

**POVERTY  
AND  
RURAL  
DEVELOPMENT  
IN  
MEGHALAYA  
(INDIA)**

**EUGENE D. THOMAS**

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The state of Meghalaya in India, though socially progressive, is characterized by the economic backwardness. Women's participation rate in the work force is high in the state as reflected in census data. The state has virtually no industrial base despite being rich in minerals and scenic beauty, the latter being an economic resource vested in the hands of the entire community. Animal husbandry has not been a serious activity here. The people, therefore, are left with little option but to seek employment in agriculture.

It goes without saying that agriculture in the hills requires not only different technologies of cultivation, but also different suitable crops. All these factors have led to low land, labour and capital productivities. In addition, the proportion of cultivators and agricultural labourers to the state's total working force is as high as 64 per cent indicating the lopsided occupational structure in the state.

This study examines the employment benefits that have accrued to workers employed under the earlier introduced poverty alleviation programmes, the N.R.E.P. and J.R.Y., in the state of Meghalaya, besides looking into the poverty incidence of both beneficiary and non-beneficiary households.

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# POVERTY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN MEGHALAYA (INDIA)

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**AKANSHA PUBLISHING HOUSE**

NEW DELHI-110 059 (INDIA)

₹60

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NE  
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**Poverty and Rural Development in Meghalaya (India)**

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First Edition 2004

ISBN 81-87606-55-X

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PRINTED IN INDIA

Published by M.P. Misra for Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi  
and Printed at Tarun Offset Press, Delhi.

## PREFACE

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Rural poverty is inextricably linked with low land and labour productivity and unemployment, including underemployment. The twin problems of poverty and unemployment are caused, to a large extent, by a similar set of factors. Capital stock is believed to be the most limiting factor to the growth in labour efficiency and productivity. Further, human capital visible in terms of organization, growth and application of human skills has posed an additional limit. The lack of technological innovations can lead to economic backwardness. The state of Meghalaya in India, though socially progressive, is characterized by the economic backwardness. Women's participation rate in the work force is high in the state as reflected in census data. But this aspect is missing in both the earlier poverty alleviation programmes like the JRY and NREP where women's participation rate in the work force is abysmal. The state has virtually no industrial base despite being rich in minerals and scenic beauty, the latter being an economic resource vested in the hands of the entire community. Animal husbandry has not been a serious activity here. The people, therefore, are left with little option but to seek employment in agriculture. Here too, crop cultivation has posed another set of problems in the light of the state's typical land tenure system. Private enterprises has guided decision making processes only on privately owned agricultural land where no remarkable growth in yield rates are exhibited due to the traditional methods of cultivation. It goes without saying that agriculture in the hills requires not only different technologies of cultivation, but also different suitable crops. All these factors have led to low land, labour and capital productivities. In addition, the proportion of cultivators and agricultural labourers to the state's total working force is as high as 64 per cent indicating the lopsided occupational structure in the state.

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Meghalaya's agriculture, however, is not without a silver lining. It is heartening to observe that the net income generated per hectare of gross cropped area is higher in the state as compared to other more advanced states in the country. This is perhaps due to low adoption of new capital-intensive seed-water-fertiliser technology in the state, resulting in a low cost of cultivation. The yields are low, but so are the capital costs, leading to a high generation of net income per hectare. But what is relevant is the fact, that net sown area per cultivator is extremely low in Meghalaya as compared to other states and the national average. People are, therefore, poor and unemployed. Although no serious statistical investigation has been carried out by any agency to ascertain the incidence of poverty and unemployment (including underemployment), indications gathered in our study suggest a high incidence of poverty in the state.

Therefore, there is a necessity to carry out comprehensive surveys ascertaining the levels and rates of poverty and unemployment incidence at the disaggregate village and block level. Further, the poverty alleviation programmes' fund allocation among the blocks and villages must match the needs of the people in such administrative units. Preferences to poorer blocks and poorer village ought to be given under such programmes. Again, poor households alone ought to be covered under these programmes.


This study examines the employment benefits that have accrued to workers employed under the earlier introduced poverty alleviation programmes, the N.R.E.P. and J.R.Y, in the state of Meghalaya, besides looking into the poverty incidence of both beneficiary and non-beneficiary households. Any error or omission in this work is entirely mine.

I am immensely indebted to Dr. Mahesh Lalwani, then a Professor in the Department of Economics, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong for his counsel, assistance, and encouragement in my work. My thanks also go to a number of people for their help in bringing out this book. I thank all those people in the many villages that had patiently given their time for the interviews, all the Block Development Officers and their staff and the officials of the various District Rural Development Agencies of Meghalaya

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who had also spared their time to answer my queries and even accompanied me to the very interior places of the State. I am also indebted to Mr. Godfrey Pathaw for his painstaking assistance in the word processing of the manuscript.

My special thanks goes to my wife, Iris and family for the enormous support that they extended to me.

 27/2/04

**EUGENE D. THOMAS**

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ISBN 81-87606-55-X



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