

Rural Development in Contemporary Mizoram, North East India

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Abstract: Although rural areas in Mizoram are calm with a pleasant environment, there are numbers of socio-economic problems which become an important agenda across the world. This is also evident in the context of India where a majority of the population live in rural areas associated with backwardness and poverty. In the state of Mizoram, 48 percent of the population lives in rural areas with significant differences from urban areas in their social and economic condition. To tackle these problems, the state government has implemented different programmes and schemes through a network of 26 rural development Blocks and 8 district rural development Agencies. Besides the schemes and programmes from the central government, the state government also implemented various schemes and programmes for the economic development and to improve the standard of living. The development and transformation of rural people are evident in the state but there is still a need to revamp the existing strategy in order to bring a sustainable and more inclusive development. Promoting people's participation, strengthening local self government and capacity are necessary in the state.

Keywords: Rural area, Urban area, Disparities, Living Conditions, Programmes/ Schemes, Rural Development.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Rural development is a strategy designed to improve the socio-economic conditions of the rural community by implementing different programmes. It is an attempt to uplift the people who are living in poverty by generating income activities and creating assets for strengthening infrastructure. It promotes livelihood security and tries to improve the standard of living in rural areas. According to Robert Chambers "Rural development is a strategy to enable a specific group of people, poor rural women, and men, to gain for themselves and their children more of what they want and need. It involves helping the poorest amongst those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas to demand and control more of the benefits of rural development". The vision of rural development is to improve the socio-economic conditions of the rural community and to uplift the people who are living below the poverty line. The Mission is providing wage employment, self-employment through income generating activities and also to create permanent assets for strengthening the rural infrastructure.

In India, a majority of the population live in rural areas associated with poverty, unemployment, inequality and other socio-economic problems. Since the beginning of the plan, the approach to rural development has been an important concern in development strategy. The growth rate in rural population has declined substantially due to decline in fertility rates, migration and reclassification of villages as urban units. The real India is rural India in which nearly 79 percent of the population lives and 69 percent depend on agriculture for livelihood. Nearly 30 percent of the population is still below poverty line and more than 30 million persons are unemployed. Thus, the scene of rural area is dominated by small and marginal farmers, landless laborers and the poor. Targeting these vulnerable sections, improving their livelihood and making them more productive is the basic objective of rural development programme in the country (Das, 1999).

In the context of Mizoram, the census of 2011 shows that the total population of the state was 10,91,014 and the growth percentage is 22.78 percent while the country (India) has recorded the growth percentage as 17.64 percent. Of the total population, about 5,61,977 persons live in urban areas while 5,29,037 persons live in rural areas. In urban areas, 2,81,020 are males while the other 2,80,957 are females while in rural areas, the state has 2,71,319 male population and 2,57,718 female population There are 27,598 households living below poverty line in 2015 (Provisional population totals- Mizoram; census of India 2011). According to the Economic Survey Mizoram, 2016-17, the growth of the state reached around 9 percent average annual growth rate during 2011-12 to 2015-16. The total State Domestic Product for the year 2015-16 is Rs.13277.78

crore against Rs.11559.33 crore in 2014-15 indicating a growth rate of 9.18 percent. The national growth rate is calculated at 7.6 percent for the same period. The State Per Capita Income has increased by 11.27 percent as it increased to Rs. 95317 in 2015-16 from Rs. 85659 in 2014-15 while the National Per Capita Income for the year 2015-16 is estimated at Rs. 9323. The rate of growth in employment opportunities is far below the growth rate of population in the state. It is estimated that the growth rate of population has been 2.2 while the rate of employment opportunities may be less than 0.5 percent.

II. BRIEF HISTORY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN MIZORAM

Rural development in Mizoram started mainly with a focus on agriculture. Majority of the people depended on agriculture and practiced jhum cultivation. With the advent of British missionaries, cash crops, cereals, potato, and rubber plantation was introduced but due to lack of financial support, administrative coordination and technical guidance it was unsuccessful. So jhum cultivation continued as a dominant feature of the rural economy (see Das, 2004). After independence, the agriculture sector received increasing attention and agriculture development took a new turn with the establishment of community development blocks in the district in 1953. During 1957 to 1958 district agriculture officer post was created with the introduction of different agricultural schemes. During the first two five years plan (1951-61) attention was laid mainly on agriculture in the state. In the third five year plan (1961-66), an emphasis was given towards development of means of communication, agriculture, and marketing of agricultural products. But due to the outbreak of insurgency in 1966, all development works were stalled. The fourth five-year plan (1969-74) also gave high priority to agriculture and allied activities. But these programmes also suffered a serious setback due to village regrouping for security reasons. Before the state attained the status of the union territory, it had nine community development blocks which were re-demarcated into twenty Blocks after it attained union territory. The Directorate of Rural Development was established in 1972 and all the blocks started functioning under this. During the fifth Five year Plan (1974-74) agriculture, community development, and rural development were given priority and the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) implemented the Integrated Rural Development Programme. The Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90) may be regarded as the first plan for Mizoram when the state was conferred statehood in 1987. During insurgency, there were no meaningful development works launched in the state, so one may say that planning process started only with effect from the Seventh Five Year Plan. (Das,2004). Till now, the government of the state has implemented different programmes to tackle rural poverty and problems. Besides the centrally sponsored schemes, the state government launched various schemes like BAFFACOS (2005-06) and NLUP in 1990-91 to promote livelihood and reduce shifting cultivation. Most of the programmes implemented by the Department are meant for poverty alleviation, reduction of unemployment or to give additional employment to people living in rural areas in order to enhance their livelihood security.

III. RURAL DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION IN MIZORAM

The Department is headed by a senior Cabinet Minister and is supported by a Parliamentary Secretary, who is a sitting MLA. There is a Secretary to the Government of Mizoram as the head of the Administrative Department i.e. the Secretariat. State Level Monitoring Cell and Internal Audit Cell (SLMC&IAC) is part and parcel of the Secretariat engaged in monitoring of works under Rural Development Department. The Directorate is headed by a Director who executes functions as the apex line department at the State level. State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) has been established at Aizawl. At the districts, there are the District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs) whose governing board is chaired by the Deputy Commissioner and has a full-time Project Director. At the Block level, there is Block Development Officer.

In the state, all schemes and programmes are being implemented through a network of 26 Rural Development Blocks and 8 District Rural Development Agencies. There are various departments and institutions under the department like Directorate of Rural Development, The Administrative Department, State Level Monitoring Cell and Internal Audit Cell, District Rural Development Agencies, Rural Development Block, State Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj and Social Audit Unit.

Disparities between Rural and Urban in Mizoram

1. Population

According to Statistical Abstract of Mizoram, 2015, rural males consists of 2, 69,135 while female consists of 2, 56,300 with a total of 525,435. In urban areas, the total population is 571,771 out of which 286,204 are males and 285,567 are females. The percentage of urban population is 52 percent which is higher than the rural population of 48 percent. As per 2011 census, the sex ratio in rural areas is 952 and 998 in urban areas (table 1).

2. Literacy rate

Regarding literacy, there are 363,334 literates that consist of 195,400 males and 167,934 females in rural areas. This is lower than urban areas with a total of 484,841 out of which 243,129 are males and 241,712 are females. In rural areas out of the total rural population, 69 percent are literates while in urban areas 85 percent are literates (Statistical Abstract of Mizoram, 2015). The literacy rate above seven years in rural areas is 84.1 percent in rural areas and 97.6 percent in urban areas (Census, 2011) (table 1).

3. Workers

In regard to workers in rural areas, main workers are 217,824, marginal workers are 34,558 and non-workers are 273,053. Out of this, there are 217,824 male workers and 134,888 female workers. In urban areas, main workers are 197,206, marginal workers are 37,117 and non-workers are 337,448. Out of this, there are 197,206 male workers and 128,417 female workers. This reveals that main workers and marginal workers are higher in rural areas (48 percent) than urban areas (40 percent) out of the total population respectively. With regard to workers in an industry, the total numbers of workers in rural areas are 2,502 which consisted of 1,245 males and 1,257 females. In urban areas, there are 2,649 male workers and 2,701 females' workers with a total of 5,350 industrial workers. This shows that industrial workers are much higher in urban areas than the rural area. Out of the state population, the total worker in rural areas is 23 percent while it is 21 percent in urban areas and 44 percent as a whole. In rural areas, there are 46.3 percent cultivators, 4.6 percent agricultural laborers, 0.6 percent household industry workers and 9.3 percent of other workers. In contrast to this in urban areas, there are 9.0 percent cultivators, 5.4 percent agricultural laborers, 1.2 percent household industry workers and 40.6 percent of other workers. This demonstrated that a large number of population in rural areas still depend on agriculture as compared to urban areas (table 1).

4. Household conditions and Infrastructures

Regarding electrification, out of the total 704 inhabited villages, 675 villages were electrified with a percentage of 95.9 percent. According to IIFD (2014), 95.1 percent have a primary school in the village, 90.8 percent have middle school, 52.8 percent have high school and 10.3 percent have higher secondary school. There is 21.0 percent using Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) and 71.8 percent used wood for cooking and the remaining used kerosene followed by electricity. Households of 71.8 percent have access to safe drinking water and 76.6 percent have improved sanitation facility (table 1).

5. Health

The annual birth rate in rural areas is 33.0 percent and 17.3 in urban areas with a total of 20.1 percent of birth rate in the state. Regarding death rate, the annual death rate is 6.2 percent in rural areas and 5.3 percent in urban areas with a total of 5.8 percent in the state. The percentage of annual birth and death rate is higher in rural areas than urban areas in the state. Infant mortality rate is 34.6 percent in rural areas while it is 45.7 in urban areas. According to IIFD (2014), out of 184 villages surveyed, 65.8 percent of the villages have Sub-Health Centre (SHC). Almost all sampled villages (94.6percent) have an Anganwadi center, 67.4 percent have access to any government health facility, but about 15.8 percent of the sampled villages have Primary Health Centre (PHC) and 69 percent of the villages have Village Health Nutrition and Sanitation Committee (VHNSC). Regarding antenatal care (ANC), there is a significant rural-urban gap of 25.5 percentage points in availing any ANC, with 95.5 percent among urban residents and 70 percent among rural residents. The prevalence of acute illness at the household level in Mizoram is 11 percent and there is no difference in the prevalence of acute illness by residence (11 percent in both rural and urban areas). About 4 percent of the households reported a member suffering from chronic illnesses that lasted for over a month in the past one year prior to the survey, which is found to be higher in urban areas (4 percent) than rural areas (2.9 percent) (table 1).

Table 1: Disparities between Rural and Urban in Mizoram

| Sl. No | Indicators/ Particulars | Rural | Urban |
|--------|-------------------------|-----------|---------|
| 1 | Population | | |
| | Male | 2, 69,135 | 286,204 |
| | Female | 2, 56,300 | 285,567 |
| | Total | 525,435 | 571,771 |
| | Sex Ratio | 952 | 998 |
| 2 | Literacy rate | | |
| | Male | 195,400 | 243,129 |
| | Female | 167,934 | 241,712 |

| | | | |
|---|--|---------------|---------------|
| | Total | 363,334 | 484,841 |
| | Above seven years (percent) | 84 % | 97 % |
| 3 | Workers | | |
| | Main workers | 217824 (41%t) | 197206 (34%t) |
| | Marginal workers | 34558 (%) | 37117 (6%) |
| | Non-workers | 273053 (52%) | 337448 (60%) |
| | Total | 525435 (100%) | 571771 (100%) |
| | Male workers | 217,824 | 197,206 |
| | Female Workers | 134,888 | 128,417 |
| | Total | 352712 | 325623 |
| | Industrial workers | | |
| | Male workers | 1,245 | 2,649 |
| | Female Workers | 1,257 | 2,701 |
| | Total | 2,502 | 5,350 |
| | Total workers from the state population(percent) | 23% | 21% |
| | Cultivators (percent) | 46%t | 9% |
| | Agricultural laborers (percent) | 5% | 5% |
| | Household industry workers (percent) | 0.6% | 1% |
| | Other workers(percent) | 9% | 41% |
| 4 | Infrastructure | | |
| | Primary school (percent) | 95% | - |
| | Middle school (percent) | 91% | - |
| | High School (percent) | 53% | - |
| | Higher Secomdary School | 10% | - |
| | Household Condition | | |
| | No of Villages Electrified | 675 (96%) | - |
| | No of Households using LPG (percent) | 21% | - |
| | No of household using woods (percent) | 71.8 | - |
| | No of household using Kerosene oil (percent) | 0.20% | - |
| | No of household having access to safe drinking water (percent) | 72% | - |
| | No of household having Sanitation Facility (percent) | 77% | - |
| 5 | Health (out of 184 villages) | | |
| | Annual birth rate (percent) | 33% | 17% |
| | Death rate (percent) | 6.%t | 5% |
| | Infant mortality rate (percent) | 35% | 46% |
| | Sub- Health Centre (percent) | 66% | - |
| | Anganwadi center (percent) | 68% | - |
| | Primary Health Centre (percent) | 16% | - |
| | Village Health Nutrition and Sanitation Committee (percent) | 69% | - |
| | Prevalence of acute illness (percent) | 11% | 11% |
| | Prevalence of chronic illnesses (percent) | 3% | 4% |

Source: Government of Mizoram & International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS)

IV. RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES/SCHEMES IN MIZORAM

1. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA):

The objective is to provide 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every household whose unemployed adult members are willing to do unskilled manual labor. The objective is to enhance livelihood security and improve the purchasing power of the rural people, whether or not they are below the poverty line.

In Mizoram, the first implementation started in Lawngtlai and Saiha Districts during the year 2006-07 and covered all the other districts in 2008. So far 1.7 lakh Job card was issued in the state (GOM)

2. National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)

The main objective of NRLM is to reduce poverty through building a strong grassroots institutions for the poor. These institutions enable the poor households to access gainful self-employment and skilled wage employment opportunities, resulting in an appreciable increase in their incomes, on a sustainable basis.

To implement the NRLM programme in Mizoram, the Government has formed a society called the Mizoram State Rural Livelihood Mission (MzSRLM) having a registration No.MSR 385 of 18.08.2011. Cumulative number of Self Help Group (SHGs) formed up to the year 2015-2016 was 736 of which 280 SHGs are under Kolasib district and 456 SHGs are under Serchhip district (GOM)

3. Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP)

The main objectives of the IWMP are to restore the ecological balance by harnessing, conserving and developing degraded natural resources such as soil, vegetative cover, and water. The outcomes are the prevention of soil run-off, regeneration of natural vegetation, rainwater harvesting and recharging of the groundwater table. This enables multi-cropping and the introduction of diverse agro-based activities, which help to provide sustainable livelihoods to the people residing in the watershed area. In Mizoram, the programme is implemented by the Rural Development Department under which the Mizoram Watershed Development Agency (MzWDA) is the State Level Nodal Agency.

4. Border Area Development Programme (BADP)

The BADP main objective is to meet the special development needs of the people living in remote and inaccessible areas situated near the international border and to bridge the gaps in the physical and social infrastructure of such areas. The aim is to transfer the border areas by ensuring multifaceted development and to saturate the border areas with the entire essential infrastructure through a convergence of Schemes and participatory approach. Border Area Development Programme (BADP) was implemented in Mizoram in 1993-1994 and it covered 4 (four) R.D Blocks then along the Indo-Bangladesh border. In 1997-1998 the programme was extended on the eastern side of Mizoram bordering Myanmar. According to Statistical Abstract of Mizoram, 2015, during 2014-15 there were 511 works undertaken with an expenditure of Rs. 3,515.55 (in lakhs).

5. Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awaas Yojana (PMGAY)

Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awaas Yojana (PMGAY), previously known as Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY), is a social welfare flagship programme to provide financial assistance for construction and restructure of rural households who are living below the Poverty Line. It is funded on the cost-sharing basis between the Government of India and the State Government in the ratio of 90:10 for the Northeast States. A number of 404 houses were constructed with an expenditure of Rs.391.32 lakh during 2015-2016.

6. Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY)

Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) is a village development project launched by Government of India in October 2014, under which each Member of Parliament will take the responsibility of developing physical and institutional infrastructure in three villages by 2019. The goal is to develop three Adarsh Grams or model villages by March 2019, of which one would be achieved by 2016. Thereafter, five such Adarsh Grams (one per year) will be selected and developed by 2024. In Mizoram, the Chief Secretary, Government of Mizoram is the Chairman while the Commissioner & Secretary, Rural Development Department is the Member-Convener and Commissioner, Finance Department and Secretary of different Departments are the members.

8. Mission Antyodaya

The main objective of Mission Antyodaya is to eradicate poverty from selected 50,000 rural areas in India by the year 2022. The Mission seeks to converge government interventions with Gram Panchayats as the basic unit for planning by following a saturation approach by pooling resources - human and financial - to ensure sustainable livelihoods. It is a State-led initiative for rural transformation to make a real difference based on measurable outcomes to the lives of 1,00,00,000 households in 5,000 rural clusters or 50,000 Gram Panchayats in 1,000 days. In Mizoram, 183 villages are selected under the Scheme.

Besides these, there are various other rural development programmes in the state which include the state schemes. The important state schemes are New Land Use Policy (NLUP), New Economic Development Policy (NEDP), Rural Housing Scheme and NEC Funded Projects. As the new government came up in 2018 different initiatives were being taken in the state.

V. CONCLUSION

Rural development becomes an important strategy in India where the majority of the people live in rural areas. There are many differences in the social and economic conditions between the rural and urban community. This has been reflected in the various schemes and programmes run by the government. Mizoram is also one of the states in Northeast region where the state government strives towards the development of rural areas. Due to this, there is an emerging improvement in the rural socio-economic conditions and upliftment of rural poor. The state government promotes different income generating activities and strengthen infrastructure in the rural areas. While development takes place in this areas, there are also some loopholes and barriers in the process which must be taken into consideration for a successful and sustainable development.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

Although rural areas in Mizoram have been progressing, there are some challenges and barriers which hinder the process of development. To tackle these problems, the following suggestions may be needed:

1. Effective Implementation of rural development programme/ schemes:

Although it was evident that different programmes and schemes of rural development have improved rural socio-economic conditions, a more comprehensive strategy and accountability would enhance the effectiveness of these programmes and schemes. Further, a systematic research on different programmes and schemes would find the loopholes for restructuring the process of implementation.

2. Promoting people's participation:

People's participation and bottom-up approach are very important for a successful and sustainable rural development. An active involvement of the people in decision making, planning and implementation, monitoring and evaluation and sharing the benefits of development is necessary. The successful implementation of Village Development Plan (VDP) is very significant in this process. Therefore, people must be at the center of development.

3. Strengthening Local Self Government:

A vibrant and strong Local self-government is necessary for carrying out different schemes and programmes. In the context of rural Mizoram, Village Councils must be strengthened and empowered to do so. There is a need of capacity building among the leaders to enable them to carry out effective work and coordinated with the people and the government.

4. Awareness of different Programmes and Schemes:

As these Schemes and Programmes are implemented for the rural people, they must be sensitized about the Schemes and Programmes to have better outcomes. This will bring motivation and obligation to the people to meet the objectives of different Schemes and Programmes implemented for them.

5. Capacity building:

Building human capital is very crucial in rural development. The introduction of new technology and idea must go along with capacity building to ensure sustainability and independence in rural development.

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