

FOREWORD

Amartya Sen

India is a country of enormous diversity, and there is a great deal for us to learn from the varying experiences and achievements of the different regions. Tripura's accomplishments in advancing human development have many distinguishing features which separate it out from much of the rest of India. An understanding of the special successes of Tripura is important for the people of Tripura, but – going beyond that – there are lessons here for the rest of India in appreciating what this small state has been able to achieve, particularly given the adverse circumstances that had to be overcome.

Among the adversities that had to be addressed, perhaps the most important is the gigantic influx of refugees into this tiny state at the time of the partition of India in 1947 and again during the turmoil in East Pakistan preceding the formation of Bangladesh in 1971. For one thing, these population movements changed the ethnic composition of the state, making it more Bengali speaking, and reducing the power and prominence of the indigenous tribal people, who are also typically poorer and more deprived than the non-tribal parts of the population. The social strains and difficulties of what can be seen as an imposed eruption of heterogeneity are particularly striking, and they needed to be overcome. One of the successes of Tripura certainly has been the ability

of the political authorities to deal effectively with the associated tensions and to attempt in an organized way to reduce the inequalities between different sections of the population. As we note in this report, there are certainly considerable accomplishments to celebrate in what has been happening in this small but high performing state.

To turn to the basic ingredients of human development, there have been achievements in educational development that clearly deserve applause. The levels of literacy and schooling are significantly high in the state, and inequalities in educational opportunities are also much less unequal than in the bulk of India. The literacy and schooling of girls are not far behind those of boys as is often the case in many parts of India, and even the educational progress of the tribal population places them relatively close to the more prosperous non-tribal communities, which too contrasts with many other parts of India.

We have noted these important successes, but we have also found the quality of school education to be generally quite low across the board. Improvement of what the schools provide is, thus, an important agenda item to which Tripura must give priority. If that happens (as we strongly suggest should be brought about), then the full benefits of wider and less unequal coverage will surely come into its own.

Regarding health, we see again some things to celebrate. For example, Tripura's levels of infant mortality and indicators of

undernourishment compare quite favourably with the bulk of India. Indeed, even the tribal population, who have been typically left far behind in much of India, has largely kept pace with the attainments of the non-tribal people in Tripura. And yet, as we have also discussed in this report, there are many deficiencies in the health infrastructure that need to be urgently addressed in this generally high-performing state.

Since the different features of success and its lack have been discussed in detail in this report, there is no need to elaborate on them in this Foreword. But there is a general point that has also emerged from our study that perhaps demands a special mention. Social good can come about through the benevolence of those in power (including of the functioning state), but also – more securely and robustly - through advancing the agency of the deprived people who can play a direct part in promoting what needs to be done. There is more evidence of benevolence in the governance of Tripura than of the systematic development of the deprived people's own agency. This can be a matter of concern, especially in the long run. Even as we cheer the benevolence that characterizes what the state has been trying to do, with notable success, we have to point to the need to pay greater attention to the role of agency of the worse-off, especially of tribals and of women in general. Perhaps this beautiful and dynamic state can fruitfully be a bit more dynamic in developing people's agency, going beyond the undoubtedly well-planned achievements of the benevolent state.