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ISSN (Online) : 2455 - 3662
SJIF Impact Factor :3.395 (Morocco)

EPRA International Journal of
**Multidisciplinary
Research**

Volume: 2 Issue: 6 June 2016



Published By :
EPRA Journals

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COMMUNITIZATION PROGRAM OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN NAGALAND: A STUDY OF THE VEC

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ABSTRACT

As a key strategy for achieving universalization of elementary education in Nagaland, the Department of Education in Nagaland in 2002 launched the 'Communitization program of elementary education' for promoting quality education. Under this program the communities are empowered through a sense of belonging and ownership responsibility in managing and functioning of the schools. The program transfers the role of day to day management and administration of the school to the community in the form of VEC. Based on the program the success and failures of the elementary education in Nagaland strongly depends on the effectiveness of the VECs as three major powers are vested in the hands of the community leaders. These are Administration, Academic and Financial powers. The Communitization based on the 3Ts i.e. trust the user community, Train the user community and Transfer of powers to the user community has a great role on the success or failure of any given policies and programs implemented at the village level in elementary education in Nagaland. As the sole custody and local legal authority of the elementary education at the village level it is important to understand and study the role of VEC's in implementing and functioning of the school under the programme.

This paper presents a research study conducted in the two district of Nagaland namely Zunheboto and Dimapur taking the sample size of 63 VECs. The data is provided in a percentage form to show the VECs awareness on the program and its powers. The data shall also present the VECs awareness on its roles and responsibilities, impact of the programme towards the education of the school, its constraints and suggestive measures to make the program more effective in the state.

KEYWORDS: Democratic Decentralisation, community participation, Communitization, VECs

INTRODUCTION

In India, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments aim at promoting the 'decentralized democracy' model. These legislations aimed at strengthening educational governance through peoples' participation and a greater degree of accountability at the local level. Significant transfers of resources and responsibilities to *Panchayati Raj* institutions at district, block and village levels were envisaged in the legislation, including appointment and transfer of teachers, construction and maintenance of school buildings, allocation of school development funds, disbursement of teachers' salaries, generation of local resources, academic supervision, etc. Ensuring transparency and accountability in the delivery of public services, including basic education was envisaged as the other important responsibility of the PRIs and ULBs. In practice, the changes in education governance structure and responsibilities as envisaged in 73rd and 74th Amendments vary greatly across states in India (Abhijeet Yadav, 2009).

Apart from the national and state level initiatives in India, several international organizations like the UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF, the World Bank and other multilateral agencies have vigorously promoted the idea of decentralization as a critical strategy for effective planning and management of large-scale education development programs since the Jomtien Conference for EFA in 1990. Since then, the developing world is increasingly turning towards the practice of decentralization to assure democratic governance for human development. As decentralization also talks about empowering the managers, the idea of 'decentralized administration' has gained roots fairly firmly in several developing societies including India. 'Democratic decentralization' as a political idea, however, is yet to become a reality, even though it exists through Constitutional or other legislative provisions to promote good governance. It may be noted that the core of decentralized democracy is centered on the arguments for 'participatory democracy'. Democratic decentralization therefore, envisages re-designing the structure of public administration and citizen participation in decision making for effective public service delivery.

The idea of decentralization is also to widen the area of democracy by granting both authorities and autonomy to the people at lower levels which is very important and necessary for a diverse country like India. It symbolizes creation of democracies within a democracy. It implies mass participation of the people at grassroots levels both in the decision making and the implementation processes development initiatives. Decentralization is mostly

understood as development strategy in the government sectors.

It is noteworthy that decentralization is also a useful tool of administration in non-governmental and private sectors. The growing participation of the people at the grassroots level is widely favored as the most effective means of securing socio-economic development compatible with the aspirations of the public at large and of ensuring percolation of the intended benefits to the poorest sections of society. The Eleventh Schedule of the constitution places as many as 29 functions within the purview of the Panchayati Raj bodies, which also includes education, including primary and secondary schools (Planning Commission, 2001). In this context, it is important to look into how states like Nagaland have created not only institutional but also administrative space for decentralization of management of basic education and other public services. The current study makes a modest attempt to look into the 'Communitization of Elementary Education Program' in Nagaland focusing on the organization, execution and outcomes through the VECs.

COMMUNITIZATION OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN NAGALAND

The Communitization program was launched in 2002 in order to improve the quality of public service delivery in the state initially in three sectors. This included education too. To create the necessary legal and institutional context for facilitating the Communitization process, the Government of Nagaland came up with the landmark legislation known as the Nagaland Communitization of Public Institutions and Services Act, 2002 (Act No. 2 of 2002), which was notified by the Department of Law and Justice vide its Notification No. LAW/ACT-63/2001 dated the 15th April 2002. The Act initially covered power, water supply, health and education sectors. The Act seeks to transfer management of core public institutions and services to local communities so as to enhance efficiency of public service delivery, align such institutions and services realistically to local contexts and also create conditions of transparency.

The Nagaland Communitization of Public Institutions and Services Act, 2002 was implemented in the school sector with the Department of Education notifying the 'Nagaland Communitization of Elementary Institutions and Services Rules 2002.' Through these rules necessary legal and institutional provisions were made to bring all government managed primary and upper primary schools under the Communitization process. Accordingly, a pilot project on Communitization of elementary education was officially launched on 15th July 2002 by the then

Chief Secretary of Nagaland, Shri. R.S. Pandey. In fact, Shi R. S. Pandey conceived the idea of Communitization of elementary education and played a key role in developing and implementing the project in the initial years. The Communitization program took off in Nagaland on pilot basis in September 2002 covering 205 schools in 90 villages. In 2003, another 197 schools in 128 villages were taken up on a voluntary basis. As the response to the program was positive and encouraging (DONER 2010), the Government of Nagaland communitised all government managed primary and upper primary schools in the state from January 2004.

COMMUNITIZATION PROGRAM AND THE VILLAGE EDUCATION COMMITTEE (VEC)

In the Communitization program, the administrative, academic and financial management of the school substantially vest with the community which acts through an elected Village Education Committee (VEC). The VEC is the local legal authority to manage the elementary education in the village. Besides teacher management including inter-school utilization of teachers and selection of substitute teachers against long-term vacancies, the VEC is also responsible for universal enrolment and retention up to the age of 14 years. In the process, the community receives funds from the Government for key purposes such as purchase of teaching-learning material including textbooks, furniture, repair and maintenance of school buildings, etc. The village community is envisaged to treat the school as its own, and also contribute their best in cash, kind and labor. The Government, on the other hand, continues to supervise, support and supplement the activities of the community.

After the implementation of the program though in its nascent stage, yet has been a major success in the process of Universalization of Elementary Education. In a Communitization program the powers for management of schools were vested to the Village Education Committee (VEC). Every village has a Village Council (VC) and shall constitute the Village Education Committee (VEC). The members of VEC are representation from relevant institutions, Village members and person from government bodies and have legal authority with respect to elementary education management in the village. VEC consist its Chairman, Secretary and Members from different representatives who are elected or selected or volunteered among the bona-fide citizens of the village. The following indicates the powers and functions given to the VECs under the Communitization of elementary education in Nagaland:

Administrative

- Ensuring regular and effective running of the schools.
- Granting of teachers leave
- Disciplinary action for misconduct of teachers by a) withholding pay b) no work no pay c) reporting to higher authority
- Transferring/ retaining of teachers
- Ensuring sufficient land for the schools
- Constructing and maintaining of school building
- Reporting to higher authority on any administrative problem beyond the solution of the VEC.
- To compile and furnish annual reports of the schools.
- Appointment of substitute teachers
- Decision of the VEC on sharing resources and activities between the governments and private schools

Academic

- Ensuring daily running of the school
- Implementation of annual plans and programs towards quality improvement
- Arranging short courses for the Capacity building of the teachers
- Availability of free school uniform, free text books and other learning material, free mid-day meals to students within the norm laid down by the government if and when grants are received for the purpose
- Ensuring universal enrolment and retention in schools children up to the age of 14 or class VIII.

Financial

- To receive grants from the government and generate resources from the community and to operate one educational fund.
- Disbursing monthly salaries of teachers and other staff members and also deduct salaries consistent with 'no work no pay' principle.
- Education fund to be used on educational purposes such as training camps for teachers, excursions for students, get together of parents/guardians and teachers, procure furniture, stationeries etc.
- Maintaining of proper accounts of income and expenditure, assets of the schools, to get accounts audited, and to bring out authentic report of the same for information of the community and the higher authority.

METHODOLOGY

It is an empirical study of VECs in two districts of Nagaland namely Dimapur and Zunheboto carried out in 2010. The primary objective of this study is to find out the awareness and

perception of the VECs on their involvement in education. Another main objective of the study is to find out the major problems and constraints in the program at the implementation as well as at the village level. Above all it is to see how effective the program is in improving the elementary education in the state. What makes the study interesting is that this will show the ground opinions or perception of the VECs not only towards the program but in education as a whole.

Total 63 VEC members were taken for the study. 30 (3 VECs from ten schools) respondents are from Dimapur and 33 (3 VECs from eleven schools) from Zunheboto district. The respondents are the VEC chairman along with two members as per their availability while the researcher making sure that their schools are under the first phase of the Communitization program.

For the collection of information a schedule containing both closed and open-ended questions was constructed for collecting necessary data related to awareness of the Communitization program, knowledge on the powers and functions of the VEC in the program, interventions of the VEC in planning and management of activities of the schools perception of the members about the impact of the Communitization program and lastly an attempt was made to know on the developmental issues of the school. The program under the administrative hands of the VEC will draw on the accountability of the respondents. This will also help us to understand the problems and constraints of the program in the implementation and on the field.

Data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative method for relevant information

collected under the study. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Content analysis method was also used to analyze for qualitative information to understand the dynamics of their involvement in education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the respondents consist of 84.13% males and 15.87% females out of which 94% of the respondents are married. It has also shown that Most of the respondents have highest educational qualification equal to or less than matriculation/high school certificate (68.66%) and only 23.81% of them have B.A. certificate. Among the male respondents, only 32.98% have studied up to PU/10+2 or above level while 40% female respondents have the same level of formal education.

Respondents’ awareness about the Communitization program:-

Concerning the level of awareness of the Communitization Program, It shows that 96.38% of the respondents are aware of the program whereas 3.17% of the VEC members are not aware of the program. It can be seen in Table 5.24 that most of the members of the VEC have got information about the CEEP (Communitization of Elementary Education Program) by being a member of the VEC (46.03%) and the village (41.27%) meetings. The State Education Department has not recognized as a major source for awareness building about the CEEP. It is also revealing that media and the school which are supposed to be important sources of awareness creation about the CEEP have failed miserably in drawing the attention of the primary stakeholders at the school level.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by source of awareness about the CEEP

Source of Awareness about the CEEP	YES	%
Being a member of the VEC	29	46.03
Media	5	7.94
Neighbor	4	6.35
Village meeting	26	41.27
School Children	6	9.52
State Education Dept.	15	23.81
From other VEC/CRC members	4	6.35
Others	4	6.35
Not applicable	2	3.17

**Source: Field Survey 2010*

RESPONDENTS AWARENESS ON ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Table 2. Distribution of the respondents by awareness of administrative powers and functions of the VEC under the CEEP

Source: *Ibid.*

Administrative Powers and Functions of the VEC	Yes	No	Can't say
The VEC is empowered to ensure regular and effective running of the school	81	7.9	11.1
The VEC is empowered to grant leave to teachers	57.1	25.4	17.5
The VEC is empowered to take disciplinary action for misconduct of teachers by withholding pay through 'No Work No Pay' policy and reporting it to the higher authorities	90.5	0	9.5
The VEC is empowered to look after the transferring and retaining of teacher	47.6	27	25.4
The VEC should ensure sufficient land for the school	81	3.2	15.9
The VEC ensures the overall construction and maintaining of the school building	85.7	0	14.3
The VEC reports to the higher authority on any administrative problem beyond the solution of the VEC	93.7	0	6.3
The VEC compiles and furnishes annual reports of the school	73	12.7	14.3
The VEC appoints the substitute teachers	27	49.2	23.8

With regard to awareness of the administrative powers and functions of the VEC, it can be seen in Table 2 that most of the VEC members are aware of their roles and responsibilities as conferred to them through the Communitization program. Around 81% of the respondents agree to the fact that the roles and responsibilities of the VEC is to ensure daily and effective running of the schools. And, also at the same time, it is disappointing to note that 25.4% of respondents do not agree that the VEC has the power to grant leave to teachers. About 57% of the respondents agree that the VEC grants leave to teachers, and 17.5% of them are either confused with the kind of leave sanctioned to the teachers or cannot say anything about this function of the VEC. About 90.5% of the respondents reported that the VEC takes disciplinary action against teachers' misconduct by withholding pay through 'No Work No Pay' policy, and at the same time, reports it to the higher authority.

About 48% of them agree that the VEC is empowered to look after the transfer and deployment of teachers, whereas 27% of the respondents do not agree to this point. Around 86% of the respondents mentioned that the VEC ensures the overall construction and maintenance of the school building, and 81% of them said that the VEC should ensure sufficient land for the school. Besides, nearly 94% of the respondents reported that the VEC reports to the higher authority any administrative problem beyond its solution. Similarly, according to 73% of the respondents, the VEC compiles and furnishes annual reports of the school to higher authorities. A small number of the respondents are aware of the fact that the VEC can appoint substitute teachers (see Table 2). Overall finding is that though there is a high degree of awareness on the administrative roles and functions of the VEC. However, many respondents are still not very clear about the roles and responsibilities laid down for the VEC by the State through the Communitization program.

Table 3. Awareness about the academic powers of the VEC

Academic Powers and Functions of the VEC	Yes	No	Can't say
The VEC ensures daily running of the school	93.7	1.6	4.8
The VEC implement plans and programs towards quality improvement of education	77.8	0	22.2
The VEC arranges short courses for capacity building of teachers	44.4	39.7	15.9
The VEC ensures the availability of free text books and other learning material, free MDM to students within the norm laid down by the government if and when grants are received for the purpose	85.7	7.9	6.3
The VEC has the responsibility to ensure universal enrolment and retention of school children upto the age of 14 or class VIII	93.7	1.6	4.8

Source: *Ibid.*

Table 3 shows the respondents' awareness on the academic powers and functions bestowed to the VECs through the CEEP. Around 94% of them agree to the fact that the VEC has the power and responsibility to ensure daily running of the school; and 77.8% state that the VEC needs to implement plans and programmes towards quality improvement of education. Several respondents were not in a position to say anything about this function of the VEC.

One of the very important roles of the VEC is to arrange short training courses for the teachers. Only 44.4% respondents are aware of this function of the VEC, and as high as 39.7% of them are not even aware about this responsibility of the VEC. About 86% of the respondents are aware of the VEC's responsibilities in ensuring free textbooks and other teaching-learning material and also to provide MDM to the students within the norm laid down by the government. Around 94% of the respondents agree that the role of the VEC is to ensure universal enrolment and retention of school children up to the age of fourteen. To sum up, majority of the respondents are aware of the academic responsibilities of the VEC. However, it is difficult to say that VECs are functioning as much effectively

compared to the degree of awareness reported by the respondents.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE RESPONDENT ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE COMMUNITIZATION PROGRAM

In regard to the perception of the respondents on the impact of the CEEP, In terms of increase in enrollment, 57.14% of the respondents agree that there is an increase in enrolment in absolute terms and 33.33% strongly agree that the increase in enrollment is due to the intervention of the program whereas 9.52% choose to neither agree nor disagree. Around 44 % of them agree that the school facilities and the overall environment of the school have improved after the implementation of the program and 44.44% strongly support the statement. 52.38% agree that the schools are functioning regularly since 2002 and 41.27% strongly agree the statement. Overall finding shows that the impact of the Commoditization program in improving and developing the school after 2002 has been positive as perceived by the VEC members and Education Administrators.

Table 4: Major development problems and issues of schools identified by VEC members

Development Problems and Issues	Respondent	%
Teacher transfer	23	36.51
Bogus teacher	31	49.21
No playground	32	50.79
Lack of awareness	41	65.08
No proper coordination from the department	28	44.44
Lack in training of VEC	40	63.49
More training of teachers	39	61.90
Inadequate games and sports facilities	29	46.03
Meetings attended by only few people	16	25.40
Library	41	65.08
Lack of computer facilities	36	57.14

Source: *Ibid.*

Table 4 indicates the major problems and issues being encountered by the school currently. Some of the serious issues that need to be addressed are the lack of awareness (65.08%) of the community and the training of the VEC members (63.49%) in planning and management of the school. As they are less education the need of training was felt important. The training of teachers (61.90%) is also an important development issue because most teachers

are untrained at the time of joining the profession. It is felt that the duty of the education department is to arrange in-service training programs for teachers in order to develop their skills and knowledge. As Naga society is known for its active nature of loving and playing sports, the inadequacy in the availability of sports facilities (46.03%) are lamented as the need of the school. The other issues are the absence of library (65.08%) and Computer facilities (57.14%).

Table 5. Major changes that have taken place in the development of the school since 2002

Major Changes at School Level since 2002	Respondent	%
Infrastructure	32	50.79
Teaching learning process	41	65.08
Classroom extension	24	38.10
school boundary	12	19.05
increase in enrolment	32	50.79
Teacher attendance	41	65.08
School building	11	17.46
School upgradation	23	36.51
MDM	42	66.67

Source: *Ibid.*

Table 5 shows the major interventions of the program at the school level since 2002. 50.79% of the respondents agree that the infrastructure of the schools have changed after the intervention of the program and 65.08% feel that the teaching and learning process have also improved. More improvements are observed from the students as well as change in the teacher's attendance. The teacher attendance has improved as 65.08% agree to it and the intervention of the MDM (66.67%) has been received well by the community. Much development has been done in the construction of school buildings

and extension of classrooms after the implementation of the program.

SUGGESTED MEASURES TO MAKE THE COMMUNITIZATION PROGRAM MORE EFFECTIVE BY THE VECs

The study also made an effort to understand and collect information from the VECs to make the program more effective. In financial management, proper monitoring of utilization of funds (50.79%) is needed as in such cases it leads to misuse of funds by some authorities. And, also 71.03% of the respondents are of the opinion that since financial assistance are not received in time, it hampers the

smooth functioning of the program. In order to have proper implementation of the program it is needed that the department should have an in-depth survey of schools (47.62%) and their needs. As the state and the school strongly depend on the SSA, it is a cry from the community that SSA (60.32) should continue in the state to develop and provide quality education to students. The other major areas that need to be addressed are the need for trained teachers (74.60%). Since the program is meant for the community, it is imperative to say that cooperation of the community should be encouraged by making them more aware of the program along with their rights and responsibilities entrusted to them through this program. More accountability (52.38%) and more frequent visits/inspection (46.03%) are expected from the community as it has been seen that, after the implementation of the program, school visits by the SIS and DIS have decreased and therefore the community expects more accountability and collaboration from the department in order to build the trust between them. The voluntary teaching which happened through the program is one of the prime movers in this program. Therefore, acknowledging the help that was rendered voluntary, teaching should be encouraged as teacher shortage is also one big problem in the state. Improper implementation of TLM (74.60%) and MDM (50.79%) are still an issue unaddressed. All the above factors, if taken into account, are expected to make the implementation of the program more successful and effective.

CONCLUSION

It may be mentioned that the VEC is not a new institution in Naga society. There existed a system where the whole village was under the guardianship of the tribal chief. Now, the modern mode of social living and more democratic pattern of society have led to creation of development forums like the village council, the village development board, etc. where the members are elected. Since this form of society was already there and the relationships between the members are already strong under the rich social capital, it was not a hard task to conceptualize and implement some kind of intervention through social agency.

The education system in the state is seen to have high political influences on the recruitment of teachers and other regulatory powers of the government, which come in the way of development of Naga society, and also reduce the autonomy of public institutions. In a state, all social identities – religious, regions, ethnic or class have become highly politicized leading to poor development of the state and society.

Therefore, the maladministration of the state, which Gunnar Myrdal called ‘soft state’ (Jose V. Abueva 2011) if considered, is manifested in Nagaland. Then, the development intervention lies in harnessing the strength of democracy at the grassroots level, which the communitization program aimed at.

A constant training and awareness campaign would benefit greatly to make a stronger and effective VEC, great deal of success lies in the hands of the VEC. The rural poor having low access to the ever changing competitive outside world directing them to cope with the change should be a challenge for the trainers and the higher authorities. Training is also needed for maintaining records and files the school level. The importance of keeping files and records and its purpose should be clearly voiced out to the VECs.

When an MDM is received, it does not directly come to the village but is received through the nearest town. So in a case like this either a VEC chairman or the Secretary had to go pick it up from the town with his own pocket money by either hiring a taxi or a tempo. This creates a financial crunch on the family wellbeing and also leads to an excuse for putting the government money into their pocket. But for an honest person when the allowances are not received in time the expenses become double. This is one of the serious issues that need to be checked by the system for the proper implementation of the program.

As regards the major constraints in the implementation of the CEEP, the common cry of the community is the lack of playground (50.79%). In most cases, children use the church ground or village ground for sports and games purposes. Several communities have expressed the view to have more supervision and monitoring of schools by higher authorities as they feel the deteriorating trend in the accountability of schools to the community. Given the three major powers bestowed on the community for effective implementation of the CEEP, the financial ownership/powers are not received well by the community. With the low economic status of the people, the government should not expect the community to voluntarily contribute cash for school improvement.

It is felt that, through the financial powers being given to the community, it has become an easy excuse for the state to move away from its funding responsibilities. This is so because, for any financial problem, when the community meets the higher authorities they are simply ignored by citing that, ‘*now that it is communitised, it is in the hands of the community*’, and therefore, the community should take care of its school (VEC Chairman, Field Survey 2010). The issue of financial ownership also gave

another reflection to the implementation process that, had there been no financial ownership given to the community this program would have been one of the best decentralized programs for the rural poor. But, with this financial assistance expected from the community, *'it is not implementable at the village level'*.-VEC, Dimapur.

It is felt that awareness program, monitoring and strict supervision of the execution of the VECs by the concerned higher authority would have pushed further the performance and impact of the program. Mere creation of institutional arrangements and execution of new management models may not always be successful and effective in the absence of necessary enabling conditions. Major base for introducing the program is built on trust between the community and the state. Communitization is a process and not an end in itself and the process in progress have to be nurtured (R.S Panday, 2010). Government officials must not forget that their roles instead of diminishing are expected to undergo a qualitative change. While part of the routine jobs shifts to the community the government is expected to provide more intensive supervision and support. Communitization instead of relieving government of its responsibilities rather places on it higher order responsibilities. The government then shifts its attention to regulatory and facilitative roles and provides more timely responses to community concerns and supervisory and supportive school visits. Such a shift in the roles and responsibilities of the Department of Education would lead to effective execution of the CEEP. The study would like to end with a strong remark on the quality of education – “If we want quality education, the government employed staff starting from the education official should start sending their children in the government schools then only we shall see the light of quality education, if not there will never be ‘quality education’ and it will remain a dream only”-VEC Chairman, Zunheboto.

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