

### **Tripura through the Lens of Human Development**

Where does Tripura stand at present in terms of basic capability development of its people? How does this record compare with the one that was presented in the first Human Development Report of 2004-05? Such assessment cannot, of course, be thought of as a purely technical exercise, dealing only with statistics, measurements and rankings, to the neglect of a broader and qualitative understanding of what people of the state can do and be. Often, Tripura is viewed as an undifferentiated part of the larger unit of north eastern states; such an unrefined view disregards its inner historical and demographic diversity, and its socio-cultural and political specificities, all of which poise it distinctively for human development, which this report examines, keeping the state-specific environment in mind. The report strives to be both critical and constructive, focusing on its human development achievements as well as challenges that demand urgent attention.

### **Interactive Multiculturalism and Human Development**

Of the larger social forces that surround and shape discussions and actions on human development in the state, the report focuses on Tripura's relative social stability ensuing out of vibrant interactions among its different ethnic groups. Such inter-community interactions, arguably, offer a key towards understanding how interactive multiculturalism may come to the aid of people's capability formation and growth. Admittedly, inter-community tensions between tribal and non-tribal groups, and strains between 'outsiders' and 'original inhabitants' occasionally disrupt the political life in the state. Also, insurgency activities are not totally unknown here, occasionally throwing up a few challenges to human security. Yet, encouragingly, it appears that substantial progress has been made in maintaining a kind of balance between the competing demands and interests of various ethnic groups.

Special attention has been paid in this report to the tribal question with the aim to give some concrete examples of mediation of ethnic conflicts in the state, through an analysis of land rights,

forest rights and rights of political representation of various sub-groups. After the Partition, the resultant heavy influx of Bengali population from present day Bangladesh and subsequent conflict with the tribal population over issues of land rights/political power/cultural hegemony became one of the most salient political issues in the state, especially during the 1960's. That the state government experienced relative success in curbing this can be inferred from their recent withdrawal of the draconian AFSPA which had been enforced since 1997.

The success achieved in restoring tribal land or in fulfilling the demand for tribal autonomy has been evident, though some crucial ground is yet to be covered in this respect. By 2011, the tribal population owned 44 percent of the land which is higher than their population share of 32 percent, unlike the SC community whose land share (14 percent) is somewhat less than their population share (17 percent).

More than one-third of the state's geographical area became reserved forests by 1980 when the Forest (conservation) Act, 1980, came into being, disallowing the traditional tribal practice of jhum cultivation. However, the state has been making efforts to rehabilitate the Jhumias through horticulture plantation scheme and rubber plantations to the point that the primary survey found that the one half of the Jhumia population that pursues jhum cultivation, does so as a second occupation. Post the passing of the Right to Forest Act in the Parliament in 2006, 66 percent received their land titles till September 2013, placing Tripura ahead of states like Assam, Jharkhand, Gujarat and Rajasthan in this regard.

Palpable success has, thus, been gained in enhancing economic opportunities for the Jhumias and in widening tribal educational participation. In general, the work participation rate is steadily increasing for the whole population as well as for the tribals in Tripura. While work participation rate increased to 40 percent for the whole population in 2011 from 35 percent in 1991, it increased to 44 percent for the tribals in 2011 from 36 percent in 1991. Again, our household survey data indicate the inter-generational educational mobility of the tribal population. Encouragingly, the younger generation has far outpaced the educational achievement of its older cohort, in terms of both literacy levels and subsequent levels of school education.

The political presence of the tribal population has, however, remained somewhat dormant in the state, notwithstanding the role of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council

(TTAADC). The tribals in Tripura were never elected in those assembly constituencies that fell in the general category. In contrast, SCs won in 9 and 10 percent of the general constituencies in the last two assembly elections (viz. 2008 and 2013) respectively, indicating their increasing importance in the political sphere in Tripura. On the other hand, the tribal candidates were hardly fielded in general constituencies. It is, however, promising to note that despite this insufficiency in the political representation of tribal communities in the state, we find that except for the assembly election of 1972, the percentage of polling was very high for all other assembly elections in Tripura, alluding to widespread electoral participation among Tripura's tribal communities. Since 2008, the percentage of polling has consistently exceeded the 90 percent mark – the mark that no other state in India has achieved.

### **Steering economic growth towards capability expansion**

Although Tripura is known as a relative economic laggard in the country, the question that is of interest to us is to examine what economic strategy has helped the state to ensure some basic congenial conditions that are essential for human development. In more concrete terms, we focus on the extent to which the state has directed its fruits of economic growth towards reducing income poverty among various social groups and across rural-urban localities, keeping in check inequality in consumption expenditure and expanding work participation rate, especially among the rural women. Also of interest is whether and to what extent the state has been successful in channelizing its development expenditure towards human development goals.

A straightforward sector-wise analysis of Tripura's economy reveals that the agriculture and allied sector has performed remarkably well to not only contribute to the economy as a whole, but to also help improve the quality of life of the predominantly rural agrarian society in the state – Scheduled Tribes being a substantial section of it. The state has altered its preferences in tune with its unique physiographic condition. On the one hand, it has improved the acreage and cropping intensity, on the other, has augmented agricultural production by promoting high yielding varieties against conventional low yielding jhum. In this way, the state has compensated for the acute scarcity of arable land in the state. One of the notable feats has been in the area of sustainably using the available forests and highlands. Presently (2013-14), forestry and logging (mostly bamboo), with a high growth rate of 233 percent, constitutes 21.2 percent of the

agriculture and allied sector, which was merely 9 percent during 2007-08. Rubber plantation has had a major share in this subsector. Plantation related activities have provided livelihood to a large section of those workers who are engaged in farming and other allied activities.

During this period, per capita Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) of Tripura at constant (2004-05 prices) also steadily grew at a relatively faster pace than the national average. The per capita NSDP of Tripura was around 96 percent of the per capita National Net Product (NNP) in 2007-08 which became 109 percent during 2012-13.

One source of Tripura's recent upturn in the field of economy lies in its prioritization of development expenditures over non-development expenditure, channelizing the resources to plan implementation and keeping the non-plan expenditure at minimum. Development expenditure, both in the social and economic sectors, has grown manifold in the recent past. Comparison of the figures for last three years reveals that development expenditure has more than doubled during the period 2012-13 to 2014-15 (BE). Arguably, this pattern of social expenditure has facilitated the state's success on the literacy front across its geographical and social sections, and in improving basic civic and household amenities like sanitation and drinking water as well as overall infrastructural developments like road connectivity, power generation and distribution.

The state has done fairly well to include various groups and subgroups in its aim of economic growth, both in terms of participation in it and distribution of its results. A fitting example of inclusiveness of Tripura's economy is evident in the spread of banking services in the state. While the number of bank branches in the state has grown by 88 percent, the deposit and credit figures have also grown substantially by 149 and 176 percent respectively in the last 6 years. These figures are much higher than the corresponding national averages and also those of the north eastern states as a cluster. According to the census of India 2011 data, overall 79 percent households have reported to have bank accounts.

These attainments notwithstanding, Tripura continues to face some significant challenges in taking its economy forward and making its successes available to its people. Apart from the much-discussed geographical isolation of the state posing a challenge to its economy, some other lingering economic issues need urgent policy attention. Some of these key concerns include its

overdependence on the service sector which itself depends too much on the public administrative services, its underdeveloped industry sector, which depends extensively on the real estate and an extremely poor manufacturing subsector, and its stagnating rural real wage rates in the recent past.

### **Centering Inclusive Education in the Human Development Debate**

Tripura foregrounds education as the focal point of its developmental policy. The growth in rates of literacy are the most telling indicators with the state ranking 13th among 35 states in 2001 and improving its position to 5th place by 2011 with a literacy rate of 88 percent. At the same time, the stark differences within groups is also decreasing and overall literacy rate of all the subgroups appears to be converging in more recent times within a range of 85.4 percent to 95.8 percent. The spatial distribution of literacy doesn't point to any story of geographical inequalities either, with district wise literacy rates varying between 84.5 percent in Gomati district to 87.9 percent in North Tripura district. The poor performance of rural ST women can to a large part be attributed to elderly women and the trends are distinctly changing for adolescent girls (10-19 years) where illiteracy is only 9.6 percent. The impact of rural-urban status is visible as the rural ST population (which constitutes 95 percent of the total ST population) performs more poorly on literacy metrics than other groups, while the urban ST population has forged ahead with a current literacy rate of 92 percent. However, the difference in literacy between rural and urban SC's isn't marked.

The inclusivity of educational opportunities and attainment is particularly visible when we look at the mean year of schooling of urban ST population. Urban Scheduled Tribes in the state are much ahead of others in terms of mean years of schooling; they are the best performing group among various social groups. Their rural counterparts, however, are far behind in this respect and therefore deserving of appropriate policy support.

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at primary level has been hovering around 135 to 141 in recent years and the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) at 98.5 at the primary level confirms that not only do almost all children attend primary school in the state, they do so at the appropriate age. GER at upper primary level has improved from 74.1 in 2003-04 to 94.85 in 2014-15 and so has NER,

with the two appearing to converge at a point (currently, 94.9 and 91.6 respectively). The enrolment in all the classes within the primary education cycle are more than 100 percent for all social categories. Trouble arises with the transition from secondary to senior secondary level. At the higher secondary level, enrolment abruptly declines to only 40.8 percent of enrolment in class 1, to further decline to 37.1 percent in class 12. The most at risk in this regard are STs, as only 25.7 percent of those enrolled in class 1 from this group is found enrolled in class 11. The dearth of schools is partly responsible for this situation. Education in Tripura is mostly state provided catering to 91 percent of total enrolment, though the dominance is slightly lower in urban areas (85.5 percent). A surprising finding in this regard is that the ST community in rural and urban areas shows a higher reliance on non-government schools as compared with other social categories. The retention rate for primary level is 98.4 percent and that for upper primary level is 62.5 percent, with girls performing slightly better than boys. Overall, the state has recorded a dropout rate of 3.6 percent at primary level with not much variation among boys and girls but distinct inter district variation. At the upper primary level, the dropout rate varies not only geographically, but also across gender (dropout among boys is one percentage point higher than for girls). Data from 2013 suggests that ST children are more at risk of discontinuing at a comparatively younger age, but the disadvantage is not very marked. Repetition of class is most common across ST's across all social groups. Available data, e.g. census 2011 for age specific work participation rate or National Sample Survey Organization data on employment and unemployment reveal that prevalence of child worker in the state is one the lowest in the country.

Looking at educational infrastructure, U-DISE (2014-15) shows that districts like Dhalai and South Tripura which had only 4.1 percent and 4.8 percent of the total schools in the state in 1949 improved infrastructure by 1963 so that these districts had 10.3 percent and 14.1 percent of total schools in the state respectively. As per Right to Education norms, the minimum number of elementary teachers required in Tripura is 20785, whereas the number of elementary teacher available in the state is 36817, 77 percent over and above the minimum requirement. Yet, there is a problem of lopsided distribution of teachers with 7.7 percent of schools in the state having less than adequate number of teachers, particularly in the districts of Unakoti and North Tripura. The shortage of teachers is sharper in schools with greater enrolment; while 50 percent of such

schools are of 'primary only' category, rest of the schools are schools with multiple sections. A lacuna in the education infrastructure of Tripura, identified by the JRM Report, is the inadequate teacher development programme with a significant proportion of teachers at the primary level having only a secondary degree and lacking any professional teacher training.

### **Health of the People of Tripura: Policy action and inaction**

Looking at health infrastructure, Tripura appears to have more Health Sub Centres (HSCs) including those functioning in tribal areas, compared to the requirement as per population norm. This is commendable. The picture of relatively better availability of HSC, however, gets blurred when we focus on the available infrastructure in these HSCs. Availability of regular water supply, electricity and connectivity to all weather roads are strikingly lower in Tripura in comparison to corresponding all-India figures and those in some major states. The advantage of higher availability of HSC in Tripura is unfortunately somewhat neutralized by the sub-optimal quality of infrastructure.

Tripura has serious dearth of health infrastructure in higher tiers of facilities. There is positive shortfall in tiers of Primary health Centres (PHCs) and Community Health Centres (CHCs). In terms of availability of PHCs per 30,000 population and CHCs per 1,00,000 population, the highest and lowest values continue to be in the districts of South Tripura and West Tripura respectively, though in all the districts the number of CHCs is considerably below the prescribed population norm.

There is also some imbalance in the distribution of hospital beds across districts that might pose certain problems in utilization of health care services. West Tripura, owing to the pressure of dense population, has far lower availability of primary health care facilities, shortages that perhaps lead to over-crowding of the two super specialty teaching hospitals in the district, thus compromising the quality of services offered there.

In Tripura as a whole on an average, one bed caters to 759 people. A grim situation in this respect is observed in Sipahijala district, where one bed caters to a population of around 1521.

Perhaps, owing to crowding of private health care institutions in West Tripura, the corresponding figure is only 479.

Moving on to healthcare related manpower, more than 35 percent of sanctioned posts of medical officer (Allopath) appear vacant in Tripura. The shortfall is also critical in respect of medical support staffs, namely Lab Technicians, Radiographers, Pharmacists and Ophthalmic assistants.

The picture of healthcare utilization in Tripura is a mixed one, entailing both progress and problems. There has been fairly large increase in utilization of Ante-Natal Care (ANC) as revealed through comparison of figures for DLHS 3 (2007-08) and DLHS 4 (2014). Share of Institutional Delivery (ID) has increased by more than 50 percent during this period. Interestingly, out of the total number of mothers delivering babies in hospital, the share of mothers receiving Post Partum Care (PPC) has increased by almost 100 percent, far higher than most states. The state has also registered impressive growth in coverage of vaccination; but early breastfeeding practices have continued to stagnate.

For the purpose of ascertaining the health status of the denizens of Tripura, we deal with two main indicators, namely, Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and Nutritional status, captured by the prevalence of anaemia among children and women in reproductive age.

Though Tripura has enjoyed better IMR figures compared to the corresponding Indian average, the rate of reduction of IMR in the state has been less than impressive. Comparing Tripura's performance with three other states (VIZ, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Sikkim) which had similar IMRs (in the range of 30-38) at the base period of 2005, we find that Tamil Nadu undoubtedly has performed the best by reducing IMR by a whopping 43 percent. Sikkim, too, has been successful in reducing IMR by 26.67 percent. Between West Bengal and Tripura, two states sharing some similarities in demographic contour and political legacy, Tripura's performance has been less favorable.

On the other hand, the population of Tripura has attained relatively better nutritional status, as indicated by prevalence of anaemia. DLHS 4 state factsheets show that Tripura has the second lowest prevalence of anaemia both among children of 6-59 months and women in the reproductive age (15-49 years), only after Kerala. The Rapid Survey on children 2013-14 has

found the nutritional status of the children in Tripura to be closer to the national average but somewhat lower to that in the other states, with which we have been attempting to compare the health of the people of this state. Importantly, the level of malnourishment of the tribal children on the whole is comparable to the corresponding average pertaining to the general population, in marked contrasts to the other states where the tribal children appear to be in a markedly disadvantageous position.

The state has expanded its ICDS network significantly. In 2014-15, the state is reported to have 9911 Anganwadi centres (AWCs) as compared to the network of 3,902 centres in 2006 or 6122 centres in 2007. The infrastructural arrangements of AWCs in Tripura are considerably better than those prevailing nation-wide and surpass those of Kerala and Tamil Nadu in some respects. The AWCs in Tripura are utilized more optimally by the people compared to the corresponding national average, as well as with those obtaining in better-off states like Kerala or Tamil Nadu, or the state of West Bengal with similar socio-political characteristics.

### **Social Policies for Human Empowerment**

In an approach that views social protection as a social commitment, an approach that this report boldly adopts, the underlying premise is that it is not adequate to ensure the negative ‘freedom from’ restraints but also at once it is essential to make available, through optimal social support, the positive ‘freedom to’ cultivate basic human capabilities. This approach does not place the entire responsibility for wellbeing and enhancing core capacities on the individual alone. From this standpoint of support-led expansion of human capabilities, this report pays close attention to the spread and workings of four key social policies in the state, namely, the Public Distribution System, the pension scheme, the housing policy, and the rural employment guarantee scheme.

In Tripura, the PDS seems to function as a near-universal programme, as it covers a little over 96 percent of the total population, as the argument goes that a targeted PDS excludes several deserving families. In Tripura, the ad-hoc BPL families are provided rice out of monthly APL allocation and a quantity of special allocation from GOI. Since the state of Tripura is a deficit

state in terms of rice production, the state is not in a position to augment centrally allocated rice through what is known as “state pool” contributions. The PDS coverage in the state has two promising features. First, over the period under consideration the PDS has retained its quasi-universal character. Second, since BPL and AAY cards are fixed by the central government, the state tends to both expand its PDS coverage as well as offer higher ‘household entitlements’ to a larger number of poorer families by including ad-hoc BPL cards within its ambit. A district wise card distribution of the state yields that since West Tripura district is relatively prosperous, a little 60 percent of the distributed cards come under the category of APL cards. In contrast, in districts like Dhalai, Gomati, Khowai and North Tripura there is a noticeably higher proportion of BPL, and Antyodaya cards in tune with the comparatively higher level of poverty. The PDS coverage in the state appears to be equity-enhancing in the sense that the socially vulnerable groups in the state, especially ST households, are included in comparatively larger proportions as BPL, ad-hoc BPL and Antyodaya families, deserving of higher quantum of ‘household entitlements’. This is also true for SC households in general. The reach of inclusivity appears to be growing as during the period between 2004 and 2014, a significant proportion of marginal groups such as SCs and STs have continued to get maximum PDS benefits. Across the districts of Tripura as well as for the state as a whole, per capita purchase of rice by BPL and Antyodaya families, and by ad-hoc BPL families, is expectedly higher than that by APL families. This suggests that the PDS transfers in Tripura are relatively free from ‘exclusion errors’. In the state as a whole, PDS rice constitutes a noticeably higher proportion of total consumption of rice among the members of BPL and Antyodaya households as compared to those belonging to APL and (and to a lesser extent for) ad-hoc BPL families. This pattern consistently holds in all the districts of Tripura. It can be concluded from this that the incidence of poverty would have been much higher in Tripura and its districts without PDS transfers.

Tripura introduced its first social security pension scheme in 1980 when it started to provide social pension for the people who were physically challenged. The state, like a few other provincial governments, is also a co-contributor to the pension schemes under NSAP. There were only six states in India in terms of state contribution for a pensioner enlisted under the IGNOAPS. Tripura and Sikkim were at the top among the north eastern states in 2011-12 in this

regard. Notably, Tripura has left behind many states, including Kerala, in terms of state contribution for a pensioner enlisted under any of the pension schemes of NSAP. Currently, there are 22 social pension schemes in Tripura that are exclusively funded by the state government. However, some of the state government-initiated schemes, indicate proliferation, replication, and duplication of schemes that defy easy rationalization. Tripura has set an example, along with Meghalaya in the North East, in disbursing the social pensions through bank accounts, which significantly curtail leakage and corruption. As per the records of the Ministry of Rural Development, 88 percent of NSAP beneficiaries were receiving their pensions through bank accounts in Tripura in 2014-15. As per the primary survey data on old age and widow pension with regard to targeting, the performance of Tripura is quite reasonable – we found that 61 percent of the old age people and belonging to the category of BPL/Antyodaya were receiving pension in Tripura at the time of our survey. With respect to the distribution of old age and widow pensions among various social categories, although the STs were found to be benefitting the most from the social pension schemes, the social groups other than SCs, STs and OBCs were also found to be benefitting in a considerable proportion.

Our field survey on the housing situation in the State suggests that most of the houses in Tripura were found to be of semi-pucca type made of mud or unburnt brick wall with tin roof and that various government schemes for housing have had to do with this progress in Tripura. According to our survey, 34 percent of total rural households benefitted from one or more types of government-sponsored housing schemes that are in place in the state, most commonly the IAY. A considerable proportion of households (22 percent) reportedly built their houses with the help of a state government housing scheme, namely, the Tripura State Government Housing Scheme [TSGHS]. Our field survey also showed that the proportion of ST beneficiary households was less than double the proportion of SC beneficiary households under the Indira Awaas Yojana scheme. We find from our survey that 72 percent of households benefitting from government housing schemes belonged to either BPL or Antyodaya category but it is a matter of concern that among the beneficiaries, APL households were found to have received 20 percent of the government housing assistance and 17 percent of those APL households were found to belong to the top income quintile (based on per capita income) in our survey. Official data for the last three years suggest that while the share of households benefitting from government assistance was 57

percent for TTAADC areas, it was 43 percent for non-TTAADC areas, indicating ethno-spatial equity in the distribution of housing assistance.

With unemployment being one of the major problems plaguing modern Tripura, the state's role in responding to the people's 'right to work' is of tremendous significance. As per the latest Economic Review of Tripura (2014), by providing an average of 88 mandays of work per household, the state has retained its position for the seventh year of being the highest provider of average employment through the NREGA scheme. The report also states that 99 percent of the households who demanded work have had their demands met. Work completion rate in the state has consistently been far higher than average and in the last financial year (2014-15) the nationwide average was 31.4 percent while Tripura's was 90.3 percent. In the last year, after Mizoram and Manipur, Tripura has had the least delays (31 percent cases) in payment beyond the stipulated 15 days. The state sponsored Sameeksha on NREGA in 2011-12 showed that across states Tripura had the absolutely lowest notified wage (Rs 118) but average wage was seen to be higher than 12 states, implying that in Tripura, efficiency is greater than many states in spite of limited budgetary allocation. Government data suggests that 14.2 percent of the workers are from the Scheduled Caste category who form 17.8 percent of the total state population and 33.3 percent are from the Scheduled Tribe category who form 31.8 percent of the total state population. Our primary survey substantiates the argument of inclusion by showing that out of 798 participants receiving remuneration as NREGA workers, 80.7 percent workers were members of SC/SCT/OBC category. With regard to gender parity within the workforce, the percentage of women working has been growing up to 49.9 percent in 2015-16, yet it still falls below the national average of 54.8 percent. A district-wise comparison across parameters reveals that work completion rate ranges from 76 percent to 91 percent with Sepahijala and Dhalai occupying those extreme positions with the other districts clustered in the 85 percent region. West Tripura appears to have an explicit problem with delays in wage payment with only 39.3 percent wages having been paid in the stipulated 15 days. With regard to generation of person days, Sepahijala appears to have witnessed a dramatic growth in the last year, compared to other districts.

## **Human Development through the Gender Lens**

Tripura has a favorable female-male ratio (FMR) (960), in line with the trend in other north eastern states, recording a 12 point improvement in the decade of 2001-2011. Among STs, FMR stands at 983 in 2011, registering an improvement of 13 points from over the previous (2001) census. Among SCs, unfortunately there has been a slow decline in FMR. Child FMR is lower at 957 for the general and ST population, and declining 9 point during the last decade (2001-11). Again, in spite of the state having low level of undernourishment among children (16.3 percent, at par with Tamil Nadu (16.45)), the nutritional level of adult women in Tripura, with 65 percent of the women being anemic, is as poor as in the most backward states such as Bihar and West Bengal.

The state has achieved a remarkable narrowing in the gender gap in literacy (from 16 percent point in 2001 to 9 percent point in 2011), but compared to several other north eastern states, the female ST community performs disappointingly in literacy. Age of marriage, which is a powerful indicator of the social status of women, shows that while the mean age of marriage for girls is high at approximately 21 across rural and urban areas, it is lower than that of several other north eastern states.

Women's work participation is relatively stagnant in Tripura with one-fourth of the women having recorded themselves as "workers" in Census 2011. There has been a gradual increase in WPR across gender among SCs (an increase of 2.6 percent point), whereas with STs there has been a decline of 1.4 percent point in the WPR between the census of 2001 and 2011. Also, among the total ST workers the share of female workers has decreased by 2.4 percent point. A worrying change is the 7.3 percent point decline among female main workers (also true for men workers), with this holding true for both ST and SC women.

Primary data reveals that across a broad range of issues starting from simple and mundane matters like marketing, visiting a friend or relative's place or purchase of household groceries to more vital decisions like purchase of land or property, the man's consent is key. In the tribal families, however, women appear to be much more outgoing as compared to their counterparts in non-tribal households; they regularly do grocery shopping on their own; in their community the men of the house are found to take care of the children when the women are away from home. In general, during our visits to households with different community backgrounds, no obvious signs

of gender disparity were visible in intra-family distribution of food and other resources in tribal households, whereas in non-tribal families women ate only after serving the men in the family, and at times, a lesser quantity.

The representation of women at the gram panchayat levels, was 36 percent, lower than that in Bihar (50 percent), Arunachal Pradesh (42 percent), Manipur (49 percent), Assam (37 percent) and West Bengal (38 percent). According to the present figures, among 60 members of the legislative assembly only 5 are female. Women barely form a meager six percent of the total contestants in the state assembly elections. In case of elected representatives too, women's representation is low with only 8.3 percent in the entire 60 constituencies. Strikingly, at the workplace almost 46.9 percent of women workers in Tripura are part of any of the worker's trade unions, far above the national average of 27.3 percent.

Here we raise a few concerns about gender based violence in the state, with a positive ambition to explore ways in which its debilitating effects on capability expansion may be mitigated more successfully than what has been achieved so far.

Unlike other north eastern states like Meghalaya, where a tribal matrilineal society and consequently greater land ownership of women manifest in a society that is relatively safer for women, Tripura, in spite of having a substantial tribal population, is a patrilineal and more patriarchal society. As per NCRB data from 2015, the rate of crimes against women is high, substantially higher than the national average. Admittedly, this figure cannot be used uncritically as the Status of Women Report from Tripura finds discrepancies between Tripura police data and NCRB data. Yet, some concerns prevail. For example, the state data from 2013-14 shows that of the 354 registered cases of domestic violence/marital dispute registered with the Tripura Women's Commission a mere two were reconciled.

In some instances, the ethnic conflict between the adivasis and Bengalis in Tripura, though centered around issues of cultural and land rights, seems to play out through violence over women's bodies. And in such situations, the legal system has often proven unequal to the task of upholding the rights of women. Another category of gender crime, which has close ties with poverty, goes under-reported in Tripura, namely, trafficking. Somewhat encouragingly,

insurgency violence has been curbed, AFSPA has finally been repealed, measures are being undertaken such as the implementation of a criminal tracking software for the police – all of which may have cumulatively been behind the small drop in crimes against women from 2013 to 2014.

### **Decentralised Governance, Local Autonomy, and People’s Well-being**

The rural local bodies in Tripura are structured under the dual framework of panchayats and the Tripura Tribal Autonomous District Council, making it a unique experiment holding promising potentials that are not apparent in other comparable situations. Drawing on the traditional tribal institutions on the one hand and the centrally designed Panchayati Raj system on the other, the local government institutions in Tripura have evolved as two notionally distinct but spatially and socially interconnected institutional streams, which have the elements of both complementarities and tension. There appears to prevail a condition congenial for relatively vibrant interactions between the local administration, the local party machinery and the local civil society. In short, the ‘politics of presence’ of these relatively assertive social groups at the local level shapes the form and everyday functioning of the local bodies in the state, creating at least a condition for institutional responsiveness to people’s aspirations.

About ~~24.70~~<sup>26.17</sup> percent (9.07 lac) of the population reside in the urban areas, around 38.7 percent (13, 59, 463) reside in the TTAADC areas, and the remaining, around 38 percent (14,04,560) reside in the Rural Local Body (RLB) areas.

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Tripura have a three-tier structure with elected representatives at the gram, block (Panchayat Samiti) and district (Zilla Parishad) levels. Under the statute the powers of a Gram Panchayat are mostly related to basic minimum civic amenities, while the upper tiers undertake schemes entrusted to them by the state government. Actual implementation of most of the development schemes/projects, however, are performed by the concerned departments, and the role of the Panchayats is mainly that of selection of beneficiaries, the sites of the project and also, to some extent, the supervision of the scheme.

On the issue of expenditure on core functions, that arguably have a significant bearing on people’s well-being, pertaining, for example, to water supply, sanitation, solid waste

management and drainage, roads, streetlights and community assets, the Panchayat bodies of Tripura have the highest per capita spending at Rs 1048 in the country as stated in a study by Centre for Policy Research. On the other hand, these rural local bodies of Tripura are highly dependent on transfer from the state and the centre. The per capita transfer from the state is substantially below the national average; the per capita central transfer to village Panchayats is, however, substantially higher than that of most other states.

The TTAADC is unique as its jurisdiction is not contiguous with Revenue district boundaries. There are 527 ADC villages which are run by an elected Village Committee headed by a Chairperson/ Vice-Chairpersons for a five-year term. The powers and responsibilities of the Village Committees are equivalent to those of the Gram Panchayat of PRI.

In pursuance of these decisions the Government of Tripura has transferred several offices/ institutions along with employees/functionaries to the TTAADC. The council controls and manages 1494 (One Thousand four hundred ninety four) primary schools, 221 (Two hundred twenty one) upper primary schools, 4 (four) offices of the Assistant Director of Animal Resource Development Department (ARDD), 4 (four) veterinary hospitals and 19 (Nineteen) veterinary dispensaries along with 123 (One hundred twenty three) stock sub-centers etc, 6 (six) agricultural sub-divisions and 2 (two) horticulture sub-divisions, 4 (four) fishery sub-divisions, six ICDS projects with 1250 AWCs, 14 forest ranges along with 54 forest beat offices, 4 (four) Sub-divisional information and cultural offices, two Block Information and Cultural Offices with 17 information centers, 2 hospitals (at Khumulwang and Twikarmo) 1 (one) health sub-centres (at Shikaribari), and 18 (Eighteen) LAMPS located in Sixth Schedule area.

~~The council controls and manages 1494 Primary Schools, 221 Upper Primary Schools, 4 offices of the Assistant Director (ARDD), 4 Veterinary Hospitals and 15 Veterinary Dispensaries along with 123 stock sub-centers etc, 6 Agricultural Sub-Divisions and 2 Horticulture Sub-Divisions, 4 Fishery Sub-Divisions, 6 ICDS projects with 1250 AW Centers, 11 Forest Ranges along with 39 Forest Beat Offices, 6 Sub-Divisional Cultural and Information Offices with 17 Information Centers, 45 Health Sub-Centres, 18 LAMPS located in Sixth Schedule area.~~

The Council is entitled to a share of forest royalties and royalties from licensing or lease for the extraction of minerals granted by the state government. The Council also has powers to levy and collect the taxes from the items a) For maintenance of schools, dispensaries or roads, b) On entry of goods into markets and tolls on passengers and goods carried in ferries, c) On animals, vehicles and boats and d) On professional trades, callings and employments.

Presently, TTAADC receives share of taxes at the following ratios – (a) Forest Revenue-75 percent (b) Agricultural Income Tax-50 percent (c) Land Revenue Tax-40 percent (d) Professional Tax-25 percent (e) Motor Vehicle Tax-25 percent (f) Royalty from Natural Gas-30 percent.

The rural local bodies in Tripura seem to have a strong presence in the rural areas and play an active oversight cum supportive role in the implementation of most development programmes of the state. They ensure that Anganwadi centers, the Health sub-centres, the schools and other local institutions are functional, they try to make up for the shortage of financial resources of these institutions by supplementing their fund from their own limited resources, ensure that raw materials for programmes like ICDS or Mid-day meal are procured carefully, keep track of diverse issues ranging from the incidence of malaria to the distribution of ration cards.

Urbanization is a relatively recent phenomenon in Tripura and the civic services are yet to catch up with the national averages in a number of areas. At present, there is one Municipal Corporation, ten Municipal Councils and nine Nagar Panchayats (Panisagar, Kumarghat, Kamalpur, Jirania, Ranirbazar, Sonamura, Amarpur, Santirbazar and Sabroom) in Tripura.

The Municipalities in Tripura have been empowered to deal with all 18 items in the twelfth schedule, a distinction that Tripura shares with Kerala and Karnataka. The state is well placed in supply of drinking water with 98 percent of the household having access to safe water. A recent report prepared by the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI) records considerable improvement in delivery of urban services during the last few years.

Yet, they appear to be in need of covering a huge ground as far as sewerage system is concerned as only 1.2 percent households are connected to sewerage. The closed drainage connectivity was also the lowest in Tripura with about 3 percent households connected to drainage network.

Encouragingly, Tripura has a very low incidence of open defecation, as compared to many other states.

Most of the urban bodies of Tripura used to be Nagar Panchayats in the recent past; their performance was found to be considerably better than the all-state average of Nagar Panchayats elsewhere in access to these services, as reported in a nationwide study commissioned by the 14<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission.

Among the Nagar Panchayats of the country, Punjab generated the highest revenue (Rs 1,110 per capita) followed by Tripura. The per capita Grants-in-aid of Rs 1,374 from the Government of Tripura is the second highest in the country.

One major worrying factor in an otherwise comforting picture of efficient local bodies is the inability of the rural local bodies to generate their own resources and high dependency on the state and central government. This is a trouble spot that needs attention in order to ensure that relatively autonomous local bodies effectively provide capability-enhancing ‘municipal’ services.

The second concern is a somewhat surprising data gap at the state level. The HDR study team proposed to make an assessment of the ‘institutional responsiveness’, defined as the achievement of congruence between community preference and public policies of the local bodies by accessing the data on participation at institutional forums such as Gram Sansads. The data on the number of people who participated in these deliberations and the social scope of discussion are indirect measures of level of interest and perceived relevance of the institutions. This information was not readily available at the state level, either for the Panchayats or for the TTAADC institutes.

### **The Media and Visibility of Human Development Issues**

The role of the fourth estate in the expansion of human development is acknowledged in many scholarly studies. The media, in principle, can extend and sustain the democratic space which is a precondition for discussions and debates on ideas as well as practices of human development; ideally, it can provide a platform for public discussion and reasoning, including a space for dissent. Given the enormous importance of the media, in this report we examine to what extent

the media has played a role in giving visibility to human development issues in the state. Despite a paucity of relevant data, the present report seeks to shed light on propitious conditions that media may have created for human development in Tripura.

Intriguingly, the culture of reading newspapers is low in Tripura. A sample study conducted for the present report indicates that one out of every four households in Tripura reads at least one newspaper, with Scheduled Caste households matching the overall ratio. This is in clear contrast to what has been reported in West Bengal or other bigger states, leaving aside examples of states like Kerala where newspaper reading has assumed a mass character. Tripura has made significant progress in literacy, as is evident from this report. The possible explanation for the relatively dormant culture of newspaper reading in the state, therefore, may be sought in the content of the news itself. The media seem to focus more on ‘sensational’ events such as accidents etc. to the relative neglect of persistent social deprivation. Nor are micro-level impediments to implementation of policies having bearing on human development performance adequately reported in the local media. For example, a sizable section of the MGNREGA workers in Tripura have recently staged protests against the non-payment or delayed payment of dues in different parts of the state for work done under MGNREGA. Events of this kind, that in principle can create a democratic pressure on policy makers and implementers, do not quite find a prominent coverage in the local media

With the huge proliferation of digital media, however, it may be expected that an interactive, non-partisan, media space will find more visibility in Tripura. Tripura, however, has to cover a lot of ground in order to create internet access for its masses and to make available technology and human resources needed for the purpose of reducing the digital divide.

### **Human Development Ranking: Inter-State and Intra-State**

The north eastern states of India regularly feature in various discussions related to human development in the country; especially the geographically smaller states like Tripura, Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur have consistently performed much better in the health and education

sector and despite some serious economic constraints, ranked way up in the list of good performers in these respects.

Tripura, despite its poor rank of 21 out of 29 states in the country in terms of income dimension, ranks 13<sup>th</sup> when the composite Human Development Index is used. This is possible because the state ranks 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> in the health and education dimensions respectively. Moreover, as it is observed in this report, NSDP of Tripura is improving faster than the NNP of the country. At the same time, the state has recorded better improvement in literacy rates and schooling, which is much better than the national average. On the other hand, despite having some deficits in health infrastructure and having recorded stagnancy in the vital health outcome of IMR, Tripura has performed better in some other health parameters like nutritional status of women and children. As a whole, the Human Development achievement of the state is fairly inspiring and offers a promising picture.

Not much inter-district variation is observed in human development terms, especially in the field of health and education. As a result, the composite Human Development Index records a greater influence of the economic indicator as opposed to that of the other two. To make a quick comparison, in the first human development report of Tripura (2007), the ranking of the districts was exactly the same along each of the individual indices, expectedly yielding the same ranking for the composite index as well. In contrast, the encouraging change that the present report captures is a kind of crisscrossing rather than overlapping of achievements across the three indicators considered. This implies that a particular district is not ordained to either do well or perform poorly consistently along all the human development measures, further suggesting that economic performance does not necessarily over-determine a district's human development record. For example, two of the districts, namely Dhalai and Khowai, that record modest economic performance, have reported impressive performance in the field of education and health respectively.

### **Human Development, Governmentality and People's Agency**

The story of Tripura's Human Development as narrated in this report not only highlights the distinctive achievements but also draws attention to some major deficiencies. While

governmental initiatives in the state have drawn substantially from a pro-people political philosophical outlook and made some significant departures, the process of development, it seems, is yet to free itself from the “implementational” approach to develop substantial reliance upon an agentic approach. As of now, the government is primarily responsible for delivering the services and is playing this role with commitment and efficiency. However, once the task stops there and the political process ceases to facilitate the people to build a movement through their own agencies, development is bound to stop at the doorstep of “governmentality”, keeping the social relationships unchanged. The political imagination therefore needs to go beyond governmentality to think anew on the complex intertwining of class, ethnicity, culture, language, and gender to take the progresses forward – notionally and in practice, politically and socially, governmentally and through peoples’ agencies, the plausibility of which has been underlined by the various movements, such as the movement for literacy, and social churning, and emancipation of the tribals and subsequent negotiations and balancing acts.