

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN HILLY AREAS OF UTTARAKHAND

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ABSTRACT

Uttarakhand is the youngest Himalayan state of the Indian Union. The state is blessed with natural beauty, eco-systems and natural resources. Such features make the state distinct from other states of the country. In spite of such features most of the development has been recorded in the plain areas of the state and hilly areas are left behind. Uttarakhand is mainly a hilly state with only approximately 10 percent of its area in plains. This paper analyses the various approaches which have contributed in the regional development of the hilly areas. Further, strategies for the development of the state have been discussed.

Keywords: Agriculture; Development; Resources; Uttarakhand

INTRODUCTION

The state of Uttarakhand came into existence on 09th November 2000 as the 27th state of the Indian Republic. After a long struggle and continuous mass movement Uttarakhand achieved the status of a separate state and was carved out of Uttar Pradesh. It enjoys the status of the youngest Himalayan state of the Indian Union. The state of Uttarakhand is bounded by Nepal in the east, the Tibet in the north, Himachal Pradesh in the west and Uttar Pradesh in the south. Uttarakhand movement has been the only one, after the independence of India, which witnessed the spontaneous participation of people of Garhwal and Kumaon region. The state covers geographical area of 53,483 sq. Km. More than 90% of the area is mountainous and 64% (approx.) is covered by forests. The state comprises of 13 districts namely, Chamoli, Pauri, Tehri, Uttarkashi, Dehradun, Haridwar, Rudrapur, Nainital, Almora, Pithoragarh, Udham Singh Nagar, Champawat and Baageshwar (Figure 1). The state is further sub-divided into 49 sub-divisions and 95 development blocks.

Uttarakhand is mainly a hill state with about 10% of the area in plains. District Haridwar, Udham Singh Nagar and some areas of district Dehradun and Nainital are in plains while remaining

area of the state is hilly. According to 2001 census, the total population of the state is 84.89 lakhs of which 49% are women. More than 75% of the Uttarakhand total population depends on the agriculture for their livelihood¹.

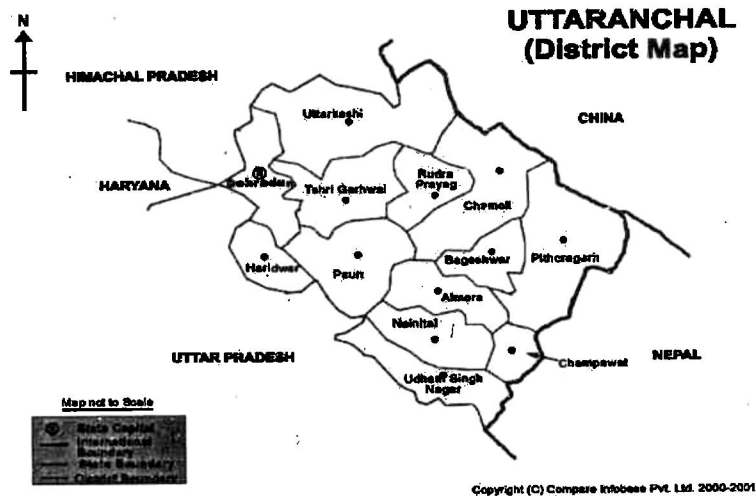


Fig. 1. Map showing different districts of Uttarakhand

However, agriculture is severely constrained due to various geographical, physical and environmental problems. Thus the economic poverty led the rural population to migrate out towards plains for employment. In such a stage of economic backwardness there is a need to implement growth strategies in order to overcome the challenge of promoting livelihoods and retain people through local employment.

The hilly regions of Uttarakhand are ecologically potential. The state is blessed with rich natural resources, globally important gene pools and ecosystems. The natural beauty, pilgrimage places make these hilly regions suited for tourism. However, the implementation of such development strategies totally depends on the development of physical and social infrastructure. Environmental degradation is another important aspect of the area that needs to be looked into and taken care for Uttarakhand to be a successful state. Due to unplanned development in the past, the ecology of the area is badly affected. If there is rapid development without any check of this problem, it may lead to the destruction of the natural resource base of the area. Also the livelihood of the weaker sections in the hill areas is completely dependent on these natural resources; their destruction will make the process of inclusive growth unsustainable in the long run. Thus the state should look after that growth process does not destroy the ecology of the area by any means.

Inequalities and Imbalances in the Economy of Uttarakhand

The geographical inequality between the hills and the plains divides the state critically. The districts in plain, i.e., Haridwar, UdhamSingh Nagar, Dehradun and Nainital are far more developed in terms of various indicators of development as compared to the hilly districts of the state. The district in plains has far better infrastructure facilities like electricity, roads and irrigation. This inter-district inequality in infrastructure leads to disparity in terms of income and livelihood between the hills and the plains, finally resulting in the underdevelopment of hills.

Agriculture in Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand is basically an agricultural state. About 60% of the state's geographical area is under forest cover and only 14.5 % of the total area is cultivated. The agricultural sector contributes around 33% to the state's GDP². The agriculture in hilly areas largely depends on women because of large scale migration of men for employment. The irrigation is the most crucial factor in agricultural performance for which hilly people depends on natural streams or rainfall that further in turn depends on monsoon. The hill region lacks other sources of irrigation due to which only the land near to rivers and streams are cultivated that contributes about only 12% of the gross cropped area.

Status of Networks

After Uttarakhand attained the status of separate state, the growth rate in the state increased from 3.5 percent to 11 percent³. It is a clear indication that the status of independent state helped Uttarakhand to change into fast growing economy. The various schemes run by the central as well as state government helped in the regional development of the state. The main problem in the hilly regions of Uttarakhand is networking of roads. In hill areas of Uttarakhand the only means of communication is road transport as the rail heads ends up in tarai region. So, hilly areas are wholly dependent on road transport. Initially before the formation of state, the condition of road transport was very poor. which is now much better than before but not up to the mark. Various schemes like Gram Sadak Yojana have helped in the development of roads. This has also helped in increasing the tourism in the state. But still there are villages which do not have pucca roads. Due to improper networking and bad condition of roads there are villages which even lack basic amenities like electricity, medical facilities, etc.

Status of Education

Education is a key to economic growth, social transformation and national integration. The state comprises of many educational Institutions which are of major importance to India as well to the world. The state is proud to have famous institutions like Indian Military Academy, Forest Research

Institute, Rashtriya Indian Military College, and Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration. According to the census of 2001 the literacy rate in Uttarakhand is 71.6 percent which is higher than the National literacy rate, i.e. 64.8 percent. This can be considered as the unique feature of the state and is one of the reasons for its growth. The school infrastructure has improved. The Navodya Vidyalayas are good example of how to provide high-quality education to talented students who cannot afford it. Also the ITIs and polytechnic colleges have been opened in the state so that jobs can be created in the industrial sector. The status of higher education has grown many folds after the formation of state, but most of them were situated in the Tarai region of the state. Therefore, for the development of hilly regions many educational institutions are opened. The medical college and National Institute of Technology have been opened at Srinagar Garhwal. Also H.N. Bahuguna Garhwal University attained the status of Central University with its campuses in Srinagar, Pauri and Tehri. The state government also opened college for professional education offering courses like BBA, BCA and Bachelors in Tourism at Rudraprayag. This effort of state government encouraged the student of rural area towards professional studies. Earlier it was difficult to get professional education but government made it easy by offering such courses at the nominal fee.

Tourism in Uttarakhand

The Uttarakhand is blessed with scenic beauty and a unique mountain environment as well as rich historical and cultural assets. The state attracts tourists for pilgrimages, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, wildlife tourism, eco-tourism, and amusement and leisure tourism. The tourists in Uttarakhand increased but it is much lower than the arrival of tourists in the country. Among tourists, the majority are domestic tourists and the foreign tourist share is less than 1 per cent. This portrays a gloomy picture of state tourism development and also shows that there is a lot of potential for developing this sector. Even 11 years after the creation of the state and despite the potential for all kinds of tourism, the state is not able to attract tourists because of the poor infrastructure.

Industrialization

The relative improvement in industrialisation in Uttarakhand has been much better than in the country over the period 2001-04. In Uttarakhand over the periods 2001-02 and 2004-05 the number of factories increased by 7.2 per cent with an increase in workers of about 23 per cent. Gross fixed capital formation increased by 72 per cent and profits by 98 per cent. The industrial sector contributes around 24% in state's GDP⁴. This shows a positive impact on the employment status in the state as a result of industrialisation. But most of the industries are situated in plains in which many workers are hired from neighbouring states and workers from the hills have to migrate in plains. Among the hill regions it is only district Almora that has set up small-scale industries and Khadi/ Gram Udyogs.

Almora has about 31.3 per cent of the state's small-scale industries, which is similar to that in Haridwar and also about 13.7 per cent of the Khadi and Gram Udyogs. The number of employees of khadi units and SSIs in Almora are about 9.8 per cent and 38.9 per cent, respectively³. Pithoragarh has shown a relatively better setting up of Khadi and Gram Udyogs in relation to other hill districts. Bageshwar, Champawat, Rudraprayag and Uttarkashi are the least industrialised hill districts, where even the setting up of Khadi and Gram Udyogs is almost negligible. It is expected that the new industrial policy will focus on these districts.

Approaches for the Successive development of hill areas

There is a need to implement the strategies in the mountainous regions of Uttarakhand in order to change the situation of economic and social backwardness. Initially there is a need to develop infrastructure of the region. The important types of infrastructure which are less developed in hilly areas are electricity, irrigation and roads. Due to this the agricultural products raised by the farmers do not get proper prices because they do not reach the area where its demand is high. To develop markets in hilly areas there is a need to have networking of roads so that better transport facility could be available and products could be exported to other state at proper time. In many hilly villages due to lack of transportation the Education and medical requirements are severely affected.

Rich Bio-Diversity

The Garhwal region is very rich in crop bio-diversity. The traditional crop bio-diversity is deeply rooted in traditions. The cultivators especially women practices their knowledge of the rain fed agriculture related to mixed farming and soil fertility. The crop biodiversity of the region is so high that about forty different crop species comprising cereals, pseudo cereals, millets, pulses, oilseeds etc, with various sub varieties are cultivated in the region. Unfortunately due to poor transportation facilities and distant located industries the cultivators do not get satisfactory income. This resulted in decrease of cultivation of many crops like buck wheat, horse gram, millets etc. So to make it economically viable, there is a need of installing industries in the region. Also the markets should be developed in the hilly regions so that cultivators may earn well.

Development of Horticulture

The climatic conditions in hilly region are good for growing fruits and vegetable. Also the region is capable of growing off season vegetables which are highly demanded in the plains and other states. Thus the development of horticulture could be seen as potentially suitable for the development of hill economy. The state offers opportunities for culture of silkworms, mushroom culture and floriculture. The silk boards have been opened by the government to provide training and encourage local people towards silviculture. The hill climate is good for growing flowers like different varieties of

roses, dahlias, gladiolas etc. These flowers are in great demand in plains especially in cities like Dehradun, Delhi, Meerut etc. But the marketing of the products becomes a difficult task for small farmers of the hilly areas. Firstly, mandis are situated so far that the marketing of the products becomes very expensive. Secondly, the storage and warehousing facilities are not available to the small farmers. Thirdly, due to poor conditions of roads and improper transport facilities many times products do not reach in mandis on time and gets spoiled on the way. The lack of proper marketing facilities results in the wastage of large part of the horticultural crops. So there is an urgent need to develop market in hill areas.

Health Sector

The health sector is another important area which needs to be looked into. The state has low records of immunization levels of children. Also institutional births in the state are recorded low. Also there are issues related to health and nutrition of women especially in remote areas where access to basic health facilities are denied. The private sector investments in health facilities have risen but they are mainly concentrated in urban areas. Also, poor village people are not able to afford high cost of private medical care. So there is a challenge of developing such institutions that can give cost effective solutions to the problems related to health facility in the hilly regions.

Tourism

Tourism is the fastest growing sector of world economy. Also domestic tourism in India has increased because of the high growth in the Indian economy from last few years. The development of tourism can be seen as a potential sector for the rapid growing economy of the state. The two inputs which are necessary for the development of this sector are –nature and human capital. The state is fortunate to have both of them in abundance. The tourism sector in the state is partially developed. The tourism sector in comparison of other sector can be a very crucial factor for the inclusive growth. Various kinds of tourism activities like leisure tourism in hill stations, religious tourism, adventure and wildlife tourism can be developed. The development of tourism can help in creating the employment for the local people. The employment can be created in hotel industry and tour operating sectors. Also development of tourism provides tax revenues to the state which can be further used for the development of the region.

The development of tourism demands good infrastructure. The most important among them is a network of good quality roads that connect all tourist destinations. The high quality bus services and car rental facilities can further develop the transport network. The connectivity of the destinations can further be improved by providing the facilities for air taxi services. Also there is a need to develop human capital This involves training people as instructors for adventurous activities like skiing, paragliding,

rafting, tour guides and trekking attendants. Such tasks require technical expertise which can be given through vocational training.

CONCLUSION

The geographical diversity in the state divides the state crucially. There is comparatively high level of development in the district lying in plains while the development in the hill districts is at slower pace. The state was formed with the aim of development of these hilly areas and it is unfortunate that still the growth in such areas is at a slow pace. The inter district inequality in terms of infrastructure is the major problem of the state. This inequality also is a reason of inequality in terms of livelihood and income. So for the development of these hilly areas there is a need to have a focussed approach aimed at the development of infrastructure as well as for the sectors like horticulture, tourism, health and bio-diversity of crops that have potential to generate income and employment in the region. Environmental Degradation is another important area that needs to be looked into and taken care of. There is a need to keep a check on this problem so that natural resource base of the area could be conserved. At the same time it should be looked that the growth process do not destroy the ecology of the area.

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