

Status of Governance in the Local Institutions of Sixth Schedule Areas in India's North-East: A case study on Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council

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Abstract

The concept of 'good governance' at local levels means quality, effectiveness and efficiency of local administration. Inclusiveness, transparency and accountability in the public service delivery system, local public policy and decision-making procedures are the integral part of it. In case of India, during 90's one major policy shifts took towards strengthening the local governance through the 73rd and the 74th amendments to the constitution of India. But the form of decentralized local governance is not uniform in our country. To protect the customary tribal traditions and cultures of the colonial "excluded" areas of North East, the idea of local self-governance has been evolved as Sixth Schedule Areas. At present the Schedule applies in four states only – it almost fully covers Meghalaya and partly the states of Assam, Tripura and Mizoram.

To strengthen the participatory democracy the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) has established Village Committees at the grass root level like Panchayati Raj Institutions. These local level institutions are now playing a vital role for enhancing good governance. The village committees (local institutions) of TTAADC has provided a democratic model of governance, which is more participatory, consensus oriented, and believes to provide better administration in tribal areas. The objective of this present study is to assess how much this global idea of achieving good governance has been accomplished by TTAADC of Tripura as a local level institution, and whether it is feasible to achieve good governance through the current approach that is being practiced by developing countries like India.

Key Words: Good Governance, Sixth Schedule Areas, Local Governance, Local Institution, Public Service Delivery System

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I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, 'governance' has been used as synonyms with 'government'. In many literatures, they are often used synonymously. But during the 1980s, political scientists broadened the meaning of governance and referred to the term as distinct from the government by including civil society actors. Therefore, governance refers to self-organizing, inter-organizational networks characterized by interdependence, resource exchange, rules of the game, and significant autonomy from the state (Kjer, 2004). It is the process of decision-making and how those decisions are implemented. When the systems and processes are accountable, transparent, just, responsive, and participatory then the governance may be defined as 'good governance'.

The terms "governance" and "good governance" are now the two most well-known keywords in the development field. Whereas bad governance is broadly recognized as a root cause of all problems, good governance is often prescribed as a way to cure all ills. In a well-cited quote, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted that 'good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development' (Press Release, 1998). The UNDP believes that developing the capacity for good governance is a primary means of eradicating poverty (Elahi, 2009). The concept of good governance was emerged at the end of the 1980s by the World Bank. Which has defined good governance as 'the manner in which power is exercised in the management of the country's economic and social resources for development' (IFAD, 1999). There are three distinct aspects in the World Bank's conceptualization of good governance (a) the form of political regime (b) the process by which authority is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development; and (c) the capacity of governments to design, formulate and implement policies and discharge functions.

As far as the criteria of good governance are concerned, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) set out eight major characteristics. These are participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective & efficient, equitable & inclusive, and follow the jurisprudence (UNESCAP, 2009). Later on, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) also identified the four major pillars against which governance can be judged are accountability, transparency, rule of law and peoples participation (IFAD, 1999).

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Indicators of Good Governance

Concerning the definitions above it should be clear that good governance is an ideal that is not easy to achieve in its totality. But to assess how far our system has reached in the pursuit of good governance, it is needed to understand the factors of good governance. Numerous multilateral organizations have identified the elements of good governance which have a relation to development. The World Bank which is the concept seeder of good governance has identified four key dimensions of governance which are (i) public sector management, (ii) accountability, (iii) legal framework for development, and (iv) transparency and information. In addition, the World Bank has also identified four other issues that are directly related to its activities such as (i) more participatory approaches to policy, (ii) program, and project design and implementation; (iii) military expenditures; and (iv) human rights (World Bank, 1994). Likewise, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, good governance has eight major characteristics. These are participation, consensus-oriented, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, equity and inclusiveness, and the rule of law (UNESCAP, 2009). Further, The Asian Development Bank (AsDB) has recognized four essential components of governance. Which are (i) accountability, (ii) participation, (iii) predictability, and (iv) transparency (Asian Development Bank, 1999). The International Development Association (IDA) which is also a sister concern of the World Bank has identified four major pillars against which governance can be judged are (i) accountability, (ii) transparency (iii) rule of law (iv) peoples participation (IFAD, 1999). The five basic elements of the African Development Bank's (AfDB) good governance policy are (i) accountability, (ii) transparency, (iii) combating corruption (iv) participation, and (v) pro-governance and the pro-development legal and judicial system (IFAD, 1999). The features of good governance were also identified by the erstwhile Planning Commission of India which were described in a specific chapter titled "Governance and Implementation" of the Tenth Five Year Plan. According to the Planning Commission of India, the features of good governance are (i) the exercise of legitimate political power; and formulation and implementation of policies and programmes that are (ii) equitable, (iii) transparent, (iv) non-discriminatory, (v) socially sensitive, (vi) participatory, and above all (vii) accountable to the people at large (Planning Commission, Govt. of India, 2002).

The above discussion clearly shows that, though the various agencies have identified a number of good governance indicators, four are common and universally recognized amongst these factors. These are (i) accountability (ii) transparency (iii) rule of law and (iv) people's participation.

Nature of Good Governance in India

When the issue of Good Governance was introduced by the World Bank during 1990's decade, thereafter, it became a major issue of concern in India. This has been well reflected in the ninth five year plan (1997- 2002) of India. The ninth plan was introduced during the year 1999 which was aimed at growth with social justice and equity. The integral link between rapid economic growth and the quality of life of the mass of

the people was recognized in this plan. In ninth plan one chapter was included on “Implementation, Delivery Mechanism and Institutional Development”, where the earlier five year plans were reviewed. It was observed that, “some minor institutional hurdles have been gradually weakened by the forces of development initiated through successive Five Year Plans, the nation has not fully succeeded in building up institutions to answer the needs of the times” (Planning Commission, Govt. of India). Therefore the weak spots in the formulation and implementation of the previous plan programmes and projects were identified and solutions were suggested to strengthen the delivery system. The issue of decentralization in development planning was also raised in chapter six of the Ninth Plan.

The issue of good governance was presented in more specifically in the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007). In a specific chapter titled, “Governance and Implementation” the tenth five year plan admits that, good governance is perhaps the single most important factor to achieve the objectives of the Tenth Plan. The Tenth Five Year Plan argues that, good governance can help to secure human well being and sustained development, whereas poor governance could well erode the individual capabilities, as well as institutional and community capacities to meet the needs of sustenance. To conceptualize good governance an alternative model of governance was also presented there. According to the model efficient governance requires (i) efficient institutions, (ii) delivery mechanism for successful implementation of development programmes, and (iii) supportive and subordinate framework of legislations, rules, and procedures for delivering and meeting the stated responsibilities of the concerned institutions.

Decentralized Governance in India through local institutions

Decentralization is considered as one of the well-known as well as much discussed issues in the literature of development planning in both federal and unitary systems of governance. Since independence, the Indian policymakers have adopted democratic decentralization as a basic theme of national policy. Several commissions and committees have been formed from time to time to identify the nature and mode of the democratic decentralization process. The ideas of these various commissions and committees have inspired the nation towards the contemporary thinking about local self-government in India for participatory planning to bring administration and development programmes to the doorstep of rural people. The most remarkable among these were the B. Metha Commission of 1957, the Asoka Metha Commission of 1978, and the G.V.K. Rao Committee of 1985 towards the formation of Panchayati Raj System in India. In this context, the Bordoloi Sub-Committee which was constituted on 27th February 1947 to report on the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas is also equally remarkable.

Rural Local Bodies in India:

Rural local bodies have many forms in India. Gram Panchayat is the most popular form among these. The government of India passed the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992 which came into effect on 20th April 1993. After then a major reform has been taken place. Part IX of the Constitution of India provides for setting up of three tiers of Panchayats (only two tiers in case of States or Union Territories having a population less than 2 million): (i) Gram Panchayat at village level and (ii) Intermediate Panchayats at block level in between Gram Panchayats and District Panchayats (iii) District Panchayats at District level. It also provides Gram Sabha as a general body of Gram Panchayat which ensures community participation in the decision-making process. The local self-governance through PRIs greatly facilitates local-level participatory planning by adopting a bottom-up approach. The grassroots level micro plans are prepared by Gram Panchayats through the Gram Sabha, which is later converged at Intermediate level Panchayat and District level Panchayat. The District Panchayat finally submits the aggregate proposals to District Planning Committee to finalize the District Plan.

Local government is a State subject. Therefore, State legislatures have a critical role in determining various aspects of Panchayati Raj in their States. Regarding the devolution of powers to Panchayats is concerned the States play a very key role. Though the Constitution envisaged that Panchayats will function as institutions of local government and prepare plans and implement schemes for economic development and social justice, powers given to the State for devolution of powers and authority to Panchayats. The Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India reports shows that, the functions entrusted to a Panchayat under the Eleventh Schedule to Article 243G of the Constitution are not devolved fully due to state-specific concerns (Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, 2019).

Areas not covered under Part IX

As discussed earlier, Part IX of the Constitution applies to a vast majority of the country. But, Article 243M of the Constitution, exempts Scheduled Areas and tribal areas referred to in Clause (1) and (2) of Article 244 from the application of the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution.

These include the States of Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland, areas covered under the Sixth Schedule, the hill areas of Manipur, and the district level Panchayats in the hill areas of Darjeeling. The Sixth Schedule is regarded as a mini-Constitution within the main Constitution. It envisages the establishment of Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) and gives them elaborate Legislative, Administrative, and Judicial powers. No law of the Centre or the State applies in any autonomous regions without District Council's approval. The district councils are also empowered to constitute Village councils and Village courts. Various kinds of grassroots local governance structures exist in these areas.

Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) towards democratic decentralization and good governance:

The tribal people of the former princely state Tripura had a strong demand for autonomy for a long time to preserve and promote their distinct ways of life. The Indian Parliament has passed the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) Act 1979 after a series of democratic movements organized by the tribal people of Tripura, under the provision of the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution. The objective behind setting up the Autonomous District Council (ADC) is to empower the tribal people to govern themselves and also to bring holistic development of the socially and economically backward people through cultural, social, and economic improvement.

The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council was constituted on January 15, 1982, and later on, it was upgraded under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution on August 23, 1984. After then the institution is marching towards removing the material disparities between the advanced and backward sections of the societies and also strengthening the bonds of unity between the tribal and non-tribal masses.

To strengthen the participatory democracy the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) has established village committees at the grass-root level like Panchayati Raj Institutions. These local-level institutions are now playing a vital role in enhancing good governance. The Village Committees (local institutions) of TTAADC has provided a democratic model of governance, which is more participatory, consensus-oriented, and believes to provide better administration in tribal areas. Therefore, Tripura has a well-established system of local planning, in the line of non-Sixth Schedule areas of the country.

To Establish and develop Local Self Government and to make better provisions for the administration of the Village into well-developed and sufficient unit TTAADC has enacted the Village Committee Act 1994. TTAADC also vested power and duties with the elected Village Committees for the implementation of the Central and State Government sponsored Developmental schemes /programmes.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The Study will be carried out to fulfill the following objectives;

1. To study the status of good governance in the local institutions for implementation of development programmes respect to accountability, transparency and jurisprudence.
2. To assess the role of local institutions of TTAADC in good governance respect to decentralized planning.
3. To suggest some policy direction for better implementation of good governance strategy.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The article has been prepared on the primary and secondary data. Both primary and secondary data was collected through instruments structured at different levels. The secondary information has been collected from TTAADC and other government offices, from different books, journals, Government reports and other reports of international agencies like World Health Organization (WHO), various organizations under United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Asian Development Bank (ADB) erstwhile Planning Commission of India, NITI Aayog etc. Primary data have been collected from different sources like villagers, Chairman, Village Secretary and other stakeholders through structured interview schedule, focus group discussion (FGD), key informants interviews etc.

As per the requirement of the study, a sample survey was conducted to collect primary data from the representative sample by following a three staged stratified random sampling method. The entire TTAADC area was divided into 5 (Five) Zones. In the first stage, from each zone, 25% of the Block Area Councils (BACs) were randomly selected. As a result, 10 BACs were identified for this study. In the second stage, from each BAC, 2 (two) Village Development Committees (VDC) were selected through Distance Function Methodology. Therefore, in total twenty village committees were selected from 10 BACs. Finally, from each Village Committee, 20 respondents were randomly interviewed by covering both male and female, and different ethnic groups of the tribal and non-tribal populations. Thus the total sample of the study was 200.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From the secondary and primary data analysis the study reveals the following significant findings:

- It is observed that the concept of 'good governance' at local levels means quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of local administration. Inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability in the public service delivery system, local public policy, and decision-making procedures are the integral part of it.
- In the case of India, during 90's one major policy shift took towards strengthening the local governance through the 73rd and the 74th amendments to the constitution of India.
- It is also found that the form of decentralized local governance is not uniform in India. To protect the customary tribal traditions and cultures of the North East, the idea of local self-governance evolved among the tribal people, and accordingly, Sixth Schedule Areas have been formed.
- The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council was constituted on January 15, 1982, and later on, it was upgraded under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution on August 23, 1984.
- It is found that, at the Village Committee level, TTAADC ensures 50 percent reservation for women representation. In this regard, the local bodies are well advanced in ensuring equal representation. The introduction of women's reservations improves the situation of women in local politics.
- From the primary data it is found that availability of basic infrastructure or facilities is satisfactory. In the case of educational infrastructure, 55 percent village has a primary school, 80 percent village has junior basic school, 65 percent village has a secondary school, 55 percent village has high school and 35 percent village has a higher secondary school within 5 KM radius.
- Regarding and health and nutritional support, it is found that 85 percent village has Angan Wadi Centres (AWC) inside the village and Health sub-centers within a 5 KM radius.
- Other basic service like Public Distribution Service (PDS) is available inside the village in 85 percent of the village, 35 percent of the village has Community Service Centres, 35 percent of the village has VLW Centres (Agriculture), and Animal Resource Development sub-center is available within 5 KM radius in 35 percent village.
- In regards to accountability, 29 percent of villagers agreed, and another 18.5 percent of villagers strongly agreed that the local bodies are fulfilling their promises through time-bound action. The majority of the villagers (66 percent) agreed and 3.5 percent of villagers strongly agreed that the officials and elected representatives have good behavior towards the people.
- Answerable to the citizen is an important factor for ensuring accountability. The majority of the citizens (56 percent) agreed that the local officials and Elected Representatives of the VC Office have the knowledge to answer our questions.
- According to 56 percent of villagers the Elected Representatives and officials of Village Committees are willingly helping them and 64.5 percent of villagers informed that the Village Committees are always seeking their participation in development activities.
- Regarding the implementation of various schemes and programmes it has been found that the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) has been implemented most efficiently compared to other schemes and programmes. The implementation of MGNREGS has been rated as very good by 51.5 percent of villagers and good by 25 percent of villagers. Whereas the implementation of Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana - Gramin (PMAY-G) and schemes for rural connectivity has been rated as poor by more than half of the respondents.
- It has been observed that the majority of the villagers (77.5 percent) didn't express any grievances against their local bodies whereas 22.5 percent of villagers have grievances in terms of service delivery (22.2 percent), misbehave with citizens (33.3 percent), poor performance (44.4 percent), etc.
- Regarding dissemination of information it has been found that notice boards were available in all the Village Committee offices. The conditions of the notice boards were good and information was up to date in 65 percent of cases. Whereas in 15 percent places the information was not up to date and in case of another 20 percent offices there was no information in the notice board.
- It has been found that all the Village Committees (100 percent) organize Social Audit for ensuring transparency and people's participation in rural development schemes and programmes. But most of the villagers (59.5 percent) are not aware of it. Only 13.5 percent of villagers are informed about the social audits.
- For ensuring transparency Village Monitoring Committee (VMC) has been formed by all the Village Committees. It has been observed that in 65 percent of cases the committee members have been selected through village sabha. Whereas in the rest 35 percent of villages the committee members were selected directly by the Chairman.
- Only 13 percent of villagers strongly agreed and another 35 percent of villagers agreed that the Village Committees of TTAADC have ensured equal treatment and absence of discrimination.
- Among the sampled villagers only 3 percent strongly agreed and 37 percent agreed that freedom of

opinion and expression is effectively guaranteed by the respective local bodies.

- It has been found that only 4.5 percent of villagers strongly agreed and 25.5 percent agreed that government regulations are applied and enforced in the village without improper influence.
- Majority of the villagers (54 percent) has insufficient knowledge regarding the rights and entitlements of different scheme and projects and 17 percent has basic knowledge. But among the villagers, 12 percent have fully and 17 percent have minimum knowledge. In this regard majority of the respondents (56 percent) stated that their local bodies are providing insufficient information on various schemes and programmes.
- While discussing with the officials and functionaries of Village Committees it has been found that most of them (65 percent) have knowledge regarding the guidelines of various schemes and projects. Whereas 35 percent of them have basic knowledge only. According to the government has provided proper training on guidelines of scheme/ programmes to all of them (100 percent).
- It has been found that the villagers have a bad impression about the officials regarding the implementation of schemes/ programmes. The majority of the interviewed officials (85 percent) claimed that they fully follow the guidelines during the implementation of any scheme/ programme and the rest 15 percent of officials follow the guidelines to a large extent. But only 15.5 percent of villagers opined that the officials fully follow any guidelines.
- The study shows that the level of discipline has to be improved by the officials and elected representatives. Only 17 percent of villagers opined that the officials and elected representatives are fully disciplined.
- It has been found that as per villagers' opinion rules are not properly followed to reduce corruption by the officials. Only 7 percent of respondents opined that rules are being followed fully by the officials towards reducing corruption.
- In case of selection of beneficiaries under various schemes, 22 percent of respondents opined that rules are not followed appropriately though a majority of the respondents (34 percent) opined that rules are slightly followed in this regard.
- The Village Committees usually conducts Village Sansad at Village Committee level twice a year. It is found that 60 percent of villagers are aware of this. Whereas 20 percent of villagers are unaware of the Village Sansad and another 20 percent of villagers are aware of the annual Village Sansad only.
- Similarly the Village Committees conducts Village Sabhas before each Village Sansad. It is found that 36.5 percent of villagers are aware of it. Another 34 percent of villagers stated that they are aware of only the annual Village Sabha only. Whereas 29.5 percent of villagers are unaware of Village Sabhas.
- The study reveals that only 10 percent of villagers are attending every meeting of Village Sabha and Village Sansad. Another 52.5 percent of villagers are attending such meetings on an occasional basis. According to 37.5 percent of villagers, they never attended any Village Sabha and Village Sansad.
- A good number of villagers (20 percent) informed that the Village Committee officials and Elected Representatives have ensured their participation by mobilizing them.
- It is found that Village Committees are organizing their Village Sabha or Village Sansad in Public Convenient open Places (45 percent) and Village Committee offices (55 percent) and they inform the villagers about such meetings through loud hailing (100 percent). In addition to that Village Committees are also informing the villagers through notice boards (35 percent), posters (15 percent), etc.
- According to the all (100 percent) key informants of Village Committees both the Village Sansad and Village sabha plays a critical role in the selection of beneficiaries, identification of development plans, approval of annual budget and expenditure, monitoring of all the government schemes.
- According to 25 percent of villagers the Village Sabha and Village Sansad are very useful for the development of their villages but a majority of the respondents (48.75 percent) informed that they don't know about the usefulness of such meetings.
- The levels of awareness, perception, and practice of villagers have been assessed during the study by asking a few relevant questions. It has been found that 38.5 percent of villagers only know the minimum criterion for participation in Gram Sabha, only 25.5 percent of them are aware of the entitlements under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, only 29 percent of villagers know about the Right to Information Act. Among them 49 percent know that participatory planning is mandatory for Village Development Plan, 55 percent of villagers know that ensuring a Community Information Board after completion of the works is mandatory, only 26 percent of them know that the beneficiary for any scheme has to be selected through Village Sabha only.

IV. CONCLUSION

The first objective of the study is to examine the status of good governance in the local institutions for the implementation of development programmes in respect to accountability, transparency, and jurisprudence. On the basis of findings firstly, it is concluded that regarding personal accountability of elected representatives and officials of the local bodies the villagers are satisfied to some extent. Whereas grievances in terms of service delivery, lack of professional behaviour, and poor performance has been also reported from a small section of respondents. Secondly, it is concluded that, the performance of local bodies is not satisfactory in terms of dissemination of information, which resulted in insufficient knowledge among the villagers regarding government schemes, programmes, and other development initiatives. As per the opinion of the villagers thirdly it is concluded that rules and guidelines of government schemes and programmes are not followed appropriately. Finally, considering all those above aspects, it is concluded that, the status of good governance in the local institutions in respect to accountability, transparency, and jurisprudence is not in very satisfactory condition.

The second objective of the study is to assess the role of local institutions of TTAADC in good governance with respect to decentralized planning. On the basis of findings firstly it is concluded that the concept of Village Sansad and Village Sabhas has also not been grasped clearly, right from the Village Committee officials to the villagers. Secondly, it is concluded that people's participation is very passive in the Village Sansad and Village Sabhas due to the unilateral exchange of information.

Thirdly it is concluded that the usefulness of Village Sansad and Village Sabhas is at stake due to lack of follow-up of the decisions. Finally, considering all those above aspects, it is concluded that, the role of local institutions has fallen short of expectations in respect to decentralized planning towards ensuring good governance.

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