

Suggestions

In the light of the findings of the study, the following suggestions we would like to make for the improvement of the socio-economic condition and demographic life of the scheduled castes people of Dhubri district of Assam.

(1) It is observed that majority of the households have unskilled labour. But the income earned from this profession is not sufficient and certain. Therefore, to improve the socio-economic condition of the unskilled labours, it is necessary to improve their skill. For this purpose, special training should be given to them according to their eligibility. Government should take strong steps for properly utilizing the Special Component Plan which is announced for the overall development of the poor Scheduled Castes People of Assam in general.

(2) Fishing is found to be another main occupation of the Kaibartas of Assam. But the income earned from it is very negligible to run the families. It is because of the fact that technology and procedure they use for catching, storing and marketing fish are crude and outdated. To improve the socio-economic condition of the Kaibartas, it is necessary to modernize fish catching and fish selling technology so that their productivity can increase and the sustainability of their fish trade can be ensured. For this purpose, special training should be given to the Kaibartas in fish catching, fish storing, fishing instrument making etc. They are also expert in producing cane and bamboo products. But due to financial problems they cannot produce it at a large scale. Agro-farming training should be given to them. Raw materials like, nylon, yarn, bamboo and cane, takau and other items may be provided at subsidized rate. Necessary marketing facilities may also provide to them.

(3) It is found that child marriage is still practiced among the Scheduled Castes people of Dhubri district of Assam. So, special campaign should be organized to create awareness among them for enhancing the female age at marriage. All the development plans including the Special Component Plan and Special Assistance Programme meant for the Scheduled Castes people should stress on raising the age at marriage so that fertility of the scheduled Castes women comes down.

(4) The mortality levels including the infant mortality is very high among the Scheduled Castes people of Assam. Therefore, it is suggested that to reduce mortality (specially infant mortality) among them special attention should be given to improve female education,

institutional deliveries and vaccination programme. Awareness should also be created among the rural mass for safe delivery.

(5) Womens' labour force participation is found to have great influence on fertility as well as couple's attitude to extra children. Since most of the respondents in the sample villages are found to be semi-literate or illiterate, government jobs are not available to them. But, the women folk are good in weaving, net making, handicraft, etc. In this connection, special training should be introduced for Scheduled Castes women to improve their skill in these trades, which will not only enhance their family income but also reduce fertility.

(6) The most popular method of family planning among the sample Scheduled Castes women is found to be the contraceptive pill, which is used for spacing. Permanent method of family planning like sterilization (both male and female) is not popular among them. Thus, the government's family planning measures should give more emphasis on permanent method of family planning and for this purpose free sterilization camps should be organized from time to time specially in the remote areas.

(7) The percentage of dropped out children is higher at upper primary level than the lower primary level. Similarly, the dropped out at secondary level is almost double than the dropped out at higher secondary level. To create healthy atmosphere in education sector, proper infrastructure and other facilities need to be provided for minimizing drop out ratio in pre-primary, primary and secondary level of education.

(8) Use of contraceptives in most cases depends on the availability of medical facilities. Medical facilities of the sample villages are not satisfactory. Therefore, it is suggested that government should open more Primary Health Centers (PHC) and sub-centers in remote areas so that people of this localities can easily access the facilities.

(9) It is observed in the Scheduled Castes villages that the son preference is the strongest motivating factor behind desiring additional children especially among the illiterates. This traditional mind set of the people must be changed to reduce fertility among them. Therefore, the government should create awareness among the illiterates through NGOs that there is no difference between son and daughter.

(10) It is found that 37.50 percent families of the sample households are living in kutcha houses. The households who are living in kutcha houses also belong to BPL category but they are still unable to get the IAY houses. It is also found that there is huge corruption for selecting IAY beneficiaries from panchayat level to officer level. During survey time it was

clear that more than 20 percent IAY beneficiaries are not the actual beneficiaries. They actually belong to APL category. They somehow managed the officer and get the IAY houses. Therefore, it is necessary that the government should immediately bring transparency in the scheme in selecting the IAY beneficiaries so that only the actual beneficiaries come out for selection. Together the government should take strong steps against the persons who are involved in corruption while selecting the IAY beneficiaries.

(11) During survey it was found that only 6.67 percent households have got government supplied pipe water facilities which is supplied by the Public Health Department of the State. Again, 11.67 percent of the households are still using surface water (pond, river, spring) for household uses and drinking purposes. Therefore, it is suggested that the Public Health Department of the State should spread the free water supply scheme in more areas so that more and more people can take the benefit of it.

(12) It is found that in surveyed villages, less than 40 percent households have electricity and more than 60 percent households use kerosene for lighting. Therefore, it is suggested that electrification facility should be increased so that more and more households can be electrified. Again, it is found that more than 90 percent households use fire wood and others mainly cow-dung as a source of fuel and only 10 percent households use L.P.G. for cooking. Hence, the government should take steps to give L.P.G. connection to more and more families under the Randhanjyoti scheme.

(13) It is found that more than 80 percent households have been issued job cards but only less than one percent households have been provided employment. In some areas it was also found that the bank pass books of MGNREGA beneficiaries were in the hands of the gaon panchayat member. Even the gaon panchayat members had taken signature of beneficiaries on withdrawal forms in advance. So, it is suggested that this system must be changed. The government must rectify the loopholes of the scheme so that actual beneficiaries are not exploited by the middlemen. The government should also take strong steps so that all the rules and regulations of MGNREGA scheme are strictly followed.

(14) The formation of SHGs is not ultimately a micro credit project but an empowerment process. The empowerment of women through SHGs would give benefit not only to the individual women but also for the family and community as a whole through the collective action for development. The SHGs empower women both socially and economically. They encourage women to participate in decision making in household, community and local

democratic sector and prepare women to take up leadership position. Besides, it provides lean season wage employment and increases saving habit among people. Therefore, it is suggested that benefits of the SHGs should be highlighted among the rural SC people so that much more people may be attracted to it. For this reason some training programmes and workshop facilities should be provided in the rural areas, especially for SC women. The NGOs and government should take necessary steps for marketing the goods produced by SHGs. Periodic training at regular interval to group members regarding self-management issues is to be necessarily imparted with the help of experienced resource persons.

(15) The Scheduled Castes people are in the habit of taking loan from the village money-lenders at an exorbitant rate of interest. The main reason of taking loan from the village money lenders is that they face difficulties to follow the complicated procedures of the banks or other Government agencies due to their illiteracy and ignorance. Therefore, it is suggested that the government should direct the bank authorities to provide loan with easy procedure and easy documentation.

In the planning and implementation of poverty reduction programmes, the bureaucracy plays the most important role. They are involved in detailed planning, allocation of allotted funds for the lower tiers of the administration and line departments, flow of funds, approving the plans and projects prepared by the lower tiers and monitoring inputs, outputs and outcomes of development interventions. Since the weaknesses in implementation are the root cause of failure and sub-optimal performance of programmes, it brings into focus the functioning of the bureaucracy in terms of its accountability, transparency and interface with the civil society.

From the aforesaid discussion it could be inferred that without reforming the bureaucracy and changing their mindset, the development interventions are unlikely to be effective and efficient. Furthermore, specific reforms need to be designed to make development administration responsible, transparent, accountable and culpable.

Lastly, a whole-hearted effort of the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Gaon Panchayats, dynamic role of the educated youths, Mahila Samities, etc are required for a drastic change in the socio-economic and demographic life of the Scheduled Castes people of Assam.