



Urban Governance in North East States

Praja has embarked upon a journey to map the status of urban governance in 28 States and National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi. As of June 2020, we have completed the study in all 28 States and NCT. Consultations have been conducted for 20 States and NCT along with one regional and one national consultation.

We conducted the Urban Governance study of the north eastern states of Meghalaya and Assam in March 2019 and Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura in February 2020. The newsletter covers glimpses of narratives and data from the governance status in the north east.



Urban Governance in the North East

The tribal population in the north east region of India stands at 47.22% of the total population of the region.¹ The region houses around 200 of the 365 tribal groups in India.² About 18.36%¹ of the total population of north east region resides in urban areas. The pace of urbanisation in the north eastern region has been less than the national average. The sixth schedule of Constitution of India mandates provisions to protect interests of the specific tribal regions within the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. However, it is also important to note that the north eastern region, as a whole, is marked with traditional customary practices being followed within communities varying from state to state. Hence, we have highlighted our findings from the study on traditional governance practices and overall challenges being faced in the north eastern states with respect to urban governance in this newsletter.

Traditional Governance Systems

Shillong, Meghalaya

There are traditional institutions of Dorbars (equivalent to wards) and the headman of the Dorbar is called the Rangbah Shnong. The headman is elected by the residents of the Dorbar by a show of hands every 5 years. The headmen are responsible for maintaining peace in the neighbourhood and for giving No Objection Certificate (NOC) to the residents for any relevant matter. The headmen are not recognised by the municipal board and report to the district council.

Kohima, Nagaland

Ward panchayats are set up at ward levels across the city. The panchayat chairman is elected by the citizens of the ward every 5 years by show of hands. Subsequently, the ward panchayat chairman selects the officials of the panchayat. The ward panchayat consists of office bearers, joint secretaries and Gaon Burhas (GB). The ward panchayat is consulted for any development effort carried out in the city and respective wards. The meetings of ward panchayat are held as and when required. Ward panchayats are recognised by the District Commissioner's office. The chief responsibilities of the ward panchayat is to maintain peaceful existence of the community, resolve any issues within the community and raise concerns of the community to the government. Furthermore, the responsibility of collection of house taxes are placed on the GBs of the ward since they know all the households in their wards.

1: https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/76697/9/09_chapter%203.pdf
2: http://www.ncert.nic.in/publication/Miscellaneous/pdf_files/tinei101.pdf

Imphal, Manipur

The traditional practice of local governance is perceived at the local community level. The communities have set their boundaries known as Leikeis. These community groups are generally referred to as Singloops. The groups elect their respective heads, who have powers to take decisions and resolve disputes within the respective boundaries. Members of the community are completely indebted towards their Singloop. Due to this, the heads of the Singloops are consulted before any government projects are executed in their locality and these projects are also monitored closely by the group.

Aizawl, Mizoram

Local Councils (erstwhile Village Councils) have been given the status of Local Councils in the Municipal Corporation jurisdiction. The elections are held within these Local Council areas in accordance to the rule of composition of Local Councils – five members for a locality of 1500 voters or less; seven members for a locality of more than 1500 voters. The members will elect the Local Council Chairman and two other members to represent them in the ward committee. The Tenure of Local Council was reported as 5 years which is coterminous with the term of the corporation. The property tax collection is entrusted in the hands of the local councils. This forms a decentralised system of property tax collection, given that local council members have a higher awareness of new properties that come up in their locality. From the corporation budget, a token amount is allotted for all the local councils. Apart from this, the local councils also receive funds through state grants known as the State Tax Devolution Fund.

Integrated system of local governance practice

Mizoram has set a ‘best practice’ in terms of integrating the erstwhile village council system into the city government structure. The local councils have been empowered with decision making powers and funds to carry out their functions and implementation of projects at the respective local areas. There is a strong connect between the ward committees at ward level and local councils. The flow of planning and execution of projects apart from the flow of funds have been orderly structured and followed.

However, an integrated local governance system as observed in the case of Aizawl, Mizoram is not found in Meghalaya, Manipur and Kohima. It is imperative for these states to look into integrating the traditional governance practices at the grassroot level with the formal municipal governance system. This will ensure better reflection of citizens’ viewpoints within the system and bring out the required social and physical developments.

Table 1 Deliberative structure

State	City	Key Deliberative Bodies		Subject Committees	
		Provision	Chairperson of standing committee/ MIC	Provision	Status
Arunachal Pradesh	Itanagar	Empowered Standing Committee	Mayor	No	-
Assam	Guwahati	Mayor-in-Council (MIC)	Mayor	6 subject committees	Non-functional
Manipur	Imphal	8 Standing Committees	Mayor	No	-
Meghalaya	Shillong	No committee in place	-	No	-
Mizoram	Aizawl	No committee in place	-	6 special committee	Functional
Nagaland	Kohima	No committee in place	-	3 Subject Committees	Non-functional
Sikkim	Gangtok	Executive Committee	Mayor	5 subject committees	Non-functional
Tripura	Agartala	Mayor-in-Council	Mayor	Subject Committees	Functional

Shillong, Aizawl and Kohima do not have any key deliberative body in place to discuss and deliberate in the issues and take decisions. Itanagar, Imphal and Shillong does not have any subject committees for deliberation and decision making and the committees are non-functional in Guwahati, Kohima and Gangtok. It is only in Aizawl and Agartala that the subject committees are functional. Deliberative committees are an important part of the local governance structure and should be robust to ensure effective deliberation and decision making towards the planning and development of the city.

Committee system in Tripura

The Agartala Municipal Corporation has an efficient and robust deliberative three-tiered committee structure. The committees consist of the ward committee at ward level, zonal advisory committee at zonal level (5-6 wards per zone) and the Mayor In Council (MIC).

The Ward Councillor is the chairman of the ward committee along with a ward secretary and 6-7 selected members from the ward. The committee is notified to the Mayor and the Commissioner and minutes of the meeting are also recorded. Ward Committee meetings take place once a month but citizen participation is not allowed in the same. Budgetary suggestions from the ward are given to the Zonal Advisory Committee.

The Zonal Advisory Committee (ZAC) is formed at the zonal level. Agartala has four zones, thus there are four ZACs. The councillors of each ward in the respective zones are members of the ZAC. The chairperson of the committee is one of the Members of MIC (MMIC) selected by the Mayor. Zonal administrative officers are also a part of the ZAC. The role of the ZAC is to ensure the implementation of the decisions taken by MIC in their zones, monitoring the ongoing projects and advisory role to the MIC. The ZAC also consolidates the budgetary suggestions, deliberate on it and send recommendations to the MIC and the committee meets twice a month.

Tripura has a Mayor In Council system which is similar to the cabinet system of the Prime Minister of India. The Mayor selects the members of the MIC. There are 10 members in MIC including the Mayor and Deputy Mayor. Each MMIC is given one department. There are subject committees also formed, if necessary, under the MMIC. All the decisions are first deliberated in MIC and then passed or presented in the council. The department and the municipal officials of the departments are accountable and answerable to the respective MMICs. The Commissioner is a part of the MIC as well and he/she has to be present in any MIC meeting, without which the meeting will be suspended. The MIC meetings happen once every week. Furthermore, the MIC also has a provision to suspend the commissioner by passing a resolution. The MIC has the responsibility to deliberate and pass the budget, which will then be presented in the council.

Empowerment of Mayor

The election of mayor in all the eight states of the north east region are done indirectly i.e. the elected councillors elect the Mayor. The term of Mayor is also coterminous with the office of corporation which is five years. None of the mayors in the states have the authority to prepare Annual Confidential Report (ACR) of the commissioner to ensure accountability. Only the Mayor of Imphal, Manipur has the authority to suspend officials.

The state government of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Sikkim have the authority to appoint, suspend or remove the mayor without the consent of the elected councillors.

Municipal Taxation

Table 2 Municipal Taxation and Final budget approval

State	City	Revise tax rates	Introduce new tax	Final budget approval
Arunachal Pradesh	Itanagar	State	State	State Government
Assam	Guwahati	State	State	City Government
Manipur	Imphal	State	State	State Government
Meghalaya	Shillong	State	State	State government
Mizoram	Aizawl	City Government	City Government	City Government
Nagaland	Kohima	State	State	State Government
Sikkim	Gangtok	State	State	State Government
Tripura	Agartala	State	State	City Government

The budget of state governments in the north east region have been dependent on the central government grants since there is very limited sources of revenue of the state. Consequently, the revenue collection of city governments is very meagre and is dependent on the state government grants and project grants.

The city governments except Aizawl does not have authority to introduce new tax or to revise tax rates. For any decision regarding the introduction or revision of taxes, the approval of state government is essential. In order for the city governments to be able to act as the third tier of government, it is essential that they are given autonomy in deciding the revenue sources and the rates.

Only the city governments of Guwahati, Assam; Aizawl, Mizoram and Agartala, Tripura have the final approval of the budget with the city government and does not require state government's approval. The budget prepared by the city government ideally should not need approval from the state government.

Way forward

The above mentioned observations provide an insightful picture of traditional governance systems, other governance status and associated issues with regard to the urban governance system in the north eastern region of India. These issues need to be taken strongly into account and relooked with effective solutions. This needs to form a fundamental part of the gamut of positive developmental changes being brought into the region through the coordination between the States and Central Government. Keeping that in mind, the following are the summarised list of reforms that Praja Foundation suggests be taken into consideration for the north eastern states, to have an effective local governance system across the cities:

- The city governments in the north east are very young and thus needs to be empowered and strengthened from the beginning.
- Need for integration of traditional governance practices at grassroot levels with the formalised municipal governance structure in Meghalaya, Nagaland and Manipur.
- The mayoral post in the cities need to be strengthened with autonomous powers and should not be subject to direct control under the state governments. The Mayor needs to hold the independent authority to prepare ACR of the commissioner to ensure accountability of the administration.
- Reforming the governance structure on the lines of a similar system such as the robust three-tiered deliberative committee system in Tripura in other states in the region.
- City governments need to be given the independent authority to introduce new taxes and revise existing tax rates. Also, autonomous powers to give final approval for its own budget should be ensured.



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