

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL DISPARITIES**(a case study of Uttarakhand)**

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ABSTRACT:

Understanding the socio-economic development of regions like Uttarakhand is a challenge mainly because of the problem of distorted development. Uttarakhand, ever since its formation and even before that has been a victim of poverty, malnutrition, and other economic problems. This paper discusses such issues and presents supporting facts. It also talks about the infrastructural problems faced. The study analyses the socio-economic development in the state of Uttarakhand, besides evaluating the extent of adequacy and performance of the created infrastructure based on the responses gathered from the people's representatives and other village respondents. Causes are evaluated in this process and solutions are presented.

“People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.”

“We should judge results, not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved.”

Jawaharlal Nehru

The question of socio-economic development of the Himalayan hills which have enormous social, and cultural variations both in nature and in magnitude, is indeed a challenging one. Though with all sincerity, the development programs are chalked out to eradicate human problems yet they may not show desired results if the diversity present in the vast social and cultural fiber of these hills is not understood and implicated properly.

The problem that we face with the issue of development is not that of lack of economic development but that of a problem of distorted development. Distorted development has occurred primarily because economic growth has not been accompanied concomitant improvement in social development. Economic growth, which has benefited only a segment of society, is meaningless. For no state can boost its development with major part of its population remaining impoverished.

The Uttarakhand region as a part of Uttar Pradesh comprised 08 hilly districts was among the most under-developed regions of Uttar Pradesh. To overcome the problems of this area need for special efforts over and above those aimed at the development of the state, was recognized. The Centre and State provided separate funds with the specific objectives of promoting development program in the region and this assistance continue to increase from one plan to the next. However, despite these efforts, the stated goal of development could not be achieved in a sustainable pattern. As a result, the demand for a separate state gained ground.

Uttarakhand was carved out of Uttar Pradesh on 09 Nov 2000 with a motive of rapid and sustainable growth of this region. In the year 2001, according to the Planning Commission of India total number of persons living below poverty line in Uttarakhand can be estimated at around 29.28 lakh out of a total population of 84,79,562 (as per census 2001). Out of the total

of 13 districts, the extent of poverty persists in the 11 hill districts. According to available data Uttarakhand has 86 cities, out of which five are major, 78 Tehsils, 95 Blocks, and 7227 Panchayats. The Number of villages in Uttarakhand is 16,828 out of which 15,761 villages are inhabited and 346 are forest villages. The Population density of the state is 159 per sq. meter. Haridwar has a density of 612 per sq. m. Uttarkashi is the lowest with a density of 37 per sq. m. For agriculture, only 762 thousand hectares land is available which 14.24% of the total reporting area and of the total agriculture land 40.66% area is irrigated. Uttarakhand state has inherited certain basic problem in its way of economic development.

Development planning in India is mostly carried out at the level of the states, which are autonomous political and administrative entities with constitutional powers and functions. The national government plays a role, besides directly planning development of certain sectors of national and inter-state significance, in providing financial resources to support state plans and centrally sponsored programs and regulations of the use of environmentally sensitive resources and of projects and activities that directly affect these resources. Therefore, the question of whether the mountain specificities get reflected in development plans and programs is to be examined primarily in relation to the state plans and their hill and mountain components.

Poverty is coming down in Uttarakhand but not fast enough. Too many people lack access to basic services especially education, health, housing, and clean drinking water. Child malnutrition afflicts millions of children. Based on the total population being 84, 79,562 as per Census 2001 and the percentage of people living below the poverty line notified by the Planning Commission, the total number of persons living below the poverty line can be estimated at around 29.28 lakh which is distinctly higher than the figures estimated by the

state government of Uttarakhand and compared to the neighboring state of Himachal Pradesh. According to a recent National Family Health Survey (NFHS) in the region, 30 percent of women and 28 percent of men in the state are under-weight. In the rural areas of the state, the figures are 34 and 33 percent.

In the five hill districts of Garhwal Mandal, today people are surviving because of remittances coming yearly from migrant workers all over India and abroad. To deal with these problems growth process is needed so that a rapid reduction in poverty can accelerate the pace of both industrialization and employment generation. The difficult terrain in hilly regions makes it difficult for development in the fields of irrigation facility, electricity, transportation and communication facilities, banking infrastructure and social infrastructure like housing and education.

Roads and connectivity with other regions, villages, and states are a big problem in Uttarakhand hill regions. The main problem is the maintenance of the roads due to heavy rainfall, soil erosion, and even snowfall in certain regions. Road maintenance is usually undertaken by the PWD, but in the case of hill districts, the maintenance is usually done by urban local bodies.

The main objective of the study has been to analyze the socio-economic development in the state of Uttarakhand, besides evaluating the extent of adequacy and performance of the created infrastructure based on the responses gathered from the people's representatives and other village respondents.

The specific problems of the region can be listed as:

1. The over dependence on agriculture, despite constraints on agricultural development as a result of topographical conditions has been observed in the absence of a developed industrial sector.

2. Due to the lack of sufficient infrastructure facilities to promote all-round development of the region, wide disparities have been observed especially in hill districts.
3. Lack of lucrative employment opportunities thus leading to widespread poverty and large scale migration of competent youth from hill region to other areas.
4. Female population is overburdened with work as a result of this migration of their male counterparts.
5. Policies formulated and implemented without considering local conditions and constraints are having a damaging effect on the socio- economy of the region.
6. The excessive exploration of forest wealth is resulting in environmental degradation.

The main constraints hampering the growth of industries in the State are summarised below:

- I. Geographical and environmental constraints in hill regions.
- II. Lack of availability of infrastructure including roads in remote areas.
- III. Lack of marketing opportunities and even Non-availability of raw materials locally.

The creation of a new state had raised the hopes of people that bad governance will give way to good and responsive governance but according to the 'Citizens' rating on politicians, Departments and Bureaucrats of Uttarakhand, 60 percent of the 10,000 odd respondents feel that politicians and bureaucrats have benefited the most from the formation of the new state. As many as 48 percent of the respondents feel that successive state governments have failed to understand and effectively address their needs and the political unresponsiveness and apathetic attitude of the administration coupled with its inbuilt inertia have alienated the people in Uttarakhand hills from the mainstream of development..

The major causes of the prevalence of poverty in this region are the implementation of initiatives that did not take into consideration the actual felt needs of the local people, mountain specifications, conscious or unconscious ignorance of the adaptive measures that include ecological and cultural values, indigenous and traditional knowledge, socio-economic conditions and practices. The measures to combat poverty are to be sought within the permissibility of mountain specificities and adaptability of people and will include options that have larger human dimensions, simple technologies and indigenous knowledge, innovation and practices.

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