

EDUCATION IN THE BORDER AREAS OF MEGHALAYA: THE NEED FOR OPEN LEARNING**Dr. Euodia B. Myrthong****Assistant Professor,****Department of Education, NEHU, Shillong****ABSTRACT**

The people in the border areas of Meghalaya have been experiencing great difficulty to give proper education of their children. On account of economic hardship; many students from Border Areas have given up their studies after the lower primary stage on account of their parents economic difficulties. Considering Education as a means of for developing the economic growth of the nation it at the same time the way of life of the people, it is therefore it is important to improve the educational system in these areas so as enhance the life of the people. The baseline survey report of the government on 10 border area blocks with 1523 villages revealed a very grim situation of the education in the area. The lack of education in these areas is a matter of great concern not only to the state but the country as a whole as these areas are in direct trade and commerce with the bordering country. Hence there is a need for open learning in these areas.

Keywords: Boarder areas, education, open learning

Introduction

Meghalaya shares a 443 km long international boundary with Bangladesh. It is bounded by Bangladesh on the south and southwest. At present there are 12 border area blocks namely Khliehriat, Dawki, Pynursla (inclusive of Shillong), Sohra, Mawsynram, Nongstoin, Ranikor, Mawkyrwat, Baghmara, Dalu, Gasuapara, Kalaichar (inclusive of Ampati) with 1692 villages (BADP, 2015). The partition of the country in the year 1947 has upset the economic condition of the people living therein due to the choking up of trade linkages which has brought about trade imbalances, population displacements etc to the citizens of India residing in the State of Meghalaya. The major issues with which India's borders are plagued with include – poor accessibility, economic backwardness, and sense of insecurity among people living in border areas. In fact, the entire North-Eastern region which is strategically important is underdeveloped in terms of economic security and infrastructure. It still lacks basic infrastructure including good road connectivity. The region needs more support, planning and funds (BADP, 2015).

Educational Scenario in the Border Areas

The people in the border areas of Meghalaya have been experiencing great difficulty to give proper education of their children. On account of economic hardship; many students from Border Areas have given up their studies after the lower primary stage on account of their parents economic difficulties. Obviously, the majority of the students hailing from those areas are handicapped and cannot catch up with those living in non-border areas (Gogoi, Goswami, & Borah, 2009). Considering Education as a means of for developing the economic growth of the nation it at the same time the way of life of the people, it is therefore it is important to improve the educational system in these areas so as enhance the life of the people. Material standards of living, the character of social and cultural life, and the well-being of societies are associated with human resource development (Alsayhawi & Gardener, 2004) and sustainable economic development. Education has an important role to play in the development of human resource in the country.

In fact Education is the biggest sector engaged in development of human resources. Education is all round development of the individual. It helps the individual to know and discover himself and motivate him to explore his potentialities to the fullest. From the baseline survey report of the government on 10 border area blocks with 1523 villages (*refer to Table No.1*), it was observed that the numbers of villages with lower primary schools are 1278, with upper primary are 499, with high schools and higher secondary are 135 and 33 respectively. The numbers of villages with college are 4. This indicates that 245 villages are without even a lower primary school which implies that there are number of students who are out of school. It can be drawn out that in some of these villages people are illiterate. This portrayed a very grim picture of the live of the people in these areas especially in the age of science and technology. The lack of education in these areas is a matter of great concern not only to the state but the country as a whole as these areas are in direct trade and commerce with the bordering country. Good quality education is the foundation of new discoveries, new knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurship that trigger growth and prosperity of the individual as well as that of a nation. Hence there is a need for open learning in these areas.

Table No. 1

Number of schools in the border area blocks

Name of the Border Block	No. of Villages	No. of Villages with LP Schools	No. of Villages with UP Schools	No. of Villages with High Schools	No. of Villages with Higher Secondary Schools	No. of Villages with Colleges
Ranikor	218	165	58	20	1	-
Mawsynram	141	123	40	6	2	1
Pynursla	157	132	60	13	3	-
Sohra	129	91	23	4	1	-
Dalu	167	154	57	22	4	1
Baghmara	205	178	78	14	6	1
Gasuapara	159	120	53	9	5	-
Khliehriat	59	51	15	2	-	-
Dawki	80	64	40	16	3	1
Kalaichar	208	200	75	29	8	-
Total	1523	1278	499	135	33	4

Source: Border Areas Development Department, Government of Meghalaya (2015-16)

Open Learning in the State

Open learning system have drawn the attention of a number of learners all over world. Open learning is not a new concept in the state. A number of people have benefitted from this system of learning. However opening learning system in the state has been associated to higher education only for a long period of time. The Meghalaya Draft Education policy (2013) have recognised the importance of open schooling in order to widen access to school education and enhance participation of learners in the educational process. According to the draft policy it has the potential for reaching the un-reached" and "reaching all". Therefore, it recognised the Open Schooling System (OLS) as the only alternative schooling system can play a significant role to provide "Education for All" and "Reaching the Unreached" and the unreserved. Open schooling systems could also provide responses to the challenges of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) and Universalisation of secondary education. According to the Draft Policy the main objective of the State Open School (SOS) will strive to provide relevant, life related and employment oriented (self employment oriented) courses at different levels of school education through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode of education. The state wise/ district wise mapping of academic study centres (AI) of NIOS (*refer to Table No. 2*) showed that there are 15 study centres in six districts of Meghalaya. The overall enrolment capacity is 10,500 however the total enrolment is only 2294 which is only 21.85% of the total available capacity of enrolment. The statistical record also revealed that in some centres there is zero enrolment at both the secondary and senior secondary level. This implies the lack of awareness and knowledge of the people on the open schooling system existing in the state. The NIOS in the state do not reach out to the people living in the border areas. No doubt the system of open schooling have been able to reach out to the prioritized group such as girls and women, rural people and urban poor but it still have a long way to go with respect to the border areas of the state. In fact it may be noted that the open school system was introduced in only 6 out of the 11 districts in the state.

Table No. 2

District wise mapping of academic study centres of NIOS

District	AI	Enrolment Capacity	Enrolment in Secondary course	Enrolment in Sr. Secondary course	Total Enrolment
East Garo Hills	1	300	0	0	0
East Khasi Hills	7	4700	800	304	1104
Jaintia Hills	2	1600	319	1	320
Ri Bhoi	1	1000	257	0	257
West Garo Hills	3	1900	216	174	390

West Khasi Hills	1	1000	223	0	223
Total	15	10,500	1815	479	2294

Source: www.nios.ac.in

Need for Open Schooling in the Borders

Nevertheless, the open schooling system has an edge over formal schooling system due to the inherent structural flexibilities, related to place, time of learning, eligibility criteria, student's choice in selecting combination of subjects both academic vocational and scheme of examinations. Noting the absence of elementary, secondary as well as senior secondary in many villages in the border areas the introduction of open schooling will provide educational opportunities for those who have missed to join the formal education stream. The open schooling system offers Elementary level courses through its Open Basic Education. The reaching out of open schooling in this area will help to boost learning in the area and increase the literacy rate of the state as well as the country as a whole. The open schooling also provides a number of vocational, life enrichment and community oriented courses besides academic courses at the secondary and senior secondary. Open schooling will also enhance the livelihood of the people living in the area not only through academic opportunity but also through vocational opportunity. It provides skill development programmes to all categories through vocational and life enrichment courses. This will enrich the people of the area; it will provide them better opportunities to explore the available resources and to develop the area for international trade and commerce as well. The Government have termed the North-East region as a gateway to ASEAN and South-east Asian countries and that to develop the economy of the country this region need to developed. A way of developing any place is through quality education. Education of the people in any region can be promoted by open schooling system as well especially at the secondary and senior secondary level and of course at higher education. Quality education can be provided through open schooling as the various programmes it offers are meant to develop the learner's full potentiality and to enable the learner to stand on his feet. Open schooling will expose the students to the use of technologies through learning. This will help develop in learners, digital knowledge which is essential in our day-to-day world as every aspect in life have become more and more digitalised. This will also help learners to connect with the world around. Today a strong digital backbone is an essential ingredient to harness and strengthen development in all sectors.

Conclusion

Open learning is a promise for a bright future to the people in the border areas. It is a means of achieving the dreams for better life and overall development of the area. However, this dream can be achieved only when certain barriers are removed. Firstly, it may be pointed out that these areas lack basic infrastructural facilities such as roads (i.e., good roads) and electricity (i.e., half of the day there will power shutdown). The percentage of electrified villages in the border Districts is 45.57 that are almost equal to the State average. Secondly the digital connectivity in these areas is very poor that no Indian network will function but instead one will get a foreign network, hence, this issue need to be addressed so as to enable opening schooling to function. When we speak of digital India we need to improve the digital connectivity in these areas for the economic growth of the country as well as for security of the nation. And of course

these areas are neglected and where security problems tend to arise from time to time as there is no proper fencing in the area. Thus, open schooling though is a solution in removing educational backwardness of the people in the border areas and for the development of the area it will be successful only when these barriers are overcome.

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