

## **Equitable and Sustainable Service Delivery through Panchayati Raj in India with special reference to the State of Manipur**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper attempts to examine the relationship between decentralized governance and development with reference to equity and sustainability. It has been widely argued that decentralized governance is an instrument for this multifaceted development and it can ensure effective and equitable development at grassroots level (Maro 1990; Tuner 2000: 115; World Bank 2000:107). This is because, locally elected representatives know their small constituency better and are in advantageous position to provide better services according to their electorate's preferences. It is easier for the electorates to hold elected bodies accountable for their performance. Equity means that access must be equal for all and that the social and educational disadvantages of certain groups within society should be taken into account. A society's well-being depends mostly on ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded from the mainstream of society. Equity is defined as the ability of decentralized governance to distribute and to deliver services fairly as well as fair justice in the society to the satisfaction of disadvantaged groups, particularly the SCs, STs, women, including minorities and people below the poverty line. Sustainability means the ability of decentralized governance to generate and to maintain the development process for a longer period. This paper focuses on the equitable and sustainability of service delivery by the panchayats in the state of Manipur. The paper is an extract from the Report of the ICSSR Major Research Project entitled "Inclusion of the Excluded: Empowering the Powerless through Panchayati Raj in Manipur".

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

It has been widely argued that decentralized governance is an instrument for this multifaceted development and it can ensure effective and equitable development at grassroots level (Maro 1990; Tuner 2000: 115; World Bank 2000:107). This is because, locally elected representatives know their small constituency better and are in advantageous position to provide better services according to their electorate's preferences. It is easier for the electorates to hold elected bodies accountable for their performance. Effectiveness of governance means maximizing its contribution to development, or to the increase in welfare (Higgins 1992:3). Effectiveness involves minimizing opportunity cost and getting the maximum amount of output. Equity means not to allow greater inequalities of income, wealth, power, privilege and social status in society (Higgins 1992:38). Similarly, UNDP observes that all men and women have opportunities to improve or maintain wellbeing (UNDP 1997). Sustainability is a long term process which includes the establishment of then basic social and economic institutions necessary for continuing economic growth. According to UNDP, "The needs of this generation must be met without compromising the right of the future generation to be free of poverty and deprivation and to exercise their basic capabilities" (UNDP 1997). Moreover, there has been debate over this definition. It is a definition of metaphor. There may be no use of such definition. The sustainability of the institution in the development process depends on the management of the institution, people's participation, performance of scheme/plan implementation, local capacity, capacity of resource mobilization and focus on the benefit continuation for the long term. Equity means that access must be equal for all and that the social and educational disadvantages of certain groups within society should be taken into account. A society's well-being depends mostly on ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded from the mainstream of society. Equity is defined as the ability of decentralized governance to distribute and to deliver services fairly as well as fair justice in the society to the satisfaction of disadvantaged groups, particularly the SCs, STs, women, including minorities and people below the poverty line. Sustainability means the ability of decentralized governance to generate and to maintain the development process for a longer period.

**Measurement Procedure**

Data pertaining to development in terms of equity and sustainability were collected from the respondents through different area scale consisting of different indicators. It is however, recalled here that equity and sustainability were measured through the degree of satisfaction of individuals. Satisfaction in this context was measured in terms of ‘score’ obtained by individuals on the scale used for the present study. The satisfaction score depended on the nature of response (satisfied=1, dissatisfied=0) expressed by the respondents for different statements given in the scale.

**Different Variables and Measuring Indicators**

Variables	Indicators
Equity:	Fair distribution in delivery of services, fair justice in society

**Sustainability:** Ability to prepare and implement scheme/plan; ability to hold regular meetings; ability to control offices and officials; ability to organize villagers and mobilize village resources; ability to collect taxes; ability to meet people’s needs; ability to create profitable assets; ability to control local disputes.

Scale was developed for effectiveness, equity and sustainability by using different indicators under different sections as mentioned above. It may help to understand the ability of gram panchayats in facilitating different services and it may also help to identify the problem in different sections since each section has its own nature.

**II. RESULT OF ANALYSIS**

To assess the relationship between decentralized governance and development a composite score was calculated based on different indicators as mentioned above. Score “one” is given for “Satisfaction” and “Zero” for “dissatisfaction” for each indicator reported by respondent, adding scores for all indicators of a particular variable and divided the range of scores into three categories: low, medium and high. The figures obtained are presented in the tables that follow.

**Households**

It is recalled that 60 households from each Gram Panchayat under study were randomly drawn for interviews. For purpose of analysis the head of the households were grouped on the basis of sex, caste, occupation, land owned, education and income with a view to ascertain whether these socio-economic and demographic factors have had any impact on receiving benefits from gram panchayat. The per cent distribution of respondents for each indicator of a variable has been calculated for different sections and services. The figure thus obtained has been presented in the following tables.

**Equity**

Two aspects of equity outcomes are examined: participation in decision making, and receipt of development benefits.

**Table 1.1: Distribution of respondents by Equity**

Sl. No.	Equity	Satisfied		Dissatisfied		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Fair distribution in delivery of services/benefits	42	17.5	198	82.5	240	100.0
2	Fair justice in society (equity in decision making)	66	27.5	174	72.5	240	100.0

*N = Number of respondents*

**Equity in Decision Making**

Participation in collective decision making is argued to be a necessary condition for equitable and sustainable development outcomes. Such participation is seen as ensuring that the interests of marginalized groups are voiced and considered, that all participants accept responsibility for the decisions made, and that the subsequent activities undertaken are collectively owned. Collective decision making is expected to lead to better distribution of benefits (greater equity) and to increase people’s motivation to engage in local governance and development.

Table 1.1 shows that an overwhelming majority of the respondents were not satisfied with the two aspects of equity outcomes. Whereas 82.3 percent of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with ‘equity in benefit sharing’, nearly the same number (72.5%) of the respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with ‘equity in decision making’. The mode of decision-making processes varies slightly, not vary widely, across the panchayats studied. The overwhelming majority of respondents in the panchayats of HaraorouTangkham, LaiphamKhunnou, and TellouChannaSeijang stated that the pradhan and influential members of the panchayat made decisions in their panchayats. This is less so but still largely in the case in Sawombung GP.

Another key question is who participates in decision making. Here equity in decision making is measured in two ways. The first is by looking at the organizational positions of the individuals who appoint office holders and who participate in key decisions. This data, which is presented in table 1.2 gives insight into the democratic functioning of the panchayat. The second is through analysis of poverty status of decision makers, which helps reveal the extent to which processes and outcomes may or may not be pro-poor. This is presented in table 1.3. Table 1.2 present reports from household surveys on participation in decision making in the four panchayats studied. Response indicate that the position a person holds in an organization and a person's poverty rank affect his or her ability to influence decision making in each panchayat.

**Table 1.2:** Participation in Decision Making by Organizational Position (Percent)

Who appoints officeholders?																	
Sl. No.	Position	HaraorouTangkham N=60				LaiphamKhunnou N=60				Sawombung N=60				TellouChannaSeijang N=60			
		d.n.k	n.a.	p	t.l.e	d.n.k	n.a.a	P	t.l.e	d.n.k	n.a.a	p	t.l.e	d.n.k	n.a.a	p	t.l.e.
1	GP (pradhan)	10	0	25	65	10	0	26	64	10	0	23	67	13	0	12	75
2	Influential members of GP	10	0	63	27	10	0	82	8	13	0	80	7	27	0	65	8
3	influential non-members	13	0	80	7	14	0	80	6	3	10	87	0	24	0	74	2
4	Common people	3	97	0	0	12	92	0	0	3	67	30	0	22	88	0	0
Who participates in key Decisions?																	
Sl. No.	Gram Panchayats	Line Dept. officials	All members	Rural elites	GP president	Dominant members	Panchayat secretary	Common people	NGO/SO staffs	N							
1	Haraorou Tangkham	5	15	7	62	10	1	0	0	60							
2	Laipham Khunnou	5	15	7	59	14	0	0	0	60							
3	Sawombung	1	15	4	35	15	0	30	0	60							
4	TellouChanna Seijang	5	1	4	55	35	0	0	0	60							

Source: Household questionnaire.

Note: because of differences in the structure of data sets for each sector, the information for this sector is presented in a slightly different format than information for the other two sectors. d.n.k = do not know; n.a.a = not at all; p = partially; t.l.e = to a large extent; GP = gram panchayat; LO = local organization; NGO = Non-government organization; SO = support organization; N = number of respondents

In all the four Gram Panchayats studied, pardhans (panchayat presidents) are deeply involved and strongly represented in final decisions on key issues such as loan disbursal, repayments, and corrective action (table 1.2 above), followed by influential members of the panchayats, and non-influential members whereas, common people are not represented at all except in Sawombung GP where they are represented partially at 30 percent. Rural elites and line department staffs are categorized under *influential non-members*. Whereas line department staffs are represented at 1 percent in Sawombung, in HaraorouTangkham, LaiphamKhunnou, and TellouChannaSeijang Gram Panchayats they are represented at 5 percent each. Rural elites are represented at 7 percent each in HaraorouTangkham and LaiphamKhunnou Gram Panchayats, whereas in Sawombung and TellouChannaSeijang Gram Panchayats, they are represented at 4 percent each. Whereas influential members of Gram Panchayat are represented highest at 35 percent in TellouChannaSeijang Gram Panchayat, in the other three Gram Panchayatspradhans strongly represented and dominated in final decisions. Decision making in this study is also measured through the analysis of poverty status of decision makers. Participation in decision making by poverty rank is presented in table 1.3. This will help reveal the extent, to which processes and outcomes may or may not be pro-poor. Exploring differences by poverty rank shows that panchayats operate in an equitable, but not pro-poor manner. The poverty rank of respondents has little effect on their participation in making important decisions in any of the four panchayats. Of even more concern is the finding that in all the four panchayats, more than one-third of members belonging to very poor and poor groups did not know how decisions were made. Wealthier representatives and presidents are more likely to dominate final decisions even though the chances are only marginally higher than for members in lower poverty ranks. In all the panchayats under study, poverty seems to have a minor impact on a person's influence in making key decisions. While levels of knowledge of decision-making were reasonable, fewer wealthy people than poor people in all the panchayat studied knew how decisions are made.

**Table 1.3:** Participation in Decision Making by Poverty Rank

(Percent)

Sl. No.	Who has the final say on key issues (such as work locations, loan disbursal, repayments, location of place, locating water supply points, allocation of funds etc.?)	HraorouTangkham GP N = 60			
		Very poor	Poor	Middle	Wealthy
1	GP President (pradhan)	11.1	13.4	18.6	20
2	GP influential members	2.5	7.7	8.4	4.8
3	GP Secretary	12.4	8.6	4.5	8.6
4	Line department staffs	0.8	3.4	4.4	8.6
5	Rural elites	4.5	11.2	3.0	4.8
6	All the GP members	5.6	7.8	8.9	12.2
7	Do not know/no response	45.5	40.2	64.2	48.4
Sl. No.	Who has the final say on key issues (such as work locations, loan disbursal, repayments, location of place, locating water supply points, allocation of funds etc.?)	LaiphamKhunnou GP N = 60			
		Very poor	Poor	Middle	Wealthy
1	GP President (pradhan)	12.1	15.4	30.6	20
2	GP influential members	2.6	8.7	9.4	4.8
3	GP Secretary	13.5	7.6	5.5	8.6
4	Line department staffs	0.9	5.4	6.4	8.6
5	Rural elites	5.5	10.2	4.0	4.8
6	All the GP members	5.8	9.8	9.9	12.2
7	Do not know/no response	32.5	45	15.2	46.4
Sl. No.	Who has the final say on key issues (such as work locations, loan disbursal, repayments, location of place, locating water supply points, allocation of funds etc.?)	Sawombung GP N = 60			
		Very poor	Poor	Middle	Wealthy
1	GP President (pradhan)	13.2	16.8	28.6	20
2	GP influential members	6.5	8.9	9.6	6.8
3	GP Secretary	19.4	8.6	6.5	9.6
4	Line department staffs	4.9	6.4	6.4	8.6
5	Rural elites	4.5	14.2	5.0	9.8
6	All the GP members	7.6	9.8	11	22.2
7	Do not know/no response	55.5	60.2	44.2	38.4
Sl. No.	Who has the final say on key issues (such as work locations, loan disbursal, repayments, location of place, locating water supply points, allocation of funds etc.?)	TellouChannaSeijang GP N = 60			
		Very poor	Poor	Middle	Wealthy
1	GP President (pradhan)	11	12.4	16.6	20
2	GP influential members	2.5	7.7	7.4	4.8
3	GP Secretary	12.4	8.6	3.5	8.6
4	Line department staffs	0.9	3.4	3.4	8.6
5	Rural elites	4.5	11.2	3.0	4.8
6	All the GP members	5.6	7.8	5.9	12.2
7	Do not know/no response	55.5	60.2	74.2	78.4

Source: Household questionnaire. Note: GP = gram panchayat; N = number of respondents

### Equity in Delivery of Benefits

Because all of the programmes/projects undertaken in the panchayats studied, purport to be *development* of the rural area, a key question is who receives the benefits. The measure of benefits to members varies from panchayat to panchayat. The benefits analyzed here, include different indicators of development:

poverty alleviation, health, education, and infrastructure as presented in table 1.4. An important issue concerning equitable sharing of benefits is that socially disadvantageous and economically backward classes may be discriminated in the process of distributing the services of Gram Panchayat. Table 8.10 shows discrimination of socially and economically backward classes of Scheduled Tribes in terms of sharing of benefits. In terms of benefits received, the percent of respondents belonging to Scheduled Tribes is lowest for high level in poverty alleviation (0.5%) and health (0.5%) as against 18.8% and 6.3% respondents belonging to upper caste. Whereas the percent of respondents belonging to Scheduled Tribes is the highest for high level (20%) in education compared to 16.7% by upper caste and 13.3 by OBC respondents. In services the percent of respondents belonging to upper caste group is low at an overwhelming (93%) followed by ST at 90% and OBC at 88.9 %. Percentage of respondents belonging to ST category is also the highest in low level of infrastructural development at an overwhelming (95%). Sex-wise, there is no discrimination in the process of distributing the services of Gram Panchayat although the score is low in high level both for female and male in poverty alleviation, education and health (20.6 & and 19.8% respectively in poverty alleviation; 14.7 and 15.1% in education; 1.2 and 7.0% in health). In services and infrastructural development the score is ‘nil’ at high level for both the sex.

LaiphamKhunnou GP has two predominated ST villages: Nagaram-I and Nagaram-II (*KhongsaiVeng*). While both the two villages have proper link roads, proper drainage systems, community assets, health care facilities, hand pumps and schools, provision of these services could be attributed to the painstaking efforts of the ‘Village Authority’ and not the panchayats as panchayat has little or no legitimacy in the eyes of the people. People in these two villages approached the Circle MLAs directly for their everyday grievances.

In Sawombung GP, discrimination in benefit sharing is even more pronounced. This GP also has two ST predominated villages (SawombungKabuiKhunjao and TurrelWangma village). Whereas the upper caste predominated wards of Sawombung Gate, SawombungThongkhong, Itamnungoi-I, Itamnungoi-II, Yourbung-I, Yourbung-II, Nungoi-I, Nungoi-II and Nungoi-III have all the urban amenities including marketing Centre, college, link roads with proper drainage system, proper drinking water supply, public libraries, public health centers and primary as well as secondary schools, the two ST predominated wards of SawombungKabuiKhunjao and TurrelWangma lacks even the minimum basic amenities. In terms of benefit sharing under poverty alleviation programmes these two villages were faced with extreme discriminations. No work allotment was given to these two villages under MREGS (the local version of Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act). ST communities from these two villages were excluded from BPL lists and Job Cards were not issued to them under (MREGS) Manipur Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.

HaraorouTangkham witnessed the most equitable distribution of benefits sharing amongst the various socio-economic groups. An interesting finding of the present study regarding distribution of benefit sharing is that discrimination has also taken place along party lines. In TellouChannaSeijang for example, party affiliation plays a crucial role in determining ones accessibility to benefits. A person faced discrimination in benefit sharing if he/she belongs to those village/wards which did not support the Pradhan and other influential members of the panchayats in the last panchayat elections.

**Table 1.4:** Percent distributions of respondents by their socio-economic and demographic characteristics, effectiveness, equity and sustainability.

Characteristics	Effectiveness												Equity			Sustainability			Total	
	Poverty			Education			Health			Services		Infrastru		Equity			Sustainability			
	L	M	H	L	M	H	L	M	H	L	M	L	M	H	L	M	H			
<b>Sex</b>																				
Men	45.3	34.9	19.8	37.2	47.7	15.1	33.7	59.3	7.0	90.7	9.3	12.8	87.2	68.6	17.4	14.0	43.0	19.8	37.2	172
women	61.8	17.6	20.6	47.1	38.2	14.7	38.2	52.9	8.8	88.2	11.8	11.8	88.2	73.5	8.8	17.6	58.8	20.6	20.6	68
<b>Marital status</b>																				
married	49.0	29.0	22.0	37.0	48.0	15.0	31.0	60.0	9.0	90.0	10.0	9.0	91.0	67.0	15.0	18.0	44.0	20.0	36.0	200
unmarried	55.0	35.0	10.0	55.0	30.0	15.0	55.0	45.0	0.0	90.0	10.0	30.0	70.0	85.0	15.0	0.0	65.0	20.0	15.0	40
<b>Caste</b>																				
Upper	54.2	27.1	18.8	52.1	31.3	16.7	50.0	43.8	6.3	93.8	6.3	18.8	81.3	81.3	2.1	16.7	68.8	10.4	20.8	96
Backward	42.2	31.1	26.7	33.3	53.3	13.3	22.2	68.9	8.9	88.9	11.1	8.9	91.1	57.8	22.2	20.0	33.3	20.0	46.7	90
SC/ST	60.0	35.0	5.0	30.0	50.0	20.0	35.0	60.0	5.0	90.0	10.0	95.0	5.0	75.0	25.0	0.0	40.0	35.0	25.0	40
Others	42.9	28.6	28.6	28.6	71.4	0.0	14.3	71.4	14.3	71.4	28.6	14.3	85.7	57.1	28.6	14.3	14.3	42.9	42.9	14
<b>Age</b>																				
a18-29	47.1	35.3	17.6	70.6	17.6	11.8	70.6	29.4	0.0	100.0	0.0	47.1	52.9	82.4	17.6	0.0	82.4	11.8	5.9	34
a30-45	46.3	34.1	19.5	29.3	53.7	17.1	19.5	73.2	7.3	82.9	17.1	4.9	95.1	73.2	14.6	12.2	34.1	34.1	31.7	80
a46-55	48.6	25.7	25.7	34.3	51.4	14.3	31.4	57.1	11.4	94.3	5.7	0.0	100.0	60.0	11.4	28.6	42.9	14.3	42.9	72
a56-65	58.3	33.3	8.3	50.0	50.0	0.0	50.0	41.7	8.3	91.7	8.3	8.3	91.7	83.3	16.7	0.0	58.3	0.0	41.7	24
a65 plus	60.0	20.0	20.0	40.0	33.3	26.7	33.3	60.0	6.7	86.7	13.3	26.7	73.3	60.0	20.0	20.0	46.7	20.0	33.3	30
<b>Education</b>																				
Illiterate	51.2	19.5	29.3	41.5	36.6	22.0	39.0	48.8	12.2	97.6	2.4	12.2	87.8	63.4	9.8	26.8	51.2	12.2	36.6	82
Primary	54.5	29.5	15.9	52.3	38.6	9.1	38.6	59.1	2.3	84.1	15.9	15.9	84.1	70.5	15.9	13.6	50.0	25.0	25.0	88
Secondary	38.1	52.4	9.5	33.3	57.1	9.5	38.1	57.1	4.8	90.5	9.5	14.3	85.7	81.0	14.3	4.8	47.6	19.0	33.3	42
Graduate	50.0	28.6	21.4	7.1	71.4	21.4	7.1	78.6	14.3	85.7	14.3	0.0	100.0	71.4	28.6	0.0	28.6	28.6	42.9	28



internally generated resources. However, the ability of the panchayat to prepare and implement scheme or plan and to control local disputes is at 37.5 percent and 27.5 percent respectively.

**Table 2.1:** Distribution of respondents by indicators of Sustainability

Sl. No.	Sustainability	Satisfied		Dissatisfied		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Ability to prepare and implement scheme/plan	90	37.5	150	62.5	240	100.0
2	Ability to control offices and officials	120	50.0	120	50.0	240	100.0
3	Ability to hold regular meetings	90	37.5	150	62.5	240	100.0
4	Ability to organize villagers and mobilize village resources	18	7.5	222	92.5	240	100.0
5	Ability generate financial resources through donor agencies	6	2.5	234	97.5	240	100.0
6	Ability to meet people's needs	0	0.00	240	100.0	240	100.0
7	Ability to control local disputes	66	27.5	174	72.5	240	100.0

*N = Number of respondents*

Table 2.2 shows the level of total score obtained for the various indicator of sustainability. As the table shows, sustainability is low at the level of 57.5 percent; medium at the level of 20 percent and high at the level of 22.5 percent.

**Table 2.2:** Sustainability Index

Sl. No.	Sustainability	No. of respondents	Percent
1	Low (0)	138	57.5
2	Medium (1-2)	48	20.0
3	High (> 3)	54	22.5
<b>Total</b>		<b>240</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 2.3 shows the level of total score for development. It is obtained by adding the scores of Effectiveness, Equity and Sustainability. As the table shows, development is low at the level of 62.5 percent; medium at the level of 17.5 percent; and high at the level of 20 percent.

**Table 2.3:** Development Index

Sl. No.	Development	No. of respondents	Percent
1	Low (< 6)	150	62.5
2	Medium (6-7)	42	17.5
3	High (> 8)	48	20.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>240</b>	<b>100.0</b>

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