

## **Gender Development Indicators: District Level Analysis for the Eastern Region**

“Status refers to a position in a system or subsystem which is distinguishable from and at the same time related to other positions through its designated rights and obligations. In the pure sociological sense, status does not imply rank or hierarchy but denotes only position vis-à-vis others in terms of rights and obligations. But as each status position in a particular structure can be viewed in terms of superiority and inferiority (that is, in terms of power, privileges, advantages and disadvantages), the notion of status involves comparison and grading. In assessing the status of women we shall follow the comparative approach as well.” (Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI), Towards Equality (1975)).

The present study examines the status of women in the districts of the five eastern states<sup>i</sup> of Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal using selected demographic, educational, socio-cultural, health-related and economic indicators. Relative levels of gender development or backwardness is assessed both for rural and urban locations based on a ranking exercise. The emerging regional patterns throw light on complex dimensions of gender equality/inequality and opens up avenues for formulation of hypotheses for detailed examination as well as policy intervention.

The variables considered for the analysis are indicative of demographic, educational, health-related, socio-cultural and economic status of women<sup>ii</sup>. There are four demographic variables that include sex ratio<sup>iii</sup> among population above six years of age, child sex ratio pertaining to the 0-6 years age group, sex ratios among scheduled castes and tribes. Since the proportion of scheduled tribes (ST) in the eastern region differ widely and result in spurious gender balances among districts with less than five per cent ST population, only districts with more than 5 per cent ST population are considered for the last demographic indicator.

Effective female literacy, that is, number of female literates in the population above six years and gender gap in literacy rates are the two educational indicators used in this study. The four health-related variables are the female infant and child mortality rates, along with gender differences in the two rates. The socio-cultural variables are mean age at marriage among females and the total fertility rates. Female work participation rates along with the gender gap in participation levels are the twin economic variables considered in this study. The selected variables and the abbreviations used are presented in list 1.

Districts are ranked based on their performance with respect to different indicators, with the first rank being given to the worst district, indicating the need for top priority intervention in the area. The area with the best performance holds the rank with the highest number. After the individual indicator analysis, the areas which display better/poor development in terms of most of the indicators are identified.

The data sources used for this study are the Census of India, 1991 and 2001<sup>iv</sup>, mortality estimates from Rajan and Mohanachandran (1998), and the calculated data on fertility and female age at marriage from the estimates of the Vital Statistics Division of the Registrar General of India based on the 1991 Census data. The total fertility rates are available only at the total (rural + urban) levels. All fertility figures refer to the total districts. Similarly, Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) data on the relative index of development also refers to the total district. The comparison between the two censuses, 1991 and 2001, is limited to the state level only.

### List 1: Chosen Indicators

S. No.	Head/Description	Abbreviation
<b>A.</b>	<b>Demographic</b>	
1.	Sex Ratio of Population above the age of 6 years	SR>6
2.	Child Sex Ratio (0-6 years)	CSR
3.	Sex Ratio among Scheduled Caste Population	SRSC
4.	Sex Ratio among Scheduled Tribe Population	SRST
<b>B.</b>	<b>Literacy Rates</b>	
5.	Effective Female Literacy	FLIT
6.	Gender Differential in Literacy Levels	LGAP
<b>C.</b>	<b>Mortality Rates</b>	
7.	Infant Mortality Rate among Females [Q (1)]	IMRF
8.	Gender Differentials in Infant Mortality Rates	IMRD
9.	Child Mortality Rate among Females [Q (5)]	CMRF
10.	Gender Differentials in Child Mortality Rates	CMRD
<b>D.</b>	<b>Marriage and Fertility</b>	
11.	Mean age at Marriage among Females	MAMF
12.	Total Fertility Rate	TFR
<b>E.</b>	<b>Work Participation Rates</b>	
13.	Proportion of Main Female Workers in the total female population above the age of 6 years	FWPR
14.	Gap in Work Participation Rates among Males and Females	WGAP

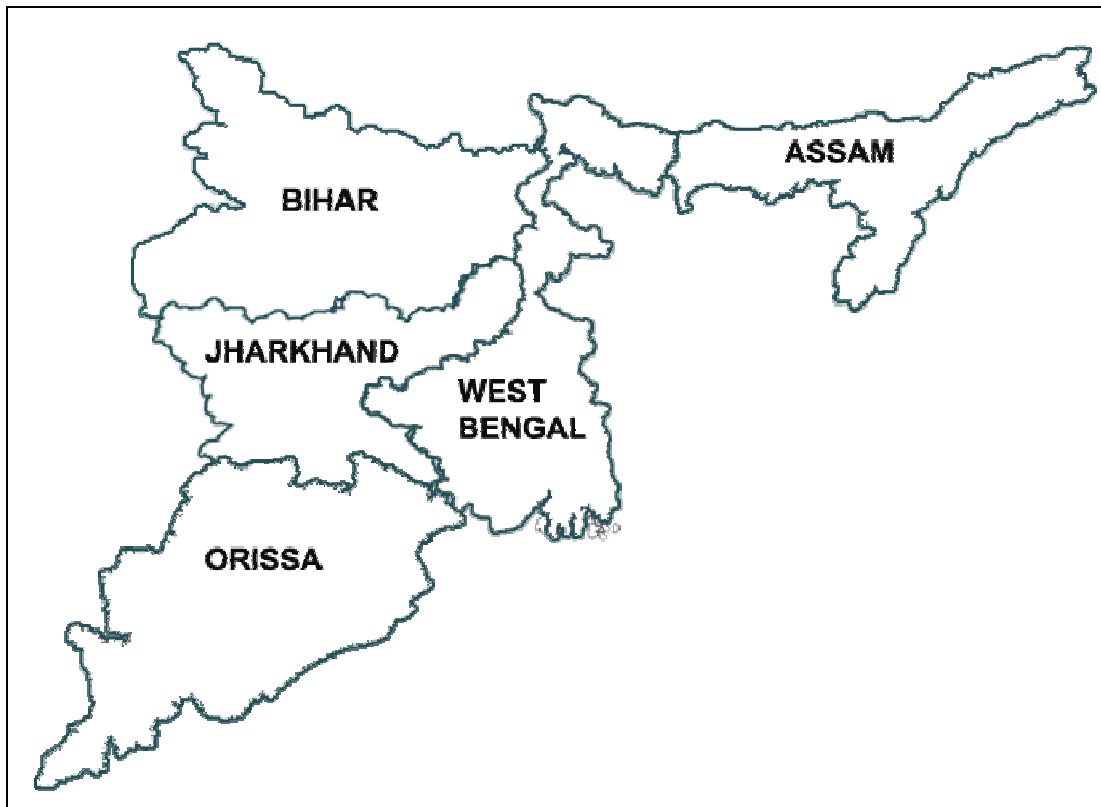
After the introduction, the second section provides the regional dimensions. The five eastern states are compared to the all-India and eastern regional levels based on the demographic, educational, health, socio-cultural and economic indicators selected for the study of relative levels of gender development. In section three, the state profiles and district performances in each of the eastern states are provided. Entire districts (both rural and urban areas) are considered for presenting these state profiles in the first subsection, while the other subsection discusses the best and worst districts in their specific urban or rural contexts.

A detailed district wise analysis is undertaken in the fourth section wherein all the eastern region districts are studied for relative levels of gender development or backwardness. This section also contains two parts, dealing with the rural situation and the urban picture emerging from the study. Finally, some concluding remarks are made.

## 2. The Regional Dimensions

The five states of Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal comprise the eastern region, which occupies 16 per cent of Indian territory. Most of it is rural, with only 2 per cent covered by urban areas. Each of the states covers an area in the range of 15 to 19 per cent of the region, except for Orissa. Since the bifurcation of Bihar into two states, Orissa has become the largest state of the eastern region, occupying 31 per cent of area.

**Map 1: Eastern Region States**



Source: DevInfo, United Nations

The density of population for the region as a whole was 443<sup>v</sup> in 1991. This has increased to 540 in 2001. All the five states have experienced increases in their densities over the last decade. West Bengal has 904 persons per square kilometre, which is the highest among all Indian states as per the 2001 census. This eastern state superseded Kerala ever since 1981 census, when the southern state held the top position with a density of 655.

In 1991 erstwhile Bihar had a density of 497 persons per square kilometre. This increases to 685 in the same year 1991, after the bifurcation of Jharkhand, since the less populated districts of erstwhile south Bihar are no longer a part of this state. Presently the density for Bihar is 880, while it is 338 for Jharkhand. Both the smaller

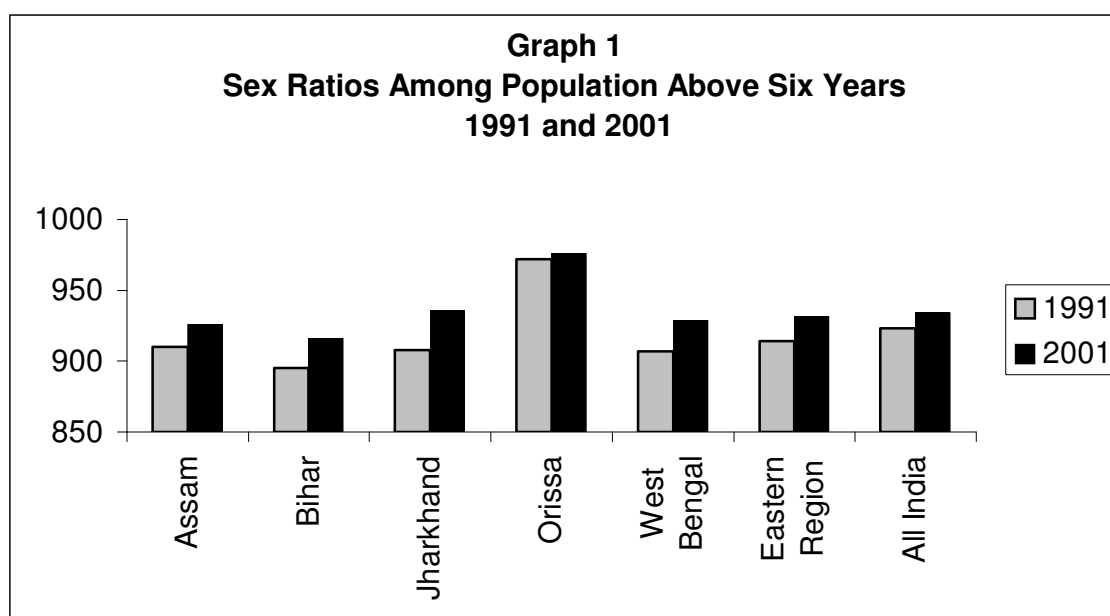
states of the eastern region, Jharkhand and Assam (340) have low population densities. However, the population per square kilometer in Orissa (236), which is the largest state in the region area wise, is lower than the density for the country as a whole (324).

**Table 1: Sex Ratio of Population above six years in the Eastern Region States**

States	Sex Ratio of Population above six years					
	Total		Rural		Urban	
	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001
Assam	910	926	923	935	820	872
Bihar	895	916	903	924	837	859
Jharkhand	908	936	941	960	803	861
Orissa	972	976	992	992	852	891
West Bengal	907	929	934	947	845	887
Eastern Region	914	932	932	946	838	878
<b>All-India</b>	<b>923</b>	<b>934</b>	<b>936</b>	<b>948</b>	<b>886</b>	<b>900</b>

Source: Calculated from the Census of India, 1991 and 2001.

The gender composition in the population, that is, the sex ratio defined as the number of women per 1000 men, is not favourable to women in the region. The sex ratio for the region has been slightly lower than the national average for the last two decades (see Table 1). The number of women for every 1000 men was 932 in 2001. This imbalance holds true both in rural and urban areas of the eastern region states. It is striking since the number of women has been increasing over the last two decades in the entire region (see Graph 1).



Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991 and 2001.

Orissa and Jharkhand are the two eastern states where sex ratios are above the all-India gender balance. It is noteworthy that Orissa<sup>vi</sup> is one of the eight states (others are the 4 southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamilnadu; Madhya Pradesh, Goa and Manipur) which have consistently recorded sex ratios higher than the national average over the period 1901-91. Till 1981, undivided Bihar also was a part of this group, but its sex ratio declined to 911 in 1991. This drastic fall from a ratio of 946 in 1981 reflects the deteriorating situation of women in the state. In addition to the worsening mortality conditions, some of the reasons for this decline lie in increasing economic pressure for survival and sex selective migration.

On the other hand, Assam and West Bengal have always recorded sex ratios below the all-India levels. Male migration from these states is part of the explanation. This is supported by the child sex ratios being higher than that among adults. Sex ratio among children in the age group 0 to 6 years for the region was at 964 in 1991 that was above the Indian average of 945 (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Child Sex Ratio in the Eastern Region States**

States	Child Sex Ratio					
	Total		Rural		Urban	
	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001
Assam	975	964	977	967	955	931
Bihar	953	938	953	940	950	924
Jharkhand	979	966	985	973	950	931
Orissa	967	950	969	954	949	927
West Bengal	967	963	969	967	955	948
Eastern Region	964	952	966	955	953	936
<b>All-India</b>	<b>945</b>	<b>927</b>	<b>948</b>	<b>934</b>	<b>935</b>	<b>903</b>

Source: Calculated from the Census of India, 1991 and 2001.

The scenario in the next decade ending in 2001 reflects a worsening gender balance among children. Child sex ratios dropped by 18 points for the country as a whole, while the decline for the eastern region was of 12 points. The decadal change reveals a decline in all the eastern states, however static comparison of the region with the country for any period shows the relatively better gender balances in the eastern states. A similar positive margin in the sex ratios for the region as compared to the all-India levels is observed in both urban and rural areas.

The proportion of scheduled castes (SCs) in the population for the eastern region as a whole is similar to the all-India composition with 18 per cent SCs in rural areas and 12 per cent in urban areas as per the 1991 Census<sup>vii</sup> (see Table 3). The proportion of SCs in urban areas are lower than in the rural counterparts, except for Assam, where the SCs share in urban population actually records 9 per cent, while it is 7 per cent in rural areas.

The sex ratios among SCs of the eastern region are slightly higher than the all-India ratios for rural areas, whereas the reverse is true for urban locations. The gender

balance among SCs is better than that for the population above six years, except in case of rural Orissa.

**Table 3: Proportion of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Sex Ratio among SCs in the Eastern Region states**

States	Total		Rural		Urban	
	%	SRSC	%	SRSC	%	SRSC
Assam	7	919	7	923	9	898
Bihar	15	912	16	914	10	876
Jharkhand	12	922	12	943	10	828
Orissa	16	975	17	981	13	932
West Bengal	24	931	28	938	13	892
Eastern Region	17	931	18	937	12	888
All-India	16	922	18	926	12	905

Source: Calculated from the Census of India, 1991.

Notes: (a) % refers to proportion of SCs in the population.

(b) SRSC denotes sex ratio among SCs.

The bias introduced through migration is clearly visible from a comparison of urban sex ratios among children, adults and SC population. The child sex ratios are uniformly higher than the female to male ratio among population above six years and SCs for all the states in the eastern region, irrespective of rural-urban areas. Part of the reason for this lies in the nature of migration across states and locations. Rural migration in a majority of these states is mostly that of both males and females, while urban migration remains male-oriented to a large extent.

**Table 4: Proportion of Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Sex Ratio among STs in the Eastern Region states**

States	Total		Rural		Urban	
	%	SRST	%	SRST	%	SRST
Assam	13	967	14	971	4	861
Bihar	1	923	1	929	0	812
Jharkhand	28	975	33	980	9	922
Orissa	22	1002	24	1006	9	930
West Bengal	6	964	7	968	1	899
Eastern Region	10	980	11	984	3	913
<b>All-India</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>972</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>976</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>920</b>

Source: Calculated from the Census of India, 1991.

Notes: (a) % refers to proportion of STs in the population.

(b) SRST denotes sex ratio among STs.

Unlike SCs, the share of STs in the region is slightly higher than that of the all-India proportions and so is the sex ratio among them. The highest shares of STs are located in rural Jharkhand and Orissa. These are the states that record the best demographic balances too. The STs in Orissa record a more natural demographic balance with 1006 females per 1000 males in rural areas (see Table 4). Urbanisation

affects the gender balance in the states even among STs, as seen in the sex ratio of 930 for Orissa.

A bulk of the scheduled castes and tribes population constitute the landless poor labouring masses who resort to migration for survival. This is supported by the sex ratio figures among children as compared to that of SCs and STs. The sex ratio among children 0-6 years for urban Orissa in 1991 is 949. A higher urban child sex ratio is witnessed in all the eastern states as compared to the urban sex ratios among STs or among population above six years.

Seen over the last two decades, female literacy levels have been steadily improving in the country as well as in the eastern region states (see Table 5). However, female literacy for the eastern region falls short of the all-India levels, averaging out the relatively better-off states of West Bengal and Assam with the lower female literacy states of Bihar and Jharkhand. All the differences stem from rural areas, since urban female literacy rates match up to the country level. Irrespective of residence, literacy rates among women belonging to Bihar and Jharkhand remain highly lacking.

**Table 5: Female Literacy Rates in the Eastern Region States**

States	Total		Rural		Urban	
	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001
Assam	43	56	39	52	73	81
Bihar	22	34	18	30	53	63
Jharkhand	26	39	16	30	60	71
Orissa	35	51	31	47	61	73
West Bengal	47	60	38	54	68	76
Eastern Region	35	48	28	42	64	73
<b>All-India</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>73</b>

Source: Calculated from the Census of India, 1991 and 2001.

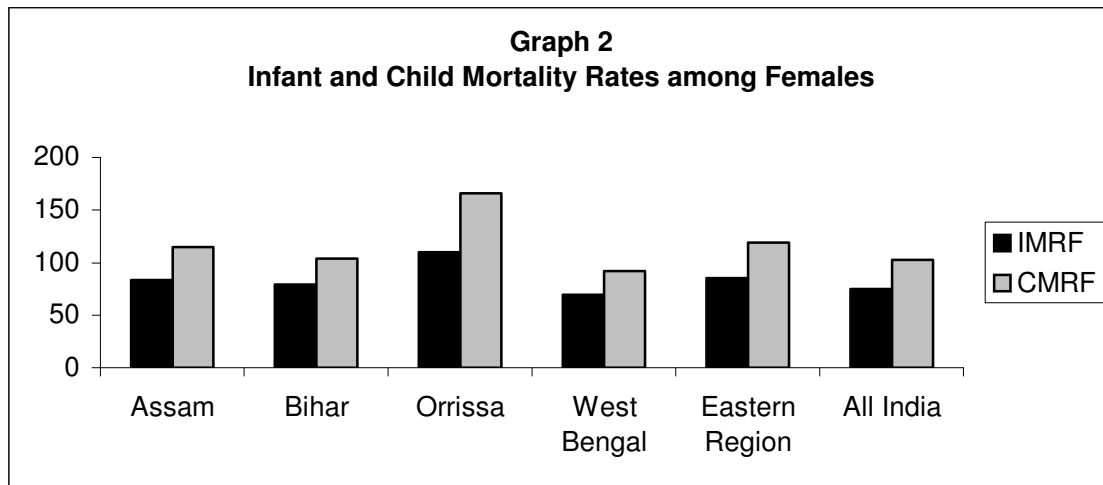
**Table 6: Gender Gap in Literacy Levels in the Eastern Region States**

States	Total		Rural		Urban	
	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001
Assam	19	16	19	17	11	9
Bihar	29	27	30	28	23	18
Jharkhand	30	29	32	31	21	17
Orissa	28	25	29	26	20	16
West Bengal	21	17	24	20	13	10
Eastern Region	25	22	27	24	16	13
<b>All-India</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>13</b>

Source: Calculated from the Census of India, 1991 and 2001.

The gender gap in literacy levels remains the same as the all-India differences across residence. Urban literacy gaps are substantially lower than the rural scenario. These gender gaps over the 1991-2001 period have been reducing (see Table 6). Better literacy rates among females go along with lower gender gaps as well in all the

eastern India states. This hints at greater significance of the economic factors as opposed to the sociocultural attitudes and perception, at least in these states. However, this could only be substantiated if it holds true at the district level.



**Table 7: Infant Mortality Rates among Females and Gender Differences in IMRF in the Eastern Region States**

States	IMRF			IMRD		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
Assam	83	86	59	3	3	-3
Bihar	79	82	53	-18	-19	-9
Orissa	110	115	74	-4	-5	4
West Bengal	69	74	48	-4	-4	4
Eastern Region*	85	89	59	-6	-6	-1
<b>All-India</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>-4</b>	<b>-3</b>	<b>0</b>

Source: Calculated from the Census of India, 1991.

Note: \*Eastern Region figures derived as an average of the four states of Assam, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal.

**Table 8: Child Mortality Rates among Females and Gender Differences in CMRF in the Eastern Region States**

States	CMRF			CMRD		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
Assam	115	119	78	2	-2	-10
Bihar	104	111	61	-28	-31	-13
Orissa	166	173	98	-11	-11	6
West Bengal	92	104	58	-8	-8	4
Eastern Region*	119	127	74	-11	-13	-3
<b>All-India</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>-10</b>	<b>-13</b>	<b>-3</b>

Source: Calculated from the Census of India, 1991.

Note: \*Eastern Region figures derived as an average of the four states of Assam, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal.



The infant and child mortality rates among females in the eastern region are higher than that of the all-India levels because of the poor health situation, worse infrastructure and inaccessibility of medical services in the region. The mortality rates increase substantially as the age of the infant advances up to 5 years (see Graph 2). While 85 female infants of every 1000 born do not survive beyond their first birthday, nearly 119 female children among every 1000 will probably not live beyond 5 years of age in the eastern region (see Tables 7 and 8).

Male mortality exceeds female infant deaths in the region, indicative of lower discrimination of the girl child in matters of health care. The poor availability of health services together with the economic levels of households in the eastern region have an overbearing influence on the survival rates of children, thereby making socio-economic biases ineffective in these contexts. While Orissa witnesses poor survival among both male and female infants, in Bihar the frailty of male children is overwhelmingly prominent.

**Table 9: Mean Age at Marriage and Total Fertility Rate in the Eastern Region States**

States	Mean Age at Marriage			Total Fertility Rate
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Assam	18.23	18.15	18.84	5.26
Bihar	16.95	16.86	17.62	3.61
Orissa	17.96	17.94	18.18	4.27
West Bengal	17.21	16.99	18.06	4.53
Eastern Region*	17.59	17.48	18.17	4.42
<b>All-India</b>	<b>17.68</b>	<b>17.44</b>	<b>18.46</b>	<b>4.30</b>

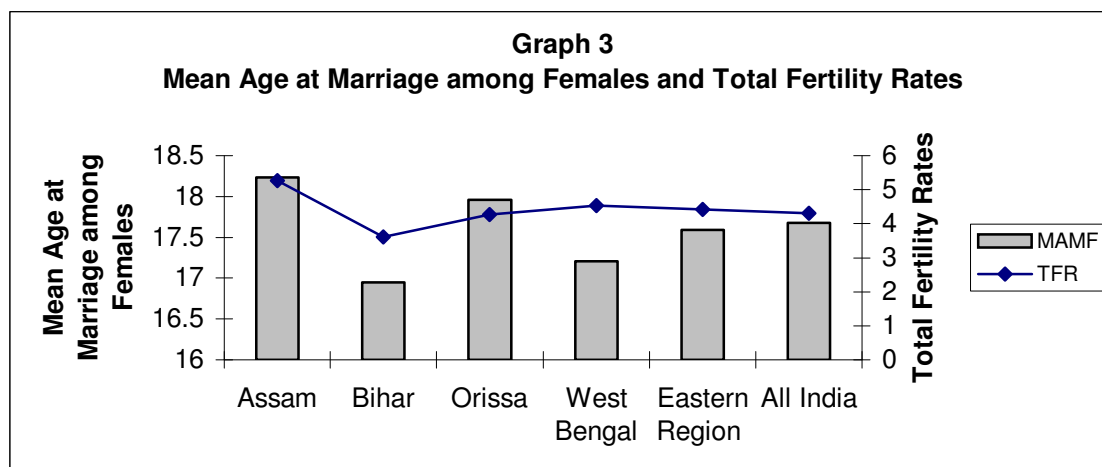
Source: Calculated from the Census of India, 1991.

Note: \*Eastern Region figures derived as an average of the four states of Assam, Bihar, Orissa West Bengal.

The health and educational indicators at the state level seem to correlate more with the economic development of the eastern region than the attitudinal and perceptual biases that are generally seen as being influential in gender discriminatory practices. The age at marriage is one indicator that hints at the latter influences being operational. The mean age at marriage for the eastern region as a whole is below the legal age limit of 18 years. Except for rural areas, the region records an average age of 17.59, which is a little below the all-India level. Bihar has the lowest age at marriage even in urban areas, where all other eastern states record an average of 18 or above (see Table 9).

The fertility rates for the region are also higher than the all-India levels of 4.30. The highest total fertility rate in the region is recorded for Assam at 5.26, while the lowest is 3.61 for Bihar (see Graph 3). This belies the expectation that lower age at marriage ought to lead to higher fertility levels. Alternatively, this emphasises the inadequacy of strict application of certain terms and terminologies given the different cultural contexts. For instance, the interim period after marriage till the ritual of

'gouna' is performed, signaling consummation of marriage may vary from case to case. Among some communities traditional rituals are followed as checks on excess fertility as in the case of tribals. Periodic separation during the initial years of marriage is also witnessed. The extent of economic participation of the woman in work activities is also expected to be affected by and in turn influences fertility rates.



Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991

Female work participation is low in the region. This is further declining, just as in the rest of the country, over the period 1991 and 2001. Only 11 per cent of the women are main workers in the eastern region as opposed to 17 per cent in the country. Status quo has been maintained in West Bengal and Bihar, while all other states have registered a steep decline (see Table 10). Improvement in the work participation of women over 1991-2001 is reported only from urban areas of Assam and West Bengal. Educational advancement among women in these states forms the basis for most of these benefits.

**Table 10: Female Work Participation Rate in the Eastern Region States**

States	Total		Rural		Urban	
	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001
Assam	16	12	17	12	8	10
Bihar	11	11	12	12	5	5
Jharkhand	16	12	19	14	5	5
Orissa	15	10	15	10	8	8
West Bengal	10	10	11	11	7	10
Eastern Region	12	11	14	11	7	8
<b>All-India</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>

Source: Calculated from the Census of India, 1991 and 2001.

The gender differences in work participation in the region, although on the decline, still remain higher than the all-India levels. However, in the urban areas, the region matches up to the country level (see Table 11). Maximum gender gap in work participation rates is seen for West Bengal.

**Table 11: Gender Difference in Work Participation Rates in the Eastern Region States**

States	Total		Rural		Urban	
	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001
Assam	44	39	43	38	50	45
Bihar	48	40	49	40	45	39
Jharkhand	44	33	44	31	45	39
Orissa	49	40	49	40	48	44
West Bengal	51	45	52	44	49	46
Eastern Region	48	41	49	40	48	44
<b>All-India</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>44</b>

Source: Calculated from the Census of India, 1991 and 2001.

CMIEs relative index of development (RID), worked out as a comprehensive economic indicator notes Bihar as a backward state, while West Bengal's performance is quite good. The relatively better position of West Bengal is a result of the inclusion of metropolitan Calcutta<sup>viii</sup> which adds to the index significantly, bringing it close to the all-India 100 (see Table 12). The average for the eastern region as a whole, nevertheless, remains poor at 64.

**Table 12: CMIEs Relative Index of Development**

States	RID
Assam	54
Bihar	43
Orissa	63
West Bengal	97
Eastern Region	64
<b>All-India</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: CMIE (1993).

The aspects of gender backwardness that trouble the eastern region women seem to stem from the economic positions they face rather than the non-economic socio-cultural factors. In terms of the non-economic influences, it could be stated that the eastern region is relatively women friendly.

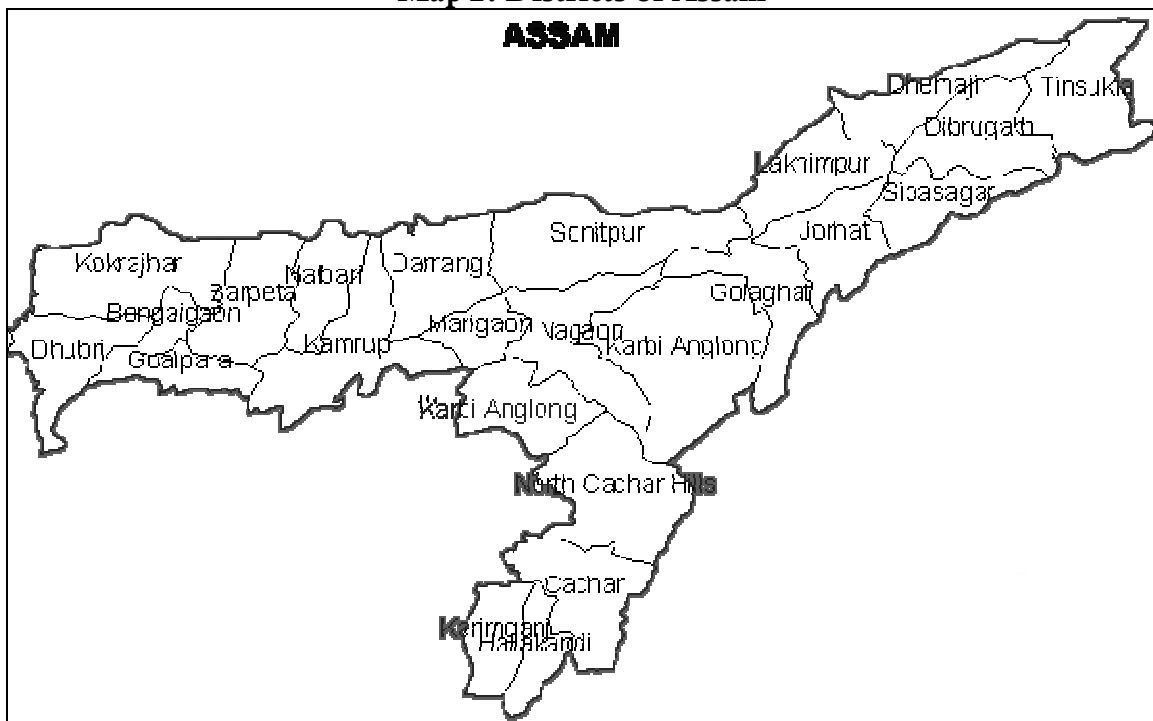
### 3. The State Profiles

This section provides a profile of each of the four eastern states highlighting some of the districts based on the selected indicators. The first subsection provides some general information on each of the states, highlighting the best and worst districts within the state based on an analysis of the socio-economic indicators. The best and worst performers in rural and urban locales for the complete eastern region are captured in the second subsection.

### 3.1. (a) Assam

Located in the northeast corner of India, spread over 78438 square kilometers, Assam is a picturesque land of fertile valleys, dense forests, numerous rivers and high mountains<sup>ix</sup>. The state is bounded by Bhutan in the north; Arunachal Pradesh in the north and northeast; Nagaland and Manipur in the southeast; Mizoram and Meghalaya in the south and in the west by Tripura, West Bengal and Bangladesh. Agriculture is the mainstay of the assamese. Apart from rice and sugarcane, tea is also produced here. The state is also rich in mineral resources. Traditional weaving, fishing as a popular hobby and exquisite craftsmanship in bell metal and cane works are common in the state.

**Map 2: Districts of Assam**



Source: DevInfo India, United Nations.

Physiographically, the districts of Goalpara, Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Kamrup, Barpeta and Nalbari fall under the western Brahmaputra valley region. The region has immense forest resources. Near terai conditions prevail in the northern foothills and the middle plains are extensively used for cultivation. The Cachar plains consisting of Cachar, Hailakandi, and Karimganj districts are also agriculturally rich. However, both the western Brahmaputra valley and Cachar plains suffer from flooding of the untamed rivers which devastate life and property. The changing nature of the riverbeds and floods affect districts of Darrang and Sonitpur of the central Brahmaputra valley as well. This region also includes the districts of Nagaon and Marigaon. Apart from rice cultivation and tea plantations, this region has spun silk, polyester and paper pulp mills.

The eastern Brahmaputra valley region is economically the most prosperous in the state. It includes the districts of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Tinsukhia, Sibsagar, Golaghat and Jorhat. Its slope is ideal for tea plantations. It supports large evergreen, semi-evergreen and deciduous forests. Rice and sugarcane are abundantly grown in these districts. All the oilfields and some coalmines are located here. Rich deposits of limestone are found here. Apart from rice and tea cultivation, another sector of employment is cane work. The districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills can be described as rugged hilly area. This region is populated by the Scheduled Tribes. They practice jhum cultivation and women are actively involved in these activities.

Tribal inhabited, hilly area district of North Cachar Hills records the best sex ratio figure in the state (991). This district probably has high levels of male out-migration as it registers the worst sex ratio among population above six years in the state. The demographic imbalance reported from North Cachar Hills is one of the worst among the scheduled caste population, with only 695 women per 1000 males. The women of this district on an average do not have very early marriages. North Cachar is the best in the state in terms of the mean age at marriage among girls.

Dhubri district of the western plains of Assam is economically backward with the lowest RID Index. This district reports the lowest female literacy, mean age at marriage and work participation rate; highest infant and child mortality along with the largest gender gap in work participation among all 23 districts of Assam. Nevertheless, Dhubri is the best district by virtue of having a demographic balance of 942 females per 1000 males among the population above six years (see Table 13).

Among scheduled caste population, the best sex ratio in the state is noted for Goalpara district at 944. The highest sex ratio among scheduled tribes is in Barpeta which is the only district with a positive gender balance. The worst gender balance among STs is recorded in Karimganj district. The district is also noted for the highest total fertility rate of 7.08.

As per the educational indicators, Jorhat district is the best performer in Assam. In terms of child mortality among females, the district records the lowest rate of 67 as compared to 155 in Dhubri district. Clearly, literacy levels among women in the state seem to have a bearing on the survival of children. The lowest gender gap in literacy levels is recorded from Sibsagar district of the eastern plains. The gender differentials in child mortality and work participation rates are also the lowest in this district. From these figures, Sibsagar appears to be certainly less discriminating across gender.

Dhemaji of the eastern plains witnesses gender discrimination in education with gap in literacy levels across males and females being the highest in the state. Surprisingly, the district records the lowest fertility rate of 3.25 in the state of Assam.

**Table 13**

<b>Statewise Best Districts by Various Indicators - Total Area (Rural+Urban)</b>				
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Assam</b>	<b>Bihar</b>	<b>Orissa</b>	<b>West Bengal</b>
SR>6	Dhubri (942)	Siwan (1032)	Ganjam (1020)	Bankura (949)
CSR	North Cachar (991)	Giridih (993)	Koraput (1007)	Nadia (983)
SRSC	Goalpara (944)	Siwan (1002)	Ganjam (1014)	Bankura (959)
SRST	Barpeta (1003)	Nawada (1066)	Ganjam (1037)	Maldah (993)
FLIT	Jorhat (57)	Purbi Singhbhum (46)	Cuttack (50)	Calcutta (72)
LGAP	Sibsagar (16)	Sahibganj (21)	Koraput (19)	Calcutta (10)
IMRF	Cachar (35)	Dhanbad (32)	Mayurbhanj (88)	Calcutta (26)
IMRD	Cachar (-54)	Ranchi (-16)	Kalahandi (-14)	West Dinajpur (-14)
CMRF	Jorhat (67)	Dharbad (44)	Mayurbhanj (116)	Calcutta (31)
CMRD	Sibsagar (-16)	Ranchi (-10)	Cuttack (-23)	West Dinajpur (-6)
MAMF	North Cachar (19.17)	Gumla (18.80)	Kendujhar (18.83)	Calcutta (19.05)
TFR	Dhemaji (3.25)	Purbi Singhbhum (3.48)	Ganjam (3.12)	Hugh (2.86)
FWPR	Karbi Anglong (31)	Lohardaga (29)	Koraput (27)	Purulia (25)
WGAP	Sibsagar (26)	Lohardaga (31)	Ganjam (39)	Darjiling (32)
RID	Dibrugarh (152)	Dhanbad (92)	Puri (91)	Calcutta (493)
<b>Statewise Worst Districts by Various Indicators - Total Area (Rural+Urban)</b>				
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Assam</b>	<b>Bihar</b>	<b>Orissa</b>	<b>West Bengal</b>
SR>6	North Cachar (828)	Dhanbad (796)	Sundargarh (930)	Calcutta (784)
CSR	Barpeta (960)	Bhojpur (917)	Cuttack (944)	Medinipur (953)
SRSC	North Cachar (695)	Dhanbad (825)	Sundargarh (954)	Calcutta (775)
SRST	Karimganj (904)	Khagaria (346)	Puri (953)	Calcutta 691)
FLIT	Dhubri (29)	Kishanganj (10)	Koraput (13)	Purulia (23)
LGAP	Dhemaji (24)	Bhojpur (38)	Phulbani (37)	Purulia (39)
IMRF	Dhubri (108)	Sitamarhi (116)	Baleshwar (181)	Maldah (106)
IMRD	Karbi Anglong (18)	Sitamarhi (39)	Baleshwar (66)	South 24 Parganas (17)
CMRF	Dhubri (155)	Sitamarhi (157)	Baleshwar (327)	Maldah (152)
CMRD	Kokrajhar (22)	Sitamarhi (56)	Baleshwar (155)	South 24 Parganas (28)
MAMF	Dhubri (16.86)	Deoghar (15.63)	Baleshwar (17.24)	Murshidabad (16.49)
TFR	Karimganj (7.08)	Munger (6.16)	Phulbani (5.00)	Maldah (5.01)
FWPR	Dhubri (5)	Sitamarhi (4)	Cuttack (4)	Howrah (4)
WGAP	Dhubri (59)	Kishanganj (66)	Baleshwar (55)	Koch Bihar (58)
RID	Dhubri (32)	Saharsa (24)	Baleshwar/Kalahandi (51)	Purulia (48)

Cachar district also of the eastern plains is the other area where infant mortality among females is the lowest in Assam. In fact, male infant mortality exceeds that of females by 54 in the district. Districts of Assam recording the highest female infant and child mortality rates as compared to males are Karbi Anglong and Kokrajhar respectively.

Karbi Anglong Hills is the region where female work participation as main workers is the highest. Generally, neglect of girl child is related to low economic worth along with socio-cultural factors. Since FWPR is high, clearly this is not a factor instrumental in the high gender difference in infant mortality. Poor health

infrastructure would imply higher loss of male infants too. The economic poverty argument coupled with neglect of female infants, which is compounded due to the working status of mothers, holds ground here<sup>x</sup>.

**(b) Bihar (including Jharkhand)<sup>xi</sup>**

Bihar (including Jharkhand) is a combination of hills, plateaux and plains. The state is bound by Nepal in the north, Orissa in the south, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in the west and West Bengal in the east. North Bihar bordering Nepal has *terai* conditions that are extremely suitable for cultivation. The northeast portion of the state however suffers due to frequent flooding. The plateau region known as Chotanagpur has many perennial rivers that are sources of hydroelectricity generation. It is also rich in mineral deposits. Of all the eastern region states, maximum numbers of mines are in undivided Bihar, mostly located in the southern plateau which is in Jharkhand now. Despite the declining trend, there are nearly 314 mines in 1999-2000<sup>xii</sup>.

Bihar has a high density with more than 10 per cent of the country's population living in the state. While 87 per cent of the people live in rural areas, there is an excessive concentration of people in the northern part. The urban centres in 1991 were 271, uniformly distributed in the plains. The town concentration in the southern plateau is found to be around the mining zones. The state consists of 42 districts as per the 1991 Census, after 11 new additions were made<sup>xiii</sup>. Palamu<sup>xiv</sup> is the biggest and Khagaria is the smallest district in terms of area. The northern plains districts are smaller in comparison to the southern part of undivided Bihar, i.e. Jharkhand. More than one fourth of the inhabitants of Jharkhand are tribals.

There is a distinct variation in density across regions, with the plains having a far higher concentration than the hills. The participation of females in agricultural activities is more prominent on the hills than on the plains. The economically prosperous, mining township district of Jharkhand – Dhanbad – has the lowest infant and child deaths among females, yet it is the area wherein women constitute the lowest share in population above six years as well as among scheduled castes. The northern district of Siwan is the positive demographic balance reporting area.

The variation in sex ratios among children of the age group 0-6 years is much lesser than the demographic balances among other categories. This is expected since the noise factor is the least among the group of population. Except for Bhojpur, Patna, Khagaria and Rohtas, all central region districts record sex ratios above the state average. Bhojpur records the lowest CSR of 917 girls for every 1000 boys. The southern Bihar (Jharkhand) district of Giridih reports the highest CSR at 993.

A highly imbalanced demographic ratio among scheduled tribes of Khagaria is depicted by a sex ratio of 346. Nawada, of the central region is the other extreme with 1066 ST women per 1000 ST men. The other two districts with positive balances are the southern districts of Gumla and Paschimi Singhbhum. Purbi

Singhbhum of the same region reports the highest female literacy rates for the state of Bihar.

**Map 3: Districts of Bihar and Jharkhand**





Source: www.censusindia.net (2001)

The lowest female literacy levels are noted for Kishanganj of northern Bihar. This district is prominent for low FWPR and largest difference in work participation levels across gender. Gender differentials in literacy levels are marked in all 42 districts of Bihar. They range from 21 in Sahibganj of southern Bihar to 38 in Bhojpur of central Bihar.

The mortality figures highlight Sitamarhi district as the worst one in the state both among female infants and children till the age of five years as well as by gender differentials among them. In addition to this, Sitamarhi records the lowest female work participation rate for the state. Excess male mortality is noted from Ranchi of south Bihar.

Mean age at marriage among females is one of the lowest in the state with only four of the 42 districts averaging at the legal age limit of 18 years. The worst district in terms of lowest mean age at marriage among females is recorded for Deoghar. Both the highest age of 18.80 in Gumla district and the lowest belong to the southern region of Bihar. An east-west divide in the district performances in the state of Bihar seems to be more operational.

Munger district of central region has the highest total fertility rate of 6.16. Purbi Singhbhum of the south records the lowest fertility rate of 3.48. This is the district with the highest female literacy in the state. The negative link between education and fertility is seen to be strong in this case.

The female work participation as main workers is quite low in the state as a whole. It is in the tribal inhabited south Bihar districts that women's work participation is relatively better, with Lohardaga reporting the highest FWPR. Nevertheless, the gender differential levels are quite high even in this district, which is the best performer in the state.

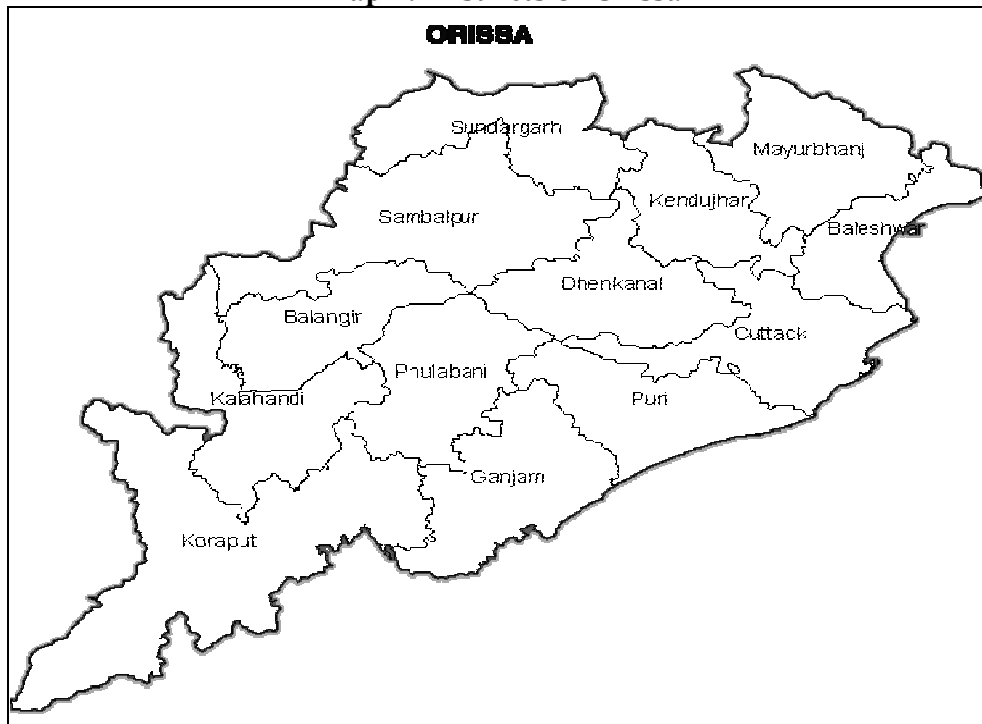
Explanations for such low women's participation in a poor state such as Bihar go beyond mere economic factors. They can probably be better explained through the play of socio-cultural factors. Apart from the low educational levels among women in the state, this is also an offshoot of sanskritisation processes wherein women's work participation is prevented even among the poorer masses due to the influence of patriarchal values. On the whole the case of Bihar emphasises the widespread variations in most of the gender related indicators.

### **(c) Orissa**

The state of Orissa lies in the east coast of India with a coastline of 560 kilometres. It is surrounded by Jharkhand in the north, Madhya Pradesh in the west, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal in the south and northeast respectively. As per the 1991 Census, Orissa occupies the tenth position among all Indian states, with an area of 155,707 square kilometers. More than one third of its area is under forests. Largely

non timber forest products, cane, bamboo and other minor forest products such as *kendu* leaves, sal seeds are produced in the state. The state is rich in minerals too. Apart from agriculture, many people are dependent on fishing, aquaculture and related occupations. A majority of the population, whether rural or urban, lives in the coastal districts or alongside the main river basins of the state. More than one fifth of its population is tribal. The tribal concentrated districts of the state are Mayurbhanj, Koraput, Sundargarh, Kendujhar, Phulbani and Kalahandi.

**Map 4: Districts of Orissa**



Source: DevInfo, United Nations.

The coastal district of Ganjam reports the best demographic gender balance among population above 6 years, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The total fertility rate is the lowest in Ganjam among all 13 districts. Gender difference in work participation levels is also the lowest in the state. Sundergarh of north Orissa has the lowest sex ratio among population above six years and SCs. Among STs, the coastal district of Puri reports the most imbalanced sex ratio at 953. Cuttack of the same region records the worst child sex ratio. This could be due to the combined effects of economic prosperity and urbanisation. The best child sex ratio with more females than males is noted in the two tribal inhabited districts of Koraput and Kalahandi, both in the southern region.

Koraput district has the lowest female literacy, a clear negative factor in women's development. This low literacy is probably stemming from poor resources and infrastructural facilities rather than gender discrimination. This is supported by the fact that the difference in literacy levels across gender is the least in this district. The

economic backwardness of the district is well accepted and reflects in the highest participation of women in the labour market.

Higher literacy among females is in Cuttack district. Phulbani of southern Orissa reveals strong gender discrimination in education. The compounded effect of this deprivation is seen in the total fertility rate of 5 for the district, which is the highest in Orissa. Frequent child bearing is known to have adverse impact on the woman's health, which in turn affects the children's health.

The high mortality figures among infants and children are due to poor facilities and access to health care services. Even the district, which has the lowest infant and child mortality figures among females in the state, reports IMRF of 88 and CMRF of 116. Kalahandi has excess male mortality rates among infants, while coastal Cuttack, a more urbanised and relatively better-off area, has more male children dying before the age of 5 years compared to female children.

Baleshwar, belonging to the coastal region has the worst mortality figures by all four indicators. Not only is the health scenario poor, even the discrimination across gender is quite high in the district. The district has the lowest mean age at marriage in Orissa. The difference among male and female WPRs is the highest in this district.

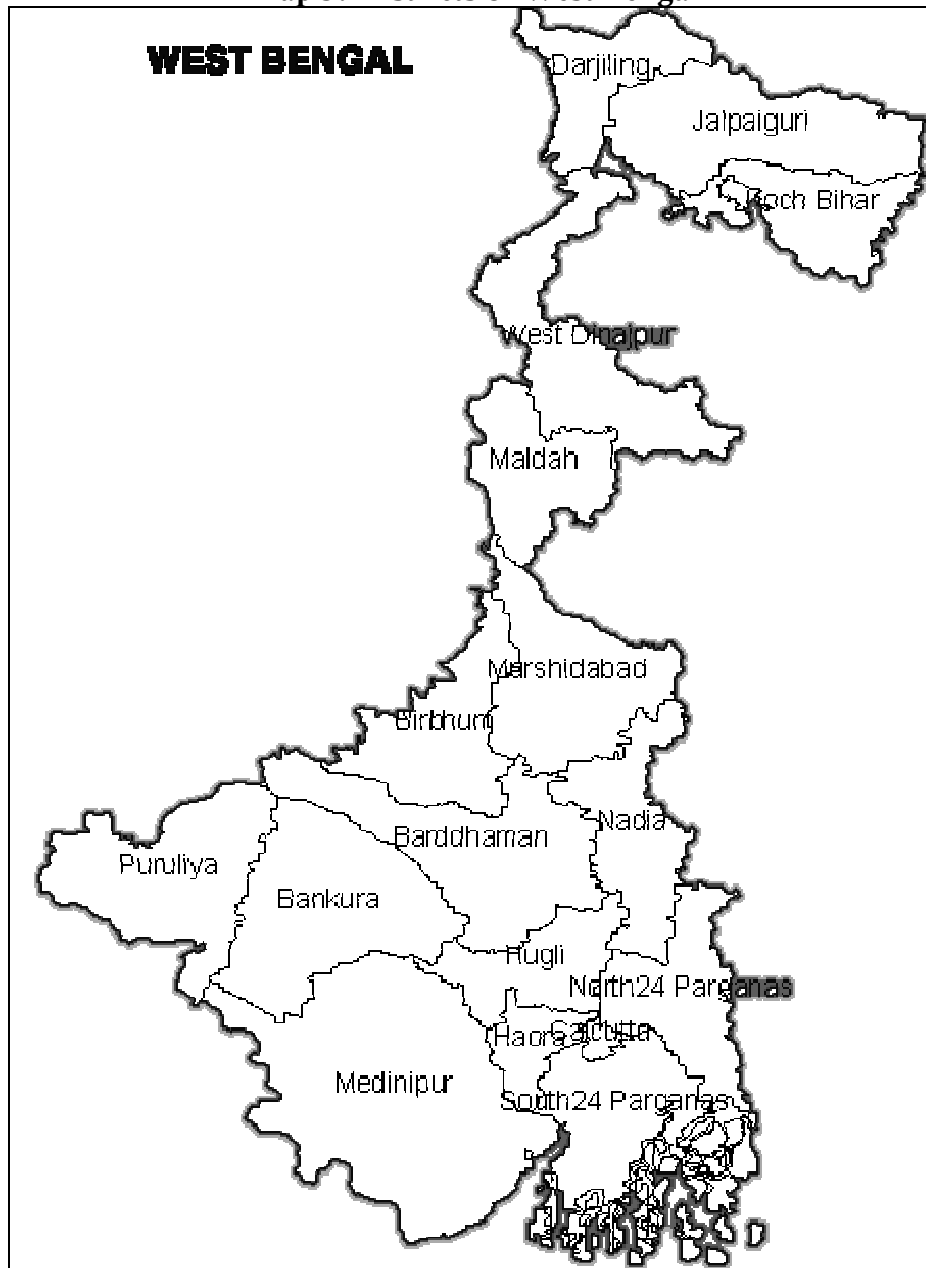
It is noteworthy that Baleshwar and Kalahandi report the same RID, indicating similar levels of development. While Baleshwar figures as the worst district on account of mortality indicators, MAMF and WGAP, Kalahandi stands prominent in terms of positive sex ratio among children and excess male mortality among infants. In short, it is not clear how economic deprivation relates to gender inequalities or development.

#### **(d) West Bengal**

West Bengal occupies only 2.7 per cent of total Indian territory. The state has the longest coastline in the region, covering 950 kilometres. It is bounded by the kingdom of Bhutan and Sikkim in the north and the neighbouring districts of Bihar and Orissa in the west. In the south, there is the Bay of Bengal and in the east is the neighbouring country of Bangladesh as well as two districts of Assam, Dhubri and Kokrajhar. Physiographically, the state consists of mountains, plateaux and plains. With only 14 per cent of its area under forest cover; four different types of forests characterise West Bengal. It is one of the few states in the country where there has been an increase in forest cover. It is also estimated that West Bengal has about 50 per cent of the total mangrove areas in India<sup>xv</sup>.

Nearly one fourth of the state's population belongs to the scheduled castes, while scheduled tribes are concentrated in some parts of the state. Districts where tribal inhabitants are in significant numbers are Jalpaiguri, Purulia, Darjeeling, Bankura, West Dinajpur, Medinipur and Birbhum.

**Map 5: Districts of West Bengal**



Source: DevInfo, United Nations.

Calcutta reports the worst sex ratio among population above 6 years, scheduled castes and tribes. Even by child sex ratio, this central plains district has the second worst rank among 17 districts of West Bengal. The RID of course, is very high at 493. On the positive front, Calcutta reports the highest mean age at marriage among females and literacy rates. The gender gap in literacy is the lowest in the state and so is the mortality among female infants and children. This is only expected from this urban district which is also the capital of the state. Better infrastructural facilities and

accessibility together with the social attitudes and perception of its people is reflected in the educational and health status of women here.

Bankura district records the best demographic balance among adults and SC population. Among STs, Malda of eastern plains with a sex ratio of 993 is the highest in the state. Child sex ratio ranges between 953 in Medinipur of western plains to 983 in Nadia of eastern plains.

The worst educational indicators are observed in Purulia both in terms of female literacy rates and gender differences. This western plains district witnesses the highest female work participation rate. The nature of work these women are involved in can well be fathomed with the poor educational levels. Most of these women are unorganised, insecure and unprotected workers, whose survival depends on their work. The eastern plains district of Malda which reports highest fertility rates also has very high mortality figures both among female infants and children. The poor survival rates may be serving as a factor in increasing fertility levels. Adverse gender differences in mortality rates are noted to be high in South 24 Parganas. West Dinajpur of eastern plains reports higher male mortality as compared to female levels. Early marriages are a practice in Murshidabad district of the eastern plains. The lowest fertility rate in the state is in Hugli district.

Poor labour market participation of females is noted from Howrah district of the central plains. The highest gender differences in WPRs are noted in Koch Bihar of the Himalayan region. In the same region, Darjeeling where tea plantations employ the services of both men and women depicts the lowest differential across men and women's WPRs. The migrant families who supply labour for the work in tea gardens probably operate under different sociocultural structures and economic compulsions as opposed to the other district of the same region. For instance, the Koch Bihar district where scheduled castes predominate with more than half of its population, surprisingly displays the highest difference across gender in work participation rates. Other factors may also be instrumental in influencing behavioural patterns in some cases and therefore require indepth analysis of the composition of the people inhabiting as well as their cultural attitudes.

### **3.2. Best and Worst, Rural and Urban Performers in the Region**

Rural India is very distinct from its urban counterparts. This situation is visible in its different regions, including the four states of the eastern region. Education is clearly higher in urban areas both among males and females. Among all districts of the eastern region, Dhemaji of Assam records the worst gender balance among population above 6 years and scheduled castes in urban areas. Even in rural areas, the district has a below state average sex ratio of 917. The lowest rural sex ratio for the state however is 853 in North Cachar Hills (see Table 14). The worst regional sex ratio among rural areas is recorded in Bihar, for Khagaria district. Interestingly, even the best sex ratio is recorded by Bihar in Siwan district (1042) which is followed by Orissa's Ganjam district among rural areas. In urban districts, Nadia of West

Bengal records 961 females per 1000 males in the age group six years and above. This is followed by Lohardaga of Bihar (see Table 15).

**Table 14**

<b>Statewise Best Rural Districts by Various Indicators</b>				
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Assam</b>	<b>Bihar</b>	<b>Orissa</b>	<b>West Bengal</b>
SR>6	Dubri (945)	Siwan (1042)	Ganjam (1035)	Bankura (951)
CSR	North Cachar Hills (995)	Giridih (998)	Koraput (1009)	Nadia (991)
SRSC	Goalpara (944)	Siwan (1006)	Ganjam (1017)	Hugli (960)
SRST	Barpeta (1003)	Patna (1064)	Ganjam (1041)	Malda (994)
FLIT	Sibsagar (54)	Patna (27)	Cuttack (48)	Medinipur (55)
LGAP	Sibsagar (16)	Sahibganj (20)	Koraput (18)	Nadia (16)
IMRF	Jorhat (54)	Dhanbad (32)	Mayurbhanj (89)	Hugli (37)
IMRD	Dhemaji (-28)	Ranchi (-18)	Kalahandi (-12)	West Dinajpur (-11)
CMRF	Jorhat (67)	Dhanbad (44)	Mayurbhanj (124)	Hugli (49)
CMRD	Dhemaji (-48)	Araria (-22)	Dhenkanal (-30)	West Dinajpur/Hugli/Purulia (-2)
MAMF	North Cachar Hills (19.11)	Gumla (18.81)	Sundargarh (18.87)	Darjiling (18.86)
FWPR	Karbi Anglong (34)	Lohardaga (32)	Koraput (28)	Darjiling (29)
WGAP	Sibsagar (24)	Lohardaga (30)	Ganjam (38)	Darjiling (27)
<b>Statewise Worst Rural Districts by Various Indicators</b>				
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Assam</b>	<b>Bihar</b>	<b>Orissa</b>	<b>West Bengal</b>
SR>6	North Cachar Hills (853)	Khagaria (849)	Dhenkanal (963)	Nadia (917)
CSR	Barpeta (959)	Bhojpur (914)	Cuttack (944)	Medinipur (953)
SRSC	North Cachar Hills (653)	Dhanbad (873)	Cuttack (964)	Jalpaiguri (920)
SRST	Karimganj (943)	Khagaria (231)	Cuttack (966)	Koch Bihar (910)
FLIT	Dhubri (24)	Kishanganj (8)	Koraput (8)	Purulia (20)
LGAP	Dhemaji (24)	Bhojpur (39)	Phulbani (37)	Purulia (40)
IMRF	Dhubri (109)	Sigamarhi (114)	Baleshwar (197)	Malda (109)
IMRD	Karbi Anglong (16)	Sitamarhi (36)	Baleshwar (81)	Darjiling (33)
CMRF	Dhubri (161)	Sigamarhi (161)	Baleshwar (341)	Malda (157)
CMRD	Kokrajhar (12)	Sitamarhi (57)	Baleshwar (167)	Darjiling (44)
MAMF	Dhubri (16.74)	Deogarh (15.48)	Baleshwar (17.18)	Murshidabad (16.40)
FWPR	Dhubri (5)	Sigamarhi (4)	Cuttack (4)	Howrah (3)
WGAP	Dhubri (60)	Kishanganj (68)	Puri (57)	Nadia (59)

In terms of child sex ratios pertaining to the population in the age group 0-6 years, districts of Bihar record the lowest sex ratios both in rural and urban areas. Deoghar in urban areas and Bhojpur district in rural areas has a CSR of 902 and 914 respectively. Among urban areas, however, even the highest CSR in the region is recorded in Madhubani district of Bihar. Among rural areas, Koraput in Orissa records the highest regional child sex ratio. Giridih of Bihar with the best CSR in the state is at 998. Overall, it may be stated that the region has a relatively better demographic balance, with even the lowest ratio being above 900. This supports to a large extent the general layperson view of the eastern region attributing better status to their women.

Among population above six years, the entire eastern plains region records a low sex ratio in urban areas. Urban Dhemaji of Assam has the worst sex ratio of 676. The district recording the lowest sex ratio in rural areas is Khagaria of Bihar (849). The best rural sex ratio (1042) for the region is that of Siwan from Bihar. Among urban districts of the region, West Bengal's Nadia with a sex ratio of 961 records the best demographic balance.

**Table 15**

<b>Statewise Best Urban Districts by Various Indicators</b>				
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Assam</b>	<b>Bihar</b>	<b>Orissa</b>	<b>West Bengal</b>
SR>6	Hailakandi (944)	Lohardaga (959)	Ganjam (945)	Nadia (961)
CSR	Sibsagar (991)	Madhubani (1012)	Koraput (987)	Birbhum (1007)
SRSC	Karimganj (963)	Gopalganj (922)	Koraput (1008)	Koch Bihar (994)
SRST	Kokrajhar (969)	Nawada (1368)	Koraput (1018)	Birbhum (982)
FLIT	Karimganj (84)	Lohardaga (69)	Puri (71)	North 24 Parganas (72)
LGAP	Sibsagar (5)	Muzaffarpur (14)	Puri (14)	Calcutta (10)
IMRF	North Cachar Hills (22)	Dumka (16)	Kalahandi (45)	Calcutta (26)
IMRD	Goalpara (-28)	Sahibganj (-42)	Mayurbhanj (-45)	Koch Bihar (-62)
CMRF	North Cachar Hills (25)	Khagaria (23)	Puri (84)	Calcutta (31)
CMRD	Goalpara (-39)	Sahibganj (-29)	Kendujhar (-35)	Koch Bihar (-15)
MAMF	Karimganj (19.60)	Gumla (18.54)	Kendujhar (18.61)	Calcutta (19.05)
FWPR	Dhemaji (25)	Madhepura (13)	Koraput (12)	Murshidabad (17)
WGAP	Dhemaji (36)	Madhepura (37)	Phulbani (43)	Murshidabad (40)
<b>Statewise Worst Urban Districts by Various Indicators</b>				
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Assam</b>	<b>Bihar</b>	<b>Orissa</b>	<b>West Bengal</b>
SR>6	Dhemaji (676)	Dhanbad (746)	Puri (791)	Calcutta (784)
CSR	Marigaon (922)	Deoghar (902)	Sundargarh (930)	Malda (940)
SRSC	Dhemaji (652)	Dhanbad (774)	Puri (874)	Calcutta (775)
SRST	Golaghat (467)	Khagaria (462)	Ganjam (690)	Calcutta (691)
FLIT	Goalpara (61)	Gopalganj (36)	Kalahandi (47)	Murshidabad (52)
LGAP	Barpeta (17)	Gopalganj (29)	Kalahandi (27)	Purulia (24)
IMRF	Kokrajhar (177)	Saran (137)	Baleshwar (110)	Birbhum (82)
IMRD	Kokrajhar (116)	Saran (94)	Sundargarh (15)	South 24 Parganas (26)
CMRF	Kokrajhar (302)	Saran (221)	Mayurbhanj (216)	Birbhum (114)
CMRD	Kokrajhar (225)	Saran (170)	Mayurbhanj (67)	South 24 Parganas (41)
MAMF	Dhubri (17.71)	Begusarai (16.74)	Kalahandi (17.64)	Murshidabad (17.26)
FWPR	Barpeta (4)	Sitamarhi (3)	Cuttack (6)	Howrah (4)
WGAP	Tunsukia (55)	Kishanganj (55)	Dhenkanal (51)	Howrah (55)

Urban Dhemaji remains the worst sex ratio recording district of the region in case of scheduled castes population too. This sex ratio is lower at 652. Among rural areas, North Cachar Hills of Assam have the worst gender balance among SC population. The best balance, both for rural and urban areas of the region is that of Orissa's districts, Ganjam at 1017 and Koraput at 1008 respectively.

The best demographic balance is seen among scheduled tribe populations especially in rural areas. The entire eastern region that is in the four states the sex ratios among STs in rural areas are higher than among other sections of the population. Patna with a sex ratio of 1064 among STs is the best rural gender balance. Even in urban areas it is Nawada, another district of Bihar that records the highest sex ratio among STs.

On the lower end, very unrealistic and suspect sex ratios are recorded. This is partly due to the small proportion of STs in the population. The variation substantially reduces if districts with 5 per cent or more STs alone are considered. The district recording the worst sex ratio among STs is Assam's Tinsukia district with 945 females per 1000 males. Rural Tinsukia too has a small proportion of STs. In urban areas, Lakhimpur district with only 5 per cent ST population records the lowest sex ratio of 672.

The best gender balance among STs, 1041 is that of rural Ganjam from Orissa. In the urban context, it is Bihar's Lohardaga district which records 1288 women per 1000 men. In the ultimate analysis, it can still be stated that STs certainly have a better demographic balance.

The overall situation of literacy among females is low in rural areas. One of the lowest female literacy in the region is recorded from rural Kishanganj in Bihar and rural Koraput in Orissa. Bihar state as a whole is far below the rest of the region. Even the best rural district in terms of literacy rates – Patna – stands at 27 only. This is striking when seen along with Assam's educationally backward district of Dhubri which records a female literacy rate of 24.

The best district in rural areas is Medinipur from West Bengal. The female literacy rate in Sibsagar from rural Assam is also close at 54. Even in Orissa, rural Cuttack district with 48 per cent literate females displays a far better educational performance than in the neighbouring state of Bihar.

The differences are not as stark in terms of female literacy in urban locations, although Bihar remains the most backward state. Lohardaga at 69 is the best female literacy rate district from Bihar. In case of urban Orissa and West Bengal, the highest literacy rates are that of Puri (71) and North 24 Parganas (72) respectively. However the best performance in the entire region is a female literacy rate of 84 from Karimganj of Assam.

In rural areas, the maximum gap in literacy rates of males and females is noted not from Bihar, but from Purulia of West Bengal. Interestingly, the least difference is from Nadia district of the same state. Sibsagar district of rural Assam has the same gender gap of 16 in literacy rates. Rural Sahibganj of Bihar, the best in the state has a literacy gap of 20, which is the highest minimum figure among all states.



Bihar's poor performance surfaces on top among urban areas. Gopalganj district not only has a low 36 per cent of female literates, but also has the highest literacy gap across gender in the entire region. Assam's performance in literacy is the best with low gender gaps too. Sibsagar district in urban Assam records a difference of 5 in male and female literacy.

Infant mortality rate among females is the least in Bihar's Dumka district (16) for urban areas and Dhanbad district (32) for rural locations. Urban rates are more alarming in case of Assam and Bihar while the reverse holds true for the other two states of the region. In urban Kokrajhar of Assam, the infant mortality rate of females is 177, which is the worst in the region. Baleshwar district of Orissa records high female mortality rates among rural as well as urban areas. In terms of mortality figures, Orissa presents the worst scenario. Among rural districts identified as the best one in terms of mortality rates in each of the four states, Orissa's Mayurbhanj district stands at 89 for infants and 124 among children.

Urban Kokrajhar and Saran, rural Baleshwar and Sitamarhi are prominent as the worst districts in terms of all 4 mortality indicators. In West Bengal, infant and child mortality rates are highest in rural Maldah, while Darjeeling reveals gender discrimination. Similarly, in rural Assam, Dhubri has the worst mortality rates while gender differences are highest in Karbi Anglong (for infants) and Kokrajhar for children. In urban areas of West Bengal, Birbhum district has the worst mortality rates and higher discrimination is observed from South 24 Parganas.

Rural Dhanbad records the lowest mortality rates in the entire region. Low gender gap is noted in Ranchi among infants and Araria among children. Mayurbhanj district from rural Orissa – best of the state in terms of mortality – is still quite a high rate.

Urban Bihar's Dumka and Khagaria are the two districts that record low infant and child mortality rates respectively. The districts with excess male mortality in the eastern region are quite a few. To name those with the maximum difference: Koch Bihar of West Bengal, Sahibganj of Bihar, Assam's Goalpara and Mayurbhanj as well as Kendujhar of Orissa.

Early marriages are witnessed more in Bihar. Deoghar in rural areas (16), and Begusarai (17) of urban locations, record the lowest mean age at marriage in the region. The best performance taking into account this indicator is from Assam: North Cachar Hills in rural areas (19.11) and Karimganj in urban Assam (19.60).

Female work participation is lowest in Howrah for rural areas, and Sitamarhi of Bihar for urban areas. The range of FWPR recorded for urban areas is very low. For instance, even the best work participation recording urban districts of Orissa – Koraput – is at 12; Bihar's Madhepura is at 13 and West Bengal's Murshidabad is at 17. Rural areas female work participation rates are higher although even these reach up to around 30 per cent.

The differences in male and female WPRs stand out across locations. The range of gender gap in economic participation is wider in rural areas. Sibsagar (24) and Dhemaji (36) of Assam are the rural and urban districts which record the least gender gap in work participation for the region as a whole. Rural Kishanganj of Bihar has the highest difference of 68 in male and female WPRs. In urban areas, the worst districts of all eastern states barring Orissa record a difference of 55.

The identification of best and worst districts in urban and rural locations highlights the levels of progress or backwardness in different parts of each of the eastern states. Do these fit into any sort of regional patterns? Can it be stated that particular areas reflect levels of gender backwardness based on a specific indicator? This is sought to be examined in the following section.

#### 4. District Scenario

The entire eastern region can be divided into nine sub-regions. Of the 94 rural districts belonging to the 4 eastern states, 23 fall in the northern sub-region, 15 in eastern plains, 14 in western plains and 5 in central plains (see Table 16). The southern sub-region consists of 13 districts, while another 12 districts belong to the central sub-region. Orissa is the only eastern state with 4 coastal districts, while West Bengal has 3 Himalayan districts and Assam – 2 hilly region districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar (see Appendix 1). In urban areas, there is an additional central plains district of Calcutta, the capital of West Bengal.

**Table 16: Regionwise Number of Districts**

State	Region	Total
Assam	Eastern Plains	10
	Hills	2
	Western Plains	11
Assam Total		23
Bihar	Central	12
	Northern	17
	Southern	13
Bihar Total		42
Orissa	Coastal	4
	Northern	6
	Southern	3
Orissa Total		13
West Bengal	Central Plains	6
	Eastern Plains	5
	Himalayan	3
	Western Plains	3
West Bengal Total		17
Eastern Region Total		95

In this section, the regional analysis of what various socio-economic, cultural, demographic, educational and health based indicators reveal shall be undertaken using the above specified sub-regional classifications. For this purpose, the 20 worst and 20 best districts of the entire eastern region have been identified using ranks. In the first subsection, rural districts are analysed. This is followed by a discussion of the urban districts. Finally, a synthesis of the findings has been provided.

#### 4.1 The Eastern Rural Scene

Sex ratio among population above six years for the region is noted as worst in Bihar districts, with 18 of the 94 rural districts among the 20 backward ones belonging to the state (see List R1). Assam is the other state from where 2 districts are listed among these 20 identified with low sex ratios. Khagaria of central region is the worst district among the eastern states. The second worst district with 853 females per 1000 males is recorded for North Cachar Hills.

**List R1**

<b>20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION RURAL DISTRICTS BASED ON SEX RATIO</b>							
<b>Worst Districts</b>				<b>Best Districts</b>			
<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>SR&gt;6</b>	<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>SR&gt;6</b>
1	BIHAR	KHAGARIA	849	94	BIHAR	SIWAN	1042
2	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	853	93	ORISSA	GANJAM	1035
3	BIHAR	DHANBAD	855	92	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	1006
4	BIHAR	PASHCHIM CHAMPARAN	858	91	ORISSA	PHULBANI	1002
5	BIHAR	BHAGALPUR	859	90	ORISSA	KORAPUT	999
6	BIHAR	PATNA	869	89	BIHAR	GUMLA	993
7	BIHAR	MUNGER	870	88	ORISSA	MAYURBHANJ	992
8	BIHAR	PURBA CHAMPARAN	870	87	ORISSA	CUTTACK	992
9	BIHAR	SITAMARHI	875	86	ORISSA	KENDUJHAR	991
10	BIHAR	ROHTAS	878	85	ORISSA	BALANGIR	989
11	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	879	84	ORISSA	SUNDARGARH	988
12	BIHAR	BEGUSARAI	887	83	BIHAR	PASHCHIMI SINGHBHUM	985
13	BIHAR	NALANDA	887	82	ORISSA	SAMBALPUR	985
14	BIHAR	ARARIA	891	81	BIHAR	SARAN	978
15	BIHAR	SAHARSA	893	80	ORISSA	PURI	978
16	BIHAR	PURNIA	893	79	ORISSA	BALESHWAR	977
17	BIHAR	BHOJPUR	897	78	BIHAR	GOPALGANJ	973
18	ASSAM	TINSUKIA	898	77	BIHAR	LOHARDAGA	969
19	BIHAR	KATIHAR	900	76	ORISSA	DHENKANAL	963
20	BIHAR	MUZAFFARPUR	902	75	BIHAR	PURBI SINGHBHUM	958

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.

Two thirds of the central region and half of all northern districts of Bihar are among the 20 demographically most imbalanced districts. Bihar as expected remains a bundle of contradictions, with 7 of its districts displaying the best sex ratios. Siwan of north Bihar is infact, the best district with a favourable sex ratio of 1042 females per 1000 males. The other above 1000 sex ratios are from Orissa's southern and coastal regions. It is noteworthy that all districts of Orissa fall in the top 20 list.

There may be some disturbances due to the large scale migration of labour from these states. Let us look at the child sex ratios to overcome this noise factor.

The predominance of rural Bihar is visible in the list of backward districts based on child sex ratio as well, north and central Bihar being the worst. Living up to the states peculiarity, Gaya of central Bihar and Araria of the northern region are among the best districts list based on CSR (see List R2). Among ten Bihar districts, apart from these two, all others belong to south Bihar. All southern Orissa districts – Koraput, Kalahandi and Phulbani – record better gender balances in the population emphasising the positive demographic situation in the economically poor southern districts.

**List R2**

<b>20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION RURAL DISTRICTS BASED ON CHILD SEX RATIO</b>							
<b>Worst Districts</b>				<b>Best Districts</b>			
<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>CSR</b>	<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>CSR</b>
1	BIHAR	BHOJPUR	914	94	ORISSA	KORAPUT	1009
2	BIHAR	SITAMARHI	922	93	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	1005
3	BIHAR	SAHARSA	931	92	BIHAR	GIRIDIH	998
4	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	940	91	BIHAR	DEOGHAR	997
5	BIHAR	SAMASTIPUR	942	90	ORISSA	PHULBANI	997
6	BIHAR	PATNA	942	89	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	995
7	BIHAR	KHAGARIA	943	88	BIHAR	HAZARIBAG	991
8	BIHAR	MUZAFFARPUR	944	87	W.BENGAL	NADIA	991
9	ORISSA	CUTTACK	944	86	ASSAM	HAILAKANDI	989
10	BIHAR	PURBA CHAMPARAN	945	85	BIHAR	PASHCHIMI SINGHBHUM	989
11	BIHAR	VAISHALI	946	84	BIHAR	GUMLA	989
12	BIHAR	ROHTAS	947	83	ASSAM	GOLAGHAT	987
13	ORISSA	PURI	949	82	ASSAM	MARIGAON	986
14	BIHAR	MADHUBANI	951	81	BIHAR	ARARIA	986
15	BIHAR	BHAGALPUR	952	80	BIHAR	LOHARDAGA	985
16	W.BENGAL	MEDINIPUR	953	79	BIHAR	DHANBAD	985
17	BIHAR	DARBHANGA	954	78	BIHAR	DUMKA	985
18	BIHAR	MUNGER	957	77	ASSAM	BONGAIGAON	985
19	ORISSA	GANJAM	957	76	BIHAR	GAYA	985
20	ASSAM	BARPETA	959	75	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	984

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.

The reverse is true for coastal Orissa with Puri, Cuttack and Ganjam recording adverse child sex ratios. Other eastern region districts with low proportion of females are Barpeta of Assam and Medinipur of West Bengal, both from the western plains.

Among the scheduled castes, it is very interesting to note that the otherwise backward state of Orissa records better sex ratios in all its districts. Six of the southern Bihar districts along with Siwan from North Bihar are among rural areas with relatively better demographic balances among SCs (see List R3). Dhanbad is the only southern district which records a poor sex ratio among SCs. Apart from the six districts of Assam which belong to three different regions, a large number of

Central Bihar districts record adverse sex ratios among SCs. In the case of Assam, the percentage of SC population is small, unlike Bihar.

**List R3**

20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION RURAL DISTRICTS BY SEX RATIO AMONG SCHEDULED CASTES									
Worst Districts					Best Districts				
RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	%	SRSC	RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	%	SRSC
1	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	2	653	94	ORISSA	GANJAM	17	1017
2	BIHAR	DHANBAD	17	873	93	BIHAR	SIWAN	11	1006
3	BIHAR	SITAMARHI	12	876	92	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	16	1000
4	BIHAR	PURBA CHAMPARAN	13	884	91	ORISSA	PHULBANI	19	995
5	BIHAR	ROHTAS	20	885	90	ORISSA	SAMBALPUR	18	987
6	BIHAR	BHAGALPUR	11	888	89	ORISSA	KORAPUT	15	987
7	BIHAR	PASHCHIM CHAMPARAN	15	889	88	ORISSA	SUNDARGARH	8	987
8	ASSAM	TINSUKIA	2	889	87	BIHAR	PASHCHIMI SINGHBHUM	5	986
9	BIHAR	BHOJPUR	15	890	86	ORISSA	KENDUJHAR	11	986
10	BIHAR	PATNA	19	890	85	ORISSA	PURI	17	980
11	BIHAR	NALANDA	21	891	84	BIHAR	GIRIDIH	13	979
12	ASSAM	KARBI ANGLONG	4	893	83	ORISSA	BALANGIR	17	978
13	BIHAR	KHAGARIA	15	895	82	BIHAR	PURBI SINGHBHUM	4	976
14	BIHAR	AURANGABAD	24	904	81	ORISSA	MAYURBHANJ	7	976
15	ASSAM	BARPETA	6	907	80	BIHAR	GUMLA	5	974
16	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	4	907	79	ORISSA	BALESHWAR	21	971
17	ASSAM	BONGAIGAON	10	909	78	BIHAR	LOHARDAGA	4	968
18	BIHAR	MUNGER	17	910	77	ORISSA	DHENKANAL	17	967
19	BIHAR	BEGUSARAI	15	911	76	ORISSA	CUTTACK	21	964
20	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	17	911	75	BIHAR	HAZARIBAG	20	963

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.

Note: % refers to proportion of SCs in the population

**List R4**

20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION RURAL DISTRICTS BASED ON SEX RATIO AMONG SCHEDULED TRIBES									
Worst Districts					Best Districts				
RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	%	SRST	RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	%	SRST
1	ASSAM	TINSUKIA	6	945	52	ORISSA	GANJAM	11	1041
2	BIHAR	HAZARIBAG	9	945	51	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	33	1027
3	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	75	947	50	ORISSA	PHULBANI	39	1026
4	ASSAM	GOLAGHAT	11	947	49	ORISSA	KORAPUT	59	1015
5	BIHAR	KATI HAR	6	950	48	ORISSA	BALANGIR	20	1007
6	W.BENGAL	DARJILING	18	950	47	BIHAR	PASHCHIMI SINGHBHUM	61	1006
7	BIHAR	DHANBAD	13	950	46	ASSAM	BARPETA	9	1003
8	BIHAR	GIRIDIH	14	952	45	ORISSA	KENDUJHAR	47	1003
9	ASSAM	KARBI ANGLONG	54	954	44	BIHAR	GUMLA	72	1003
10	W.BENGAL	JALPAIGURI	25	957	43	ORISSA	SUNDARGARH	66	1003
11	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	44	957	42	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	9	1001
12	BIHAR	PALAMU	19	958	41	ORISSA	MAYURBHANJ	60	998
13	BIHAR	DEOGHAR	14	960	40	ORISSA	SAMBALPUR	30	995
14	ASSAM	SONITPUR	11	961	39	W.BENGAL	MALDAH	7	994
15	W.BENGAL	PURULIYA	21	962	38	ASSAM	MARIGAON	16	994
16	ASSAM	KOKRAJHAR	43	963	37	ASSAM	NALBARI	18	989
17	ASSAM	LAKHIMPUR	25	964	36	ASSAM	BONGAIGAON	19	987
18	W.BENGAL	WEST DINAJPUR	11	968	35	BIHAR	PURBI SINGHBHUM	51	983
19	W.BENGAL	MEDINIPUR	9	969	34	ASSAM	DARRANG	18	983
20	ASSAM	JORHAT	14	972	33	W.BENGAL	BARDDHAMAN	8	982

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.

Note: % refers to proportion of STs in the population.

List R5

20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION RURAL DISTRICTS BASED ON FEMALE LITERACY							
Worst Districts				Best Districts			
RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	FLIT	RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	FLIT
1	BIHAR	KISHANGANJ	8	94	W.BENGAL	MEDINIPUR	55
2	ORISSA	KORAPUT	8	93	ASSAM	SIBSAGAR	54
3	BIHAR	PASHCHIM CHAMPARAN	11	92	ASSAM	JORHAT	53
4	BIHAR	PURBA CHAMPARAN	12	91	W.BENGAL	HUGLI	51
5	BIHAR	GIRIDIH	12	90	W.BENGAL	HOWRAH	50
6	BIHAR	ARARIA	12	89	ORISSA	CUTTACK	48
7	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	12	88	ASSAM	GOLAGHAT	48
8	BIHAR	SAHARSA	13	87	ASSAM	LAKHIMPUR	48
9	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	13	86	W.BENGAL	BARDDHAMAN	46
10	BIHAR	KATI HAR	13	85	ASSAM	KAMRUP	46
11	BIHAR	SAHIBGANJ	13	84	ASSAM	CACHAR	45
12	BIHAR	DEOGHAR	13	83	ORISSA	PURI	45
13	BIHAR	PURNIA	13	82	ASSAM	NALBARI	44
14	BIHAR	SITAMARHI	14	81	ORISSA	BALESHWAR	44
15	BIHAR	PALAMU	14	80	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	43
16	BIHAR	HAZARIBAG	14	79	ASSAM	NAGAON	43
17	BIHAR	DUMKA	15	78	W.BENGAL	NORTH 24 PARAGANAS	42
18	BIHAR	PASHCHIMI SINGHBHUM	16	77	ASSAM	KARIMGANJ	41
19	BIHAR	MADHUBANI	16	76	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	41
20	BIHAR	GOPALGANJ	17	75	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	39

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.

There are 52 rural eastern region districts with more than 5 per cent scheduled tribe population. A majority of the tribal population lives in Orissa and Assam. All southern and most of northern Orissa, record favourable demographic balance with more ST women. South Bihar districts of Gumla, Purbi and Paschimi Singhbhum have relatively better ST sex ratios – while 5 other districts of the same region (Hazaribagh, Dhanbad, Giridih, Palamu and Deoghar) are prominent for low SRST (see List R4).

Literacy rates among females are very low in the districts of Bihar along with Koraput and Kalahandi of Orissa. The regions displaying better literacy levels are coastal Orissa, eastern plains of Assam and central plains of West Bengal (see List R5).

Gender differences in literacy levels are striking in Bihar, with only Sahibganj of south Bihar figuring among the best districts list (see List R6). Koraput district of southern Orissa displays low disparity levels. The lowest discrimination levels are witnessed in Nadia and Murshidabad from the eastern plains of West Bengal. A large number of Assam's districts are among this list showing lower degree of discrimination across gender in education.

List R6

20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION RURAL DISTRICTS BASED ON GENDER GAP IN LITERACY							
Worst Districts				Best Districts			
RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	LGAP	RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	LGAP
1	W.BENGAL	PURULIYA	40	94	W.BENGAL	NADIA	16
2	BIHAR	BHOJPUR	39	93	ASSAM	SIBSAGAR	16
3	BIHAR	DHANBAD	39	92	ASSAM	NAGAON	17
4	BIHAR	SARAN	38	91	ASSAM	MARIGAON	17
5	ORISSA	PHULBANI	37	90	W.BENGAL	MURSHIDABAD	17
6	BIHAR	JEHANABAD	37	89	ASSAM	GOLAGHAT	17
7	BIHAR	SIWAN	37	88	ASSAM	JORHAT	18
8	ORISSA	BALANGIR	36	87	ASSAM	GOALPARA	18
9	BIHAR	DEOGHAR	36	86	ORISSA	KORAPUT	18
10	BIHAR	GIRIDIH	36	85	ASSAM	DARRANG	18
11	BIHAR	AURANGABAD	36	84	ASSAM	SONITPUR	19
12	BIHAR	ROHTAS	36	83	ASSAM	KOKRAJHAR	19
13	BIHAR	GOPALGANJ	34	82	ASSAM	DHUBRI	19
14	ORISSA	GANJAM	34	81	ASSAM	BARPETA	20
15	BIHAR	PATNA	34	80	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	20
16	BIHAR	NAWADA	33	79	ASSAM	LAKHIMPUR	20
17	BIHAR	PASHCHIMI SINGHBHUM	33	78	ASSAM	KARIMGANJ	20
18	BIHAR	NALANDA	33	77	ASSAM	BONGAIGAON	20
19	BIHAR	PURBI SINGHBHUM	33	76	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	20
20	BIHAR	HAZARIBAG	33	75	BIHAR	SAHIBGANJ	20

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.

List R7

20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION RURAL DISTRICTS BASED ON INFANT MORTALITY RATES AMONG FEMALES							
Worst Districts				Best Districts			
RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	IMRF	RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	IMRF
1	ORISSA	BALESHWAR	197	94	BIHAR	DHANBAD	32
2	ORISSA	PHULBANI	135	93	W.BENGAL	HUGLI	37
3	ORISSA	SAMBALPUR	132	92	BIHAR	GOPALGANJ	52
4	ORISSA	PURI	116	91	BIHAR	PURBI SINGHBHUM	53
5	ORISSA	CUTTACK	116	90	ASSAM	JORHAT	54
6	BIHAR	SITAMARHI	114	89	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	55
7	ORISSA	KORAPUT	110	88	W.BENGAL	PURULIYA	58
8	ORISSA	BALANGIR	109	87	W.BENGAL	BARDDHAMAN	60
9	ORISSA	DHENKANAL	109	86	BIHAR	HAZARIBAG	60
10	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	109	85	W.BENGAL	BANKURA	61
11	ORISSA	KENDUJHAR	109	84	BIHAR	VAISHALI	61
12	W.BENGAL	MALDAH	109	83	BIHAR	RANCHI	61
13	ASSAM	DHUBRI	109	82	W.BENGAL	DARJILING	62
14	ORISSA	GANJAM	107	81	ASSAM	SIBSAGAR	63
15	BIHAR	KISHANGANJ	103	80	ASSAM	GOLAGHAT	63
16	ASSAM	MARIGAON	103	79	W.BENGAL	HOWRAH	63
17	BIHAR	DEOGHAR	102	78	BIHAR	SARAN	65
18	BIHAR	PALAMU	102	77	ASSAM	TINSUKIA	66
19	ORISSA	SUNDARGARH	101	76	BIHAR	KHAGARIA	67
20	ASSAM	DARRANG	100	75	BIHAR	DUMKA	68

Source: Rajan and Mohanachandran, 1998.

List R8

20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION RURAL DISTRICTS BASED ON GENDER DIFFERENCES IN INFANT MORTALITY RATES							
Worst Districts				Best Districts			
RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	IMRD	RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	IMRD
1	ORISSA	BALESHWAR	81	94	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	-28
2	BIHAR	SITAMARHI	36	93	BIHAR	RANCHI	-18
3	BIHAR	DARBHANGA	35	92	ASSAM	KARIMGANJ	-13
4	W.BENGAL	DARJILING	33	91	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	-12
5	BIHAR	PURBA CHAMPARAN	29	90	W.BENGAL	WEST DINAJPUR	-11
6	ORISSA	SAMBALPUR	27	89	ASSAM	SIBSAGAR	-10
7	BIHAR	MADHUBANI	27	88	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILL	-10
8	BIHAR	BEGUSARAI	26	87	ASSAM	NALBARI	-10
9	BIHAR	NAWADA	24	86	ASSAM	HAILAKANDI	-10
10	BIHAR	SAMASTIPUR	24	85	ASSAM	BARPETA	-10
11	BIHAR	SAHARSA	23	84	ASSAM	DHUBRI	-10
12	BIHAR	GAYA	23	83	ASSAM	GOLAGHAT	-9
13	BIHAR	BHOJPUR	23	82	W.BENGAL	HUGLI	-8
14	BIHAR	PALAMU	22	81	W.BENGAL	PURULIYA	-8
15	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	22	80	ASSAM	KAMRUP	-8
16	BIHAR	MUNGER	22	79	BIHAR	ARARIA	-6
17	BIHAR	SIWAN	22	78	ASSAM	BONGAIGAON	-6
18	BIHAR	AURANGABAD	21	77	ASSAM	CACHAR	-5
19	BIHAR	LOHARDAGA	20	76	ORISSA	GANJAM	-5
20	BIHAR	PASHCHIM CHAMPARAN	20	75	ORISSA	CUTTACK	-4

Source: Calculated from Rajan and Mohanachandran, 1998.

As far as health indicators are concerned, infant mortality rates among females is very high in all districts of Orissa. Except for Mayurbhanj in the northern part of the state, all other districts have an IMRF above 100. Among the relatively better districts are nine from Bihar, six from West Bengal and 5 from Assam's eastern plains region (see List R7).

The gender differences in IMRs are worst in the northern and central parts of Bihar. Assam once again does not figure here, reflecting lower disparity across gender (see List R8). In fact, a number of districts record a negative IMRD, that is, higher male infant mortality as compared to female deaths. This is the case from 24 districts in the entire region. Another six districts record IMRD as zero implying similar levels of infant mortality across gender.

As age advances, the gender disparity becomes more stark with child mortality rate among females increasing. This occurs in all the eastern states, although Orissa is the worst with high CMRF. Districts of north Bihar such as Kishanganj, Maldah from eastern plains of West Bengal and districts of Assam's western plains record high CMRF and all these districts are geographically proximate to each other (see List R9).



List R9

20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION RURAL DISTRICTS BASED ON CHILD MORTALITY RATES AMONG FEMALES							
Worst Districts				Best Districts			
RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	CMRF	RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	CMRF
1	ORISSA	BALESHWAR	341	94	BIHAR	DHANBAD	44
2	ORISSA	PHULBANI	215	93	W.BENGAL	HUGLI	49
3	ORISSA	SAMBALPUR	210	92	BIHAR	PURBI SINGHBHUM	65
4	ORISSA	PURI	167	91	ASSAM	JORHAT	67
5	ORISSA	KORAPUT	165	90	BIHAR	GOPALGANJ	75
6	ORISSA	BALANGIR	163	89	W.BENGAL	BARDDHAMAN	76
7	ORISSA	DHENKANAL	163	88	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	77
8	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	163	87	W.BENGAL	BANKURA	78
9	ORISSA	KENDUJHAR	162	86	W.BENGAL	HOWRAH	78
10	BIHAR	SITAMARHI	161	85	ASSAM	SIBSAGAR	80
11	ASSAM	DHUBRI	161	84	W.BENGAL	PURULIYA	80
12	ORISSA	GANJAM	159	83	BIHAR	SARAN	84
13	BIHAR	KISHANGANJ	158	82	BIHAR	VAISHALI	84
14	ORISSA	CUTTACK	158	81	BIHAR	DUMKA	85
15	W.BENGAL	MALDAH	157	80	ASSAM	TINSUKIA	86
16	ASSAM	MARIGAON	153	79	ASSAM	GOLAGHAT	88
17	BIHAR	DEOGHAR	150	78	BIHAR	BHOJPUR	91
18	ORISSA	SUNDARGARH	148	77	W.BENGAL	DARJILING	94
19	ASSAM	DARRANG	146	76	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	97
20	ASSAM	BONGAIGAON	142	75	BIHAR	HAZARIBAG	97

Source: Rajan and Mohanachandran, 1998.

List R10

20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION RURAL DISTRICTS BASED ON GENDER DIFFERENCES IN CHILD MORTALITY RATES							
Worst Districts				Best Districts			
RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	CMRD	RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	CMRD
1	ORISSA	BALESHWAR	167	94	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	-48
2	BIHAR	SITAMARHI	57	93	ORISSA	DHENKANAL	-30
3	ORISSA	SAMBALPUR	57	92	ORISSA	CUTTACK	-23
4	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	51	91	BIHAR	ARARIA	-22
5	BIHAR	PURBA CHAMPARAN	48	90	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	-20
6	BIHAR	DARBHANGA	47	89	ASSAM	KARIMGANJ	-16
7	BIHAR	MUNGER	47	88	ASSAM	SIBSAGAR	-15
8	BIHAR	BEGUSARAI	46	87	ASSAM	HAILAKANDI	-15
9	BIHAR	MADHUBANI	45	86	ASSAM	SONITPUR	-12
10	BIHAR	SAMASTIPUR	44	85	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	-11
11	WEST BENGAL	DARJILING	44	84	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	-10
12	BIHAR	NAWADA	42	83	ASSAM	JORHAT	-9
13	BIHAR	PATNA	41	82	ASSAM	NALBARI	-9
14	BIHAR	GAYA	41	81	ASSAM	BONGAIGAON	-9
15	BIHAR	SAHARSA	41	80	ASSAM	DHUBRI	-9
16	BIHAR	MUZAFFARPUR	40	79	ASSAM	TINSUKIA	-8
17	BIHAR	NALANDA	38	78	ASSAM	BARPETA	-8
18	BIHAR	DEOGHAR	37	77	ASSAM	GOLAGHAT	-7
19	BIHAR	ROHTAS	36	76	ASSAM	KAMRUP	-6
20	BIHAR	SIWAN	36	75	ORISSA	GANJAM	-6

Source: Calculated from Rajan and Mohanachandran, 1998.

List R11

20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION RURAL DISTRICTS BASED ON MEAN AGE AT MARRIAGE AMONG FEMALES							
Worst Districts				Best Districts			
RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	MAMF	RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	MAMF
1	BIHAR	DEOGHAR	15.48	94	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	19.11
2	BIHAR	NAWADA	15.81	93	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	19.04
3	BIHAR	GIRIDIH	16.08	92	ASSAM	SIBSAGAR	18.98
4	BIHAR	GAYA	16.27	91	ASSAM	JORHAT	18.94
5	W.BENGAL	MURSHIDABAD	16.40	90	ORISSA	SUNDARGARH	18.87
6	BIHAR	HAZARIBAG	16.41	89	W.BENGAL	DARJILING	18.86
7	BIHAR	MUNGER	16.41	88	ORISSA	KENDUJHAR	18.86
8	W.BENGAL	NADIA	16.43	87	ASSAM	GOLAGHAT	18.82
9	W.BENGAL	NORTH 24 PARAGANAS	16.43	86	BIHAR	GUMLA	18.81
10	BIHAR	PALAMU	16.48	85	ASSAM	KARBI ANGLONG	18.72
11	BIHAR	BHAGALPUR	16.50	84	ASSAM	TINSUKIA	18.60
12	BIHAR	BEGUSARAI	16.52	83	ASSAM	SONITPUR	18.51
13	W.BENGAL	PURULIYA	16.57	82	BIHAR	PASHCHIMI SINGHBHUM	18.50
14	BIHAR	DHANBAD	16.60	81	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	18.45
15	W.BENGAL	MEDINIPUR	16.63	80	BIHAR	MADHUBANI	18.39
16	BIHAR	NALANDA	16.64	79	ASSAM	CACHAR	18.39
17	W.BENGAL	KOCH BIHAR	16.66	78	BIHAR	KISHANGANJ	18.27
18	BIHAR	ROHTAS	16.66	77	ASSAM	LAKHIMPUR	18.23
19	BIHAR	GODDA	16.66	76	ORISSA	PHULBANI	18.22
20	W.BENGAL	MALDAH	16.70	75	ORISSA	CUTTACK	18.21

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.

Apart from Orissa, all the other three states have some districts which are relatively better in terms of CMRF. There is considerable overlap with the IMRF list. Districts which record excess male child mortality rates are 30 in number spread across all states – 19 in Assam, 3 in Bihar, 4 each in Orissa and West Bengal. So, once again Assam stands out as the least discriminating state in the region.

The age at marriage among females although moving up to more acceptable levels, is still worrisome in some districts of Bihar and West Bengal. Assam and Orissa are relatively better off with the female mean age at marriage being above 18 years in a large number of districts (see List R11).

Work participation among females as main workers is generally low in the entire region. The lowest FWPRs are recorded in central plains of West Bengal, north Bihar, western plains of Assam and coastal Orissa regions. The gender gap in work participation is high in the same regions. Some districts of these regions however, have higher work participation levels as well. Ganjam of coastal Orissa, Sonitpur of Assam's western plains, Madhepura of north Bihar, are some of the instances (see Lists R12 and R13).

List R12

20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION RURAL DISTRICTS BASED ON FEMALE WORK PARTICIPATION RATES							
Worst Districts				Best Districts			
RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	FWPR	RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	FWPR
1	W.BENGAL	HOWRAH	3	94	ASSAM	KARBI ANGLONG	34
2	W.BENGAL	SOUTH 24 PARAGANAS	3	93	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	34
3	BIHAR	SITAMARHI	4	92	ASSAM	TINSUKIA	33
4	ORISSA	CUTTACK	4	91	ASSAM	SIBSAGAR	32
5	W.BENGAL	NADIA	4	90	BIHAR	LOHARDAGA	32
6	ORISSA	BALESHWAR	5	89	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	31
7	W.BENGAL	NORTH 24 PARAGANAS	5	88	W.BENGAL	DARJILING	29
8	BIHAR	VAISHALI	5	87	ASSAM	JORHAT	29
9	ASSAM	DHUBRI	5	86	ORISSA	KORAPUT	28
10	ASSAM	BARPETA	5	85	BIHAR	PASHCHIMI SINGHBHUM	28
11	ORISSA	PURI	5	84	ASSAM	GOLAGHAT	28
12	BIHAR	KISHANGANJ	6	83	BIHAR	GUMLA	28
13	BIHAR	SARAN	6	82	ORISSA	MAYURBHANJ	27
14	BIHAR	SIWAN	6	81	W.BENGAL	PURULIYA	27
15	ASSAM	KARIMGANJ	6	80	BIHAR	RANCHI	27
16	ASSAM	KAMRUP	7	79	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	27
17	BIHAR	MUZAFFARPUR	7	78	ORISSA	GANJAM	27
18	BIHAR	SAMASTIPUR	7	77	ORISSA	PHULBANI	27
19	ASSAM	MARIGAON	7	76	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	26
20	BIHAR	DHANBAD	7	75	ASSAM	SONITPUR	24

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.

List R13

20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION RURAL DISTRICTS BASED ON GENDER GAP IN WORK PARTICIPATION RATES							
Worst Districts				Best Districts			
RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	WGAP	RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	WGAP
1	BIHAR	KISHANGANJ	68	94	ASSAM	SIBSAGAR	24
2	BIHAR	SITAMARHI	61	93	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	25
3	ASSAM	DHUBRI	60	92	ASSAM	JORHAT	26
4	W.BENGAL	NADIA	59	91	ASSAM	TINSUKIA	26
5	W.BENGAL	KOCH BIHAR	59	90	W.BENGAL	DARJILING	27
6	W.BENGAL	NORTH 24 PARAGANAS	58	89	ASSAM	GOLAGHAT	30
7	ASSAM	MARIGAON	58	88	BIHAR	LOHARDAGA	30
8	W.BENGAL	HOWRAH	58	87	ASSAM	KARBI ANGLONG	30
9	ORISSA	PURI	57	86	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	32
10	W.BENGAL	WEST DINAJPUR	57	85	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	32
11	W.BENGAL	MURSHIDABAD	56	84	ASSAM	LAKHIMPUR	33
12	ORISSA	BALESHWAR	56	83	W.BENGAL	PURULIYA	34
13	W.BENGAL	SOUTH 24 PARAGANAS	56	82	BIHAR	GUMLA	37
14	ASSAM	BARPETA	55	81	BIHAR	PASHCHIMI SINGHBHUM	38
15	BIHAR	PURBA CHAMPARAN	55	80	BIHAR	RANCHI	38
16	ORISSA	BALANGIR	55	79	ASSAM	SONITPUR	38
17	BIHAR	MUZAFFARPUR	55	78	ORISSA	GANJAM	38
18	W.BENGAL	BIRBHUM	54	77	BIHAR	NALANDA	39
19	W.BENGAL	HUGLI	54	76	ORISSA	MAYURBHANJ	39
20	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	54	75	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	39

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.

Similarly, some other districts are highlighted for a high gap in work participation rates across gender too. Koch Bihar of West Bengal displays a high gender gap in WPRs, although it is from the Himalayan region where women's work involvement is traditionally high. Puri of coastal Orissa is among the districts with a high gap in WPRs, while Ganjam of the same region is among the better off districts. Madhepura of north Bihar has a lower gender difference in work participation, while Kishanganj, Sitamarhi, Purba Champaran and Muzaffarpur are the areas where female participation as main workers is very low relative to the labour market participation of men.

## 4.2 The Urban Picture

Some indicators present a clear positive image in urban locations, although these areas have their own sets of problems. Education and health of urban women and girls in the aggregate shows a better position than their rural counterparts. However, sex ratios and work participation rates reflect an adverse situation for women.

Urban districts of the eastern region, as a whole, have a more unequal demographic balance, with more males. Districts of Assam figure prominently, along with Bihar districts, among the 20 worst ones by sex ratio for population above six years. The more developed and prosperous districts of West Bengal (Calcutta and Howrah) and Orissa (Cuttack and Puri) figure in this list (see List U1).

**List U1**

<b>20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION URBAN DISTRICTS BASED ON SEX RATIO</b>							
<b>Worst Districts</b>				<b>Best Districts</b>			
<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>SR&gt;6</b>	<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>SR&gt;6</b>
1	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	676	95	W.BENGAL	NADIA	961
2	ASSAM	GOLAGHAT	742	94	BIHAR	LOHARDAGA	959
3	BIHAR	DHANBAD	746	93	W.BENGAL	MURSHIDABAD	958
4	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	753	92	W.BENGAL	KOCH BIHAR	950
5	ASSAM	TINSUKIA	764	91	ORISSA	GANJAM	945
6	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	765	90	ASSAM	HAILAKANDI	944
7	ASSAM	KAMRUP	769	89	ORISSA	KORAPUT	936
8	BIHAR	HAZARIBAG	772	88	W.BENGAL	BANKURA	933
9	ASSAM	KARBI ANGLONG	773	87	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	922
10	ASSAM	SIBSAGAR	774	86	W.BENGAL	MALDAH	921
11	ASSAM	LAKHIMPUR	775	85	ASSAM	DHUBRI	919
12	W.BENGAL	CALCUTTA	784	84	ASSAM	CACHAR	917
13	ORISSA	PURI	791	83	ASSAM	GOALPARA	915
14	BIHAR	SAHARSA	800	82	W.BENGAL	BIRBHUM	912
15	ORISSA	CUTTACK	800	81	ASSAM	BARPETA	912
16	ORISSA	DHENKANAL	802	80	ORISSA	BALANGIR	912
17	BIHAR	GIRIDIH	805	79	ASSAM	KARIMGANJ	909
18	W.BENGAL	HOWRAH	806	78	W.BENGAL	JALPAIGURI	908
19	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	807	77	W.BENGAL	MEDINIPUR	897
20	BIHAR	GODDA	809	76	BIHAR	GOPALGANJ	891

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.

The best sex ratios among population above six years are noted in the districts of West Bengal and Assam, along with a few districts of the other two eastern states, figuring in the 20 best districts list by this indicator. As mentioned earlier, disturbances introduced by factors such as migration affect the indicator. A more reliable sex ratio is one among children.

At both extremes of the child sex ratio spectrum, urban districts of Bihar figure, with Madhubani of north Bihar reporting the best CSR of 1012, while Deoghar in the southern part records 902 girls for every 1000 boys (see List U2). Of the 20 best and worst CSR districts, an almost equal number of Bihar districts are listed (11 and 12 respectively).

Among the scheduled castes, urban districts of Bihar and Assam have the worst sex ratios, while Orissa and West Bengal figure among the best districts list. Koraput and Kalahandi are the only two among all 95 eastern districts with more than 1000 SC women (see List U3). Most of the Assam districts that fall in the worst SRSC list have a small proportion of SC populations as opposed to those from Bihar. Bihar is prominent by not appearing in the 20 best SRSC list.

The proportion of scheduled tribes in urban locations is above 5 per cent only in 26 of the 95 districts (see List U4). STs are concentrated in north and south Orissa, south Bihar, Darjeeling of West Bengal, and the different regions of Assam. Lohardaga of south Bihar reports 1288 women per 1000 men and is the only district, along with Koraput of Orissa, with a positive sex ratio among STs.

**List U2**

<b>20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION URBAN DISTRICTS BASED ON CHILD SEX RATIO</b>							
<b>Worst Districts</b>				<b>Best Districts</b>			
<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>CSR</b>	<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>CSR</b>
1	BIHAR	DEOGHAR	902	95	BIHAR	MADHUBANI	1012
2	ASSAM	MARIGAON	922	94	W.BENGAL	BIRBHUM	1007
3	BIHAR	PATNA	926	93	BIHAR	GODDA	1003
4	ASSAM	DARRANG	926	92	ASSAM	SIBSAGAR	991
5	BIHAR	PURBA CHAMPARAN	926	91	BIHAR	AURANGABAD	989
6	BIHAR	JEHANABAD	928	90	BIHAR	ARARIA	987
7	ORISSA	SUNDARGARH	930	89	ORISSA	KORAPUT	987
8	ORISSA	BALANGIR	931	88	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	984
9	BIHAR	MUZAFFARPUR	931	87	BIHAR	KATIHAR	983
10	BIHAR	PASHCHIM CHAMPARAN	932	86	BIHAR	NAWADA	982
11	BIHAR	SAHARSA	936	85	BIHAR	GUMLA	981
12	BIHAR	SAMASTIPUR	937	84	BIHAR	SIWAN	978
13	W.BENGAL	MALDAH	940	83	W.BENGAL	DARJEELING	977
14	ORISSA	PURI	941	82	BIHAR	PASHCHIMI SINGHBHUM	975
15	ASSAM	CACHAR	941	81	BIHAR	LOHARDAGA	972
16	BIHAR	MUNGER	942	80	ASSAM	BARPETA	972
17	ORISSA	CUTTACK	942	79	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	972
18	BIHAR	BHOJPUR	943	78	ASSAM	KOKRAJHAR	971
19	BIHAR	VAISHALI	943	77	ASSAM	GOALPARA	971
20	BIHAR	DHANBAD	945	76	W.BENGAL	JALPAIGURI	971

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.

**List U3**

<b>20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION URBAN DISTRICTS BY SEX RATIO AMONG SCHEDULED CASTES</b>									
<b>Worst Districts</b>					<b>Best Districts</b>				
<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SRSC</b>	<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SRSC</b>
1	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	3	652	95	ORISSA	KORAPUT	17	1008
2	ASSAM	KARBI ANGLONG	3	751	94	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	16	1007
3	ASSAM	GOLAGHAT	6	768	93	ORISSA	KOCH BIHAR	19	994
4	BIHAR	DHANBAD	14	774	92	ORISSA	GANJAM	13	993
5	W.BENGAL	CALCUTTA	6	775	91	W.BENGAL	BANKURA	25	964
6	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	4	783	90	ASSAM	KARIMGANJ	16	963
7	ASSAM	TINSUKIA	5	796	89	W.BENGAL	BIRBHUM	24	961
8	BIHAR	HAZARIBAG	13	815	88	ASSAM	CACHAR	10	959
9	BIHAR	KHAGARIA	7	830	87	W.BENGAL	MURSHIDABAD	17	957
10	BIHAR	BHOJPUR	9	844	86	W.BENGAL	MEDINIPUR	14	955
11	ASSAM	DARRANG	12	846	85	ORISSA	BALANGIR	15	954
12	BIHAR	PATNA	10	851	84	ORISSA	PHULBANI	20	952
13	BIHAR	PURBA CHAMPARAN	7	852	83	ASSAM	BARPETA	14	952
14	ASSAM	SONITPUR	8	855	82	W.BENGAL	NADIA	23	950
15	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	6	856	81	W.BENGAL	PURULIYA	21	949
16	BIHAR	SARAN	10	858	80	ORISSA	SAMBALPUR	17	944
17	BIHAR	PALAMU	11	859	79	ASSAM	GOALPARA	14	943
18	BIHAR	JEHANABAD	15	860	78	W.BENGAL	MALDAH	14	940
19	BIHAR	BHAGALPUR	7	864	77	W.BENGAL	JALPAIGURI	25	935
20	BIHAR	GODDA	5	867	76	ORISSA	KENDUJHAR	14	933

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.

Note: % refers to proportion of SCs in the population

**List U4**

<b>SEX RATIO AMONG SCHEDULED TRIBES FOR URBAN DISTRICTS WITH MORE THAN 5 PERCENT ST POPULATION</b>				
<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SRST</b>
1	ASSAM	LAKHIMPUR	5	672
2	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	20	818
3	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	34	856
4	ORISSA	DHENKANAL	6	871
5	BIHAR	PALAMU	5	881
6	ASSAM	KARBI ANGLONG	32	884
7	ORISSA	PHULBANI	9	896
8	BIHAR	HAZARIBAG	9	904
9	ASSAM	MARIGAON	11	908
10	ORISSA	BALESHWAR	6	912
11	ORISSA	MAYURBHANJ	18	914
12	BIHAR	PASHCHIMI SINGHBHUM	20	917
13	ORISSA	KENDUJHAR	24	922
14	BIHAR	GODDA	5	932
15	BIHAR	RANCHI	21	932
16	BIHAR	PURBI SINGHBHUM	9	933
17	ORISSA	SAMBALPUR	13	946
18	ORISSA	SUNDARGARH	20	949
19	ORISSA	BALANGIR	5	954
20	BIHAR	DUMKA	6	956
21	W.BENGAL	DARJEELING	5	968
22	ASSAM	KOKRAJHAR	15	969
23	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	7	975
24	BIHAR	GUMLA	37	981
25	ORISSA	KORAPUT	14	1018
26	BIHAR	LOHARDAGA	17	1288

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.

Note: % refers to proportion of STs in the Population.

With 18 of the 20 worst female literacy districts belonging to Bihar, this is the state where immediate intervention is required (see List U5). Of the 18, 12 districts are that of north Bihar, while another five are located in Central Bihar. Two districts of Orissa, Kalahandi and Kendujhar, figure in the list. Among the best female literacy districts, there are 15 from Assam, four from West Bengal and one (Puri) from Orissa. Of the ten eastern plains districts of Assam, nine of them report more than three fourth of their women to be literates.

**List U5**

<b>20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION URBAN DISTRICTS BASED ON FEMALE LITERACY</b>							
<b>Worst Districts</b>				<b>Best Districts</b>			
<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>FLIT</b>	<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>FLIT</b>
1	BIHAR	GOPALGANJ	36	95	ASSAM	KARIMGANJ	84
2	BIHAR	KISHANGANJ	36	94	ASSAM	SIBSAGAR	81
3	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	37	93	ASSAM	HAILAKANDI	80
4	BIHAR	SAHARSA	41	92	ASSAM	GOLAGHAT	80
5	BIHAR	MADHUBANI	42	91	ASSAM	CACHAR	78
6	BIHAR	SITAMARHI	43	90	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	77
7	BIHAR	VAISHALI	43	89	ASSAM	SONITPUR	76
8	BIHAR	PASHCHIM CHAMPARAN	43	88	ASSAM	JORHAT	76
9	BIHAR	JEHANABAD	44	87	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	76
10	BIHAR	SARAN	44	86	ASSAM	NAGAON	75
11	BIHAR	ARARIA	45	85	ASSAM	KAMRUP	74
12	BIHAR	BEGUSARAI	46	84	ASSAM	BONGAIGAON	74
13	BIHAR	PURBA CHAMPARAN	47	83	ASSAM	TINSUKIA	74
14	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	47	82	ASSAM	NALBARI	73
15	BIHAR	KHAGARIA	48	81	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	73
16	BIHAR	SIWAN	49	80	W.BENGAL	NORTH 24 PARAGANAS	72
17	BIHAR	AURANGABAD	50	79	W.BENGAL	CALCUTTA	72
18	BIHAR	MUNGER	51	78	W.BENGAL	KOCH BIHAR	72
19	BIHAR	GIRIDIH	51	77	W.BENGAL	DARJEELING	71
20	ORISSA	KENDUJHAR	51	76	ORISSA	PURI	71

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.

It is only expected that the districts of Assam reveal low levels of gender disparity in literacy rates, while the reverse holds true for Bihar (see List U6). High gender disparity in literacy reflects the play of attitudinal and socio-cultural factors in constraining women's education, over and above availability and infrastructural factors.

Districts of urban Bihar and Assam, especially north Bihar and western plains of Assam, report high infant mortality rates among females. The Baleshwar (coastal), Dhenkanal (northern) and Koraput (southern) districts of Orissa, along with the Birbhum and South 24 Parganas of West Bengal, figure in the worst IMRF list (see List U7).

Bihar has an equal number of districts in the best IMRF list as well, the only difference being that most of these districts are from the southern part of the state.

Seven districts of West Bengal, and four from Assam, record low female infant mortality rates.

**List U6**

<b>20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION URBAN DISTRICTS BASED ON GENDER GAP IN LITERACY</b>							
<b>Worst Districts</b>				<b>Best Districts</b>			
<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>LGAP</b>	<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>LGAP</b>
1	BIHAR	GOPALGANJ	29	95	ASSAM	SIBSAGAR	5
2	BIHAR	SARAN	29	94	ASSAM	KARIMGANJ	7
3	BIHAR	JEHANABAD	29	93	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	7
4	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	29	92	ASSAM	JORHAT	7
5	BIHAR	MADHUBANI	28	91	ASSAM	SONITPUR	8
6	BIHAR	AURANGABAD	27	90	ASSAM	GOLAGHAT	8
7	BIHAR	SAHARSA	27	89	ASSAM	TINSUKIA	9
8	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	27	88	ASSAM	HAILAKANDI	10
9	BIHAR	GIRIDIH	27	87	W.BENGAL	CALCUTTA	10
10	ORISSA	BALANGIR	26	86	ASSAM	CACHAR	10
11	BIHAR	BHOJPUR	26	85	W.BENGAL	DARJEELING	11
12	BIHAR	MUNGER	26	84	ASSAM	NAGAON	11
13	ORISSA	PHULBANI	26	83	W.BENGAL	KOCH BIHAR	11
14	BIHAR	NAWADA	26	82	ASSAM	KAMRUP	11
15	BIHAR	SIWAN	25	81	W.BENGAL	WEST DINAJPUR	12
16	BIHAR	SITAMARHI	25	80	ASSAM	LAKHIMPUR	12
17	BIHAR	ROHTAS	25	79	W.BENGAL	NORTH 24 PARAGANAS	12
18	BIHAR	VAISHALI	25	78	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	12
19	BIHAR	KISHANGANJ	24	77	W.BENGAL	HUGLI	12
20	ORISSA	KENDUJHAR	24	76	ASSAM	DARRANG	12

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.



List U7

20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION URBAN DISTRICTS BASED ON INFANT MORTALITY RATES AMONG FEMALES							
Worst Districts				Best Districts			
RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	IMRF	RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	IMRF
1	ASSAM	KOKRAJHAR	177	95	BIHAR	DUMKA	16
2	ASSAM	BONGAIGAON	147	94	BIHAR	KHAGARIA	17
3	BIHAR	SARAN	137	93	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	22
4	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	122	92	BIHAR	PURBI SINGHBHUM	22
5	ORISSA	BALESHWAR	110	91	W.BENGAL	CALCUTTA	26
6	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	101	90	W.BENGAL	HUGLI	29
7	BIHAR	DEOGHAR	100	89	BIHAR	GODDA	29
8	ASSAM	LAKHIMPUR	99	88	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	30
9	ASSAM	DHUBRI	96	87	BIHAR	DHANBAD	30
10	ORISSA	DHENKANAL	91	86	W.BENGAL	HOWRAH	32
11	BIHAR	SAMASTIPUR	90	85	BIHAR	SAHIBGANJ	32
12	ORISSA	KORAPUT	89	84	W.BENGAL	KOCH BIHAR	34
13	ASSAM	KARBI ANGLONG	88	83	ASSAM	SIBSAGAR	36
14	BIHAR	PALAMU	86	82	W.BENGAL	BANKURA	36
15	W.BENGAL	BIRBHUM	82	81	W.BENGAL	MEDINIPUR	38
16	BIHAR	ROHTAS	81	80	BIHAR	GUMLA	39
17	BIHAR	PURBA CHAMPARAN	81	79	W.BENGAL	PURULIYA	39
18	W.BENGAL	SOUTH 24 PARAGANAS	81	78	ASSAM	JORHAT	40
19	BIHAR	MADHUBANI	79	77	ASSAM	GOALPARA	42
20	ASSAM	MARIGAON	73	76	BIHAR	KATIHAR	42

Source: Rajan and Mohanachandran, 1998.

List U8

20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION URBAN DISTRICTS BASED ON GENDER DIFFERENCES IN INFANT MORTALITY RATES							
Worst Districts				Best Districts			
RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	IMRD	RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	IMRD
1	ASSAM	KOKRAJHAR	116	95	W.BENGAL	KOCH BIHAR	-62
2	BIHAR	SARAN	94	94	ORISSA	MAYURBHANJ	-45
3	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	58	93	BIHAR	SAHIBGANJ	-42
4	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	47	92	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	-36
5	BIHAR	DEOGHAR	44	91	ORISSA	PHULBANI	-31
6	ASSAM	KARBI ANGLONG	41	90	ASSAM	GOALPARA	-28
7	BIHAR	SAMASTIPUR	39	89	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	-25
8	BIHAR	MUNGER	29	88	BIHAR	PURNIA	-22
9	BIHAR	PURBA CHAMPARAN	28	87	ORISSA	KENDUJHAR	-21
10	BIHAR	PASHCHIM CHAMPARAN	28	86	ASSAM	MARIGAON	-20
11	BIHAR	RANCHI	27	85	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	-18
12	W.BENGAL	SOUTH 24 PARAGANAS	26	84	BIHAR	KATIHAR	-18
13	BIHAR	NAWADA	24	83	BIHAR	JEHANABAD	-18
14	ASSAM	LAKHIMPUR	23	82	ASSAM	DARRANG	-16
15	BIHAR	SAHARSA	23	81	ORISSA	CUTTACK	-16
16	BIHAR	ROHTAS	19	80	ORISSA	BALANGIR	-16
17	ASSAM	BONGAIGAON	18	79	BIHAR	GODDA	-14
18	W.BENGAL	BIRBHUM	18	78	ASSAM	NAGAON	-12
19	BIHAR	HAZARIBAG	18	77	ASSAM	HAILAKANDI	-12
20	BIHAR	GAYA	16	76	ASSAM	JORHAT	-11

Source: Calculated from Rajan and Mohanachandran, 1998.

List U9

20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION URBAN DISTRICTS BASED ON CHILD MORTALITY RATES AMONG FEMALES							
Worst Districts				Best Districts			
RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	CMRF	RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	CMRF
1	ASSAM	KOKRAJHAR	302	95	BIHAR	KHAGARIA	23
2	ASSAM	BONGAIGAON	239	94	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	25
3	BIHAR	SARAN	221	93	W.BENGAL	CALCUTTA	31
4	ORISSA	MAYURBHANJ	216	92	BIHAR	GODDA	34
5	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	187	91	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	35
6	ORISSA	BALESHWAR	165	90	BIHAR	DUMKA	35
7	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	156	89	BIHAR	DHANBAD	35
8	ASSAM	LAKHIMPUR	150	88	W.BENGAL	HUGLI	36
9	BIHAR	DEOGHAR	145	87	W.BENGAL	HOWRAH	37
10	ASSAM	DHUBRI	138	86	BIHAR	PURBI SINGHBHUM	38
11	ASSAM	KARBI ANGLONG	131	85	BIHAR	RANCHI	40
12	ORISSA	DHENKANAL	128	84	W.BENGAL	BANKURA	42
13	BIHAR	SAMASTIPUR	127	83	ASSAM	SIBSAGAR	43
14	ORISSA	KORAPUT	124	82	BIHAR	GUMLA	45
15	BIHAR	PALAMU	119	81	W.BENGAL	PURULIYA	45
16	W.BENGAL	BIRBHUM	114	80	W.BENGAL	MEDINIPUR	46
17	ORISSA	PHULBANI	114	79	ASSAM	JORHAT	48
18	ORISSA	BALANGIR	112	78	BIHAR	GOPALGANJ	49
19	BIHAR	ROHTAS	110	77	ASSAM	GOALPARA	50
20	BIHAR	PURBA CHAMPARAN	109	76	BIHAR	KATI HAR	50

Source: Rajan and Mohanachandran, 1998.

According to differential in mortality rate figures, gender bias is prominent among districts of Bihar. In terms of the magnitude of difference in mortality figures across gender, the Assam districts of Kokrajhar, Dhemaji and Karbi Anglong report much higher mortality rates among girls (see List U8). Of the 95 urban eastern districts, 34 record excess male mortality figures among infants. In another two districts, there is no difference in infant mortality rates across girls and boys. Among these 36 districts with non-excess female infant mortality, 14 are from Bihar, ten belong to Assam, eight from Orissa, and four from West Bengal.

Child mortality figures for girls are much higher than those reported during infancy. The districts of Assam, Bihar and Orissa record a high CMRF. The only district of West Bengal listed among the worst CMRF districts is Birbhum from the eastern plains. Among the 20 best CMRF districts, Orissa does not figure (see List U9).

A more or less similar picture emerges from the gender differences among CMRs as in the case of IMRs, with the exception of three districts of north Orissa figuring among the 20 worst CMRD districts. Most of the regions figure in the best CMRD list, other than two of the West Bengal regions – eastern and central plains (see List U10). Excess mortality among male children is recorded in 29 districts of the eastern region.

List U10

20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION URBAN DISTRICTS BASED ON GENDER DIFFERENCES IN CHILD MORTALITY RATES							
Worst Districts				Best Districts			
RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	CMRD	RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	CMRD
1	ASSAM	KOKRAJHAR	225	95	ASSAM	GOALPARA	-39
2	BIHAR	SARAN	170	94	ORISSA	KENDUJHAR	-35
3	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	112	93	ASSAM	MARIGAON	-33
4	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	90	92	ORISSA	CUTTACK	-32
5	BIHAR	DEOGHAR	76	91	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	-30
6	ASSAM	KARBI ANGLONG	70	90	BIHAR	SAHIBGANJ	-29
7	BIHAR	SAMASTIPUR	68	89	ORISSA	PHULBANI	-27
8	ORISSA	MAYURBHANJ	67	88	BIHAR	KATIHAR	-25
9	BIHAR	MUNGER	54	87	BIHAR	JEHANABAD	-24
10	ASSAM	LAKHIMPUR	53	86	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	-23
11	BIHAR	PASHCHIM CHAMPARAN	51	85	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	-23
12	BIHAR	SAHARSA	47	84	BIHAR	GODDA	-17
13	BIHAR	PURBA CHAMPARAN	45	83	BIHAR	PURNIA	-17
14	W.BENGAL	SOUTH 24 PARAGANAS	41	82	ASSAM	NAGAON	-16
15	ASSAM	BONGAIGAON	40	81	ASSAM	HAILAKANDI	-16
16	BIHAR	ROHTAS	31	80	ORISSA	DHENKANAL	-16
17	ORISSA	SAMBALPUR	31	79	W.BENGAL	KOCH BIHAR	-15
18	BIHAR	NAWADA	30	78	ORISSA	PURI	-14
19	ORISSA	SUNDARGARH	27	77	W.BENGAL	PURULIYA	-13
20	BIHAR	MUZAFFARPUR	27	76	ASSAM	JORHAT	-13

Source: Calculated from Rajan and Mohanachandran, 1998.

The low marriageable age of females is primarily noted in Bihar, with 19 of the 20 worst MAMF districts belonging to the state (see List U11). Murshidabad of West Bengal's eastern plains is the only district from another state in this list. More than one half of the 95 urban districts in the region have a mean age at marriage below the legally stipulated age limit, while 40 districts record an MAMF above 18 years, most of which belong to Assam.

Work participation rates are pretty low among urban females, especially in the 17 districts of Bihar. Ten of the north Bihar districts are among the worst FWPR districts, while two of the same region (Madhepura and Saharsa) fall in the best FWPR list (see List U12). Eight of Orissa's districts report relatively high FWPRs. Even the best FWPR reporting district – Dhemaji of Assam – has only one-fourth of its female population working as main workers.

**List U11**

<b>20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION URBAN DISTRICTS BASED ON MEAN AGE AT MARRIAGE AMONG FEMALES</b>							
<b>Worst Districts</b>				<b>Best Districts</b>			
<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>MAMF</b>	<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>MAMF</b>
1	BIHAR	BEGUSARAI	16.74	95	ASSAM	KARIMGANJ	19.60
2	BIHAR	NAWADA	16.77	94	ASSAM	SIBSAGAR	19.44
3	BIHAR	DEOGHAR	16.83	93	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	19.39
4	BIHAR	DUMKA	16.93	92	ASSAM	JORHAT	19.32
5	BIHAR	SAHARSA	16.99	91	ASSAM	CACHAR	19.28
6	BIHAR	GODDA	17.05	90	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	19.24
7	BIHAR	SAMASTIPUR	17.14	89	ASSAM	KAMRUP	19.11
8	BIHAR	PASHCHIM CHAMPARAN	17.15	88	W.BENGAL	CALCUTTA	19.05
9	BIHAR	AURANGABAD	17.15	87	ASSAM	GOLAGHAT	19.02
10	BIHAR	SITAMARHI	17.17	86	ASSAM	KARBI ANGLONG	19.02
11	BIHAR	VAISHALI	17.22	85	ASSAM	HAILAKANDI	19.01
12	BIHAR	MUNGER	17.25	84	ASSAM	SONITPUR	18.97
13	W.BENGAL	MURSHIDABAD	17.26	83	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	18.90
14	BIHAR	ROHTAS	17.27	82	ASSAM	BARPETA	18.76
15	BIHAR	MADHUBANI	17.28	81	W.BENGAL	DARJEELING	18.72
16	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	17.30	80	ASSAM	TINSUKIA	18.70
17	BIHAR	GIRIDIH	17.32	79	ORISSA	KENDUJHAR	18.61
18	BIHAR	SAHIBGANJ	17.33	78	BIHAR	GUMLA	18.54
19	BIHAR	PURBA CHAMPARAN	17.36	77	ASSAM	MARIGAON	18.53
20	BIHAR	GAYA	17.36	76	ORISSA	SUNDARGARH	18.51

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.

**List U12**

<b>20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION URBAN DISTRICTS BASED ON FEMALE WORK PARTICIPATION RATES</b>							
<b>Worst Districts</b>				<b>Best Districts</b>			
<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>FWPR</b>	<b>RANK</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>DISTRICT NAME</b>	<b>FWPR</b>
1	BIHAR	SITAMARHI	3	95	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	25
2	BIHAR	BHOJPUR	3	94	W.BENGAL	MURSHIDABAD	17
3	BIHAR	ROHTAS	3	93	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	13
4	BIHAR	SIWAN	3	92	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	12
5	BIHAR	SAHIBGANJ	3	91	ORISSA	KORAPUT	12
6	BIHAR	DEOGHAR	4	90	ORISSA	PHULBANI	11
7	BIHAR	VAISHALI	4	89	BIHAR	SAHARSA	11
8	BIHAR	SARAN	4	88	ASSAM	KARBI ANGLONG	10
9	BIHAR	KISHANGANJ	4	87	ASSAM	JORHAT	10
10	BIHAR	GOPALGANJ	4	86	ORISSA	BALANGIR	10
11	BIHAR	DARBHANGA	4	85	ASSAM	KAMRUP	10
12	W.BENGAL	HOWRAH	4	84	W.BENGAL	DARJEELING	10
13	BIHAR	KATI HAR	4	83	ORISSA	KALAHANDI	10
14	ASSAM	BARPETA	4	82	ORISSA	MAYURBHANJ	10
15	W.BENGAL	SOUTH 24 PARAGANAS	4	81	ORISSA	GANJAM	10
16	BIHAR	GODDA	4	80	ORISSA	KENDUJHAR	9
17	BIHAR	BEGUSARAI	4	79	ASSAM	LAKHIMPUR	9
18	BIHAR	SAMASTIPUR	4	78	W.BENGAL	KOCH BIHAR	9
19	BIHAR	DHANBAD	4	77	ASSAM	MARIGAON	9
20	BIHAR	MUZAFFARPUR	5	76	ORISSA	SAMBALPUR	9

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.

List U13

20 WORST AND BEST EASTERN REGION URBAN DISTRICTS BASED ON GENDER GAP IN WORK PARTICIPATION RATES							
Worst Districts				Best Districts			
RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	WGAP	RANK	STATE	DISTRICT NAME	WGAP
1	ASSAM	TINSUKIA	55	95	ASSAM	DHEMAJI	36
2	BIHAR	KISHANGANJ	55	94	BIHAR	MADHEPURA	37
3	W.BENGAL	HOWRAH	55	93	BIHAR	GUMLA	39
4	ASSAM	MARIGAON	55	92	W.BENGAL	MURSHIDABAD	40
5	ASSAM	GOLAGHAT	54	91	BIHAR	RANCHI	41
6	ASSAM	SONITPUR	52	90	BIHAR	SAHARSA	41
7	ASSAM	DARRANG	52	89	BIHAR	NALANDA	41
8	ASSAM	SIBSAGAR	52	88	BIHAR	GAYA	42
9	ASSAM	BONGAIGAON	52	87	BIHAR	LOHARDAGA	42
10	ASSAM	NAGAON	51	86	BIHAR	DARBHANGA	42
11	W.BENGAL	CALCUTTA	51	85	ORISSA	PHULBANI	43
12	ORISSA	DHENKANAL	51	84	ASSAM	NORTH CACHAR HILLS	43
13	BIHAR	SITAMARHI	51	83	ORISSA	GANJAM	43
14	ASSAM	NALBARI	51	82	BIHAR	MUNGER	43
15	ORISSA	CUTTACK	50	81	BIHAR	PATNA	43
16	ASSAM	KOKRAJHAR	50	80	BIHAR	MUZAFFARPUR	44
17	ASSAM	DHUBRI	50	79	W.BENGAL	DARJEELING	44
18	ORISSA	BALESHWAR	50	78	BIHAR	AURANGABAD	44
19	W.BENGAL	HUGLI	50	77	ORISSA	MAYURBHANJ	44
20	ASSAM	DIBRUGARH	50	76	BIHAR	NAWADA	44

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991.

The gender differences in WPRs are glaring across the board, with even the best off district reporting a gap of 36 (Dhemaji – Assam), while the worst district is at 55 (Tinsukia – Assam) (see List U13). Assam's districts, especially those belonging to the western plains, are prominent among the worst WGAP list, while Bihar figures among the best, with 13 districts.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

The importance of a disaggregated analysis is only made sharper from this study, as dimensions of strengths and weaknesses within each state are identified. An aggregative or composition based exercise would result in Bihar standing out to be the most backward of all states and Sitamarhi district, one of the worst districts in the entire eastern region. This district figures in eleven of the fourteen indicator lists of the 20 most backward ones, when total (rural+urban) area is taken into account.

Of the 23 districts identified as the worst due to poor performances based on five or more of the selected indicators, all except three coastal Orissa districts, belong to the eastern state of Bihar (see List 2). Ten northern and eight central Bihar districts, with only two south Bihar districts of Deoghar and Palamu, figure among the gender backward areas. Adverse demographic balances, low female literacy levels, poor health conditions, especially the gender differences in access to health, low age at marriage, high fertility rates and low work participation levels across the northern and central Bihar districts are the causes for the poor status of women in the region.

**List 2: Identification of 23 Districts with Worst Performances**

No. of Indicators	State	Districts	Region
11	Bihar	Sitamarhi	Northern
8	Bihar	Deoghar	Southern
7	Bihar	Purba Champaran	Northern
	Bihar	Munger/Begusarai/Rohtas	Central
	Bihar	Madhubani	Northern
6	Orissa	Baleshwar	Coastal
	Bihar	Samastipur/Madhepura	Northern
	Bihar	Khagaria/Bhojpur	Central
	Bihar	Paschim Champaran/Kishanganj	Northern
5	Bihar	Saharsa	Northern
	Bihar	Palamu	Southern
	Orissa	Cuttack/Puri	Coastal
	Bihar	Dharbanga/Siwan	Northern
	Bihar	Gaya/Nalanda/Aurangabad	Central

The three coastal Orissa districts of Puri, Cuttack and Baleshwar are highlighted as backward for their poor health conditions, especially for women, and for the low work participation levels, as compared to women from other parts of the state and men within the same district. Cuttack of coastal Orissa is an interesting case, since it is the only district which is listed both among the best and worst districts based on different parameters. Cuttack has a low child sex ratio, the female health and economic indicators also being poor. However, gender discrimination, whether in access to education or health services, is close to being non-existent. Female literacy is quite high and so is the age at marriage. Ganjam and Puri reveal similar extreme scenarios, although they do not get listed among the worst and best respectively.

It needs to be pointed out that at the all-India level analysis, districts of Bihar did not figure among the gender backward areas<sup>xvi</sup>. In other words, among the BIMARU states, districts belonging to UP, Rajasthan, and MP fare badly as compared to Bihar. Even among the eastern Indian states, where Bihar districts display gender backwardness, certain regions within the state are prominent. Variations, however, are visible even within these sub-regions.

In fact, the entire north Bihar region, whether rural or urban, is prominent for its backwardness by the selected gender development indicators. Except for rural mean age at marriage, by all other indicators, some districts of north Bihar are noted among the worst 20. It must be mentioned, however, that a few districts belonging to this region are listed among the 20 best lists as well. The northwest districts of Siwan, Saran and Gopalganj report a better demographic balance among population above six years, while Araria in the northeast, records a child sex ratio of 986. Vaishali, along with Saran and Gopalganj, witness low infant and child mortality rates among females, while Araria is the only Bihar district which reports a low

gender disparity in CMRs. The legal age at marriage is average in Madhubani and Kishanganj from the region, along with two south Bihar districts.

Madhepura of north Bihar is the only district of the state with a high FWPR and low gender differences in work participation. The disparities within regions of any particular state are highlighted here to emphasise socio-cultural factors that influence the attitudes and perceptions of people. In other words, apart from regional, economic, geographical factors, socio-cultural aspects are also important for understanding gender dimensions of development.

An average of the ranks by all 14 indicators lists 19 districts of Bihar among the 20 most backward ones in the entire region. These belong to north and central sub-regions, with only one district – Deoghar - of south Bihar. The other district in the average of ranks list is Baleswar of coastal Orissa. Its backwardness stems from its extremely poor health conditions – as the district is listed as the worst of the eastern region by all four health related indicators. The district also reports low FWPR and high gender differences in WPRs. The analysis based on averages of ranks of all the indicators is quite similar to the results from individual indicator based rank analysis, hence, the rest of the analysis will be based on the latter.

Whether rural or urban, there is no sub-region in any state which does not report strengths or weaknesses by a given set of indicators. This reiterates the need for individual indicator analysis. The only region which does not have any district listed among the 20 worst urban districts is the Himalayan region of West Bengal. Among the 95 eastern region districts, only 17 of them are not found in any of the 14 indicator based, 20 gender backward districts list.

Among the 14 lists based on different indicators, 24 districts display relatively better performances by occupying a prominent position in five or more lists (see List 2). Assam's eastern plains districts are among the best in the entire eastern India region, with higher work participation, better literacy and health conditions. Six of these eastern plains districts – Cachar, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Sibsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat - do not figure in any of the 14 backward district lists. Two western plains districts of Assam – Sonitpur and Goalpara - are also a part of this category.

The North Cachar Hills of Assam is the best off district in the entire region by virtue of its performance in 11 of the 14 indicators. The two indicators by which the district records poor ranks are sex ratios among the population and among SCs, both of which are clearly affected by migration factors, since the CSR rank is very high among all districts of the region.

The coastal Orissa districts of Ganjam and Cuttack, although prominent for their relatively better performances, also display backwardness in some aspects. Ganjam figures in the backward districts list based on CSR, CMRF, gender differences in literacy and work participation rates. Cuttack also records poor female work participation levels. Apart from the coastal belt, the southern districts of Kalahandi,

Koraput and Phulbani reflect better gender development. Since the demographic balances in these districts are healthy, gender inequality, whether in literacy, health related variables, or work participation, is far lower and involvement of women in work activities is high. The fertility rates of women in these tribal-inhabited areas are lower as compared to other regions and the age at marriage is also high. Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh are the only two north Orissa districts which report a better performance (since these districts do not figure in any of the backward district lists) especially for the socio-cultural indicators. Mayurbhanj also records relatively high FWPRs.

In the case of Bihar, it is the southern districts of Gumla, Paschimi Singhbhum, Lohardaga and Ranchi which record better levels of gender development. Work participation of women in these districts is high and all of them record better demographic balances. Once again, these are the tribal-inhabited districts. Nevertheless, in Lohardaga and Gumla, the fertility rates are high.

Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri of the Himalayan sub-region of West Bengal also display better gender development levels. Prominent among the sets of indicators are the socio-cultural and economic variables that reflect better performances. The districts of the central plains, Calcutta, Hugli, and Howrah and Bankura from the western plains are the other better-off districts in terms of literacy, fertility and mortality rates. The districts of the central plains, however, report low female work participation levels, with Howrah being the worst district in the entire eastern India region, followed by the South 24 Parganas. The western plains, on the other hand, along with the Himalayan districts, report better work involvement of women.

A brief discussion based on the relationships that emerge from the analyses of the districts in this region is undertaken here. The links highlighted may not hold true universally across different areas, but can be stressed upon based on the strength of their prevalence in some districts. The role of education is significant in reducing mortality among children<sup>xvii</sup>. This, in turn, has a bearing on the fertility levels, since improvement in the survival of children reduces the insecurity related to reproductive behaviour among parents. This also ensures an aversion to the discriminatory treatment leading to neglect of girls that is heightened under pressures emanating from strong son preferences. The desperate bid to save male offsprings often leads to unequal treatment across gender, as scarce economic resources are devoted entirely for the care of boys<sup>xviii</sup>.

Another factor which links up only too obviously to higher mortality rates among children is that of early age at marriage. Girls being married off at a younger age often implies early childbearing and problematic childbirth, or complications thereof, leading to high mortality among children. Working mothers, as opposed to those at home, have been noted in the literature to relate to higher mortality among children, although this may very often go along with lesser differences across gender<sup>xix</sup>. In the eastern region too, especially in pockets where low literacy among women coincides



with higher work participation levels, the phenomenon of neglect of children is noted.

**List 3: Identification of 24 Districts with Relatively Better Performances**

No. of Indicators	State	Districts	Region
11	Assam	North Cachar	Hills
10	Assam	Dibrugarh/Golaghat	Eastern Plains
9	Assam	Sibsagar	Eastern Plains
8	Orissa	Ganjam	Coastal
	Assam	Jorhat	Eastern Plains
7	Orissa	Kalahandi	Southern
	Bihar	Gumla/Paschimi Singhbhum	Southern
	West Bengal	Darjeeling	Himalayan
6	West Bengal	Calcutta	Central Plains
	Orissa	Koraput	Southern
	Assam	Dhemaji	Eastern Plains
	Bihar	Lohardaga	Southern
	Orissa	Cuttack	Coastal
5	West Bengal	Hugli	Central Plains
	Orissa	Phulbani	Southern
	Bihar	Ranchi	Southern
	West Bengal	Howrah	Central Plains
	Assam	Cachar/Tinsukia	Eastern Plains
	Assam	Sonitpur	Western Plains
	Orissa	Mayurbhanj	Northern
	West Bengal	Bankura	Western Plains

The presence of low literacy and high labour market participation levels among women is an important dimension of women in the eastern region. Given the strong positive link established between economic betterment and literacy levels among women, the areas where educational deprivation thrives are the economically weaker ones. It is in such areas that poverty pushes and compels women to undertake work for survival. Since the upkeep and care of the family and children still predominantly rests on women, their work for wages which keeps them away from home hampers the health and survival of children. Ironically, the wages earned by the women are essential for the same purpose.

An analysis of the districts where gender development levels are relatively better highlights the importance of women's economic participation. Although this accepted measure of empowerment has been questioned on grounds of income autonomy and decision making<sup>xx</sup>, this factor does seem to exercise an overall influence in changing attitudes and perceptions of women's roles, and thereby, affects their status.

In the ultimate analysis, it can be stated that the women of the eastern region suffer more from their economic constraints, although other socio-cultural influences also play a significant role in their lives.

## Notes:

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- i The state of Bihar has been bifurcated into two states, carving out Jharkhand from the southern districts of erstwhile Bihar. In addition to this, many new districts have been added to all states except Assam (see Appendix 2).
- ii The list of indicators is in no way exhaustive.
- iii For the significance of sex ratios as a composite indicator of women's well being and intra-household inequalities, see CSWI (1975), Dreze and Sen (1995), Mazumdar and Krishnaji (eds) (2001).
- iv As of now, only some of the information is available from the 2001 Census of India, such as sex ratios, female literacy and work related data. All such data as is accessible has been incorporated in this report. Alternatively, 1991 Census data forms the main source while discussing other indicators. Due to considerable changes in the districts of most of the eastern region states, comparisons over the two censuses are restricted to the state level only.
- v The population density for the eastern region as a whole is calculated as an average of the five states.
- vi A similar comparison for Jharkhand is not yet easily available.
- vii The data for Scheduled Castes and Tribes for 2001 Census is not yet available.
- viii Calcutta has since been changed to Kolkata.
- ix Census of India, 1988
- x See Krishnaji (1997) and the explanatory arguments developed therein.
- xi Throughout this section and wherever district level analysis is undertaken, Bihar refers to undivided state including Jharkhand.
- xii CSO, 2001.
- xiii Further additions followed in 2001 after the two states were subdivided, see Appendix 2.
- xiv Palamu is a part of Jharkhand now and a new district – Garhwa has been carved out of the district (see Appendix 2).
- xv GOI (1995).
- xvi See Rustagi (2000).
- xvii See NFHS-II, 1999-2000.
- xviii See Rustagi (2002).
- xix See Krishnaji (1997), Basu and Basu (1991) and references cited therein
- xx See Batliwala, et.al. (1998) for instance.