Part – I
Main Report

Chapter 1

Meghalaya: A Socio-Economic Profile and Projections

Meghalaya, one of the most picturesque states in the north-east of the country, is home to two major tribal groups — the Khasis and the Garos — apart from several smaller tribes. The state's area, largely comprising tablelands and hill regions, is heavily forested and criss-crossed by several rivers. It is an abode of tremendous biodiversity, and the soil and climate are conducive to the cultivation of a large variety of agricultural crops, horticultural produce, and flowers.

As a state of the Indian Union, Meghalaya came into being on **21 January 1972**. It was created by carving out two districts of the former composite state of Assam, namely, the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and the Garo Hills. At present, Meghalaya comprises seven districts: East Garo Hills, East Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills, Ri-Bhoi, South Garo Hills, West Garo Hills, and the West Khasi Hills. Its capital Shillong was also the capital of undivided Assam from 1874 till the creation of the new state of Meghalaya. On its south and southwest border Meghalaya is bounded by Bangladesh with which it shares a 443 km international border, to its north and northwest is the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, while Assam's Cachar region lies to its east.

Meghalaya is one of eight states in the north-eastern region (NER) of the country, the other seven being Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura. The entire state of Meghalaya (along with the state of Mizoram and parts of Assam and Tripura) falls under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, which prescribes a separate code for the governance of tribal areas in the country. Administration of the districts in the state is undertaken by three Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) which have extensive legal and executive powers over the use of land and resources, social custom, inheritance, and other areas.

The development of Meghalaya, along with other states in the NER, lags significantly behind the rest of India. The process of development has been shaped by the specific experiences of the state, and the region in general. The partition of the country had a tremendous adverse impact on the region, which was abruptly cut off from its traditional markets and linkages, and acquired a long and porous international border overnight.

Although Meghalaya has made substantial socio-economic progress since then, this has not been sufficient to propel the state to a higher sustainable growth path. The development model followed for the state in the years after Independence was largely determined by the Centre, and did little to lay a strong infrastructural base, promote linkages within the region, or generate employment opportunities. Today, constrained connectivity, abysmal infrastructure, and poor governance is combined with low productivity and limited access to the broader market, thus posing difficulties in sustaining high growth rates over medium and long periods of time. The lack of development has forced the state to be overwhelmingly dependent on the central government for resources. The Eleventh Plan envisages higher GDP growth and, more importantly, inclusive growth, requiring a rapid increase in employment, significant improvement in human development, particularly of disadvantaged groups and regions, and a sharp decline in poverty. According to a survey conducted by Meghalaya's State Rural Department in 2002, almost half the rural households (48.9 per cent) in the state fall into the BPL category. There is clearly an urgent need to bring the state in sync with the rest of the country so it can be an equal partner in India's growth story.

This report presents a vision of the development goals of the people of Meghalaya, and the strategy best suited to achieving these goals. Its perspective aims at promoting integrated development on a foundation of participative planning and implementation. The section that follows gives a brief description of the state, placing it in the context of development and growth in the rest of the country.

1.1 THE PEOPLE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

The people

Meghalaya's population has been growing at an increasing rate, at a rate that is higher than the national average. Thus, while in 1951 its decadal growth rate was 8.97 per cent, growth increased sharply in 1961 to 27.03 per cent, and to 32.86 per cent by 1991; growth declined to 29.94 per cent in the decade ending 2001, and further to 24.4 per cent in the most recent decade, ending 2011. In comparison the decadal population growth rates of the country as a whole were 21.56 per cent, and 18.74 per cent in the last two censuses, respectively.[1]

The state's population density was 130.5 per sq. km in 2011, based on its population of 2,964,007 and its land area of 22,720 sq. km, which is far lower than the population density for the country as a whole (*Annexure Table 1.A3*). As in any hilly

[1] *Table 1.2* from the State Development Report

region, population density varies tremendously across the state, from 241 persons per sq km in the East Khasi Hills to only 54 in the South Garo Hills (*Table 1.A3*). The capital Shillong is located in the East Khasi Hills, the most densely populated district, with over 28 per cent of the population and only 12.3 per cent of the state's land area.

An important aspect of Meghalaya's demography is its largely youthful population; in fact it has the largest share of very young people (below the age of 14 at the time of the last census in 2001) in its population among the north-east states, and indeed in the country: in 2001, 41.6 per cent of Meghalaya's population was below 14 years against a national average of 34.3 per cent (*Table 1.A1* in the Annexure). With 27.13 per cent of its population in the next age category of 15–29 years, the state has more than two-thirds its population (68.73 per cent) below the age of 30, which has important implications for its economic policy.

Its ethnically diverse population is 85.9 per cent tribal, mainly comprising people from the Khasi and Garo tribes. The Khasis are the dominant group, constituting more than half (56.4 per cent) the total tribal population of the state, followed by the Garos (34.6 per cent), so that the two groups together account for 91 per cent of the total tribal population of Meghalaya. The other main tribal groups are the Hajong (1.6 per cent), Raba (1.4 per cent), and Koch (1.1 per cent), followed by smaller tribal groups like the Man (Tai speaking), Dimasa, Chakma, Pawi, and Lakher.[2]

Like most other parts of the country, the state is predominantly rural, with over 80 per cent of its population living in the countryside. Here, the East Khasi Hills district is again an outlier, with only 58 per cent of its population in the rural areas compared to all the other districts which have over 88 per cent rural-based populations (*Annexure Table 1.A2*); more than 60 per cent of the urban population of the state resides in the East Khasi Hills, mainly because it is home to the state capital of Shillong.

The Resource Base

The state is richly endowed with natural resources and mineral deposits. Its long, abundant monsoon sustains intensive and varied flora, and over 70 per cent of its total geographic area is under forest cover.[3] Wide geological, ecological, and climatic variations mean that the state is home to five agro-climatic sub-zones, which have given rise to tremendous biodiversity, and are conducive to the cultivation of a wide variety of crops and produce.

[2] Census of India, 2001

[3] State of the Forest Report, 2005, from the *Meghalaya State Development Report*

The state also has vast reserves of coal and limestone and other commercially exploitable mineral deposits, along with rich deposits of uranium. Granite of excellent quality is at present being mined in the East and West Khasi Hills districts. Clay, which can be used in the ceramic, paper, rubber, and refractory industries, is found in some abundance, and minerals like gypsum, phosphorite, glass-sand, base metals, quartz, and feldspar exist in various parts of the state. Meghalaya is also credited with having one of the most valuable sillimanite deposits in the world.

The resource base of Meghalaya has unfortunately not been managed to the advantage of the state and the people. While most of the reserved forests are under the control of local communities, they have not been managed to the benefit of these communities. Of its rich mineral reserves, only coal and limestone have been mined commercially, but not in a systematic or organised fashion. Streams and rivers fed by heavy rainfall, cascading down the hill slopes, provide abundant hydropower potential, but of the assessed capacity of around 3,000 MW, only 185.2 MW has so far been tapped.

1.2 SOCIAL PROFILE

Along with its geological and climatic diversity, the state is characterised by large socio-economic variations across its seven districts, which are the combined outcome of geophysical conditions, the historic role of Shillong as the capital of undivided Assam, and the development strategy and priorities so far.

Meghalaya's literacy rate, at 75.48 per cent (2011 census), is marginally above the national literacy rate of 74.04 per cent. And while there is little gender related difference in literacy rates (with male literacy rates of 77.17 per cent and the female rate of 73.78 per cent), there is considerable variation in literacy rates across the districts, with rates ranging from a low of 63.26 per cent in Jaintia Hills and 68.38 per cent in West Garo Hills to 84.7 per cent in the East Khasi Hills (*Annexure Table 1.A3*). There is also a significant difference between literacy in the rural and urban areas: overall urban and rural literacy rates are 87.12 per cent and 57 per cent, respectively; in some districts such as the Jaintia Hills urban literacy rates are almost double the rural rates. More importantly, even as the average literacy rate in the region is marginally lower than the national average, there are concerns about the quality of education, which has not translated into higher employability or productivity. Further, the slow pace of industrialisation and limited capacity of the population to engage in productive economic activities has meant a high rate of unemployment and underemployment.

This district-wise variation is further reflected in other major indicators such as the infant mortality rate and in access to basic amenities like electricity (*Annexure Table 1.A3*). Thus while the aggregate data for the state appears to be on par with the average for the country, they mask vast disparities that exist within the different districts, and between urban and rural populations, reflecting the poverty of access to services such as health, electricity, and schools for many.

1.3 THE ECONOMY OF THE STATE

1.3.1 Income Levels

Per capita income over time is a good indicator of the economic status of people in the state. Data for Meghalaya (*Annexure Table 1.A4*) shows that the per capita income in the state is below the per capita income in the country as a whole average, and that the gap between the rates of growth in per capita income between the country and the state has increased, especially since 2005–06. Within the state, there are significant differences in the standards of living among the different districts (*Annexure Table 1.A3*), with per capita incomes in the East Khasi Hills being significantly higher than the per capita incomes in most other districts.

1.3.2 The State's Development Path: Sectoral Analysis

Growth of the state's economy has also been lagging behind the national economy. During the Tenth Plan (2002–07), the per capita NSDP growth in the state at constant (2004–05) prices averaged about 5.1 per cent, which was substantially lower than the country average of 6 per cent. Even in the first four years of the Eleventh Plan, annual growth of the per capita NSDP in Meghalaya at 6.1 per cent lagged behind that of the country (6.4 per cent), though by a smaller margin.

As in the rest of India, an overwhelming proportion of Meghalaya's population depends on agriculture for its livelihood, but a large majority of the people engaged in agriculture have subsistence living. While 79.9 per cent of the population resides in the rural areas of the state, income generated from the primary sector as a whole in 2010–11 was just about 17 per cent, with the secondary and tertiary sectors contributing 31.4 per cent and 51.6 per cent, respectively (*Annexure Table 1.A5*).

Further analysis of the sectoral data reveals that the structure of the economy has been showing a very slow change. While the share of the primary sector in the country has declined from 25 per cent to 14.5 per cent between 1999–2000 and 2010–11, the primary sector's share in Meghalaya over the same period has fallen only marginally, from 22.9 per cent (advanced estimates) to 17 per cent. The shares of the secondary and tertiary sectors in the state's GSDP too have changed only marginally: while the contribution of the secondary (industry) sector has risen from 23.31 per cent to 31.4 per cent over the same period, services' share has remained almost stagnant, shifting from 53.8 per cent to 51.6 per cent during the period (*Annexure Table 1.A5*).

With the increase in population over time and the decrease in land for agricultural purposes, levels of poverty have risen substantially. Unfortunately, a reliable estimate of poverty for the state is not available. The usual practice by the Planning Commission has been to assume that Meghalaya's poverty ratio is the same as that of Assam, as the National Sample Survey Office's (NSSO) Consumer Expenditure Survey in the Northeast was conducted only for Assam. Thus, in 2006–07, Meghalaya's poverty ratio was taken as 31.4 per cent. To get a more reliable estimate relevant to Meghalaya, the state government undertook a survey of households to estimate poverty based on the advice of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India in 2002, and estimated the poverty in 2002 at 48.9 per cent. However, the sample was too small to ensure any degree of reliability of the estimates. Nevertheless, in the absence of any other state specific estimate, this has to be taken as the indicator.

An important reason for the persistence of high poverty is that in rural areas of the state, there are few employment and income-generating opportunities, poor linkages with markets, and low productivity arising from shifting cultivation and traditional methods of cultivation. And as we have shown above, they are further disadvantaged in comparison with urban areas in terms of access to amenities and other economic and social indicators of development.

Despite its rich resource endowments which could form the basis of a vibrant industrial sector, Meghalaya continues to be industrially backward. For a start, the manner of exploitation of its natural resources has been to market them mainly in primary form, with little or no value addition in the state, thus reducing employment and income-generating opportunities in the sector, as well as the revenue base. The various incentives offered to industrial investment in recent years have not been sufficient to offset the drawbacks, which include poor infrastructural facilities which have hampered communication and connectivity, shortages of power, a low technical and skills base, and the almost complete absence of non-community land that can be used for enterprise. This slow pace of industrialisation and limited capacity of the population to engage in productive economic activities has resulted in a high rate of unemployment and underemployment, especially among young people.

One of the biggest development challenges in the state is the lack of a strong infrastructural base, which is important to create an enabling investment climate. In the absence of air and rail networks to transport people and freight across the state, Meghalaya is dependent on its national and state highways and access through the neighbouring states for connectivity. However, not only is the road network inadequate in the state, so much so that in 2008 it had the second highest proportion of unconnected villages (47.02 per cent) among the north-eastern states, but poor maintenance also means that the few existing roads are in dire need of attention and funding. Even in terms of road density, in 2006–07, Meghalaya's road density at 43.87 km/100 sq. km area was substantially lower than not only that of the country (97.57 km/100 sq. km) but also that of the north-eastern region (127.87 km/100 sq. km). In addition, less than one-third of its rural households have electricity (2001). In a recent ranking of states and union territories in the country by infrastructure, Meghalaya came twenty-first — and, in fact, was sixth in a ranking of seven north-eastern states (excluding Sikkim).

The pace of development in the region is the outcome of the development approach followed so far, which has been generated from the centre rather than determined through a 'bottom up' process of participatory decision making by the people of the state. Various centre-based schemes have only led to unaccountable spending with no monitoring systems in place. It is only when priorities, planning, and strategies involve the people they impinge on will development and progress truly lead to improved capacities and livelihoods.

Table 1.1: Some Indicators: Meghalaya and India

	Reference Year	Meghalaya	North-East Region	India
Area (sq. km)	2001	22,429	262,179	32,87,240
Population (in lakh)	2011	29.64	455.88	12,101.93
Population density (per sq. km)	2011	132	174	368
Sex ratio (per ’000 males)	2011	986	956	940
Literacy rate (%)	2011	75.48	64.69	74.04
Forest cover (%)	2009–10	77.23	66.28	21.02
Villages electrified (%)	2009–10	59.3	74.83	83.7
Electricity consumption (per capita in kwh)	2009–10	655.42		733.5
Birth rate (per ’000)	2006	24.4		22.5
Death rate (per ’000)	2006	8.1		7.3
Infant mortality rate (per ’000)	2006	59		50
Road density (PWD roads) (km per ’00 sq. km)	2006–07	43.87	127.87	96.57

Source: Meghalaya State Development Report 2008, Government of Meghalaya

1.4 THE GROWTH SCENARIO

Bringing prosperity and peace to the people of Meghalaya would require sustained increases in the per capita income and a more equitable distribution among the population. At the very least, the people should have a standard of living at par with the rest of the country by 2030. The growth of the state’s economy has been lagging behind growth in the national economy. During the Tenth Plan (2002–07), the per capita NSDP grew at 5.11 per cent annually, which was lower than the all-state average of 6 per cent. Although during the first four years of the Eleventh Plan, the state’s annual growth rate accelerated to 6.1 per cent, it was still lower than that of the all-state average of 6.4 per cent. This implies that the state will have to improve its efforts to catch up with the national growth rate in the coming years.

The Vision 2020 document of the north-eastern region has estimated that if the NDP of the country at factor cost at constant (2011–12) prices grows at an average rate per cent during the Twelfth Plan at 9 per cent during the remaining period (7.6 per cent in per capita terms), Meghalaya will have to grow at a marginally higher rate of 9.2 per cent during the period (7.9 per cent per capita) to catch up with the country’s average per capita income by 2030. Moving into a higher growth path to achieve 9.2 per cent per year on average for the next 18 years is going to a major challenge, and would require considerable efforts at creating the right investment climate in the state. After the vision document for the North Eastern Region (NER) was adopted by the North Eastern Council in May 2008 in which all the states of the NER were signatories, not much appears to have been done to implement its recommendations on the ground, which would have created significant externalities to Meghalaya as well as the entire NER. Meghalaya, however, should proceed to evolve a strategy to create an enabling environment for inclusive development without any further delay to ensure its own progress.

With the national economy poised to grow at an average annual rate of about 9 per cent, this would result in per capita income growth of 7.74 per cent annually, as over the period, population is expected to decelerate and per capita income growth is expected to accelerate from 6.63 per cent during the Eleventh Plan to 7.76 per cent in the Fifteenth Plan period (*Annexure Table 1.A6*). Under this assumption, the per capita NDP (at factor cost) of the country in 2029–30 is estimated at Rs 2,17,855 at 2011–12 prices.

To achieve this level of per capita income, the NSDP in Meghalaya will have to grow annually at 9.2 per cent between 2013–14 and 2029–30, accelerating from 7.7 per cent during the Eleventh Plan to over 9 per cent during the Fifteenth Plan. The growth of per capita NSDP should accelerate from 6.5 per cent per year to 7.9 per cent per year during the respective Plan periods, requiring an average annual growth rate of 8.8 per cent during the period. This is clearly within the realm of feasibility. Nevertheless, growing consistently at over 9 per cent would require considerable efforts to ensure the flow of investment. This order of acceleration will be carried out in phases (as indicated in *Annexure table 1.A7*). Indeed, if favourable conditions for economic growth in the state are created, it is possible for the state to accelerate growth at a much faster rate to achieve per capita income levels higher than that of the country. Indeed, the target should be to achieve that and be a leader rather than a follower in terms of accelerating growth.

1.5 FUNDING THE GROWTH PROCESS

The required acceleration in growth of NSDP in Meghalaya would call for a substantial increase in investments in the state and an expansion in efficiency of resource use to promote higher productivity. We have estimated the investment requirements for achieving the required growth in GSDP in two alternative scenarios — one by assuming the incremental capital-output ratio (ICOR) at 4, and another assuming that the ICOR will show a gradual decline from 4 to 3.6 between the Eleventh Plan period and the Fifteenth Plan period. There is no state-specific ICOR available and we have assumed that the prevailing ICOR of the country will also be applicable to the state. Furthermore, the lower ICOR scenario is based on the assumption that over different plan periods, an increase in productivity will result in a marginal decline in the ICOR.

The estimates (presented in *Annexure Table 1.A8*) show that it is necessary to increase the investment substantially to equalise the per capita income in Meghalaya with that of the country in 2030. Under the first scenario where the ICOR is assumed to remain constant at 4, the volume of investment required as a ratio of GSDP will have to increase from 29 per cent during the Eleventh Plan to 33.2 per cent during the Fifteenth Plan. Even under the alternative scenario of ICOR declining from 4 in the Eleventh Plan to 3.6 in the Fifteenth Plan, investment as a ratio of GSDP will have to increase to 30.6 per cent (*Annexure Table 1.A8*).

The large amounts of investment required for Meghalaya to catch up with the rest of the country by 2030 cannot come from public sources alone, and a large part will have to come from the private sector. However, for the private sector to make large investments in the state, it is necessary to create an enabling environment. Among other factors, the quality of infrastructure in the state is an important determinant of investment by the private sector. Given the poor condition of overall infrastructure in the state, it is important that both the Centre and the state governments significantly augment their investments. Large scale upgradation is necessary for improving connectivity within the state, between the state and the region, between the state and the rest of the country, and between the state and neighbouring countries and beyond. Thus, significant increases in public investment are necessary in setting up good road, rail, and air connectivity. Other enabling infrastructure that needs to be upgraded to attract private investment into the state includes telecommunication networks, power supply, agricultural storage and marketing links, and border trading facilities.

Since both the central and state governments will be required to make large investments to create the infrastructural environment for private investment, and for the larger benefit of the people of the state, it could be important to involve the private sector in the effort through public-private partnerships (PPPs). This will require the formulation of an appropriate PPP framework for infrastructural investment.

An important aspect of development in Meghalaya, as in other states in the NER, is the lack of productive economic activity and extreme dependence on the government for employment and income generation. Development is not sustainable if government is the only major economic activity in the state. Changing the structure of income generation to shift from a predominant public administration share to non-governmental sectors, and more importantly, to manufacturing and services other than public administration should be a priority, and will call for the entry of private investment.

1.6 THE WAY FORWARD

The people's vision for Meghalaya is to achieve happiness through peace and prosperity in a sustainable manner. They would like to see their state emerge as strong, secure, peaceful, prosperous, and confident; to embrace markets gainfully; and prepare to significantly increase trade within the region, with the rest of the country, with neighbouring countries, and beyond. They would like to move away from dependency in every sense of the term, and towards determining their own development strategy, which will harness the resources of the state for their own benefit. In the process, they would like to create abundant productive employment opportunities for the youth. At the same time, they would like to have the chance to empower themselves by acquiring the education and skills needed to be gainfully employed in emerging productive economic activities, raise their own wellbeing, and to build the nation.

Responses to the questionnaire circulated to ascertain from the people of Meghalaya their vision for development of the state overwhelmingly stress the lack of economic opportunities, especially for the youth in the state, mainly due to the lack of empowerment. Inclusive development requires inclusive and participatory governance. Planning is not only a means to achieve sustained and inclusive development but also an end in itself, as it empowers people to have a voice in deciding their strategy. The responses also emphasise the need to create a climate for investment by putting in place transport connectivity and competitive infrastructure facilities (a summary of the responses is included in the Appendix to this report).

To meet the aspirations of the people, the development path of the state needs a course correction to include strategies that will place it on the road to progress in a sustainable manner. The strategies followed so far have failed to produce the momentum to propel the state forward in a sustained manner. Investments made in the state have not created strong backward and forward linkages, nor have they generated employment opportunities in the state. This Vision document for the state proposes a shift in strategy from a Centre- and state-centric approach to planning and implementation to a people-determined model, where people participate in the planning process and determine and monitor their own programmes and schemes.

The elements of the new strategy are as follows:

(i) Empowerment of the people through participatory planning and inclusive governance is the most important component of the strategy. An essential prerequisite of inclusive development, it involves strengthening the traditional institutions of local governance and grassroots planning, calibrated right from the village level. As the state is covered under Schedule VI of the Constitution, neither the panchayat system nor the panchayat extension to scheduled areas (PESA) is applicable. The traditional village level institutions in the state include Nokma, Syiem, and Dolloi. At the same time, after 1952, Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) were set up in the state. Harmonising the traditional institutions with village councils is important to have effective participatory planning from the village level. Planning at the village level involves harnessing the various central projects to benefit the village economy in an effective manner to get the maximum benefits from them in addition to mobilising resources for spending on various public services desired by the people.

(ii) Creation of institutions and systems to promote the development of markets in the state. This will entail improving governance, as well as the development of market-promoting infrastructure.

(iii) A focus on sustainable development based on the state's comparative advantages so that natural resources are harnessed for the benefit of the population. This involves enhancing agricultural productivity through an expansion in irrigation and agricultural extension, promoting the cultivation of commercial crops, shifting tribal populations away from "jhuming" by encouraging them to take up organic farming, and by providing alternative rural livelihood opportunities by promoting the marketing of traditional crafts and small industries. It also involves promoting manufacturing activity and value addition based on the resources of the region. The state's pool of educated manpower provides a base for the development of information technology enabled services (ITES) as well. At the same time, given the fragile topography and ecosystem of the state, development has to be carried out in an environmentally sustainable manner.

(iv) Infrastructure development to promote markets and attract investment into the region. Improving the state's connectivity both within the region and with the rest of the country is key to its prosperity and growth. This requires significant investment in road, rail, and perhaps air connectivity. A good road network within the state which includes rural roads, opens up markets for labour and products, and enables the rural population to access basic services, including education and healthcare is essential. Equally important is the need to make regular, quality power available by harnessing the state's potential to generate power from its own hydel sources. A good telecommunications network can help overcome the problems of providing physical infrastructure in predominantly hilly terrain; it is vital to provide connectivity to bring the state at par with other well performing states, quite apart from being essential to the creation of a good IT trained workforce in the state. Agricultural and rural development requires, in addition to rural roads and connectivity, the creation of warehousing facilities and a cold storage chain. Building people's capabilities and strengths will require the creation and maintenance of health and education related infrastructure — health centres, schools, playgrounds, and hospitals. Further, sustainable development in both urban and rural areas calls for the provision of environmental sanitation infrastructure — water supply, sanitation, and waste disposal — to ensure the wellbeing of people.

(v) Expanding trade and investment opportunities is important in a globalising world. This includes expansion of trade within the region, with neighbouring countries and beyond. A number of recommendations have been made by various committees and study groups which have been summarised in the Vision 2020 document for the north-eastern region. These are applicable to Meghalaya as well.

(vi) Building the capacity of people and institutions is important for accelerating growth, providing employment security, and empowering people. Institutional capacity must be augmented to improve governance in the state, and to design and implement development plans from the village level up to the state level. Considerable capacity building is also needed to ensure responsive and market-friendly governance.

(vii) Inclusive development is possible only when vulnerable sections of the population have access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. The development strategy should foster greater gender balance by ensuring a more equitable role for women in representative and elected bodies at all levels of government. Inclusive development also entails ensuring balanced development of the areas within the state. There are significant variations in the levels of development — both physical and human — across districts, and the development strategy should ensure a more equitable development path for all areas.