

## Areas identified for Regional Planning for NER

Following an amendment of the North Eastern Council Act in 2002, NEC became a Regional Planning Body with the induction of three full time Members in NEC, of which two have their headquarters in Shillong and one in Delhi who is Member (NE) in the Planning Commission. The general directions to be pursued by the NEC, State Governments in the region and the Central Government for the overall development of the NER have been laid down in the NER - Vision-2020 document and this document, which was released by the Hon'ble Prime Minister on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2008, encapsulates the aspirations of the North Eastern people.

B. With the Vision 2020 in mind, the NEC General Guidelines was formulated and was approved in the 58<sup>th</sup> NEC Plenary in 2010. One of the important components in the guidelines was the requirement for the NE States to send annual priority list of projects for funding by NEC. It was however noted that the projects proposed by the NE State Governments were mainly State-specific projects without much linkages to regional planning. For bringing about more clarity in this regard, modified Guidelines for preparation and submission of "Annual Priority List of Projects for NEC Funding" was issued to all NE States vide letter No.NEC/PLAN/I-54/2013 dated 22.11.2013 drawing the attention of the State Governments in the NER to, as far as possible, formulate and propose projects from the Thrust Areas, NER - Vision 2020 Document and 12 FYP Working Group Reports having regional character that benefit more than one State in the NER.

C. In furtherance of the advice for proposing projects of regional character that benefit more than one State in the NER which was re-emphasised in the modified Guidelines for preparation and submission of Annual Priority List of Projects for NEC Funding, areas identified in the first instance for Regional Planning and Strategy for NER are brought out in the guidelines below for enabling the NE States to work towards achieving some common objectives and outcomes for the region. These are apart from the priority of the Central Government for development of major infrastructures in the region. It is important to mention here that the implementation of actionable points in NER Vision 2020 document has reached its midway point and the next half of the period is available for making attempts to achieve the various aspirations contained in the document.

D. **NE States to propose projects in priority list to fit into regional planning and strategy:** While the process for Regional Planning and Strategy on the areas mentioned in the guidelines would be taken up shortly by NEC, the completion of the final regional plan document is expected to take some time. State Governments in the region may therefore

prepare their annual priority list of projects for NEC funding for 2014-15 with reference to the general directions for fulfillment of common aims and goals for the region as contained in the NER Vision 2020 document and this note. NEC would be examining and considering projects submitted by the State Governments with reference to the aims and goals it has identified for the region.

E. The areas initially identified for Regional Planning and Strategy for NER are given below in the guidelines:-

**Additional Guidelines for Preparation of Annual Priority List of Projects for NEC funding in line with the identified Areas for Regional Planning and Strategy for NER**

**1. Background:**

The geographical positioning of NER in the midst of five countries encircling 98% of its landmass with more than 5000 kms of international border needs to be converted into an advantage. The emphasis should be for regional planning and strategy to take advantage of the international borders and transform NER into a zone primarily focused on export oriented economic activities with neighbouring countries and to South East Asia and beyond. Such an approach would be in furtherance with the Look East Policy of the Government of India as elaborated in the NER Vision Document 2020.

2. Working towards this direction would require a multi-sectoral approach in creation of enabling environment for sustainable agricultural growth, industrial activities and socio-economic development besides major infrastructure development. It would also require addressing developmental deficits in identified areas to make the region more robust in dealing with the impact of Look East Policy.

3. The areas initially identified for regional planning and strategy are as follows:-

a. **Regional Planning for establishment of Special Economic Zones at the borders:**

The NER has several roads that lead into the neighbouring countries. Some of the roads have already been developed by the Central Government in cooperation with the neighbouring country concerned and one example where substantial progress has been made is the Moreh – Tamu – Mandalay – May Sot (Thailand) road through Manipur. There are also other border towns in NER where Border

Haats have been developed too and have achieved a healthy degree of cross border trading activities. Such towns where substantial cross border trading have started may be targeted for provisioning of all requisite support facilities to further develop them into full fledged international trading towns which may include establishing Special Economic Zones, proper Land Custom Stations, Integrated Check Posts, Truck and Container Terminals, banking facilities etc. At the same time other locations which have potentials for being developed as a centre for border trade may also be identified. Regional plan should also cover the requirement for improvement and upgradation of road/rail/waterway/telecom connectivity to such towns and beyond.

b. **Regional Plan for establishment of industrial estates/parks:** Central Government has a number of schemes for establishment of industrial estates and IT parks in the States. States in the NER have been sanctioned such projects by the Ministry of MSME, Ministry of Food Processing Industries, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of IT, etc. In order to provide the requisite enabling environment for operation of industrial estates and IT parks, various growth centres across the State, specially in the border towns, could be identified. A regional plan and strategy to give impetus for creating enabling environment for establishment of industrial estates is necessary as the NER should be able to produce goods for local consumption as well as exports without which the Look East Policy could face the risk of turning NER into a dumping ground for cheap imported goods. The plan and strategy may also cover IT enabled services, medical tourism, cultural exchange programmes. There will also be a need to suggest policy incentives to be considered by NE States and modification of existing schemes, especially NEIIPP by the Central Government for attracting investments.

c. **Regional Plan for achieving self-sufficiency in selected produces:** The cost of living in NER is comparatively higher than other regions in the country partly due to high transportation cost as several essential produces have to be imported into the region from the mainland. Some of the produces where self-sufficiency may be

targeted could be in production of eggs, poultry, fish, meat, vegetables and fruits. A Regional Plan and strategy could be worked out for intensification of cultivation of such crops, fruits and rearing of birds and animals along with hatcheries, nurseries for planting materials etc. and establishment of marketing facilities and food processing units. Irrigation facilities should also be included in the plan for intensification of agricultural activities. Such identified areas could be named as Special Development Zone for taking up suitable projects on mission mode which may also include policy incentives for attracting investments on PPP mode mainly for economic activities for production of packaged products.

- d. **Regional tourism plan:** The “Integrated Tourism Master Plan for NER” prepared by TCS has been sent to the Ministry of Tourism. To implement the Master Plan, which has recommended for establishment of 33 regional circuits across the NER, the State Level Project Management Agencies (SLPMAs) are being set up by the Ministry of Tourism. Apart from the regional circuits there is an urgent need to give thrust to the creation of rural tourism by facilitating development of small numbers of home stay houses in villages which have scenic natural beauty and natural eco-tourism settings. The plan may bring out the various options for development of circuits through PPP mode by attracting private investments, community owned approach and Government managed enterprises. Developing medical tourism in the border towns could also be integrated into such plans.
- e. **Regional Plan for upgrading educational institutes:** The north eastern region has been witnessing a trend where students migrate in large scale to institutes in other parts of the country in pursuit of higher education causing heavy financial burden to the families. Such migration is not confined to students at university level but also among school going children. One of the reasons for this, apart from many others, is the poor educational infrastructure and lack of good faculty in the NER. Although recently, the Government of India has set up an IIT in Guwahati, an IIM in Shillong, an NIFT in Shillong and a number of National Institutes of Technology (NITs) in the region, these are still found to be inadequate to meet the increasing

demands for seats. To address the issue it would be important to develop a regional plan and strategy which may include providing infrastructure to existing educational institutions in selected cities/towns and transform them into premier educational centres, attract outstanding faculty members to serve in the NER by providing incentives, extend scholarships to students studying in premier educational centres in NER.

- f. **Regional Plan for skill/ vocational studies:** The north eastern States suffer from migration of educated unemployed to other parts of the country in search of skill education and upgradation for better employment opportunities. There is therefore a need for having facilities for providing a wide spectrum of skill training courses in the NER itself. The strategy should include leveraging the strengths of youth from NER in English speaking, music and fashion. English speaking could be improved further through technical collaboration with the British Council for training of college and school teachers in refining their English language and giving them certificates which will make them employable in the neighboring countries. Courses in which the youth from the region has innate aptitude like music, beauty care, health care, fashion design, IT enabled services could be given the thrust it deserves. The plan may cover integrating fine arts like music and culture studies in school education curriculum besides upgrading/ establishing institutes for skill and vocational courses. Institutes like the Central Institute of Vocational Education in Bhopal, Advanced Training Institute in Hyderabad, College of Physical Education in Bhopal, Indian Institute of Tourism & Travel Trades in Gwalior, Tata Football Academy in Jamshedpur and many more can and should be replicated in the NER. An enabling environment should be created and incentives and facilities provided so that private education providers are encouraged and attracted to venture into this region for empowerment of the youth.
- g. **Regional Plan for improving access to technical and professional courses:** Youth from the NER are generally found to be weak in mathematics and science and therefore land up pursuing higher education in humanities which limits their

employment opportunities. If the right facilities are available for encouraging youth in NER to take up mathematics and science, it will enhance opportunities for students who will be pursuing courses that will lead them to become doctors, engineers, technicians, scientific researchers etc. This could be achieved if a regional plan and strategy is developed for popularization of mathematics and science among school children in NER. This may include setting up of dedicated institutes for maths and science besides upgradation of infrastructural facilities for maths and science in existing schools right from the primary school level. To demystify science and maths and make it challenging for the school children, the strategy could include setting up science centres, planetarium, scheme for special tuition classes etc.

- h. **Development of inter-state roads in the State borders:** Most of the inter-state roads in NER originate from Assam and enter into the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura and Manipur. There are several such roads where the last mile (a few kilometers) before crossing the border lies mainly in Assam. It has been the experience of the States neighbouring Assam that such roads remain neglected and are left in very poor condition hampering smooth traffic and provoking adverse sentiments from the people of the neighbouring States. Such neglect leads to unhappiness and bad feelings and creates social tensions in the border areas. A regional plan and strategy to develop and maintain the last section of such inter-state roads need to be evolved.
- i. **Conduct study on the efficacy of 10% earmarking for NER by Central Government:** After several years of implementation of 10% earmarking of schemes by Central Ministries for the NER, it has become necessary now to conduct a study on such an approach in terms of its appropriateness and efficacy of schemes for NER and make recommendations for improvement in the approach and delivery including a close monitoring and evaluation mechanism. The study may also cover the extent of CSS and Central Sector Schemes availed by the NE States and the difficulties faced in accessing such schemes. As done by the Ministry

of Textiles by launching a North East Textile Policy, other Central Ministries could also consider recommending to the Central Ministries for formulating and evolving North east specific schemes that suits the land and conditions of the NER.

- j. **Study Land Use Policy and practices for replication:** Mizoram is a forerunner in the development of an innovative land use approach in tribal areas which has resulted in scientific planning of land resources, appropriate utilisation of land, regulated use of land resulting in improved agricultural production, augmenting income to the poor farmers and increasing production of raw materials for commercial activities. The New Land Use Policy of Mizoram could be studied for replication in tribal areas in the rest of NER.
- k. **Sports policy for NER:** The National Advisory Council (NAC) has been carrying out several consultations to recommend a Sports Policy for NER. This report could be used to develop a regional plan with State specific interventions for developing sports in NER and promote sports disciplines in States/communities which have the highest potential and natural talent for earning medals in national and international competitions.
- l. **Drawing up of a long term Master Plan for Telecom/ IT Development in the NE Region:** The North Eastern Region suffers from poor telecom and internet connectivity. To leverage the potential of the youth for getting gainful employment in the IT Sector, improvement of mobile telecom services and high speed broadband internet connectivity is very important. For this purpose, one holistic integrated and time bound action plan could be prepared by pooling together the piecemeal works carried out by different agencies like BSNL, private mobile operators, railtel, PGCIL, etc.
- m. **Regional Plan for providing and improving tertiary and secondary health care facilities in NER:** The Central Government has set up NEIGRIHMS in Shillong with the objective of providing tertiary health care treatment for the entire NER. However, patients still continue to travel outside the NER for investigation and treatment. This is causing huge financial burden to the families of the patient and

the objective of setting up a tertiary facility in NER remains unfulfilled. One of the reasons is the lack of good super-specialists in the NER. Given the fact that the majority of the population cannot afford to go outside the NER for specialized medical treatment, strategy needs to be evolved for attracting super-specialists, training specialist to become super-specialists, training nurses and health care workers to assist super-specialists etc. Further, except for the States of Assam and Manipur, all the other six States of the NER are presently facing acute shortage of medical specialists. Practically none of the PHCs and CHCs in these States is having the prescribed number of specialists. A regional plan is needed for ensuring that within a given timeframe, all NE States are in a position to man the secondary health care sector to meet the IPHS manpower standards.

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