work site.

#### ***Qualitative Monitoring***

A consistent system wise monitoring of all these programmes should be in place. Such a system should include, besides periodic reporting, regular field visits and physical verification of assets and infrastructure created by officers at various level. The inspection report/field visit notes should also be discussed at various levels and corrective measures should be taken, wherever necessary. The Ministry of Rural Development and the states should strengthen their "Area Officers" Scheme. The Ministry has already introduced a system of qualitative monitoring of the programmes through independent agencies in selected districts. This system is also to be strengthened. In order to ensure the quality reporting by these agencies, a system of

sample check at the field level by designated teams comprising government functionaries and peoples' representatives may also be necessary.

Over and above, the states themselves have to play a pro-active role against the central dependency that they have been displaying so far. Each state has to identify its thrust areas and formulate district-wise suitable perspective plan for long-term focus on the rural areas and the rural poor. Government of India should emphasize this with proper caution. A piece-meal approach to such a vital issue is of serious consequences. What is required is that there is need of production oriented projects and their formulation should be based on local needs, local skills and local resources as well as demand potentials i.e. marketability of products both within and outside of the region. There is also an immediate need to gear up the implementing machinery of rural development programmes in the region. It is rightly said that the rural development programmes should no more be treated in isolation as sectoral programmes. The potential of the programmes to contribute to economic growth and their potential to change the standard of living of the poor in the region has to be strongly recognized.

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