

Formulation and Implementation of Government Policies and Programmes with Reference to Assam

* *Ritimoni Bordoloi*

Abstract

For improving the standard of living among the people of the country, the Government has implemented various schemes and programmes for securing the people economically, socially, culturally, educationally, and so on. However, the effects of the programmes have been found to be not up to the mark. There are various disparities like rural urban disparity, gender disparity, and regional disparity in the implementation of development programmes. Still, there are a large number of people (more than 30%) in our country who are living below the poverty line ; they have low standards of living in terms of human development index, poor educational facilities ; they suffer from lack of food security, unemployment, or are mostly employed in unorganized sectors (mostly women), and so forth. In Assam, there are problems like women trafficking, mostly in Kokrajhar district ; ethnic conflict, mainly in NC Hills; areas that are massively affected by floods - Dhemaji and Lakhimpur districts, and due to such massive problems, people loose their identity, respect, and dignity due to poverty and exploitation that accompany these problems, and they are devastated economically, educationally, and socially. Therefore, the present study has made an attempt to ascertain the present status of the people of Assam in terms of education, health, and employment; ascertain their rank in terms of the human development index, gender development index, and gender empowerment measure. In addition, the study also analyzed how much they (the people) have benefitted from the schemes and programmes which have been implemented under the means of human security for eradicating poverty in the state.

Keywords: food security, north-east India, microfinance, education, skill based learning, mid-day meal scheme, MGNREGS, millennium development goals

JEL Classification: I3, Q1, Q18

Paper Submission Date: July 29, 2013; **Paper sent back for Revision:** November 4, 2013; **Paper Acceptance Date:** December 25, 2013

In a democratic country like ours, everyone has the right to enjoy equal rights and equal opportunity, which are constitutionally guaranteed to all. The implementation of the rights under the social sectors such as right to education, right to employment, right to equal pay for equal work, right to participate in the political life of one's community, right of access to health services, and so forth have been launched for bringing the necessary upward mobility of different sections of people in our country. Besides, in a democratic country like ours, the basic motto is to bring welfare to the citizens of the country. For improving the standards of living among the people of the country, the government has implemented various schemes and programmes for making us (the citizens) secure economically, socially, culturally, educationally, and so on. However, still, the effects of the programmes have not been up to the mark to ensure equality of opportunity for all people in the country. There are various disparities like rural-urban disparity, gender disparity, and regional disparity in the implementation of development programmes. There are a large number of people (more than 30%) who are living below the poverty line; they have a low standards of living in terms of human development index; they suffer due to poor educational facilities, lack of food security, unemployment, or are mostly employed in the unorganized sector (Hazra, 2009). But for the long term benefit as well as for the development of the country, economic security, social security, educational security, security of life, and so forth for the citizens of the country is very essential.

Even today, we are talking about inclusive growth, formation of human capital, and also, various attempts have been made to achieve the millennium development goals. Improving people's productivity and quality of life implies a multidimensional contribution for their overall growth and development. It is a common target for a developing country to provide the basic amenities to everyone living in the country. According to RBI's "Handbook of Statistics" and the Economic Survey of India (2009-10), in spite of deceleration in the growth rate of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) during 2008-09 and 2009-10, optimism was expressed towards achieving the country's growth target

* *Assistant Professor in Education*, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Housefed Complex, Dispur-781 006, Assam.
E-mail: ritimonibordoloi@gmail.com

of 8.75 % for the year 2010-11. While the Indian economy witnessed an average annual growth rate in GDP of 8.8% between 2003-04 and 2007-08, the real GDP growth decelerated to 6.7% during 2008-09. The advance estimate of national income (as per the GOI in 2010) points out that the growth in GDP during 2009-10 was 7.2%. The upward growth was due to the increased growth of the industry and the service sector. However, there was a continuous reduction in the growth of agriculture and other allied activities from 4.9% during 2007-08 to 1.6% during 2008-09 and 0.2% during 2009-10.

In the case of Assam, the economy of the state is mainly agro - based. The population of the state is 26.66 million people, of which 12.85 million are female. As regards to the sex ratio, it was 935 females per 1000 males (Census of India, 2011), and it increased to 954 females per 1000 males in 2011. In the state, more than 70% people are dependent upon agriculture for their livelihood, but the sectoral growth and the share of agriculture in GDP is declining gradually. The contribution or share of agriculture in the annual plan has declined, as it was 10.3% in 2002-03, but in 2005-06, it came down to 6.2% (Economic Survey of Assam, 2005-06). Although in this region, agriculture makes the maximum contribution to the national state domestic product (NSDP), but the share of agriculture has gradually declined. In Assam, during 1980-81, 1990-91, 2000-2001, and 2007-08, the percentage contribution to NSDP by agriculture was 51.51%, 39.07%, 32.46%, and 24.61% respectively, which shows how the contribution of agriculture's share to NSDP gradually declined from 51% to 24% (Economic Survey of Assam, 2009-10). Besides, the sector growth rate of NSDP also depicts the same picture, where the growth of agriculture has massively declined after the economic liberalization in 1991 and in the post reform period, and the maximum growth place is occupied by manufacturing and tertiary sectors. It means that the farmers have lost their faith in agriculture, suffer a lot from natural calamities, poor economic conditions, lack of manpower, rural deprivation, educational backwardness and marginality, lack of knowledge in the application of modern technology in the fields, lack of motivation to work, and so forth.

Therefore, the Indian agricultural sector is in distress today. It means that today, the growth in agriculture is less than what it is in the service sector, and the whole economy is shifting from agriculture to the tertiary sectors. This is the reason as to why it is called a distress driven growth. Although the major source of income or livelihood is agriculture, but due to poor productivity, there has been a gradual increase in the percentage of poverty, lack of food security, crisis in food purchasing, or purchasing power parity, big gap in between haves and have nots, a number of farmers committing suicide, and so forth. In Assam, soil erosion and flood are the two most important causes behind the pathetic conditions of the farmers. They lose their identity, and they are devastated economically. Lack of knowledge and the entrance of the third party in market selling always results in loss of profit for the farmers. Therefore, it is the right time to analyze why the crisis has occurred in the agricultural sector, or why farmers are willing to sell their land and shift to petty sectors in the urban space. For ensuring the long-term benefit of the country or for the welfare of the country, these questions should be kept in mind by the policy makers when they formulate state policies and economic mechanisms.

Objectives of the Study

Through this paper, some basic challenges have to be looked into:

- ✎ The status of people in the present society in terms of education, employment, and health (measured by HDI), especially in Assam,
- ✎ The application of programmes and schemes which have been implemented for giving food security or alleviating poverty in Assam.
- ✎ The ways of accelerating social justice or human justice to people with special reference to Assam.

Methodology

The paper is purely descriptive and is analytical in nature based on the extraction of data from secondary sources of information such as Census of India 2011, RBI Handbook of Statistics on Indian Economy and Economic Survey of India 2010-11, Economic Survey of Assam, 2005-06, 2009-10, Inequality Adjusted Human Development Index for India's States 2011 and so forth.

Poverty : A Cause for Concern

Poverty means living in a poor situation in which people are unable to get proper and adequate food and daily amenities necessary for living. In India, where a major percentage of people are dependent upon agriculture for their livelihood, the declining growth factor of this sector affects the living conditions of the people, particularly in rural areas. A UN study revealed that there are more poor people in different states of India than in the 26 countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. More than 410 million people live in extreme poverty in the Indian states, including Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and Orissa. The Planning Commission (1999-2000) estimated that the percentage of people living below the poverty line in India was 26.10%. In Assam, it was 36.09%; with Assam being the fourth state in terms of poverty ratio, next to Orissa, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh.

A person who is deprived of social security protections such as educational security, economic security, and health security can also be considered as living under conditions of poverty. The rank of Assam in terms of human development index (HDI) was 16 out of 23 states, gender related development index (GDI) was 26 out of 35 states, and gender empowerment measure (GEM) was 28 out of 35 States (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2009), which reflects that the people in the state of Assam lack access to proper education, health care facilities, adequate employment opportunities, and so on. Besides, the number of women participating in parliament is few as compared to men, gender inequalities prevail in many sectors, which hampers the socioeconomic and cultural development of the people, particularly the women folk, and the people of the state have a poor standard of living. However, in a democratic country, everybody has the right to live with dignity and have access to the basic needs which are constitutionally guaranteed to them. Hence, various policies and programmes need to be implemented for the people so that they are able to get adequate and nutritious food and feel secure economically, educationally, politically, culturally, and with respect to other social dimensions.

Challenges Before Us

In order to meet the target of human development and its basic indicators such as good health, literacy, and developing the standards of living, there are some basic challenges faced by the Indian Government.

➤ **The First Challenge :** Even in a democratic country like ours, the society demands to formulate inclusive growth for our socioeconomic development. Inclusive growth encompasses equality - equality of opportunity in accessing education and health services, and protection in market and employment transitions. Thus, the Government has to provide equality of opportunity in terms of access in the economic field, in the educational field, in social and cultural norms, in the health sector, and provide an unbiased regulatory environment for business and individuals and so on. It is a fact that even after impressive growth in the post-independent India on all fronts; nearly two-thirds of the Indian populace still lives in rural areas. A significant portion of these are landless labourers whose livelihood is dependent on the mercy of employment providers on a daily basis like rich farmers, contractors, and so forth. Therefore, this class of Indian population is most vulnerable to poverty, under employment, under development, and so forth. The call for inclusive growth necessitates that these people are mainstreamed into the development pathway by provision of minimum livelihood opportunities.

➤ **The Second Challenge :** Besides achieving the target of inclusive growth in all sectors of the economy, there should also be concerted efforts to achieve the challenges of the millennium development goals by 2015. Eight millennium development goals (MDGs) were established in the Millennium Declaration at the General Assembly of the United Nations in the year 2000. These include eradicating extreme poverty and hunger and reducing child mortality, improving health and fighting disease, reducing poverty and mitigating hunger, expanding education and lowering child mortality, increasing access to safe drinking water, and ensuring environmental sustainability. Rural poverty itself is a major threat to the millennium commitments. Poverty, in its various dimensions, is a manifestation as well as a determinant of hunger. In its most basic form-as a state of food deprivation and nutritional inadequacy-rural poverty has a direct bearing on the existing hunger situation. Starvation death in various corners of rural India is a stark example of this reality. The Government has implemented various approaches and many schemes for achieving the targets of the MDGs.

➤ **The Third Challenge :** In this present knowledge based society, there is an urgent need to formulate human capital or required manpower as per the society's need. Human capital realizes that a person should be acquainted with the need-based skills. Actually, it indicates the utilization of the human resources and enhancing the capabilities of manpower for the development of the country. Human capital plays an important role in the development of a nation. It is the quality of human beings which helps in the development of the country and in accelerating the pace of development. Developing countries need to control diseases and improve health. Good health makes people feel healthier and healthy people prove to be more productive workers. Investment in building the health care infrastructure and ensuring the availability of safe drinking water should be considered extremely useful for social capital. Thus, development of a state is an integral product of health, income, the level of education, and their applications. Actually, the concept of human capital is linked with the growth and development of a nation, and therefore, the focus should be clearly traced out for capacity building among the people in the states. Human capital is ensured through proper education only. Educated people are generally more productive workers because they can use the capital more effectively, adopt new technologies, and learn from their mistakes. For ensuring the capacity to become self-dependent or to pull people above the poverty line, human capital formation is a major strategy that should be adopted by imparting knowledge and skills through proper education.

Programmes for Protecting the Poor

Food security is a basic right for everyone living in the country. The rate of poverty decides at what level a person is able to provide food for himself or for the family. Per day income of a person will depend on getting adequate, healthy, and nutritious food. The poverty line is measured by the intake of calories and purchasing power parity method. It was estimated by a task force of the Planning Commission in 1979, which defined poverty line as the per capita expenditure at which the average per capita per day calorie intake was 2400 calories in rural areas and 2100 calories in urban areas. But later on, Suresh Tendulkar reviewed the calorie-norm of estimating poverty and recommended the purchasing power parity for estimating poverty in urban and state-level rural areas. The planning commission of India has defined that those who earned below ₹ 26 per day in rural areas and ₹ 32 per day in urban areas are living under BPL category (Tendulkar Committee Report, 2009). They are entitled to get rice or wheat from the public distribution system, or they will be eligible to draw benefits of the Central and State government welfare schemes meant for those living below the poverty line (Krishnaraj, 2006). Besides, the new multidimensional poverty index was developed by United Nations Human Development Report (UNHDR), which used ten major variables including access to good cooking fuel, schooling, electricity, nutrition, and sanitation. Thus, a person who can access education and adequate health services, and has a certain standard of living, is not categorized as living in poverty.

➤ **Provision of Food Security :** Food security is basically understood in terms of food availability, stability, and accessibility. Ensuring availability of food implies efficient domestic production and internal trade to make enough food available for the entire population. However, despite having available food in the market, it may not be within easy access to certain sections of the society. Hence, there should be enhancement of people's purchasing power to buy food through the public distribution system and employment programs. National Food Security Act has been brought in to ensure entitlement of 25kg of rice or wheat per month at ₹ 3 per kg to every family living below the poverty line in rural or urban areas. At present, a BPL family is entitled to 35kg of rice at ₹ 4.15 per kg or wheat at ₹ 5.65 kg per month. While four crore BPL families are benefiting from the current provision, after the enactment of the food security laws, an additional 2 crores families would be added to the existing list of beneficiaries. By implementing this policy, the Government of India intends to provide food to the poor at affordable prices (Singh, 2011).

➤ **Mid Day Meal Scheme :** The Government of India launched the MDM programme for school going children on August 15, 1995. The Cooked Mid-Day Meal scheme (MDMS) adopted by the Govt. of India was introduced in the state of Assam with effect from December 2004 in five districts, namely, Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Chirang, Udalguri, and Darrang. In the year 2004-05 itself, the scheme was extended to the whole of Assam. The main objective of this programme is to boost universalization of primary education, increase enrolment, and maintain regularity of attendance, reduce dropouts and sustain retention, and improve the children's level of learning and self-esteem by

providing proper nutrition. However, in spite of implementing this scheme, the state of Assam still has a large number of drop outs from schools, there is gender disparity and regional disparity in terms of literacy, and the state has lower gross enrolment ratio, and so forth. According to the Census of 2011, in Assam, the total literacy percentage was 73.18% - the literacy percentage of males was 78.81%, whereas the literacy percentage of the females was 67.27 %, with a gap of 11.54%. Still, 22.2% children dropped-out from the Classes of I-V and 73.5% children dropped- out from the Classes I-VIII in 2007-08.

✚ **MGNREGA** : The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme was launched on February 2, 2006 from the Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh in 200 districts of the country. Now, it is known as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). NREGA, one of the flagship schemes of the Government, has been expanded to cover all the 614 districts across the country. The programme has benefited over 10 crore households. It provided employment opportunities to more than 4.479 crore households in 2008-09. It also contributed to the improvement in rural infrastructure. The low work participation rates in the rural areas are due to the non-availability of employment opportunities, and the necessary investment needed for job avenues in rural sectors. MGNREGS was expected to create employment opportunities at the grass root level. The scheme has completed 7 years since its implementation, and has provided 100 days of employment to around 40 million rural households. For eradicating poverty and providing employment opportunities to the poor and unemployed, it is one of the most popular schemes started by the Government in India. But it is the right time to check how much the scheme has been able to achieve in terms of its target of giving security to the poor people in the state. In Assam, MGNREGS has failed to achieve its targets. According to a news report :

- ✚ Although the working days should be 31.85 crore days, it was able to cover only 41.64 lakh days.
- ✚ Only 0.23% people benefitted from the scheme for full 100 days.
- ✚ Only 28.01% labourers got the job-card, out of which, 78% labourers could not get the chance to do the work for 30 days and 30% were not able to get the work for 10 days.
- ✚ 15 Panchayats have no formal registration of the NREGA Scheme, although it has been a long time since the scheme was implemented.
- ✚ Nearly 79,655 families are still deprived of the benefits from the scheme.
- ✚ Only 10.96% of the workers have a bank account under the scheme.
- ✚ 52% of the jobs in this scheme were for the construction of rural roads only.

Besides the implementation of the scheme like MGNREGA in the state (where 50% of the jobs are ear marked for women), a research was conducted by the North East Social Trust (NEST) in collaboration with the Centre for Microfinance and Livelihood (CML) to understand the rural livelihood status under MGNREGA in the state. It was seen that despite the government's claims about rural development, the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) during 2011-12 (till December 31, 2011) was rather poor. At a press conference in Guwahati, NEST executive director Tasaduk Ariful Hussain said, "One of the main reasons for the poor implementation of the MGNREGA scheme is the fact that there should be a programme officer in every block to supervise all scheme-related works. In Assam, there are 217 blocks, and till date, no programme officer has been appointed in any block. As a result, the Block Development Officers (BDOs) have to look after the implementation of the MGNREGA scheme in their respective blocks. As the BDOs already have a lot of work, they cannot give due importance to the MGNREGA scheme and its implementation." Even during 2011-12, ₹ 311 crore was transferred to the panchayats for MGNREGA scheme. Of this, only ₹ 24 crore was spent. Proper implementation of MGNREGA can bring about a sea change in the socioeconomic situation at the panchayat level. However, unfortunately, the State Government is not taking MGNREGA implementation seriously. Such types of examples are sufficient to see the government and the non-government accountability and the responsibility towards the implementation of the schemes which have been launched for the socioeconomic development of the people in the state.

✚ **Micro Finance**: Micro Finance plays an important role in making the people self-dependent and in helping the

poor and the needy persons in creation of micro credit for their economic empowerment. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Development of Women and Child in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana (SGSY), the basic accent of these schemes was to organize the rural poor into SHGs through a process of social mobilization to enhance their capacity in the socioeconomic domain and to encourage them to take up some economic activities so that these poor families are able to come out of decisive poverty within a targeted period of time. These schemes were visualized as 'holistic schemes covering all aspects of self-employment,' where assistance is given to the BPL families to set up micro-enterprises in rural areas.

In the formation of self help groups (SHGs), women SHGs are dominant in the north eastern region. In Assam also, out of total 1, 70,779 SHGs, more than 93 thousand SHGs are women SHGs. The most effective form of SHGs in the country is that it creates the concept of credit system and also, these SHGs encourage and provide micro credit (small loans) to the poor people who want to start small businesses such as making handicraft items. Small loans can be a good source for enhancing the business sense among the people in rural areas. Although the SHGs are not enough for developing entrepreneurship in the state, but the poor people in particular gain a lot from micro-finance initiatives because it instills in them an attitude of independence. The poor who themselves raise economic credit enjoy better life, have better access to food, shelter, health care, and education, and are also more comfortable financially and socially as compared to their non-earning counterparts, and also, they are able to contribute a lot for the betterment of their family (Ahirrao, 2009).

Although the above-mentioned schemes could provide a lot of avenues for developing enterprises in rural and urban areas, but their real application was not up to the mark. There is a big gap between the loan providers and the loan takers; there are communication hazards, ignorance, lack of confidence for which the schemes have failed to achieve their targets in terms of making the poor people self dependent and self reliant.

Measures Taken into Account for Eradication of Poverty and Hunger, Particularly in Assam

It is high time for our country as a whole to make a rationalization towards social and economic discrimination, and also, measures should be adopted for reducing the factors of such exclusion. Education is the only way to boost up the positive social transformation for the welfare of the country. Education can build up people as economically empowered, educationally competent, and make them self reliant, self-dependent, and in the control of their own decisions and choices. Life skills education is a practical way for developing the competencies of the people and thus, can empower people in their day to day life. Education is the only way to meet the target of human development and human resource development.

In order to achieve this progress, people should be skilled, they must be competent about their work, they must be aware about their status or position in the society, they should have the capacity to realize their basic human rights, and also, they should be capable of critical thinking to identify the oppressive forces in the society so that they can act for their own development and empowerment.

✍ The role of the Government should be directive besides providing the practical vision and a transparent political will towards the implementation of the schemes which are adopted as well as implemented for enhancing the capacity of the people. Nowadays, due to transparent political will and its practical applications, Chhattisgarh can be considered as a model state in terms of successful implementation of the public distribution system and the implementation of MGNREGS in the country.

✍ It is a fact that Assam or India as a whole is demographically very potential or vibrant, which is our national strength. It is because 51% of the Indian population is under the age of 25. Therefore, in order to address the needs of the people in a positive direction, and to make them vibrant human capital, education should be need-based as per the demands of the present society. Education is the only means to make men skilled and competent by nature. However, in Assam, the gross enrolment ratio is 8%, and that in India is 12% (Annual Report, MHRD, 2008-09), and this fact shows the comparatively poor status of Assam in terms of GER. Therefore, apart from the conventional system of education, open and distance learning (ODL) and open and distance e-learning (ODEL) system should be adopted sincerely for starting a new frontier for socioeconomic development in the state. By launching various general,

professional, and vocational courses, open and distance learning gives the chance for those who are deprived to receive education due to their various constraints.

In this regard, the National Knowledge Commission 2005 rightly said that the appropriate application of knowledge in agriculture can play a major role in boosting the agrarian economy and giving the Indian farming a competitive edge in the global market, and ODL can play the role for that. Common Wealth of Learning (COL) has demonstrated that by using information and communication technology, and by adopting flexible and blended learning approaches, one can increase access to quality technical and vocational skills development that can be used to overcome the urban-rural and gender divides that exclude learners from skills training to create a skilled workforce of lifelong learners for the informal and formal economies.

✍ The fee structure is comparatively lower in open and distance learning system than in the conventional one, but the policy of providing free education should be implemented for those who are economically and socially deprived.

✍ Some local personnel should be involved in transmitting information of such open education resources to those sensitive unreached areas that do not have access to newspapers or even electricity. The courses should be taught in local languages in order to develop the functional literacy among the people in the society.

✍ Through open and distance learning, various entrepreneurial courses or some need based training courses for the women of self help groups (SHGs) can be launched or designed with the help of open universities and other ODL institutions. Before launching the courses, there is the need to conduct surveys to identify the needs of the women in a particular area, and then to train them to utilize their local resources in productive ways.

✍ Finance is the most important factor for the question of development. As a special category state, Assam as well as the North East receives 90% grants and 10% loans centrally for implementation of development plans. The states in the Northeast are allowed to use 20% of Central assistance for Non-plan expenditure and also, 10% of the budget(s) of the Central Ministries/Departments are earmarked for the development of the north-eastern states under the fund of non-lapsable pool, specifically for the development of infrastructure and economic and social situations. Besides, there is the provision of 'women component plan,' where not less than 30% funds/ benefits are earmarked in all women-related sectors for ensuring women empowerment. Women are also benefitted from the gender budget, where the main aim is to analyze the budget expenditure from a gender perspective (i.e., the government expenditure and revenue should impact men and women equally, and the women should not be left out). In Assam, 12 departments covered the gender budget in the year 2008-09, which is a positive sign. But the fact is that in Assam, the Government fails to utilize the funds properly, there is a leakage of funds, lack of administrative training in budget analysis, lack of adequate role of the opposition parties and the civil-society (such as universities, academicians, research institutions, intellectuals, group of All Assam Student's Union, etc.) in properly addressing the issues connected with our state, regional, and national development.

✍ A transparent rural credit system should be promoted by the Government for providing economic and social security to the rural people. Even proper water pumping and irrigation facilities in the agricultural fields, particularly in the drought seasons, must be provided by the Government for helping the poor that will ultimately increase the production in agriculture.

✍ There is a mismatch between the production and infrastructure allocations. There are a number of problems related to diversification of farming. While India produces over 162 million tonnes of fruits and vegetables, the cold storage facilities exist only for 12% of the total produce. Again, there are wide state disparities in the availability of cold storage facilities. For example, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu, which together constitute 31.66% of total fruit production, 14.26% of the vegetable production, and 71.58 % of flower production, have only 5.31% share in the cold storage facility in the country. But Punjab, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh, who have more than 71% cold storage facilities, produce only 12.83% fruits, 36% vegetables, and 8% flowers together. Thus, such type of mismatch should be reduced and equality and distributive justice should be maintained while allocating the facilities to the states (Singh, 2011).

Conclusion

In this study, an attempt has been made to ascertain the present status of the people of Assam in terms of education, health, and employment; ascertain their rank in terms of the human development index, gender development index, and gender empowerment measure, and the study also analyzed how much they (the people) are benefitted from the schemes and programmes which have been implemented under the means of human security for eradicating poverty in the state. Such studies can help policy makers to grasp the reality about the implementation of the programmes, particularly those that are implemented for providing food security to the poor and needy in a state like Assam.

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