Almost twelve years ago, Madhya Pradesh started the process of publishing its Human Development Reports. The first sub national human development report set a milestone in reporting—candid, based on outcomes, owned by the state government, yet written with a mix of independent authors and experts within the government, basing itself on evidence from data, case studies, and field investigation.

Being the first state human development report, the report set down the status of human development in the state and identified areas of concern, both sectoral and spatial. This was also a period when the state had launched a series of policy and programme initiatives in human development in critical areas such as literacy, basic access to schooling, infant mortality, giving support to livelihoods, and so on. The state human development report in some cases pointed to gaps in the state's actions and in programme parameters and in other cases acted as a companion document for the state government in its focus on human development. The human development report, therefore, was as much a way to find the areas where further work was required, as much as it was a statement of intent and purpose for the state.

The second human development report came at a period when the state had been following focused action on quality issues in education, health, and in empowering people’s collectives and their panchayats. There was also work going on in promoting livelihoods and livelihood supporting initiatives in several areas such as in forestry and water management. The second report, therefore, carried on with human development reporting and focused on critical issues of livelihoods, while adding a section on action on human development.

The third report came in 2002 when the institutional issues in human development were becoming increasingly important, and the experiences of Madhya Pradesh were being sought elsewhere too. The third report also undertook further innovations in data reporting.

While the decade spanning the three Madhya Pradesh reports saw considerable work and achievements in the quality and software issues in human development services, the hardware issues started becoming more and more important. Basic infrastructure that enables citizens as necessarily as the provisions of other services and opportunities were major gaps in public provisioning.

Human development forcefully advocates for not just building human capabilities, but equally for entitlements of citizens, and the need for an environment that enhances their capabilities, and gives them opportunities to live a life of quality and dignity. As a state, it is essential to ensure that such entitlements are available to all citizens in adequate measure.

Human development calls for the primacy of public action in investing in people, by putting people at the centre of development, building their capabilities as well as enhancing their opportunities. In simple terms, this means that the state has a primary responsibility to focus on and advance investment into education, health, social security, articulating and protecting citizens' rights, and ensuring equality before law. Simultaneously, it also means paying attention to, and investing in, basic amenities, basic infrastructure, and creating an enabling environment and infrastructure that help promote more diversified livelihoods, more efficiency into the economy, and more socially or public owned and developed facilities that can be used by all.

The experience of the last few years saw considerable progress on many fronts in the state, but also brought out in sharp contrast the gaps in infrastructure that became impeders and decelerators in human
development progress. Across the state, basic road connectivity, and basic power availability were turning into development concerns. Along with this, infrastructure related to communications, to urban infrastructure and for credit—three essential forms of infrastructure that are required for growth and providing people equality of opportunities in today’s changing economy were also identified as needing assessment.

This provided the background for the theme of ‘Infrastructure for Human Development’ for the fourth report.

Infrastructure, in the context of human development, is as vast and multidimensional as within the more conventionally understood definition of development. Infrastructure has a much more important role in human development in poorer and backward states than in others where such basic provisions have been largely provided for. The social, economic, and poverty profile of Madhya Pradesh is such that the quality of infrastructure is a bottleneck in more rapid and equitable growth in the state, and thereby growth in human development. The infrastructurally backward zones also correspond to areas where the poorest reside, and human development deficit is the maximum.

The fourth Madhya Pradesh Human Development Report looks at ‘Infrastructure for Human Development’. Previous reports have reflected the concerns in human development and its urgent and imminent issues. The fourth report explores the relationship and issues in some infrastructure areas with human development, discusses the need for public investment in infrastructure and focuses on where public priority is required so that faster progress in human development takes place in Madhya Pradesh.