



URBAN GOVERNANCE DIALOGUE

Transforming Urban Governance

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Unveiling Traditional 'Citizen Participation' Practises from North-Eastern India

Case Studies from Praja's Urban Governance Study

Citizen participation in the governance process plays a vital role to ensure accountability, and transparency; and making governments responsive to the needs of the people. **While studying the urban governance structure in cities across the North-Eastern States of India, Praja team mapped the traditional practises of 'Citizen Participation' in the local governance.**

Article 243S of the Constitution (Seventy-fourth Amendment) Act, 1992 has provision of 'Constitution and composition of Wards Committee'. These committees act as platforms with designated functions and responsibilities and enact the same through the City Government. Consequently, this ensures local level deliberations among Councillors along with local area representatives leading to decentralised development. **Through this newsletter, let us delve into three case studies of citizen participation in the North-Eastern States of India: Shillong, Aizawl, and Imphal.** These cities serve as compelling examples of effective community participation, showcasing the transformative power of grassroots involvement in shaping the urban landscape.

Case Study 1 - Shillong, Meghalaya

Local Level Governance for Active Citizen Participation

Introduction:

The **Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Village Administration) Bill, 2014** empowers Dorbar Shnong to create **Village Development Council** to govern the socio-economic development as per the traditional tribal culture; but within the governance structure of democratic India. It aims to codify, provide and make provisions for the administration of villages



in the autonomous district of Khasi Hills. The provisions of the Bill strengthen governance by enhancing transparency in decision-making, improving accountability, and encouraging community participation.

Structure and Functioning of Welfare Society, Shillong:

Shillong Municipal Board was constituted under the Meghalaya Municipal Act, 1973. It is responsible for undertaking work which is essential for provision of civic services and management of the city. Shillong does not have a local elected body at the city level despite the willingness of the government to conduct municipal elections. However, in Shillong, Dorbar Shnongs (Welfare Committee) are in place to ensure the local-level participation of the citizens.

The District Autonomous Councils (DAC) are formed according to the 6th Schedule of the Constitution. Whereas, the **Welfare Societies** are formed in the non-6th schedule areas of Shillong city. The Dorbar Shnongs or the Welfare Committees are created in each ward of Shillong city. In the welfare societies, the minimum number of executive member in the committee is 18 while maximum is 21. From the executive members, the elected members are - the President, the Secretary and the Treasurer. The remaining members of the Welfare Committees are appointed by these three elected members.

The Committee functions according to the Constitution created and adopted by the **General Body Meeting (GBM)** of the Welfare Committee. The GBM consist of the households residing in the jurisdiction of the Welfare Society. It is a guideline for elections and other functions of the committee. The Committee maintains a database online for all citizens under the ward area and helps citizens with their day-to-day challenges. Citizens reach out to the committee members for problems ranging from garbage disposal, improper sewerage or inadequate water supply. The Committee members solve these issues by connecting with the authority or contractors in charge for the delivery of these services and get it addressed. Besides this, the committee also helps the citizens with verification of documents for address proof with help of their online database.

Learnings:

- It is an instrument to strengthen grass-root democracy at city-level.
- Addresses the needs & wants of the citizens in urban service delivery.
- Dorbar Shnong/Welfare Society platforms to develop habits amongst citizens and create general awareness.
- Helps in increasing revenue collection and solid waste management.

Challenges:

- Absence of reservation for women and other communities.
- The Members of the DAC are not paid any honorarium for their service.
- Lack of institutionalised state government recognition for the Welfare Society.

Case Study 2 - Aizawl, Mizoram

Local Council- The 4th tier of government

Introduction:

The Mizoram Municipalities (Ward Committee and Local Council) Rules, 2010 was passed to institutionalise citizens' participation in municipal functions by setting up Local Council for every locality in the Ward holding election to be conducted by State Election Commission. Any person residing in the concerned locality whose name is included in the electoral roll of that locality for Election of Councillors has the right to vote in such election. Provided further that only such person who is eligible to vote in the election for Local Council may be elected in such election, except an employee under the Central Government or State Government or Public Sector Undertakings.



Prior to 2010, in the state of Mizoram, there were village councils (VC) where local citizens with any concerns or public issues were resolved and village council used to hold powers to take decision on all matters concerned within the locality. Later, the government of Mizoram implemented the 74th Constitution Amendment Act to streamline the Urban Local Bodies in the year 2010. In the state of Mizoram, the first ULB (Urban Local Bodies) "Aizawl Municipal Council" was established in 2010-2015 and all Village Councils under the city limit were abolished, but since Village Councils used to play a major role in the local community and customary practice of Mizo people.

Structure & Functioning of Committee:

As per the Mizoram Municipalities (Ward Committee and Local Council) Rules, 2010, the Local Council is categorised into 2 (two) parts. (a) Five members in a locality comprising 1500 voters or less and 1(one) Member shall be Women. (b) Seven members in a locality comprising more than 1500 voters and 2 (two) Members shall be Women. One-third of the members in a Local Council have been reserved for women. There shall be a Secretary of the Local Council who may be appointed or dismissed by the Municipality on the advice of the Chairman of the Local Council. The Secretary shall not be a member of the Local Council. There shall be a "Tlangau" (Local Crier) in each Local Council to be appointed by the Council. The remuneration of Chairman is Rs 1,500; Vice-Chairman Rs 1,200; Members Rs 1,000; Secretary Rs 900 and Tlangau may be as determined from time to time by the concerned Municipality. The tenure of Local Council members shall be 5 (five) years from the date of the first meeting of the Committee and in the case of casual vacancy in the membership for any reason, the Council may nominate any prominent person residing in the locality to fill the vacancy for the remaining period of the tenure.

Once a month or whenever the occasion demands the Local council committee meets. As per the process, the secretary circulates the information about the meeting three days prior. The agenda is prepared by Secretary and handed over to the chairman to convene the meeting. The quorum for a meeting is one-third of the total Members

including Chairperson. The Secretary shall record the minutes of the meeting of the Local Council in the minutes' book which shall be signed by the Chairman and the Secretary

The Municipality can devolve functions to the Local Council as per requirement of the common civic services and common benefit of the community and other matters in accordance with the Mizo traditions, customs and practices. For E.g.: -

- The Property Tax assessment and collection is done by Local Councils and 5% of the collected amount goes to Local Council as a reward. This fund is utilised for the O&M (Operation & maintenance) of the office and small development and repair work in the locality.
- The Local councils have a provision of sub-committee where 1 (one) local Council member is chairperson of committee and 20-30 residents from the area will be member to look after the functioning of the sub-committee. For E.g.- Beautification committee, Electrical and maintenance committee, Food supply committee, Sanitation Committee, Hall Committee

Learnings:

- Well-structured platform for citizen to participate in the development project and service.
- Collection of property tax by local council helps streamline revenue collection.
- Well defined roles and duties for of Local council help in day-to-day functioning.
- Tax devaluation: An amount decided by State government is given to local councils once in a year for O&M.

Challenges:

- Even though tenure of Local Council is 5 years but is not co-terminus with the corporations, as the elections for Local Council is not conducted with the Municipal Elections. Local Councils are constituted under The Mizoram Municipalities (Ward Committee and Local Council) Rules, 2010.

Case Study 3 - Imphal, Manipur

Model of Community Participation in Manipur

Introduction:

The **Manipur Municipality Community Participation Act** was passed in **2010** to institutionalise citizens' participation in municipal functions by setting up **Ward Development Committee (WDC)**. The act mandates establishment of a WDC for individual wards in the municipalities to incorporate citizens' opinion in setting priorities and budgetary provisions for the municipalities in Manipur.



Structure and functioning of Ward Development Committee

[Section 3(1)]:

According to the Section 3(2) of the community participation act, 2010 the WDC shall comprise of a Chairperson, who shall be the Councillor of a ward, two persons elected from the ward and two persons representing the civil society from the ward shall be nominated by the state government. The Municipal Commissioner of the Imphal Municipal Corporation (IMC) shall appoint any member of the corporation as the Secretary of the WDC. The term of the WDC shall be **co-terminus** to the term of the municipal corporation. The election of the members of the WDC shall be conducted by the State Election Commission during the election of the councillors.

The Chapter III of the act in detail elaborates on the rights and duties of the WDC, some of the functions enlisted are:

- To provide assistance in solid waste management,
- To encourage harmony amongst various social groups,
- To promote art & cultural activities,
- To maintain street lights & parks and delegate functions entrusted by the municipal corporation.
- To produce ward plans, prepare ward budget, ensure optimal collection of revenue and map the Ward Infrastructure Index for that ward.

The WDC shall constitute a **Ward Finance Committee** according to the Chapter IV of the act to conduct financial functions of the ward. The Ward Finance Committee shall prepare the annual ward budget and place it before the Municipal Corporation. The municipal corporation shall accept the ward budget with necessary suggestions and changes. The budget of the municipal corporation shall be a compilation of the ward level budgets and other additional account heads of receipt and expenditure as incurred by the municipal corporation.

There shall be a **Ward Information and Statistics Committee** to monitor the developmental and planning works in the ward. The committee shall compile the economic and land use information and infrastructure index including the status of projects in the ward. The WDC will further be involved in spatial planning for the city and providing necessary services to urban poor. To ensure due deliberation in the WDC, the act mandates maintaining of minutes the meetings and making those available for general public.

To delegate the roles and functions devolved in the act, the WDC shall have the right to retain up to 50% of the ward's revenue for local development. WDC is a mechanism for public participation and scrutiny in the governance of the cities. It acts as a link for integrating all activities undertaken by the state government and coordinating with relevant agencies.

Learnings:

The WDC is a mechanism to **strengthen grass-root democracy and people's participation in city governance**. The presence of such tool **ensures financial accountability and transparency in governance**. The inclusion of citizens other than elected representatives from a respective ward leads to deliberation on needs & wants of the citizens. This **ensures public involvement in urban planning and infrastructural development**.

Challenges:

There is a lack of reservations for women and other communities in the WDC. This limits discussion on women centric issues at the local level. The act empowers the WDC to plan the infrastructural and financial needs of the ward however, **lack of efficient co-ordination between the municipal corporation and state government hinders effective implementation of the projects**. The members of the WDC **do not receive honorarium/remuneration/allowance**. The members of the WDC other than the councillors should receive honorarium as they contribute to the governance and service delivery of the city.

Local governments are the closest to understanding the problems and requirements of their citizens, and are therefore best equipped to make policies, decisions, and implement projects. The decentralisation of India's governance system gained momentum in 1992 with the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts, which mandated the establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) for rural areas and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) for urban areas. Since citizens are the consumers of the services provided by the city governments, it is important to keep them at the centre of all planning and governance processes and ensure citizen participation.

There is a need for a platform for citizen participation in Urban Governance which ensures continuous citizen interaction, involve youth in institutional strengthening and cater to the needs and wants of the citizens. Local Councils at decentralised level enhance citizen participation in the city, which can enhance the governance structure for better deliberations.

References:

- Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Village Administration) Bill, 2014
- District Council Affairs Department, Govt of Meghalaya
- The Mizoram Municipalities Act 2007
- The Mizoram Municipalities (Ward Committee and Local Council) Rules, 2010
- Manipur Municipality Community Participation Act, 2010
- Constitution of India, Part XXI, Article 371A



To read Full Report on **Regional Consultation Report on Key Findings from North - Eastern States**

Scan the QR Code or Click on the link below

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We would like to know your views and feedbacks based on the above information shared. Feel free to reach us at info@praja.org

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'N. Mehta'.

Nitai Mehta

Managing Trustee, Praja Foundation

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Mhaske'.

Milind Mhaske

CEO, Praja Foundation