

COMMUNITISATION EXPERIENCES IN NAGALAND: ACCOUNTS FROM TWO VILLAGES OF A DISTRICT

Yanbeni Kikon*

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to critically analyse the working of Communitisation Programme¹ in Nagaland which was introduced in 2002. The programme seeks to make use of community's social capital for development effectiveness by making the community the stakeholder of its resources. With large-scale success of the programme, initially, other sectors like electricity and health were also communitised. This paper acknowledges that Communitisation has brought about much needed governance reforms at the local level and has ensured wider participation of the community as well as the traditional institutions. What seems to be at stake is the overburdening of the community, if too many sectors are communitised without the conscious and intensive support of the State. Information availability of the programme is also necessary for mobilising and actualising the community's active participation.

Introduction

Communitisation programme is an innovative governance arrangement introduced by the State of Nagaland in 2002. It aims to actively engage the community in development effectiveness by harnessing the community's social capital. This paper underlines the shift in governance paradigm by engaging the community extensively in many sectors at the local level through Communitisation. It also attempts to critically understand the processes wherein the programme is actualised at the local level. While acknowledging that Communitisation has brought about much

needed governance reforms, this study underlines that caution is needed for devolving too much responsibility to the community without the State's conscious role which may lead to over-burdening of the community.

Initial Experiences of Nagaland's Communitisation Programme

In the backdrop of a highly militarised society perpetually existing for seven decades, Nagaland State innovatively created the Communitisation Programme that seeks to engage the community into the broader governance agenda. The legislation and implementation of Communitisation Programme,

*Assistant Professor, ICFAI University, Nagaland, Email : yanbe83@gmail.com

set up in 2002, through the Communitisation of Education and Public Services Act, 2002, materialised the concept of social capital on a large-scale. Naga society is strongly community-oriented ranging from the culture of hospitality, common welfare, mutual trust and concern for neighbours and clans, villages and tribal communities. Availability of such social bond led the State endeavour to "exploit" the social capital of the Nagas. Thus, the endeavour was to frame a programme to harness social capital based on "trust, reciprocity and concern" for developmental outcomes, making the communities the shareholders of their resources. Such endeavour guarantees a high degree of devolution to the communities and creates participatory opportunities for making them part of governance, specifically local governance. The scope and extent of this programme promises communities controlling their own local affairs through devolution of powers and responsibilities.

The basic principle underlying Communitisation is adopted from the concept of social capital which attempts to harness the community's human resources of togetherness, trust, bondedness and reliability. Robert Putnam defines social capital as "features of social organisation, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam, 1994 : 167). While Anirudh Krishna identifies that "appropriate mediating agencies" are needed for activating the "stock of capital" and also for linking social capital to the State for realising high institutional performance (Krishna, 2003 : 16-25).

R. S. Pandey, the then Chief Secretary of the State and the architect of Communitisation programme, while elaborating the concept explains that 'Communitisation seeks to harness the social capital in the form of trust, bondedness for capitalising the dormant social capital towards community welfare'. R. S. Pandey considers Communitisation to be "a third way" to governance where "the funds, expertise and regulatory powers of the government with the social capital of the user community" are "leveraged" by combining "the best of the public and the private sector systems" (Pandey, 2010: 15). So undertaking the concept of public-private partnership, where the community acts as the owner of community resources engaging itself in "day-to-day management responsibilities" and the State undertaking the "role of a partner, assistant, monitor and supervisor" (Pandey, 2010:16), acting in partnership for achieving an effective and efficient public service delivery, ensuring accountability and efficient management of resources. Such devolutionary powers granted to the community empowered it to take charge and engage itself in the activities concerning its welfare. Communitisation programme in its design also has the inherent mechanism for making the officials accountable and responsive to the community. For example, in the education sector there is a provision for "no work, no pay", where the community takes charge over the attendance of the teachers in the schools of concerned village/locality. When a teacher failed to attend the school without leave, her/his pay is deducted and deposited into the school fund. This, further, acts as fund generation

for the welfare of the school. This works out well in contexts where the community and the elected representatives engage actively.

The institutional arrangement of communitisation involves the engagement of community, State officials, the elected representatives of the traditional institutions like the village councils and also the newly established institutions² for carrying out the programme. The newly created institutions like the Village Education Committee (VEC) set up in each village play an important role in making communitisation effective. It also connects the community at the village or block level to the concerned State officials. It acts as an institutional agent that oversees and directs when needed, in the working of the programme. At the outset, the role of State agencies, village institutional structures and the community are in synchrony to work towards engendering village governance and in bringing about transformative social change.

When introduced in 2002 in the education sector, the government reports that there were "apprehensions and doubts" and also widespread enthusiasm and acceptance by various communities leading to success of the programme. A year after its implementation, it saw the elimination of "proxy and ghost teachers" resulting in minimising "expenditure in this account" (Department of School Education, Government of Nagaland, 2009: 28). Another positive contribution is that when teachers were paid salary on time, there were outcomes which showed "improvement in attendance, discipline

and performance" (Ibid, p. 28). Participation of the village education committee and the communities through finances, free labour and interest increased. The concerned department reported that in the following years after communitisation of elementary schools, there were reports of increased enrolment in both urban and rural schools. The community also contributed in cash, building materials and free manpower service for construction, extension, repair and renovation of existing school building. It also witnessed encouraging response from village councils, where some villages donated land for constructing schools (Ibid: 1-2). Such active response led the government to communitise all elementary schools in urban and rural areas by February 2014.

Such has been the vigour, commitment and focus of the State officials, the community and the VEC representatives at the initial phase of communitisation in Nagaland, adding to success of the programme. The government on seeing the widespread success decided to expand it to other sectors. Eventually sectors like power, health, water and sanitation and tourism were communitised.

Objectives

This paper attempts to analyse the working of Communitisation Programme in Nagaland by focusing on two villages of a district. While understanding communitisation experiences, it also seeks to understand the inter-relationship between the communities, elected representatives, and government officials. On assessing the working of communitisation

Programme, this paper will list out the policy implications for improving the programme for development effectiveness.

Methodology

This paper employs qualitative methods, relying on primary sources like narratives from the field.³ Secondary sources in the form of literature available in the concerned area including government reports have been studied. The methodology has been largely empirical. Random sampling has been undertaken to locate the study, while target sample of the district has been chosen for focusing in a particular district which the author is familiar with, so as to make an in-depth understanding of the context and the underlying socio-political processes.⁴ For an in-depth discussion of each sub-topics discussed, brief narratives of some respondents have been highlighted, besides generally analysing the experiences of all the respondents. Open-ended questionnaires were employed. Wherever possible, intensive interviews and narratives were undertaken with the community, elected representatives and government officials. The respondents were selected randomly by locating each respondent at a distance of five to ten households. However, care was taken to ensure fair representation of men, women, youth and village elders. Only the key elected representatives were chosen. Triangulation method was employed so as to assess the experiences of all the agencies involved.

For an in-depth understanding of communitisation practices, education sector has been focussed, though queries related to other

sectors have been initiated. This will help understand how the community perceives and engages in communitisation. Out of the eleven districts in Nagaland, Wokha district has been selected for the study to contextually study the communitisation experiences. The study is confined to two villages- Wokha village and Longsa village. Both the villages are located close to Wokha town and district headquarter (for Wokha village it is around 3 km, and for Longsa around 7 km from Wokha town). Both have comparatively educated and employed persons in the government and private services, unlike other villages in the district. Both villages also have two private schools in the villages and students have an option to study in the private schools within the village or in the nearby town. Such location and availability of opportunities for education in private schools, rather than government schools, make this study curious in knowing how government schools fare under communitisation and whether it sustains students' enrolment. Both villages were also chosen on the grounds that these two villages are located near the district headquarter, and so have enabling opportunities for directly approaching the district officials in need for programme related queries. The fieldwork was undertaken in May 2010, for around one month.

With a focus to assess community's participation in Communitisation Programme, participatory democratic indicators like voting, identification and deliberation of issues, involvement in the implementation processes were identified. For evaluating the engagement of representatives and the State officials, key

participatory democratic indicators like responsiveness, accountability, transparency, availability and approachability of representatives and officials were taken into account.

Contextualising Communitisation of Education (CoE): Communitisation Practices of Two Villages

One of the major concerns of the State and the community has been the education sector. As much as there are qualified teachers in the government schools and colleges, a recurrent problem and a phenomenon that has been witnessed are the poor results of such institutions and the high drop-out rates of students before passing out high school. Besides these, there has been a mushrooming of private academic institutions that are result-oriented. Most parents, therefore, enrolled their children in private institutions, despite extra expenses compared to government schools. In the wake of such persisting dilemmas, the introduction of CoE was a welcome initiative. The huge support and success of it can be attributed to this one factor.

Against this backdrop, it can be noted that when communitisation was introduced, other schemes like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Mid Day Meal (MDM) were also functional. These schemes also complemented the Communitisation Programme. Take the case where, it is reported, with the introduction of communitisation, students' enrolment increased leading to accommodation problems, which were taken care of through funds granted under SSA by constructing extra classrooms and school

buildings. Also, the MDM scheme ensured the availability of toilets, drinking water and a meal a day. Adding to that, the government also provided free text books to children. All these have added to the increase in students' enrolment, besides communitisation, which ensured teachers' regular attendance and efforts to provide quality education where the village/ward education committee regularly checked the curriculum, and the teachers' teaching plans.

In order to understand the contextual experiences of communitisation, focus is on two villages of a district, specifically focusing on the education sector.

For a qualitative study, 11 respondents were selected from each village, and a total of 9 Village Council (VC) members, Village Development Block (VDB) members and Village Education Committee (VEC) members from both villages were interviewed. Following are the findings and observations from the field.

Access to Information: Out of the 22 respondents, 9 from each village were aware of CoE, while one from Longsa village and two from Wokha village had heard about the programme but were unaware that it was CoE. Since MDM and SSA schemes worked in collaboration with CoE, the respondents were asked if they were aware or heard about these schemes and if they had any source of information. 20 respondents (9 from Wokha and 11 from Longsa village) had heard from their friends and family, village council and Village Development Board (VDB), some from sources like TV and newspaper or few from children who were enrolled in the Government

Primary School (GPS) and one from information received through government campaigns, besides their friends and family. For instance, a woman from Longsa village, mother of two children, had heard about the activities under communitisation, SSA and MDM schemes from her children who were students in the primary school. She narrates that her children also attend classes regularly with interest. Another respondent from Wokha village, also had heard about communitisation, SSA and MDM schemes from her friends and family. She narrates the occasions where parents of those school children attending school discuss about the schemes of free education and school matters.

In both the villages, information related to CoE was acquired through contacts and interactions with their friends and families mostly. This, in some way, translates the social capital that is said to have been activated through networks of relationships and passing of information within communities. Most networking and thereby passing of information is related to discussions concerning what schemes and programmes the community engages in, the issues the village face and such informal gatherings and interactions as friends, neighbours and village community. The role of the VC and VDB proved to be marginal when it came to information access regarding CoE. This draws for the concern for more active engagement of the VC, VDB, VEC and also the officials, since more detailed awareness about CoE can help enhance greater participation of the user community and also ease the

government's responsibility through efficient participation of the community.

Awareness of CoE: To assess whether the community was well aware of the working of CoE, questions were asked about the awareness level and how they perceived CoE. Out of 11 respondents in Wokha village, five were fully aware, while four had heard about the programme, and two were unaware. In Longsa village, eight were aware and two unaware, one was aware but did not know the details. In both the villages, it was perceived that CoE ushered in good infrastructural development and improved the overall attendance of the teachers. One respondent felt that COE was "well organised." Respondents from Wokha village related awareness of CoE mostly to the benefits and improvement availed through it. As one of the respondents who is a cultivator and a father whose children attend government primary school narrates "communitisation has improved education in the past two years (i.e., 2007-2009). Teachers are also available". He observes that private school going students attend government primary schools since there are benefits through communitisation. Also, SSA scheme provided school bags, constructed toilets and MDM scheme provided meals to the students, which encouraged students to enroll in the government primary schools. However, he points out that meal was not provided on a daily basis.

One respondent remarked that through assistance given by the government, teachers sincerely taught and students regularly

attended classes. One respondent recalled how the community looked into the school requirements according to khel (area wise), like school repairs. A youth leader claimed that the educational system had improved, ensuring quality education and active participation from the teachers as well as from the community.

Participation in Meetings: In the village council meetings, four from Longsa village participated, while eight did not attend. Acting as an active participant, one responded that he had advised the school to buy more land. Accordingly the council bought more land. One even urged the village council to improve the school.

While in Wokha village, two attended VC meetings, eight abstained from attending and one respondent thought it was not required to attend meetings on the ground that VEC was instituted for matters relating to the school. He further added that he only attended meetings in cases when the VEC could not handle situations. The respondents who attended the meeting mentioned that when there were issues relating to the school, they discussed and addressed in the meetings.

In both the villages, though most of them did not attend the meetings, acknowledged the role of the VC instead of VEC, and thought that the role of VC was significant. This in a way translates the community's trust and dependence on the traditional institution for addressing matters related to the school.

Again, seven respondents in Wokha village were aware of CoE, but did not participate or

addressed issues related to the school in council meetings, yet when called upon for assistance, they willingly participated. Three respondents who were active in CoE mentioned that they personally checked and looked into the school functioning. They also participated in council meetings and proposed suggestions and plans for the village council and the school to implement. One respondent said when the issues put forth by him were implemented, he felt his participation in the meetings had impact.

It can be observed that community's engagement was through the council, else its active involvement was confined to fewer members. Besides, women had lesser opportunity in the deliberation process. All ten women respondents from both the villages did not attend the council meetings, nor the meetings related to communitisation. They did not have plans to deliberate over matters related to education through communitisation in the village public meetings. This is because in the village councils, only the male head of the household is represented and women are denied participation in the council.⁵

Community's Engagement in CoE: When it came to checking the attendance records of teachers, only nine (four from Longsa and five from Wokha) checked whether they attended and took the classes regularly. Most of the respondents felt that basic infrastructure like school building, chalks, tables and blackboards were available and were satisfied with the infrastructure. Most engagement in CoE involved manual labour and community social work

relating to cleaning the school compound or repairing the school building. A village elder from Wokha village observed that the community actively participated due to good results and improvements recorded in the past four years. He also mentioned that villagers appreciated the committee members and encouraged the officials and teachers in putting efforts.

Both the primary teachers affirmed that they had checked the attendance of the teachers regularly. One respondent observed that once or twice a month, he checked the sincerity of teachers and reported their accountability to the authorities concerned. He would check the attendance of the teachers, maintain a leave register, and warn the teachers when required. He narrates one incident where the headmaster was replaced in 2010 due to his insincerity. The respondent was a village elder and Goanbura of a khel (head leader of an area), who was an active participant who actively checked the school functioning and efficiently contributed in managing the responsibilities assigned to the community through CoE.

Accountability of the Representatives: In both the villages, the respondents strongly felt that the elected representatives like the village council and VEC members took responsibility for inspecting the school buildings and checking the attendance of the teachers regularly. Most observations on the contribution of these leaders were in renovating schools, purchasing materials for the school and contributing funds. One respondent from Longsa village remarked that whenever the school needed assistance, the

village council was always ready to assist. However, one respondent from Wokha village, while acknowledging the village council's role and contribution, noted that even if the village council checks the attendance, it does not properly scrutinise the utilisation of funds. From both the villages, six respondents felt there were some anomalies in managing funds, especially regarding infrastructure development. However, the majority felt that the elected representatives efficiently performed their duties. The common remarks and observations made by the community show that the traditional village councils are looked upon with trust and confidence when it comes to managing the resources and affairs of the village. It also indicates that the community is aware of the working of this institution. Moreover, it can be asserted to some extent that the VEC, which is newly created, has contributed to bringing quality change in the education sector leading to confidence building of this institution by the community. It, therefore, necessitates for more proactive role of these institutions.

The village council and VEC members also acknowledged that the community actively participated through voluntary social works like cleaning, school repairing and donations. They observed that the community advises them to look into school issues like negligence of the school staff. The VEC secretary of Wokha village also mentioned that the community enquired about the activities and performance of the VEC during the meetings. Through such engagements the community keeps a check on the institution's role, making them more accountable and

cautious. Thus, in order to ensure efficient functioning of the programme, maintaining transparency and accountability of the elected representatives of the village council and VEC is necessary.

Participation of State Officials: An official commented that it would depend on the VEC for creating awareness within the community. However, it is to be noted that the active and continuous involvement of the officials are needed to keep the programme efficient and working. An official also mentioned that CoE had not been able to reach its target since the contribution of the community in the form of funds and labour was marginal. It was also reported that there arises problems during the election of VEC members since they contest for the post. In some cases, the VEC mismanaged funds meant for the school. Also, there had been cases when it came to setting agendas for the school and decisions had to be made. The chairman and secretary of the VEC dominated the decisions taken in the meetings, practising "highhandedness" instead of engaging all the VEC members (Personal communication on 26th May, 2010, Wokha).

Another official observed that since CoE is a structured system of governance, a great deal of its success depends on field officers, and their sincerity in the matter. He pointed out that the community complain, but since the village community does not exactly know the rules and procedures, they hardly approach them. Therefore, he points out the need for public sensitisation which, he is of the view, is the

domain of the State government. To this end, the government had launched plans to educate the general public (Personal communication on 26th May, 2010, Wokha).

The overall observation is that the community did participate, to a higher degree, by providing manual labour, donations, checking attendance of the teachers and encouraging the teachers and elected leaders to be sincere in their position and responsibilities. However, when it came to participation in the meetings of the council related to the issues faced by the school and in decision making, the community's participation is low. Worst is, women's participation in such meetings which remained very low and minimal. Some respondents had the interest to participate, however, the lack of information obstructed them from being active in such engagements.

It can be stated that social capital is present, as the community within the village has a long established norms, practices, networks and relationships. Mostly, neighbours are known to each other well enough as most of the village population maintains a network of relationships. Even elected representatives are from the same community within the village, so the community, especially the elders find it convenient and comfortable to advise the elected representatives to perform their assigned duties honestly and sincerely. In a close-knit community like the two study villages, the community feels it is its social responsibility to help each other when in need, especially when there is a need for collective action for solving

a collective problem. However, there are tendencies of imposing social responsibility by calling for a collective action which also means financial contribution at times, especially in the village context where the villagers are mostly into farming and spend most of the time in the fields. Also, as one respondent commented, she could not participate as she had to attend the fields, besides household chores. What is of concern is that devolving responsibility to the user community in some sectors like education and health may be workable, but it will be problematic if too many responsibilities are devolved in many sectors. With their own set of works and priorities, it will be a burden for the community, more so if the officials fail on their part in performing their duties as coordinator, mediator, and facilitator in a sustaining manner. Another aspect is that most respondents were unaware that sectors like tourism and water and sanitation had been communitised.

Community's Perception of Communitisation Programme

Analysing the overall accounts and the experiences of the community, it can be noted that the communities are reasonably satisfied with the results of communitisation. There are loopholes and sometimes there is lack of transparency regarding the information of funds, programmes and sometimes mismanagement of funds. However, looking at the overall progress they are satisfied, though they have expectations for much better outcomes. The participation of women in the councils has been marginal as it is male dominated. However, in Communitisation Programme women are

actively engaged in materialising it. For instance, women would actively participate in providing manual labour concerning school cleanliness, encouraging school children to attend schools and encouraging teachers to perform their duties. As such their role is visibly encouraging.

Communitisation has transformed the public service delivery by engaging the communities in the implementation process at the local level. Yet, as pointed out, certain perplexities arise at the implementation process. This paper does acknowledge the governance transformation. Yet it directs the attention to the overlooked aspects which may see certain issues as given. This overlooked aspect is the process of harnessing social capital, which while attempting to draw collective welfare, there is scope for hampering individual's right to participate out of their own choice and preferences. The other aspect is the potential for overburdening the community by devolving too much power and responsibilities, which affects its quality participation in all the assigned sectors. Besides, there is the tendency on the part of the officials for easing out responsibilities to the community leading to their failure in discharging their overseeing and complementary roles towards the success of the programme.

Conclusion

What can be arguably perceived through the study across the two villages is that intensive and active role of the State is necessitated as well as the conscious and accountable contribution of local elected representatives. The active presence of the State officials will not

only effectuate Communitisation Programme's efficiency and effectiveness, but will also forge citizen-State relations. A healthy balance between officials' role and citizens' concerns and participation needs continuous reworking and inputs, which necessitate their interactions and transparency. Since multiple agencies are involved, the conscious and contributory role of each agency is required.

Notes

1. Communitisation Programme was awarded the prestigious United Nations Public Service Award on 23rd June, 2008 by the United Nations" in recognition of exceptional contribution of Government of Nagaland towards improving the effectiveness, efficiency and quality of public service." The programme was implemented under the leadership of R. S. Pandey, former chief secretary during 2002-04.
2. Each sector has its own appointed committees, where the representatives consist of the officials, council members and community members. For instance, there will be the Village Education Committee, Water and Sanitation Committee to manage and oversee affairs pertaining to the concerned sector.
3. The field study was undertaken in May 2010 for author's M.Phil. Dissertation work, which was submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi in 2010.
4. Wokha district's majority inhabitants are Lothas. The author belongs to this tribe, which is an advantage for conducting this study from the perspective of understanding the socio-political relations in that context, while observations can be made over the field situations without the help of an interpreter.
5. Women of Lotha community, the dominant tribe where this fieldwork was undertaken, are represented in the village council only when the male head of the household passed away and there was no male heir to represent or the male heir is young to represent the household.

References

Krishna, Anirudh (2003), "Active Social Capital: Tracing the Roots of Development and Democracy," Oxford University Press: New Delhi.

Pandey, R.S (2010), "Communitisation: The Third Way of Governance," Concept Publishing Company: New Delhi.

Putnam, Robert, D (1994), "Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy," Princeton University Press: New Jersey.

Government of Nagaland (2009), "Success Story of Capacity Building and Community Mobilisation on Communitisation of Elementary Education 2008-2009," Department of School Education, Kohima.

..... (2008), *RD Newsletter*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, Directorate of Rural Development.

..... (2003), "The First Year of Communitisation of Elementary Education in Nagaland 2002-2003," Department of School Education.