



Economic potential of Pir Panjal region in J&K state

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Abstract

The purpose of this research paper is to investigate the viable or feasible economic activities which could be started in Pir Panjal region of Jammu and Kashmir State on the basis of both material and human resources available in the area. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through a survey of 200 common households; 100 entrepreneurs and from 15 revenue officials (Patwaries, Namberdars, Chowkidars and others) to make the study fully representative.

Results show that there is lot of economic or entrepreneurial potential which has not been harnessed or exploited in the area. There are also huge material as well as human resources available in the region. Many banking and other facilities are also available in the region. What is needed is to make possible efforts both at individual and governmental level to exploit the resources and develop the possible entrepreneurial activities in the Pir Panjal region of J&K State.

It is on the basis of this research suggested that economic activities must be explored and developed in other areas of the state of Jammu and Kashmir also.

Keywords: economic; entrepreneurial; resources; finance; Pir Panjal; region; Jammu & Kashmir

Introduction

Jammu and Kashmir is bestowed with rich natural resources with its towering snow- clad mountains, green meadows, placid lakes and lush green forests. The State has also been endowed with rich resources, forests, herbal plants and minerals. Tourism and agro- based activities are the mainstay of the economy and offer tremendous investment potential. The Pir Panjal Range is situated principally in the Southeast of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. It extends for more than 200 miles (320 kms) from the Nilam (Kishanganga) River in western occupied Kashmir area (administered by Pakistan), through southwestern Jammu and Kashmir state (administered by India) to the Beas River in Northwest Himachal Pradesh state, India. Rising sharply to an average elevation of more than 13000 feet (4000 meters), it separates Jammu Hills to the south from the vale of Kashmir beyond which lie Great Himalayas. The major passes through the range include the Pir Panjal (11462 feet) [3494 meters] and Banihal (8985 feet) [2739 meters]. A highway tunnel near Banihal Pass makes the Vale of Kashmir accessible to traffic from the south, even in winter. The mountains extending to the north of the Nilam River in Pakistan are sometimes considered part of the range. The agro- climatic conditions of the Pir Panjal offer a great potential for growing a variety of fruits, such as apple, almond, cherry, apricot, citrus, etc. the region offers workforce for delicate handicraft items, ethnic products including embroidery, wood carving, fur and leather, woodwork, willow and grass work, nomad crafts, ornaments, painting, stone craft, metal work, pottery, etc. The breathtaking beauty of the region and its climate which is favourable for growing a wide variety of fruits and flowers make Pir Panjal an attractive destination for tourism and agro-based industries, especially horticulture and floriculture. The

area has a significant mineral resource base especially limestone, a key ingredient for the cement industry. Some of the focus areas of the State Government include food processing and agro- based industries, auto- ancillaries, precision- engineering, mineral exploration, eco- tourism, etc. The natural resources coupled with fiscal incentives and the focus of the State Government on improving industrial infrastructure, augmenting power generation and skill development make Pir Panjal region an attractive investment destination.

The challenges of climate change and global warming continuously threaten the world community. The government of Jammu and Kashmir has taken note of the growing recognition of impact climate change at the local, national and global levels. The Government recognizes the urgent need to tackle challenges that arise on account of these impacts through integrated policy prescriptions and programmes aimed at mitigation of impacts and adaptation to reduce vulnerability of systems. The Government is also cognizant of the cross- cutting nature of impacts with enormous cost implications for tackling them and these costs could escalate if preventive action is not taken.

Objectives of study and hypotheses development

Objectives of Study

1. To study the economic resources (agricultural as well as non- agricultural) available in the region.
2. To identify the Labour (both skilled and unskilled) resources in the area.
3. To understand the level of existing economic activities carried on in the region
4. To study government and non- governmental agencies efforts to develop entrepreneurial activities

5. To suggest viable economic activities for the region

Research Methodology

Research methodology adopted for the study was based on a survey of 200 common households selected from different areas of the region. These included Mendhar (Poonch District); Thanamandi (Rajouri District); Ghatt (Doda District); Bhandarkot (Kishtwar District); Ramban (Ramban District) and Shopian (Shopian District). It was decided to draw a sample of minimum of 5 households or a maximum of 25 households or 25% of the total households whichever is less from each of the 6 blocks to make the study fully representative.

Information was also collected from the selected blocks from 100 economic unit holders to understand the status of existing and future activities. Different types of entrepreneurs were covered for study purpose.

Revenue Officials and village headmen, etc. were also consulted to come to know the status of resources available, existing economic activities and future activities for the region. Information was also collected from published and unpublished sources to make the study fully representative.

Resources Available in Pir Panjal Region

Pir Panjal region is most feasible for tourism. The most attractive spots could fetch a lot of economic resources in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. The area is mineral rich. Gypsum, Limestone, marble, granite, dolomite, corundum, garnet, quartz and felsper are the leading non-metallic minerals. Among metallic minerals important are galena, nickel, and copper ores.

The geo-climatic conditions are ideal for sericulture operations- mulberry cultivation and cocoon rearing. Livestock also constitute an important resource for the economy of Pir Panjal region as well as the State. It includes draught animals, milch animals and other animals.

Land provides income and employment in a big way to sustain a vast chunk of the population in the area. There are other resources also like roads, power, etc. available in the area. The human resources include-- cultivators; agricultural labourers; workers in household industry and other workers.

Findings and Suggestions

On the basis of in-depth study of the region made from common households it has been found that economic development of the region has been limited. Much dependence of the people of the area has been upon primary production for subsistence and general absence of other major economic activities. The information from existing unit holders reveals that no major effort has been made for potential and major economic activities which could be exploited for economic development. There is dependence upon old age activities in the region. On the basis of overall analysis of the area the following economic activities are suggested for the Pir Panjal region:

Suggested Industrial Activities

A. Mineral - Based Industries

1. Gypsum

Pulverized gypsum finds wide industrial application and is the

primary raw-material for the manufacture of surgical plaster, plaster of paris, gypsum boards, ceramic products and even chalk crayons.

2. Gypsum Board

The gypsum boards are versatile and find application in partitioning and finishing of apartments and dwellings. The scope for selling the product to various institutions within and outside the state is good.

3. Chalk Crayons

It is the least added product manufactured out of Gypsum and is used in writing on black boards. There is increasing demand for chalk crayons as the number of educational institutions is growing in the area.

4. Granite Slabs

The granite slabs could be used widely in construction of residential buildings and apartments particularly in kitchens and bathrooms.

5. Slates

Slates are used commonly as roofing material for houses and dwellings. There are a lot of mineral resources for slates particularly in Doda region. These could be exploited for the purpose.

B. Forest - Based Industries

1. Pencil, Cedar Wood Oil

The needed raw material is deodar wood which is available in adequate quantity from local forests. There is huge demand for the products in the state and outside.

2. Activated Carbon

The primary raw material required is wood, saw dust, paddy husk, walnut shells, etc. The units may be promoted by the J&K State Forest Corporation (J&K SFC).

3. Wooden Electrical Accessories

The basic raw material required is wood. There is quality wood available in the area. There is lot of demand for the product due to increased construction activity in the state.

4. Handloom and Accessories

Pir Panjal is the major weaving area of J&K state. But most of the weavers operate on traditional pit looms. There is a lot of scope for such units in the region.

C. Horticulture - Based Industries

Horticulture based industries are divided into two categories:

1. Jams, squashes and pickles
2. Walnut Bleaching and Processing

D. Industries Based on Domestic by – Products

1. Herbal Medicines
2. Coal Briquettes
3. Leather Tanning
4. Silk Reeling

E. Demand - Based Industries

1. Detergent Powder

2. Confectionary
3. Hosiery Knitting / Ready Made Garments
4. Utensils (Aluminium)

F. Service - Based Industries

1. Opticals - sale and service
2. Electric / Electronic Gadgets, etc.
3. Restaurants
4. Hotel (Economy Type)
5. Printing Press

Suggestions

Government must come forward with the following steps:

1. Promoting generation of green and clean power in Pir Panjal region using solar energy.
2. To put in place an appropriate investment climate that could leverage Clean Development Mechanism.
3. Productive use of waterlands thereby fostering a socio – economic transformation.
4. Employment generation and skill enhancement of local youth.
5. Promotion of Research and Development (R&D) and facilitation of technology transfer.
6. Establishment of core technical competence in professionals in the area to initiate and sustain use of effective management of newer energy applications.
7. Creation of environmental consciousness among people of the region.
8. Use of Information Technology (IT) for heralding e-Tourism in the area.
9. Bringing specialized treatment to the remotest areas through telemedicines.
10. Accelerate the investment and growth in IT hardware, software, internet, training, IT enabled services, telecom, e-commerce and related sectors in the region.

Conclusion

Pir Panjal region in Jammu and Kashmir State is endowed with abundant natural resources. It extends for more than 200 miles (320 kms.) from the Nilam (Kishanganga) River in Western occupied Kashmir area (Pak occupied) through southwestern Jammu and Kashmir State (administered by India) to the Beas River in Northwest Himachal Pradesh state, India. The agro- climatic conditions offer a great opportunity for establishing different economic activities in the region. The area is rich in horticulture. Minerals are also in abundance in the area. But the maximum workforce is engaged in agriculture and un-organized sector.

The vast forests and plenty of water available offer a good opportunity for economic development in the area. On the basis of resources available and institutional support system certain economic/ entrepreneurial activities have been suggested for the region. They are:-

1. Resource - Base Industries
2. Demand - Base Industries
3. Service - Base Industries

In-spite of huge natural resources, techno- environmental

changes and certain efforts by the government also majority of the people have preference for their traditional crafts and other occupations. There is need for socio- psychological measures to change the mind-set from traditional vocations to newly emerging industrial / economic scenario.

The State government with financial support from the Central Government and international organizations like UNDP and Asian Development Bank needs to establish Entrepreneurship Development Institute in the region for the development of young entrepreneurs. The educational system should be restructured in such a manner that youth of Pir Panjal area may come forward for new types of economic units.

Government as well as NGOs must come forward with institutional support system to overcome the problem of marketing, finance and the quality of product.

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