

# DECENTRALIZED PLANNING IN THE SIXTH SCHEDULED AREA OF INDIA (A Study of Meghalaya)

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**Abstract:** In order to decentralise the planning process, Article 243ZD of the Constitution of India directs States to constitute District Planning Committees which are responsible for formulating draft district plans by consolidating the plans of the panchayats and municipal bodies. This provision of the Constitution however, does not cover certain parts of the country. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, which paved the way for the creation of three tier panchayati raj institutions and municipal bodies are not applicable to States like Meghalaya which are listed in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. An alternate structure of local self-government, called the Autonomous District Councils, operates here. This paper examines the planning structure in Meghalaya and highlights the absence of decentralization of planning structure in the State.

The paradigm of people's participation in development as an alternative to the top down centralized development approach emerged in development theory and practice when it was realized that the participation of people in the decision making process results in positive outcomes for the targeted beneficiaries and help in realizing the full potential of development interventions. The significance of the participatory approach in (rural) development is captured in an often quoted statement of the respected African leader Julius Nyerere, who said:

Rural development is the participation of people in a mutual learning experience involving themselves, their local resources, external change agents and outside resources. People cannot be developed; they can only develop themselves by participation and co-operative activities which affect their wellbeing. People are not being developed when they are herded like animals into new ventures (Nyerere, 1968 cited in Oakley, 1991).

Since 1970s, there has been a gradual acceptance of the new development paradigm which acknowledges the importance and criticality of people's participation for the success of development interventions. This new paradigm calls for including the poor and the excluded to gain access to and control over development resources and benefits. Through out the 1980s and 1990s, active people's participation in development interventions has gained in popularity and usage. Participation has also expanded into new sphere such as policy reforms which hitherto was completely cut off from public intervention (Cromwall, 2001).

In India, development planners realized in the very early stage of implementation of the development projects like the Community Development Programme (launched in 1952) of the necessity of involving the community at the grassroots for achieving real progress in rural development. An example of the

importance of participation of people at the grassroots in designing and implementing of an innocuous development intervention such as an improved cooking stove is underlined in the study of the rural renewable energy programme in India (Neudoerffer, et. al., 2001, p29). Citing the example of improved cook stove programme, the study highlight how the absence of participation has adversely affected this initiative meant to help mitigate the rural energy needs of the rural populace. To quote from the study: '....in the programme to provide improved cook stoves factors such as local cooking practices, food and fuel preferences, and local knowledge and expertise are either entirely overlooked or considered only in a cursory, secondary manner without figuring into the stove design. While a number of stoves have been successfully installed in rural kitchens, because they fail to fulfill any local need, more often or not these improved stoves sit idle. They are either never used and are discarded because they fail to fulfill any vital need, or demand a dramatic change in cooking practice or fuel use' (Neudoerffer, et. al., pp. 373).

The existences of strong association between project performance and beneficiary participation is also supported by empirical studies (Isham, et. al., 1995). There are many benefits that participation brings to development interventions such as (i) improvements in the effectiveness, efficiency, self-reliance, coverage, sustainability of development projects (Oakley, 1995; Mitchner, 1998; Stein, 1998; Karl 2000) (ii) accountability and the empowerment of primary stakeholders (Sen 1997, Cornwall, 2001).

This paper evaluates the state of people's participation in development planning in Meghalaya. In the preceding section we begin with an introduction of the theme of participation and its importance in development intervention. Section II discusses measures initiated to operationalise decentralised planning in India. In section III, we describe the structure of local self government existing in Meghalaya under the Sixth Schedule of the constitution and the scope available within the structure to secure and effect people's participation in development planning. Section VI examines the state planning structure and analyse the extent of people' participation in planning process at state and sub state levels. Section V concludes.

## **II. Decentralized Planning in India**

The importance of people's participation in planning is captured in this statement of Gunnar Myrdal<sup>1</sup>: 'policies should be decided on by some sort of democratic political procedures and that they should, as far as possible, be implemented with the cooperation and shared responsibility of local and sectional communities'. Since the beginning of planned development in India, several recommendations have been made and measures initiated towards increasing people' participation in planning process through democratic decentralisation.

In India, the First Five Year Plan recognized the need to undertake planning exercise at the national, state, district and local community levels, but

did not spell out how this was to be operationalised. The Second-Five Year Plan called for planning and execution of development programmes within the district with the full support and participation of the best non-official leadership at all levels. It introduced two new elements in planning process, namely the establishment of the district development council and the participation of people in village planning through panchayats. In the Third Five Year Plan, attempt was made to prepare state plans on the basis of district and block plans. However, these early initiatives of planning from below could not be operationalised.

In 1969, the planning commission introduced guidelines for formulation of district plans. This was followed by a scheme by the Planning Commission in 1972 for strengthening of planning machinery at the state level. In 1978, an important recommendation to strengthen decentralized planning was made by Prof. M.L. Dantwala who identified block level planning as the appropriate sub-state planning level for proper appreciation of the felt needs of the people and a vital link between clusters of villages and the district, state and national levels. The Planning Commission issued guidelines on formulation of block level plans in tune with these recommendations.

In the early eighties, a working group under the Chairmanship of Professor C.H. Hanumantha Rao, was constituted to develop guidelines for district plans. Based on the recommendations of this Committee, the Seventh Five Year Plan adopted decentralized planning at the district level as one of the major strategies to achieve plan targets. In 1985, the Committee set up to review the existing administrative arrangements for rural development reemphasized the need for decentralised planning at the district level and below, as participation of local representatives would reflect the needs and aspirations of the local people. It also envisaged that planning and implementation of sectoral activities would be decentralised and integrated into a unified activity, with horizontal coordination at the district level.

A major impetus to increase people's participation in development process was achieved by the passing of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts. The Acts which introduced Parts IX and IXA in the Indian Constitution containing Articles 243 to 243 ZG, paved the way for establishment of local self governments at the rural and urban areas devolved with powers, responsibility and accountability to the local population. As far as decentralised planning is concerned, Articles 243 G, 243 W, 243 ZD and 243 ZE introduced under the Acts empower people to be involved in planning in areas assigned to the panchayats and municipalities bodies for the social and economic upliftment of the local population. As a step towards implementing the new decentralised planning model throughout the country, the planning commission has provided state governments with guidelines for formulation of district plans by the District Planning Committee and incorporating these in the state annual plans for financial year 2007-08 and also for preparing the XI Five Year Plan proposal. These

guidelines are as per the recommendations of the Expert Group formed by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj in 2005 to make planning at the grass roots level a reality and to operationalise the planning mandate bestowed upon the local governments by the constitution.

However, as the provision of the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts does not apply to Sixth schedule areas in the state of Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura in Northeast India <sup>2</sup> the three tier local government system introduced by the above constitutional amendments does not exist in these areas and as such the decentralization planning mechanism is not operational. What exists is a distinct institutional setup of local government in the form of the Autonomous District Council constituted under the sixth schedule of the Constitution.

### **III. Local Self-Government and Decentralized Planning in Meghalaya**

Right from the period when the country was under the British rule, the administration of the tribal inhabited hills areas in the north eastern region (NER) of India was different from that prevailing in the rest of the country. In the period before India gained its Independence, the tribal areas of the NER, which were then known as the 'Backward tracts', were separated from the general administrative and constitutional setup prevailing in the rest of the country. When the country gained Independence in August of 1947, the founding fathers of the constitution recognised the uniqueness of the traditional and customary institutions of the tribal areas in the region such as the self governing village administration. They also felt the need for a political and administrative framework which would work to safeguard and promote the rights and interests of the tribal in these areas, while at the same time prepare people in these areas to assimilate with the national mainstream. Accordingly, the Sixth Schedule was incorporated in the Indian Constitution according to which Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) were established in the tribal dominated hill districts of then composite state of Assam. Later, many of these tribal areas were carved out as separate states from Assam but they continue to come under the Sixth Schedule of the constitution. Today, there are 10 ADCs constituted under the Sixth Schedule of the constitution in Meghalaya, Mizoram, and in tribal dominated areas of Assam and Tripura. The ADCs in these areas form the alternate structure of local self government at the sub state level.

Of the areas under the Sixth Schedule, Meghalaya, a state carved out of Assam in 1972 with a predominantly tribal population, is the only state where all the area (other than the small area in Shillong Municipality and Cantonment) fall within one of the three ADCs. These ADCs are the (i) Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) comprising of the districts of East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills and Ribhoi. (ii) Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC) comprising of the district of Jaintia Hills and (iii) Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) comprising the districts of East Garo Hills, West Garo Hills

and South Garo Hills. In the absence of three tier panchayat system in the state, the ADCs, whose members are directly elected by the people, represent the lowest tier of government in Meghalaya<sup>3</sup>.

An ADC constituted under the Sixth Schedule is a corporate body by name of the district/regional council, having perpetual succession and a common seal with the right to sue and be sued. The council consists of 30 members (in the case of ADCs in Meghalaya) who are elected on the basis of adult franchise<sup>4</sup>. ADCs are vested with legislative, executive, judicial and financial powers and functions in areas under their jurisdiction. This include powers to make laws in respect to allotment and use of land, management of forests, establishment and management of village and town, regulation of shifting cultivation and irrigation, appointment and removal of chiefs and village headmen, inheritance of poverty and social customs (provided in Paragraph 3 of the Sixth Schedule). Additionally, the ADCs have power to regulate and control money lending and trading by non-tribals within the autonomous council area (Paragraph 10). ADCs are also empowered to constitute village and district council in the autonomous areas for trails of suits and cases in which all the parties are members of the scheduled tribes (Paragraph 4).

Additionally, ADCs can also establish, construct and manage primary schools, dispensaries, markets, roads, road transport and waterways, and fisheries. Further, the Governor may also entrust ADCs with functions relating to rural development, community project and village planning (Paragraph 6). Under the Sixth Schedule, ADCs can levy and collect taxes on land revenue, lands and buildings, professionals, employments, animals, vehicles, boats, trades, callings and employments, entry of goods into markets for sale therein, and tolls on passenger and goods carried and ferried. Besides, ADCs can also levy taxes for maintenance of school, dispensaries or roads (Paragraph 8). Under paragraph 9 of the Sixth Schedule, the royalty on the licenses or leases for the extraction of minerals in the autonomous districts is shared between the state government and the ADCs.

As pointed out above, under the Sixth Schedule of the constitution ADCs are empowered to undertake certain developmental activities. However, studies undertaken on one of the councils in the state, namely the KHADC, reveal that the council has fared badly in carrying our development functions entrusted on it. Many have commented that in the very first place the ADCs unlike the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) have not been constituted to facilitate and promote grassroots participation in economic development but rather are meant to provide autonomy in social and cultural spheres in areas dominated by tribals in a situation where the tribal areas were part of the state Assam. With the attainment of statehood and the limited resources available to ADCs, the development functions are now carried out mainly by the state government. Most of the

development activities undertaken by the ADCS are minor project such as construction/maintenance of footpath, footbridge, drinking water well, community hall and improvement of market which poses a question on the impact they may have on the socio-economic well being of the people (Syiem, 2005 and Stuligross, 1999).

On promoting of decentralized planning in the country, the 73rd and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Acts explicitly spells out the role of PRIs in developing plans for socio-economic benefits of the community. Article 243 G and 243 W endow local government at both rural and urban areas respectively with powers and responsibility to prepare and implement plans for economic development and social justice.

In the case of ADCs no such direct provision(s) exist in the Sixth schedule.

However, paragraph 6 does state that the governor may entrust the district councils with:

"...functions in relation to agriculture, animal husbandry, community projects, co-operatives societies, social welfare, village planning or any other matter to which the executive power of the state ".

This provision of 'village planning' could have been used to create a mechanism to involve communities in planning and implementation of development programme and to use this inputs in preparing the district and state plan. However, this option has not been exercised or tried by the ADCs or the state government.

#### **IV. Development Planning Structure in Meghalaya**

In Meghalaya, the present planning structure consists of the Planning Board at the apex level and the District Planning and Development Council (DPDC) at the district level. In 2004, another level of planning organization was added through the constitution of the two Regional Planning and Development Councils (RPDCs).

The State Planning Board was constituted in 1972 as an advisory body. It's main functions are (i) to advise the government regarding the formulation of the annual plans and Five Year Plans (ii) monitoring and review of development plans (iii) conduct special studies. In the beginning, the board was constituted with one Chairman, one Deputy Chairman, Five members, and 11 member advisers. In 2007, the members of the Board consist of one Chairman, four Co-Chairmen, two Deputy Chairman, six official members and nine non-official members.

The RPDCs were created to function as additional layer of planning unit between the state Planning Board and DPDCs. One RPDC was constituted for areas covered by East and West Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi District and Jaintia Hills

District and another for the areas under East, West and South Garo Hills districts. The function of the council is to take stock of the natural & human resources of the Districts as well as the pattern of development and exploitation of their resources. The council is also to coordinate, monitor and review the implementation of the district plans and programmes of the two regions. Each council consists of a Chairman appointed from amongst the Ministers and 18 Members appointed from amongst the Minister, CEM's and Deputy Commissioners of the concerned District etc. Although the constitution of the **RPDCs** has been notified by the state government, the **RPDCs** have not met even for a single meeting till date. Therefore, the functional development planning structure in the state consists of only the State Planning Board and the **DPDCs**.

Below the **RPDC** are the **DPDC** which was constituted in all the districts by the state government in 1986 replacing the then existing District Planning Committees (**DPC**). Unlike the then existing **DPCs** which were mainly involved in the review of implementation of project and programmes in the districts (Khan, 1993), the **DPDC** was established for formulation of Five Year Plans and Annual Plans at the district level. The main functions of the **DPDC** are drawing of the plans based on the need and potential of the district and within the objectives of the state and national plan, co-ordination and monitoring of district plans projects and programmes, undertaking of special studies and providing advice to the state government on development issues.

The members of the council comprise of all Members of the Legislative Assembly (**MLAs**) of the concerned district, Deputy Commissioner, who is also the vice chairman of the council, Chief Executive Member or representative of the Autonomous District Council of the district. Additional Deputy Commissioner/District Planning Officer, who is the member Secretary. The council is headed by a cabinet rank minister of the district. The meetings of the Council are held once or twice a year and are attended by all district officers of respective government departments.

## **V. DPC and DPDC in Meghalaya**

A comparison of the role of the **DPDCs** in Meghalaya and the District Planning Committees (**DPC**) that are mandated to be established in every district across the country as per Article 243ZD of the Indian Constitution shows the absence of any framework or mechanism in the present planning structure of the state for participation of people in formulation of developing plans.

Under the 73 and 74 Amendment Acts, The preparation of development plans is a key functional obligation devolved on the panchayats (municipalities) by Article 243 G and 243 W of the Constitution. Such planning is required to be undertaken at each level of the **PRIs**. Further, article 243ZD has explicitly laid down the role of the **DPCs** in formulating the district plans by consolidating the

plans of the panchayats and municipalities and then to be forwarded to state government. In this regard, Article 243ZD states the role of **DPC** as:

"....to consolidate the plans prepared by the Panchayats and the Municipalities in the district and to prepare a draft development plan for the district as a whole ".

In the drafting of the plans, the **DPC** has to consider:

".... matters of common interest between the Panchayats and Municipalities including spatial planning, sharing of power and other physical and natural resources, the integrated development of infrastructure environment conversavation; the extent and type of available resources whether financial or otherwise; consult such institutions and organisations as the Governor may, by order, specify... ".

Further the planning role of the **PRIs** (and municipalities) at different tiers is clearly laid down. Article 243G (243W) provide for devolution of powers and responsibilities to **PRIs** (municipalities) with respect to (i) Preparation of plan for economic development and social justice; (ii) Implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice in relation to 29 (18) subjects given in Eleventh (Twelfth) Schedule. According to Article 243G:

" ...The state, may, by law, endow the panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government and such law may contain provisions for the devolution of powers and responsibilities upon Panchayats at the appropriate level, subject to such conditions as may be specified therein, with respect to: a) the preparation of plans for economic development and social justice; b) the implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice as may be entrusted to them including those in relation to the matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule "

The above provision of the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts, therefore, clearly spells out a direct role for the people through the panchayats and municipalities in planning and implementation of development projects and programmes for benefits of the people. In contrast to this process, the existing mechanism of formulation of district plan by the **DPDCs** in Meghalaya is based on departmental proposal submitted by the district offices with no framework for development of plans from villages to block and finally the district levels. The development plans prepared by the **DPDCs** are mere compilation of the proposals of departments prepared by district government offices. These proposals are placed at the meeting of the **DPDC** for approval and forwarded to the planning department of the government. Apart from the **MLAs**, there are no non-government representatives such as those from the farmers, co-operatives,



development NGOs, entrepreneurs, women groups, academicians, and representatives of the village councils. There is also no mechanism for undertaking of planning below the district level (i.e., at block, village cluster or village levels). Thus the planning structure that exist at the district does not support bottom up planning process nor ensure wide public participation in formulation of development plans of the district.

Further, while theoretically the state plans should incorporate district plans forwarded by the DPDCs, however, in practice the state plans are formulated by the planning department from the sectoral proposal of government departments in line with guidelines set out by the planning commission. Thus, the whole planning exercise becomes a centralized process with little or no consultation or consideration of the district plans in building of the state plan proposal.

The observation of Dr. D. R. Gadgil on the status of the state level planning in the country delivered in 1966 best sums up the present state of development planning in Meghalaya. In his address, Dr. Gadgil had remarked that state planning in India is centralized and highly officialised. The state plan is prepared by piecing together departmental proposal formulated by respective government departments. There is no consultation or discussion of general or specific objectives or proposals and no information is available outside as to what is contemplated or proposed. This statement aptly describes the present status of planning structure and process in Meghalaya.

## V. Conclusion

As explained above, Meghalaya is one of the States in the country where the 73rd and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts do not apply. The State of Meghalaya has a unique local government institution called the Autonomous District Councils constituted under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The existing planning structure and process clearly shows that in the present setup there is no mechanism to allow for participation of the people at the grassroots level. Decentralized planning and creation of a framework for genuine participation of people in the development process is imperative. The challenge arises in doing so within the special decentralized governance structure that exists at present.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Asian Drama: An Enquiry into the Poverty of Nations, by Gunnar Myrdal (An Abridgement by Seth S King, Twentieth Century Fund Study, Vintage Books pp 42).

<sup>2</sup> The act is also not applicable to the tribal areas in nine other states referred as fifth Schedule Areas which comes under The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA, 1996) which was enacted and came into operation on 24 December, 1996. Also the state of Nagaland, hill areas of the State of Manipur for which District Councils exist and the District of Darjeeling in the State of West Bengal is also outside the purview of the Acts Act.

<sup>3</sup> The other ADCs constituted under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule are (1) Assam:

(i) Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, (ii) North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council.

(iii) Bodoland Territorial Council. (2). Mizoram: (i) Chakma Autonomous District

Council, (ii) Mara Autonomous District Council, (iii) Lai Autonomous District Council.

(3). Tripura: Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous District Council.

<sup>4</sup> of the 30 members of council known as Member of District Council (MDC), one is a nominated member.

<sup>5</sup> R. B. R.R. Kale Memorial Lectures by R. D. Gadgil (1966) on the title District Development Planning.

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