

School Education in Manipur Hills: Experiences from the Communitisation Programme of Nagaland

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ABSTRACT: Taking into account the significance of the communitisation programme launched in Nagaland in elementary education, the paper narrates the experiences of the neighbouring state to provide necessary inputs to build a win-win relationship between the government of Manipur and the community to spur growth and development of proper educational institutions in the hill areas. Keeping this in view, the paper argues that school education in Manipur hills could be reinvented through communitisation programme with the active support of the community elders and teachers.

Keywords: *Communication programme; elementary education; VEC, CEC, Nagaland; Manipur Village Authority (in Hill areas) Act, 1956; Reinvention.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

As Education is one of the important levers for social, economic and political transformation the Twelfth Plan places an unprecedented focus on the expansion of education, improving its quality and on ensuring that educational opportunities are available to all segments of the society. While a well educated population, equipped with the relevant knowledge, attitudes and skills strengthens democracy by empowering them to fully participate in the governance process, education also acts as an integrative force in society by imparting values that foster social cohesion and national identity.

Methods and materials:

The data of the present article have been collected from available primary and secondary sources and also from field work interviews of informed and uninformed persons and intellectuals across the hills of Manipur. Most of the available published works on the subject matters have been consulted and analyzed critically.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Although a good number of committees constituted by the State and Central Government have given recommendations towards improving the quality of elementary education in the Country no substantive results have so far been achieved. The programme of SARVA SHIKSYA ABJIYAN, RASHTRIYA MADHYAMIK SIKSHA ABHIYAN could be successfully implemented through the communitisation programme.

Communitisation Programme:

Post colonial India however, has not been able to take the full advantage of a fairly old and developed educational system with probably the biggest administrative structure of implementing the various policies and programmes. It is, however, important to note that the role of "service providers" and the "delivery mechanism" are critical component for the success of a particular system. It is against such a background that in a significant development, the state of Nagaland has made a strong quest for improving the delivery mechanism in the education sector through the communitisation programme. The Government of Nagaland has provided a comprehensive account on the formulation as well as implementation of the above programme in the state (Handbook on communitisation 2002). Under the said system the government attempted to build up a synergic relationship between the community and the government with a view to creating a sense of ownership of public institutions and better management of limited resources. Communitisation of an institution of the Government means transferring the ownership to and sharing responsibility of its management with the community.

It encompasses decentralization of authority, delegation of responsibility, empowerment of the community and building up a win-win relationship between the Government and the community to spur growth and development of institutions. The idea of devolving power and authority from government to the community i.e. the real stakeholder, is considered in development circles as the hallmark of "people's empowerment".

Nagaland Model : Communitization in Education

In Nagaland, the idea of communitisation began in 2000, when the State Government under the able leadership of the then Chief Secretary, R.S. Pandey initiated a statewide dialogue, involving various stakeholders including the village elders, members of civil society organisations, govt, officials, church leaders and reknown educationists. The new initiative extensively discussed a vision of a better Nagaland with particular focus on improving the delivery system of the Government services in three key sectors i.e. elementary education, power and grass root healthcare (Handbook on communitisation 2002). A proper legal and administrative structures to facilitate shaping up of a responsive community, who, through intensive partnership with the State Government, would take greater responsibility in the management of public institutions in certain sectors was framed. The "Nagaland Communitisation of Elementary Education Institution and Service Rules" declared all Government-run Primary and middle Schools in the State to be communitised thereby transferring the day-to-day management responsibilities of the schools in academic, administrative and financial matters-into the hands of the local community.

R. Bansal (<http://mdoner.gov.in/storiesdetails.asp?sid= 18>) has succinctly pointed out that to operationalize the system, every village which traditionally constituted the primary unit of Naga social fabric was empowered to look after communitised Government school (s). The new initiative needs to be understood within a specific cultural context. In Naga society, across rural and urban environments, "the village," "the clan" and "the tribe" are the real and symbolic basis of individual identity. With its well-organized tribal bonds and institutions that serve as social capital, every village, would set up a Village Education Committee (VEC), which had the legal and administrative authority to manage elementary education within its jurisdiction. Since the primary objective of constituting VECs was to ensure the participation of the community and create within it a sense of ownership, proper measures to improve the functioning of a grass root level public institution through the inputs of social capital i.e village elders, members of the customary village councils, Church leaders students unions and other members of the village community who provided physical and financial support became vital. The committee, thus included

- i) Chairman elected by the Village Council,
- ii) Head Teacher of the communitised school.
- iii) One Village Council member
- iv) one representative each from different church denominations in the village and
- v) two members from the village community (preferably an educationist and at least a woman nominated by the village community).

In cases where more than one village share a communitised middle school, a Common Education Committee (CEC), which include the VEC of the host village and three representatives from each VEC served by the school, is constituted.

A VEC takes responsibility for the management and supervision of school(s) involving financial and administrative duties within its jurisdiction, including the implementation of a "No Work, No Pay" policy for errant teachers and ensuring universal enrolment up to age 14 or Class VIII. The committee also looks into the cases of transfer of teachers, construction /maintenance of school buildings. It was also responsible for compilation of annual reports of schools and implementation of plans. The receipt of grants from Government and generation of resources along with the auditing of the accounts in time was also an indispensable function of the Committee.

The VEC was to open two bank accounts: a current account (for salary transaction) and a savings account (for transactions related to the development fund). All grants from the State Government and other incomes are credited to the savings account. Since the entire amount for the school (s) are remitted to these accounts, the chance for leakage during financial transactions is greatly reduced. The VEC accounts are subjected to internal audits by the State Government. An overall District Coordination Committee (DCC), at the district level, monitors and reviews the exercise of communitisation programme in the villages, as well as to improve upon its implementation. Although communitisation seem to relegate the Government to a supervisory and supportive role, R.Bansal stated that the overall system still remains under the aegis of the Government. While VECs undoubtedly form the basic building block of the programme, the overall charge of elementary education in the State rests with the Directorate of School Education, State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), and the Nagaland Board of Secondary Education (NBSE). Thus, a deeper probe reveals that communitisation programme could work successfully only with the support of the State Government.

The implementation of the programme occurred in phases and within a voluntary framework. Only schools of those villages that volunteered to be part of the programme were communitised. Between 2002-2003 as many as 402 elementary schools in 272 villages were brought under communitisation programme. The programme has clearly been able to tap into this traditional, culture-specific social capital, which no doubt played a strong role in the response that it received from the people. The synergistic support the State received from national programmes, in particular the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), has been key in taking forward the work of communitisation in the education sector. In Nagaland, the SSA attempted, to universalize elementary education through community-ownership in a partnership involving the Central, the State and the local Governments. The intervention by SSA-in the form of resources and funds-provided the communitisation programme with much needed support. The scheme also had provisions for free text books and school bags in addition to additional financial allocation for constructions of school buildings, water tanks, toilet facilities, computer aided learning facilities, etc.

Perspectives in Manipur:

Indeed, partnership between Government and the community involving transfer of ownership of school facilities, control over service delivery, empowerment, decentralization, and delegation of responsibilities has led to increase in school enrolment, reduction in school drop-outs, better attendance of teachers and improved school facilities among the Primary schools in Nagaland. The new system provided opportunity to the community to play a critical role in the management and in ensuring proper and timely delivery of education. It is tempting to argue that communitisation can be applicable to tribal and hilly areas where the role of chiefs and traditional village councils are very effective. In a tribal society a chief is still very relevant because of centuries of tribal traditional system of governance.

Till 1956, the Hill Areas of Manipur remained largely un-administrated with little participation of the local people in any democratic process, except on occasions of election to the Manipur Legislative Assembly. In 1956, the Manipur Village Authorities (in hill areas) Act, 1956 was enacted by an Act thereby introducing for the first time a local body of self-governance at the local level (village). It provided a system of election to the village body which will be headed by the nominated Chief (ex-officio Chairman). Under this act the chief will continue to be the nominated head of the tribal council and the village authority will continue to administer the tribal areas where civil administration is quite ineffective. Despite the merger of Manipur with India in 1949 with an aim of establishing the defacto power still lies with the village authority.

The Manipur District Council Act, 1971 passed by the Parliament provided self governing council for the hill areas. According to the act, all hill areas of Manipur were divided into six autonomous districts with a council of its own, each having 18 elected and 2 nominated members. The councils which started functioning in 1973 continued till 1989, but after that due to interference from various pressure groups there had been no election till 2012. During this period the officials elected under the village authorities act had been practically running the administration of the hill areas with indirect support of the District authorities.

III. CONCLUSION

In Manipur, education department has not been performing too well. The government schools and colleges have not been successful in providing education for the masses in Manipur because of strong interference of different outfits. Moreover, there are a dominant feature of absentee teachers in the hill areas. Lobbying with the village authorities is very common, the teachers normally give up half their salaries to the authorities to make up their absence. Besides civil administration cannot reach these areas. There is no one to check the allocation of funds and local newspapers are replete with numerous cases of collusion between the village chiefs and the teachers/officials to get the funds are siphoned off. Such a system makes good will schemes like SARVA SHIKSHA ABHIYAN (http://www.education.nic.in/ssa/ssa_1.asp#1.0), RASHTRIYA MADHYAMIK SIKSHA ABHIYAN applicable only in paper. Though education is the talk of the day, it still remains a challenge in Manipur. All these problems can be addressed if powers are given to the village authorities for administration of education and if they are empowered.

There is, thus, a need to invent an alternative model of education in Manipur. People in Manipur have a strong sense of community spirit. Considering the fact that there is a similarity of culture, values and customary practices between Manipur and Nagaland, this model can be viewed as an alternative approach to development in the hill areas in the state of Manipur. If the empowered are not motivated, we should empower the motivated. Reinvention of Manipur through Communitisation of education can be a way out to make education a success in Manipur. It will be a democratic solution for inefficiencies of the democracy. Besides we can develop institutes of excellence with the active support of the community, teachers and support of the government.

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