

Introduction

North-East Region (NER) of India comprises eight States (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim), and is located in the outskirts of the country. Though the entire NER constitutes 7.98% of India geographical area (an area of 262,179 sq. km.), its population is only 3.77% of the country's population (over 45.5 million of population), according to Census 2011. Despite being rich in natural resources with fertile land, rich forests and mineral deposits, the region is still very poor.

Around three-fourth of the NER is filled with hills and mountains where mainly the tribal people of various races, especially the different mongoloid stock, are found, most of them living in villages. Here, basic necessities of life of these people are much lower than that of people living in towns or cities. Generally, they are isolated from the mainstream and are identified as an independent economic unit. For example, their production and consumption activities take place within small units, usually households (Taylor and Adelman, 1996). Although there are some difficulties in defining a village, definitely the tribal hill villages, particularly in the North-East, are quite different from other villages in the country. They have some uniqueness in their social, cultural and economic structure. At the same time, villages have something in common too, such as remoteness, being settled together in a particular area, being settled by people of the same origin or indigenous people whose main occupation is agriculture (or it is anyway related to primary activities), prevalence of traditional culture, belief, orthodoxy and conservatism, being mainly consisting of only one caste/community and characterized by commonality of some economic behaviours, having a low rate of literacy, high drop-out rate and backwardness of infrastructure (Singha, 2009). Particularly, there is not a school system as good as the one of the mainland, neither an adequate number of schools and facilities in the rural areas, due to geographical barriers but also to the reputation of violent people of the local inhabitants. Not every village has its own school and very often children have to walk for kilometres before reaching it. This is the reason why the majority of them attend just the first years.

“I would say that if the village perishes India will perish too. India will be no more India. Her own mission in the world will get lost. The revival of the village is possibly only when it is no more exploited [...]. Therefore we have to concentrate on the village being self-contained.” – said Mahatma Gandhi.

After the country got its independence, the Government of India took strong steps to

quickly bring sustainable development in the North-East, establishing the North-Eastern Council (NEC) under an Act of Parliament (North-Eastern Council Act, 1971). Besides the NEC, the Government does a lot for the sustainable development of the region, through different plans, programmes and activities. It directly and indirectly encourages the State Governments of the NER to launch immediate and long-term strategies for solving the existing problems of their respective States and to achieve the tasks of development. Also, the non-governmental organizations are taking a lot of initiatives for bringing a desirable change in the NER (Singha, 2009).

In such a framework, a social business like The ANTs was born in 2007. It has been developed with the aim of helping the artisans (weavers, black pottery, jewellery and baskets makers) living in the NER, mostly women. After having lived for 2 years in this area, working with the weavers of different tribes, The ANTs' founders decided to start a social enterprise in Bangalore, whose business would have been to organize social events in order to provide deeper information about the North-East and to sell the beautiful handicrafts made by the artisans. Through these activities, The ANTs wants to achieve the double purpose of promoting a more positive vision of the NER and its inhabitants, on one side; and of guaranteeing an extra income, in addition to the agricultural – and seasonal – one, to tribal families. Women can work either inside specific textile building or at home. This extra income makes families able to afford medical emergencies and, above all, children education.

The ANTs has been certified as Fair Trade organization. It means that there is no exploitation among its workers, indeed weaving is used as a means to generate livelihoods for women. The challenge the organization faced was to turn a daily part-time non-commercial necessity for self to a commercial activity. The object was not to force women to step out of their environment but to adapt the process to suit their lifestyles, becoming self-contained but maintaining their traditions.

This year, I have been interning for almost two months at The ANTs and that has been the experience from which the idea for this work of thesis came up. The aim is to present a design of an impact evaluation of the two objectives of The ANTs above described. Particularly, the first evaluation will focus on the estimate of the real impact the organization has been able to produce in changing mainland people's perception of the North-Easterns, through the events of awareness it organizes once a month. The second one, indeed, will focus on the impact employing women has on women's children education.

The thesis, is organized as follows. In the first chapter, a general presentation of the country is provided, with two specific focuses: a deeper one on the North-East Region of India, and a second one on Bangalore, the Southern city where The ANTs is placed. It also includes a paragraph about Fair Trade, what it is, which principles it follows and how it has been evolving over time. The second chapter, instead, is centred on The ANTs and its business, how it is organized and what are its objectives. The third chapter concerns what an impact evaluation is and which are the steps needed to be performed in order to set up an evaluation. In this part, a short description of the main methods used to perform an impact evaluation is provided, stressing their general characteristics, their strengths and their weaknesses. In the fourth chapter are designed two impact evaluation procedures that can be applied – if funds are available – in order to evaluate if The ANTs has really achieved the two selected objectives. Finally, in the fifth chapter, the conclusions of my work of thesis are presented.