

Public Responses to the Questionnaire for the Meghalaya State Vision 2030

Responses were received from around 50 people, largely from the government, but also from academic institutions and concerned individuals. Most respondents had a clear understanding of the basic constraints to development planning faced by a small hill state like Meghalaya. The views of the responders have been summarised under various headings below, corresponding to topics in the questionnaire. These views provide us important underpinnings to the vision for long-term planning for the development of Meghalaya.

A2.1 General Comments

In general the view was that the vision for Meghalaya should be based on a bottom-up approach, so that planning is based on the panchayati raj system. A major constraint to growth and prosperity identified by almost all respondents was the state's poor connectivity transport-wise, which has hindered the creation of robust markets, led to the isolation of rural communities, exacerbated intra-state disparities, and hampered human development by impacting delivery of services, such as healthcare and education. A major issue repeatedly identified was the absence of employment avenues for the young in particular, but for the state in general. While demand side factors were acknowledged through the lack of industry and services in the state, many pointed to the absence of employment-oriented training and professional education in the state as a major hindrance. Finally, a key thread that ran through the responses was the need for any developmental strategy to be very sensitive to the long term ecological and environmental security of the fragile hill state, with minimal adverse impacts on forests, environment, and wildlife.

A2.2 Agriculture

Several recommendations were put forward for expanding agricultural activity and increasing growth of the sector. These are as follows:

- Encourage the application of modern technology by making up-to-date techniques and inputs easily available, and by providing agricultural equipment and machinery. Most of the land is single-cropped, and there is a need to introduce double-cropping, crop rotation, and short-duration cropping, and high yielding varieties (HYVs) of paddy, maize, wheat, and horticultural crops on a priority basis. Implement the free distribution of seeds and plant protection measures; encourage the use of fertiliser, especially organic fertiliser, by making it available in a timely manner, and by subsidising all fertiliser and animal feed. Strictly enforce the *Land Ceiling Act*.
- **Shifting Cultivation:** All respondents were against *jhumming* for various reasons, especially ecological. Suggestions included policy interventions to discourage *jhumming*, awareness programmes to motivate people to shift to permanent cultivation through terrace farming and tree farming, and promoting horticulture.

- **Horticulture:** This needs to be promoted as an alternative to *jhumming* and because it has excellent potential for the state. Encourage double-cropping — fruit trees can be planted in vacant land to reforest the hills; encourage judicious crop choices that minimise water use; focus on fruits such as oranges, chestnuts, peaches, which were grown in the past. There are several projects to promote this, but although a Technology Mission exists, the state needs to have a proper market strategy for horticulture, and to support farmers during the gestation period till the crops take off. Medicinal plants should not be ignored.
- **Animal Husbandry:** Farmers in this sector can benefit from the setting up of abattoirs by the government and through public-private partnerships.
- **Water Management:** This is required, and recommendations included the provision of assured irrigation facilities for farmers; improved water harvesting technology; protecting the catchment to increase the yield of water resources; and terracing of gentle slopes to prevent water runoff.
- **Marketing and Distribution:** A supply chain for farm produce needs to be in place. For a start, poor rural connectivity results in the loss of perishable goods, and with improved connectivity, farmers get better prices. Thus there is a need for new roads and proper maintenance of existing roads. Well-run markets are a necessary condition to make agriculture a profitable activity. For this we need to modernise existing traditional *haats* and construct new markets with proper connectivity and good transport facilities. Procurement centres must be set up near production centres, offering market prices for all produce. These can be set up by private players with government supervision. Storage and cold storage facilities should be set up in each district and sub-district. Cold storage could be privatised and well regulated.
- Policies to improve the welfare of farmers.

A2.3 Non-Farm Activity

- **Non-Farm Employment:** The promotion of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), based on processing, value addition, and marketing of renewable forest resources such as bamboo, cane, medicinal and aromatic plants, and other non-timber forest products (NTFP), is needed to provide employment opportunities for *jhumias*. Piggeries, dairy, fish farming, and cottage industries should also be encouraged.
- **Forest-based industry:** One suggestion was to relocate farmers to areas with basic facilities and use the forest resources by setting up forest-based industry in these areas. Private investment in forestry by non-tribals and companies could be encouraged by leasing out barren and degraded non-forest land on a medium-term lease (say 30 years) to raise captive plantations of fast-growing forest species.
- **Silk Farming:** The geography of the state is congenial for rearing of silkworms which produce silk comparable to that in Japan and China. For this, the state should produce good quality leaves by planting HYVs of mulberry trees, and transfer these to villages. The state should provide for reeling units of cocoons and market facilities for both mulberry and Muga culture.

A2.4 Industry, Mining, and Private Investment

- **Attracting Private investment:** Private investment can be attracted by amending the Land Regulation Act of 1972 to allow the transfer of land by reducing red tape, having single window clearances, and easing other bottlenecks.
- **Types of Industry:** There is scope for mineral-based, forest-based, agro-based and horticulture-based industry in the state. Only small and medium industry should be set up. Need to attract investment in agro-processing activities: special incentives are needed in the Industrial Policy for this. Community processing units based on SMEs may be initiated to add value to forest-based products. There is scope for MCCL established in the 1960s to be upgraded into a large scale industry.
- **NEIIPP:** Many feel that the NEIIPP has not worked in the state; it has benefited large business houses from outside the state, but not local businesses, added to which it has exacerbated shortages of power and water, and added to pollution.
- **Cement:** There were conflicting views on promoting a cement industry in Meghalaya. Many underlined the polluting effects of unregulated cement manufacture currently being carried out. The cement industry so far has not followed regulations and added considerably to environmental damage. Waste products from existing industries have caused great injury to the environment and ecological balance, besides polluting rivers and streams known for their rich biodiversity and as habitats for endangered species and aquatic life. Some felt that the central government should encourage large PSUs to set up major cement industries in the state, but to regulate these well to prevent any ecological fallout. The adverse impact on the ecology and environment and on the flora and fauna in particular, should be taken into account in deciding the location, number, and capacity of severely polluting industries like cement plants.
- **Transport Subsidy:** There were divergent views on this. Some felt this would help reduce costs and encourage industry, others felt that subsidies should be done away with as they have been misused or misappropriated by the state over the past years. Still, others felt that the subsidy should be provided on a selective basis, be need-based, and applied only for industrial development.

A2.5 Infrastructure and Amenities: Schemes and Implementation

- **Amenities:** The scattered nature of the villages and low density of population has had an adverse impact on the supply of basic services and central schemes. Many villages in Meghalaya are disqualified for setting up certain basic service facilities because of the planning norms. There are over 6,000 villages; 50 per cent of them have less than 200 people. Only 4 per cent of the villages have more than 500 people. This has an impact on the state's ability to access central schemes designed for different geographical and demographic configurations. The recommendation is that if within a radius of 10 km the number of people in the villages is 500 or more, then they should qualify for the services. Services such as potable water and basic sanitation should not be a problem in a rain-fed state like Meghalaya.
- Planners in a state like Meghalaya, where villages are scattered and population densities abnormally low, recommend the organisation of clusters, either for locating industries or setting up service facilities (such as hospitals, schools, etc.). A

cluster approach helps realise economies of scale and also generates the necessary forward and backward linkages, with their own external benefits on other areas.

- **Water Schemes:** Need private participation in the provision of essential services like drinking water in urban areas.
- **Sanitation:** The sanitation drive needs awareness campaigns to encourage people to construct, use and maintain latrines.
- **Transport:** Improving connectivity over land, water, and air is essential for development of markets and promotion of trade and investment in the region.
 - Need proper maintenance of existing roads and road connectivity with four lanes on all existing NHs and two lanes on all inter-state roads.
 - Need a four-lane east-west highway from Garobaha to Garampani to open up the plateau to development. From this, north-south highways would branch out to all economic regions and sub-regions.
 - Upgradation of a functional airport at Umroi in East Khasi hills and Balpagram in Garo hills; air connectivity from Baljek airport in West Garo to Dhaka.
 - Introduction of waterways at Simsang, Daring, and Ginginram rivers in Garo hills.
 - A railway line up to Byrnihat in Ri-Bhoi district.
- **Constraints:** Acquisition of land is a major constraint to infrastructure development, and in fact to the setting up of industry, attraction of private investment, and almost all developmental activities. Only 4.5 per cent of land is not owned by the community, and can be used for infrastructure and other purposes. Policy intervention on this is important, as land need to be released for public purposes, such as genuine housing projects, other projects, and commercial activity. Further, the practice of confining non-locals to select areas of the capital has created ghettos in some towns and cities: such a move may have been necessary in 1972, but it has now served its purpose.

A2.6 Health

- The vision would be to improve the quality of health care especially in the areas of infant and maternal mortality, and to introduce measures to improve life expectation, reduce the incidence of diseases both communicable and non-communicable, and reduce disparities across community and regions.
- **Recommendations:** Increasing public expenditure on health; reducing regional imbalances in health infrastructure; pooling resources, integration of organisational structures; optimisation of health manpower; decentralisation, and district management of health programmes, community participation and ownership of assets; induction of management and financial personnel into district health system; operationalising community health centres into functional hospitals; and meeting Indian public health standards in each block.
 - These can be done by boosting family planning services, providing round the clock PHC services, making drugs freely available, having an adequate supply of essential drugs and equipment, providing regular courses to expose doctors to modern medical techniques, and providing a blood bank in each district.

- **Rural Health:** Greater importance needs to be accorded to infrastructure, amenities, and healthcare centres in rural areas to remove disparities with urban centres. Also, incentives are needed to attract healthcare providers to serving in difficult areas; there should be regular monitoring and supervising officers with regular updates to the directorate; and transport facilities (ambulances) to reach difficult areas.
- **Health Insurance** should be provided to poor and BPL families.
- **PPPs in Health Sector:** PPPs in health are in their early stages, but the experience so far indicates that while they can help with curative aspects of healthcare, they may not work for preventive care. These PPPs can be expanded, but with careful supervision and regulation. Preventive care needs outreach to the communities, which can only be done through field health workers.
- **Community Awareness:** Immunisation scheme for preventable diseases needs to be explained to people in order to prevent morbidity from those diseases.
- Need strict competency and quality standards for the regulation of private health institutions.
- **Environmental Sanitation:** Clean air, water, and food should be a focus, as good sanitation facilities, sewage, and solid waste disposal, etc., have direct impacts on health. Thus, integration with other linked line departments such as PWD, PHE, MSEB, is essential.

A2.7 Education:

Schools

The general consensus was a need to increase the access to and quality of education.

- **Access to Education:** Have quality schools in every village according to number of inhabitants. Need to have proper road connectivity between villages and schools and school buses in rural areas. Focus needed on helping physically challenged students access education.
- **Infrastructure:** Need to improve school infrastructure and provide ample facilities, such as libraries, laboratories, computers, playgrounds, toilets; the lack of toilets and hand washing facilities, in particular, affect attendance and performance of schoolchildren.
- **Quality of Teaching:** Recruitment of teachers should be streamlined and guidelines formulated to ensure objectivity in postings and transfers. Provision should be made for lecturers and teachers from the state to travel to upgrade skills and knowledge. Only qualified teachers should be recruited to teach at all levels of education; and these should have regular refresher training. The lack of trained teachers in the state is an issue as only 30 per cent of those teaching have a B. Ed. degree (2007); this should be the minimum entry requirement. New teachers should be better prepared, and provided with pre-service training. More incentives are needed to attract qualified maths, science, and language teachers to teach in schools.

- The DIETs need to be strengthened (perhaps by developing linkages with other educational institutions) to become institutions of excellence for teacher education at the district level, both pre-service and in-service. Their role could include secondary and pre-school education.
- Teacher training institutes (TTIs) to be made residential to improve the attitude and quality of the trainees passing from those institutions.
- Non-government teachers should be given adequate post-retirement benefits.
- **Curriculum:** The curricula need to be revamped to be aligned to changing needs of the times and become more relevant to the occupational needs of the state; teachers can help provide inputs into developing curricula. Curricula can include eco-friendly programmes to teach ways to save energy, improve air quality, and preserve the environment; safety education to inculcate life skills; sports and co-curricular activities; and a focus on moral values and ethics.
- **Student Evaluation:** There should be a shift to comprehensive and continuous evaluation of students rather than examination oriented evaluation; introduce open book exams that test higher level competencies like interpretation, analysis, and problem solving.
- **People's Participation:** Create a sense of community 'ownership' of schools to strengthen curriculum and involve parents in the educational process. This calls for the creation of a local village body and enhancement of capacities related to school management. In the first stage, village education committees need to be formed with representatives from all relevant sections of the community. These committees have to be made aware of their roles and responsibilities. In the second stage, a village education plan can be drawn up based on a household survey.
- **Monitoring:** There should be effective monitoring of teachers' and students' performances. The monitoring body should have community representation. This can be done by setting up school monitoring cells at the village level headed by a youth organisation which will submit weekly reports to the District Inspector of schools/Inspector of schools with copies to the Director DEME/DTHE. School management committees at the village level can be constituted with government supervision and will submit monthly reports to the DI and SI of schools based on criteria outlined by the government. Currently school inspections do not take place regularly but they need to be conducted.
- Free and compulsory medical check-ups should be introduced for students and teachers on a regular basis.
- There needs to be a publication cell for the publication of textbooks, research work, reports, etc.

Beyond Schooling/Professional Development

- A majority of respondents pointed to the lack of employment based training and education in the state. The recommendation was to begin at the school level, by setting up educational and vocational guidance cells in every higher secondary school. High schools should offer a variety of vocational subjects — shoe making,

furniture making, TV repair, dress making, library attendant, beauty culture, bee keeping, two- and four-wheel mechanism, poultry farming, etc. — to introduce students to the world of work.

- The government department could tie up with industry and factories to help students with vocational skills be absorbed in work after school.
- Need to provide more professional and training opportunities within the state and set up job oriented technical institutions, such as a training school for nursing staff, technicians, and paramedics.
- Need to help entrepreneurship development as residents need to become self-sufficient and not rely on partnerships with people from outside the state. A management information system could be set up for collection of data on demand and supply of job skills, at the same time research in education should be encouraged to provide inputs into policy planning, improvements in education, etc.

A2.8 Women's Empowerment

- The vision should include empowerment of women politically, economically, and socially in all spheres of development; and to reduce crime and violence against women in the state.

A2.9 Urban Development

- Master plans are needed to check the unplanned sprawl of all the towns and cities in the state. The unplanned ribbon development of towns like Nongpoh along the highway to Shillong has exacerbated urban problems in the area.
- Basic infrastructure needs to be provided for the people: these include pavements, street lighting, garbage disposal, drainage, solid waste management plants and incinerators, etc. These will help prevent environmental damage and improve health outcomes.
- Local bodies in urban centres need to be strengthened.
- Slums and shanty towns need to be improved.

A2.10 Participatory Planning

- It may be difficult, perhaps impossible, to promote participatory governance and planning for the development process in the state until Parts IX and IXA of the Constitution are applied to the state either fully or partially.
- **Panchayati Raj Institutions:** It is vital to involve people in planning for their development. The active participation of people will call for the creation of a suitable institutional mechanism based on adult franchise, similar to PRIs at the grassroots. This will call for suitable amendment to statutes governing the composition, manner of constitution, powers, functions and responsibilities of

grassroots level institutions of self-governance, such as the village durbars, to empower them in the same way as *panchayati raj institutions* have been.

- **Awareness of Schemes:** Participation will increase when people become aware of the works to be implemented. Thus, the government and grassroots organisations need to make people more aware of these. The introduction of social auditing will also enable people to better understand these schemes and how they can be improved. However, the people need to be equipped to carry out these roles, and will need capacity building.
 - One method would be to involve the youth in the planning and provision of various community and basic services.
 - The Meghalaya State Planning Board should have only people from specialised sectors with close links to government implementation agencies and rural communities.
 - Funds allocated for NREGA and other developmental schemes should be employed to truly benefit the people. Need regular monitoring of projects and schemes to ensure effectiveness, appropriateness, and acceptance by locals. Also, linkages and inter-sectoral coordination of various institutions and departments (government, NGOs, developmental, etc.) will improve the developmental role.

A2.11 Links with Bangladesh

While some felt that links with Bangladesh were important for the development of agro-industries and promotion of local employment opportunities in Meghalaya, a few felt that this would lead to an influx of people from across the border.

- **Transport:** Many recommended reviving air, rail, and road access from Kolkata to Shillong through Bangladesh, as this would contribute to the state's development through the expansion of markets and access to resources.
- **Trading Infrastructure:** What is needed is better connectivity for trade with neighbouring countries with consulate offices and custom offices, especially for the movement of perishable goods. Some recommended giving incentives to open up more border *haats* along the Bangladesh border and increase trade facilities without jeopardizing national security. Other suggestions included improving marketing links and strengthening existing land ports such as Dawki, setting up border trading infrastructure such as storage depots, weigh bridges, and customs stations along the border to facilitate the trade of bamboo and other forest products, as well as other products.
- Lafarge Company carries limestone from Lumlawshun near Shella to Bangladesh. If the state's resources and minerals are going to be exploited, it is preferable that value addition is done within the state.

A2.12 The Northeast Vision Document and the North Eastern Council (NEC)

- The general view was that the recommendations of the Northeast Vision 2020 document were acceptable, but needed to be made more specific to be applicable

in a state like Meghalaya. Other goals (apart from those articulated in the NE Vision Document) were: an economically strong state that attracts and retains a wide range of career advancement employment opportunities; need to attract businesses that balance economic needs with environmental concerns; a workforce development system to ensure job readiness of residents.

- Rather than acting as a coordinating agency, the NEC has become an implementation body with strict rules for implementation. The council should first serve the NE states and not the central government. Hence, sectors like connectivity, agriculture, horticulture and allied sectors which are based on linkages need to be prioritised.
- The NEC can become more effective by involving economists and experienced administrators from the region as members of the Council. Those from other parts of the country are not in a position to be successful members of the Council!
- More than three-fourths of the area under the jurisdiction of the NEC is under forests. To ensure effective protection and conservation of forest resources, some posts at all levels within the Council need to be set aside for officers with special knowledge or experience of forestry and wildlife.

A2.13 Fiscal Concerns

- **Revenue:** There was agreement on the need to expand sources of revenue in the state. At present the main source of revenue is royalties from minerals. There needs to be a proper assessment of the transportation of minerals/transport subsidy claimed by manufacturing units, and an assessment of royalty paid.
- Revenues can be increased by increasing or introducing state taxes where there is scope:
 - Introduce reasonable taxes, especially service taxes, where not levied by the central government;
 - Levy a tax called the Meghalaya Development Tax (or some appropriate name) on tribal residents with incomes above a certain level, who are currently exempt from paying tax; levy a 10 per cent cess on all employees in the state exchequer, which is deducted at source; similarly, politicians should pay a cess of 12 per cent deducted at source.
 - Set up a mechanism to claim royalties on minor minerals extracted by private individuals and NGOs; there should be effective weightment of coal, limestone, and other minerals exported outside the state to prevent under-realisation of royalties; increase the cess on coal exports, minerals, and cut timber; provide a suitable mechanism to collect stone boulders from rivers draining into Bangladesh and export them to Bangladesh, Tripura, Mizoram and other boulder-deficit states;
 - Make municipalities self-sufficient in urban areas so that they pay for the amenities, such as water supplied by the department for distribution to the public;

- Strengthen and upgrade the tax-collection mechanism to prevent leakages; streamline and modernise customs and excise facilities with proper monitoring strategies at border check posts;
 - Develop tourism which is as yet untapped; and
 - Promote new industries like IT, BPO, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, hotels, banking, organised real estate development, etc.
- **Expenditure:** Developmental expenditure can be increased by skill upgradation of key functionaries; installing an efficient and transparent mechanism for award of contracts and a need-based and unbiased transfer and postings policy; the objective allotment of funds to prevent and minimise duplication of effort and resource allocation to non-priority sectors; periodic reviews and monitoring of ongoing projects to prevent cost overruns; and curbing non-developmental expenditure;
 - ‘High society of the government’ should practice austerity: there is a need to phase out unessential posts, and political appointments; abolish or reduce medical reimbursements; and reduce the number of vehicles run by government officials.
 - The timely release of central funds to departments will enable them to use the funds appropriately and in a timely fashion;
 - The present allocation of funds from the centre is too meagre to meet the developmental needs of the people of the border areas, especially in view of infrastructural needs.

A2.14 Governance and Insurgency

- Meghalaya is exempt from Parts IX and IXA of the Constitution, but it should have laws modifying the provisions in these two Parts relating to the third tier of representative government in the state. The relationship between the state and the centre: need further amendments to the Tenth Schedule regarding which cases should rest with the Election Commission and with the speakers of Parliament and the State Assembly.
- **Insurgency:** Unemployment is the main cause of insurgency, and employment opportunities need to be enhanced. Development planning in the state should focus on setting up infrastructure that attracts private investment in every sector including social sectors, thus providing employment opportunities for the youth, which will help curb insurgency activities.
- Insurgency can be controlled through persistent dialogue and follow-up; also through employing police and paramilitary action; religious institutions, churches, NGOs, and village durbars should regularly counsel youth, and invite experts to talk to them.