

## Chapter 2

# A Profile of the Himalayan Hill Region of India

The IHHR is comprised of the States of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and thirteen districts of the Uttarakhand region of Uttar Pradesh<sup>1</sup> in the north; three hill districts of West Bengal<sup>2</sup> and the State of Sikkim; and seven north-eastern States, viz; Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura. It covers a total area of 592,701 sq.km., accounting for 18 per cent of the total area of the country. The population comprises a little over six per cent (51.39 million as per the Census of 1991) of the country's population. As with most hill regions, the population density of the IHHR is relatively low, only about 87/ km<sup>2</sup> compared to the national average of 258/km<sup>2</sup>. The level of urbanisation of the Himalayan region is 19.71 per cent compared to a national level of 26.13 per cent. (For comparative figures of different aspects of development

in different states and areas in the Himalayan region and national averages referred to in this chapter, see Annex 5).

The literacy rate is 56.04 per cent, higher than the national average of 52.2 per cent. However, more striking is the level of literacy among women (46.03%) in the IHHR compared to 39.29 per cent at national level. It has a higher proportion of workers as a percentage of total population than the national average. The same is the case for main workers in agriculture and allied activities. However, it has a lower share of main workers in industries, both non-household and household, than the national level. This indicates a heavy dependence on agriculture and allied activities. While the average size of operational land holdings is bigger in the IHHR (2.16 ha) than the national average of 1.69, the

1 Almora, Bageshwar, Chamoli, Champawat, Dehradun, Haridwar, Nainital, Pithoragarh, Pauri Garhwal, Rudra Prayag, Tehri Garhwal, Udham Singh Nagar, and Uttar Kashi.

2 Cooch Behar, Darjeeling, and Jalpaiguri.

per capita value of outputs from major crops is significantly lower than the national average. Thus, despite the fact that the average land holding is bigger than the national average, agriculture is less remunerative in the hill regions than in the plains. Undulated topography and farming practices (e.g., *jhum* or shifting cultivation), which also cause widespread land degradation and soil erosion, are among the important factors contributing to low productivity.

In terms of infrastructure, the IHHR has serious constraints, primarily because of its terrain. The extremely rugged topography means that few villages are accessible by road. Compared to the national average of 60 km of road per 100 sq. km., the IHHR has barely 36.72 km per 100 sq. km. in some cases even as low as about six km. per 100 sq. km. (e.g., in J&K). Similarly, the railway network in the IHHR is insignificant<sup>3</sup>

The IHHR has only 193 telephones per 100,000 people compared to a national ratio of 800. Although it has a better network of banks, per capita bank deposits are only about 69 per cent of the national average. Per capita bank credit is barely 36 per cent, with Rs 711 in the IHHR and Rs 1,978 at the national level. Similarly, per capita bank credit for industry in general is far below national average. This applies to agricultural credit also. Conse-

quently, credit to deposit ratio is more unfavourable than the national ratio.

The social structure in most of the hill region, however, is more egalitarian than in the plains (Papola 1996). This is because, unlike in the plains, the inequalities in land ownership are not so great in the hills. Historically, frugality has been a way of life for the hill people. Entrepreneurship has not been a predominant feature of)

Until recently there have been few disruptions in the way of life of the hill people. However, there are now recurring law and order problems instigated by insurgent activities. The root cause of these movements there is economic deprivation. Problems in the hill region are interrelated, arising from economic stagnation, unemployment, and poverty. Hence, measures to solve them must be based on an integrated approach.

There are no easy options for eradicating the problems faced by people in these areas. Developing successful entrepreneurs, capable of perceiving economically viable opportunities and converting them into sound business propositions, could be an effective strategy for economic development of distressed areas. Such a strategy will not only create self-employment, but will also open up new opportunities for income generation in the hills areas.

3 It is barely 0.43 km. per 100 sq. km. of area compared to 2.04 km. per 100 sq. km. nationally. If Assam, with 3.15 km per 100 sq. km. of rail length, is excluded; it will be even less than 0.1 km per 100 sq. km. in the IHHR taken together.