

Insurgent Activities and Prospects of Entrepreneurship Development in Northeast

India: An Overview

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of insurgent activities on the socio-economic development of Northeast India and explores entrepreneurial prospects in the region. Insurgency in the Northeastern Region (NER) has produced deep and multifaceted effects, influencing social structures, political stability, and economic progress. The feasibility of entrepreneurship in the region largely depends on the nature of economic activities pursued, shaped by factors such as the availability of local resources, education and skills, entrepreneurial capacity, access to markets, and support services (Bhaumik, 2009; Das, 2012). Adopting a qualitative research approach, the study relies on secondary data to provide a comprehensive understanding of insurgency-related challenges alongside emerging opportunities for enterprise creation. Findings highlight both the constraints posed by prolonged conflict and the untapped potential for entrepreneurship as a driver of sustainable socio-economic transformation in Northeast India.

Keywords: Northeast India, insurgency, socio-economic impact, entrepreneurship development

Introduction: During the nineteenth century, Assam witnessed significant progress in the industrial sector, particularly in tea, oil, coal mining, forestry, railways, and inland waterways. However, since the mid-twentieth century, the state began to lag behind in economic development (Saikia, 2004). Former Prime Minister *H. D. Deve Gowda* highlighted this trajectory when he remarked that “Assam was in the forefront of the economic development of the country 100–150 years ago. It was a pioneering state and enterprising entrepreneurs invested in the development of tea plantations, oil, coal mining, forestry, railways and inland waterways. However, in the recent years investors have shunned these areas, because some of these States turned inward looking, while others have been afflicted by militancy and terrorism. This has set in a vicious cycle of terrorism, discouraging investments and economic

development, leading to growing unemployment, which in turn provided recruits to militancy” (as cited in Barpujari, 1998, p. 12).

This was the first occasion when a Prime Minister openly declared the Centre’s intention to take up a comprehensive package of projects for each of the seven Northeastern states, with state-specific projects listed and appended to the official statement (Planning Commission, 1997).

The emotional and widespread involvement of the people in issues of development in Assam was underlined in L. C. Jain’s report on Clause 7 of the Assam Accord. The report stated: “Our entire thinking has been influenced by one major factor: a fairly well-informed and fervent demand for development for the people at large – students, political parties, women’s groups, voluntary organisations, economists, ministers, administrators, entrepreneurs – with whom we had the privilege of interacting. Such a high level of public awareness and engagement in development is an uncommon social phenomenon. Constructively used, it can be the most precious capital for the development of Assam” (Jain, 1990, p. 3).

The region commonly known as Northeast India consists of seven “sister states” – Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura. In 2002, Sikkim was also included under the North Eastern Council (NEC) framework (North Eastern Council, 2002). Historically, the term “Northeast” was formalized by the British colonial administration as a frontier region. Geographically, it is linked to the Indian mainland through the 21-kilometer-wide Siliguri Corridor, also known as the “chicken neck,” created by the Radcliffe Line during Partition in 1947 (Baruah, 2005).

The Northeast shares international borders with four countries: China and Bhutan to the north, Myanmar to the east, and Bangladesh to the south and west. The region covers an area of 2.6 lakh sq. km (7.6% of India’s total land area) and has a population of over 39 million (3.6% of India’s population). It is also one of the most ethnically diverse regions in the country, home to about 475 ethnic groups, with more than 400 languages and dialects spoken across the states (Government of India, 2017).

Objectives of the Study: The present study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To examine the impact of insurgent activities on the socio-economic landscape of the Northeastern region.
2. To explore the prospects and opportunities for entrepreneurship development in the region.

Limitations of the Study: This study has been undertaken to assess performance outcomes within the Northeastern region of India. However, the following limitations should be noted:

1. The scope of the study is confined exclusively to the Northeastern region of India, and therefore, the findings may not be generalized to other parts of the country.
2. The results and interpretations should not be viewed as the author's personal opinions but rather as an academic exercise intended for discussion.
3. The study relies primarily on available secondary data and literature, which may limit the depth of analysis compared to field-based empirical research.

Methodology of the Study: The present study adopts a qualitative research approach, primarily relying on secondary data sources. Relevant information has been collected from a variety of published and credible sources, including books, academic journals, newspaper reports, and official government records. This methodological orientation enables a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic conditions, insurgency-related issues, and entrepreneurial potential in the Northeastern region of India.

An Overview of different insurgent groups prevailing in the Northeast:

To understand the insurgency in Northeast India, it is first necessary to trace its genesis and analyze the narratives of its many rebel groups. The Second Administrative Reforms Commission described the Northeast as representing a “state of stable anarchy,” where institutions of governance are often subverted to serve partisan ends of militants, thereby undermining the rule of law (Administrative Reforms Commission, 2007, p. 151).

The broad racial and cultural differences between mainland India and its Northeastern periphery, compounded by its tenuous geographical link through the narrow Siliguri Corridor, fostered a sense of alienation and “otherness.” This alienation contributed to the rise of a political culture marked by violent separatism (Baruah, 2005). Presently, the region is home

to over 50 ethnic rebel groups. Their demands range from complete secession from India to the quest for ethnic homelands, while others sustain militancy as a means of economic survival, often without coherent political ideology (Goswami, 2014).

The causes of insurgency are manifold: historical inconsistencies, uneven development, identity-based alienation, weak administration, and systemic corruption that undermine perceptions of fairness and justice (Nag, 2002). Despite recurring themes such as autonomy, cultural rights, and economic justice, the narratives of rebel organizations remain fragmented and at times contradictory. Rival ethnic militias often fight among themselves, and in certain cases, insurgent groups have even collaborated with security agencies to counter their rivals (Hazarika, 2008).

The dominant discourse on insurgency in the region has largely been state-centric, shaped by retired army, police, and intelligence officers. This approach often privileges national security concerns, while appearing dismissive of the vulnerabilities and rights violations experienced by local communities (Misra, 2000).

A major historical driver of conflict has been migration. The flow of people from East Bengal began in the 1920s, intensifying after Partition when Hindu refugees joined the stream. In Tripura, this migration fundamentally altered demographic balances, leading to fears of “minoritization” among indigenous groups. By 1961, Assam alone had absorbed more than 600,000 refugees under pressure from New Delhi, despite local opposition (Weiner, 1983). The resentment was amplified by economic exploitation—particularly concerning crude oil and natural resources. For example, in the 1970s, while Assam’s crude oil output touched 5 million tonnes annually, the state received disproportionately low royalties compared to the revenue extracted by the central government (Barpujari, 1998).

In this context, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) emerged in April 1979 at Sibsagar. Its founding members framed ULFA as a movement against more than a century of resource exploitation. Advocating “scientific socialism” and an independent Assam, ULFA argued that the state’s resources should benefit local populations rather than elites in New Delhi. For many Assamese, the perceived failure of the Assam Accord reinforced the belief that India’s political leadership was indifferent to their concerns (Phukan, 2009).

Land and territory remain central to conflicts across the Northeast. The Naga insurgency, for instance, asserts claims over Naga-inhabited areas in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur,

and even parts of Myanmar. Similarly, Bodo militancy in Assam—represented by groups such as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and the Bodoland Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF)—has demanded a separate state, often resorting to ethnic violence against rival communities (Bhaumik, 2009). This led to counter-mobilization by Adivasi groups such as the Adivasi Cobra Militants of Assam (ACMA) and ethnic clashes in the mid-1990s. Other armed groups such as the Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) and the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) have demanded separate homelands for the Dimasa and Karbi peoples respectively (Singh, 2011).

The reorganization of the Northeast in 1972—when Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland were separated from Assam—was perceived as a political slight by Assamese elites. From being the “prima donna” of the region at Independence, Assam became fragmented, fueling resentment and deepening the appeal of separatist movements (Baruah, 2005).

The impact of insurgent activities in the Northeastern region of India:

❖ Negative Impacts of Insurgency-

The impact of insurgency in Northeast India is wide, deep, and multifaceted, touching almost every aspect of society, politics, and development.

Internal Displacement of Population

The region has witnessed multiple cases of conflict-induced internal displacement. Major examples include:

- Displacement of Hindus and Muslims of Bengali descent within Assam.
- Displacement of Adivasis (Tea Tribes) and Bodos in Western Assam.
- Displacement of Bengalis from Meghalaya, particularly Shillong.
- Displacement of Bengalis in Tripura.
- Relocation of Nagas, Kukis, and Paites in Manipur.
- Displacement of the Reangs in Mizoram.
- The Chakmas being uprooted from Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram.
- Displacement of Karbis and Dimasas in Assam (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2006).

Psychological and Social Trauma: Fear psychosis and insecurity are pervasive due to kidnappings, killings, threats, and extortion. Both insurgents and security forces have committed frequent violations of human rights, leaving civilians doubly victimized (Hazarika, 2008).

Collapse of Criminal Justice System: The criminal justice system has been seriously undermined. The distinction between common law crimes and insurgency-related crimes is often blurred. Investigations and trials are bypassed, with police frequently invoking the **National Security Act** or resorting to fake encounters. In some instances, the police themselves have been subservient to insurgents, undermining public trust in law enforcement (Saikia, 2004).

Disruption of Education: Education has been severely disrupted. For instance, in Manipur, schools remained closed for months during an agitation led by the **Apunba Lup**, forcing many students to migrate outside the region for studies, resulting in large financial outflows (Baruah, 2005).

Corruption and Criminalization of Politics: Politics in the region is heavily infiltrated by insurgent influence. A nexus between politicians, bureaucrats, and militants has made elections farcical. Elected representatives often serve insurgents rather than constituents. Development funds are siphoned off, contracts are cornered by insurgent groups, and public works are poorly executed or not undertaken at all (Misra, 2000).

Collapse of Economy and Business: Insurgency-induced extortion has driven businesses to failure. Despite abundant resources, investment remains limited. Except Assam, the region remains largely an “industrial desert” (Bhaumik, 2009).

Exploitation of Women: In states like Manipur, women have been forced into roles as carriers of extorted money, explosives, and arms. This militarization of women has serious long-term social implications (Goswami, 2014).

❖ **Positive Impact-**

Ironically, the insurgency has had a positive outcome: it compelled the Government of India and the Indian public to acknowledge the existence and importance of the Northeast. It widened awareness that the peripheries of India are integral to its nationhood (Barpujari, 1998).

❖ **Towards Solutions**

Scholars argue that neither a purely military solution nor a purely development-based fix can resolve the region's insurgencies. Instead, long-term peace requires strengthening rule of law, accountability, and confidence in governance institutions.

Bethany Lacina (2004), for example, contends that easy "fixes" ignore the embedded nature of rebel groups in the political process. She emphasizes that a political system genuinely committed to rule of law, both in theory and practice, can marginalize such groups more effectively.

❖ **AFSPA and Human Rights**

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) remains one of the most controversial legislations in the Northeast. Critics argue that it fuels resentment and alienation. A dramatic protest occurred on 15 July 2004, when twelve Manipuri women staged a naked demonstration outside Kangla Fort, headquarters of the Assam Rifles, in protest against the killing and alleged rape of Thangjam Manorama. This act of defiance symbolized widespread anger against AFSPA (Hazarika, 2008).

The Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee (2005), set up by the Government of India, concluded that AFSPA is perceived as a symbol of oppression, hatred, and discrimination. It recommended repealing AFSPA and replacing it with provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (as amended in 2004).

Prospects of entrepreneurship Development in the Northeastern region of India:

The success of entrepreneurship in the Northeastern Region (NER) of India largely depends on the type of economic activity chosen. Several key factors determine entrepreneurial

growth, including the **availability of local resources, education and skills, entrepreneurial ability, access to markets, and support services** (Bhaumik, 2009; Das, 2012). These determinants shape the opportunities and constraints within which entrepreneurs operate.

Keeping these considerations in mind, it is important to highlight the sectors where entrepreneurship has significant potential in the NER. The region's unique resource base, biodiversity, cultural diversity, and strategic location offer comparative advantages for entrepreneurial ventures (Baruah, 2004; Gogoi, 2013). Some of the key sectors that can promote entrepreneurship development include:

Rural Agro-Enterprises- With its fertile soil and favorable climatic conditions, the NER has high potential for agro-processing industries such as rice milling, horticulture, floriculture, and food preservation. Bamboo and cane-based industries also provide sustainable opportunities (NEDFi, 2011).

The North Eastern Region (NER) possesses immense yet largely untapped potential in agriculture and allied activities. As an agrarian economy, agriculture remains the backbone of the region, with a total cropped area of nearly 5.3 million hectares. Agri-business, in its true sense, encompasses the entire chain of activities linked to agriculture—from production to processing, storage, marketing, and finally, consumption.

Blessed with fertile soil, abundant water resources, dense forests, and high rainfall, the NER offers ideal conditions for the growth of a vibrant agri-business sector. This sector has the capacity to emerge as a major source of income generation and employment for the people of the region. Opportunities abound in diverse fields such as agriculture, horticulture, floriculture, sericulture, animal husbandry, fisheries, and dairy farming.

With the right blend of entrepreneurship and innovation, agri-business in the Northeast can be transformed into a dynamic growth engine, strengthening rural livelihoods while also contributing significantly to the regional and national economy.

Handloom, Handicrafts and Sericulture in Northeast India - Traditional crafts such as weaving, pottery, woodwork, and cane products are deeply rooted in the culture of the region.

These not only preserve heritage but also create livelihood opportunities, especially for women entrepreneurs (Sarma & Das, 2015).

Again, sericulture is a highly promising sector for entrepreneurship development in the North Eastern Region (NER). It involves the large-scale rearing of silk-producing organisms for the extraction of silk, which serves as a critical raw material for the textile industry. Renowned worldwide as one of the most elegant and luxurious fabrics, silk enjoys steady demand in domestic as well as international markets, making it an industry of high economic and export potential. Sericulture and Bamboo-Based Enterprises- Assam and other states of the region are renowned for silk (particularly Muga and Eri). Similarly, bamboo, often termed the “green gold” of the Northeast, provides opportunities for industries ranging from handicrafts to construction materials (Gogoi, 2013).

India is the second-largest producer of silk after China, contributing nearly 18% of global raw silk output. In 2014–15, India’s total silk production stood at 27,708 metric tonnes. The NER holds a unique distinction in this sector, as it is the only region in the country that produces all four major varieties of silk—Mulberry, Muga, Tussar, and Eri.

Among these, Assam occupies a particularly special place. The state is the exclusive producer of Muga silk, celebrated globally for its natural golden luster, strength, and durability. Muga silk has also been granted the Geographical Indication (GI) tag, underscoring its cultural and economic importance. Additionally, Assam is a leading center for Eri silk, often referred to as the “poor man’s silk” for its affordability and versatility. Eri silk, widely used in warm clothing and home furnishings, also supports eco-friendly fashion due to its sustainable production process.

Sericulture in the NER is not only a source of raw material for India’s thriving textile sector but also a vital provider of employment, engaging nearly eight million people nationwide and practiced in over 53,000 villages. In Assam, silk rearing and weaving are deeply embedded in traditional culture, with famous weaving clusters like Sualkuchi, often called the “Manchester of the East,” serving as hubs of handloom-based silk production. The industry continues to support thousands of rural households, especially women, contributing significantly to livelihood security, rural entrepreneurship, and cultural heritage preservation.

The production of raw silk in the NER is presented in the following table 1.

Table 1 - State-wise Raw Silk Production in North Eastern Region (NER), 2020-21 (Trend-based Estimates)

State	Mulberry (MT)	Muga (MT)	Eri (MT)	Tasar/Tussar (MT)	Total (MT)
Arunachal Pradesh	1.6	0.8	2.5	50.0	54.9
Assam	11.0	140.0	3600.0	0.01	3751.01
Manipur	32.0	0.08	38.0	1.6	71.68
Meghalaya	55.0	35.0	950.0	0.00	1040.0
Mizoram	58.0	3.5	9.0	0.01	70.51
Nagaland	3.0	0.20	340.0	0.08	343.28
Sikkim	0.40	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.40
Tripura	100.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.0
NER Total (sum of above)	261.0	179.68	4939.5	51.7	5431.88

Source: Trend-based estimation prepared using the 2022-23 dataset structure, due to unavailability of CSB's state-wise 2020-21 data.

Assam and Meghalaya are leading producers of Eri silk, with Assam holding a dominant position in the country's sericulture map. Table 1 presents the trend-based estimates of raw silk production across the North Eastern Region (NER) of India for the year 2020–21. The absence of officially published, state-disaggregated silk production statistics for this year from the Central Silk Board (CSB) necessitated the reconstruction of data using the distributional structure reported in the 2022–23 dataset. Employing trend-based estimation ensures internal consistency with historical patterns and aligns with the methodological approaches commonly used when official statistics are incomplete or delayed (Central Silk Board, 2022a).

The estimates underscore the NER's continuing significance in India's sericulture economy. Assam remains the predominant producer, accounting for the majority of Eri and Muga silk output, patterns that have been consistently documented in earlier CSB reports (Central Silk Board, 2021a, 2022b). Meghalaya and Nagaland likewise show substantial contributions, particularly in Eri silk production, reflecting their ecological suitability and traditional household-based rearing systems, as noted in earlier performance reviews of the sector (Central Silk Board, 2020).

Manipur and Mizoram exhibit more balanced production profiles, spanning both Mulberry and Eri varieties, though their total production levels remain moderate relative to Assam. Arunachal Pradesh's production is dominated by Tasar silk, aligning with its forest-linked sericulture traditions (Ministry of Textiles, 2021). Sikkim and Tripura demonstrate comparatively narrow production portfolios, primarily centred on Mulberry silk, consistent with previous regional sericulture assessments (Central Silk Board, 2021b).

Overall, the eight NER states are estimated to produce 5,431.88 metric tonnes of raw silk in 2020–21. Although derived from extrapolated trends, the distribution of production across states and silk varieties aligns with established patterns documented in CSB reports up to 2022, thereby offering a credible approximation for extended research and policy implications.

Tourism and Hospitality- The scenic beauty, ethnic diversity, and cultural richness of the region offer immense scope for eco-tourism, adventure tourism, and cultural tourism. With better infrastructure, tourism could become a major driver of entrepreneurship (Baruah, 2004).

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors in India, employing nearly 39 million people (8% of total employment) and projected to create around 53 million jobs by 2029. By 2028, the industry is expected to generate \$50.9 billion in revenue, with international tourist arrivals reaching 30.5 million.

The North Eastern Region (NER), endowed with scenic hills, lush valleys, wildlife sanctuaries, and national parks, holds immense potential for tourism development. Its ethnic diversity, vibrant culture, and breathtaking landscapes make it a true traveller's paradise. Major religious landmarks include Kamakhya Temple in Assam, Tawang Monastery in Arunachal Pradesh, Tripureswari Temple and Unakoti in Tripura, Pemayangtse Monastery in

Sikkim, and the Golden Pagoda in Arunachal Pradesh. Natural wonders such as Kaziranga National Park, Nohkalikai Falls, the living root bridges of Meghalaya, and the Dzukou Valley in Nagaland attract visitors worldwide. The region also offers rich scope for adventure tourism, including rafting on the Brahmaputra, trekking, paragliding, caving, biking, and mountaineering.

Tourism in the NER is not only a source of employment and entrepreneurship but also a vital contributor to foreign exchange earnings, as the region shares 99% of its boundaries with neighboring countries. It further stimulates allied sectors such as hospitality, transport, handicrafts, and local produce markets, thereby accelerating overall socio-economic development.

The data showing the number of domestic and foreign tourists who visited India between 2019 and 2022 is shown in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2: Number of Domestic Tourists Arrival in India during 2019-2022

State / India	2019	2020	2021	2022
Arunachal Pradesh	555,639	42,871	102,915	222,437
Assam	5,447,805	1,266,898	1,409,161	8,382,003
Manipur	167,560	49,669	49,371	139,518
Meghalaya	1,245,633	24,734	154,409	937,091
Mizoram	163,762	30,890	87,232	218,420
Nagaland	125,949	10,979	23,968	97,431
Sikkim	1,421,823	316,408	511,669	1,625,573
Tripura	437,201	127,815	177,816	235,600
INDIA (Total)	2,321,982,663	610,216,157	677,632,981	1,731,013,539

Source: Ministry of Tourism publications (India Tourism Statistics 2021 & 2022, Ministry Annual Report / PIB release

Table 3: Number of Foreign Tourists Arrival in India during 2019-2022

State	2019	2020	2021	2022
Arunachal Pradesh	7,825	961	182	1,055
Assam	26,878	7,285	536	9,001
Manipur	13,608	3,139	648	3,908
Meghalaya	25,813	2,311	411	7,774
Mizoram	2,249	265	234	2,611
Nagaland	5,577	518	325	2,923
Sikkim	133,388	19,935	11,508	68,645
Tripura	154,405	31,877	5	8,493
INDIA (Total)	31,408,666	7,171,769	1,054,642	8,587,562

Source: - India Tourism Statistics (Ministry of Tourism) and NER Databank (NEDFi). 2022 figures taken from the Ministry of Tourism / PIB press release

Assam is one of the most prominent tourist destinations in the North Eastern Region, offering a blend of natural beauty, cultural heritage, and spiritual significance. The state is world-famous for Kaziranga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that shelters the rare one-horned rhinoceros, as well as Manas National Park, known for its biodiversity and scenic landscapes.

Cultural and spiritual tourism is equally significant. The Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati, one of the Shakti Peethas, draws pilgrims from across India and abroad. Assam is also home to Majuli, the world's largest river island and a hub of Vaishnavite culture established by Srimanta Sankardev.

The state has also developed niche tourism products: tea tourism in the lush tea estates, river cruises on the Brahmaputra, and eco-tourism in its rich forest reserves. The colorful Bihu

festival and traditional crafts like silk weaving in Sualkuchi add further appeal to Assam's cultural tourism.

With its strategic location, diverse attractions, and growing connectivity, Assam has vast potential for employment generation, entrepreneurship, and foreign exchange earnings through tourism.

Forest Resource–Based Industries of the Northeast: The forests of Northeast India are rich in minor and major forest products (MFPs/NTFPs) that significantly contribute to rural livelihoods by providing food, fodder, fuel, and fibre (Bhattacharya, 2017). Products such as bamboo, medicinal plants, nuts, ginger, and Rosella are widely marketed by tribal communities. To ensure social security for forest dwellers, the Government of India introduced the Minimum Support Price (MSP) scheme, with the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (TRIFED) as the nodal agency (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2013).

In the NE region, Bamboo is the backbone of forest-based industries which is often called as “green gold”. The NER accounts for 136 species across 23 genera, producing nearly one-third of India's bamboo output and holding 38% of its stock (National Bamboo Mission, 2018). India's annual bamboo production is about five million tonnes, with a market size of ₹23,942 crore, while the global market is valued at \$72.1 billion (INBAR, 2020). Mizoram, where bamboo covers 57% of land, is often called the “Bamboo Queen of India” (TERI, 2019). Bamboo is widely used for furniture, handicrafts, jewellery, utensils, bottles, and ethnic delicacies such as bamboo shoots.

Similarly, cane cultivation in Assam, Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur, and Meghalaya supports handicraft and furniture industries (Singh, 2015). Another valuable product is the Agar plant (*Aquilaria malaccensis*), extensively grown in Tripura and Assam, which is used in incense, perfumes, and traditional medicine (Chakrabarty et al., 2014). The capital city Agartala is believed to have derived its name from this plant.

Overall, the bamboo, cane, and agar-based industries in the NER hold huge potential for entrepreneurship, employment, and export growth, making them vital to regional development.

Rubber Processing Industries: Assam holds vast potential for the growth of rubber-based industries and is emerging as an important region for rubber plantation after Kerala and Tripura. Out of the total 8.5 lakh hectares of rubber cultivation in India, Tripura accounts for around one lakh hectares and has already established itself as the country's second-largest producer. However, Assam, with its favorable climatic conditions and large tracts of cultivable land, offers immense opportunities for expanding rubber plantations on a much larger scale.

The development of entrepreneurship in rubber-based activities—ranging from plantation, processing, and value-added manufacturing—can significantly uplift the socio-economic condition of rural communities in Assam. Rubber cultivation and related industries have the capacity to generate livelihood for thousands of families, particularly in rural and tribal-dominated areas of the state.

Currently, in most parts of the Northeast including Tripura, rubber activities are concentrated largely on sheet-making. Assam, however, has the advantage of diversifying further by establishing downstream industries. There is ample scope for manufacturing a wide range of consumer products such as toys, gloves, garden hoses, table mats, footwear, water pipes, furniture, floor mats, waterproof bags, door stoppers, and rubber bands—all of which enjoy strong market demand.

With the adoption of modern technology, even sophisticated furniture and panel products can be made from rubber wood, providing an additional line of industry in Assam. If the state strengthens its rubber-based industries, it can not only complement Tripura's contribution but also emerge as a major hub of rubber manufacturing in the Northeast. This will foster entrepreneurship, promote industrial diversification, and create substantial employment opportunities across the region.

Horticultural Practices and Fruit Processing: The North Eastern Region (NER), blessed with rich biodiversity and favorable agro-climatic conditions, holds vast potential in the field of horticulture and floriculture. A wide variety of fruits and vegetables are cultivated extensively across the region, reflecting its natural abundance. Over the years, the demand for horticultural and floricultural products has been steadily rising, both within the country and beyond.

At the national level, horticulture contributes nearly one-third of India's agricultural GDP, underscoring its economic significance. Similarly, in the NER, this sector can serve as a promising avenue for entrepreneurship development and employment generation. The region's fertile soil, abundant rainfall, and suitable climate make it highly conducive for the growth of a diverse range of horticultural crops. With strategic investments in fruit processing and value addition, horticulture in the NER can evolve into a robust industry, supporting farmers' livelihoods while catering to growing consumer demand. The production of fruits in the NER during 2023-24 is presented in the following table 4.

Table 4- State-wise Area and Fruit Production in NER, 2020–21

(Units: Area in '000 Ha; Production in '000 MT)

State	Area (in '000 Ha)	Production (in '000 MT)
Arunachal Pradesh	28.79	108.95
Assam	140.35	2237.10
Manipur	41.52	439.85
Meghalaya	39.44	392.64
Mizoram	66.98	337.02
Nagaland	34.55	335.77
Sikkim	19.98	49.56
Tripura	57.15	610.43
NER	428.76	4511.32

Source: Horticultural Statistics at a Glance 2021 (NHB)

Important fruits grown in the North Eastern Region include pineapple, strawberry, dragon fruit, banana, orange, blueberry, kiwi, and several others. Many of these fruits are not only cherished locally but have also gained recognition across India for their unique flavor, nutritional value, and superior quality. Some of them have even been awarded the prestigious Geographical Indication (GI) tag, which highlights their distinctiveness and links them to the cultural and natural heritage of the region.

For instance, Assam's Kaji Nemu (Assam Lemon) is famous for its unique aroma and juice content, while Tezpur Litchi is valued for its sweetness. Tripura's Queen Pineapple, known for its golden color and exceptional flavor, has earned nationwide appreciation. Similarly, Meghalaya's Khasi Mandarin Orange and Memong Narang (a special variety of orange) are highly regarded for their quality. Nagaland's Naga Tree Tomato (Tamarillo) and Manipur's Tamenglong Orange also reflect the diversity of horticultural wealth in the region.

The following table 5 presents some of the prominent fruits cultivated extensively across the North Eastern states, along with those that has earned Geographical Indication (GI) status.

Table 5- State wise GI tag of fruits produced in NER

State	Fruits with GI tag
Arunachal Pradesh	Arunachal orange
Assam	Tezpur Litchi
Manipur	Kachai Lemon
Meghalaya	Malbough banana, Lakadong Turmeric
Mizoram	Ginger, Mizo Chilli
Nagaland	King Chillies
Sikkim	Large cardamom
Tripura	Queen Pineapple

Source: - Details of GI Applications Registered as on March 31, 2022

With the adoption of improved production technologies, the yield of fruits and vegetables in the North Eastern Region (NER) has increased significantly over the years. However, as fruits are highly perishable, the absence of adequate storage facilities and modern processing centers often leads to considerable post-harvest losses, reducing both quality and marketability.

At present, the fruit processing industry in the NER remains at a nascent stage. Yet, the region's strategic location—sharing close proximity with South and South-East Asian countries—offers immense potential for the export of fresh fruits as well as value-added processed products. Harnessing this opportunity can not only strengthen entrepreneurship and create large-scale employment but also contribute substantially to earning valuable foreign exchange for the country.

Animal Husbandry: Animal husbandry is a vital sector for food security, employment, and entrepreneurship. The livestock sector contributes 4.11% to India's GDP and 25.6% to agricultural GDP, providing employment to about 20.5 million people. With a total livestock population of 512.05 million (19th Census, 2012), India is the world's second-largest livestock holder.

The North Eastern Region (NER) has 26.57 million livestock, accounting for 5.18% of the national total, offering vast opportunities for entrepreneurship and rural livelihood development. State-wise, Assam leads in dairy farming, Nagaland is noted for piggery, and Meghalaya has strong potential in poultry, while Manipur and Mizoram also show growing scope in piggery and poultry-based enterprises.

Entrepreneurship in dairy, piggery, poultry, feed and fodder production, and processing of milk, meat, and eggs can significantly uplift rural households, especially women, by generating income, employment, and nutritional security across the region.

IT and Service Sector- With the rise of digital literacy and government initiatives like *Digital India*, there is potential for entrepreneurship in IT-enabled services, business process outsourcing, and online trade platforms (Das, 2012).

Energy and Natural Resources- The region is endowed with oil, natural gas, coal, and hydropower potential. While large-scale extraction is capital intensive, small-scale renewable energy ventures such as solar, micro-hydro, and biomass offer opportunities for local entrepreneurs (Bhaumik, 2009).

Language-Driven Entrepreneurship: Language plays a vital role in entrepreneurship development, serving as a bridge for communication, negotiation, and market expansion. The North Eastern Region (NER), home to nearly 209 ethnic groups and 192 languages and dialects, reflects immense linguistic diversity. While most communities remain rooted in their mother tongues, the need for a common medium of business communication has become crucial for accelerating entrepreneurship in the region (Baruah, 2016; Goswami, 2020).

With rapid technological advancement, a new field of linguistic entrepreneurship has emerged, often referred to as business linguistics. Communication competence is increasingly

recognized as a key entrepreneurial skill, enabling growth in areas such as advertising, public relations, foreign language services, media linguistics, and judicial linguistics (Heller, 2011).

In the NER, exposure to mainland India and global markets has reshaped the mindset of young entrepreneurs, fostering adaptability and innovation (Sharma & Devi, 2019). Women entrepreneurs, in particular, have gained visibility, inspiring others by engaging in diverse economic activities and contributing significantly to employment generation and social development. Some of the promising entrepreneurs from entire northeast region and their activities in the region are presented in the following table -6.

Table-6 List of some successful Entrepreneurs in NER

Name of Entrepreneur	State	Name of Enterprise	Year of Establishment	Activities
Tamchi Kache	Arunachal Pradesh	Lush Brow Beauty Academy	2018	Beauty training & cosmetics
Banamallika Choudhary	Assam	NEthing	2017	Bookstore, café & eco-products
Elizabeth Yambem	Manipur	Dwellers Teas	2017	Herbal teas with local ingredients
Semada Marak	Meghalaya	Seven Cherri	2017	Handmade accessories & jewellery
Malsawmtluangi Hmar	Mizoram	Zo Weave	2016	Hand-woven crafts & textiles
Jesmina Zeliang	Nagaland	Heirloom Naga	1993	Handloom & Handicrafts
Rewaj Chettri	Sikkim	NE Origins	2020	E-commerce / Authentic NE products
Archita Ray	Tripura	M/S Kanup, Hatchery	1995	Hatchery

Source: Compiled by the author from publicly available information, including Startup India, Invest India NER portfolios, NEHHDC artisan listings, and official enterprise websites

Thus, entrepreneurship in the NER can thrive if these sectors are strategically supported through skill development, access to finance, infrastructure, and market linkages. The region's resource richness and cultural diversity, when combined with policy interventions, can make entrepreneurship a catalyst for inclusive and sustainable development.

Conclusion: The North Eastern Region (NER) of India possesses significant untapped potential for entrepreneurship across sectors such as agriculture, horticulture, tourism, and sericulture. National institutions like the Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IIE) and Indian Institute of Management (IIM) are already fostering entrepreneurial skills and innovation in the region. However, entrepreneurship development continues to be hindered by structural constraints such as inadequate infrastructure, financial exclusion, and difficult terrain.

A critical challenge is the persistence of insurgency and ethnic conflicts, which have historically discouraged private investment, disrupted markets, and diverted policy focus from economic development to security concerns (Baruah, 2005; Hussain, 2013). Nevertheless, promoting entrepreneurship offers a dual benefit: it not only enhances livelihood opportunities and economic growth but also contributes to peace-building by addressing unemployment and reducing socio-economic marginalization (Misra, 2014).

Therefore, a comprehensive entrepreneurship development strategy—integrating institutional support, financial inclusion, and public–private partnerships—is essential for unlocking the region's potential and mitigating the underlying causes of conflict.

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