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## **RURAL DEVELOPMENT: PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTIVE MEASURES IN ASSAM**

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# Rural Development: Problems and Suggestive Measures in Assam

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**Abstract – Rural development is a strategy of development designed to make the rural people develop in respect of the economic and social life. It requires using natural and human resources, techniques, infrastructural facilities, govt. schemes and projects to provide proper education, works and improve the quality of human life in the rural societies. In the process of development, the rural people have to face many problems such as poverty, poor infrastructure, less awareness, poor health etc.**

**Keywords – Rural Development, Infrastructure, Poverty, Education, Health.**

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## INTRODUCTION

*“India lives in villages” – M K Gandhi*

Rural development is a dynamic procedure of development of the rural people through different aims and schemes. Usually, it requires an overall development of the rural zones which contains the development of agriculture allied activities, the level of living standard comprising employment, education, health, nourishment, drinking water, housing, hygiene, village and small scale industries and variety of community services. The World Bank defines rural development as “Rural development is a strategy to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people, the rural poor, including small and marginal farmers, tenants and the landless”. Without the rural development it is quite impossible to think of development of a country as well as of a state. Laying stress on the importance of rural areas, Mahatma Gandhi said, “India lives in villages, if villages perish, India will perish.”

The state of Assam is placed in the North East of India covering 78,438 sq. km. and has a population of 31,205,576 according to the census of 2011. The density of population is 398 per sq. km. population of Assam has increased to 3.12 crores in 2011 from 2.66 crores in 2001 with decadal growth rate of 17.07. Assam is a state where about 86% of the total populations are living in rural areas.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are as follows –

1. To find out the major problems in rural areas which hampers in development.

2. To provide some suggestions for all round development of the rural people in the state.

## METHODOLOGY

The study is mainly based on descriptive method. The information's are collected from secondary sources like books, journals, articles, official records, govt. reports, web sites etc.

### Problems of Rural Development

The problems faced by the rural people on the path of development are classified as economic and social problems.

## ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

The following are some of the important economic problems of rural development.

1. **Vicious circle of poverty** - Vicious circle of poverty is regarded as one of the crucial constraints in the path of rural development in Assam. According to 2011 census 31.98% of the total population are living below poverty line (BPL) in the state. In the rural areas 33.89% people are living below poverty line as against 20.49% in urban areas. There is vast gap between the BPL rate of rural and urban areas. This is because of low productivity backwardness arises. Low productivity results in low level of income and low rate of savings leading to low rate of investment, which is again responsible for low rate of productivity. The factors of high poverty are-out migration of young and highly skilled laborers, lack of technical jobs etc.

**2. Infrastructure-** Poor infrastructural facilities is one of the serious problems which obstructs the process of rural development. In respect of transportation, communication, loan facilities, power supply, clean water facilities, security etc the rural areas of the state are very much backward than the urban areas. Number of households using electricity for domestic lighting seems to be unsatisfactory. Moreover the average availability of electricity per day is about 14 to 16 hours. The rural people are not acquiring safe drinking water. Moreover they are not conscious of the dangerous effects of polluted water for which water borne diseases like diarrhea, typhoid, cholera, amoebiasis, conjunctivitis, scabies etc affect mostly the rural people.

**3. Education-** Rural families live relatively far from the public schools which make difficult for the students to go to schools. Moreover percentage of girl students in schools is very disappointing. The parents do not send their girls to schools, rather engage them in domestic work. Even today they consider that their only responsibility is to get their girls married. Moreover the quality teachers are not enthusiastic to do job in rural areas. Another problem in this sector is that the books are not supplied by the govt to the schools in right time.

According to 2011 census, the literacy rate of India & North- East India is as follows-

India- 74.04% and of

Assam is 73.18%

Manipur -79.85%

Mizoram -91.58%

Nagaland -80.11%

Tripura -87.75%

Arunachal Pradesh – 66.95%

---(Source-Economic Survey, 2015-16)

It is observed that Assam is lagging behind not only India but also other states of North East. The rural literacy rate in the state is 69.34% as against 88.47% in urban areas. Due to illiteracy the rural people do not have knowledge about industrial and technological advancement. They have also failed to evolve marketing, banking and cooperative credit systems. Moreover they are not acquiring many employment opportunities due to illiteracy or lack of education. All these factors resulted in financial backwardness and poverty.

#### 4. Agricultural backwardness –

More than 70% of the total populations in Assam depend on agriculture for their livelihood. But the

contribution in percentage of agricultural sector to Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) has been declined from 32.24% in 1999-2000 to 19.22% in 2010-11 which is shown below.

#### Contribution % of agricultural sector to GSDP

Year	1999-2000	2005-06	2006-07	2010-11
GSDP share	32.24	22.39	20.78	19.22

Source – Economic survey Assam 2011-12,

Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Assam

Poor technology and reduced skills are responsible for inefficient and inadequate production in rural areas which causes poverty of mass. Moreover computer literacy, internet facilities, resources are poor in rural areas which delays the path of development.

#### 5. Less awareness

Rural people are not fully aware of projects about job opportunities, family planning, provided by the central government and the state government. Though the govt has adopted various family planning measures yet the rural birth rate is 23.6 against 15.5 urban birth rates. On the other hand rural death rate is 7.6 against 5.3 urban death rate. Moreover they lack the knowledge about economic circumstances and price of goods and good marketing system for which most of the rural farmers have to offer their products at very low prices.

#### 6. Indebtedness of Rural Households

Though considerable efforts are made to provide institutional credit, the rural household, the indebtedness emerged at higher extent due to rising expectation of rural households towards loan waving policy of state and central govts. Due to long procedures in the institutional sources of credit, the rural people are interested to take loans from non-institutional sources like mahajans, merchants and commission agents and rich zamindars even at higher rate of interest rate. The rural poor farmers have to purchase modern inputs like chemical fertilizers, HYV seeds etc. Sometimes they fall in financial crisis for their children's education, marriage and other ceremonies. For these reasons the rural people have to take loans from moneylenders at higher interest rates. The Royal Commission on Agriculture made this observation-"the agriculturists are born in debt, live in debt and die in debt passing on their burden to those who follow."

## **SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

### **1. Health**

According to report of Economic Survey, Assam 2015-16 the number of health institutions in 2015 are as follows –

Civil Hospitals – 25

Sub- Divisional

Civil Hospitals-13

Primary Health

Centres – 1014

FRUS – 62

CHCs – 151

Sub Centres – 4621

Though Govt. has taken various measures to improve maternal health and to reduce infant mortality rate, yet the Infant Mortality Rate in Assam is 49 against 39 in India during 2014 which is still very high compared to national level. At the same time this rate is 52 in rural areas against 27 in urban areas in the state. Moreover the small hospitals of rural areas generally lack high quality doctors, nurses and equipments which shows a large gap between rural and urban areas. A patient of this area who needs surgery or other types of complicated medical care has to go to an urban hospital. The long distance from these areas to urban hospitals make the people difficult to travel by ambulance so far. Still now the interior rural residents have to bring their patients to the hospitals by Thela or stretcher for which many people have to leave the world on their way before reaching the hospitals. Travelling distances make difficult for the rural residents to receive preventive services such physical health examinations, screenings for cancer and vaccinations for various diseases. Another problem is that the rural areas of the state lack mental health care, drug abuse counselling, awareness programmes etc which drives the youths to more critical situation.

### **2. Gender gap –**

According to 2011 census in the rural areas total female population is 13,128,045 against 13,678,989 male populations and the rural sex ratio is 960. Gender inequality and discrimination are present in rural Assam, despite various steps taken by the govt to empower women especially in rural areas. Many women in rural Assam continue to face inadequate healthcare, cultural pressures, ignorance etc. Gender discrimination in nutrition and health care, in childhood

education, early marriage, and lack of family planning and poor state of maternal healthcare services only indicate women's poor status in the society. Moreover a number of incidents have been seen in the news related to the issue of female feticide and infanticide. There have been incidents of the fetus lying in farms, floating in rivers, wrapped up in jute bags and left to die. This attitude is specially found in the rural community. Even today most of the rural parents are not willing to continue for their girls' higher education or for their employment in various jobs and they consider that their only duty is to get their girls married. All these factors retard in women empowerment which obstructs the rural development.

## **SUGGESTIVE MEASURES**

Considering the high magnitude of socio-economic backwardness of rural people some measures could be suggested which are as follows-----

1. According to 2011 census, the growth rate of population in Assam is 17.07 % this growth rate of population must be reduced in order to remove poverty.
2. Special policies should be introduced to solve the problems of unemployment specially disguised unemployment.
3. Small Scale and Cottage industries should be improved to create a large number of job opportunities in the rural regions.
4. Accelerated growth rate of agricultural production using scientific method should be made to remove urban as well as rural poverty.
5. Initiatives and participation of rural people in development schemes must be enlarged.
6. Government should take necessary steps to enhance the public involvement in policy making procedure.
7. Infrastructural facilities must be adequate in rural areas.
8. Awareness of the public should be raised by organizing assembly.
9. Proper educational facilities should be provided to literate the rural people.
10. Women education should be encouraged and parallel women should be empowered.

11. Policies should be formulated to encourage the rural youths for entrepreneurial occupations.
12. NGOs are to be stimulated to take up rural development schemes.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that rural development builds on a string system of collaboration among the government, government employees and the public. Education is the part and parcel for rural development. As by education the rural people will become aware of modern science and technology; they will be able to solve their obstacles. The government with the cooperation of the public has to play a crucial role to solve all difficulties discussed herein. Without solving these issues no one can think about the wide ranging development of rural society and its residents. Finally it must be accepted that the duty and responsibility lie on each and every person of our society to think about the development of rural society.

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