



Dynamics of Education and Employment as the Primary Drivers for Improving Economy: A Policy Implication for Scheduled Tribes of Northeast India

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Background

Education and employment are well associated (Todaro, 1991). Likewise, education and economy are well interconnected (Stevens and Weale, 2003; Kelly, McNicoll and White, 2014). Educational development raises income, through more remunerative jobs, and accelerates economic growth (Kelly, McNicoll and White, 2014) and thereby improves living standards (Stevens and Weale, 2003). In the Northeastern Region (NER), with the intensification of modern English education, the Scheduled Tribes (STs) have developed considerably (Singha, 2011). Educationally, some STs have transgressed to other social groups (Goswami, 1984). However, tribals generally lack education, training, and communication facilities (Singh, 2007). Moreover, in terms of employment, in India, a majority of agricultural labourers are Scheduled Castes and STs (Sethi, 1984). STs constitute a marginalised social and economic class (Roy, 1989) with smaller income, greater prevalence of indebtedness, limited assets (Hanumantha and Grover, 1979) and largely depending upon shifting cultivation with a subsistence production (Nongbri, 1999; Sengupta, 2013). They remain at the lower end in social, economic and living conditions (Bhagat, 2013).

For the tribals, land and forest, a fundamental component of the agrarian economy, are complementary factors of a unified production system (Nongbri, 1999). Tribal economy is related with the livelihood practices in terms of production, consumption, and management

of goods and services. It is largely an underdeveloped economy, small economy, forest-based economy, uses simple technology, with the family as a unit of production, consumption and pattern of labour, absence in economic dealings, periodical markets, absence of capital investment, subsistence agriculture and hunting and gathering, besides having gifts and ceremonial exchanges (Karmakar, 2002). Nevertheless, it is dynamic as it develops with the change in economic intervention, development of education, increasing flow of the knowledge system, and technological development and intervention. Most tribal families live on multiple sources of livelihood like agriculture and gathering of forest products and/or working in other activities (Roy, 1989; Nongbri, 1999) that portrays diversification of occupations and economic activities (Corbridge, 1988). Incidentally, the tribal economy is integrating in the market economy (Sengupta, 2013) such as commercialisation, market relations and monetisation (Singh, 1988), and changing from shifting cultivation to intensive settled cultivation and to market-oriented economy (Sengupta, 2013).

This policy brief indicates that educational development has positively changed the employment dynamic and improved the tribal economy in NER.

Data and Method

The study used secondary literature (Ministry of Human Resource Development, National

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Sample Survey Organisation and Central Statistical Office) and primary data to study the dynamics of education and employment in relation to the economy of STs of NER. STs are compared with all social groups, using secondary data, to analyse the magnitude of social or economic deprivation. The changing condition of education that changes the employment structure that further affects the economy, using secondary data, is validated through primary data of the ST population from Manipur.

Primary data were collected from 170 households through multi-stage sampling technique, semi-structured household questionnaire, and household survey during March to August 2014 from the purposively drawn sample area of Manipur. Manipur was purposively selected as a sample unit since it has the characteristics of NER in terms of population structure such as ST, SC, OBC and others. Through multi-stage sampling technique, first, sample area was divided into four strata. Next, from these four strata, 43 villages and towns were selected randomly. Then, 170 sampled households were randomly drawn from it. Samples were drawn from all the five hill districts predominantly inhabited by ST (Chandel, Churachandpur, Senapati, Tamenglong and Ukhrul) and three valley districts (Imphal East, Imphal West and Thoubal) where the ST population is sparingly scattered in Manipur. Samples were randomly drawn from areas of different proximity to urban centres of these districts. One person of every household was interviewed using a semi-structured household questionnaire.

As many as 852 individuals were recorded from the 170 households. The survey's reference period was the preceding one year from the date of survey. Primary data included household characteristics, income, land ownership and its use and indebtedness, and individuals' data like demographic features of the members of the households, education, employment and related characteristics. The data covering the social, demographic and economic variables were computed and analysed.

Thus, the study, using secondary data as well as primary data, examines the changing structure of education besides employment that acted as the primary driver for an alteration in the economy for STs.

Key Findings

It is evident, from the secondary data results, that development in education has increasingly altered employment as well

as economic structures, which are converging towards the non-agricultural, mainly service sector for the tribal population trailing India's development trajectory. Educational development for STs was remarkable like for the all-social groups. It has progressed reasonably more in NER when compared to the country's progression, specifically for the ST. Educational deprivation is not evident in the region as literacy level was greater for the ST in comparison to the all-social groups for most NE states, unlike for India. In education, females are incessantly trailing the males in almost all NE states. Development in education has altered the educational structure with more educated people. As expected, the attainment of higher education was greater for urban than rural areas owing to better access to developed educational facilities. Development of education is well correlated with a surge in educational expenditure by the government and private households in NER.

The level of employment of NER is similar to India's level. Amongst the ST, close to half were engaging in the labour force for many NE states following the country's pattern. Both the labour force participation rate (LFPR) and work participation rate (WPR) have dropped for many NE states following India's trend for the ST as for the all-social groups irrespective of rural and urban areas. Additionally, WPR declines with the rise in educational level for most NE states for both ST and all-social groups. The LFPR and WPR including education specific were better for the males than the female counterparts and in rural areas in comparison to the urban area counterparts for the ST as for the all-social groups.

Agriculture continues to be the major employment sector for the ST community of NER as in India. But it is less prominent in NER than India. Agricultural employment has steadily declined because of the increase of non-agricultural jobs in all the states of NER following the trend of India. Notably, employment in this sector falls with an increase of non-agricultural employment along with a rise in educational attainment among the ST in NER as in India.

The economy of NER is progressively propelled by the service sector. It indicates that the STs' economy is converging towards the mainstream economy. Income from non-agriculture sector has increased, which is caused by educational development, owing to the substantial decline of agricultural income for all the states of NER. The economy was not growing uniformly across the states of

the region. The growth of economies of ST dominated NE states such as Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland was more rapid than the overall growth level of the region. It suggests that the overall economic development and growth have a positive trickle-down effect to the STs' economy. Yet, the region is trailing the country in terms of economic growth.

Further, field data indicates that education, livelihood and the economy has changed and improved for the ST population. Evidently, based on field data of households, development in education has contributed to raising non-agricultural employment and income, especially in the services sector. Most of the rural households were self-employed unlike urban households who were largely a regular salaried income earner. Importantly, STs' living standard was modest because majority of the households were living with a meagre income of less than Rs.15,000/- per month.

Furthermore, individual field data results showed the development of education with high literacy rates especially for the younger generation when compared to the older generation. Educational attainment is positively associated with income. Labour and income mobility was evident. Education has enormously contributed to transforming the economic quest of ST individuals that acted as the primary driver for shaping the economy towards a market economy.

Policy Recommendations

The following are the policy measures that are inferred from the study's findings to enhance the economy of the tribal community.

Strengthen Government's Educational Schemes

Government should increase spending to strengthen various educational schemes and programmes to promote and retain students, especially females, both in school and higher educational institutions to enhance labour employability and improve economic contribution in the economy.

Increase Educational Spending

The level of educational attainment has improved; however, the level of higher educational attainment remains low. This requires raising educational expenditure to establish higher educational infrastructure to cater to growing higher educational demand, ascribable to the development and expansion of the educational base like literacy rates and school enrolment, in the rural tribal areas, as in the urban

areas. Households should also stimulate expenditure on education, particularly of females, to elevate themselves to a higher educational attainment level.

Enhance Imparting Professional Education

Enhance imparting industrial, professional, vocational and managerial education to benefit ST students, particularly the younger generation, for labour employability in the highly remunerative jobs.

Generate Adequate Formal Jobs in Rural Areas

It is paramount to generate formal job opportunities in the non-agricultural sector syncing with the rise in educational attainment for the STs, especially in the rural areas. Generation of it in rural and ST areas for balance development will bridge the rural and urban gap, and tribal and other social group development gap. Create sufficient formal employment opportunities analogous to educational growth.

Expand Education in Sync with Employment Opportunities

Develop and expand education including higher education in concurrence with the pace of non-agricultural sector, like industrial development and its capacity of employment opportunities generation. Encourage private investors to invest on educational and industrial development. Develop special economic zones (SEZs) to develop the industrial sector for employment generation.

Provide Adequate Livelihood Source

Employment has increasingly diversified, and concurrently employment and economic structure was converging towards the non-agriculture sector and market economy for the tribals. However, living standard was low because their income level remains low. Therefore, it is required to raise income by providing adequate and better means of non-agricultural livelihood including market economy as tribals relinquish dependence on agriculture caused by rising educational attainment. Additionally, provide alternative means of livelihood for shifting cultivator families. Moreover, explore and tap the natural and human resources efficiently and effectively to improve livelihood condition and economy.

Adopt State or Tribe Specific Planning

Adopt a separate educational and employment planning for each state, district and community (tribe). And monitor and evaluate the ST educational and employment plans and

programmes at regular intervals for real-time understanding and affirmative action to improve the tribal economy.

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