

Implementation of Rural Development Programmes in North Eastern States: A Discussion ¹

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Development of rural areas of north-east is sine qua non for the overall development of the region, as most of its people live in rural areas and agriculture is the mainstay of life. Mizoram is of course little different where almost 50 percent of its people live in urban areas (Table-1).

Table 1: Percentage of Rural Population in North-Eastern States in 2001

Name of the state	% of Rural Population
1. Arunachal Pradesh	79.80
2. Assam	87.30
3. Manipur	69.98
4. Meghalaya	70.06
5. Mizoram	50.60
6. Nagaland	82.30
7. Sikkim	88.90
8. Tripura	83.10
9. All India	72.20

Source: Population Census, 2001

Rural northeastern states are characterized with comparatively high poverty ratio. With rich natural and mineral resources, in fact no states in the region should have poverty as in our

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country poverty is determined based on calorie value of food. If any person does not get minimum calorie value of food, the person is considered as living below the Poverty Line (BPL).

Poverty in North-East:

The magnitude in India even after 50 years of plan period is a matter of concern as still 28 per cent of our rural population lives below the poverty line. The problem is conspicuous in north-eastern states of India particularly in rural areas as latest figure shows 22.3 percent population is Below the Poverty Line (BPL hence BPL will be used) in these states.

Majority of the BPL families in rural areas of our country as well as in the states of northeast belong to small and marginal farmers, share-croppers, artisans and landless agricultural labourers. Since these people are not economically well-off so they need interalia, financial support to improve their economic condition. With the development of rural people rural development can be achieved. In the context of rural development United Nation Centre for Regional Development's (UNCRD 1985) definition of may be quoted here, "(It) no longer means agricultural development alone. It is also not a social welfare case of pumping money into rural areas to provide for basic human needs. It encompasses a spectrum of activities and human mobilization to make people stand on their own feet and break away from all the structural disabilities which chain them to the condition in which they may live." Rural development, therefore aims at transforming rural life of rural population particularly BPL families.

To determine BPL families one of the important criteria is calorie norm – a rural person requires 2400 calorie of food value per day and for an urban person, requirement is 2100 calorie per day. The concepts itself clarifies that a person is in the BPL category if minimum food value is not provided which in a country like India is unthinkable. Based on the norm, income criterion has been adopted in the country for rural and urban areas separately, which in turn leads to determine BPL in absolute and relative terms.

For eradication of poverty from rural areas, time to time poverty alleviation programmes were systematically launched from late 1970s in India by creation of self and wage employment. Over the years, impact of the programmes was realized as poverty ratio in the states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Kerala has declined substantially in recent years, but not much achievement is found in the states of north east. For example in Andhra Pradesh, during

1973-74, 48 per cent of rural population was below poverty line which declined to 11 percent in 2004-05 per Uniform Recall Period (URP) consumption data. On the other hand, the decline in the rural poverty ratio in the north-eastern states is not very significant (Table-2). It is pertinent to mention here that poverty data for different states of north east is based on survey carried out in Assam, thus Assam data of BPL is taken into consideration for other states of the region. Since social, cultural and economic conditions of different states are totally different, so it is suggested that survey should be carried out in all the states of the region to get an actual picture of BPL population.

Table-2: Rural Poverty in the States of North Eastern Region

State	1973-74	1977-78	1983	1987-88	1993-94	1999-2000	2004-05 (Based on URP data)
1. Arunachal Pradesh	52.70	59.80	42.60	39.40	45.01	40.04	22.30
2. Assam	52.70	59.80	42.60	39.40	45.01	40.04	22.30
3. Manipur	52.70	59.80	42.60	39.40	45.01	40.04	22.30
4. Meghalaya	52.70	59.80	42.60	39.40	45.01	40.04	22.30
5. Mizoram	52.70	59.80	42.60	39.40	45.01	40.04	22.30
6. Nagaland	52.70	59.80	42.60	39.40	45.01	40.04	22.30
7. Sikkim	52.70	59.80	42.60	39.40	45.01	40.04	22.30
8. Tripura	52.70	59.80	42.60	39.40	45.01	40.04	22.30
9. All India	56.40	53.10	45.60	39.10	37.27	27.09	28.30

Source: Compiled from Rural Development Statistics, 1998 and 2002-03, NIRD, Hyderabad and Planning Commission.

Striking feature of the table is that poverty ratio in the states of north east has gone up in 1993-94 than the preceding years – 1983 and 1987-88. Against this backdrop, poverty ratio at all India level has come down, even in the states like Andhra Pradesh the ratio has come down, substantially (in 1993-94, rural poverty ratio was 15.92). Naturally question is coming why this fluctuating trend in poverty ratio in the north east states, when All India data has fallen steadily and same is the case for states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka etc. There may be many reasons for this but two important reasons inter alia may be attributed to high growth rate of population and lack of utilization of fund under centrally sponsored programmes meant for rural poverty

alleviation/ rural development. To substantiate the facts, in the next section detail discussions are made with facts and figures.

Population Growth Rate in the Region:

Growth rate of population in the states of north east is presented in table-3. Impact of rural development programmes will be neutralized if population growth rate is not controlled, so urgent attention is required in this regard.

Table-3: Demographic profile of North Eastern Region

State	1951-61	1961-71	1971-81	1981-91	1991-2001
1. Arunachal Pradesh	---	38.91	35.15	35.86	26.21
2. Assam	34.98	34.95	23.36	23.58	18.85
3. Manipur	35.04	37.53	32.46	28.56	30.02
4. Meghalaya	27.03	31.50	32.04	31.80	29.94
5. Mizoram	35.61	24.93	48.55	38.98	64.41
6. Nagaland	14.07	39.88	50.05	56.86	64.41
7. Sikkim	17.76	29.38	50.77	28.47	32.98
8. Tripura	78.71	36.28	31.92	33.69	15.74
9. All India	21.51	24.80	24.66	23.50	21.34

Source: Compiled from NE Region at a Glance, North Eastern Council, 1991 and Rural Development Statistics (2002-03), NIRD, and Hyderabad.

The table reveals that growth rate of population during 1991-2001 is higher than national average in all the states of north-east except Assam and Tripura. Against this backdrop in the states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu decadal growth of population is around 10 per cent in 1991-2001. It may be mentioned here that Social Development index (Rural) based on 2001, Kerala has been ranked as 1 against the rank of Assam as 12, although Assam is endowed with huge natural, mineral and manpower resources.

The high growth rate of population is a matter of concern for north eastern states as projected data for north eastern states for the period 1997-2012 has been worked out as 2.05 per cent(except Assam 1.39%) against all India average of 1.45 per cent (RDS 2002-03).

Implementation of Major Programmes in NE Region:

Regarding utilization of funds under centrally sponsored rural development programmes, a few cases may be cited here. For example, erstwhile Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP continued up to 1999), and present programmes like Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana (SGSY), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), and Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) which are important rural development programmes are critically analyzed here with reference to north-eastern states.

Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDP) in North Eastern States:

Integrated Rural Development Programme, popularly known as IRDP, was launched in all the blocks of the country as well as in northeastern states from 1980. It was meant for rural BPL households assisting through bank credit and government subsidy for taking up income generation activities. In the initial phase, that is, during Sixth Plan, utilization of fund in the states of north-east (out of total fund meant for IRDP) was low. Even states like Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya could not spend 50 per cent fund during entire Sixth Plan period, however, over a period of time the utilization rate was increased to some extent.

Table-4 Percentage utilization of fund under IRDP in Sixth Plan onwards and far different years

State	Sixth Plan	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99
1. Arunachal Pradesh	45.0	61.0	74.0	68.0	66.0	66.0	81.0	74.0
2. Assam	90.0	87.0	101.0	56.0	74.0	113.0	81.0	25.0
3. Manipur	45.0	86.0	98.0	86.0	75.0	69.0	74.0	0.0
4. Meghalaya	28.0	87.0	74.0	86.0	65.0	73.0	67.0	70.0
5. Mizoram	59.0	99.0	98.0	96.0	97.0	147.0	85.0	98.0
6. Nagaland	85.0	84.0	102.0	85.0	50.0	73.0	59.0	0.0
7. Sikkim	73.0	105.0	82.0	74.0	74.0	120.0	82.0	82.0
8. Tripura	111.0	67.0	64.0	117.0	80.0	94.0	90.0	82.0
9. All India	94.0	88.0	83.0	75.0	77.0	81.0	81.0	78.0

Source: Compiled from various Annual Reports of Ministry of Rural Development and Basic Rural Statistics (2001), Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

IRDP along with five other programmes viz. DWCRA, TRYSEM, SITRA, GKY and MWS were merged together in 1999, 1st April. And a new self employment programme has been launched in the

country, known as Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY). Progress of Programme in the context of north east is discussed below.

Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY):

Before discussing SGSY, a few salient features of SGSY are presented here. SGSY has been in operation since 1st April, 1999. It is a holistic programme covering all aspects of self employment for rural BPL population.

(i) **Objective:** To bring rural BPL families above the poverty line by ensuring appreciable increase in income on a sustainable basis through creation of income generating assets.

(ii) **Component of SGSY:** SGSY is a major on-going scheme to bring the assisted rural poor families (Swarojgaris) above the poverty line by providing them income generating assets through a mix of bank credit and government subsidy. The scheme involves organization of the poor into Self Help Groups (SHGs) and building their capacities through social mobilization, training and skill development, selection of key activities, planning of activity clusters, creation of infrastructure, technological and marketing support, etc. The scheme is implemented through District Rural Development Agencies (RDAs) with active involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs, banks, line Departments of the state governments and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs).

SGSY is a credit-linked programme where credit is the key component and subsidy is the enabling element. Besides giving loan to the Swarojgaris, Banks play key roles in every stage of implementation of the scheme. Banks are involved in the selection of Swarojgaris, identification of key activities, planning of preparation of the projects, infrastructure, planning, capacity building, pre credit activities and post credit monitoring. Banks can also act as a facilitator. Self Help Group-promoting Institution and help in formation & development of the SHGs. Subsidy under the SGSY to individual Swarojgaris is uniform as 30 per cent of the project cost, subject to a maximum of Rs. 7500. In case of SCs/STs and disabled persons, the subsidy is 50 per cent of the project cost, subject to a maximum of Rs. 10,000. For groups of Swarojgaris (SHGs), the subsidy is 50 per cent of the project cost, subject to per capita subsidy of Rs. 10,000 per cent of total subsidy of Rs. 1.25 lakh, whichever is less. There is no monetary limit on subsidy for irrigation projects, subsidy is back-ended. Special safeguards have been provided to vulnerable

sections by way of reserving 50 per cent benefits for SCs/STs, 40 per cent for women, 15 per cent for minorities and 3 per cent for disabled persons.

SGSY also has the provisions of taking up special projects in the area where it is felt that BPL families are required to be brought above the poverty line in a time-bound manner. Further, these projects are implemented with a view to providing a base for different models of generation for self employment and enhancing the income generation capacity of rural poor. The projects are designed in such a way that their conceptual consistency, social and economic potential, bankability, technology marketability etc. are provided and they can be replicated under normal SGSY or by people themselves through their own initiative. 15 per cent of funds under SGSY are kept aside for these special projects. Under SGSY, marketing of the products of Self Help Groups are also taken care of. Regular SARAS Melas are organized for this purpose. Permanent facilities for display and sale of the products of the rural artisans have been created in Delhi at different centers.

Methodology

- Selection of key activities
- Project based on cluster based approach
- Organizing rural poor into Self Help Groups (SHGs)
- Capacity building, infrastructure support, technology and marketing
- Financial assistance through a mix of bank credit and Government subsidy.
 - * Revolving fund (for Grade I Groups)
 - * Economic assistance (for Grade II Groups)
- * Emphasis on vulnerable sections (50% SC/ST, 40% women, 15% minorities and 3% disabled)
- * Special Projects (15 per cent of central allocation)

Funding Pattern

It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme financed on 75: 25 cost sharing basis between the Centre and the States, except in the case of North Eastern states where it is 90: 10 basis.

Physical Achievements

Under SGSY 31.72 lakh groups have been formed under the scheme since its inception in April, 1999 to November 2008. Of this, more than 111 lakh Swarojgaris have been assisted, (Gram Vikas)

The funding of SGSY which was earlier shared between the Centre and the North East States in the ratio of 75:25 has now been revised to the ratio of 90:10. Against the Central allocation of Rs. 22000.00 lakh during 2008-09, only Rs. 21693.22 lakh could be released to NE States. The actual expenditure is Rs. 20867.42 lakh with utilization level being 74.14 percent. In Nagaland (27.27%), Arunachal Pradesh (32.99%), Meghalaya (38.81%) and Manipur (46.00%) the utilization level is low. On the other hand, in Mizoram (94.46%), Tripura (78.25%) and Assam (77.33%) the utilization is relatively better. The physical achievement in terms of the number of Swarojgaris assisted is 169805 against the target of 176333. The state-wise summary of financial progress during 2008-09 is given below.

Table: 5 Financial Progresses 2008-09 under SGSY (Rs. in lakh)

	States	Total fund Available	Utilization of Funds	Percentage Utilization
1	2	3	4	5
1	Arunachal Pradesh	495.99	163.63	32.99
2	Assam	22625.08	17496.75	77.33
3	Manipur	440.85	202.79	46.00
4	Meghalaya	633.03	245.65	38.81
5	Mizoram	336.2	317.58	94.46
6	Nagaland	659.31	179.79	27.27
7	Sikkim	465.2	316.77	68.09
8	Tripura	2411.76	1887.26	78.25
	All India	300305.00	228540.00	76.10

Source: Annual Report 2008-09, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

Some of the other important issues related to SGSY in the states of the region during 2008-09 are (Background Note of PDs Conference, 2010):

Arunachal Pradesh:

- Against the norm of 10 percent fund meant for training and skill development only 8.16 percent was spent.
- Of the total target, 7.74 percent of credit was mobilized.

Assam:

- Against the norm of 10 percent fund meant for training and skill development only 7.25 percent was spent.
- 75.61 percent of credit was mobilized, against the target.

Manipur:

- Against the norm of 10 percent fund meant for training and skill development only 5.64 percent was spent.
- Of the total target, 10.01 percent of credit was mobilized

Meghalaya:

- 6.25 percent of credit was mobilized.

Nagaland:

- 51.52 percent of credit was mobilized, against the target.

Sikkim:

- Of the total target, 41.00 percent of credit was mobilized

Tripura:

- Against the norm of 10 percent fund meant for training and skill development only 5.47 percent was spent.

It is evident from the above that fund meant for training and capacity building was not utilized in almost all the states of the region. Without training and capacity building of BPL families, programme's objectives get diluted. Also disheartening to note that credit mobilized was much less than the target. During the same period, mobilization of credit in Andhra Pradesh was much above than the target. The question is coming why the states of the region cannot achieve at least the target.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)

During the year 2008-09, in the North Eastern States, 86 districts were covered under NREGA. Against the total available fund of Rs. 293187.64 lakh, the expenditure during 2008-09 was Rs. 234291.36 lakh. The percentage of utilization is 80 percent. The utilization level is as low as 46.5 percent in Arunachal Pradesh and as high as 94.4 percent in Mizoram. 73 days of employment per household was provided in Mizoram and only 40 days of employment in Assam. The state-wise summary of financial during 2008-09 is as given below:

Table: 6 Financial Progress in 2008-09 under MGNREGS (Rs in Lakh)

Sl No.	States	Total available funds	Total Expenditure	% Utilization of fund
1	2	3	4	5
1	Arunachal Pradesh	3162.53	1471.16	46.52
2	Assam	136557.02	95028.42	69.59
3	Manipur	39731.42	35558.25	89.49
4	Meghalaya	10975.28	8947.31	81.52
5	Mizoram	17426.30	16455.70	94.42
6	Nagaland	28921.18	27231.15	94.15
7	Sikkim	4832.04	4371.51	90.45
8	Tripura	51581.87	45227.86	87.68
	All India	3630046.00	2725068.00	75.07

Source: Annual Report 2008-09, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

A comparative study of table-5 and table-6 reveals that funds meant for MGNREGS was utilized more than SGSY fund in most of the states of the region. SGSY is a self-employment programme and self-employment provides sustainable income for the family, so care should also be taken to utilize the fund in SGSY.

Rural Housing (Indira Awaas Yojana)

With the implementation of IAY, every rural household in north east can be provided with shelter. The housing programme Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) of Government of India has been in implementation since 1985-86, to provide financial assistance for construction/up-gradation of

dwelling units to the below poverty line (BPL) rural households belonging to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and freed bonded labourers categories. From 1993-94, the Programme was extended to cover non-Scheduled Castes, non-Scheduled Tribes and rural BPL poor subject to the condition that the benefits to non-SC/ST would not be more than 40% of the total IAY allocation. The benefits of the Scheme have also been extended to the families of ex-servicemen of the armed and paramilitary forces killed in action. Of the total expenditure, 3% of the houses are reserved physically/mentally challenged persons. From 2006-07, funds and physical targets under IAY are also earmarked for BPL minorities in each state.

(b) Under the Programme, financial resources are shared between the centre and the states on 75: 25 ratios. In case of UTs, 100percent funding is done by Government of India. However, in the case of North-East States, the funding pattern is in the ratio of 90: 10. (c) On the basis of allocations made and targets fixed, District Rural Development Agency (DRDAs) Zilla Parishads (ZPs) decide Panchayat-wise number of houses to be constructed under IAY and intimate the same to the concerned Gram Panchayat. Thereafter, the Gram Sabha selects the beneficiaries, restricting its number to the target allotted, from the list of eligible households from the Permanent IAY Waitlists. No further approval of the higher authority is required.

(d) The ceiling on construction assistance under the IAY is Rs. 45,000 per unit in the plain areas and Rs.48, 500 in hilly/difficult areas from 1st April 2010. For up-gradation of kutchha house, the financial assistance is Rs. 15,000 per unit. In addition, the Reserve Bank of India has been requested by the Ministry of Finance to advise public sector banks to include IAY houses under the Differential Rate of Interest (DRI) scheme for lending up to Rs.20, 000 per unit at an interest rate of 4percent.

(e) Further, the dwelling units are invariably allotted in the name of a female member of the beneficiary household. Alternatively, the same can be allotted in the name of both husband and

wife. Only in case there is no eligible female member in the family, the house is allotted in the name of an eligible male member.

(f) No specific type design has been stipulated for an IAY house. Choice of design, technology and materials for construction of an IAY house is at the sole discretion of the beneficiaries. The construction of the houses is the sole responsibility of the beneficiary. Engagement of contractors is strictly prohibited. Sanitary latrine and smokeless chullah are required to be constructed along with each IAY house.

The funding of IAY which was earlier shared between the Centre and the North East States in the ratio of 75:25 has now been revised to the ratio of 90:10. IAY is a rural housing scheme covering below the poverty line families in rural areas. It has also provision of upgrading unserviceable kutcha houses. It emphasizes using of cost effective, disaster resistant, and environmental friendly technologies. The allocation of funds and the physical achievements during 2008-09 are given in table: 7 and table-8.

Table: 7 Financial Progresses under IAY in 2008-09

(Rs. in lakh)

SI No	State	Total available funds	Total Utilization	% utilization
1	Arunachal Pradesh	4806.66	1809.91	37.65
2	Assam	199639.49	62704.10	31.41
3	Manipur	2451.04	212.88	8.69
4	Meghalaya	3039.32	1959.24	74.46
5	Mizoram	1681.90	1528.75	90.89
6	Nagaland	5434.31	5498.61	101.18
7	Sikkim	791.48	685.60	86.62
8	Tripura	10510.44	6343.68	60.36
	All India	1446057.00	834807.00	57.73

Source: Annual Report 2008-09, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

It is evident from the above table that except Nagaland, no states in the north east could spend the amount allocated under IAY. When available funds are not spent (BPL families), so this is

the matter of concern as they belong to economically weaker sections of the community. Being the smaller states of the region, utilization of fund should be 100 percent in all the cases. With the, less utilization of the allocation, houses constructed were also less, (table-8)

Table 8: Physical Progress under IAY in 2008-09

Sl.No.	States	Target 2008-09	Houses under construction
1.	Arunachal Pradesh	6770	3267
2	Assam	149699	94961
3	Manipur	5877	2945
4	Meghalaya	10235	4350
5	Mizoram	2181	693
6	Nagaland	6773	3082
7	Sikkim	1295	696
8	Tripura	13187	10552
	All India (In Lakh Number Completed)	21.27	21.34

Source: Annual Report 2008-09, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

Field Observations:

During the course of visit in different parts of north east in general and Assam in particular many youths in rural areas were feeling frustrated due lack of employment. On the other hand, many Assamese youths expressed their happiness while provided employment under SGSY. I can recall SHGs of Tingkhong block and Barbarua block of Dibrugarh district most of whom were youths of early 20s' were earning descent income through different income generation activities funded under SGSY. So whatever SGSY fund is allocated to the states of north east, if spent properly then more SHGs can be formed and more youths will get employment. Same is the case of Mahatma Gandhi NREGS, where more rural persons can get wage employment, if allotted fund can be spent. The region has high unemployment rate which is around 12 percent against the national average of 7.7 percent, as per 1999-2000 data. Regarding poverty in the region, India's Five Year Plans: Complete Documents, published by Academic Foundation may

be quoted, “the poverty ratio in India is expected to decline to about 19.2 per cent in 2006-07 as compared to 36 per cent in 1993-94. However, most of the poor would be concentrated in only a few States – Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and the North-Eastern States. Some pockets of poverty will also remain in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. With the overall growth target of around than 8 per cent accompanied by a high growth in agriculture in some of the states, the States of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Goa, Gujarat, Punjab, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu and Delhi are likely to register negligible levels of poverty ratio”. However, on silver lining for Sikkim is that, state government is committed to eradicate poverty from the State by 2013, ‘by providing a renewed thrust to pro-poor programmes’.

Fund under IAY is meant for houses for rural BPL families, with the spending of fund more houses can be constructed. With the eradication of poverty by creating employment, not only purchasing power of the people will go up, but it will work as ‘Multiplier Effect’ in the region. If we look at the recent data on per capita net state income for different states of north east, the picture is not at all encouraging. Except Mizoram, other states are sliding down (table- 9).

The table -9 shows that Mizoram is the only state where per capita income has remained above the national average in last two decades. Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Sikkim had incomes 10 percent to 20 percent higher than the national average in 1993-94. All three have come down below it in 2007-08. Remaining four states, which were always poor in terms of incomes and lagged behind the country’s average, have slid further down. Assam and Manipur are trailing the national average by over 35percent in 2007-08, compared to about 25percent in 1993-94. Meghalaya was 10 percent below the national average, in 2007-08 it is 17percent behind. Tripura used to be the most laggard state 15 years ago with its net state income per person almost 30percent short of the national average. In 2007-08 it was still behind, but only by 5percent. These figures are based on the net state domestic product data released by the CSO.(The Times of India, 2nd November, 2009)

Table 9: Per Capita Net State Income**(In Rs)**

S.No.	States	1993-94 (at 1993-94 prices)		2007-08 (at 1999-00 prices)	
		Income	% Difference*	Income	% Difference
1.	Arunachal Pradesh	8733	+14	20570	-15
2	Assam	5715	-26	15857	-35
3	Manipur	5846	-24	15270	-37
4	Meghalaya	6893	-10	20094	-17
5	Mizoram	8319	+8	27501	+13
6	Nagaland	9129	+19	18318	-25
7	Sikkim	8402	+9	23761	-2
8	Tripura	5534	-28	22987	-5
	India	7690		24295	

Source: The Times of India, Hyderabad Edition, 2nd November, 2009.

Conclusion: The north-east is a diverse region in terms of social, cultural, natural factors. The region is endowed with huge natural and mineral resources. In fact no states in the region should have BPL families in true sense, considering the abundance of resources. The manpower resources particularly in rural areas are really a pride for the country. The women are endowed with the skills of making different types of gents' and ladies' garments- shawls, towels etc. which are not observed not only in our country but also in many parts of the world. Beautiful cane and bamboo products and other crafts made by the rural people of the region have high demand in the country. For smooth marketing of these produce require proper coordination among different states and central government's departments. Exploitation of resources, in the sectors like fisheries, poultry, dairy, piggeries, forest produce etc, should be paid attention so that rural persons find employment in these sectors. All these should be properly harnessed. As is

known, poultry and its product, fish, etc. come from other states to this region. Fund meant for rural development must be utilized in this respect with 100 percent achievement i.e. 100 percent fund should be spent. As mentioned already Sikkim has already taken steps to eradicate poverty from the state by 2013. Like this, all other seven states of the region should develop their own strategy with mission mode.

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