

Preface

Socio-economic development and environmental conservation of the Himalayan region have been persistent thrust of our study, continuing from the beginning of the 1990s. Overtime, we carried out several studies through undertaking projects from the national research institutions and funding agencies and published over hundred research papers and books. The present study mainly examines the approaches of sustainable livelihoods to poverty reduction and carries both conceptual and empirical studies. Mizoram state, lies in the eastern extension of the Himalaya, constitutes one of the integral parts of north-east India. It has primitive economy. Agriculture is the mainstay and the major source of income and employment. Livelihood of people largely depends on the output from agricultural production. Livestock farming and non-timber based forest products also support it. Mizoram is bestowed with abundance of natural resources—land, forest and water, the life supporting layers. Sociocultural entity of the state is varied and is quite different from the mainland of India. On the above backdrops and keeping all these aspects in mind, we conducted the study ‘a sustainable livelihood approach to poverty reduction: an empirical analysis of Mizoram, the eastern extension of the Himalaya’ and the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, funded it.

Poverty and malnutrition have become very common phenomena in the developing world where food supply is insufficient for the vast growing population. The areas where this situation exists include the part of South America, Africa and South and South-east Asia. These areas are socially backward and economically underdeveloped, where agriculture is the main occupation and a major source of income for the majority of people. Similarly, most of the mountainous regions of the world are worst affected by poverty and malnutrition. Agricultural practices in mountain regions are the major economic activities, characterise traditional cultivation of crops which is insufficient to meet the food requirement of the people. Sustainable livelihood approach, therefore, becomes a significant tool to poverty reduction and attaining food security.

India, an emerging economy of the world, suffers from the menace of poverty and malnutrition as about 40 % people live below poverty line. Although, it obtains a huge reservoir of natural resources in the forms of the vast fertile agricultural land,

forest, water, precious minerals and power resources yet, it could not utilize them sustainably, mainly due to lack in proper development approach and scarcity of technological advancement. Further, disparities in economic development in all the Indian states are profound that can be seen in the spatial perspectives and they are influenced by geographical location and the availability of infrastructural facilities.

Mizoram characterises underdeveloped economy and practices traditional subsistence agriculture as about half of the total population of the state is involved on it. Further, shifting cultivation dominates agricultural pattern, obtains a maximum proportion of arable land and is the major socio-economic activity of the native tribal people. However, output is insufficient and thus, food insecurity situation exists.

Population distribution in Mizoram is sparse. The urban and rural settlements are located on the hills and ridges, as the people of Mizoram like to reside on the top of the hills, and it is one the indicators of their social status, as the term 'Mizoram' itself denotes the land of the highlanders. Urban population is higher (51 %) than rural population and population density is 52 persons living per km². Social status of women and men is equal and their number is almost equal in the total population. Further, social structure of Mizoram has largely been influenced by the western culture and women also participate in all the family affairs including decision-making. Church plays a greater role in the social integration and transformation. About 83 % populations, including all ethnic Mizos, (2011) is Christian. It was a disturbed area during the long-lasting movement of the Mizos for statehood (the 1960s). After emerged as a full flagged state of Republic of India in 1985, Mizoram has become India's peaceful state.

The landscape is mountainous. Structured hills, valley fills and flood plains form it and constitute the panoramic landscapes. Tourism may obtain a prominent place in economic development and may enhance livelihoods. Diversity in faunal and floral species further accelerates livelihood options, if they are harnessed optimally because the economic viability of biodiversity resources is high. Water resource availability is enormous. There are many perennial streams and rivers that originate and flow from the state. Climate, in the whole state, is very feasible. Average annual temperature remains about 23 °C. Intensity and frequency of rain is high that occurs mainly during the monsoon season and stretches for about six months from May to October. Winter, mainly four months—November, December, January and February remain dry and moderately cold.

Infrastructural facilities are poor. Difficult terrain and unavailability in financial resources are the main constraints in development processes, as the state characterises fragile landscape/ecology and underdeveloped economy. A large part of the state is remote. Transportation facilities are lagging behind. Lacking in educational institution, banking, energy sectors and others are the main hindrances for socio-economic development, leading to poverty and malnutrition.

Sustainable livelihood approach is the key driver to reduce poverty in the countries, which characterise poverty and malnutrition. It comprises of the five livelihood assets—natural, human, financial, physical and social. Availability and use of these assets optimally will lead to sustainable livelihoods. This study

illustrates potential of assets and applies them in Mizoram context for livelihood sustainability and poverty reduction.

A geo-empirical analysis of land resources and livelihood assets was carried out to conduct this study. A case study of 16 villages lie in eight districts of Mizoram was carried out, and the household level survey (random sampling) was conducted. Further, a structured questionnaire was constructed and questions were framed on the various socio-economic and livelihood aspects. Secondary data on natural and human resources were also collected for assisting and enhancing the study. We used a set of qualitative and quantitative approaches to elaborate the gathered data and applied a participatory rural appraisal after rapid field visits.

This study is unique in the field of sustainable livelihoods in Mizoram and other areas where the similar socio-economic and geographical conditions exist. Livelihood options are mainly related to and obtained from agriculture and forest products/resources. We elaborate livelihood patterns and socio-economic development of the study villages and suggest several measures to develop methodologies for livelihood sustainability and poverty reduction. This study supports the researchers, academicians, farmers and all other stakeholders who are involved in rural development.

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