

Evaluation of Planning and Development in Kakopathar Block, Tinsukia, Assam

Dipankar Saikia¹ & Uttam K Roy²

Abstract

Democratic decentralization and economic liberalization in 1990's has opened now a days many facets of planning and development in different hierarchies of planning units. Prior to the recommendations made by Balwant Rai Mehta Committee three tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions were established at village, block and district in 1957. Accordingly, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992 provided legal framework and endowed functions and responsibilities to the institutions at each level for performing developmental activities. The District Planning Committee (DPC)'s as mandated by the 74th CAA are to be constituted at all states for consolidating plans prepared by Panchayats and municipalities in the district into the Draft District Plan. Block planning units act as an extension of District Planning Committee at the intermediate level.

This study is thus revisits the past approaches of micro planning in regional development and tries to find the imbalances in growth within a known flourished region. Generally, a district is often too large a unit in which to fully understand the extent to which local social and cultural contexts influence the effectiveness of key services. This is more possible at a smaller local government level, such as an Intermediate Panchayat or a Village Panchayat.

In conclusion the study wants to state that the planning and development of Kakopatharis in good health and performing well as mandated by the constitutional amendments.

¹ Research scholar, Indian Institute Technology, Roorkee, India

² Assistant Professor, , Indian Institute Technology, Roorkee, India

Introduction

Kakopathar block is situated in the district of Tinsukia which is one of the most urbanized regions in Assam. It extends upto 832sq.km and covers 21% of the total geographical area of the district. The largest share of population from the district lives in the villages of Kakopathar. The planning and development in Kakopathar Block had started in 1964 after the establishment of the block during Community Development Programme, but till present rural character is still prevalent in the block. It is located in a core economic region distinguished by National Commission on Urbanization for planned urban development in India.

Block Planning has a very unique history in Indian planning. Since independence Community Development Blocks are treated as normal administrative units. They have regular budgetary allocations. Block Development Officer (BDO) at each block or the revenue tehsil, with a team of subject specialists and village level workers (VLW) execute the various developmental activities in a block. The BDOs reported to the District Collector, who is the administrator of the district. This type of centralized approach however resulted failure in upliftment of regional disparities in rural and urban growth.

The apex body for local governance in the block is Kakopathar Anchalik Samiti (Block Samiti). At the grassroots level, revenue villages falling in each GP is having a Gram Sabha. As the only fast

growing urban cluster of Kakopathar Block Headquarter has not been classified yet as census towns, there are two GP's which are entrusted with the developmental activities of the town. The two GP's are Kakopathar and Koomsang which covers a total of 30 villages.

The Gram Sabhas at the village level are conducted as per the dates notified by government. Schemes and beneficiaries are chosen at Gram Sabha and then transferred to the upper hierarchy of panchayats. Block Development Officer has two fold responsibilities in the block – to administer in Ward Sabha and release of funds to the panchayats. DPC set up in 2013 is not functioning for the time being. Therefore, Plans prepared by Zilla Parishad goes directly to State Government via District Collector at the district level. The Zilla Parishad also executes some developmental activities directly through Gram panchayats.

The method used in the study to evaluate development is a convenient and quick way of understanding the comparative status of different blocks. The comparative analysis was done against some indicators that were found important index for gauging development. The nos. 1 to 7 have been assigned to the different blocks as per their current quantity of produce, values etc. against the indicators. The highest value corresponding to a particular indicator is ranked "7" and the lowest being "1". In the end, the individual ranks are added to get the final rank of the blocks to showcase the status of their development.

In demographic analysis, the block scored between rank 3-4 which suggested Kakopathar has relatively low income opportunities and extremist activity and out-migration compared to other parts of the district. Extortion notices and sudden attacks on selected identity groups have caused many people to move away. Political instability thus observed in the study area as an issue in development.

Under the socio economic indicators, high share of cultivators in Kakopathar (Rank 5) suggests availability of small land owners. Similarly a low share of cultivators in Itakhuli indicates landlessness and dependence. Lowest family savings in Kakopathar indicate either low disposable income or awareness. Also owing to extremist activity, savings might be unregistered.

Some of the lowest number of beneficiaries in Kakopathar suggests lack of governance which might suggest lack of funds or inability to utilize it. High expenditure in MnREGA suggests active participation of people and government and can be associated with addition of employment and infrastructure as a resultant.

Highest net sown area and gross cropped area showcase heavy pressure on cultivable land when analyzed against highest percentage of cultivators. Cognizable fertilizer usage implies intensive usage of cropping land but at the same time suggests a good access to fertilizer facilities. Owing to heavy agricultural activity, largest investment is

being diverted to Kakopathar which is in turn intensifying exploitation of fertile land. Lowest irrigated land suggests heavy dependence on rainfall and comparatively shorter cropping period (180 days). Area irrigated by canals is appreciable suggesting good utilization of available technology. But least irrigated land suggests the canal facility is immensely limited.

It shows that Kakopathar has some of the highest veterinary facilities, however low improved cattle breeds suggest that either the facilities are largely inaccessible or inept. Highest percentage of electrified villages indicates a more developed block and higher standard of living. Appreciable educational infrastructure exists in Kakopathar block but health facilities in Kakopathar are limited as it scored the least score 1.

In the whole process of evaluation Kakopathar showed highest development in many spheres of development. It clearly signifies that there are ample of opportunities in the block. Resource, agriculture and infrastructure are the major strengths of the block. The major occupation of people is agriculture and other agro-based trade and businesses. Therefore future development of the block should move towards a development scenario which ensures huge agriculture based economy.

The block headquarter has potential to be developed as an agro based industrial town which will support local industries like bamboo, rattan etc. The NH 52

connecting the town to Tinsukia will boost the economy which is a regional linkage between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Basic metal industries popping out in and around the town also needs separate industrial areas.

Methodology

The study has the perspective of regional development in a diverse economic region. The district of Tinsukia is distinguished as one of the 49 Spatial Priority Urban Region (SPUR) by National Commission on Urbanization of India. Despite of that there are disparities in levels of development within the district. By so far the industrial and economic growth has been limited to only a small part of the district.

The methodology adopted for the study was to select an area having heterogeneous characteristics and compare it with the district to know the present position of the block.

Analysis and Discussion

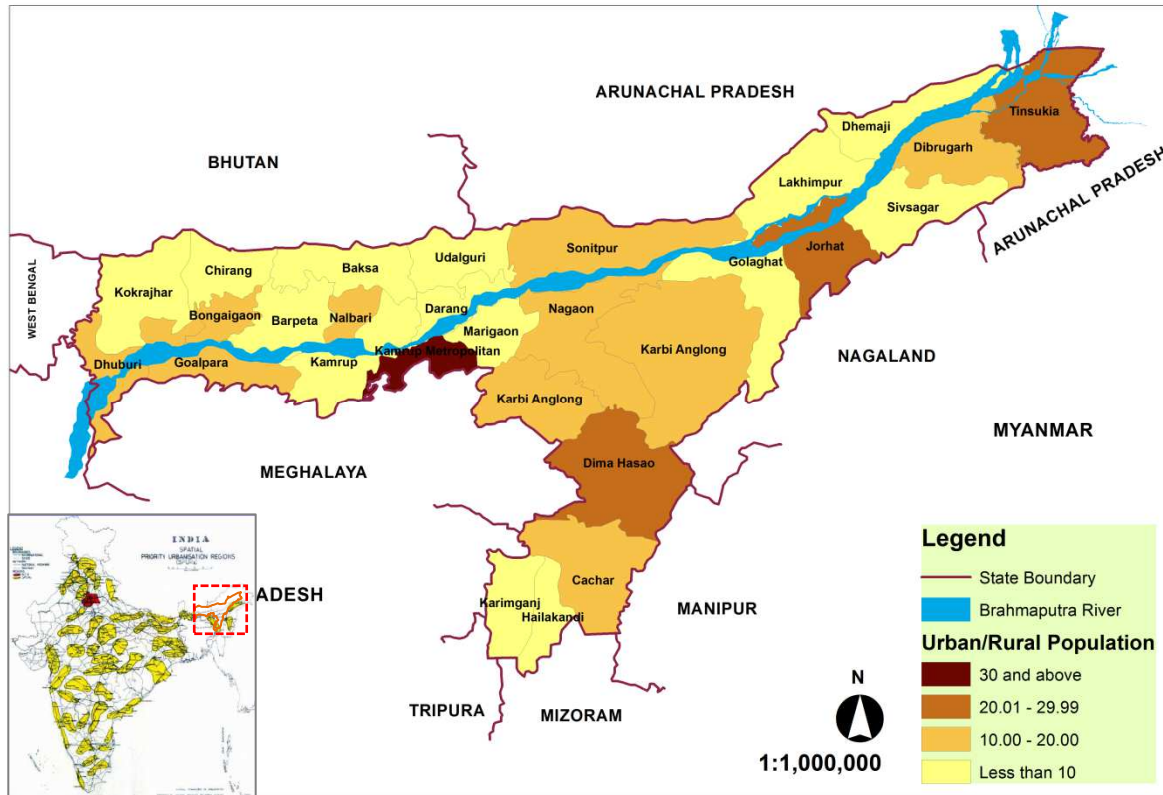
According to Chand &Puri (1981) the delineation of planning regions can be grouped under three categories; administration, homogeneity and nodality. For the availability of data and correct political status of a region, an administrative boundary aids convenient implementation of developmental plans. In regional development concept, the localization of development/growth elements at a selected point at a given space is the solution for regional development and reducing the economic disparities within region and amongst different regions. If the nodal character is ignored than there might be

ambiguity in development of e delineated region. Some homogeneity in topography, economic and socio-cultural structure is also required for a region to implement the development plans.

Assam is the second largest state in north eastern region. Being the central part it tends the communication and transportation of goods and services to other states of the region. In spite of that the level of urbanization in the state is low. Assam is the third lowest urbanized state in India. According to the present census nearly 14% of people live in urban an area which is far lower than the national average of 31.16%.

The present distribution of urban population shown in the following map shows that the districts which were marked by NCU have somewhat higher level of urbanization than the remaining districts. The highest percentage of urban population lives in Kamrup Metropolitan (82.9%) as the state capital Dispur is located and many other regional and state facilities are placed there.

The other districts Dima Hasao, Jorhat and Tinsukia have shown fairly equal growth pattern in the next category of urbanization. Dibrugarh district has a little lower than Tinsukia with 18.4%.

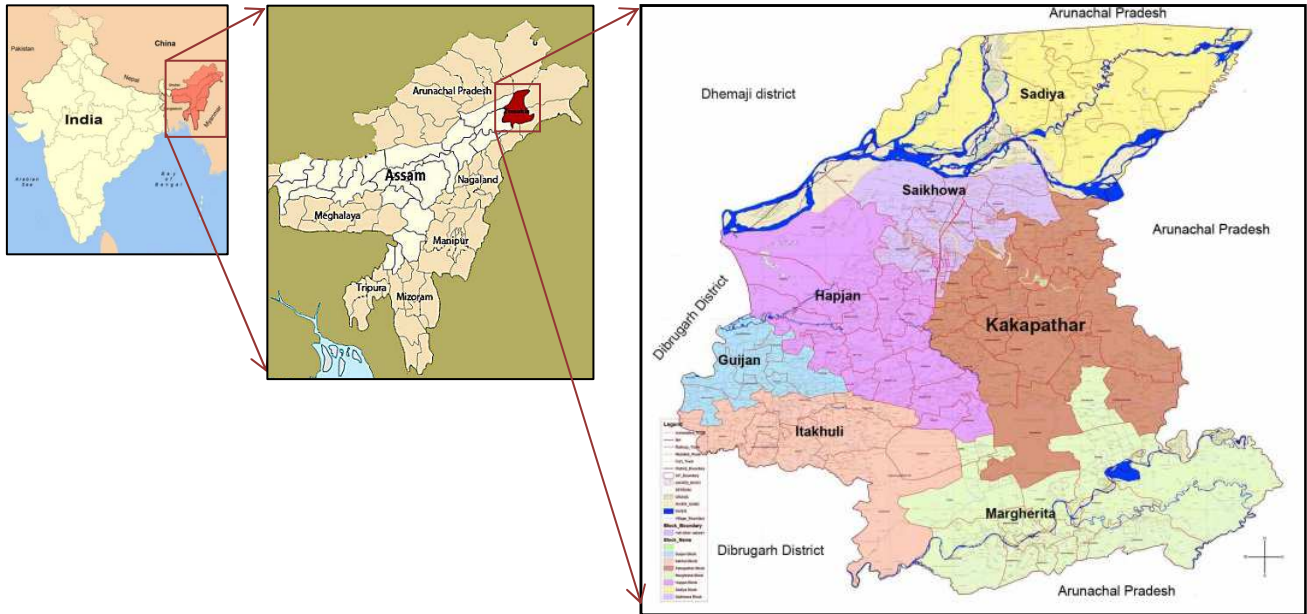


Map 1: Map showing percentages of urban population in the districts of Assam

The rate of urbanization fell down for the district of Dibrugarh as Tinsukia district bifurcated from it in 1989. Dibrugarh has been identified as one of the GEMs in 1988.

The district has 3 subdivisions viz, Tinsukia, Margherita and Sadiya. The district was itself once a sub division of undivided Dibrugarh District. The District of Dibrugarh was created

through its bifurcation from Lakhimpur District on October 2, 1971. Following the formation of the district of Dibrugarh, a new subdivision-Tinsukia was created in the district in 1973. In 1989, the Tinsukia sub-division of Dibrugarh district was separated to form a new district called Tinsukia. There are 7 development blocks in the district namely, Guijan, Hapjan, Itakhuli, Kakopathar, Margherita, Sadiya and Saikhowa.



Map 2: Location of Tinsukia District

The District head quarter Tinsukia can be reached by NH 37, SH-23 and by other connecting roads. The distance from major locations are; Guwahati - 494 km, Nagaon -

253 km, Sivasagar - 173 km, Jorhat - 141 km, Dibrugarh - 47km. Regular bus and private taxi services are available between the locations.

Table 1: Distance to block headquarters

Sl No.	Name of Block Headquarter	Distance (km.)	Approach Road
1	Guijan	11	Rangagara Rd
2	Hapjan	9.1	AT Road
3	Itakhuli	5.4	Tinsukia - Duliajan Rd
4	Kakopathar	39	NH - 52 A
5	Margherita	47.9	NH 38
6	Sadiya	57.2	AT Road
7	Saikhowa	45.6	AT Road

Tinsukia is also well connected by air and railway. The nearest Airport is at Mohanbari, Dibrugarh which is about 40 Km from Tinsukia with daily flights for New Delhi, Guwahati and Kolkata.

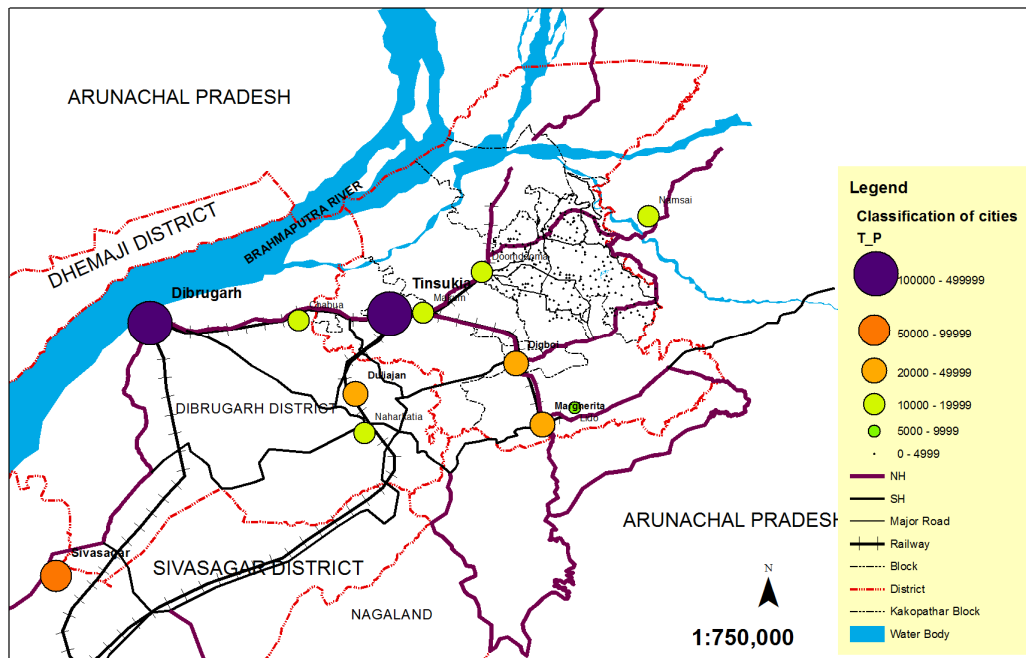
The Lumding-Dibrugarh broad-gauge railway line connects Tinsukia to other surrounding places. A meter gauge line also runs from Tinsukia to Sadiya and Lido

The land utilization pattern of the district is as follows

Table 2: Land Utilization

Land use pattern of the district	Area (ha.)	% of Total Area
Total Geographical area	3790	100
Cultivable area	2000.54	52.8
Forest area	345.52	9.1
Land under nonagricultural use	741.8	19.6
Permanent pastures	35.6	0.9
Cultivable wasteland Land	15.86	0.4
Land under Misc. tree crops & groves	206.16	5.4
Barren and uncultivable land	368.07	9.7
Current fallows	64.86	1.7
Other fallows	11.59	0.3

Map 3: Connectivity and linkages to major locations



Source: Agriculture Contingency Plan

It can be seen from the above table that the area under cultivation is more than 50% of the total area. This shows the high agricultural domain of the district.

Table 3: Blockwise land utilization of Tinsukia District

Sl No	Block	Geographical area	Cultivable Area	Forest Area	Land under non-agriculture use	Cultivable waste	Barren Land	Permanent pasture	Land under miscellaneous tree crops and groves	Current fallow	Other fallow	Net sown area	Gross cropped area	Cropping intensity (%)
		(sq.km.)												
1	Guijan	209	35.26	22	47.4	3.6	52.5	9.5	24.74	11.5	2.5	61.33	82.18	134
2	Itakhuli	387	229.29	17.03	58.41	1.2	16.4	3.8	44.52	13.9	2.5	81.12	105.45	130
3	Hapjan	516	243.46	87	124.1	2.2	37.0	2.61	13.7	3.1	2.8	148.05	157.34	106
4	Kakopathar	832	471.21	96	154	2.9	14.3	6.3	78	6.95	2.34	334	722.73	125
5	Saikhowa	442	288.38	11	35.49	4.1	57.0	3.94	34.87	6.24	1.01	116.83	145.02	124
6	Margherita	623	185.862	102.2	251	1.4	69.3	6.5	1	5.7	0	232.41	266.17	114.5
7	Sadiya	781	639.998	11.57	11	1.0	88.0	3.1	9.7	16.2	0.41	200	223.35	136
	Total	3790	2093.46	346.8	681.4	16.4	334.5	35.75	206.53	63.59	11.56	1173.74	1702.24	124.1

Source: Guha D. "Planning for integrated development of Tinsukia District" 2011, unpublished thesis, IIT Roorkee

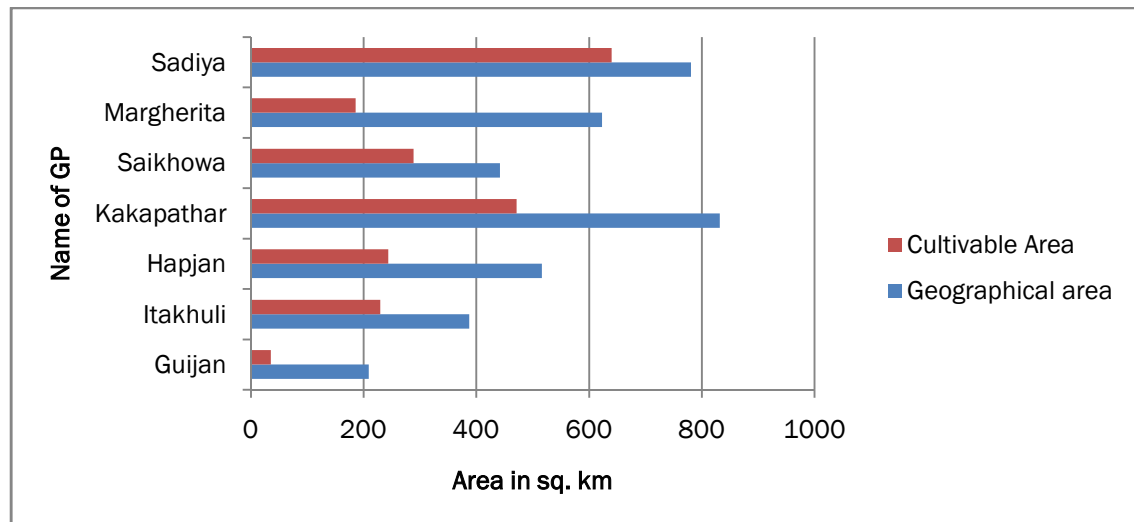


Figure 1: Cultivable area versus geographical area

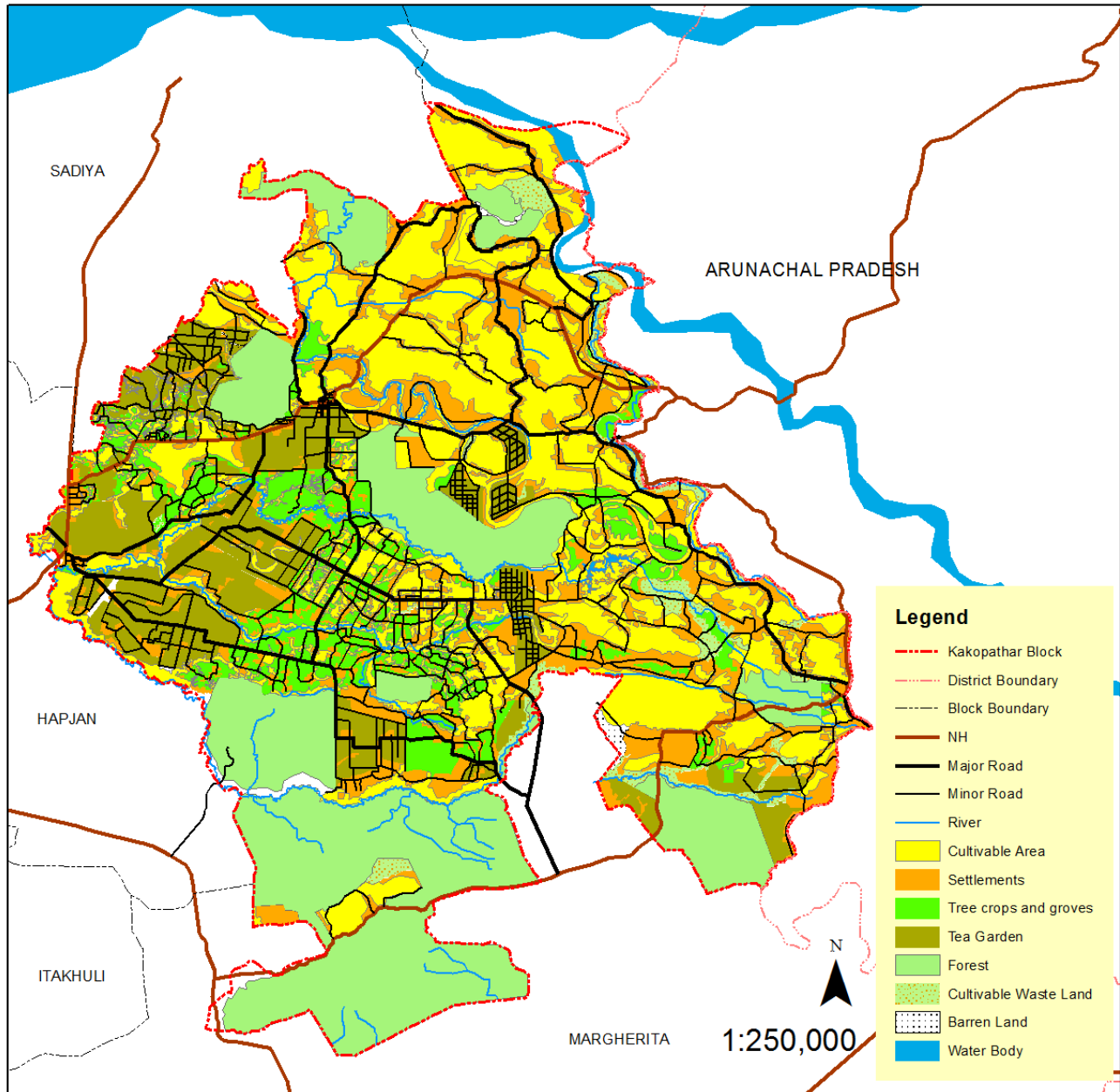
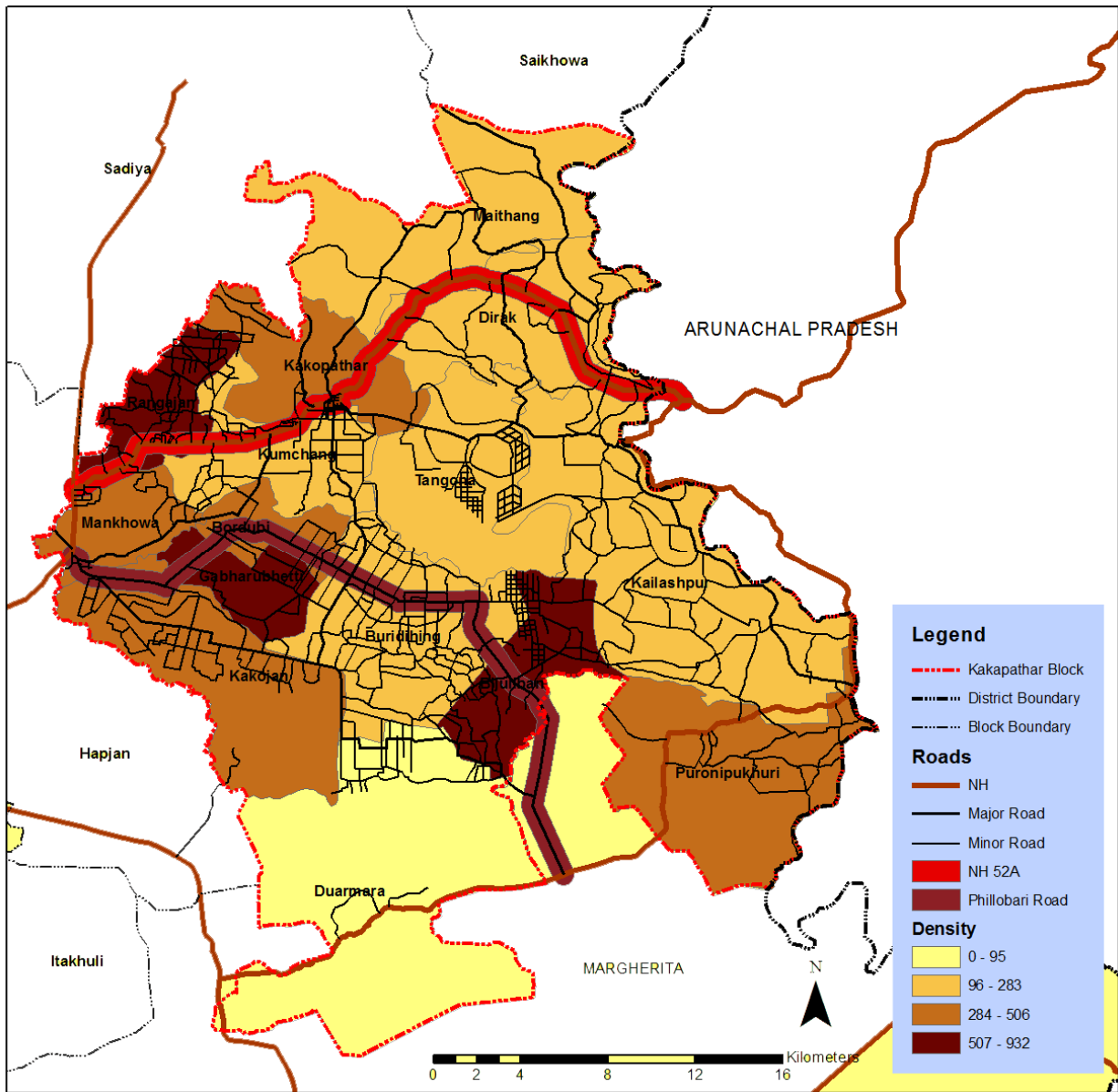


Figure 2: Land Utilization Map of Kakopathar Block



Findings and Conclusions

- The study area has high density of tribal population, majority of which fall in below poverty line. There is serious lack in employment generation schemes for the block.
- Target group oriented schemes can be handy for the block. Majority of the available worker HH are agricultural labourers. As the cropping pattern of the district is low they can be engaged in other activities like plantations in orange orchards.

- The irrigation potential of the area is not fully explored. The block has the highest area under agriculture in the district. Only a minute portion of total cultivable land has been irrigated. So, the agricultural activities in the block are rain fed which cannot support dry crops.
- Year round fodder availability is limited for the animals of certain areas.
- The elementary and other education facilities are adequate for the study area. But there is no technical institution present in the block
- Only few settlements have access to pucca roads. Shared rural taxi service has increased rural connectivity of Kakopathar in recent years. But the conditions of roads apart from NH-52A and Phillobari Road are bad which in turn reduces the life-span of vehicles.
- Block level planning methodologies are followed with accordance to the integrated district planning methods.
- Blocks have a unique place in the framework of Panchayati raj as they lie between the first and the third tier of decentralization as a functional link

between the Village Panchayats and the Districts Panchayats.

- Most of the past experiments have failed basically due to lack of public participation and monitoring framework.
- Target group oriented schemes were successfully implemented at block level. Therefore employment planning at local level can be organized at block level.
- Large scale human resource development is above the scope of block planning.

Recommendations

As the visioning exercise proceeds closer to the grassroots, it tends to telescope into the practical planning process. Taking advantage of the tendency of people at these levels to combine the vision with practical suggestions on what should be done; special attention could be paid to more closely correlate the service gaps with human development shortfalls.

Generally, a district is often too large a unit in which to fully understand the extent to which local social and cultural contexts influence the effectiveness of key services. This is more possible at a smaller local government level, such as an Intermediate Panchayat or a Village Panchayat.

Visioning at a lower level can also highlight local level priorities in concrete and practical terms and link them to local institutions,

such as Primary Health Centres (PHCs), schools etc., which are accountable regarding those priorities.

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