Chapter Six

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

One of the major problems associated with the development process is the growing imbalance over the regions and across the social strata. Various regions, therefore, have to be developed according to their growth potentials. The planning process in the present study has been conceived as a measure of correcting imbalances, accelerating faster growth in case of poor, and maintaining upward growth trend for the other sections of the society leading to corrective growth and balanced impacts.

The high density of population, low level of land-man ratio, relatively low per capita income, food deficit, frequent floods followed by droughts in Manipur valley have posed many questions related to poverty, unemployment, regional disparity and social inequality, which raise major issues in favour of planning for the socio-economic well-being of the people, especially the poor and downtrodden.

The present study identifies the degree of imbalance in economic growth of social groups and reviews the planning schemes for the poor and their impact in balancing the
social inequality. It also suggests remedial measures to make poverty alleviation programmes a strategy for rural transformation.

The study area – Manipur valley, with its alluvial cover and salubrious climate, accommodates around two-thirds of Manipur’s population in about nine per cent of the state’s area. Divided into three districts – Imphal, Thoubal and Bishnupur, and eight community development blocks/subdivisions for administrative purposes, the valley is surrounded by the Manipur hills on all sides. Its population dwells in 405 villages and 28 towns, including Imphal, the capital city of Manipur and the cultural, commercial and political focus of the region.

The oval-shaped Manipur valley is one of the Himalayan midlands, a high level flood plain at an elevation of about 760 metres above the mean sea level, with 900 metre contour forming its outer limits. A number of hills and mounds scattered throughout the valley inter-twined with sparkling lakes including Loktak add to its scenic beauty and tourist potentials. Carved out by river Manipur and its tributaries – Iril, Imphal, Thoubal, Wambul, Wambol and Khuga, the valley comprises mostly of the transported soils carried down by these rivers. Besides this alluvial
cover, the hills are formed of red soils and the area around the lakes of peaty or organic soils. The mixed vegetation found in the valley contain variety of species ranging from evergreen to deciduous types. Aquatic and swamp vegetation cover the areas around the lakes and marshes, and the riverine forests along the river banks.

This fertile alluvial tract is well suited for agriculture and associated activities. Around three-fifths of the valley area is under settled cultivation and one-tenth under jhuming. Cropping pattern in the valley is dominated by mono-cultivation of rice, while maize, sugar-cane, pulses, oilseeds and wheat are also grown on a limited scale. A large variety of vegetables are grown abundantly in the kitchen gardens attached to the homestead land. Cattle and buffaloes provide motive power in agricultural operations. Pigs, dogs, goats, sheep and horses and ponies comprise rest of the livestock. Pisciculture is the main occupation of the people living in settlements around the lakes and in the island villages.

The region is famous for its handloom fabrics and handicrafts throughout the country and even outside, but their impact on the economy has been negligible. A large number of agro-based industries including rice, dal, flour
and oil mills, a spinning mill, a vanaspati plant and a khandnari sugar factory have emerged on the industrial scene in the valley. The transport network in the valley is adequate but most of the roads are narrow, unmetalled and qualitatively poor.

The spread of population in the valley is fairly uniform due to the nature of topography, climate and pattern of land use. Imphal district accommodates around three-fifths of the valley population and records a density of 641 persons per km² as per 1991 census, while Thoubal and Bishnupur districts form 25.52 and 15.69 per cent of population respectively with population density of 572 and 364 persons per km². Sex ratio in the region is inversely related to urbanisation, which in turn is correlated to literacy. Imphal, with over two-fifths of population living in the towns, has lower sex ratio and higher literacy than Thoubal and Bishnupur districts.

The Meiteis, the Pangals and the Nepalese constitute over nine-tenths of the population, and the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes the rest of it. The main workers, marginal workers and non-workers form 34.35, 4.67 and 60.98 per cent of valley population respectively. About three-fifths of the main workers are engaged in
agricultural pursuits, one-tenth in household industries and the rest in tertiary activities.

Around three-fifths of the valley people live in the rural settlements and two-fifths in the towns. Imphal district has larger number of small villages and Thoubal and Bishnupur districts larger proportion of medium and large-sized villages, which form linear pattern along the river banks, roadsides and margins of the lakes and marshes. Most of the towns are situated along the National and State highways south of Imphal. Social facilities exist in most of the towns and larger villages. Educational institutions, health care services, electricity, drinking water and banking facilities are adequate but need further improvements.

Irrespective of rich resource base, the region has lagged behind in economic development mainly for its excessive manpower and lack of incentives, initiatives and programmes for economic transformation leading large chunks of its population live in poverty.

The incidence of poverty as measured by head count ratio varies markedly across the country. The rate of decline in the proportion of population below poverty line,
the poverty ratio, also differs from state to state and region to region, with rich and developed areas showing higher decline than the poor and depressed regions. Though there has been perceptible decline in the incidence of poverty at the national level, from 48.3 per cent in 1977-78 to 29.20 per cent in 1987-88, there are pockets of acute poverty in the eastern, central and southern regions of the country.

In Manipur, as per the latest estimates, around 45.06 per cent of the state population live below the poverty line. The hill districts, in general, have higher proportion of population living in abject poverty than the valley districts. The number of families living below the poverty line in the valley declined from 81,604 in 1988 to 71,698 in 1991, and registered an upward increase to 83,573 during 1992. Currently, 63.27 per cent of the poor families reside in Imphal district, 19.17 per cent in Thoubal district and 17.56 per cent in Bishnupur district.

The largest proportion of villages having about 80 per cent of the households below poverty line are found in Thoubal district followed by Bishnupur and Imphal districts, where about one-third villages have 60-80 per cent of the poor households. Around 30.5 per cent of the
villages in Imphal district and 9.5 per cent in Bishnupur district have 40-60 per cent of the households below poverty line. In six villages of Imphal district the magnitude of poverty is the least, below 20 per cent of the households classed as poor. Spatially, the poverty concentration is greater in the eastern and south-eastern parts of the valley and lesser in the western and south-western parts.

Poverty in the Manipur valley, like other parts of the country, is inversely related to the size of landholdings and correlated with landlessness. The bulk of the families below the poverty line consist of marginal farmers, agricultural labourers and small farmers. Rural artisans and non-agricultural labourers constitute rest of the poor households in the region. Thoubal and Bishnupur districts with higher percentage of small and marginal farmers have comparatively lower quantum of poverty than Imphal district, where the agricultural and non-agricultural labourers and rural artisan dominate the occupational structure.

About two-thirds of the households below the poverty line in the valley are those of the destitutes and very very poor people and the rest one-third of the poor and very poor group. Destitute and very very poor families constitute three-fourths of the poor households in Bishnupur
district and two-thirds in Imphal district, which have greater intensity of poverty than Thoubal district where such families form only half of the poor households. The increasing intensity of poverty has to be bridged with help of appropriate programmes to ameliorate the conditions of the poorer sections of the society.

Poverty alleviation aims at extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas. Among the various poverty alleviation programmes implemented in the region, IRDP, MRPD, RECP and JRY are the most important. Two other programmes - DWCRA and TRYSEM have also been taken up as supplementary programmes to the IRDP. Similarly Indira Awas Yojana as a supporting programme to JRY was also implemented in the area.

IRDP is the major instrument of government's strategy to eradicate rural poverty. The strategy is designed to create new productive assets for the vulnerable sections of society which includes improving the productivity of land by providing access to inputs like water, improved seeds and fertilizers etc. and diversification of agriculture through animal husbandry, dairying, forestry,
fishery, sericulture etc., useful both for the landless and the land holders. Implemented through the DRDA at the district level and block at the grassroot level, IRDP covers all the blocks in the valley since 1980-81.

An inverse correlation is inferred between the amount allocated and utilised for the IRDP, while the physical achievements have surpassed the target in the successive years. The impact of the programme in context of crossing the poverty line has been a meagre 13 per cent in the region though the physical achievements have been spectacular, surpassing the target in most of the years in all the valley districts.

NREP, designed to generate gainful employment opportunities, create durable community assets and improve the quality of life, was implemented in the region in 1985-86. Though the fund allocated for the programme increased over the years, it remained underutilised except in 1986-87. The physical achievements under the NREP, however, have been impressive although, surpassing the target in all three districts.

RLEG, a centrally sponsored wage employment programme, was implemented in the state in 1984-85 through the
DRDA. Its aim was to provide a minimum of 100 days of employment to one member of each landless agricultural labour household. Under the RLEG, the gap between the allocation and utilisation of funds was much narrower than other poverty alleviation programmes. There has been a positive relationship between fund utilisation and physical achievements under the RLEG in the region.

Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) was launched in April 1989 as an intensive wage employment programme amalgamating the WREP and RLEG into it. JRY aims at generation of additional employment for the unemployed and underemployed persons in the rural areas besides creating productive assets and improvements in the overall quality of life in the villages. Though the amount allocated for JRY in the Manipur valley could not be utilised fully, the physical achievements, the generation of mandays, surpassed the target, of course marginally. Due to disturbed law and order situation in the valley, the JRY could not attain the tempo of the single rural wage employment programme and got implemented as any other programme of the state government.

Poverty alleviation programmes have helped the poor households and unemployed youths to some extent but their impact on augmentation of income of the target group remained
insignificant mainly due to the poor quality of created assets, lower wages paid due to leakage and corruption, and use of allocated funds for unproductive works. As such, the poor could not get much benefit from the assets created under these programmes. An appropriate strategy for poverty amelioration at the grassroot level has, therefore, to be adopted to improve the quality of life in the countryside.

In an assessment of the impact of anti-poverty programmes at the grassroot level taking example of Laphupat Tera, a village situated along the Imphal and Khordak rivers at the tri-junction of Imphal, Thoubal and Bishnupur districts overseeing the Loktak lake, where poverty looms large with 95 per cent of the households living below poverty line, it is observed that only 11.72 per cent of the poor households got assistance under IRDP since 1982-83, and a meagre 503 mandays were created under JRY since 1990-91. The poverty alleviation programmes, thus, have not been able to bring substantial benefits to the poor in the village for the lack of funds, improper planning, poor implementation, absence of proper training for efficient utilization of assets created under the IRDP and lack of guidance and supervision on part of the block development authorities.
From the experiences emerging from the implementation of anti-poverty programmes in the rural areas of Manipur valley, it is felt that the programmes as such have great potential in ameliorating poverty, if they are not seen as mere doles but as integral part of overall development strategy contributing to the growth process like other productive investment. Lack of area planning approach and preoccupation with target fulfilment in these programmes had the perverse effect of corrupting both the delivery system and the beneficiaries of the programme. As a result, these programmes could neither bring any perceptible change in the incomes of the poor nor any improvement in the productivity of the resources.

To make the poverty alleviation programmes an instrument of rural transformation and employment generation for the poor, appropriate choice of policies and development strategies detailed below have to be adopted:

1. Poverty alleviation through agricultural growth by increasing yield per hectare through double and multiple cropping with investments in irrigation, introduction of high yielding short duration varieties of seeds, and diversification of crops.
2. Promotion of non-farm sector with linkage between agriculture and non-agricultural sectors with growth of agro-processing and agro-servicing enterprises in the rural areas besides the development of dairying, poultry farming, pisciculture, sericulture, handlooms and handicrafts and promotion of tourism.

3. Appropriate institutional framework and an effective and responsive delivery system with involvement of panchayats, cooperative societies and voluntary agencies.

4. Development of infrastructure comprising effective transport system, network of markets and chain of financial institutions; and

5. Human resource development with facilities for vocational education, training facilities for skill development and reduction in population growth.

Thus, in Manipur valley conscious efforts have to be made to integrate the objectives of poverty alleviation with the growth strategy both in farm and non-farm sectors. By removing infrastructural bottlenecks operating as constraints on the structural transformation of the rural economy and manpower development, a self-sustained growth will be possible in the valley with a favourable impact in terms of poverty alleviation.