

Chapter 10**People's Participation in the Development Process in Meghalaya****10.1 Introduction**

The word 'Development', in the context of a developing society, encompasses a number of elements. Besides, the economic component i.e. economic growth, it includes equality, sustainability, empowerment, political and social freedom and cultural prosperity. As an end, it is for the people and as an offshoot, it is of the people and as a process it should ideally be by the people. How development comes about, is an important determinant of the quality of development. Some people even go a step further to say that how development comes about is in itself an end. This expression 'how development comes about' basically refers to what is now popularly known as 'participation'.

Participation of the people in development is not a new concept. In economic growth and choice theory, participation is assumed. The theory of economic growth is built around the sacred institution of market. The efficacy of Market mechanism is based on the involvement of the people. When economists opine that growth depends on market expansion and division of labour, implicit in this proposition is the assumed role of participation of the people as agents of production, consumption and exchange.

Now, why has participation become so important in the contemporary development discourse and practice? Participation is basically relevant to developing societies as development too is. First, the modern growth process in these societies has not been participatory. Many of these economies and societies were exploited by the colonial rulers and the growth process too was exploitative and deliberately made subservient to the needs of the masters. After independence, the colonial institutions and organizations did not just wither away. The social and economic roots of the colonial system have been so penetrative that these societies had fallen into a trap of severe inequalities of opportunities being reflected in deprivations of all types including poverty, illiteracy, malnourishment and unemployment. The end result was that access to economic institutions like credit market, product market; labour market etc. got severely squeezed and denied to the vast majority of people. Thus, the failure of market was evident along with the non-participatory nature of the growth process. To overcome this, the intervention of the government was suggested in terms of planned programmes and policies. Here also, the approach was top down and it naturally could not deliver the best, as it did not enlist the participation of the people at large. Both these models, failed to deliver the best, because of problems of deprivations and inequalities, moral hazards and information asymmetry, which occurred due to lack of participation.

Similarly, in the political field, genuine participation is the pillar of political development. Democracy as a form of government is being denied to millions of people around the globe. Further, where ever there is democracy in the developing societies, the quality of it is a big question. For example, not withstanding the success that many of these societies have reported, democracy in practice in these societies, is not truly participatory, as opportunities to participate in some of the important democratic exercises like contesting elections, voting impartially are denied to good number of people, because of lack of empowerment and presence of poverty, deprivations and fear. Hence, effective participation of people is the answer to enrich political freedom and decision making.

Another component of development is governance. Governance, in the context of a country like ours, includes both (i) basic governance i.e. undertaking of basic activities like maintaining law

and order, defence, dispensation of justice and (ii) developmental governance, in terms of intervention in economic activities in the form of planning and implementation. Although, participation of people is important in both these spheres, its role in the latter sphere assumes much more importance and immediacy because of obvious reasons.

Sustainability of activities which include environmental protection and care for the posterity is another important component of development. Peoples' participation is extremely relevant in this dimension of development. A large number of studies have established the positive relationship between sustainability and participation.

Pluralism, gender empowerment and equality of opportunities are three other constituents of development, wherein participation of people plays a vital role. Therefore, participation and development are both intrinsically related. If development is the ultimate objective of societies, then participation of people is the ultimate means to realize it. If participation in itself becomes an end, development and participation become synonymous.

The rest of the chapter is organised as follows. Section 10.2 discusses the different concepts of participation and examines the benefits that participation brings to development interventions. Sections 10.3 and 10.4 present brief discussion of participation and economic growth and participation in civic matters in Meghalaya, respectively. Section 10.5 examines the extent and scope of people's participation in development plans of Meghalaya. In section 10.6, we examine the structure of local self governance and its role in promoting participation in development in the state. Section 10.7 presents a case of a development project in the state which has adopted a participatory bottom up development approach where the beneficiaries of the project are at the centre of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In section 10.8, we discuss people's participation in village planning under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). Section 10.9 concludes, discusses the limitations of this study along with recommendations for increasing participation in development process.

10.2 Understanding Participation

10.2.1 CONCEPT OF PARTICIPATION

(i) Definition: There is a wide range of opinions and interpretations on what constitute participation depending upon the context and background to which participation is applied (Kumar, 2002). The World Bank Participation Sourcebook (1996) defines participation as a rich concept that means different things to different people in different settings. For some, it is a matter or principle; for others, a practice and for still others, an end in itself.

The Economic Commission of Latin America (1973) provides a definition of participation that limits its scope to voluntary contribution by the people to public programmes without their involvement in decision making processes. In the context of development programme, Cohen and Uphoff (1977) define participation as people's involvement in decision-making processes, implementation and evaluation and in sharing in the benefits of development programs. Others like Paul (1987) describe community participation in developing project occurring when the beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view of enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish.

At the other end of the spectrum, is the broad definition of participation which expands the scope of participation beyond the domain of development projects to empowerment, control and

involvement in decision-making by all stakeholders (World Bank 1994). In this sense participation encompasses transparency, openness and voice in both public and corporate settings (Stiglitz, 2002). Other interpretations of participation include the one given by Pearse and Stifel (1979) which defines participation as an organized effort to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations on the part of groups and movements or those hitherto excluded from such control.

Box 10.1 A Selection of Interpretations of Participation

- With regard to rural development participation includes people's involvement in decision-making processes, in implementing programmes, their sharing in the benefits of development programmes and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes (Cohen and Uphoff, 1977).
- Participation is concerned with organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control (Pearse and Stifel, 1979).
- Community participation [is] an active process by which beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view of enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish (Paul, 1987).
- Participation can be seen as a process of empowerment of the deprived and the excluded. This view is based on the recognition of differences in political and economic power among different social groups and classes (Ghai, 1990).
- Participatory development stands for partnership upon the basis of dialogue. This implies negotiation rather than the dominance of an externally set agenda. (OECD 1994)
- Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decision resources which affect them. (World Bank 1994)

Source: A. Clayton et al (1997)

Mainstreaming participation and scaling up participation are two concepts that are related to participation. Mainstreaming participation is defined by Long (1999) as adoption of institutional reforms and innovations necessary to enable full and systematic incorporation of participatory methodologies into the work of institutions to ensure meaningful participation of primary stakeholders in project and policy development. Scaling up participation on the other hand means increasing the number of participants or places of participation or expanding people's participation in all aspects of development process (Gaventa, 1998).

(ii) Types: Participation can be classified into different types, forms or degrees depending upon (i) the stage of project cycle at which participation occurs- planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and takeover; (ii) quality, intensity or extent of participation- as passive beneficiaries, as informant, cost-sharers, consultees, colleague or counterparts in management, decision-making and control; (iii) at societal level- local, regional and national (Rudquish and Woodford-burger, 1996). Pretty, et al., (1995) offer a typology of participation which range from low level of participation where people are told what to do (passive) to participation where the people themselves are initiator of change (self-mobilization). In between these two extremes are 'participation in information giving', 'participation by consultation', and 'participation for material incentives', 'functional participation' and interactive participation'.

Participation is also distinguished in terms of being a means or an end. The former involves the use of participation to achieve some predetermined goal or objective, while the latter as an end in empowerment and enhancement in peoples' development. Another important categorization of participation is between participatory development and participation-in-development. While participatory development approaches conventional project practice in a more participatory and sensitive manner, participation-in-development entails a genuine efforts to encourage and engage local people in all levels of development process (Oakley, et al., 1991)

10.2.2 BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

Studies have shown that participation is a key input that can boost the performance of projects and programme and bring benefits to the people at the grassroots level (Stiglitz, 2002). It is also recognized that the benefits of participation is no longer restricted to development projects alone, but stretches to national policy formulation, implementing of national programme and also in improving governance of local government (World Bank, 2002). There are many benefits that participation brings to development interventions such as (i) improvements in the effectiveness, efficiency, self-reliance, coverage, sustainability of development projects, (ii) accountability and the empowerment of primary stakeholders (Oakley, et. al., 1991; Sen, 1997). These are discussed below:

(i) Effectiveness: Involvement of the people particularly the primary stakeholders in designing, implementing, and in monitoring and evaluation of development projects can ensure that the intervention is more likely to achieve its objectives. Participation of local people ensures that the local knowledge, skills and resources are taken into account in deciding the priorities and strategies of development intervention. Further, monitoring of projects by the people ensures that potential major problems are identified and addressed quickly thereby saving project time and costs overruns (Oakley, 1995; Karl, 2000; Rudquish and Woodford-burger, 1996).

(ii) Efficiency: Participation promotes efficiency by decreasing costs associated with conflicts resolution and societal disagreement; lowering implementation costs of project through mobilization, pooling and optimal use of financial and other available resources (Karl, 2000; Michener, 1998).

(iii) Coverage: Participation ensures better targeting of developing projects for the poor and target groups thereby increasing the impact and ensuring equitable distributions of benefits of a project. Participation of people in all stages of development intervention prevents the siphoning of benefits of a project by rich and elite that controls development projects (Oakley, et al., 1991; Karl, 2000).

(v) Sustainability: People's participation in development projects and the use of local resources creates a sense of local ownership, responsibility and control over development intervention thereby increasing the likelihood of the continuation of activities initiated by a project in post project period (Oakley, et al., 1991; Stein, 1998).

(vi) Self-reliance, Empowerment and Accountability: Participation empowers the primary stakeholders by breaking the mentality of dependence, increasing awareness, self confidence, by leading the poor to examine their problems and actively participate in addressing them. Participation builds the capacity of the poor to generate and influence development at various levels, increasing their access to and influence over resources and institutions. It promotes the use of local resources and knowledge to provide solutions to development issues that affect the people and which can be addressed at local levels. Participation promotes accountability as the involvement of the primary stakeholders at all levels of decision-making ensures that they are aware of the availability and use of resources and therefore, they can hold other stakeholders to account. When primary stakeholders can hold others accountable, powers shift to them (*Karl, 2000; Sen 1997; Cornwall, 2000*).

10.3 Economic Growth and Participation in Meghalaya

Although the economic growth process in Meghalaya can not be called fully participatory, during the last few years some positive developments have happened in this field, particularly in the spheres of credit market, labour market and product market. The growth and spread of SHGs (Self Help Groups) and development Non-government organisations (NGOs) in the state is a welcome sign for making the growth process participatory. In the last few years the state has witnessed fast growth in SHGs that have access credit from banks. From just one SHG in 1988, the number of SHGs in the state has increased to 4843 in 2006. As per latest survey, the state has more than 9395 SHGs in 2007-08¹. The number of NGOs involved in promoting SHGs has also increased. At present, there are about 47 NGOs involved in promoting SHGs in the State².

10.4 People's Participation in Civic Matters in Meghalaya

The emergence of institutions and organizations like NGOs, other bodies of civil society like women's groups, is an indicator of pluralism and increased participation in societal development. During the last one decade, in Meghalaya, a good number of NGOs and women's bodies of civil society have come up. Compared to other states in the region, the growth in this field is spectacular. This is a positive development that promotes participation of people in societal and civic matters. Whether it is uranium mining or sex education or civic amenities like roads and traffic control, more and more voices are being heard from these organizations.

10.5 People's Participation in Development Plans in Meghalaya

The paradigm of people's involvement in development as an alternative to the top down centralized development approach emerged in development theory and practice when it was realized that the participation of people in the decision making process results in positive outcomes for the targeted beneficiaries and help in realizing the full potential of development interventions. The significance of the participatory approach in (rural) development is captured in an often quoted statement of the respected African leader Julius Nyerere, who said: 'Rural development is the participation of people in a mutual learning experience involving themselves, their local resources, external change agents and outside resources. People cannot be developed; they can only develop themselves by participation and co-operative activities which affect their wellbeing. People are not being developed when they are herded like animals into new ventures' (Nyerere 1968, cited in Oakley et al. 1991).

¹Source: Dr. Shreerajan, IAS, State Coordinator for SHGs in Meghalaya.

²Source: <http://www.megselfhelp.gov.in/shgsanalysis.htm>

Since 1970s there has been a gradual acceptance of the new development paradigm which acknowledges the importance and criticality of people's participation for the success of development interventions. This new paradigm calls for including the poor and the excluded to gain access to and control over development resources and benefits. Through out the 1980s and 1990s, active people's participation in development interventions has gained in popularity and usage. Participation has also expanded into new spheres such as policy reforms which hitherto were completely cut off from public intervention (Cromwall, 2001).

In India, development planners realized in the very early stage of implementation of the development projects like the Community Development Programme (launched in 1952) of the necessity of involving the community at the grassroots for achieving real progress in rural development. In order to ensure the widest possible public participation in planning implementation and monitoring of rural development schemes and projects, two important committees known as the Block Development Committees (BDC) and Block Selection Committees (BSC) were constituted in each Community Development Block. The majority of these members are non-officials taken from each Gram Sevak Circle. Women are also given adequate representation in these committees. The developmental needs of different areas within the Community Development Block are articulated and deliberated in these committees after which a consensus is arrived as to what is really needed, where and how much fund is to be allocated depending on the overall availability of fund.

An example of the importance of participation of people at the grassroots in development interventions is seen in a study of the rural renewable energy programme in India (Neudoerffer, et. al., 2001). Citing the example of improved cook stove programme, the study highlights how the absence of participation has adversely affected this initiative meant to help mitigate the rural energy needs of the rural populace. To quote from the study: '...in the programme to provide improved cook stoves factors such as local cooking practices, food and fuel preferences, and local knowledge and expertise are either entirely overlooked or considered only in a cursory, secondary manner without figuring into the stove design. While a number of stoves have been successfully installed in rural kitchens, because they fail to fulfill any local need, more often or not these improved stoves sit idle. They are either never used and are discarded because they fail to fulfill any vital need, or demand a dramatic change in cooking practice or fuel use' (ibid, pp. 373).

Similarly, the scheme to provide solar energy to far flung villages in the northeast as part of the rural electrification programme of the government of India has also met with very limited success due to the same problem of lack of participation of the beneficiaries in the programme. The absence of mechanism or a process that brings about genuine participation of the people and the communities in such programmes creates a situation where the beneficiaries see themselves merely as recipients of government schemes and not as stakeholders having a voice in the implementing the programme and being equally responsible for its success.

This kind of situation is, however, changing gradually with the spread of education, general awareness and capacity building among the rural masses. The State Government is pinning its hope for the success of newly launched schemes like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) and the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) on this qualitatively improved human resource scenario of the ground. Under (NREGS) for instance, there are participatory bodies like the Village Employment Council (VEC), the Area Employment Council (AEC), the Block Employment Council (BEC) and the District Employment Council (DEC). In the Village Employment Council, all male and female heads of all households are members and they are the ones who are expected to play a more active role in the planning and implementation of the scheme at the village level with assistance of the Gram Sevak

and Community Coordinator. At the higher levels, important roles have been envisaged for the Self Help Groups (SHG), federations of SHGs, Watershed Committees, etc. for the effective implementation and monitoring of NREGS. Similarly, under NRHM, we have Village Health and Sanitation Committees (VH&SC) and Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) numbering more than 5500 who are recruited from within the villages themselves to spearhead the implementation of this scheme on a mission mode. Besides, for women-focused issues in health, 1400 Mahila Swasthya Sangha (MSS) were constituted in villages. Under NRHM, each health institution now is a Society where NGO and local representative/traditional heads are members. This is intended to transform rural health into participatory mode. United funds and maintenance funds, mobility and performance-based incentives have been built up in the programme. In the case of NRHM also, intended outcomes are ensured basically through capacity building measures undertaken by the Health & Family Welfare Department.

Decentralized Planning in India: The importance of people's participation in planning is captured in this statement made by Gunnar Myrdal in 1968³: 'The ideal has always been the plan should come from the people and meet their wishes and needs and have their support in thought and as well as deed'. Since the beginning of planned development in India there has been several measures initiated and recommendations made towards increasing people's participation in planning process through democratic decentralisation.

Democratic decentralisation has been advocated as it enables a better perception of the needs of the local areas, makes better informed decision possible, gives people a better voice in decisions concerning their development and welfare, serves to achieve better coordination and integration among programmes, enables felt needs of the people to be taken into account, ensures effective participation of the people, serves to build up a measure of self-reliance by mobilising resources of the community in hand or money, bringing improved production in development of local resources and expanding growth potentials of local areas.

In India, the First Five Year Plan recognized the need to break up the planning exercise at the national, state, district and local community levels, but did not spell out how this was to be operationalised. The Second-Five Year Plan called for planning and execution of development programmes within the district with the full support and participation of the best non-official leadership at all levels. It introduced two new elements in planning process, namely the establishment of the district development council and the participation of people in village planning through panchayats. In the Third Five Year Plan, attempt was made to prepare state plans on the basis of district and block plans. However, these early initiatives of planning from below could not be operationalised.

In 1969, the planning commission introduced guidelines for formulation of district plans. This was followed by a scheme by the Planning Commission in 1972 for strengthening of planning machinery at the state level. In 1978, an important recommendation to strengthen decentralized planning was made by Prof. M.L. Dantwala who identified block level planning as the appropriate sub-state planning level for proper appreciation of the felt needs of the people and a vital link between clusters of villages and the district, state and national levels. The Planning Commission issued guidelines on formulation of block level plans in tune with these recommendations.

In the early eighties a Working Group under the Chairmanship of Professor C.H. Hanumantha Rao was constituted to develop guidelines for district plans. Based on the recommendations of this Committee, the Seventh Five Year Plan adopted decentralized planning at the district level as one

³Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations, 3 volumes, by Gunnar Myrdal. (New York: Pantheon Books, Twentieth Century Fund, 1968)

of the major strategies to achieve plan targets. In 1985, the Committee set up to review the existing administrative arrangements for rural development reemphasised the need for decentralised planning at the district level and below, as participation of local representatives would reflect the needs and aspirations of the local people. It also envisaged that planning and implementation of sectoral activities would be decentralised and integrated into a unified activity, with horizontal coordination at the district level.

A major impetus to increase people's participation in development process was achieved by the passing of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts (CAA). The CAA paved the way for establishment of local self governments at the rural and urban areas devolved with powers, responsibility and accountability to the local population. It empowers panchayats at all three tiers in the rural areas and municipalities in the urban areas to plan taking into account the resources (natural, human and financial) available and covering the sectoral activities and schemes assigned to them for the social and economic upliftment of the local population. The plans of the different tier of local governments are then to be consolidated into a district plan by the District Planning Committee, a body which every state⁴ have to constitute under Article 243 ZD of the Constitution. The consolidated district plan is then to be forwarded to the state authority.

As a step towards implementing the new decentralised planning model throughout the country, the planning commission has provided state governments with guidelines for formulation of district plans by the District Planning Committee and incorporating these in the state annual plans for financial year 2007-08 and also for preparing the XI Five Year Plan proposal. These guidelines are as per the recommendations of the Expert Group formed by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj in 2005 to make planning at the grass roots level a reality and to operationalise the planning mandate bestowed upon the local governments by the constitution.

Development Planning in Meghalaya: Meghalaya is one of the states with autonomous district councils, where the provisions of the 73rd and 74th CAA do not apply. The state, therefore, is following a different development planning approach from the one that the other states are following or have to follow in formulating of annual and Five Year Plans.

The present development planning structure consists of the Planning Board at the apex level and the District Planning and Development Council (DPDC) at the district level. In 2004, another level of planning organization was added through the constitution of the two Regional Planning and Development Councils (RPDCs). The RPDCs were created to function as additional layer of planning unit between the state Planning Board and DPDCs. One RPDC was constituted for areas covered by East and West Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi District and Jaintia Hills District and another for the areas under East, West and South Garo Hills districts. Although the constitution of the RPDCs has been notified by the state government, they are yet to meet. Therefore, the functional development planning structure in the state consists of only the State Planning Board and the DPDCs.

The State Planning Board was constituted in 1972 as an advisory body. Its main functions are to advise the government regarding the formulation of the annual plans and Five Year Plans, monitoring and review of development plans and the conduct of special studies. Originally, the board was constituted with one Chairman, one Deputy Chairman, Five members and 11 member advisers. At present, the members of the Board consist of one Chairman, four Co-Chairmen, two Deputy Chairman, six official members and nine non-official members. A review of the members of the Board clearly shows that the

⁴Except states and districts under Autonomous Councils

board lacks the expertise that is needed for it to become a serious body that can guide the formulation of development projects and programmes that reflects the needs of the people and can usher in rapid development in the state.

The District Planning and Development Council (DPDC) first constituted in all the districts by the state government in 1986 replacing the then existing District Planning Committees (DPC). Unlike the DPCs which were mainly involved in the review of implementation of project and programmes in the districts (Khan, 1993), the DPDC was established for formulation of Five Year Plans and Annual Plans at the district level. The main functions of the DPDC are drawing of the plans based on the need and potential of the district and within the objectives of the state and national plan, co-ordination and monitoring of district plans projects and programmes, undertaking of special studies and providing advice to the state government on development issues.

The members of the council comprise of all Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) of the concerned district, Deputy Commissioner who is also the vice chairman of the council, Chief Executive Member or representative of the Autonomous District Council of *the district*, *Additional Deputy Commissioner/District Planning Officer* who is the member Secretary. The council is headed by a cabinet rank minister of the district. The meetings of the Council are held once or twice a year and are attended by all district officers of respective government departments.

A comparison of the role of the DPDCs in Meghalaya and the District Planning Committee (DPC) that are mandated to be established in every district across the country (as per Article 243ZD of the Indian Constitution) shows the absence of any framework or mechanism in the present planning structure of the state for participation of people in formulation of developing plans.

Article 243ZD has explicitly laid down the role of the DPCs in formulating the district plans by consolidating the plans of the panchayats and municipality bodies. In this regard, the Act states that the role of DPC is:

“...to consolidate the plans prepared by the Panchayats and the Municipalities in the district and to prepare a draft development plan for the district as a whole”.

In the drafting of the plans, the DPC has to consider:

“... matters of common interest between the Panchayats and Municipalities including spatial planning, sharing of power and other physical and natural resources, the integrated development of infrastructure, environment conservation; the extent and type of available resources whether financial or otherwise; consult such institutions and organisations as the Governor may, by order, specify....”.

Further the planning role of the PRIs at different tiers is clearly laid down. Article 243G provide for devolution of powers and responsibilities to different tiers of PRIs with respect to (i) Preparation of plan for economic development and social justice; (ii) Implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice in relation to 29 subjects given in Eleventh Schedule.

According to Article 243G:

“...The state, may, by law, endow the panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government and such law may contain provisions for the devolution of powers and responsibilities upon Panchayats at the appropriate level, subject to such conditions as may be specified therein, with respect to: a) the preparation of plans for

economic development and social justice; b) the implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice as may be entrusted to them including those in relation to the matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule”.

The above provision of the 73rd and 74th CAA, therefore, clearly spells out a direct role for the people through the panchayats in planning and implementation of development projects and programmes for benefits of the people. It also delegates powers to the people in monitoring of development schemes in relation to 29 subjects contained in the Eleven Schedule.

In contrast to this process, the formulation of district plan by the DPDCs in Meghalaya is based on departmental proposal submitted by the district offices with no framework for developing of plans from villages to block and finally the district levels. The development plans prepared by the DPDCs are mere compilation of the proposal of departments prepared by district government offices. These proposals are placed at the meeting of the DPDC for approval and forwarded to the planning department of the government. Apart from the MLAs, there are no non-government representatives such as those from the farmers, co-operatives, development NGOs, entrepreneurs, women groups, academicians, and representatives of the village councils. There is also no mechanism for undertaking of planning below the district level (i.e., at block, village cluster or village levels). Thus, the planning structure that exist at the district does not support bottom up planning process nor ensure wide public participation in formulation of development plans of the district.

In the formulation of the state plan, while theoretically the document should incorporate district plans forwarded by the DPDCs, often the plans are formulated by the planning department from the sectoral proposal of government departments in line with guidelines set out by the planning commission. Thus, the whole planning exercise becomes a centralized process with little or no consultation or consideration of the district plans in building of the state plan proposal.

The observation of Dr. D. R. Gadgil on the status of the state level planning in the country delivered in 1966⁵ best sums up the present state of development planning in Meghalaya. In his address, Dr. Gadgil remarked that state planning in India is centralized and highly officialised. The state plan is prepared by piecing together departmental proposal formulated by respective government departments. There is no consultation or discussion of general or specific objectives or proposals and no information is available outside as to what is contemplated or proposed.

10.6 Local Self-Governance and Participation in Meghalaya

Democratic decentralisation of authority and the participation of people in the lower units of administration are considered essential for the development of the country. Democratic decentralisation involves the transfer of power and function to lower units of government comprising of members directly elected by the people. The main premise of democratic governance is that it brings popular participation and accountability to local governance and therefore makes it more responsive to citizen's desires and more effective in delivering services (Blair, 2000).

Right from the period when the country was under the British rule, the administration of the tribal inhabited hills areas in the NER was different from that prevailing in the rest of the country. In the period before India gained its Independence, the tribal areas of the North East India, which were then known as the 'Backward tracts', were separated from the general administrative and constitutional setup prevailing

⁵R. B. R.R. Kale Memorial Lectures by R. D. Gadgil (1966) on the title District Development Planning.

in the rest of the country. When the country gained Independence in August 1947, the founding fathers of the constitution recognised the uniqueness of the certain traditional and customary institutions of the tribal areas in the region such as the village administration. Accordingly, the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution was incorporated in the Indian Constitutions, according to which the Autonomous District Councils were established in the tribal areas of NER. Thus, in Meghalaya, Mizoram, and some areas of Assam and Tripura, an alternate structure of local self government called the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) came to exist below the state government.

In Meghalaya, all the areas of the state fall within one of the three ADCs (other than the Shillong Municipality and Cantonment). These district councils are the (i) Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council comprising of the districts of East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills and Ribhoi. (ii) Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council comprising of the district of Jaintia Hills and (iii) Garo Hills Autonomous District Council comprising of the East Garo Hills, West Garo Hills and South Garo Hills. In the absence of three tier panchayat system in the state, the ADCs whose members are directly elected by the people represent the lowest tier of government.

Powers and Functions of ADCs: The three ADCs are vested with legislative, executive, judicial and financial powers and functions in areas under their jurisdiction. This include the power to make laws in respect to allotment and use of land, management of forests, establishment and management of village and town, regulation of shifting cultivation and irrigation, appointment and removal of chiefs and village headmen, inheritance of poverty and social customs (provided in Paragraph 3). Additionally, the ADCs have power to *regulate and control money lending and trading by non tribals within the autonomous council (Paragraph 10)*. ADCs are also empowered to *constitute village and district council in the autonomous areas for trails of suits and cases in which all the parties are members of the scheduled tribes (Paragraph 4)*.

Additionally, the ADCs can also establish, construct and manage primary schools, dispensaries, markets, roads, road transport and waterways, and fisheries. Further, the Governor may also entrust the ADCs with functions relating to rural development, community project and village planning (Paragraph 6).

Under the Sixth Schedule, the ADCs can levy and collect taxes on land revenue, lands and buildings, professionals, employments, animals, vehicles, boats, trades, callings and employments, entry of goods into markets for sale therein, and tolls on passengers and goods carried and ferried. Besides, the ADCs can also levy taxes for maintenance of school, dispensaries or roads (Paragraph 8). Under paragraph 9 of the Sixth Schedule, the royalty on the licenses or leases for the extraction of minerals in the autonomous districts goes to the District Council.

As pointed out above, under the Sixth Schedule of the constitution, the ADCs are empowered to undertake certain developmental activities. However, studies undertaken by Syiem (2005) and Stuligross (1999) on the KHADC reveal that the council has fared badly in carrying our development functions entrusted on it. Many have commented that in the very first place the ADCs, unlike the PRIs have not been designed as agents of economic development but rather are meant to provide autonomy in social and cultural spheres in areas dominated by tribals. Further, with the attainment of statehood and the limited resources available to ADCs, the development functions are now carried out mainly by the state government. Most of the development activities undertaken by the council are minor project such as construction/maintenance of footpath, footbridge, drinking water well, community hall and improvement of market which poses a question on the impact they may have on the socio-economic well being of the people.

While the PRIs have an explicit mandate to promote participatory planning for socio-economic benefits of the community, no such direct provisions exist in the sixth schedule. However, paragraph 6 does state that the governor may entrust the district councils with:

“...functions in relation to agriculture, animal husbandry, community projects, co-operatives societies, social welfare, village planning or any other matter to which the executive power of the state”.

This provision of ‘village planning’ could have been used to create a mechanism in which the ADCs involve the communities at the grassroots in the development of village plans. However, this option has not been exercised or tried by the ADCs or the state government. At present, the ADCs are not involved in any village planning exercise with the grassroots communities either of formulation of district plan or even in developing their own development activities.

10.7 People’s Participation in Village Planning in NERCORMP⁶

Project Background, Objective and Operational Structure: The paradigm of participatory approach to development, where poor people are at the centre of the development process and are actively involved in shaping of developmental programmes that affect their lives, form the basic strategy of the North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCORMP).

Box 10.2 NERCORMP

NERCORMP is a joint livelihood project of International Fund for Rural Development (IFAD) and Government of India (under North Eastern Council, Ministry of DONER). The project which commenced in FY1999-00 is operating in 3 States namely Meghalaya, Assam & Manipur. It is present in 860 villages and outreach to 39,161 families. It is operating in 2 Districts each in these 3 States totaling 6 districts. NERCORMP is strongly guided by twin principles of IFAD (i) A world without hunger or to attain hunger free communities (ii) To enable rural poor people to overcome their poverty. The basis objectives of the project are:

- promote a more sensitive approach to the design and implementation of development intervention
- enhance the capabilities of the local people to manage technologies and institutions at the village level
- improve the income through the development of more sustainable farming systems and development of non farm enterprise
- increase the participation of women in local institutions and in the management of the income and assets
- develop the habits of increased savings and thrifts amongst the poor
- creation of basic amenities through the resource participation of the villagers.

⁶This section is based on inputs from NERCORMP

In Meghalaya this project is in operation in selected villages in West Khasi Hills and West Garo Hills districts. The core principles followed in the implementation of the project are the following:

- Bottom-up participatory approach in planning and decisions making process where communities/villagers are in planning, implementation and monitoring of development activities.
- Inclusive development where the poorest, weakest and women are actively brought into development fold with equally active participation. This is made possible by the introduction of grassroots social institutions.
- Empowerment of the primary stakeholders particularly the women is another key feature of the project.
- Emphasis on creation of stakeholdership/ownership of the project by the community both in understanding and practice.

The Project is managed by the Project Support Unit (PSU) at the regional and district levels consisting of development professional at the Regional and district levels supported by NGOs, line agencies of the state government, research bodies as well as the other traditional institutions existing in the field. An important strategy of the project is the process of sensitization of the project partners such as PSU, NGOs, line department about the conditions, needs, resources, and aspirations of the community through their involvement and their regular interaction with the villagers of the project area. This is very important process enabling the experts to help the villagers formulate development plans which takes into account the resource base as well as the capacity of the community.

In the project villages, the community is organised into Natural Resource Management Group (NaRMG) and the Self Help Groups (SHGs) which work in close collaboration with the PSU and other supporting agencies for the planning and implementing of development work in the village. An important feature of this process is that, these village level institutions not only participate in planning but also are ultimately responsible for the execution and the monitoring of the development plans, with the financial resources being directly allocated to these community institutions. The importance given to community mobilization in the project is to establish viable and sustainable community institutions capable of continuing the development process in which the poor people take active participation and ownership of the development process.

- i. **Self Help Groups (SHG)** – They are essentially meant for thrift/savings and credit groups formed with the objective of providing easy access to credit to the group members.
- ii. **Natural Resource Management Group (NaRMG)** – NaRMG is a body which serves as Village Development Council and is responsible for planning and monitoring of all development activities in the village. Unlike the traditional institution in the village whose member comprise of only the adult male, the NaRMG comprises of all adult male and female members which include the members of the traditional institution in the village. The body is formed with the permission of the traditional institution in the village. Office bearers of this body are selected by the members and term of office is fixed by the members. All key planning and decisions related to the project are taken by this body.
- iii. Further, at cluster level the SHGs and NaRMG are organised into SHGs Federations and NaRMG Associations.

Table 10.1: NERCORMP in Meghalaya

District	Project Village	NaRMG	SHGs	NGO	NARMG Association	SHG Federation
West Khasi Hills	162	162	443	8	8	7
West Garo Hills	192	257	847	7	29	22
TOTAL	354	419	1390	15	37	29

Source: NERCORMP

Village Planning in NERCORMP: The field intervention starts with social mobilization process wherein the community is sensitised about their situation and the resources and strength of the community, through various participatory methods. Capacity building programmes are organized to make the community self confident and equip them with basic skills. The communities are then encouraged to formulate their vision and perspective plan for the development of the village and their surrounding area.

The project fund is allocated for three different activities as indicated below:

Table 10.2: Allocation of Project Funds in NERCORMP

Income Generating Activity (IGA)	51.8 % of the total budget
Infrastructure Activity	20.4 % of the total budget
Social Sector Activity	5.4 % of the total budget
Total	77.6 % of the total budget

Source: NERCORMP

The District Support Team of the project under the guidance of Regional Office provides budget outlay for each village which is determined by various factors like population, available infrastructure, needs, etc. Villages are made aware of the quantum of fund being made available to them in the coming financial year. Community/individual has to contribute 30 per cent of the total cost involved in undertaking any activity proposed by them which can be in the form of labour and/or local material.

As part of the planning process, villages prepare a vision or perspective plan with timeframe spanning over the next 15 to 20 years. In these perspective plans, major inspirational items and targets are drawn up with tentative time frame to realize them. The perspective plan is very important as yearly plan needs to be built in consonance with perspective plan. The process of formulating annual village plan is normally carried out by the NaRMG sometime in July for the next financial year of the next year. The following steps are adopted:

- i. Advance notice is given to every member for this very important exercise. All members and groups like SHGs are informed to prepare proposed inputs well in advance. On the appointed day or days, NaRMG members gather at appointed time.
- i. Chairman, Secretary and other executive members conduct the meeting. Every important point like objectives, proposed activities and fund available are shared with every member. Members would discuss various aspects of proposed activities. The proposed activities are prioritized and right sizing is worked out to accommodate within funds allocated to the village. Participatory Rural Approach (PRA) is a key tool employed for Village Planning.
- ii. The Village is essentially a community driven and bottom-up approach. However, the Project staff, NGOs and line department assist the community by providing them with technical inputs

and other information to help the villages make informed decisions regarding the activities proposed by them. Very often infrastructural constructions require technical guidance which obviously cannot be managed adequately by community members / villagers. Here, subject experts from Project Staff, NGOs and district administration, line departments come in a substantial way to provide technical guidance.

- iii. During planning exercise, conscious effort is paid as to ensure that benefits to be derived are uniformly and broadly shared by all members.
- iv. Further, in the exercise, NaRMGs also discuss and deliberate other important issues such as Biodiversity and Forest Management; River and Water management; Matters relating to Hygiene & Health; Matters relating to Education; Matters relating to Land allocation for Jhum; Matters relating to even conflicts and relationship with other villagers, etc.
- v. These planning meetings are held systematically by presenting agendas with relevant and required information. Once discussions are made and decisions are arrived at, proceeding/minutes are drawn up which is both recorded in registers and files and also are shared with the members.
- vi. Once the plans containing work plans and budget are formulated, they are send to District Office where they are examined to see whether the activities proposed fall within the Project guidelines. In case any plan needs modification or alteration, they are send back to the NaRMG. There final plans of all the villages are presented to The Board of Management of District Society for approval. The plans are then compiled into a consolidated plan for the district and submitted to Regional Office.
- vii. The Project Support Unit at the regional office on its part once again examine and scrutinize the plans in order to ensure that the districts plans are within the confines of project objectives and guidelines. The district plans then submitted to the Board of Management of Regional Society for final approval. The finalized budget is submitted to NEC which provides the fund in its budget.

Monitoring and Evaluation in NERCORMP: Besides involving the community in planning, there exists an elaborate mechanism for participation of the primary beneficiaries in the implementation and monitoring of the project activities under the project. In the project, funds allocated for different activities as per the village plan are released directly by the district society to the community through the NaRMG. Participatory Research Appriasal (PRA) methods are used for monitoring and assessment of the implementation of the project activities, with the community under the guidance of the NGOs and district support taking the leadership and responsibility to ensure proper implementation of the project⁷.

There is another similar project entitled **Meghalaya Livelihood Improvement Project for the Himalayas (LIPH)**, which is jointly funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Government of Meghalaya. It is implemented through the Meghalaya Rural Development Society (MRDS). The thrust of this programme is to build alliances to overcome poverty and economic insecurities of vulnerable groups through sustainable livelihood promotion efforts and the principle of self-help. Its objectives are sought to be achieved, inter alia through enhancement of the capabilities of local people to make appropriate economic choices and take appropriate decisions at the village level

⁷A few examples of success stories brought about by NERCORMP are given in chapter 11.

for their overall economic welfare. The project is just a little more than two years old but it is progressing well and presently 426 villages and 22,891 households have been covered under this scheme. LIPH and NERCORMP have made significant impact in recent years in the field of people's participation in development through various training and community mobilization programmes.

10.8 People's Participation in Village Planning under NREGS

With the coming of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, and the specific provision of implementation through the Panchayats only, the Government has to design a new model where the people at the village level could participate in planning and implementation of scheme. Meghalaya Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MREGS) was thus notified with the Centre's approval where the Village Employment Councils and Area Employment Councils were formed, where there is participation by all the members of the village. The NREGA has been launched in all seven districts of the state.

Further, as per the Programme Guidelines of the Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF), the Village Employment Councils may undertake the planning and implementation of BRGF at the village level. It seems, therefore, that the Village Employment Councils (VECs) are emerging as an alternative to the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Several success stories of the VECs have emerged during the short period since the implementation of MREGS in 2006. For instance, in West Garo Hills district 91,000 households benefitted from the job cards. The 15,000 VECs created in the district also came to a social agreement with the district administration to ensure that all households registered for the NREGS should send their children for immunization and avail compulsory education for children aged 6 – 14 years. According to the Deputy Commissioner, P. Sampath Kumar, immunization and compulsory education schemes were not taking off. But after the VECs were formed and these two welfare schemes were tagged along with the implementation of the NREGS, immunization of children has seen a phenomenal jump to 90 percent and the number of children dropping out of school has come down from 20,000 to 6,000 in the district (The Sentinel, July 7, 2007).

In Rongram C & RD Block, villagers came together to construct a lengthy road deep inside a village for as little as ten lakh rupees. Project estimate revealed that the cost for such a road by Government contractors and departments would have almost touched one crore (The Shillong Times, April 24, 2007).

Social audits have been conducted in many Community and Rural Development Blocks. The social audit programme is aided and spearheaded by the Meghalaya Rural Development Society. During these social audit exercises, people evaluate their work and point out deficiencies in the implementation of NREGS. They may also openly lodge complaints against officials who violate the norms of the MREGS.

The MREGS has tremendous potential for uplifting village economy. There is keen participation of the rural people, which is an indication of people's acceptance. Further, social audits by NGOs can help prevent misuse of fund.

10.9 Conclusion and Policy Suggestions

Analysis of participation in Meghalaya, in the context of some of the important components of development, shows both progress and failures. When it comes to economic growth, the process has gradually become more participatory. In the field of pluralism, it is becoming more participatory. In

development planning, the state clearly shows that in the present setup there is no mechanism to allow for participation of the people at the grassroots level and that decentralization of planning does not exist in the state. While there is no second opinion about the necessity to decentralized planning and create framework for genuine participation of people in the development process, the challenge arises in doing so within the unique decentralized governance structure that exists in the state. The implementation of NERCORMP has shown the possibility of adopting a participatory and integrated development model where the people play a central role in all stages of development project.

Keeping in view the present planning structure in the state, the following broad policy suggestions from village to the state levels are recommended to bring about genuine participation of people in development process of Meghalaya:

- (i) A separate institution such as the NaRMG should be set up at the village level which should comprise of all men and women members of village. The body would be responsible for undertaking participatory and integrated planning for the village. Besides planning, this body through its various committees would also be responsible for implementation of the development activities in the village and for monitoring and evaluation of the performance of such activities. Issues such as the legal status of this body, mode of appointment (through common consensus or through election) will have to be decided by the ADCs and the state government.
- (ii) A detail scrutiny of the technical and financial feasibility of activities proposed by the village plans should be undertaken by the line department at the block level. A committee comprising of all representatives of line departments and representatives of the NaRMG should be constituted at the block level. The committee would evaluate the village plans as per the guidelines provided by the state and national plans. The department proposals at the block should be integrated into the village plans if suitable. The village plans approved by the committee should then be constituted into a block plan.
- (iii) At the district level, the DPDC should be reconstituted to also include NaRMG from the block committee, representatives of farmers, co-operatives, development NGOs, entrepreneur, industrialist, SHGs groups/federation and women groups. District plan should be prepared taking into consideration of the block plans and the guidelines provided by the state and national plans. Department proposals at this level should be integrated with the block and village plans.
- (iv) There is an urgent need to strengthen the capability and expertise of the Board so that it becomes a body that can guide the formulation of development projects and programmes in the state. Also the State Planning Board needs to include community representatives, representatives of farmers, development experts, co-operatives, development NGOs, entrepreneurs, industrialists, SHGs groups/federation and women groups. State plan should be prepared taking into consideration the district plans and the guidelines and development priorities of the state and country.

The above recommendations are not exhaustive and limited to structural changes in the planning framework. As for the process of participatory planning, the steps recommended by the expert committee for planning at the grassroots level (not being reproduced here) for formulation of district plan from the village to the district levels could be adopted with suitable changes to suit the proposed planning structure of the state. The above recommendations are but some of the steps that the state should take to make development process more participatory and open to people.

Further, as has been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, development has various components. Participation and its nature are crucial in all of these components. We could not analyse the entire gamut of the relationships in many of these components of development, because of non-availability of data and evaluative case studies. It requires in-depth separate case studies to unearth the dynamics of participation in all these fields. Hence, questions like what is the dynamics of participation in the grass root democratic institutions? How is participation linked to sustainability, equality of opportunities and gender empowerment? etc. remain unanswered. Similarly, the intensity and effectiveness of participation in development planning (such as in NERCORMP) also could not be explained in the absence of a detailed evaluation of the planning programmes. Therefore, a holistic understanding of dynamics of participation in development in Meghalaya requires a number of case studies of plans and programmes, and evaluations of institutions. Studies of this sort with adequate support will be needed to come out with more specific suggestive measures, to make the developmental process truly participatory in the state.