

Poor infrastructure, frequent damage to the infrastructure due to recurring floods particularly in Assam, low productivity puts the region into disadvantages position to achieve faster development. Social conflicts, insurgencies, different kinds of political movements are further impediments to the process of development and often slows down the implementation of developmental activities and brings in inefficiency in service delivery.

The eight States of North-East India has a geographical area of 2,62,179 sq. km which accounts for 7.9 percent of the country's geographical area. About 3.8 percent of the nation's population which comes to 39 million people (2001 Census) live in the region. Indicators normally used to depict the status of development of any State are compiled for the four North-Eastern States covered in this book is given in Table 1.

Table 1 : Socio-Economic Profile—NE Region

Sl. No.	Item	Assam	Manipur	Nagaland	Tripura
1.	Area ('000 sq. km)	78.44	22.33	16.58	10.49
2.	Population (lakh)	266.56	23.89	19.89	31.99
3.	Rural Population (lakh)	232.16	18.18	16.36	26.53
4.	Average exponential growth rate (percent) per annum	1.73	2.63	4.97	1.46
5.	Density of population (Person/sq km)	340	107	120	304
6.	Sex Ratio (Female per thousand males)	932	972	909	950
7.	Percent of Forest area to geographical Area	34.45	78.01	52.05	60.01
8.	Reporting area for land utilization ('000 ha)	7,850	2,211	1,560	1049
9.	Production of total grains ('000 MT)	3,895	392	389	558
10.	Per capita consumption of electricity (KWH)	105.5	72.9	61.4	111.3
11.	Road length per 100 sq km of Area (km)	114.09	51.21	126.79	155.41
12.	Road length per 1000 population (km)	3.29	4.76	10.51	5.09
13.	Average population	21,906	31,021	28,821	17,928
14.	Credit deposit ratio (percent)	30.77	29.06	16.93	25.36
15.	Number of Health Centres functioning	5819	508	502	621

(Contd.)

Table 1 (Contd.)

Sl. No.	Item	Assam	Manipur	Nagaland	Tripura
16.	Persons served per PHC	274765	125307	91553	336098
17.	Birth rate (per thousand)	27	17	NA	15
18.	Infant Mortality Rate/000	70	14	NA	34
19.	Literacy Rate percent	53.79	59.85	57.65	63.81
20.	Student-teachers Ratio				
21.	(a) Hr Secondary Schools	21	20	27	23
22.	(b) High Schools	18	19	20	23
23.	Population per post office	6,672	3,444	6,142	4,468
24.	Area served by a post office	19.63	32.13	50.93	14.57
25.	Population BPL (percent)	36.09	28.54	32.67	34.44
26.	Per capita NSDP (State income) current price (Rs.)	11,755	12,230	17,629 (00-01)	17,459 (01-02)
27.	Tenth Plan outlay/capita (Rs.)	3,119	11,737	11,200	13270

Agriculture in the region is still subsistence agriculture and commercialization is in nascent stage. The irrigation development is lagging behind thereby the yield level of most the crops grown in the region is far below the potential. The population in the hilly areas of Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura obtain their need of agricultural produces from a primitive practice of shifting cultivation (Locally known as *jhuming*) which is a kind of management of land-use in forested areas. The reduction in *jhum* cycles due to increase in population has endangered this practice and the amount of produces harvested by the *jhumia* farmers from *jhuming* earlier is no longer becoming possible due to decreased fertility and other types of degradation. The productivity of principal crops in Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura (Table 2) indicates scope for enhancing productivity.

The local governance in many parts of the North-Eastern Region are as per parts IX and IX-A of the Constitution or under the Sixth Schedule. The Nagaland has its own traditional system. Village development boards are functioning at the village level in Nagaland and there are 1286 village development boards in the entire State. Communitisation of the village bodies have been undertaken by the State Government which was found to be useful capacity building

for discharging the responsibility of service delivery and planning for development of villages.

In Assam, there are two autonomous District Council, namely Karbi-Anglong Autonomous Council and NC-Hills Autonomous Council governed under the Sixth Schedule. The Boroland Territorial Council has recently been constituted. In Tripura, there is a autonomous council catering to the tribal inhabited villages.

Table 2 : Relative Productivity of Principal Crops in the NER in 2003-04

(quintals per hectare)

Crop	Assam	Manipur	Nagaland	Tripura
Rice	0.74	1.13	0.66	1.04
Maize	0.35	1.13	0.73	0.44
Small millet	1.06	—	1.94	0.00
Wheat	0.39	—	0.86	1.57
Total cereals	0.76	1.18	0.70	1.09
Total pulses	0.86	0.81	1.30	0.95
Total foodgrains	0.85	1.32	0.77	1.23
Sesamum	1.22	1.11	1.67	1.04
Rapeseed & mustard	0.45	0.39	0.89	0.70
Total oilseeds	0.49	0.44	1.00	0.67
Tea	0.96	0.13	0.07	0.52
Coffee	—	—	—	—
Natural rubber	0.61	—	—	0.61
Banana	0.54	0.50	0.71	0.50
Sugarcane	0.66	—	0.81	0.73
Potatoes	0.39	—	0.24	0.00
Chillies	0.61	0.56	9.15	1.33
Ginger	—	0.48	3.85	0.25
Coconut	1.21	—	0.42	0.33
Turmeric	0.19	—	1.39	0.77
Pineapple	0.96	0.54	0.93	1.30

Note: Figures are calculated.

Source: Statistical Abstracts of India, 2003-04.

There is a great need for capacity building of these village level institutions and Gram Panchayats to enable the people to have the right perspective. Autonomous district councils are facing many inherent problems due to the hilly and inaccessable terrain. Development of village plans by the Gram Panchayats and municipal plans by the urban local bodies must properly be done and these plans

must be incorporated into district plans. Proper planning is the key for holistic development in the rural areas of the North-Eastern States.

Getting insight to socio-economic profile of the villages and rural areas of the States of North-East India is very important for improving governance. Better governance, reaching out to the entire population by Government machinery and capacity building of the existing institutions and new institutions being created is very vital and should receive priority in the coming years.

1

Assam

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INTRODUCTION

Speak of a land of wooded hills and valleys with a wide river, of sprawling tea gardens, of enticing songs and dances, of fine silks, and you are already able to hazard a good enough guess. Add to that, the one-horned rhinoceros, the oldest refinery in India, a people made all the more colourful by a sizeable population of tribals and one of the most venerated Sakti temples in the country, and you know it is **Assam**—the land of the Red River, the Brahmaputra, and the Blue Hills flanking it.

For Assam is identified no better than by its **Bihu songs and dances**, the **Kaziranga Wild Life Sanctuary** where the rare **one-horned rhinoceros** roam at will, silks such as *paat* and *muga* which rank amongst the finest in the world, the State's tea which finds its way to millions of homes all over the globe, and the **Shrine of Kamakhya** which draws thousands of devotees every year.

WHAT IS IN THE NAME ?

In ancient times Assam constituted a part of the land known successively as **Pragjyotisha** or **Pragjyotishpura**, and **Kamarupa**. **Asom** (**Axom**) or its anglicized version **Assam** is a comparatively modern name. Opinions on the root of the name vary with one view ascribing its origin to the Bodo word *Ha-Cham* which means

“low or level country” and a second view ascribing it to the word *Asama*, meaning “unequaled”, and used to denote the *Ahoms*, a Shan tribe which ruled the land for six centuries from the 13th Century A.D.

The word ‘Assam’ is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘Asoma’, meaning peerless. The land of Assam is in fact, peerless, judging by her exquisite natural beauty, cultural richness and human wealth. Assam has a rich legacy of culture and civilisation behind her. Home to different races of men—Austic, Mongolian, Dravidian, and Aryan, who came to dwell in these hills at different points of time. Assam has developed a composite culture of variegated colour.

Assam, which is situated in the north-east corner of India is surrounded by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh on the north, Nagaland and Manipur on the east, Meghalaya and Mizoram on the south and Bangladesh, Tripura and West Bengal on the west. A narrow strip of sub-mountainous region of the Himalayas, connects Assam to the Indian mainland. The State is dominated by the river Brahmaputra, whose lush 700 kilometre valley is sandwiched between the Himalayan foothills to the north, and the hills and plateau of Meghalaya to the south.

Important tourist centres of the State around Guwahati are Kamakhya Temple, Umananda (Peacock Island), Navagraha (Temple of nine planets), Gandhi Mandap, State Zoo, State Museum, Sukreswar Temple, Geeta Mandir, Madan-Kamdev Temple and Saraighat Bridge. In the rest of the State the places of tourist interest are Kaziranga Park (famous for one horned rhinos), Sib Sagar (Shiv Temple), Majuli (largest river island in the world), Chandubi lake, Batadrava (Birthplace of great Vaishnav Saint Sankardev), and Saulkuchi (renowned for its silk industry).

HISTORY

Much of the ancient past of Assam still lies buried deep beneath its soil. Lack of proper and systematic archaeological research has resulted in a dearth of archaeological material, and though evidence of human habitation in the land has been traced back to the Early Stone Age, the overall picture remains vague and indistinct. That Assam, by whatever name, was known in other parts of the world as far back as in 100 BC is nevertheless clear from the records of the