

# Insight into Indian States (I3S)

## Assam Inception Workshop

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OKDISCD Conference Hall, VIP Road, Guwahati, Assam



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## **Insight into Indian States – An Overview**

Insight into Indian States (I3S) Project initiated on October 01, 2013 in four States (Assam, Odisha, Karnataka and Rajasthan), supported by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), India. The Project focuses on Rural Non-farm Livelihood with the objective to generate an interactive, coherent and user friendly online portal at the national level. The main aim is to research, document and highlight the successful as well as not so successful practices in the selected States and areas to enable policy makers to identify and acquire new skills and developmental activities as well as implementing current policies and programmes effectively and to facilitate the States by stimulating them and learning from each other's experiences to enhance the overall growth rate of the State.

The Project will cover Centrally and State sponsored schemes related to Rural Non-farm Livelihood Sector, such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, State Rural Livelihood, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Non-farm Sector), local or regional premier research institutes and specific initiatives taken by Non-governmental Organisations/Community based Organisations will also be explored. The Inception Workshop was one of the key activities, under the Project to formally launch the Project by State government officials and other stakeholders.

### **Launching I3S Project**

The Inception Workshop was organised to formally launch the Project by State Government officials and other stakeholders to apprise about the objectives and activities of the Project and to acquire comprehensive information about the various programmes and schemes being implemented and the initiatives taken by the Assam State in this direction. Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development (OKDISCD) in collaboration with CUTS International, Jaipur organised the inception workshop of Insights into Indian States on December 03, 2013.

### **Eminent Speakers and Participation**

R. M Talukdar, Deputy General Manager, NABARD, Manjula Saikia Bhuyan, Additional Director, Department of Industry and Commerce, Prof. Bhupen Sarmah, Director, OKDISCD, Monjit Borthakur, Assistant Professor, OKDISCD, Dr. Joydeep Baruah and Madhu Sudan Sharma, Programme Coordinator, CUTS International.

More than 30 participants comprising government representatives from Department of Industry and Commerce, National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD), Assam Centre for Rural Development, Centre for Microfinance and Livelihood, Centre for Environment and Social Research, Action Aid, other NGOs/CSOs, I3S Project team and print media attended the meeting.

## **Developing a Cogent Web Portal**

Monjit Borthakur, Assistant Professor, OKDISCD gave the welcome address and after formal round of introductions. Madhu Sudan Sharma, Programme Coordinator, CUTS gave a presentation on the rationale of the study to be launched. According to him, the main feature of this United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported study is a coherent user friendly, sustainable and interactive web-portal, which would depict successful and not so successful practices on governance in the selected four States of Assam, Odisha, Rajasthan and Karnataka. The aim of the portal as explained by Sharma was to present an independent and dispassionate view of policies and practices, which can help other States to imbibe and improve their own policies and practices. According to him, in the first instance, the coverage will mainly be in the areas of rural development initiatives with focussing upon employment generation in the rural non-farm economy.

Prof. Bhupen Sarmah, Director, OKDISCD made insightful comments in the capacity of the Chair.

## **Promoting Non-rural Farm Sector**

Manjula Saikia Bhuyan, Additional Director, Department of Industry and Commerce formally launched the Assam chapter of this study. In her lecture, she emphasised upon understanding North-east and its uniqueness before embarking upon any study or project that have been implemented elsewhere in the country. She also mentioned that understanding the tribal culture and their traditional means of livelihood, especially non-farm related livelihood activities are very important. Here, she indicated the Cane and Bamboo development cluster approach etc. in brief and also emphasised the importance of capacity building of the rural mass to promote the rural non-farm sector in the state. According to her, motivational support to workers and people engaged in RNFS is the most difficult task. She concluded her lecture by indicating resources inventory generation and area wise skills development as two main option to enhance the livelihood opportunities in the rural non-farm sector in Assam.



## **Rural Non-farming Sector Schemes in Assam**

Monjit Borthakur made a presentation on different government schemes operating in the rural non-farming sector in Assam. Dr. Joydeep Baruah chaired the next session of presentations by different organisations. Representatives of the various organisations, such as National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD), Assam Centre for Rural Development, Centre for Microfinance and Livelihood, Centre for Environment and Social Research and Action Aid had made their presentations on their organisational activities and the prevailing practices of governance in Assam and North-east India.

## **Rural Non-farm Sector Initiatives**

R. M Talukdar, Deputy General Manager, NABARD talked about the initiatives of their organisation in rural non-farm sector in Assam. During his lecture, he informed that in 1982 NABARD coined the term Rural Non-farm Sector to indicate the livelihood options in rural area other than agriculture. He also stated about the key areas of work of NABARD like financing to the banks and refinancing to the schemes and programmes and providing loans to the farmers and RNFS workers, entrepreneurs in the state. Talukdar mentioned the scope of some RNF Schemes of NABARD like Swarojgar Credit Card (SCC) Scheme, Credit Linked Capital Subsidy Scheme (CLCSS) and SHG-2. While sharing his experience of SHG formation, he mentioned the importance of Primary Learning Institutes (PLI) in the formation of Inclusive Cluster. In his

concluding remarks, he made an important observation that the performance of the craftsmen in the state is very successful in individual level, but as soon as they formed the cluster, it mostly fails to sustain.

### **Problem in market linkage**

Swapan Singha, representative from ActionAid, Assam mentioned the politics behind the livelihood programme in the State. According to him, it is very important to understand the financing and functioning of these programmes to map their successfulness in promoting livelihood. He also made a vital observation regarding women's control over the market in many parts of North East India. It is very important to understand the failure of many sericulture schemes in the state and also problem of market linkage, he added. Singha indentifies high interest rate as a main barrier to the development of entrepreneurship in many parts of the country. During his lecture, he expressed deep concern about non availability of raw materials and market linkage in the State.

### **Importance of convergence**

Dr. Partho Patowari, executive director of Centre for Microfinance and Livelihood indicated the importance of convergence of departmental schemes in rural non-farm sector. Patowari mainly talked about technology transfer. According to him, the rural artisans and craftsmen are using old and inefficient technologies for production and it is a main barrier in promotion of rural non- farm sector in the State. He suggested that the concerned departments should emphasise on technology transfer to the rural poor entrepreneurs to enhance their capacity of production for better livelihood and competition with rest of the country.

Representatives from Assam Centre for Rural Development made a presentation of their “Piggery Project” towards the end of the panel discussion. With financial support from Ministry of Women and Child Development, the NGO has tried to build the capacity and enhance livelihood of about 500 women in Rani Village near Guwahati. All participants appreciated the initiatives made by Assam Centre for Rural Development and added that this kind of intervention could be an example for the stakeholders working in rural non-farm sector in the state.

## Conclusion

All the participants provided their feedback and added that the workshop contributed in enhancing their understanding about the project. In the concluding remarks, Amar Deep Singh of CUTS International extended vote of thanks and expressed the hope that the project will be successful with the active support from all the stakeholders in RNF sector in Assam.

The workshop concluded by summing up the session and vote of thanks given by Amar Deep Singh, Senior Project Officer, CUTS. He summarised the key points that emerged in the discussions during the course of the event. Lastly, he expressed his gratitude towards all the dignitaries and thanked the participants for taking active part in the workshop and providing valuable inputs and giving commendable contribution.

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