

Ambitious programme for poor in India's northeast

A 14-point action plan to eradicate poverty from India's eight northeastern states promises to improve the condition of the estimated 7.9 million poor people in the region.

The poverty alleviation programme has been approved by the North Eastern Council (NEC), the planning body for the region.

'The economic poverty of the region, as per the estimates of the Planning Commission, is 19.1 percent as against 27.5 percent in the country as a whole, and is being reduced at a faster rate in the region compared to the all-India average,' said Mani Shankar Aiyar, central minister for development of the north eastern region (DoNER).

'Poverty appears to be largely rural in nature and heavily concentrated in Assam (19.7 percent or 5,577,000 people) and Tripura (18.9 percent or 638,000 people),' Aiyar, who is also chairman of the NEC, told IANS in an interview.

The plan was approved by the NEC during its plenary session, attended by chief ministers, ministers and governors of the eight states here Monday and Tuesday.

According to an NEC document, 7.9 million of the estimated 40 million people in the northeast are living below the poverty line.

In the concept paper of the poverty alleviation programme, poverty in the northeast has been classified into four categories - economic poverty, nutritional poverty, human poverty and basic amenities poverty.

Among the other northeastern states, Meghalaya has 18.5 percent people living below the poverty line followed by Manipur at 17.3 percent, Nagaland at 19 percent, Arunachal Pradesh at 17.6 percent, Mizoram at 12.6 percent and Sikkim at 20.1 percent.

'The participation of the poor in the process of planning is low and only some of the poor are organised in groups such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs) while local self-governments need to be empowered to address issues of poverty abolition,' the document added.

'The problem of youth unemployment is perhaps the most serious and disturbing of the social and economic problems of the region, accounting, in turn, for serious political and law and order problems in many parts of the region,' it pointed out.

A five-fold programme of development perspectives for the eradication of poverty in the northeast region has been highlighted in the document. These are economic development, institutional, participatory, human resource and infrastructure development.

'As with investment in industry and infrastructure, which is governed by the North East Industrial and Investment Promotion Policy, 2007, the rural sector requires a 'North East Agriculture and Allied Activities Development and Export Promotion Policy,' Aiyar said quoting the programme document.

The 14-point action plan to eradicate poverty includes land reforms and distribution of lands,

updating of land records and computerisation, codification of the customary land tenure system and recognition, provision of adequate resource support by the union government, intra-regional cooperation by the NEC and promotion of the SHG movement.

According to the official document, the northeastern region has a workforce of 41.6 percent cultivators and 13 percent agricultural labourers who depended on the land for their subsistence.

'What is needed is to modernise agriculture, practise mechanised farming, promote hybrid varieties of seeds and foster minor irrigation to make the transition to high value agriculture as also to move from subsistence farming to cash crop farming,' the document added.

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