The following participants, representing various institutions and organisations and/or in their individual capacity from different parts of North East India and comprising seven states viz., Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura wish, at the outset, to stress the following:

We welcome the initiative of the Planning Commission of the Government of India in holding Consultations with civil society and grassroots organizations on the Approach Paper to the Twelfth Five year Plan in different parts of the country.

We would bring to the attention of the Commission that in the past decades, there have been a number of path-breaking initiatives on documentation and planning for the North East Region. These have included the comprehensive Shukla Committee Report of 1997, “Transforming the North East”, that called for special attention to the needs of region and to address four specific deficits – basic needs deficit; an infrastructure deficit; a resource deficit and a trust deficit.

Subsequently, in a separate development, the Chief Ministers of the region signed and adopted a NER Vision 2020 document which was based on public consultations in the region and released by the Prime Minister in 2008. Thus Vision 2020 appears to us to be a substantial articulation of the problems and issues relating to the challenges, development and growth of the North Eastern Region and also because it emphasizes a fifth crisis before the region: the governance deficit.

It would be appropriate therefore that, at the very least, the Twelfth Five Year Approach Paper should reflect the key recommendations of the NER Vision 2020 and other relevant documents, including the People’s Mid-Term Review, most of which could further be incorporated and implemented, in addition to the recommendations mentioned below.

In the two day consultation, the following problems in certain key strategic challenges were discussed and suggestions made.
Strategy 1: Enhancing the capacity for Growth

Suggestions:

Reform of the Subsidy regime

1. Subsidies to industries in NER must be re-evaluated or conditional subsidies should be imposed. It must be based on certain criteria including employing local human resources and without degradation to the environment. Indicators should be put for corporate social responsibility for recipients of subsidies.

2. Subsidies must not be given towards the mining sector in the region

3. However, air transport subsidy should be given for all agriculture products and handicraft and weaving products from the NE states to the Metros

4. Government should develop alternative to target-centric evaluation methods. Target driven approach must be replaced with need based approach.

5. ‘Inclusive development’ or participation by civil society organizations and stakeholders to be made central to the planning process

Proliferation of Plan Schemes

6. The ‘one size fits all’ approach of developing schemes does not serve intended beneficiaries because of diverse social and geographic settings. Plan schemes should be prepared in context of the region, its peoples and the current situation of some states which are burdened with unrest and political turmoil.
Strategy 2: Enhancing Skills and Faster Generation Of Employment

1. North East India has been a special region and special institutions have been created to cater to its needs. These institutions, like the North Eastern Council (NEC), have to absorb the varying degrees of prevailing disparities within the region and make interventions to fit the context of people’s needs in the states. In this context the NEC has to introduce programmes that are people oriented. In its planning strategies, representatives from civil society must be included;

2. Development should not be measured only in terms of GDP model of growth, but within a human development framework that includes environment-friendly paradigms;

3. Social Capital of region to be taken into account while development schemes are planned through the inclusive planning suggested earlier: In Nagaland it is communityisation of health. Similarly other parts of the region should invest on appropriate, people-driven schemes;

4. The population criteria for sanction of grants & schemes does not fit in with some states like Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Manipur because of sparse settlements in a radius of 50 Kms from each other. Thus the schemes should be need based. Such remote areas also require investment in projects relating to roads, health units, educational centres and PDS outlets.

5. Promotion of ethno tourism that would fulfill the need based earning capacities of local people and also towards preservation and promotion of ethnic cultures: (1) There has to be professional skill building of the local populace on management in the entertainment and hospitality industry, various facets of eco tourism like popularizing ethnic cuisines, travel booklets, comprising folk and general histories of the area in order to attract inter state and foreign tourists; (2) Investing on locally managed areas like river banks, environmentally green areas in the foot hills as well as the hills, confirming the State’s territorial integrity with India. Arunachal is a case in point. NEC had, in September 2004, at Shillong, emphasized on the potential of ethno tourism in a discussion between Chief Secretaries of the north eastern states and with the DoNER.
**Strategy 3: Managing the Environment**

**Suggestions**

1. Proper implementation of a Mining Policy that would ensure that a percentage of the profits from mining are ploughed back into the community (that is located in these areas), through a specific mechanism for the benefit of resident populations and skill upgradation and capacity building developed. In addition involve representatives of concerned civil society organizations and stakeholders in the monitoring/evaluation process as well;

2. Creation of Wilderness Zones to promote bio-diversity of the region;

3. Technical assistance for achieving optimal utilization of river navigation (especially dredging specific channels on the Brahmaputra which is designated National Waterway No 2 so that water-driven, environment-friendly, cost-effective bulk transportation system that benefits river bank communities is encouraged, thus spurring local economies);

4. Sustainable water management by popularizing rain water harvesting

5. A critical study of the region’s carrying capacity has to be carried out before any further mega projects are undertaken. Current mega dam projects should be stopped in the region till then;

6. Alternative sources of renewable energy and smaller, mini hydel projects should be considered;

7. Community forest rights have to be respected. (State, unclassified forests, protected forests), e.g. in Manipur;

8. All existing laws enacted by the Government/State Government/autonomous councils/traditional institutions for the protection of lands, forests and water resources should be monitored strictly and implemented fully. Space for review should be given in this process to civil society organizations and stakeholders living in the surrounding areas.

**Strategy 4. Markets for Efficiency and Inclusion**

**Suggestions**

1. Cold storage has to be made available by the for perishable items within the region;

2. Extensive water harvesting systems to be encouraged and initiated in rural & hilly areas. A policy initiative should be that of community education on water harvesting. This could be incorporated in the sector of Skill Building and IEC;
Strategy 5: Decentralization, Empowerment and Information

Our view is that human resources development is obstructed when states go through the turmoil of conflict. The GOI’s official response to situations of armed conflict is one of denial outside the country while such situations are viewed internally as anti-State activities. Government officers are either obstructed from their work or they use this situation as the rationale for dysfunctional implementation systems. Conflict situations are approached from a national security perspective and not from human security viewpoint. Policies or programmes are not directly aimed at addressing the fallout of the various conflict situations.

Suggestions:

1. Implementation of Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) to facilitate women’s representation in local governance;

2. The Autonomous Councils must become catalysts for economic transformation and not merely be legislative, regulatory and administrative agencies. They will however need to adopt a more participatory approach in order to effectively assume a central role in local development. In this context, it may be desirable to consider the approach adopted in the Fifth Schedule areas, where democratic elections, (based on adult franchise and reservations for women in elected seats), and leadership positions have been applied without reducing the importance of tribal customs and traditions;

3. Provide all forms of communication in the local language. Support TV/radio/print IEC in local languages at all levels. Fund community radio to facilitate knowledge and the very institutions for grassroots governance;

4. Internally Displaced Persons (development, disaster & conflict induced) should be recognized as a separate category;

5. Conflict situations have created unprecedented numbers of internally displaced people within the NE region and many of them are displaced for over a decade while several others get displaced periodically. A comprehensive displacement policy is needed and adherence to existing international standards should be followed;

6. Policies and social programmes need by to be formulated taking into account India’s commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW. All efforts should be made to remove negative gender stereotyping. Witch hunting has spread in several parts of Assam and a legislative provision has to be initiated.

7. Translate gender commitments into budgetary allocations;
8. Disability should be an inclusive human rights issue cutting across all sectors and receipt of support should not be entirely on an economic criteria such as the BPL cards;

9. Education of persons with disability should be exclusively under the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

10. Social audit of implementation of all schemes is necessary with the inclusion of civil society and relevant stakeholders.

11. Ensure access to and transparency in availability of government funding for civil society organisations

12. Health care system must respond to the needs of those affected by conflict in the NER, especially for trauma counseling service for women and children;

13. The State must recognize the realities of those affected by the various conflicts situations in the NE region by adopting appropriate policies and livelihood support programmes. In addition compensation packages for families and individuals affected by conflict should be introduced too. Similarly, central schemes for those affected by communal and terrorist violence should be extended to families affected by state and non-state violence.

14. There is a need to recognize the direct and indirect impact of conflict on women. India should adopt and implement UN Resolution such as 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889 which are related to impact conflict on women and 1814 related to children.

15. Increase women’s representation and participation in peace building processes, especially in formal ones. Poor and disproportionate representation of women in different political bodies do have an indirect impact in peace negotiations.

16. Strong monitoring systems and accountability of implementing agencies must be ensured. For instance, the Eleventh Five Year Plan recommended setting up of a task force on VAW in conflict areas which is yet to be materialize. The Vision 2020 document recommended a monitoring and review mechanism for all projects costing above Rs. Five crore. This needs to be built into policy and law if such recommendations are to be honoured and not remain on paper.

17. The history, culture and language of the indigenous peoples of Tripura have been stunted by their marginalization and must be revived and preserved through special funding by the Centre.

**Strategy 7: Securing the energy future for India**

**Suggestions:**

1. Rationalise and reconcile the need for fuels for energy with environmental costs
Strategy 9: Rural Transformation and Sustained growth of Agriculture

Suggestions:

1. All weather roads must be connected with far flung areas in the NER. Once again the process should include communities in residing in respective locations; Funds for its regular and proper maintenance has to be made available;

2. In remote and low population rural areas in the northeast, emphasis to be on renewable lighting systems e.g. Subsidize Solar LED home lighting system;

3. Implementation and assurance of drinking water & sanitation but again in remote areas of low population density. Promote use of wells, streams, storage of rain water and harvesting;

4. Irrigation is almost non-existent in the region. With climate change and unpredictable rains, irrigation facilities become critical. Promote study and support indigenous methods of irrigation such as terraced rice fields and use of rain water for low land paddy cultivation. These can be improved and supported through State financial interventions including micro-credit;

5. Promote use of indigenous methods and indigenous crops; higher purchase price for indigenous crops and subsidies for those using traditional methods & traditional crops. Millets have a great potential in the NER and must be promoted;

6. There should be a platform for marketing goods from remote villages with a process that includes storage (including cold storage for food products) and food processing;

7. Subsidy for animal feed as the NER is highly dependent on animal husbandry; both for food and cash

8. Mandatory public hearings on food and its distribution along with rates in the PDS

Strategy 10. Managing Urbanization

Suggestions:

1. Infrastructure for differently able persons in all public places
2. Incorporate programmes to deal with homelessness and destitution; provide shelters and facilities, particularly for women and children who are more vulnerable;

3. Need for capacity building for elected representatives of urban governance on issues relating to civics, ecology, solid waste management etc;

4. Skill building for unemployed youth living in urban areas in manufacturing, construction of low cost sanitation products, computer and technical skills;

5. Promotion of digital libraries and easy access to its users.

Strategy 11: Improved Access to Quality Education

Suggestions:

1. Not “right to education” but “Right to quality education” especially in rural areas.

2. Vocational courses should be relevant with the local context

3. Life skills should also be incorporated at the secondary level.

4. Gender Studies as a separate discipline to be introduce at the graduate and post graduate level.

5. Hostels are required for rural school children who attend Bridge courses in urban areas. This is necessary to sustain the students through these courses and also ensure their safety in towns.

6. Introduce a syllabus of NER histories to the national educational curriculum both at the school as well as the university levels. This will enhance the knowledge of students who, currently, have poor knowledge of the region and its diversity;

7. Making knowledge books available in vernaculars for young people all over the NE states

Strategy 12: Better preventive and Curative health:

Suggestions:

1. Health care system must respond to the needs of those affected by conflict in the NER, especially for trauma counseling service for women and children. This includes a large segment of children working in the coal mines of some NE states. Ensure provision of accessible, affordable and quality health services;
2. The Health population policy of the government should be reformulated and made on the lines of the ICPD, especially with regard to the persistent high ratio of Infant Mortality Rate and Maternal Mortality rate. Thus a gender sensitive approach should cut across all projects/programmes and schemes;

3. Community monitoring of NRHM and health facilities to be extended to all the districts, despite state reports showing high success of the Programme, especially in Assam;

4. There is a high incidence of parent to child transmission in North East. Prevention of parent to child transmission (PPTCT) centers should be expanded in the NER, along with appropriate information dissemination on the issue. The provision of preventive medicine for children should be made available to pregnant HIV positive women;

5. Women living with HIV find it extremely difficult to secure bank loans. Financial assistance for HIV positive SHG members must be provided by the government, so that they will have the means on improving their economic conditions and become a productive member of the community;

6. Orphaned children living with HIV/AIDS need special attention due to the all prevailing stigma around HIV/AIDS. The Government must ensure their safety receiving food and nutrition, medicines and shelter;

7. To address the concerns of working women living with HIV regarding their children, government should assist them by putting up Day-Care Centers where children can be left by working mothers for minding and caring;

8. Recognize the growing incidence of mental illness - and the lack of facilities, services for persons with mental illness. The focus has to be in the entire NER which has witness very low quality services and appropriate infrastructure for such people;

9. All ICDS Projects have to be dealt with strict monitoring tools as the accountability scale on this large programme in the NER is dismally poor. This has resulted in lack of motivation amongst the workforce one hand and high scale malnutrition amongst the children, especially in areas that are remote.