



The Challenges Ahead

Given its agro-climatic conditions, natural resource endowments, and long coastline, Orissa is often cited as a case of unfulfilled potential for both agricultural and industrial growth. Huge public investments were made to create a large-scale irrigation system and industrial base, resulting in fairly impressive growth during the 1960s. However, it soon became apparent that such growth was heavily concentrated in a few pockets of the state. The resultant inter-regional disparities have tended to widen over time.

In the context of Orissa, broad-based growth would essentially mean making this happen in the Kalahandi, Balangir, and Koraput (KBK) region and in other tribal districts where chronic poverty is among the highest in the country, giving rise to serious food insecurity. Certain elements of a labour-intensive growth strategy in these regions are:

- Improvement in agricultural productivity, adoption of small-scale locally managed irrigation, soil and water conservation.
- Promotion of second crops for supplementary income of small and marginal farmers and wherever suitable, introduction of second non-paddy crops.
- Cultivation of horticultural and plantation crops, on high and marginal lands, with proper marketing support.
- Increasing access to institutional credit.
- Reducing the dependence of tribal people on forest resources, by increasing agricultural income and by increasing the number of days of employment.
- Provision of all weather connectivity to and between rural and urban growth centres.
- Generation of supplementary employment through public works programmes with a food transfer component.
- Promotion of rural industries based on locally available materials and local labour.
- Safeguarding the customary rights of tribal population to land and forests, in order to ensure their livelihood security.
- Undertaking measures for upgradation of skills of the populations, particularly the workforce.
- Initiating Joint Forest Management.

While the above measures are meant to increase incomes of the poor, food security requires certain additional measures:

- Involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Self-Help Groups in the management of the Public Distribution System (PDS) in order to minimise corruption and leakage.
- Inclusion of coarse cereals for sale through PDS outlets.
- Community managed grain banks.

Absolute poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition are fundamental forms of deprivation. However, ill health is an equally serious form of deprivation. In the context of Orissa, survival risk is particularly high in the case of infants and children. Infectious

and communicable diseases dominate the illness pattern, exposing the entire population to the risk of contracting these diseases.

Thus, provision of health care is of critical importance. On the supply side, in the context of Orissa:

- Provision of basic curative as well as preventive and promotional care in a cost-effective manner is a challenge since human settlements are scattered and population density is low in much of non-coastal Orissa.
- Physical access to facilities in such a situation becomes difficult. In this connection, road and transport connectivity becomes crucial.
- In order to improve economic access, adequate availability of medicines, tonics, and vaccines is important.
- Quality of health care in the primary tier and the lowest rung of the secondary tier can have an important bearing on the credibility of the system.
- Health counselling becomes significant in areas with low literacy (especially amongst females) and poor physical access.
- Institutional delivery is ideal but if it is not possible, home delivery and neonatal care could be provided through trained ANMs.
- On the demand side, the rate of utilisation of public health facilities in Orissa is at present quite low.
- Female literacy is the single most important factor that determines health-seeking behaviour.
- At the district level, there is a fairly close negative correspondence between female literacy and the percentage of women married below 18 years of age. This is also true for female literacy and the percentage of safe deliveries, i.e., those attended by trained professionals, the two being positively associated.
- Mother's education makes a significant difference to IMR, as is brought out clearly by the NFHS-1.

For the state as a whole, there is not much difference in enrolment and dropout rates between boys and girls at both primary and upper primary stages. The enrolment rates in the 6-14 year age group for girls belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and general population are also not vastly different from each other. However, though the inter-district disparity in female literacy has come down between 1991 and 2001, it is still high and remains a matter of concern. Female illiteracy can be taken as a robust indicator of social and economic backwardness.

Thus, there are two thrust areas for human development in the state: a broad-based and regionally balanced growth strategy, led by the agricultural sector and the promotion of literacy, with special emphasis on female literacy. Region-specific strategies are required to achieve positive results in both areas. These two basic requirements, taken together, will increase the demand for human capital, primary education, and primary health care.

However, the most severe challenge to sustainable development in the state is its vulnerability to recurrent natural disasters, in the form of drought conditions (in western and southern Orissa) and floods and cyclonic storms (different parts of coastal Orissa).



The need for a micro insurance system based on the disaster risk factor and covering a cluster of villages has been suggested by some but has not been worked out as yet. In the case of drought, however, crop insurance is only a short-term solution after the event has occurred and it is important to think of long-term measures against drought. These could include, *inter alia*, soil and water conservation measures, in a participatory mode, in all the watersheds. Massive afforestation and joint forest management, changes in the cropping patterns, and commercialisation of the farm sector (for the better off farmers) would also be necessary for providing financial sustainability to the agricultural sector. For this there is a need to explore feasibility of contract farming arrangements, besides acknowledging and giving legal status to share-cropping, which would improve the status of the landless agricultural labourers and make them credit worthy.

