Communitization: An Experience of Governance in Nagaland

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Abstract

The realization of the need for participation of people at the grass root level was seen as necessary for real development and progress of a community. The paper tries to analyze how Naga traditional village administrative system has embraced the most modern concept of governance. The policy makers taped the vibrant and rich social capital i.e. the feeling of community of the Nagas to evolve legislation based on it. Governance gives importance to the participation of stakeholders at all levels of government, private sector and civil societies to provide public services to the people. In Nagaland, Communitization has given legal structure to the concept of governance by giving the responsibility of management of both resources and human resources to benefit the user community. The paper tries to study the process of communitization, its challenges and suggestions for improvement.

Keywords: Administration, Governance, Communitization, Legislation, Community

Introduction

The Nagas were fiercely independent people and most of the villages were an entity on their own, democratic and republic. Each village had their own way of administrative system and rules. The people were introduced to the modern system of administration with the coming of the British rule and eventually coming a part of India as the 16th State in 1963. The Government of India understanding the uniqueness of the Naga situation the makers of Indian Constitution had given importance to the traditional system of administration of the Nagas. The traditional system of village administration and customs has been brought under the aegis of Article 371(A) in the Constitution.

It should be noted that because of the democratic nature of the way of traditional administration with the Village Council at the helm which saw the involvement of the whole community in any work of the village like clearing of the jungle passage for going to the field, if wild animals destroyed paddy fields the whole village came together to hunt them down etc. Therefore the sense of community is very strong even today amongst the Nagas and this positive energy can be taped to bring about change in Nagaland.

While a traditional village in the state maybe understood as having functioned effectively in the past, with the demand of changing times and the Constitutional obligation[i] cast

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on the state, it is legitimate to raise a query if the state of Nagaland has taken any measure to empower the villages of the state (Z. Angami 2008, i).

After the independence of India from the British Raj, India gave to itself a bulky Constitution resulting in red-tapism brought about by the traditional hierarchical bureaucratic structure inherited from the British resulting in lack of progress at the grass root level of administration. The top down administrative system seem to be very slow in bringing change, therefore the need was for an alternative system. This led policy makers to embrace the idea of participation of the community at the grass root level in deciding how to bring about change and development, a more people friendly and community centric system of governance.

Concept of Governance

The concept of 'governance' is not new. It is as old as human civilization. Simply put 'governance' means: the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented[ii]. The concept of governance were not frequently used in the developmental and policy making parley till the 1990s after which it has become a word which is on the lips of every government, NGOs etc. The word governance was first used by the World Bank in its report on Sub-Saharan Africa in 1989. The term governance gained currency in India with the liberalization of the Indian economy. The decade of the 1990s saw increasing use of the term governance and the policy makers accepted that governance is critical for the alleviation of poverty in the country. UNDP defined governance as the exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels. Governance exercises its influence, and in turn is influenced by institutions and organizations (Bharathan 2013, 51).

The key components of governance are accountability, transparency, predictability and participation at all levels of government and public enterprises and other private agencies that provide public services to the people. The universally accepted features of good governance are the exercise of legitimate political power , a complex set of institutions and actors that are drawn from but also beyond the government, recognizes the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues, recognizes the autonomous self-governing networks of actors, formulation and implementation of policies that are equitable, transparent, non-discriminatory, socially sensitive, participatory and accountable to people. "Governance is concerned with network of relationship of three actors-state, market and civil society. Governance is concerned with the changes taking place in the organization of the state and its relationship with the private and civil society actors. Here academic attention turns from state-centric analysis towards an understanding of the wider public policy system in which the institutions of government appear to be involved in processes of negotiation, bargaining and compromise with a host of other actors. This is what is conventionally described as the transition from government to governance" (Mathur 2008, 6).

Communitization as a Step towards Good Governance

In Nagaland the concept of communitization was introduced for good governance by the policy makers of the state led by the then Chief Secretary of Nagaland, Shri R. S. Pandey. During a Seminar titled 'Working with Community for Universalization of Elementary Education and Quality Issues in Elementary Education' he clearly pointed that nothing is possible without community. He further stated that working with the community and quality issue had to attend not only at the apex but also at the grass root levels. He said that social capital should be utilized in the form of strong bonds and the best way to improve management was to hand over the management to the community. Thus an attempt was made to use the key characteristics of good governance participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society[iii].

Communitization is about the user community, the real stakeholders taking charge of the institutions and services set up by the Government and turning them around. It involves empowerment, delegation, decentralization, building-capacity and much more rolled into one. The word 'communitization' was coined by Shri R. S Pandey for want of an appropriate word in the dictionary. It refers to the sharing of ownership of the government institution and its assets with the user community. Pandey cites that the co mingling of the government and the user community leads to a new paradigm, different both from governmental and privatization. It is another way of governance-the third way (Pandey 2010, ix).

The idea for a new way of governance came to fruition when it was realized that the system was hobbled with an apathetic workforce, absenteeism by the employees, lack of protest and pressure for reform etc. Through communitization, the ownership of the assets is substantially transferred to the user community, who are empowered with delegated governmental authority.

The policy makers in Nagaland realized that 'community' is still very important for a Naga both in the rural and urban areas-social capital which was found to be very strong and vibrant in the state. There was also the realization that the benefits of various Developmental Programs like the Community Developmental Programs, IGRY, IRDP, TRYSEM, various schemes under VDBs were not really reaching the target groups. So communitization was conceived to let communities and individuals participate in the developmental activities of their village/areas. The common people were given the responsibility and the task to find solution to challenges and ways for continuation of the developmental programs. Thus, it aimed to tap the rich social capital of the Nagas.

The concept of communitization has made decentralization, delegation and grass root level participation a reality in Nagaland. The

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creative forces that lay latent in the community were unleashed by the sense of responsibility that came along with communitization. Communtization consists of a unique partnership between the government and the community with the aim of improving the public utility systems. It involves transfer of public resources and assets, control over service delivery, empowerment, decentralization, delegation and capacity building. The thrust area of communitization is the triple 'T' approach:

1. Trust the user community.

2. Train them to discharge their new found responsibilities, and

3. Transfer governmental powers and resources in respect of management.

The Government of Nagaland took the bold step to legalize this concept by an Executive Ordinance passed "The Nagaland Communitization of Public Institutions and Services Ordinance, 2002". The objective of the Act has been set out as follows:

"Whereas it is expedient to provide for empowerment of the community and delegation of the powers and functions of the State Government to the local authorities by way of participation of the community in matters connected with the management of public utilities, public services and the activities of the State Government connected with education, water supply, roads, forests, power, sanitation, health, tourism, agriculture, and other welfare and development schemes and also provide for promotion of community based schemes incidental thereto." (Benjongkumba 2016, 17)

By the Ordinance, the State Government, by notification, constitute authorities as maybe called Board or Committee or as any other nomenclature or any of the existing local authorities established under any law for the time being enforced for a village or an area covering two or more villages to exercise the powers and to discharge the functions. The Executive Ordinance became the Nagaland Communitization of Public Institutions and Services Act, 2002[iv].

It is important to note that the policy makers were very prudent in understanding the issue of gender equality in a traditional society like Nagaland. Therefore in the light of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, women representation has been made mandatory in all the committees of the communitized departments. This would give impetus to the women folks to lend in their voice for the betterment of her community.

Concrete Steps Attempted towards Communitization

The powers and functions of the Board or Committees are to manage and operate the public utilities and public services or the activities of the State Government connected with education, water supply, roads, forests, health etc as delegated by the State Government, to implement any scheme or policy that maybe formulated with respect to any particular service or activities and to undertake any other social, cultural and educational activities. The control of the developmental programs, therefore, in Nagaland has been given to the Village Councils which is the apex body of village administration (traditional institution) and it

controls the working of all the other committees. Thus, the Government brought the participation of the traditional institutions in the developmental process.

The first department to be communitized was Education i.e., Khuzama Village, Kohima district. Village education committees are formed comprising of teachers, parents of students, representative of the civil societies and village council. It was based on the maxim of 'no work, no pay' .Therefore, the system of education has become more effective and they are now responsible for managing the affairs of the school. There are instances of deduction of salaries of those teachers who do not perform their duties, school management worked more effectively with the delegation added responsibility, parents and guardians became more involved towards the betterment of the schools, the vice of keeping proxy teachers have reduced to some extent though not wholly etc.

Secondly, the Water Supply is also brought under communitization. Under the new program, the department has handed over the operation and maintenance of the village water supply to the Village councils, which appoints the Village Water and Sanitation Committee (WATSAN). Thus the problems of water pilferage, damages of pipe line and non-performance of duties by departmental field staffs have tremendously reduced. The villagers themselves will now be the owners and responsible for adequate and clean drinking water.

Thirdly, the department of power had also handed over the management of electricity in villages to the Village Councils, which constitute the Village Electricity Management Board. The departmental staffs posted in a particular village shall not be eligible to be a member of the Board of that village. The Board members oversee the dispatch and collection of bills. The bill collectors can keep 20% of the collection for the service rendered, tampering of meter and power theft has drastically reduced, and the department is also instrumental in providing CFL and LED bulbs at subsidized rate to reduce electric consumption. Communitization has led to the increase of revenue for the department due to the effectiveness of collection of bills as a result of delegation of work to stakeholder themselves.

Fourthly, the Health sector in Nagaland has also been communitized. The Village Health Committee was set up to look after the effective and efficient working of the Village Health Centers. Before this legislation the health sector in Nagaland was in a very poor state but with the participation of the stakeholders, it has improved to a large extent. Now the health workers are monitored by the community so for non life threatening sicknesses the community has trained workers for consultation.

The above mentioned are few instances of the developmental programs delegated to the common people. The process of communitization has been undertaken in almost all over Nagaland in varied departments. The kind of political support which is proclaimed by the Government has given the richness of the Naga tradition in which community bonds are extraordinarily strong.

Communitization as a form of good governance has been implemented in Nagaland. This concept of communitization can be termed as a 'people –centered' approach (Sen and Dreze 2002, 6) which puts human agency at the centre stage (rather than the market or the government). Communitization is a process; it is not an end in itself. The process in progress, need to be nursed. The role of the Government has increased with need to provide supervisory and supportive help. Active participation of the people from the community, particularly the poor's, along with the government in the process of development enhances their motivation and provides a sense of status and power. The process of communitization have tried to embrace the characteristics of good governance and this can be seen in the way traditional aspect of administration has been roped in to improve the living conditions of communities in Nagaland. This lends credence to the importance of the traditional institutions in the development process and also the bottoms up approach. The concept of communitization has touched the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) declared by United Nation like providing compulsory primary education, gender equality and women empowerment, development activities etc.

The Government of Nagaland has received accolades for the concept of communitization for instance, the prestigious United Nations public service award in 2008 and Indra Awaz Yojana award 2009. This concept is deliberated all over India and it is also recognized by the global community.

Challenges and Suggestions

The government and the Villages are trying to bring this concept to fruition though not without challenges. The VDBs, Village Councils, civil societies, administration and the political leadership should not bask in the past success. About 15 years have passed since the implementation of the legislation, there has been instances of both success and failures. There is a need for more commitment to the implementation of communitization as a process of good governance from the government, user community, civil societies, stakeholders etc. Some of the challenges faced in the successful implementation of communitization are:

1. The initial hype towards the concept seems to be dying out. There is a lack of commitment in all the spheres of society from the political executives to the grass root level workers to achieve the tenets of good governance.

2. The teachers, health workers and field workers are dissatisfied due to the dual nature of reviewing authorities i.e. one to the government and the other to the VDB. The former are also discontent as they are controlled by illiterate villagers who hold positions of authority in various committees of the village.

3. There have been voices of concern regarding the functioning of the Village Development Boards. They are accused of mismanagement, corruption, siphoning of funds, nepotism etc.

4. A times party politics is involved in the selection of committee members leading to

the alienation and discontent of the minority group in the community.

5. On the issue of representation of women in the committees, it has been opined that women are left out from decision making decision and relegated to making refreshment in the kitchen. They are members just in name.

6. There is an ongoing blame going on between the government and the villagers. Like the villagers feign lack of awareness about certain aspects of the rules while the departments are of the view that enough awareness has been given and that most of the villagers are literate so they can update themselves on any new rules and regulations.

7. According to the communities there is paucity of funds to carry out development and daily expenditure of the committees. The villagers themselves do not have means to generate hefty amounts to carry out developmental activities.

8. Another lacuna in the Naga society is the culture of dependency whereby the Nagas are so dependent on the government handouts and welfare programs. There is a lack of determination, motivation and a sense of civic responsibility to sacrifice time and energy for the advancement and betterment of the community.

For any good process to achieve its full potential, it will definitely face challenges and criticisms. However, the former should be taken to hone the dents in the process. There is an immediate need for recommitment by the political executives, the bureaucracy, civil societies and user community so that this process of grass root development does not reach a death end. Some of the suggestive measures would be:

1. A sense of ownership should be developed and this can be done by urging the traditional institutions at the village level to revive the sense of 'community' feeling and do away with the selfish and individualistic mindedness. Public leaders, administrators and the common people will have to bear the responsibility of keeping our traditional institutions transparent, accountable, credible, and responsive for greater public service for one and all.

2. At the governmental level, during Civil Services Day celebration 2016, the then Chief Secretary of Nagaland Pankaj Kumar announced several recommendations like "communitization committee at village level, review of the policy every five years structural system to oversee the policy, incentive for best performing committee and penalty for non performance or non compliance"(The Morung Express, April 23, 2016). This shows the commitment of the government to achievement of communitization.

3. The sense of mistrust that exist between the teachers, health workers, field workers, government officials and various committees can be sorted out by free and frank dialogue. An environment of mutual respect and trust should be created for the policy of communitization to progress.

4. The various political parties should not allow petty politics to hamper the work of

development in the communities .There is a danger of party- politics making its way into these bodies which will lead to the corruption of our traditional institutions, the very essence of the Nagas. Rather the political parties should take a proactive role in disseminating the knowledge of new rules being put out regarding the policy of communization.

5. The ability of women should not be undermined. If gender equality starts from the grass root level, it will have a profound impact in the greater society. Women should be given more important and trusted role in the decision making.

6. One of the most important components of good governance is transparency and accountability. As there are cases of mismanagement and distrust in the utilization of funds and selection of committee members, these two components should be embraced literally.

7. Intensive awareness and sensitization program should be conducted if any new rules arise. The channel of communication between the governmental agencies and the committees should be without apprehension and doubt.

8. In Nagaland the role of the civil societies is very important for any program or policy of the government to succeed. The Churches, Hohos, and the plethora of Unions should take it as their responsibility to help in the development of our communities for a better future. The culture of dependency on governmental handouts should be broken and to strive for merit should be encouraged.

Conclusion

The Nagas have come a long way from single village republic units to working as a fully fledged unit of the Indian state; a transition from traditional village administration to that of a modern system of government. From the 20th century there has been a shift from the thrust of the government from above to a system of decentralization and more involvement of people at the grass root level. More than a decade has lapsed since the introduction of the legislation on communitization; it has tried to introduce programs to empower the villages of the state by roping in the rich social capital inherent in the Naga society. The concept of communitization has enabled the participation of the community in the development and progress of their own resources.

The analysis of communitization as an experience of governance is still in its infancy, there have definitely been successes and failures; from winning accolades in the international arena for implementing the components governance to doubts and skepticism about the effectiveness providing services to the real targets. Despite some legitimate setbacks in the implementation of communitization, effort should be made for better communication between the state, private sector and civil society in achieving efficiency and effectiveness at work, transparency in disbursement and utilization of funds, accountability to controlling agencies and encouraging greater participation and responsibility of the user community through awareness and sensitization programs. If so, in another decade the Naga model of governance i.e. communitization could become a credible model of governance especially in the developing countries.

Endnotes

[i] Article 40 of the Constitution of India which is an article of the Directive Principles of State Policy says that the state shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them such powers and authority as maybe necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.

[ii] See https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/good-governance.pdf. Accessed on 23-10-2018

[iii] See https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/good-governance.pdf. Accessed on 23-10-2018

[iv] Seehttps://www.nagaland.gov.in/Nagaland/UsefulLinks/The%20Nagaland%20Communitisation%20of%20Public%20Institutions%20and%20Services%20Act,%202002.pdf. A simple paraphrasing of the Act was done.Accessed on 23-10-2018

[v] See http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgoverview/mdg_goals.html. Accessed on 23-10-18

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