

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DYNAMICS IN SOUTH ASSAM

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INTRODUCTION

There are 23 districts in Assam of which Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi are the three plain districts and Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills are the two hills districts in its southern part. Karbi Anglong is known as the biggest district in southern Assam covering an area of 10,434 sq. kms in contrast to Hailakandi being the smallest district with an area of 3786 sq. kms. The two hills districts cover 68 percent of the total area in South Assam. Out of 33 lakh populations, 75 percent of it lives in the three plain districts and the district Cachar alone gives shelter to 36.7 percent of its total population.

Over the years there has been consistent rise of both population and density in South Assam. The density of population has increased from 75 per sq. km in 1960-61 to 98 per sq. km in 1970-71 and further to 149 per sq. km in 1991 as against the corresponding figures of 286 persons in Assam and 267 persons at the all India level. In contrast Karimganj has been observed to be the most thickly populated district in South Assam with the highest density of 457 persons per sq. km.

Out of 33 lakh of populations in South Assam 15.89 lakh are living in the Cachar district alone as against 0.69 lakh in N.C. Hills. The percentage of female population to total population is varying from district to district from the lowest of 46.16 percent to the highest of 48.61. It is estimated that 76 percent of the total female population are living in the plain districts and percentage of female has been higher in rural areas than that of the urban areas in all the five districts in South Assam.

URBANIZATION

Urbanization is one of the important indicators of development in an economy. The economy of South Assam being a part of the Indian economy is no exception to this. It is found that about 3.2 lakh populations in South Assam are living in the urban areas.

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Among these urbanites 37.4 percent are living in the Cachar district and 22.1 percent in Karbi Anglong. It is estimated that 67 percent of the total urbanites are living in the plain districts only. The extent of urbanization is found to be too less in Hailakandi and N.C. Hills in comparison to other three districts in South Assam.

According to 1960-61 Census report, there were only one lakh of urban population in South Assam. However, there has been slow but a continuous rise in their number over different census periods. The number has increased from 1.51 lakh in 1970-71 to 3.19 lakh in 1990-91. In other words, the percentage of urban population to total population has increased from 6.04 percent to only 9.64 percent in 190-91. The figure of 9.64 percent is comparatively too low to the all India average of 25.7 percent and all Assam average of 11.1 percent. The highest growth rate of urban population of 22.87 percent is observed in the N.C. Hills district. Growth of urban population has been observed to be relatively higher in the hills districts than that of the plain districts.

LITERACY

Literacy being another important indicator of socio-economic development reflects the relative position of the region in the country. It is estimated that 14.5 lakh of people in South Assam are literate of which 40.4 percent are living in Cachar district alone. Only a measure of 4.8 percent of the total literates lives in N.C. Hills. It also reveals that 79 percent of the total literates in South Assam live in the three plain districts. There has been slow but a steady rise in the growth of literacy in the region. During 1960-61 the literacy rate was at the level of 26.7 percent which was increased to 28.5 percent in 1970-71 and further to 43.9 percent in 1990-91. Comparing this literacy rate of 43.9 percent in South Assam t with the corresponding figure of 42.5 percent in Assam and that of 52.2 percent in India it can be said that not only South Assam but also the whole of Assam State is lagging behind in this respect. Moreover, within South Assam the lowest literacy rate of 35.9 percent is observed in the Karbi Anglong district as against 48.3 percent in Cachar.

Surprisingly female literacy is much better in this part of the State in Assam. It is estimated that 5.6 lakh females are literates. The percentage of female literacy is relatively at a higher level of 38.4 percent as against the corresponding rate of 35.2

percent in Assam and that of 24.8 percent at the all India level. However, it is in much worse a position compared to the States of Nagaland and Mizoram where the rates are 45.5 percent and 64.1 percent respectively. As far as different districts are concerned there is no significant variation in the female literacy rates in South Assam.

AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

To have an overall idea about the extent of development in the field of agriculture in South Assam only a few indicators, namely creation and utilisation of irrigation potential, use of high yielding varieties of seeds and consumption of fertilizer were taken into account for their analysis. It was found that up to 31st March 1994 only 39,164 hectares of land were brought under irrigation in South Assam. There has been a very poor tendency of increase in the creation of irrigation potential for the last five years in this part of the State. Least irrigation potential has been created in the Hailakandi district. Karbi Anglong is the only fortunate district having both the minor and medium/major irrigation facilities. Surprisingly only 35.2 percent of the total irrigated area comes under the three plain districts as against 64.8 percent in the two hills districts.

As far as utilisation of these potential is concerned there has been very poor response from the farmers in the area. A wide gap has been observed between the irrigation potential created and their utilisation. Excepting in Karbi Anglong there has been more or less diminishing tendency in the utilisation of irrigation potential. This necessitates the importance of conducting an intensive study on the problem to identify the reasons and suggest the remedial measures. The also reveals that the degree of utilisation of irrigation potential like its creation is found to be more in the hills districts than that of the plain districts. Uniformly more weight has been given to *Kharif* crops in the utilisation of irrigation potential in all the five districts. Only a meager of 10 percent of total irrigation potential has been utilized for the Rabi crops.

It is shocking to note that the area under high yielding variety (HYV) of paddy in South Assam has decreased from 1.4 lakh hectares in 1991-92 to 1.3 lakh hectares in 1993-94. This tendency is common to all the districts excepting Hailakandi. More than 78 percent of the total area under HYV of paddy in this part of the State has been in the plain districts only. It is also observed that the farmers are using HYV seeds in three different

seasons. Out of 1.3 lakh hectares of land brought under HYV, 73.4 percent and 24.7 percent of it have been devoted to winter and autumn paddy respectively and only a meager of 1.9 percent to summer paddy and thus having enough scope of utilizing HYV seeds for producing summer paddy in these districts.

It is equally painful to note that consumption of fertilizer in agriculture is far from satisfactory. In 1993-94 more than 98 percent of the total fertilizer consumption was in the plain districts only. Moreover, there is an indication of insignificant increase in the consumption of fertilizer over the last five years. Besides, the use of fertilizer has been very poor in Rabi crops in comparison to *Kharif* crops.

CONCLUSION

In view of the above mentioned facts it was thus felt necessary to state that there is a greater need on the part of the Government to take some bold steps to solve these chronic problems. There is an urgent need of increasing the literacy rate in South Assam and particularly in the Karbi Anglong district. Creation of more irrigational facilities is a must for the overall development of agriculture in South Assam in general and the plain districts in it in particular. There is a need to encourage the farmers to utilize the available irrigation potential to the maximum and particularly steps be taken to see that Rabi crops are not neglected in the region. Since the area is very remote there is also a need for creating awareness among the farmers in the hills districts to use fertilizer and HYV seeds through some extension programmes.

Table 1

District-wise Area, Population, Density and Literacy Rates in South Assam

(Population in lakh)

District	Area (sq. km)	Density (per sq. km)	Total Population	Female Population	Urban Population	Literates
Cachar	3786	321	12.15	5.86	1.19	5.87
Hailakandi	1327	338	4.49	2.16	0.34	1.90
Karimganj	1809	457	8.27	4.02	0.60	3.64
Karbi Anglong	10434	64	6.63	3.15	0.70	2.38
N.C. Hills	4888	31	1.51	0.69	0.34	0.7
South Assam (Districts Total)	22244	249	33.05	15.89	3.19	14.49

Source: Statistical Hand Book, Assam

Table 2

Growth of Population, Density and Literacy in South Assam

(Population in lakh)

Census Year	Density (per sq. km)	Population (in lakh)		% of Urban Population	Literates (in lakh)	% of Literates
		Urban	Total			
1960-61	75	1.00	16.58	6.04	4.43	26.7
1970-71	98	1.51	21.69	6.97	6.18	28.5
1990-91	149	3.19	33.05	9.64	14.49	43.9

Source: Statistical Hand Book, Assam

Note: Census was not held in Assam in 1980-81.