

Communitisation of Electricity Management: A Reflection of Political Participation for Sustainable Democracy

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Abstract

Communitisation is an important driver of political participation that reflects in Naga community as it is based on the triple 'T' approach - Trust the user Committee, Train them to discharge their new found responsibilities and Transfer governmental powers and resources in respect of management. Naga people owes pride of a rich historical resource in the form of community, spirit and community action as a way of life. With the tremendous interface of people far and wide daunted with various global challenges, the Naga spirit of traditional efficiency stands at the threshold. In the truest spirit to this call, the State Government of Nagaland evolved a unique way of empowerment of community through the process of Communitisation. Communitisation of electricity management through single point metering (SPM) was introduced in 2002 to check the chronic problem of distribution loss. The primary objective of the paper will, therefore look specifically into the power sector of the state which is one targeted dependable amenity for brighter existence of life. This paper is a reflection of how communitisation can contribute towards greater participation, improved efficiency and consolidation of gains by sharing of resources, responsibility and ownership for a sustainable community. In hindsight the Naga electorates' consistent patterns of political participation calls for emulating in strengthening the ultimate concept of communitisation.

Key words: Communitisation, Nagaland, Participation, Ownership, Efficiency, Sustainable

Prologue (The Conceptual Framework)

Communitisation is an important driver of political participation that reflects in Naga community as it is based on the triple 'T' approach - Trust the user Committee, Train them to discharge their new found responsibilities and Transfer governmental powers and resources in respect of management. Change in an attitudinal self of a citizen bringing with them changes in community building. This requires in striking the right path of indulgence with the culture and society of belongingness. The most wanting institution is how to implant these vital components

of collectivities for change. It explicitly lies through citizens' participation which is the cornerstone essence of democracy. People have every right to participate irrespective of opportunities or standards prescribed in the state. Participation encompasses a relationship between civil society and the state which is destined for the growth of public good. The journey of an active citizen in partaking public services for and within the communities is an emerging concept in the context of political and social life. The role of the citizen in shaping

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communities of the future has long been contemplated in the wake of man-made existing domain.

Conventional feelings of citizens' expectation from the government relates to a strong public delivery system. Yet contemporary approach confines which equally require a responsive public participation on the part of citizens. Based on this understanding to evolve a platform in strengthening their ties towards reaching its goal is expected. In order to sustain this process, society has to remain true to their beliefs, values and attitudes of harmony. Otherwise the sincere intention on the part of the state machinery with the concept of citizen-centric governance will represent the quintessential idea of democracy.

Naga people owes a pride of rich historical resources in the form of community, spirit and community action as a way of life. Loaded with a heart of bravery and supreme ideals, have further raised higher stakes in participatory process too. Communities have exemplified perfectly by carrying forward this very form and spirit with the advent of modern democratic dictates. Guided by the democratic values of participatory module, an intense pattern of Naga electorates testifies the defining moment pertaining the health of the state. Keeping this framework in mind the present paper addresses the sustainable community responsibility of the state through communitisation. In hindsight, it will probe the patterns of citizens' political participation as a model in order to establish effective continuity of community and communitisation in the state of Nagaland.

A Paradigm of Political Participation on Communitisation

Every Naga community was a self-governed and self-sufficient people practiced since time immemorial for which they had developed an indigenous traditional system of governance. Yet with the tremendous interface of people far and

wide daunted with various global challenges, the Naga spirit of traditional efficiency stands at the threshold. The fact that the massive welfare infrastructure and vast network of delivery services was largely ineffective and dysfunctional emerged as a strong challenge. These debates revealed that one of the strongest reasons for this situation was a top down government control and nearly no local role in design, decisions, implementation and monitoring of these welfare services (Neema P. Broome).

To identify the challenges faced by the community needs a different approach towards public services and their system of delivery. In the truest spirit to this call and build upon the strong socio-political traditional institutions, the Government of Nagaland evolved a unique way of empowerment of community through the process of Communitisation. Recognizing the need for community participation as a fundamental requirement to achieve well being and sustainable development, initiated measures to harness its rich social capital to vitalize the public institutions by launching the "Communitisation Policy" with the enactment of Nagaland Communitisation of Public Institutions and Services Act in 2002.¹ This system evolved from an effort to transfer certain management and responsibilities to the community and to involve them in the management of certain basic public institutions. At a time when privatization of public sector units has become the buzzword, the State Government adopted openness and encouraged active participation of civil society, harnessing its rich social capital to revitalize and improve public services through the concept of Communitisation. Unlike other forms of decentralization or privatization, communitisation develops partnership between Government and the people through delegation of powers and responsibilities to the community for the management of public institutions, so that the performance of the public utilities improve. This

venture paid off as Nagaland was awarded for United Nations Public Service Awards in 2008 for communitisation programme in recognition of its innovative use of rich social capital.

Since independence the primary responsibilities of the Government of India is to provide basic public welfare services towards its people. This task has been institutionalised through the elaborate arrangement of political and administrative machineries. Likewise India introduced such mechanism in the form of a western model of democratic process to nurture those services. This system of democratic process has been in operation in Nagaland since 1964 during which twelve State Assembly Election and thirteen National General Elections have been conducted on the basis of Universal Adult Franchise. Right from 1964, Nagaland has witnessed a high turnout almost throughout the National and State elections. In fact, in the last Lok Sabha Election held in 2013, Nagaland recorded the highest voters turnout (87.8%) with the national average (66.4%), which was also the highest that India has ever seen in a national election (*The Hindu*, 2014: *Op*). This indicates widespread acceptance of and participation in modern democratic process which is interestingly embedded in a predominantly traditional social structure. By emulating such a consistent pattern of political participation establishes a perfect platform to incorporate in the process of communitisation. With this sharp commitment of high citizens' participation is expected to forge ahead creating a congenial space for reaching its ultimate vision of communitisation.

To further the conjunction of paradigm in political participation, it is most befitting to illustrate its core tenets in order to relate the theme communitisation. Political participation is often seen as a prerequisite for any democratic institution. In fact, a participatory public is crucial for democratic responsiveness and is seen as an intrinsic democratic good. Without extensive public engagement, a democracy lacks

vitality, the legitimacy of the political order is problematic and the promise of political life remains unfulfilled. Though political participation has been defined in various ways, yet in a nutshell it refers to the participation of individuals in the political process, and that it ensures that individuals are able to take part in deciding the common goals of the society and the best ways of achieving it. Verba & Nie in the first major study on political participation defined it as "those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take". Thus, political participation refers to an activity that is designed to have an impact on governmental decision making and actions.

For Herbert McClosky, political participation is the principal means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in a democracy and rulers are made accountable to the ruled. Further, Joseph Schumpeter elaborates that democracy has two elements- one that is representing the electorates and the other making collective decisions. It is based on the notion that all citizens have the right to participate in the managing of political affairs, and that every citizens input is of equal importance. This basic assumption clearly places emphasis on political engagement by the public in maintaining a stable democracy. Whereas according to J.W. van Deth, political participation: a). involves action, not merely expression of interest or sideline observation, b). is undertaken by citizens rather than elected officials, c). is undertaken freely, and d). takes place in a variety of contexts and times; it is not limited to local or national activities, nor is it limited to actions during a campaign or election year.

Taking the above cited narratives makes it more appropriate to link the take on political participation in making the objectives of communitisation a reality. Without the genuine active involvement of citizens it will not bear any productive results in the principle objective of the government's policies and priorities.

Such that by incorporating the consistent patterns of Naga participation in electoral politics is projected to enhance the right prospect of communitisation. With such spirit of participation nothing can derail the constructive partake of the community with the government in reaching its common goals. This kind of an interconnectness suggests being a good blend in forging ahead between the citizen and the government at large.

The Scenario

The primary objective of the paper is to look specifically into the power sector under the communitisation programme which is one targeted dependable amenity for brighter existence of life. Traditionally, power system is considered to be a natural monopoly and electricity is treated as an essential public service. An approach to proper power efficiency lays emphasis on power sector management provision by the people. It centers on peoples' participation in their own activities. Community based initiative encourages communities to identify local priorities and to build community capacity in order to meet their electricity needs. It motivates them to work together to improve their wealth, lightening status and environment besides enables them to undertake sustainable development activities to improve the quality of their own communities.

As a part of the communitisation process, the Government of Nagaland initiated the programme in the power sector during 2002-2003. Communitisation signifies a unique partnership between the government and the community involving transfer of ownership and sharing responsibility of management of the government institutions with the community; all with the aim of improving the delivery of public utility systems. It thus, includes decentralization of authority, delegation of responsibility, empowerment of the community, and building up of a synergistic relationship between government and the

community for growth and development of the institutions and their service delivery. Through communitisation, the Department of Power decentralized revenue management both in rural and urban sector by involving their representatives as partners in electricity revenue management. This is a unique way of decentralization of electricity management through community empowerment.

Through communitisation it aims to provide quality electricity and improve capabilities of the power utilities, through a sense of belonging and sharing amongst the community and to manage the material and resources for betterment of the society. This section provides how community participates in practice and describes instances of vital approaches and techniques through the communitisation policy in Nagaland.

The Department of Power launched the Communitisation of Electricity Management through Single Point Metering (SPM)² system for billing and collection of revenue. These provides for empowerment of the community through local authorities such as the Village Council, Ward Councils, Village Development Board and Town Committee. The Department accordingly framed its own legal framework and transferred the responsibility of electricity revenue management in the state throughout the villages and towns.³ Community involvement in the area of revenue management includes the prevention and control of energy theft which has a direct bearing on revenue collection. The Department also delegated the responsibility of management in distribution of supply as well to the community within the rural and urban areas.

In order to assess the consumption of power by an individual household the Department innovatively developed the concept of 'useful points'. One 'useful points' is defined as equal to 40 Watt. The Village/Urban Electricity Management Board (VEMBs/UEMBs) bills the individual electrified

households either through the individual household meters or on the basis of ‘useful points’ in the house. An example of billing through useful points of a community with 5 households has been shown below:-

If, the monthly power consumption of:

Household A, is 200 W, useful points	=	5 (200W ÷ 40W)
Household B, is 160 W, useful points	=	4 (160W ÷ 40W)
Household C, is 320 W, useful points	=	8 (320W ÷ 40W)
Household D, is 80 W, useful points	=	2 (80W ÷ 40W)
Household E, is 240 W, useful points	=	<u>6 (240W ÷ 40W)</u>
		25 points

Total useful points of the community will be equal to 25 points.

And, if the total power consumption (of a month) of the 5 households in the community is 300 units as per the SPM and billed for, and if the rate is Rs. 2.50 per kWh, total energy charges of that community will be 300 units x Rs. 2.50.

Therefore, the total amount billed for power consumption of the community = Rs. 765.00 (Rs. 750. 00 plus Rs. 15 meter charges)

Rate per useful points=Total amount ÷ Total no. of useful points of the community
i.e., Rs. 765/25 = Rs. 30.60

Bill for each household = Rate per useful point x number of useful point of that house.

Household A, Rs. 30.60 x 5	=	Rs. 153.00
Household B, Rs. 30.60 x 4	=	Rs. 122.40
Household C, Rs. 30. 60 x 8	=	Rs. 244.80
Household D, Rs. 30.60 x 2	=	Rs. 61.20
Household E, Rs. 30.60 x 6	=	<u>Rs. 183.60</u>
Total	=	Rs. 765.00

Amount payable to the Department = Rs. 673

The VEMB/UEMB shall thus retain Rs. 92 @ 12% (Rs. 765- Rs. 673) ⁴

The Department of Power is the nodal Department for coordinating the communitisation of electricity management in the villages and towns, through Single Point Metering and billing and the Chief Engineer Power is in general the overall in charge of communitisation of electricity management in the villages as well as in urban areas. Under all the circles, divisions and subdivisions, the Superintendent Engineers, Executive Engineers, SDOs and JEs carry out different task in implementation of Communitisation programme.

Status of Communitisation of Electricity Management: A Field Study

The field study is empirical and exclusive in nature. Data is collected through both primary and secondary sources. The primary data is established through the survey from a pre-selected sample. The secondary data is directly sourced out from the implementing institution i.e., Chief Engineer (CE), Power, Government of Nagaland (GoN), Kohima, Nagaland.

The initial report of the status of SPM billing and the sample analysis depicts a very favorable trend both for the Department as well as for the VEMBs and UEMBs. According to the Power Department, besides few early hitches in some technical aspects, all VEMBs and UEMBs are reported to be functioning as envisaged. Table 1 shows the summary of Consumption and Income/Revenue collection in the state’s electrical divisions with pre-SPM (2000-2001) and post-SPM (2015-2016) respectively.

Sl. No.	Year	Overall Power Consumption (MU)*	Total Income through Collection of Bills (rupees in crore)	Cost of Power i.e., Rs. in Crore per 1 MU
1.	Pre-Communitisation 2000-2001	220	18.69	11.77
2.	Post-Communitisation 2015-2016	645	104.56	6.16

Table 1: Status of Electricity Consumption and Income during Pre-Communitisation (2000-2001) and Post-Communitisation (2015-2016)

* MU = Million Unit

Source: CE, Power, GoN, 2017.

Table 1, clearly defines the consumption and income of electricity in the State of Nagaland. During the pre-communitisation 2000-2001, the cost of power was at a high of 11.77 crore per 1 million unit. Whereas during the post-communitisation 2015-2016, there was a drastic change in the cost of power in the state. As per the statement of the Power Department, for the first time an amount of Rs. 100 crore mark crossed during the last financial year of the department. Thus, with the cost of power at a rate of 6 crore per 1 million unit showed significant improvement in the purchasing efficiency of power. This implies healthy sustainable cost effectiveness as envisaged by the power department. It was possible only through proper undertakings of communitisation by the people of Nagaland at large. This has truly exhibited to the other communities of how a society can make use of such sector in sustainable living with the resources at hand.

Further, along with the illustration of primary data from the government source, a pre-sample is selected in order to get firsthand experience of the study. The sample located at Sangtemla Ward under Mokokchung district, Nagaland is categorized as an urban area. The ward's UEMB has a fully fledged body dully constituted as per the Nagaland Communitisation of Electricity (Management in

Urban areas by Urban Electricity Management Board) Rules, 2004.

The UEMB has been entrusted the sole responsibility to work out the detail modalities with regard to the billing and collection. Figure 1 given below depicts a typical monthly consumption, billing and income procedure.

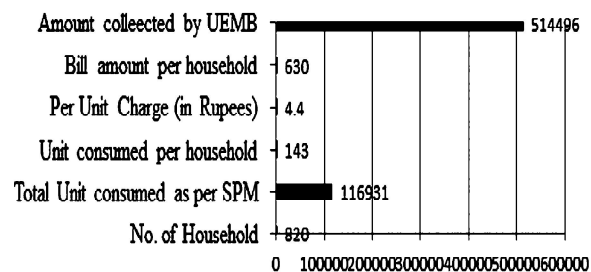


Figure 1: Sample of Monthly Electricity Status as per March, 2017.

Source: UEMB, Sangtemla Ward, Mokokchung, Nagaland, India, 2017.

The foregoing descriptions reflect how communitisation can contribute towards greater participation, improved efficiency and consolidation of gains by sharing of resources, responsibility and ownership for a sustainable community. Martina Solo and Tongpangkumla (2013) in their study to evaluate the effectiveness of Communitisation programme in rural areas of Nagaland reveals that “Communitisation programme has been effective

in achieving the objectives in terms of revenue collection, control of power theft, and reduction of technical and commercial losses in villages. Success of communitisation depends on the level of awareness and the capacity of the committee members, and strength of the functioning of the governance and implementation institutions... also depends upon how motivated and united a community is and how coordinated different institutions within the area". Communitisation requires the community to generate resources for services for which government is able to provide limited or no funds. The ability and resourcefulness of the community to be able to generate such funds is therefore an important factor impacting success (Neema P. Broome). Through communitisation it has provided quality electricity and improved capabilities of the power utilities. It is possible only through a sense of belonging and sharing amongst the community and by managing the material and resources for betterment of the society.

Way Forward

By tradition and culture, the Naga society has a rich social capital, community spirit, a sense of community based action and the unique absence of caste and social discrimination. Strong tribal and village community bonds exist in traditional institutions which are organized, effective and participatory. Traditional socio-political governing

institutions have been the crux of grassroots administration in Nagaland. Communitisation in the state has come as a perfect interface to utilise the rich resources towards a sustainable way forward. Amidst numerous global challenges this is a one stop call for the Nagas perhaps to reignite the principle of community spirit and unity like in the past.

It has to be kept in mind that there is a huge demand of citizens' involvement for fulfilling the Communitised projects in the State. With this holistic approach if the Naga community fervently emulates in applying the patterns of political participation on communitisation, then surely any given targets are achievable in terms of its objectives. The way the Nagas participate in electoral game with high rates is definitely a positive indication of a healthy growth of democratic institution. It is to be reminded that citizens' participation is the key to the essence of a successful democratic state. Hence Nagas know more about how they live and what they want and what is best for them than what people from outside do. Further, equipping people with right information and knowledge that is acceptable and compatible with the community will help them make healthy choices. On a brighter blend of interconnectness between the ideals of communitisation and patterns of political participation, then together there is a hope to strike the right tone for a sustainable community.

End Notes

- ¹ Communitisation evolved out of a quest to improve public delivery systems providing mass scale services; involves partnership between government and community including: transfer of ownership of public resources and assets, control over service delivery & decentralization, delegation, empowerment and building capacity; and based on Triple 'T' approach : Trust the user community, Train them to discharge their newfound responsibilities & Transfer governmental powers and resources in respect of management.

- ² Single Point Metering (SPM) can be defined as collective metering of the power consumption by a village/town through one or more main meter(s) in that area. It is a system where a village/town is collectively billed with a single electricity bill through one or more main meter(s) at the intake point of the village/town and served to the Village/Ward Council or Village/Urban Electricity Management Board for payment to the Department of Power.
- ³ As on date there are 1338 VEMBs and 24 UEMBs spread across 11 districts of Nagaland state.
- ⁴ A commission at a rate of 12% to VEMB and 20% to UEMB is paid in order to absorb Handling and Management of the whole distribution system on the energy charges presented to these bodies. The percentage payable is however be fixed from time to time as per tariff setting by the SERC/State Government as may be notified from time to time.

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