



Introduction

The social and economic development of small islands is beset with a set of challenges that are quite unique. The idyllic geography and climate of such islands have made many of these islands haven of tourism, some of the examples being the Seychelles, Mauritius, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Maldives, Andamans, Lakshadweep and Singapore. However, these regions face serious threats as well from various sources. Their fragile ecology does not go smoothly with large influx of visitors. The smallness of these regions makes the cost of provision of administrative services and social-economic infrastructure too high, due to diseconomies of scale. These small island economies (or, SIEs) are also facing, in general, depletion of the natural resources. Tourism, which has been a mainstay for the economic sustenance of the SIEs, is vulnerable to the vagaries of natural climate as well as to the law and order situation prevailing in the neighbouring regions.

SIEs could be classified into sovereign independent countries such as Singapore, Mauritius, Maldives or Seychelles and into islands that are part of a mainland country, such as Hawaii, Tasmania, Lakshadweep, or Andamans. There is a case to examine if these two categories of SIEs face the same kind and level of vulnerability and, if so, do they respond to the situation differentially and with what results. While most of the independent island countries, notably Singapore, Seychelles, Maldives and Mauritius, have recorded tremendous growth, the islands attached to mainland countries have turned out to be a 'poorer cousin'. Therefore, on the face of it, one can draw some conclusion. But then, there are examples of the Hawaii or Tasmania that draw considerable strength from the economy of their parent country.

Seen in the global context as an SIE, Lakshadweep offers an interesting case study. It is neighbour to an

independent but only relatively larger SIE country, Maldives, that comprises as many as 1,200 small and tiny coral islands, of which only one in six are inhabited, covering in all 298 square kilometres (sq km) of area and having a population of about 3,00,000. Thus, in terms of area and population, Maldives is six times as large as Lakshadweep. However, the difference in the economies appears to be fairly large and Maldives seems to offer hints for the growth and development of Lakshadweep.

Despite its smallness in terms of geographical landmass, Lakshadweep has a large territorial water (20,000 sq km) and Exclusive Economic Zone (4 lakh sq km), which makes it strategically very important for the country. The flora and fauna of Lakshadweep have survived the vagaries of times and nature including the tsunami of the 26th December, 2004.

While tourism appears to be a very important growth sector for Lakshadweep, there are certain critical in-house issues that need equal, if not greater, attention. These include public health, in terms of access to safe drinking water and disposal of sewage, medical care and employment opportunities. While agriculture remains the predominant land based economic activity for the island population and agriculture itself very largely means coconut cultivation. The yield in terms of nuts per tree and per hectare is very high, more than double the all-India average. Yet, coconut alone is unable to provide optimal returns from the land. The delicate ecology of these islands discourages large-scale use of chemical fertilisers. The strategy for enhancing the returns from agriculture, therefore, has to keep such constraints and expectations in view.

As the exploitable economic zone of Lakshadweep exceeds its landmass manifolds, the development strategy for it would necessarily need to focus on the

marine aquatic resources. There are many marine aquatic resources, ranging from fishes to the sea-grass, available in large quantities awaiting potential to be exploited safely.

Analysis of the development prospects for Lakshadweep leads inevitably to the issue of nature and nature tourism. The richness and uniqueness of the flora and fauna of these islands offer a fascinating scope for nature tourism. However, while growth of tourism is desirable, but it needs to be coupled with preservation of the ecology and environment of this fragile zone.

The State Development Report on Lakshadweep has been prepared with the painstaking contributions from a set of carefully identified institutions and individuals. The institutions directly involved in preparing the initial draft chapters were the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Kochi, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi, Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education, Dehradun, Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding, Coimbatore, National Institute of Ocean Technology, Chennai, the Ministry of Non-Conventional Energy Sources and the Department of Ocean Development of the Government of India. The Lakshadweep Administration also contributed for specific chapters, besides providing valuable inputs and help to all other institutions. Their individual contributions were deliberated in a series of meetings with all the

stakeholders, experts and other interested groups, which greatly helped in finalising the report. A lot of credit for the timely completion of this task would go also to the Planning Commission, in particular to Dr. Syeda Hameed, Member, Dr. Rajan Katoch, Joint Secretary and Shri Rajat Sachar, Director, who actively participated in this effort at various stages.

The State Development Report of Lakshadweep was launched by IAMR under Professor H. Ramachandran, the then Director IAMR, other study team members were Smt. Madhu Srivastava, Head (Employment and Unemployment Studies Unit), Shri Sant Lal Arora, Senior Research Officer, Shri I.C. Awasthi, Senior Research Officer, Shri U.S. Bhandari, Senior Research Officer, Shri S.K. Yadav, Senior Research Officer and Shri J.S. Chauhan, Research Associate. Excellent secretarial support was provided by Smt. Prem Maddan, Smt. Urmila Chakravarti and Shri Devendra P. Kohad. Credit also goes to Shri K.B. Saxena, Shri Sudhir Krishna and Shri S.R. Shukla, Consultants, IAMR for successfully completion of the project report.

The report consists of seven chapters, commencing with a review of the developmental framework for Lakshadweep. The subsequent chapters deal with economic issues, infrastructure, human development, biodiversity and environment protection, and governance issues.