EXPERIENTIAL STUDY
PRI-CBO CONVERGENCE PROJECT
ASSAM, TRIPURA, MANIPUR & MIZORAM

Printed in India

DISCLAIMER

This document is written based on limited field work in the intervention areas of the PRI-CBO Convergence Project. The findings are purely based on interaction with subject experts, project stakeholders, and observations from the field. The information in this documentation is not intended as an offer or solicitation with respect to being referred to as an empirical study for research purposes.

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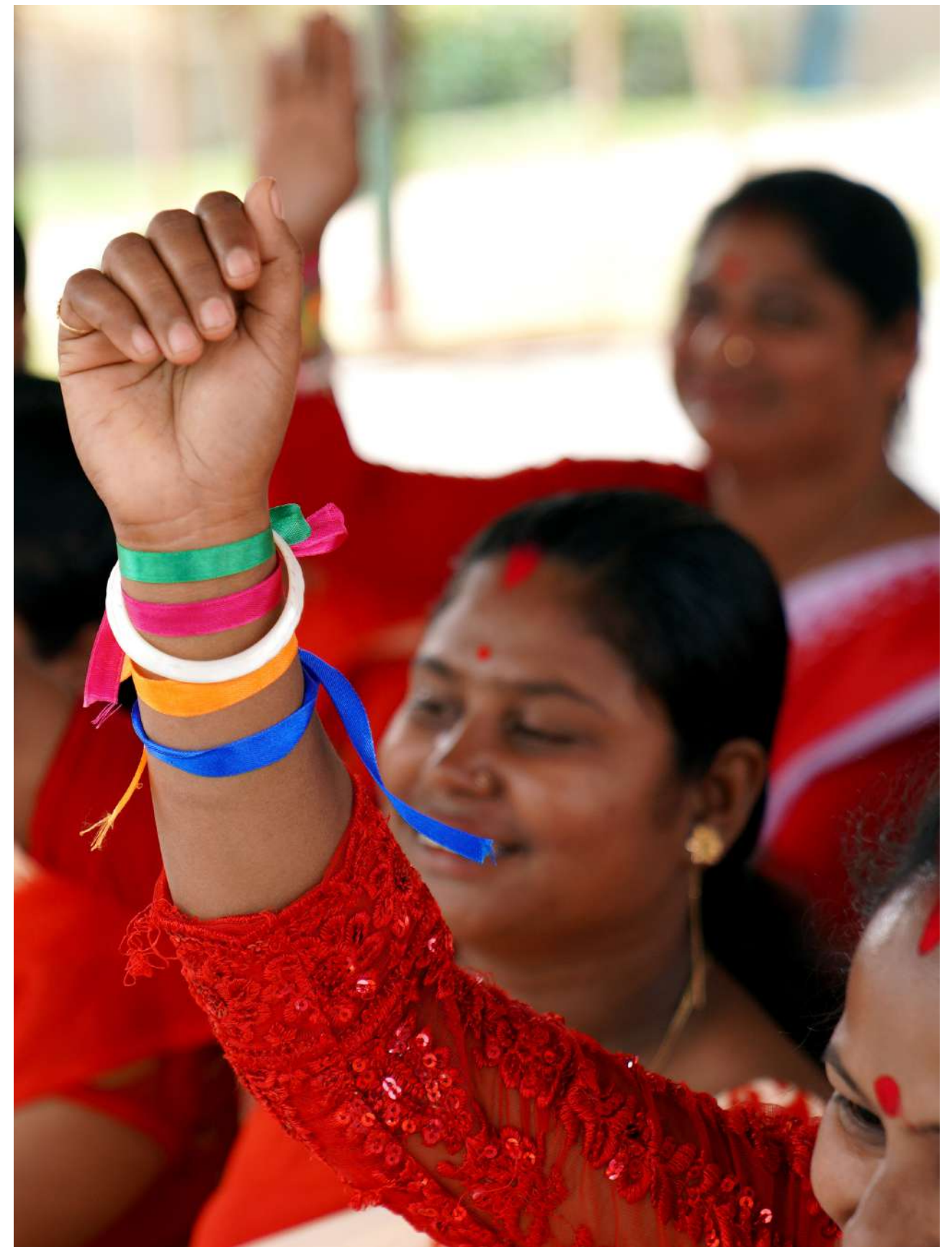
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FOREWORD

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) was launched in June 2011 to create institutional platforms for the rural poor, enabling them to increase household incomes through livelihood support and access to financial services. As of May 2021, there are 6.9 million Self Help Groups (SHGs) in India with 75 million members across 783,389 villages/habitations. The SHGs have proved themselves remarkably competent to go beyond the scope of thrift and credit and can be seen engaging in livelihood activities, in improving outcomes in health, nutrition, and education, and in rural development- working shoulder to shoulder with the Panchayats and Local Self-Governing Institutions.

The way DAY-NRLM has managed to overcome regional disparities today is significant. Strong Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) have been set up in the North-Eastern States, especially over the last 5-6 years with continued special attention given by the MoRD and State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLMs) of the North Eastern States. A crucial aspect of NRLM's journey so far has been the goal of establishing convergence and synergy between Panchayati Raj Systems and the Community Based Organizations so as to enable women to become equal and important stakeholders in the rural development process. This holds all the more relevance in the North Eastern States with their multiple forms of Local Self-Governing Structures such as Village Councils, Village Authorities, Autonomous District Councils etc. The challenge has been to increase the participation of SHG women in these different local structures, being mindful of the living realities of the communities inhabiting those areas - such that the dual aim of women empowerment and community-owned development can be achieved.

Kudumbashree, Kerala was made the National Resource Organization (NRO) to help States establish convergence between Panchayati Raj Institutions and Community Based Organizations through the "PRI-CBO Convergence model". The organization has worked extensively in the four North-Eastern States of Assam, Tripura, Manipur, and Mizoram to make women the fore-runners in rural development, keeping in mind the contextual realities of each block, district, and region. In a period of 6 years starting from 2014, this initiative has gone on to cover several districts of four North-Eastern States of Assam, Tripura, Manipur, and Mizoram. The citizens' participation in the region has been enhanced manifold being mindful of upholding local community traditions. Such extensive work has brought with it an entire gamut of knowledge on the functioning of Local Self-Governing Institutions in the North East - from the Panchayats, to the Autonomous District Councils to Village Authorities etc. This handbook puts together a lot of information about the local government systems in these States and also their convergence with the Women's institutions.

For someone looking to work in the North East, this handbook can act as a potent resource material and give the reader insights into the existing cultural practices and traditional systems of local governance and how to work with these set-ups. The Handbook draws from several Acts, government guidelines, research papers, community experiences, and insights from the CRPs working on the ground to serve as a useful repository of information on the North East.

[Nagendra Nath Sinha]

Government of Kerala

P. I. SREEVIDYA IAS
Executive Director

Kudumbashree
(State Poverty Eradication Mission)
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PREFACE

Panchayati Raj Institutions got constitutional legitimacy in 1993 through the 73rd constitutional amendment with the mandate of addressing rural poverty and ensuring social justice. The Self Help Group (SHG) network that has emerged alongside has been an immense social capital for the Gram Panchayat to work with in order to facilitate rural development. Recognizing the need for an effective functional relationship between PRIs, especially Gram Panchayat and the SHGs and Village Organizations (V0), also known as Community Based Organization or CBOs, the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) and Ministry of Panchayat Raj (MoPR) issued guidelines in the year 2013, for increasing convergence between the institutions of local government and the organizations of the poor. Kudumbashree NRO with the experience of converging Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) with the SHG network in Kerala was mandated to support interested states in implementing the model through the PRI-CBO Convergence project. It was based on the premise that a synergy between both these institutions (Viz. Panchayati Raj Institutions and Community Based Organizations) can be mutually beneficial in addressing the issue of poverty for the larger goal of socio-economic development of the village.

Since 2013, the PRI-CBO Convergence project has been piloted in partner States in western, central and northern India such as Maharashtra, Odisha, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Chattisgarh, and Uttar Pradesh. In 2014, Kudumbashree NRO had its first experience of working in the North East. The pilot phase of the project in Assam, which was initiated in two Blocks led to the expansion in two new districts with four blocks and 51 GPs in 2016. Meanwhile, in the same year, an MoU was signed between Tripura and Kudumbashree for the implementation of the PRI-CBO Convergence project in pilot locations in Tripura. Subsequently, in another two years, the project was initiated in Manipur and Mizoram piloted in a few blocks of these states too. By 2020, the project was running in several districts across the four states of Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, and Tripura. The four states offered a plethora of opportunities because of their diverse Local Self-Governance Institutions - ranging from PRIs to Autonomous District Councils to Village Councils to Village Authorities to Chieftaincy. The idea was to ensure that the SHGs operating within the framework of these

different Self-Governing Structures are able to establish themselves as formidable stakeholders in the development paradigm. Context-specific modules, processes, and workshops were rolled out for the effective implementation of the project.

The core values of the project lie in increasing women's participation in decision making. However, challenges were faced in doing this with the active involvement and consent of the community and make it a community-driven process. This long but satisfactory process has wide-ranging ramifications in the form of women being able to take part in the Village Assembly in villages of Manipur for the first time since independence, CBO members becoming Presidents of Gram Panchayats in Assam - each achievement unique and revolutionary in its own way. As we see the community imbibing what we had to offer, we have also been exposed to an entire repository of information and knowledge. Thus, the need was felt to document this information for it to serve as a useful guide to people wishing to work in the North East. This handbook aims to serve as a resource guide laying out the demography, geography, and administrative structure of Local Self-Governing Institutions (LSGIs) in each of the four states. It also aims to offer experiences and insights from the field, knowledge on the functioning of the project, and context-specific cultures, traditions, and ways of living. It will serve as a handy tool for anyone looking to gain insights into the practical functioning of LSGIs in these areas, beyond the theoretical literature available. The reader will also be able to grasp the extent of diversity within each state and will be exposed to narratives of women from all walks of life. We hope that we are able to succeed in our honest endeavor of sharing knowledge.

P.I. Sreevidya, IAS
Executive Director
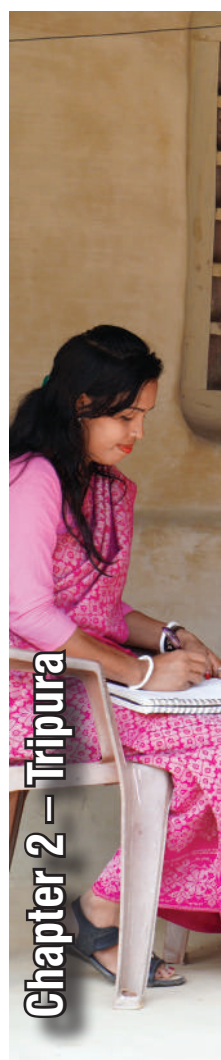**Kudumbashree Mission**
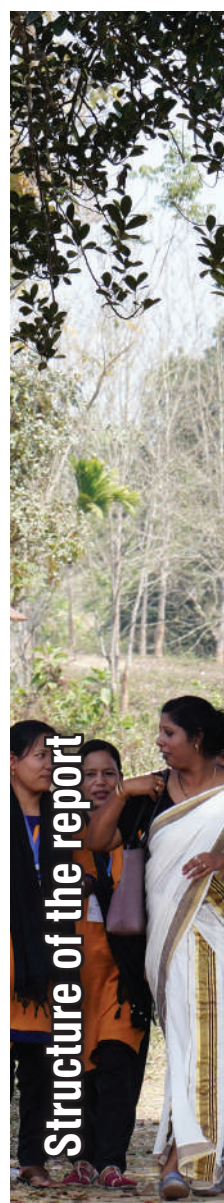
CONTENTS

STRUCTURE
OF THE **REPORT**

This report is structured into three major chapters

INTRODUCTION

The introduction chapter will talk about the evolution of the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) – Community Based Organisation (CBO) Convergence project through the historical account of: De-centralization movement in Kerala post-independence, socio-political movements, evolution of the role of women in local governance, formation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), de-centralization efforts post 73rd amendment and amalgamation of SHGs to form a state-wide network - 'Kudumbashree'. It will then dwell into the details: of setting up Kudumbashree as a National Resource Organisation (NRO) under National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), conceptualisation of PRI-CBO Convergence project, expanding of PRI - CBO Convergence project to other states in India, and finally into the details of preparedness for its implementation in the Northeastern (NE) states of Assam, Tripura, Manipur, and Mizoram.

EXPERIENTIAL STUDY

The second section of the report will talk about the experience of multiple stakeholders of the PRI-CBO Convergence project from various states including Assam, Tripura, Manipur, and Mizoram. This section will have experiences from individual states divided into two sub-sections as below:

Historical Context

This section will talk about the historical account of de-centralization, implementation efforts of the 73rd amendment, role of women and SHG movements, and the socio-political conditions of the state. It will also provide an overview of acts and rules related to local self-governance, ascertained powers, roles & responsibilities. This chapter will also borrow from the experience of academicians and the experts from the respective states on the success of various programmes around governance & village development.

Field Reflection

The field reflection part will talk about the experience of the PRI-CBO Convergence project in each state, the methodology used, processes followed, challenges, and success stories. It will also give a record of the perspectives of key stakeholders from the communities, Local Self Government (LSG) members, State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM) staff, Kerala Mentors, Internal Mentors (IMs), Local Resource Group (LRG) members, and line department officials about their experience with project implementation, customization, strategies, and training. An overview about the project location such as No. of blocks, No. of Gram Panchayats (GPs) / Village Councils (VCs) / Village Development Councils (VDCs) / Village Authority (VA), information about Village Organisations (VOs) / SHGs and, information about LRG / Internal Mentors / Mentors will also be stated.

CONCLUSION

This section will have concluding views from the experiences of multiple stakeholders from all the four states. It will attempt to sum up the on-ground experiences of Kudumbashree National Resource Organisation (KS NRO), the community networks of women, and PRI bodies. It will also state in detail the impact of the PRI-CBO Convergence project in these states and put forward a few perspectives for sustaining these measures, both at the centre and at state levels.

Gram Sabha, West Pilak GP, South Tripura

INTRODUCTION

Convergence of Self-Help Group (SHG) networks as Community Based Organisations (CBOs) with Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has been central to Kerala's Kudumbashree experience. In 2012, the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) recognized Kudumbashree as a National Resource Organization (NRO) to provide technical support to other State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLMs) in the implementation of the Panchayati Raj Institution - Community Based Organisation (PRI-CBO) Convergence project. As a National Resource Organisation, Kudumbashree's work is towards helping partner states implement and materialize convergence between PRIs and CBOs.

This Experiential Study Report is a collation of field reflection of the PRI-CBO Convergence project of Kudumbashree National Resource organization (KS NRO) under the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) in the Northeast (NE) states of Assam, Tripura, Manipur, and Mizoram in India from 2014 to 2020. The project began as a pilot in Nagaon and Morigaon districts of Assam in 2014 and later was scaled up across the state. Inspired by its positive outcomes, neighbouring SRLMs of Tripura, Mizoram, and Manipur showed interest in replicating the project model to their respective states. This knowledge report attempts to consolidate the experiences of the field study through observations about different Local Self Government (LSG) models in the project states and perspectives to improve participation of women and marginalized communities in local self-governance.

The next section of the report will talk briefly about the evolution of a decentralized governance model in Kerala which resulted in the formation of Kudumbashree and subsequently the idea for a pan India PRI - CBO Convergence project.

BACKGROUND

Kerala has a rich culture of sociopolitical movements and community participation in the development processes right from the beginning of 20th Century. This vigor got intensified post-independence. Consecutive governments in the past showed tremendous willingness towards holistic development, and path breaking initiatives such as land reforms, education reforms, and public distribution systems (PDS) managed to advance the society in the right direction. Though Kerala is known for its Pro-Left political movements and progressive trade unions, there has also been a history of people-driven movements. In the 90s, following the 73rd and 74th amendments, Kerala's initiatives towards implementing the acts led to a historical announcement of the devolution of a third of the state's annual plan funds to the local governments. Today, Kerala has evolved with well-established institutions of LSGs. In this regard, N. Jagajeevan (Technical Advisor – Haritha Kerala Mission, Government of Kerala - formerly Program officer, Kudumbashree Mission, and a present member of the State Resource Group of NRO) stressed that it is important to understand the sociopolitical background of the state to relate to its success in terms of participatory planning in local village development.

EVOLUTION OF LOCAL SELF GOVERNANCE IN KERALA – POST INDEPENDENCE

Under the State Reorganization Act, Kerala was formed on November 1st, 1956. Even though Panchayats existed at this time as a state subject, they had their own limitations in terms of structure and resources required to mobilize development action at the grassroots. In the early 60s, a group of science writers founded the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP) aimed at promoting science literature in Malayalam language. However, KSSP soon realized that if science were to empower common people, merely conducting classes or publishing literature was not enough because, 'the benefits of science and technology was being monopolized by a privileged minority' (Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad)[1]. Hence, this initiative was transformed into a 'People's Science Movement' with the motto 'Science for Social Revolution'. Side by side, there was also a growing art movement as part of Kerala's culture in the 80s. Street plays and theater performances that focused on science and education in the initial stages also started focusing on democratization & village development later. There was also a 'Library movement'[2] happening around the same time. Under the leadership of P.N. Paniker, this state-wide library movement was pivotal in increasing the reach and use of libraries and highlighting the importance of literacy, especially in rural areas[3].

In the late 80s, society witnessed many more volunteering activities and movements that were largely aimed at bringing people together. All this played an important role in creating a conducive environment for participatory development process in Kerala in the years to come. There were also initiatives around technology mission (Sam Pitroda) and literacy mission at the national level during this time. This added momentum to the ongoing activities around street plays, and theater. Subsequently a new 'Literacy movement' evolved in the district of Ernakulam around 1989 and the voluntary activities continued, driven by citizens on improving literacy, distributing reading materials, and providing medical assistance for the elderly (including eye check-ups etc. all) aiming at including adults too into the process.

The success of these initiatives helped pave the way for the initiation of a state-wide programme called 'Total Literacy Programme' (TLP) in the early 90s. Though financial resource available was just enough for training and printing books, the overwhelming participation of public across the state made it a large movement. People were participating with excitement since they were able to contribute and also see the results of their efforts immediately. As a society, 'volunteerism' & 'literacy' was a huge learning experience and became integrated into the state's culture for years to come. Today, it is one of the important reasons for the development of Kerala.

Simultaneously, there were also campaigns, seminars & workshops about decentralization happening during this time. Though formal elections happened in 1978, the Panchayat Act of 1960 helped structure the Panchayat department in 1962. The voluntary actions around democratization and decentralization between 1960s and 1990s made communities aware of their rights and entitlements, available village resources, village level planning and development. This 'People participatory' model of development helped Kerala evolve 'People-centric development' in the years to come. In the mid-90s, a clear architecture evolved based on two pillars ii) ideation at the state level and ii) execution at the Panchayat level in association with non-paid volunteers. The creation of Jilla councils (District councils) in 1987 helped establish a two-tier village administration system. When the 73rd and 74th amendments were passed by Government of India (GoI) in 1992, Panchayat emerged as a constitutional body and Kerala was prepared on ground with its local resources. The State Government gained confidence that any development project with public agreement can be planned & implemented. With this, a new programme was initiated by the State Government in the early 90s called 'Panchayat Level participatory Development Programme' (PLDP) as a pilot project in 22 model Panchayats. This programme was very much in

> "It is not just giving money to the public but educating them to use it in a proper manner and knowledge about the bureaucratic processes which is important."

N. Jagajeevan
State Resource Person, Kudumbashree NRO, Government of Kerala

line with the 73rd amendment and was enacted through the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994. "This gave ample learning opportunities for the people involved and they mastered an important tool called Resource Mapping of Panchayat", Jagajeevan added.

While this was happening, there were many other things evolving out of these actions, especially related to poverty alleviation. Women based SHG networks were one such evolution that was largely based on micro-finance activities. A prelude to this project was the collaboration between UNICEF and the Urban Development Department in 1993 that created SHGs for the pilot urban poverty alleviation programmes in Alappuzha district and later scaled up to Malappuram district.

Consecutive governments of Kerala continued their sustained efforts towards democratization & decentralization. When a new government assumed office in 1996, the state was ready with the experiences and knowledge from i) Literacy movement ii) Kerala Literacy programme iii) De-centralization and local governance efforts, and iv) successful pilot project of local level planning in 22 model Panchayats. Backed by these success models, the Government initiated the 'People's Plan Campaign' (PPC) in 1996 which was aimed at decentralizing the planning process by allowing the LSG institutions to make their own development plans. The LSGs could utilize around 35 percent of the state development budget to prioritize and implement their own development projects. The willingness of the local government to spend more for the village development and the mass voluntary force available helped in the smooth implementation of the campaign. This resulted in local plans being made through a bottom-up approach and added new vigor to the on-going movement (The New Indian Express. 23 July 2020). Today, Kerala is the one among few states that have a maximum budget allocation for grassroots development every year. In this scheme of things, Jagajeevan said, "It is not just giving money to the public but educating them to use it in a proper manner and knowledge about the bureaucratic process." Educating the community about bureaucratic processes not only created better participation but also improved transparency between both the stakeholders, he further added.

These experiences helped form the 'Women Component Plan' (WCP) as part of the People's Plan Campaign in 1997 further enhancing the participation of women. It ensured 10% budget

[1] Kerala SasthraSahithya Parishad website - https://kssp.in/about-us/
[2] Under the guidance of P.N. Paniker, a group of libraries in Travancore came together to form the 'Thiruvithaamkoor Granthasala Sangham' in 1945 with a motto of promoting reading skills among the common public. This later became a collective of libraries across Kerala called the 'Kerala Granthasala Sangham' in 1956. After the State Government took over the institution in 1977, it became the Kerala State Library Council.
[3] Krishna Ananth. How P.N. Paniker Single-Handedly Kerala's Literacy Landscape. Swarajya. December 27th, 2017.

allocation from the funding for local planning & development for women-based development. During this journey, the SHGs started participating in the local village planning and block specific interventions in education, drinking water, mental health, agriculture, rainwater harvesting, anti-alcohol campaigns, sanitation, and women & child health development. These processes paved the way for the creation of multiple SHGs. The Government of Kerala (GoK) decided at this juncture, based on the local planning experience from Panchayats and Nutrition programme experience from Malappuram that the society should progress towards 'No Absolute Poverty'. This paved way for the Kerala Government's Poverty Alleviation Mission.

POVERTY ALLEVIATION MISSION OBJECTIVES

• The representative of this mission should be the local body and the Panchayat should be the key actor.

• Since poverty is a societal problem, it needs to be addressed collectively and not individually through Neighborhood Groups (NHGs)[4].

• Whoever is interested can participate in this project and there should be no exclusion.

• The NHGs along with the Panchayats should be the vehicle to anchor govt. sponsored schemes and programmes.

• It should not just be a thrift & credit society but one that should focus on holistic development.

• It would be a subset of local governance.

FORMATION OF KUDUMBASHREE[5]

Kudumbashree is a poverty eradication and women empowerment programme implemented by the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) of the Government of Kerala. The name Kudumbashree in Malayalam language means 'prosperity of the family'. The name represents 'Kudumbashree Mission' or SPEM as well as the Kudumbashree Community Network.

Thus, what is commonly referred to as 'Kudumbashree' means two entities:

• The Kudumbashree Community Network
• The Kudumbashree Mission

Kudumbashree was set up in 1997 following the recommendations of a three-member Task Force appointed by the Kerala state government. Its formation was in the context of the devolution of powers to the PRIs in Kerala, and the Peoples' Plan Campaign, which attempted to draw up the Ninth Plan of the local governments from below through the PRIs.

Kudumbashree has a three-tier structure for its women community network, with Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) at the lowest level, Area Development Societies (ADS) at the middle level, and Community Development Societies (CDS) at the local government level. The community structure that Kudumbashree accepted is the one that evolved from the experiments in Alappuzha Municipality and Malappuram in the early 1990s.

Features of Kudumbashree

• Started with a mission of Financial inclusion but later progressed towards working on the issues of local development.

• Created the federated structure of NHGs and instituted ADS at ward level and CDS at Panchayat level.

• Developed the institutional mechanisms for the network of NHGs to engage with the Panchayats through platforms such as Gram Sabhas.

• Integrated ADS and CDS not only into the local planning process but also with the implementation of the Panchayat-led development projects.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

The visibility of women in the development space is remarkable in Kerala right from the beginning. During the literacy movement, 60% to 70% of participants were women and formed the major pool of instructors. Similarly, during the TLP too, there was more than 70% of women participation. This continued during the decentralization efforts and was evident in the Gram Sabha participation. "The cutting-edge activities of the development space in Kerala always witnessed creative and active participation of women", added Jagajeevan said.

A decade (1998-2008) of Kudumbashree's journey tremendously improved the capability of women in Kerala. Women, who were just participants started functioning independently by taking decisions to address the issues of the needy in the community. Gradually they started acquiring control over the processes and the institutions such as ADS and CDS that were initially mentored by the Panchayats.

At this juncture, in 2008, there was a byelaw that was enacted that insisted the mode of relationship between the local government and Kudumbashree to be of a 'Development Partnership'. It entrusted the rights to demand, deliberate, and discuss mutually as a citizen's collective. It also stressed that preserving the rights of this citizen collective rests with the local bodies. This led to massive changes to the structure and operations of Kudumbashree.

EVOLUTION OF THE PRI - CBO CONVERGENCE PROJECT

Gram Sabha Rally, Beraipar GP, Uttar Pradesh

In India, PRIs were given constitutional mandate through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1993. SHGs of women started evolving around the same time as institutional collectives of the rural poor. SHG network offers an unparalleled social capital to help the Panchayats in ensuring social justice and economic development. In turn, Panchayats are institutions that render a bottom-up design to the process of governance. The idea of a functional synergy between these two institutions provided a robust set of opportunities for an organic and sustainable system for an inclusive socio-economic development. Hence the NRLM framework was amended by MoRD to bring about a formal relationship between the PRI and the CBO, as the two bastions of realizing the intent of poverty alleviation. "Another bonanza was the 14th Finance Commission award to the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) and this set-in motion the actions around the PRI-CBO Convergence movement on-ground. Gram Panchayats (GPs) were expected to come up with Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) and conduct active Gram Sabhas (GS). As it was a people-centric activity, GPs needed to involve people to create local level plans", noted Sarada G Muraleedharan (Principal Secretary, Local Self-Help Government Department, Government of Kerala) who was instrumental in the creation of the PRI-CBO Convergence project. It was also a coincidence that the people who were involved in the process of Kudumbashree formation were placed at appropriate organizations to drive the initiative forward with Vijay Anand as the Additional Secretary at the Ministry of Rural Development, GoI, Sarada G Muraleedharan asChief Operating Officerat the NRLM and Jagajeevan as the Program officer at the Kudumbashree Mission.

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[4] NHG – Neighborhood Groups are local women collectives consisting of 10-20 members. As a society, in Kerala it was realized that 'poverty' is not an individual issue but a societal problem. Hence it is important that the issue is addressed as a citizen collective involving members of a community / neighbourhood.
[5] Kudumbashree website - https://www.kudumbashree.org/

"Another bonanza was the 14th Finance Commission award to the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) and this set-in motion the actions around the PRI-CBO Convergence movement on-ground."

Sarada G Muraleedharan
Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Kerala

The Convergence project is premised on the belief that creating a space for democratic dialogue between the community and their elected representatives would be an effective way to achieve the primary obj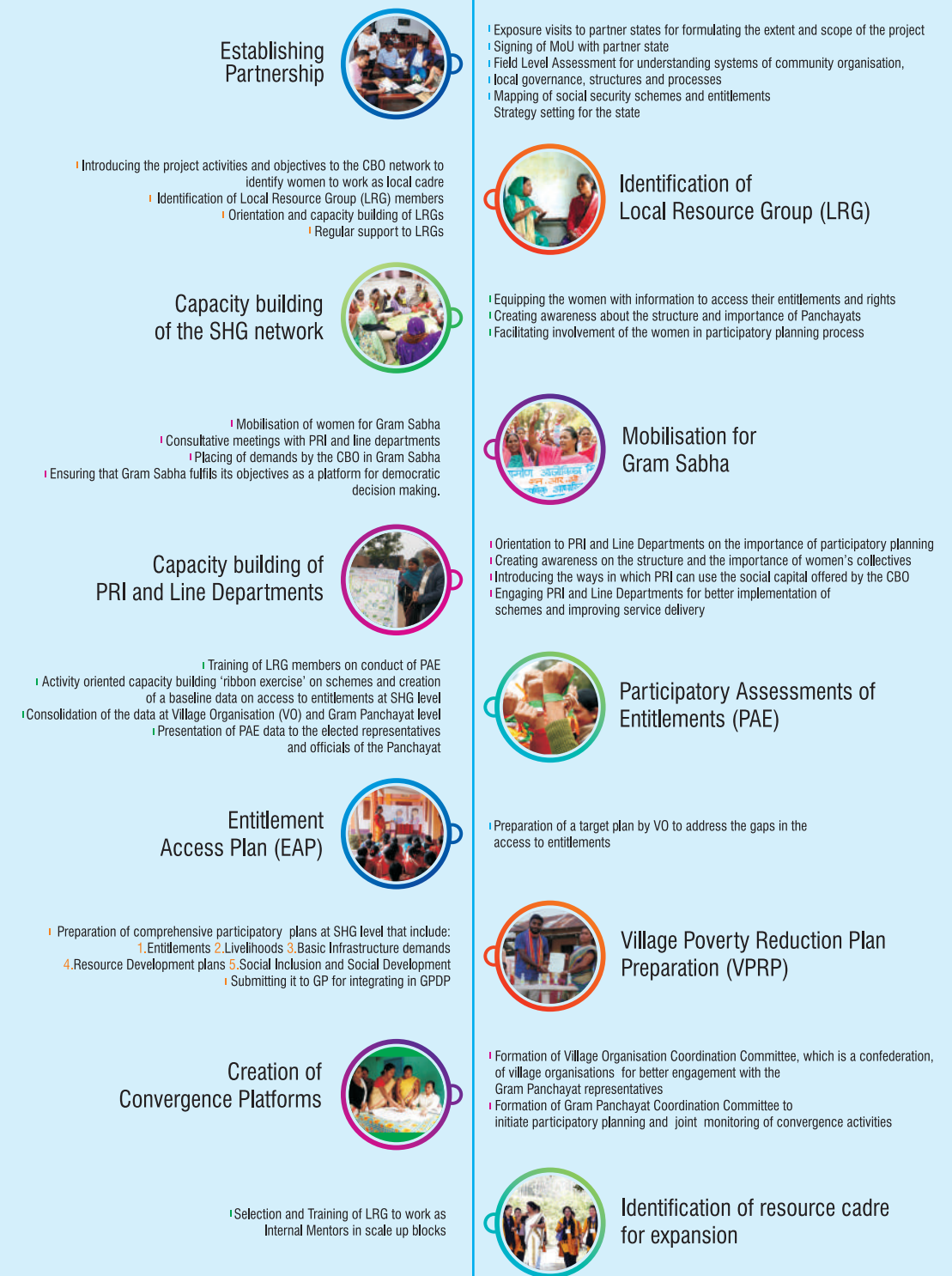ective of democratic decentraliza-tion. Recognizing the fact that women are one of the most important yet ignored stakeholders in the decision-making processes; various strategies and adaptive tools are designed to use the CBO as a collective to achieve their inclusion on social, economic as well as political fronts. By leveraging the knowledge that women have of their milieu, the project aims at ensuring that the planning process includes the needs and demands of the community. The PRI-CBO model functions by equipping local communities, fostering collaboration between the citizens and their administration, enabling public participation of marginalized groups, and correcting information asymmetries.

The PRI and CBO bodies can work together in the following ways:

• PRIs, being democratically elected bodies, can create awareness among the communities about entitlements through CBOs.

• PRIs can interface with the line departments and advocate for delivery of entitlements to the targeted communities and those in need.

• PRIs can utilize the network of CBOs to identify the target beneficiaries of a government scheme.

• CBOs can effectively participate in the Local Governance processes like Gram Sabha and advocate for their rights and entitlements.

• CBOs can act as generators of local needs and issues by playing a vital role in the programmes like GPDP.

Architecture of PRI - CBO Convergence project	
Programme Architecture	**Process Architecture**
• Mentor • Local Resource pool • Demand Plan • Schemes / Entitlements through PRIs and Line departments • Resource creation from the experience	• Situation analysis • Problem identification • Intervention plan • Target setting

PROCESS

Establishing Partnership
ı Exposure visits to partner states for formulating the extent and scope of the project
ı Signing of MoU with partner state
ı Field Level Assessment for understanding systems of community organisation,
ı local governance, structures and processes
ı Mapping of social security schemes and entitlements
Strategy setting for the state

Identification of Local Resource Group (LRG)
ı Introducing the project activities and objectives to the CBO network to identify women to work as local cadre
ı Identification of Local Resource Group (LRG) members
ı Orientation and capacity building of LRGs
ı Regular support to LRGs

Capacity building of the SHG network
ı Equipping the women with information to access their entitlements and rights
ı Creating awareness about the structure and importance of Panchayats
ı Facilitating involvement of the women in participatory planning process

Mobilisation for Gram Sabha
ı Mobilisation of women for Gram Sabha
ı Consultative meetings with PRI and line departments
ı Placing of demands by the CBO in Gram Sabha
ı Ensuring that Gram Sabha fulfils its objectives as a platform for democratic decision making.

Capacity building of PRI and Line Departments
ı Orientation to PRI and Line Departments on the importance of participatory planning
ı Creating awareness on the structure and the importance of women's collectives
ı Introducing the ways in which PRI can use the social capital offered by the CBO
ı Engaging PRI and Line Departments for better implementation of schemes and improving service delivery

Participatory Assessments of Entitlements (PAE)
ı Training of LRG members on conduct of PAE
ı Activity oriented capacity building 'ribbon exercise' on schemes and creation of a baseline data on access to entitlements at SHG level
ı Consolidation of the data at Village Organisation (VO) and Gram Panchayat level
ı Presentation of PAE data to the elected representatives and officials of the Panchayat

Entitlement Access Plan (EAP)
ı Preparation of a target plan by VO to address the gaps in the access to entitlements

Village Poverty Reduction Plan Preparation (VPRP)
ı Preparation of comprehensive participatory plans at SHG level that include:
1.Entitlements 2.Livelihoods 3.Basic Infrastructure demands
4.Resource Development plans 5.Social Inclusion and Social Development
ı Submitting it to GP for integrating in GPDP

Creation of Convergence Platforms
ı Formation of Village Organisation Coordination Committee, which is a confederation, of village organisations for better engagement with the Gram Panchayat representatives
ı Formation of Gram Panchayat Coordination Committee to initiate participatory planning and joint monitoring of convergence activities

Identification of resource cadre for expansion
ı Selection and Training of LRG to work as Internal Mentors in scale up blocks

EXPERIENCE OF KUDUMBASHREE NRO: WORKING WITH PRIs IN KERALA & PARTNER STATES

Convergence of the SHG network with PRIs has been central to Kerala's Kudumbashree experience. In 2012, MoRD recognized Kudumbashree as a National Resource Organisation (NRO) to provide technical support to other SRLMs in the implementation of the PRI-CBO Convergence project. As a National Resource Organisation, Kudumbashree's work is towards helping the partner states implement and materialize convergence between PRIs and CBOs. The focus has primarily been to democratize decision-making processes by strengthening institutional systems for local governance.

Over the last eight years of its operation, it has achieved the following major milestones.

• SHGs in pilot locations in various states have increased knowledge about schemes, and have informally identified beneficiaries for major schemes.

• SHGs and their federations have documented the gaps in entitlement access.

• SHGs have, subsequently, planned for accessing their rights and entitlements and undertaken joint action with Gram Panchayats.

• Across partner states, the SHG network has been able to prepare the relevant plans, which have been fairly successfully incorporated into the next planning process. They have also shared these plans with the concerned government departments, who have begun to engage directly with the federations.

• Improvement in the leadership skills and confidence of the women from the SHGs, as evident in the increased number of women participants in Gram Sabhas and quality of discussions and demands raised there.

IMPLEMENTATION OF PRI - CBO CONVERGENCE PROJECT IN NORTHEAST: PREPARATION

Over the years, Kudumbashree NROs' experience in other states helped it learn and evolve as an organisation. Hence, before venturing to the NE states, Kudumbashree NRO ascertained the complexities in dealing with diversity of languages, culture, terrain, and a vastly different set of local village administration systems.

"In the NE Region, it was decided that NRO team will spend more time in outreach with the communities, not only to understand the ground realities but to align with them as quick as possible."
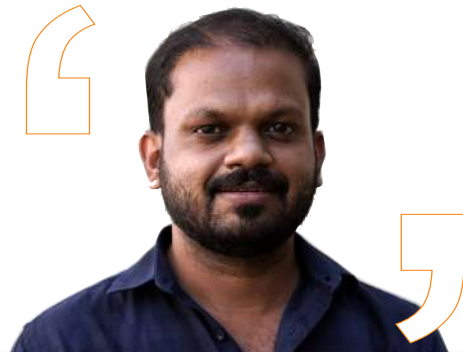
Manu Sankar
Program Manager - Convergence, Kudumbashree NRO, NRLM

The availability of secondary literature about local village administration systems in NE was very limited. SRLMs in these regions, especially Mizoram State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MzSRLM) and Manipur State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MS-RLM) were also pretty new and were just organising their networks of women on-ground. To overcome these challenges, Kudumbashree NRO undertook recce visits to various states prior to project implementation which helped them assess the prevailing structures of SHGs, local governments and, people's preparedness for local planning & development. The project states in NE also had sixth schedule areas. This provided a different set of opportunities and challenges to strategize approach in mobilizing communities which are administered under the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs). In addition to this, many communities had a tradition of 'Chieftaincy'. Hence it was important not to confront these exiting systems

while implementing the PRI- CBO Convergence project.

The participation of community in the local development and tools to engage them by departments seemed to be limited across all the states. However, there have been efforts by State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) towards capacity building of the community and government departments, the results of which were yet to be seen on field.

All this understanding gained through recce visits helped Kudumbashree NRO visualize key areas to focus on. "Outreach was one such areas and a decision was made to spend more time with the communities not only to understand ground realities but to align with them as quick as possible", noted Manu Sankar (Program Manager - Convergence,

Kudumbashree NRO, NRLM). It was also decided to spend more time in understanding the stakeholders at the grassroots and building relationships instead of hastily rolling-out programmes. It was also understood that new approaches would be needed like using social development issues or livelihood as entry points for the project instead of using Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) which was the practice in other states.

The next section will deal in-depth the experience of implementing the PRI-CBO Convergence project in the states of Assam, Tripura, Manipur, and Mizoram.

Local Cadre of the PRI-CBO Convergence project & CBO members, Tripura

STUDY
METHODOLOGY

This experiential study report was designed as a qualitative study. Qualitative research is an appropriate strategy for this kind of a project because it underlines an interpretive approach, which emphasizes understanding the meanings that people attach to a phenomenon. As a multi-sited research project, this study maps the evolution of PRI-CBO Convergence project across scaled up interventions and a diversity of settings, from the offices of the Kudumbashree NRO to the LSG institutions at the grassroot level and to the localized settings of SHGs in the villages of the project states.

Information for the report was gathered from a number of sources, both primary as well as secondary. The first step of this study started with an interaction with key stakeholders and field teams of Kudumbashree NRO in all project states. Information thus collected helped us identify the key institutions involved in rural governance, LSG Acts specific to each state, preliminary information regarding project locations, demographics, LSG structures, phase-wise strategies, success, and challenges. Further, our informal conversations with academicians, government officials, local people, and SHG members helped us identify the key players in the decision-making processes related to rural governance. Secondary sources included largely online resources such as journal articles and other papers.

The method for collecting information from field has been both semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Interviews with key persons in each state opened world views - so essential for understanding and analysing the local set-up, politics, the way 6th schedule functions, role played by women in these societies, and much more. These views provided the first foothold for spelling out the gap between what was there in paper and what exists in reality. Moreover, the process illuminated certain dominant patterns of functioning of the institutions of rural governance.

For secondary literature on information on the evolution and functioning of LSGs, role of women SHGs, and relevant acts and laws respective to each state, we relied heavily on secondary literature, Acts and Rules and interviews with experts with many years of research and field experiences in the above subjects.

CHALLENGES

Limitations on the methodology chosen - The small sample from which data was collected and analysed cannot be extrapolated on a broader scale. In other words, generalizations of the results is not desirable.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

All of the participants were informed about the purposes of this project and gave their informed consent to being mentioned in the report. Their identity as well as the names of the organisations they belong to has been mentioned in appropriate sections of the report.

FIELD STUDY

Field work for this report was undertaken in the month of February 2020 across the states of Assam, Tripura, Manipur and Mizoram.

Deepak Kumar G (Documentation Expert, Travelling Tripod Films) interacting with Mentors from the
PRI - CBO Convergence project, Mizoram

RESEARCH OUTLINE

Approach (a multi-sited qualitative study)

Preliminary research
- Interaction with Field Resource Persons
- Online resources
- Expert interactions

Field study
- Formal and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with various stakeholders
- Participating in on-going PRI-CBO Convergence project activities (like Participatory Assessment of Entitlements (PAE) / Entitlement Access Plan (EAP) / Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP) preparation / Gram Sabha / GPDP integration)
- Informal interaction with members of CBOs / PRIs / VCs-VDCs-VAs / BDOs…
- Formal interaction / interview with academicians and experts

Information collation
- Field notes on project milestones – Schedule of activities
- Major benchmarking activities, outcomes, sustainability plans
- Personal stories and testimonials from Mentors, Internal Mentors, Local resource Group members, SHG members, LSG officials, line department officials, community leaders, andother stakeholders

KS NRO and Travelling Tripod Films Team with SHG, VO, PRI Members, Tripura

Residents of Karbi Anglong

ASSAM

The state of Assam is located in the heart of the North-east (NE) India bordering seven states viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and West Bengal, & two countries viz. Bangladesh and Bhutan.

SOCIO-CULTURE BACKGROUND[6]

Assam has a very heterogeneous population from various socio-cultural & ethnic backgrounds. "Assam is the meeting ground of diverse cultures. The people of the enchanting state of Assam are an intermixture of various racial stocks such as Mongoloid, Indo-Burmese, Indo-Iranian, and Aryan. The Assamese culture is a rich and exotic tapestry of all these races evolved through a long assimilative process" (Secretariat Administration Department, Govt. of Assam). The native population are called 'Asomiya'. A large number of tribes like Bodo, Karbi, Miri, Kachari, Mishimi, and Rabha, each with their unique cultures, traditions, dressing styles and ways of life, inhabits the hilly terrains.

The state has a large Bengali speaking Hindu population. Muslims form the largest minority. Buddhism and Christianity are also practiced in the state. Bihu is one of the most prominent festivals celebrated by people across the state.

TOPOGRAPHY[7]

Assam is a land of river valleys and plains. It could be broadly divided into three parts; the Brahmaputra river valley in North (largest), the hilly region between Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Manipur in South-central and Barak River valley in South.

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[6] More information could be found on - 'Official State Portal of Assam, Secretariat Administration Department, Govt. of Assam, Government of Assam.' https://assam.gov.in/en/main/CULTURE%20OF%20ASSAM
[7] More information could be found on - Hariprasanna Das & Deryck O. Lodrick, Assam, Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/place/Assam

Many streams and small rivers flow from neighbouring hills to Brahmaputra. "Although only a small portion of the Barak River valley lies within Assam's borders, it nevertheless forms an extensive lowland area that is important for agriculture in the state's southern region. Geologically, the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys lie on ancient alluvial sediments, which

themselves cover a variety of deposits from the Neogene and Paleogene periods" (Hariprasanna Das & Deryck O. Lodrick, 2020).

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The journey of democratic decentralization over the past 26 years after the 73rd constitutional amendment devolved a range of powers and responsibilities to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) and Autonomous Councils (AC) at the grassroot level. This led to the organic evolution of these institutions over the course of time, both in the valley and hill regions. The deployment of resources and funds to carry out their duties towards village development have also been steady. Set in this context of decentralized administration, the next section will talk about the implementation of the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) – Community Based Organisation (CBO) Convergence project in Assam from 2014.

Some of the salient features of the state are as follows:

S. No.	Item	Detail
1	Population (2011 Census)	3,12,05,576
2	No. of Districts (in 2016)	33
3	Geographical Area (Sq. Km.)	78438 of which 98.4 % area is rural
4	Literacy Rate (2011 Census)	72.19

Source:
Official Portal of Government of Assam (May 2020)

SHG member, Katoni Gaon

LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT WHAT THE ACT SAYS

In Assam, two types of legal frameworks exist for Local Self Government (LSG):

1) Panchayati Raj Institutions (Covered under Parts IX & IX A of the Constitution) in the valley areas.

2) Sixth Schedule (Areas with significant population of Scheduled Tribes, which are governed by the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution) in the hilly regions.

PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS (PRIs)

PRIs are established through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, under the 11th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Keeping with the provisions of the 73rd Amendment Act, the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1986 was replaced with the Assam Panchayats Act, 1994, which was enacted and came into force in May 1994. The Act is similar to the PRI

laws of other states, outlaying a three-tiered institutional structure, consisting of Gram Panchayat (GP) at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the intermediary (Block) level, and Zilla Parishad (ZP) at the District level. The Act extends over the rural areas of Assam, except the autonomous districts under the 6th schedule of the Constitution of India and area under Autonomous councils established under state legislation.

The history of PRI Act in Assam is as below:

1. Assam Rural Panchayat Act, 1948
2. Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1959
3. Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1972
4. Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1986
5. Assam Panchayats Act, 1994

Currently, the Assam Panchayats Act, 1994 is the prevailing act in Assam for local self-governance in the rural areas of the plains.

As per the act, Grama Sabha (GS) consists of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village or group of villages comprised within the area of the Gram Panchayat (GP). The GP consists of Mukhia (President) elected directly by the voters of territorial constituencies of the village. The Grama Sabha shall meet from time to time, but a period of three months shall not intervene between any two meetings. There shall be wide publicity fifteen days ahead of the date for holding the Grama Sabha meeting. The quorum for a meeting of the Grama Sabha shall be one-tenth of the total members or one hundred members of the village / villages whichever is less. Every meeting of the Grama Sabha may be presided over by the President of the concerned Panchayat and in their absence by the vice president or any person to be selected by majority of Grama Sabha members for that meeting.

Grama Sabha shall consider the following matters and may make recommendations and suggestions to GP.

1. To report with respect to development programmes of the GP related to the preceding year and development programme proposed to be undertaken during the current year.

2. The promotion of unity and harmony among all sections of society in the village.

3. Such other matters as may be prescribed.

Powers & Functions of Gram Sabha

The Grama Sabha shall perform functions of i) mobilizing voluntary labour and contribution in kind and cash for the community Welfare programmes and ii) identification of beneficiaries for the implementation of development schemes pertaining to the villages.

Standing Committees (SC)

Every GP shall constitute the following Standing Committees (SC) by election from amongst the elected members of the GP:

1. Development committee for performing functions relating to agricultural production, animal husbandry

and rural industries, and poverty alleviation programmes.

2. Social justice committee for performing functions relating to: -

    a. Promotion of educational, economic, social, cultural, and other interest of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Backward classes.

    b. Protection of such castes and classes from social injustice and any form of exploitation.

    c. Welfare of women and children.

3. Social welfare committee to perform functions with respect to education, public health, public works, and other functions of the Gaon Panchayat.

District Planning Committee (DPC)

The Government shall Constitute in every district a District Planning Committee (DPC) to consolidate the plans prepared by Zilla Parishad, Anchalik Panchayats, Gram Panchayats, Town Committees, Municipalities, and Municipal Corporations and prepare a draft development plan for the whole district.

Budget and Finance[8]

The 'PRI Fund comprises receipts from their own resources, State / Central Government grants and assistance awarded from time to time, loans

obtained from any public financial institutions / nationalized banks or such 6 other institutions as the state Government may approve, sums received as donations / contributions and all income from any trust or endowment' (AR of 05-06 corrected by Sr DAG LB, Principal Account General, Assam, Guwahati).

The GP shall prepare in each year a budget of its estimated receipts and disbursement for the following year and submit the same to the Anchalik Panchayat. The Anchalik Panchayat may either approve the budget or return it to the GP for modifications. If the approval of the Anchalik Panchayat is not received by the GP within thirty days from the date of submission or re-submission, the budget shall be deemed to be approved.

The Anchalik Panchayat is required to submit its annual budget to the Zilla Parishad.

Every Zilla Parishad shall prepare in each year a budget of its estimated receipt and disbursements for the following year and submit it to the Government through the Director of Panchayat and Rural Development, Assam. The Government may either approve the budget or return it to the Zilla Parishad for modifications. If the approval of the Government is not received by the Zilla Parishad within thirty days from the date of submission or re-submission, the

budget shall be deemed to be approved by the Government.

Present system of Reservation for women in PRI system

The Assam Panchayat Act (1994) states that 'Not less than 1/3rd (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled up from amongst the directly elected members shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies under the Zilla Parishad' (Assam Panchayats Act, 1994).

The Government of Assam brought a few modifications in this policy on Nov 10th, 2012 and reservation of seats for women was increased from 1/3rd to 50% in the Panchayat.

AUTONOMOUS COUNCILS IN THE HILL AREAS [9]

For the welfare and empowerment of Scheduled Tribes (STs) and for their participation in 'planning, monitoring and implementation of Tribal Sub Plan (TSP)' various councils were constituted namely the Territorial Councils, Autonomous Councils, and Development Councils.

Kherekunda, Dhekiajuli block

[8] More information –AR of 05-06 corrected by Sr DAG LB, Principal Account General, Assam, Guwahati. India Audit & Accounts Department. http://www.agasm.cag.gov.in/forms/audit_report/issued_to_state_%20government/2005-06/chap_1.pdf

[9] More information could be found on - 'Official State Portal of Assam, Secretariat Administration Department, Govt. of Assam, Government of Assam.' https://assam.gov.in/en/main/Autonomous%20Councils

The Autonomous Councils (ACs) constituted are under the following

- Territorial Councils under Sixth Schedule of Constitution of India
- Statutory Autonomous Councils constituted under State Act

Autonomous Councils have varying degrees of autonomy. In Assam, there are 3 Autonomous Councils under Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. They are:

- Bodoland Territorial Council
- Dima Hasao Autonomous District Council
- Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council

The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) has legislative, administrative, executive, and financial powers over 40 policy areas in the Bodoland Territorial region comprising four administrative districts namely Udalguri, Baksa, Chirang, and Kokrajhar.

The North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council, Dima Hasao District (NCHAC), and the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, East Karbi Anglong (KAAC) are autonomous councils constituted under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India to administer the respective districts and for the development of the tribal people. The headquarter of North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council, Dima Hasao District (NCHAC) is in Haflong, Dima Hasao district. The headquarter of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, East Karbi Anglong (KAAC) is in Diphu, East Karbi Anglong district.

Under the PRI-CBO Convergence project, the Karbi Anglong Autonomous council was chosen as a Phase-III project location.

Statutory Autonomous Councils are constituted for Social, Economic, Educational, Ethnic and Cultural advancement of the ST) communities living in Core Areas as well as in Satellite Areas covering many districts of Assam. They are:

- Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council
- Mising Autonomous Council
- Tiwa Autonomous Council
- Deori Autonomous Council
- Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council
- Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council

Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong - Village Development Committee

Village Development Committee (VDC) is the local administration for villages. It compromises of 4 members, a chairman, secretary, and other two members. There are 10 general members. There are Gaon Buras who work with the VDC. There is one Sarkari Gaon Bura assigned for 5-6 villages under whom the Gaon Bura functions.

• President and Secretary

The VDC President / Secretary is selected by Members of Autonomous Councils (MACs) who are elected members from Autonomous Councils. The VDC President and Chairman are responsible to solve the problems of their VDC and work for their village development.

• Election of members of VDC

There is no election of members in the VDC. The members are selected by the MACs of the respective area. Chief Executive Member (CEM), Executive Member (EM), and VDC members are mostly selected by VDC chairman and EM. The tenure of a VDC is 5 years.

Functions of VDC

The functions of a VDC include:

1. Maintenance of movable, immovable and institution within the village.

2. Making of village development plans and mobilisation for GS.

3. Conduct Gram Sabhas.

4. Construction, repair, and maintenance of roads, bridges, channels, buildings.

5. Establishment, maintenance, and management of dispensaries.

6. Public Health and Sanitation.

7. Establishment, maintenance and management of primary schools and the construction and repair of all buildings.

8. Establishment, maintenance and management of markets and fairs, repairs and community building connected therewith.

9. Construction, repair, and maintenance of embankments and the supply. Storage and control of water for agricultural purposes.

10. Supply of and control of pollution of water for drinking, cooking, and bathing purposes

11. Preservation and reclamation of soil.

12. Preservation, protection and improvements of livestock and prevention of animal diseases.

13. Initiation, inspection and control of relief work.

14. Allotment, occupation or use, or land acquired for public purposes, for agricultural purpose or grazing.

15. Maintenance of plantation.

Duties of VDC

The VDC performs the following duties:

1. It shall, to the best of its ability maintain law and order and for their purpose exercise and perform the powers and duties.

2. Identification of beneficiaries for the development program of the Government, help formulate and supervise village development work.

3. The utmost duty of the VDC is to maintain law and order in the village. If any crisis arise within the village, they play an important part in warding off the situation.

Residents of Sonitpur engaged in a livelihood activity

LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT ON GROUND

A PARADIGM SHIFT IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

For the Socio - Economic upliftment of different backward communities, Government of Assam has created 33 Development Councils[10] to decentralize power and responsibility so that they can take care of their own development needs (Government of Assam, 2020). Each of these groups has their own distinct ethnic languages, customs, and identities which they try to protect by legitimately using the power under the banner of council. The very existence of this wide range of councils shows how identity politics is deeply rooted in Assam.

The socio political landscape of Assam has seen the existence of multiple autonomous councils, insurgency and demands to include certain areas into the sixth schedule. Conflict between various groups have affected the function of PRIs and ADCs, thereby bringing challenges in the progress of rural governance in the state as well. For example, the 2014 Panchayat Elections in Goalpara district were resisted by the people, as the functioning of PRIs was a threat to their autonomy. There were clashes between Rabha and non-Rabha groups in the district.

The ethnic tension between the state's indigenous population and migrant population from Bangladesh has been a major concern for Assam with the death of many and displacement of thousands. People continue to live in the fear of violence. In this regard, Dr. Bhupen Sarmah (Professor, Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati, Assam) stated that the ongoing reality of Assam's identity politics has led to ethnic fragmentation. This fragmentation has made it difficult for communities to come together and mobilize on development agenda. The cauldron of ethnic and religious hatred continues to boil even today. The current outrage of Assamese people during the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) depicts how the locals fear CAA would lead

Dr. Bhupen Sarmah
Professor, Omeo Kumar Das Institute of
Social Change and Development, Guwahati, Assam

[10] Moran Development Council, Mottok Development Council, Maimal Development Council, Moria Development Council, Gorkha Development Council, Chutia Development Council, Adivasi Development Council, Nath Jogi Development Council, Koch Rajbongshi Development Council, Bishnupriya Manipuri, Development Council, Tai Ahom Development Council, Mech Kachari Development Council, Manipuri Development Council, SadharanJati Development Council, Singpho (Man Tai) Development Council, Amri Karbi Development Council, Sarania Kachari Development Council, Barak Valley Hill Tribes

to permanent citizenship of migrants from Bangladesh which they believe will overwhelm indigenous communities, burden resources, and threaten their local language, culture and tradition.

The heights of identity politics reached their peak when the state created ACs for low-lying plain regions as well for addressing the special needs of the Bodo tribes. This led to the creation of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). Prior to this, post the 73rd amendment, Assam had only PRIs in plains and Autonomous Councils in the hills.

However, Pabitra Kalita (Joint Director, Training, State Institute of Panchayat & Rural Development (SIPRD), Assam) is confident that recent trends show a positive change towards local self-governance in the districts where the three-tier PRI system is in place, "The last election saw more than 50% women elected representatives." Similarly, reservations on ST were also implemented at par with the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994. Rules and provisions are followed and implemented according to the guidelines mentioned in the act. Executive body meeting happens every two months, in-line with the provisions of the act, and monitors the day-to-day planning and implementation of the Panchayat body, he added.

There are three standing committees in the Panchayat, and they share the progress reports among themselves. The Secretary and President operate jointly the Gram Panchayat bank account which is used for all financial transactions pertaining to development programmes in their Panchayat area. Currently, all the transactions happen only through digital mode and helps maintain records for review. Though the tax collector collects tax, it is meagre compared to other states like Kerala.

According to the act, 4 Gram Sabhas must be conducted every financial year in all the panchayats. Since 2014, after Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) was introduced, there have been more than 4 meetings. The planning activities initiated by the Panchayat is supported by Anchalik Panchayat and Zilla Parishad.

During the implementation of GPDP in 2015, Ward Sabhas were formulated under GPs (around 10 wards in each Panchayat) as the lowest statutory body which were expected to discuss and formulate plans for annual action plan for Gram Sabha. However, spending of funds for development programmes is based on the recommendations of the Gram Sabha and most of the plans from wards usually do not get featured in GPDP. In the Gram Sabha during the consolidation of Ward Sabha plans, they are majorly categorized into MGNREGA fund, Finance commission fund, Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (PMAY), and National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) funds. Many other demands like livelihoods, infrastructure, natural resources, social issues etc. usually do not get any funds.

There is an Anchalik Panchayat for each Development Block and most funds for rural development are channelised through this institution to the Gram Panchayats. Under the PRI-CBO Convergence project, there have been representation of upto 165 members of GPs (except ADCs) across the 25 Anchalik Panchayats. On an average, there are around 20 to 25 members under each block. The Anchalik Panchayat body constitutes of President selected by the members of Anchalik Panchayat. The functionaries include 4 to 6 officers such as the BDO, Accountant, System accounts officer, junior engineer, assistant BDO, extension officer-PR, and other officials like extension officer-women & development. It plays a supervisory role for GPs and monitor and guides the implementation of schemes such as MGNREGA and 15th Finance commission programmes.

Assam has also witnessed elections in PRIs uninterrupted from 2001 (2007, 2013, 2019). Post 2019 election, under the 14th Finance Commission (FC), many development programmes have been implemented and the Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission (ASRLM) is very actively engaged in the grassroots implementation of such programmes. Pabitra however added that there still is a long way to go as the implementation of the PRI system is yet to happen effectively in all locations, especially coordination with the other departments.

GRAM SABHA – AN ACTIVE INSTITUTION

According to Pabitra, all the three-tiers of PRI has its own discretion of power to plan and implement programmes. The lowest body, Ward Sabha has its own identity and Gram Panchayat or Anchalik Panchayat or Zilla Parishad can express their views but cannot impose their views. Similarly, Gram Sabha is very active and powerful. "Amar Gaon Amar Achoni" (Our Village Our Scheme) is a classic case of institutionalizing participatory planning process at the local level, post GPDP implementation." Their activity under "Mission Antyodaya" is

Pabitra Kalita
Joint Director, Training, of State Institute of Panchayat
& Rural Development (SIPRD), Assam

also appreciable. "Without the approval of Gram Sabha, even MGNREGA and Finance Commission programmes cannot be implemented. This speaks about the influence and reach of Gram Sabha and Panchayats", he added. There has also been a tremendous increase in the Gram Sabha participation over the years. For instance, in Margherita block, Tinsukia district participation grew from a few hundred to more than 4000 over the years. "An average of 500-members participating in Gram Sabhas has become a norm these days", said Pabitra Kalita.

FUNDING AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURE

Funding for the PRIs is mainly through three sources i) MGNREGA iii) Finance commission and ii) own revenue sources. The PRIs are aware of the available budgets and provisions which incentivize them to plan their yearly budgets well, Pabitra Kalita said. For example, under the 15th Finance there are certain guidelines such as i) schemes implemented by the Zila Parishad should not be less than 5 lakhs, ii) schemes by Anchalik Panchayat should not be less than 2.5 lakhs, and iii) Panchayat has no limit (1000 to 25 lakhs). Once the allocation of funds is available with them, the plan and estimate have to be prepared by the technical cell and approved by the competent authority. Administrator approval is further given

before the implementation of the programme. There is also a provision available under 15th Finance commission for Construction committee at all three levels. The disbursement of fund is done through the e-gramswaraj portal. The amount is released based on the progress of the activities (25% - 50% - 25%). MGNREGA being a centrally sponsored scheme, is allotted based on the already issued Job cards prepared by the Gram Sabha based on the e-master roll issued by the Program officer (PO). These guidelines and provisions have a positive impact on planning and implementation of projects, Pabitra Kalita added.

BUILDING CAPACITIES

Out of 26000 elected representatives, 13000 have been trained within 6 months since the last election. Despite this, Pabitra Kalita was not reluctant to acknowledge the fact that there is much more to be done to address the gap in training. "SIPRD has taken a lot of initiatives to address this. The training module for the elected representatives of PRIs focuses on MGNREGA, PMAY, NSAP, and Finance commission programmes. Management Information System (MIS) is an important aspect which has been recently added to the module. It helps the elected representatives to focus on the MIS aspects of the each and every implemented programme. Online payments using digital signature and geo-tagging of the projects using mobile camera are few advanced areas of training focused on the application of technology for local planning and development."

The SIPRD of Assam has also been mandated to train all the planning committees. The Planning and Resource team comprises of 140 model members under each Panchayat (40 members from the planning team and 100 members from the resource team). Through the network of secretary members from 17 centers, SIPRD has trained almost 13000 Village Resource Persons about the programmes and schemes, Pabitra said. These Village Resource Persons further help in local level planning process.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Women's participation in public domain especially on the political front remains limited both in terms of women casting their votes and women contesting elections. Their awareness about microcredit programmes and formation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) however indicate that progress towards economic emancipation and employment has been there (Nayak and Mahanta, 2009). While this opened up a new economic avenue, off late government's regulatory mechanism has restrained their functioning due to delay or failure in loan repayment. It was also observed that there has been resistance to leadership change in the SHGs as the dominant member of the group manipulates other members who are either from the same tribe, family, or have some working relationship with the leader.

Dr. Bhupen Sarmah in this context calls for improving awareness among women about their political rights. This according to him will be the first step towards equality of opportunity to choose their representatives. He further highlighted how the Rural Livelihood Missions should work towards making women active and informed citizens. In an ideal situation, this awareness should be brought by Gam Sabhas where women should be encouraged to participate, Bhupen added. However, in a context where the very existence of Gram Sabha is questioned and contested by other institutions, the whole idea of women's participation again stands last in the priority list of the communities.

Pabitra Kalita on the other hand was more optimistic. "In addition to the self-employment activities through SHGs, the participation of women through poverty reduction programmes helped enable their skills and potential." A growing network of SHG women was used in the preparation of Vulnerability Reduction Plan (VRP) which helped further empower local women in the process. Under each village level programmes, there are sub-committees to monitor and implement the projects and one of the members of those committees are mandatorily from the SHG network. They are taking part in the planning process of the Ward Sabha. "Slowly, SHGs have become more active and are taking part not only in the planning process but also in implementation and monitoring too," Pabitra Kalita added about the role of women in the local development process.

CONVERGENCE WITH DEPARTMENTS

While devolution of power started happening to the lowest bodies and, the functions and responsibilities are in line to states like Kerala, we are yet to see effective co-ordination between various line departments and PRIs as far as the local planning and development is concerned, Pabitra Kalita noted. For instance, planning and implementation of programmes like MGNREGA, PMAY, NSAP, and Finance Commission programmes are managed by the PRI bodies individually.

Being a grassroots organisation, PRI bodies are limited in resource to plan and implement the programmes that cut across sectors such as agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry, fishing, natural resources to name a few. "The PRIs are yet to evolve working together with various line departments", Pabitra Kalita added.

AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCIL (ADC)

The Sixth Schedule which gives power to the Autonomous Councils was designed to provide autonomy for the native tribes to make choices about their own development. However, it is yet to achieve any major milestones. Today, tribal communities hold limited power and rights to their community's natural resources. For instance:
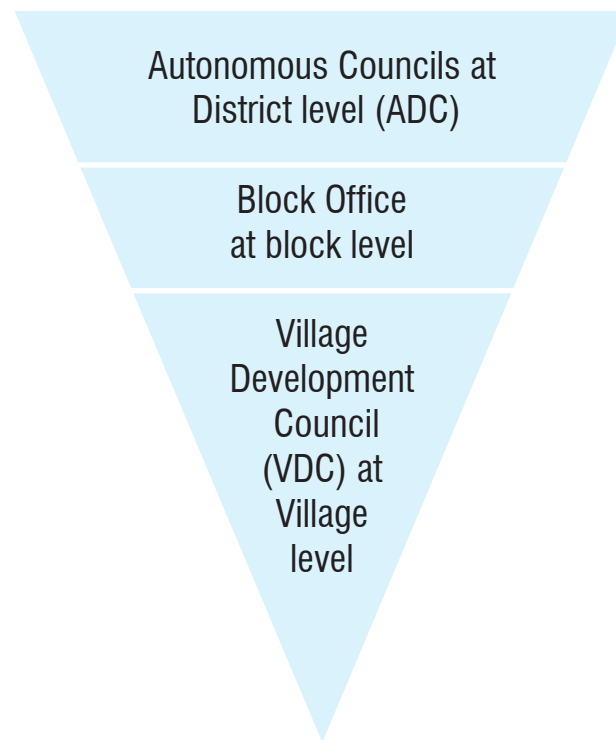
- State has unfettered authority in transfer of ST land to the government and allotment to non-tribal community.

- Despite the Forest Rights of tribal community, which ostensibly recognizes the right of communities to protect and manage the resources, it is up to the state to decide whether a certain region is denoted as Village forest or Reserve forest. In this process, many communities have been evicted without adequate rehabilitation and resettlement packages.

The ADC system has also become political in functioning. Members are influenced by the party in power, both at the state & centre. The recently concluded Bodo accord is a classic example where the ruling party of BTC which was in power for the past 15 years was replaced by a coalition of three new parties who then proposed to create a new AC within the

BTC[11] through the Bodo Kachari Welfare Autonomous Council Bill 2020.

Elections for ADCs are conducted by the State Election Commission (SEC). The Chief Executive Member of ADC decides on crucial decisions related to 33 departments and appointment of key government staff, done in consultation with the State Government. Similarly, matters related to selection and removal of VDC Chairperson and members are overlooked by MACs. Allocation of funds also happens through the VDC, with the MLA as the nominal head and ADC Chairperson as the deciding authority.

The state holds financial power till it gets the share of funds from Central Government. MAC has to produce a 'Special consideration certificate' to get finances approved for payment of salaries. However, once the funds are transferred by the state to ADC, its role is limited. ADC also has control over the funds that MLAs receive. The money is routed through ADC and also spent according to MACs priorities. Likewise, VDCs also don't get funds directly as they are not formal in-

Autonomous Councils at
District level (ADC)

Block Office
at block level

Village
Development
Council
(VDC) at
Village
level

stitutions. Though the cluster Panchayat gets funds in crores, it is seldom utilized. The funds for GPDP come from Finance Commission but Karbi Anglong district has never received any such funds. ADCs always get funds from Tribal Sub Plan (TSP). Funds from the Hill Area Development Program (HADP) for VDCs come through ADCs but the disbursement is always late and is politically rooted.

Additionally, the state has power in matters related to land ownership. ADCs autonomy has been curtailed over the years. As per rules, no outsider can buy land in the region but now more than 50% of the land is owned by outsiders.

The overlap of functions has always led to frictions between the State Government and ADCs. There have been allegations from certain sections that the autonomy of these institutions have been subjected to interest in political gains. However, these fears have to be allayed by the government by reinstating their faith on ADC and also bringing about necessary changes to ensure independence in the functioning and autonomy of the institutions.

Jonathan,
Block Project Manager (BPM), ASRLM

To attain this, Jonathan (BPM, ASRLM) suggested the following:

- Appointment and removal of the officials in these institutions must be done judiciously and with utmost transparency.
- Capitalize on the strengths of traditional institutions' knowledge and include them when decisions are made.
- ADC should function in a transparent manner accommodating all and should consider the cultural aspirations of people when development planning is done.
- Capacity building of tribal women in modern techniques of production and marketing (most of them are engaged in weaving) will increase production.
- Strengthen bank linkages of SHGs to promote viable micro-economic activities with substantial support in terms of credit and market.
- Centre, state & ADCs should arrive at a consensus for every development agenda planned, and failing so, it will delay bringing in any development.

Kudumbashree Community Cadre & VDC officials, Karbi Anglong

[11] Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) was constituted to look after issues of Bodo tribes like education, horticulture and forests. However, police, general administration and revenue are controlled by the Government of Assam.

Zorina Khatum
Resident, Thelamara GP, Sonitpur

EXPERIENCES FROM
PROJECT LOCATIONS

PILOT PHASE

The PRI-CBO Convergence project was implemented in the state of Assam in the year 2014 with SHGs as grassroots CBO structure. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between ASRLM and Kudumbashree National Resource Organisation (KS NRO) in January 2014.

PILOT PHASE

Assam was the first state in the Northeast (NE) region to implement the PRI-CBO Convergence project, providing an opportunity to work with Gram Panchayats (GPs) in the plains. Bajiagaon block in Nagaon district and Laharighat block in Morigaon districts (consisting of 36 GPs in total) were selected in the pilot phase of the convergence project. A team of eight Mentors from Kudumbashree NRO went to Assam in January 2014 to train SHGs in these two blocks.

Name of the district	No. of blocks	No. of GPs/VDCs	No of Professionals	No of Mentors
Nagaon	1	12	1	3
Morigaon	1	24	1	5

Pilot phase Profile

In the pilot phase, MGNREGA was used as a strategic entry point for the PRI-CBO Convergence project in Assam. Mobilization of women and Gram Sabha participation were the initial focus as CBOs were dormant in the project locations. Good amount of effort went into capacity building of community institutions through various exercises and activities including Participatory Assessment of Entitlements (PAE) & Entitlement Access Plan (EAP). Since the aim was to sensitize SHG women about their rights and entitlements, discussions around the same were initiated at the community level. The pilot phase witnessed a strong involvement of Mentors in managing daily affairs with CBOs and the PRIs. Towards the end of the pilot phase, major outcomes included a) the creation of Village Organisation Coordination Committee (VOCC) b) Identification of local cadre including Local Resource Group (LRG) members & Internal Mentors, and c) the preparation and participation in Gram Panchayat Poverty Reduction Plan (GP2RP), now known as Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP).

Initial Experiences

Cultural Alignment – A new experience

For Mentors from Kerala, Assam was a whole new cultural experience. Radha, (Mentor Resource Person, Sadiya, Guijan & Kakopathar blocks, Tinsukia) recollected that one of the initial challenges was to deal with people from various cultural backgrounds as the villages had a mix of Nepalis, Bengalis, and Bodos. However, they found ways to overcome this. "I learned that one can communicate with others even if he / she does not know the language. We just need a strong intent to do that." This was also true for the local cadre recruited within Assam. Similarly, Chitramani Bora, (Internal Mentor, Lumbajong block, Karbi Anglong) shared that she had to overcome the challenge of working with people from various ethnic backgrounds in her project location. Thankfully, there were LRG members who were well versed in Assamese and many other local languages to support her, she added.

Radha A.
(Mentor Resource Person, Sadiya, Guijan & Kakopathar blocks, Tinsukia) with Internal Mentors

Enabling Women to be Active

The initial period of orientation, training, and monitoring was a difficult task as women were not allowed to be part of any public domain work. MGNREGA provided the entry point for the PRI- CBO Convergence project to create awareness and rightful demand among daily wage labourers for job cards. This requirement of MGNREGA brought together women who started interacting with each other. Slowly, they were keen to be part of meetings and discussions on entitlements and schemes. This prepared them to participate in participatory planning exercises like PAE & EAP. "Initially SHGs were just limited to thrift and credit and lending loans to women. Now, they are no longer about lending loans. Women in SHGs are involved in progressive activities like conducting health and maternity camps", said Simi Bora (Internal Mentor, Titabor block, Jorhat). Not only did the community women become more active and participative, the local cadre recruited also became more confident and outgoing through the whole process. Similarly, Chitramani Bora said that it was her stint in the PRO-CBO Convergence project which helped improve her communication skills and confidence. "Initially I was not aware of my rights and entitlements. I became aware of my rights after I got selected as an LRG member." While working in the field she had to find new ways to bring women out of their homes. "For instance, to work with women from the local Muslim community, I had to talk to men in their respective families to ensure that women get support from their families."

Chitramani Bora
Internal Mentor, Lumbajong block, Karbi Anglong

Mentors as Torch Bearers

Mentors acting as torch bearers of the project were responsible for the initial mobilization of women, identification of local cadre, motivating and training them. Chandan Borbora (Block Project Manager (BPM), Barhampur block, Nagaon, Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission (ASRLM)) appreciated the initial orientation, training & monitoring programmes on ground carried out by the Mentors in coordination with the State Project Coordinator (SPC). He said, "We have worked with Mentors in developing community-specific modules for LRG members and SHG networks." Saramma Johnson (Mentor, Tittabor, North West Jorhat & Ujjain blocks, Jorhat & Majuli) along with concerned Field Coordinators (FCs) designed workshop modules and implemented them to motivate women to be proactive in the SHG activities. She recollected, "They would sometimes shut their house doors when we tried to talk to them. We had to make repeated attempts to make sure they are convinced to come out and work."

Chandan Borbora
Block Project Manager (BPM), Barhampur block, Nagaon, Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission

Major Outcomes of the Pilot Phase

Community mobilization

The first seeds of women's participation in public sphere were sown in this phase through active involvement for Job card registration in MGNREGA. Through this, women slowly started participating in Gram Sabha meetings. This was possible with regular interactions (formal and informal) with SHGs and VOs. Overall, the project witnessed a scalable improvement in women's attendance in the Gram Sabha meetings.

"We worked in collaboration with panchayat members and ensured that people received pension and Job cards."

Rezia Sultana
Internal Mentor, Raha block, Nagaon

Creation of a Confident Community Cadre

Capable women from the community were identified and trained as LRG members during the pilot phase. They started participating in community mobilization, training, and village development planning. Many women recollected that their lives went through a sea of change after becoming LRG members including improvement in communication skills, self-confidence, and physical mobility. Towards the end of the pilot phase, few LRG members were identified based on education, skillset, and interest to take up more responsibility. These selected LRG members from the pilot phase joined as Internal Mentors in the Scale-Up phase. Chitramani Bora added, "The knowledge I gained while working as an LRG member has helped me work efficiently in the role of an Internal Mentor. For instance, while working as an LRG member, I understood the ways in which various government departments function. I also became aware of development schemes meant for women. I could communicate with women about their rights and entitlements in an effective manner." Rezia Sultana (Internal Mentor, Raha block, Nagaon) formulated village committees for addressing social problems. Along with SHG members, she was also instrumental in forming livelihood and healthcare committees. This systematic approach helped the SHG members identify issues faced by the villagers and allowed them to bring the problems to the notice of Panchayats. "We worked in collaboration with panchayat members and ensured that people received pension and Job cards", said Rezia. This also triggered enthusiasm in more women, thereby motivating them to be proactive participants in the Gram Sabhas.

Creation of Community Convergence Platforms

Once the participatory tools of PRI-CBO Convergence project were done, an informal body at the Panchayat level called the Village Organisation Coordination committee (VOCC) was formed by including the representatives of different VOs, in order to have a strategic & active interface with the PRI bodies. This was one of the major outcomes of the Pilot Phase to sustain the momentum of the participatory process. This institution acts as a bridge between the community and the PRI bodies. Once the VPRP is submitted to be included in GPDP, VOCC follows up with the Panchayat about the status and implementation of the plans incorporated. Sharmila (LRG member, Borchalla block, Sonitpur) said, "VOCC is a good institution and if the committee members are trained properly, they function well on their own. With the combined efforts and coordinated work done by LRG members and VOCC, I think VPRP preparation for GPDP will become a regular practice."

Conclusion – Pilot Phase

The success of the pilot phase led to the articulation of common/shared problems, agenda, expectations, and success narratives. These experiences were shared and circulated by different stakeholders in new geographic areas. The enhanced participation of SHGs did not lead to a radical change in governance regimes but challenged and influenced them subtly. It brought in changes in behaviour, practices, and routines. Discussions with SHGs during the pilot phase enabled the tabling of key issues related to scaling up of the project to other districts of the state. Thus, the pilot phase set the ground for i) the effectiveness of community-driven approaches in promoting community-led planning, ii) management of development activities, and iii) the 'how to' of inclusive and sustainable development.

SCALE-UP – PHASE 2

Inspired by the success of the pilot phase, the ASRLM decided to scale-up the project to more districts in 2017. Two new districts with 4 blocks – Naogaon (Barhampur & Lawkhowa blocks) & Sonitpur (Dhekiajuli & Borcholla blocks) with 51 GPs were selected.

Orientation of communities and convergence of line departments was one of the main focus areas of this phase. Good amount of effort went into the continuous interface with the local bodies and strengthening existing institutions. The PAE & EAP exercises enabled discussions around rights & entitlements at SHG level. Phase 2 also witnessed a deeper involvement of LRG members and Internal Mentors. Unlike the Pilot Phase, creation of VOCC happened at a very early stage in Phase 2 which helped in speeding up of outcomes towards the end which included a) Implementation of demands as a result of line department convergence b) Integration of VPRP with GPDP, and c) Increased achievement of Entitlements.

Name of the district	No. of blocks	No. of GPs/VDCs	No of Professionals	No of Mentors
Nagaon	2	22	2	2
Morigaon	2	29	2	2

Scale-Up - Phase 2 Profile

Strategy - Identifying Local Leaders

One of the key tasks of Phase 2 was the selection and training of Internal Mentors and LRG members who were to take the responsibility of rapport-building exercise within the communities and PRIs. It was decided that Mentors would take charge of district level assignments instead of block level. Since they worked closely with the district & block level staff of SRLM, they could strategize the activities for ground-level implementation. Experienced LRG members from the pilot phase were provided opportunities to become Internal Mentors during the scale-up phase and were given block level responsibility. Initially, they were trained by the Mentors from Kerala & professionals from Kudumbashree NRO to i) mobilize and empower women through VOs, and ii) build capacity of CBOs on entitlements and government schemes. This also helped build the capacity of Internal Mentors to work with line departments over a period of time. This was one of the distinguishable strategies in the scale-up phase as it enhanced the role of each member involved in the project thereby maximizing the effectiveness of the project within a stipulated time period. The difference between the roles played by the Mentors and Internal Mentors was also clear among the community members. Sharmila said, "Mentors who have come here knew exactly what is required. No one would have trained me better than them. Internal Mentors on the other hand are there on a daily basis to tackle usual challenges. To me, Mentor is a Guru (teacher) & Internal Mentor is a friend."

Sharmila
LRG member, Borchalla block, Sonitpur

Internal Mentors identified & trained the LRG members who were responsible for taking care of field level coordination with SHGs at GP level. After identification of LRG members, data on MGNREGA, Job cards, education, health, pension etc. all was collected through the PAE exercise. In this regard, Radha said, "It is the LRG members who segregate the information. So, they must be trained effectively to make sure that the collected data reaches the panchayat officials." Unlike in the pilot phase where Panchayats recommended the selection of LRG members, a proper screening was done by Mentors, who ensured that there is a sense of community ownership among the participants. "I am very happy with the changes I have witnessed in Assam. LRG members who were once terrified to leave their homes (even for few hours), now work as Internal Mentors across various districts of Assam", said Raseena (Mentor Resource Person, Dholongghat, Raha & Khagorijan Blocks, Nagaon).

Raseena P. A.
Mentor Resource Person, Dholongghat, Raha & Khagorijan Blocks, Nagaon

No. of Internal Mentors Trained	No. of LRG Members Trained
52	180

Local Cadre Trained

Unique Experience

- **VOCC - A major success of Phase 2**

The absence of an institution which could act as a bridge between the CBOs and the PRIs at the Panchayat level paved the way for the creation of VOCC. It consists of Office Bearers (OB) of VOs. One of the members is a coordinator and there are conveners of sub-committees like livelihood, social welfare, health, education etc. Two members of sub-committees

are trained and are further expected to train the SHG members on their respective verticals. VOCC works with the PRIs in tracking demands submitted through VPRP in GPDP and also other entitlements requested. Under the NRLM initiative, there is a federation of VOs called Cluster Level Federation (CLF) which takes care of the financial matters of VOs. VOCC meets every month, prioritizes issues and plan work accordingly in tandem with CLFs at cluster level.

VOCC meeting in progress, Katoni Gaon, Nagaon

No. of VO Members Trained	No. of PRI Members Oriented
776	1100

Capacity Building of VO members and PRI Officials

VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS (VOs) AS INDEPENDENT UNITS

Village Organisations from Katoni Gram Panchayat formed a VOCC. This helped them collectivise and meet with the officials of Line Departments with whom they were not able to meet regularly. With the relentless efforts put by LRG members, women were convinced to participate in the Gram Sabhas. M. Sajeeda Begum, VOCC Coordinator is very confident of conducting meetings on a regular basis with clear agendas and recording minutes. As a result, it has led to women-led decision making processes for village development.

Additionally, Panchayats encourage the SHGs to prepare their own plans which then gets consolidated and vetted by VO. It is an affirmation which makes a case for Panchayat to take it forward. For instance, Hiranwala Sangma (VO Secretary, Kenchi village) brought forward the issue of school dropouts as one of the agenda points for the discussion and successfully sanctioned the proposal for admitting those students who could otherwise not afford to get re-enrolled.

Capacity building of Institutions

Expansion of the project was an outcome of coordinated efforts put in by multiple actors. The NRO team and SRLM block level officials customized training modules based on the local context of the blocks. The modules covered mobilization process, capacity building of stakeholders like community leaders and PRI representatives, training on PAE & EAP tools and monitoring techniques. Following this, regular observation was done to select members for various committees of VOCC. The program interventions began in the areas of mobilizing community members on schemes like MGNREGA and identifying vulnerable families outside of SRLM network.

The project worked with the SRLM network of vulnerable SHG households and encouraged participatory process of village development. Attempts were made to further strengthen the SRLM network by using the ground forces (LRG members and SHG members) to identify vulnerable families outside the existing SHG network. A detailed survey was done to identify the poorest of the poor in the blocks. The collection of this data was planned and monitored by Mentors, Internal Mentors, and LRG members. The SHGs gathered the data of the households which were not captured in the previous surveys. Community leaders and SRLM appreciated this initiative and fully supported PRI officials in acquiring the required data.

In addition to the regular training on the PRI-CBO activities, there were instances of LRG members taking extra initiatives to empower women. In one of the instances, Rezia Sultana trained the LRG and SHG members to conduct activities around social service and strengthened the community through social action initiatives. She also trained the villagers on basic reading and writing skills. "Literacy rate in the villages of Assam is very low. People are not aware of the importance of education. I always motivate women to get educated", she said. Similarly, Chitramani Bora, had to not only educate the women about their rights and entitlements but also help them improve their literacy. She achieved this through her literacy campaigns where women from VOs participated through weekend classes and were taught to read and write.

Major Outcomes of Phase 2

PAE & EAP as an enabler of VPRP

Progress in the convergence project was not an easy task. Breaking the taboo of women moving in public sphere and carrying out unpaid work was an additional challenge. The LRG members had difficulty in scheduling meetings as the communities were occupied in their daily routine. Meticulous planning was done to reach out to the communities as

per their convenient time & venue. It was not easy for the LRG members as this was a voluntary work and for many of them, their family members were apprehensive. In this regard, Chandan Borbora stated that, "Mentors working at the block & the district level with the SRLM staff, and LRG members at the field level working with SHGs made a remarkable impact in the Assam. There were Gram Sabhas happening earlier also, but with little participation from women. Now, not only do women participate, but are also aware of various schemes, entitlements, eligibility, and documents required much before they participate in the meetings."

Through the PAE exercise, a need assessment was done with all the SHGs. Rezia Sultana recollected her experience with the PAE exercise, "We made a list of entitled beneficiaries depending on priority and submitted the list to the Panchayat officials. LRG members and the SHGs worked in collaboration with the Panchayat members and ensured that the villagers received pension and job cards." The data from all blocks were consolidated in the EAP exercise. PAE and EAP exercises helped the SHG work better for the preparation of VPRP.
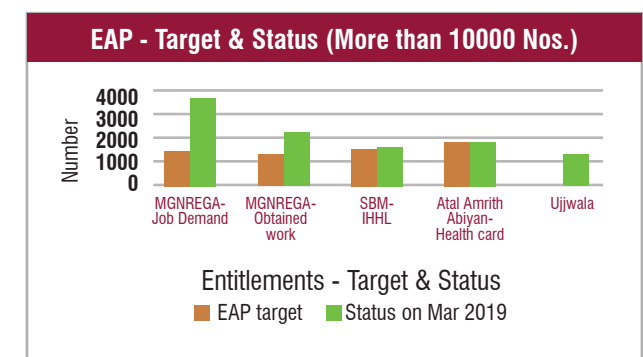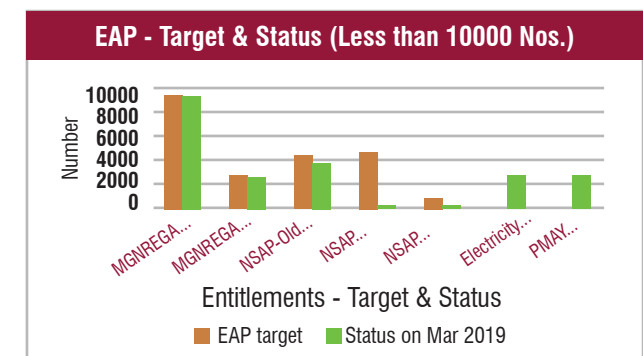
EAP - Target & Status (Less than 10000 Nos.)

EAP - Target & Status (More than 10000 Nos.)

WHAT THE GRAPHS INDICATE

- Target set during EAP exercise in the year 2018 for different government schemes such as MGNREGA Job cards, Health Insurance, Pension, Widow benefits, Disability benefits, Electric connection and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yogana (PMAY).

- The Status of achievement in the above graph indicates the success of VOs with PRIs and line departments in setting and achieving targets through direct interaction and effective coordination.

- Better progress was witnessed (more than 60% achievement) on – MGNREGA Job card, NSAP Widow pension, Swach Bharat Mission – Individual Household Latrine (SBM-IHHL), Atal Amrith Abhiyan – Health card and Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yogna.

- Individual beneficiary demand was comparatively less than the household demands.

- Moderately performed schemes (Less than 60% achievement) include - MGNREGA Job identified / Demand, Health Card/Insurance, Old-age pension / Widow / Disability pension.

- Overall, the achievement indicates better performance in centrally sponsored schemes than the state intervened programmes.

- The highest gap in the deliveries was found in the Job demand and Job identified under MGNREGA and Pension schemes.

No of Blocks	Total number of GPs	Time period when PAE was undertaken	Total No of SHGs Covered under PAE	Name of the Schemes	EAP target	Current Status of Achievement	% of Achievement	Period of Achievement Status
4	51	November , December 2017	5586	MGNREGA				As of March 2019
				Job card	9427	9332	98.9%	
				Job Identified (No of SHG's)	3151	3057	97%	
				Job Demand	15849	34632	218%	
				Obtained work	13812	21647	156%	
				SBM				
				IHHL	11999	12361	103%	
				Atal Amrith Abiyan				
				Families with health card	28308	28432		
				NSAP				
				Old age pension	4255	3835		
				Widow pension	4881	282		
				Disability pension	1207	208		
				Ujjwala		14427		
				Electricity Connection		3349		
				PMAY		3326		

Status of Entitlements received after PAE for Phase 2

Further to this, VPRP exercise was carried out. Later, a consultative meeting was conducted with PRI officials and representatives from line departments. VPRP was then integrated with GPDP in the Gram Sabha meeting. The entire process was accepted by the Panchayat too since prioritization and target setting was keeping the poorest of the poor in mind by the villagers themselves.

LRG MEMBER TO GRAM PANCHAYAT PRESIDENT - CASE OF JUNTI HAZARIKA, GP PRESIDENT, KATONI GP

Junti Hazarika
Panchayat President,
Katoni Gaon GP, Nagaon

Before becoming an LRG member, Junti Hazarika was an SHG member. Her keenness and proactive involvement in discussions related to village development paved way for a more responsible position during the later stages of the project. As an LRG member, she mobilized 1200 people from all 15 villages for the Gram Sabha meeting conducted on 15th Aug 2017.

A positive spirit, enthusiasm, and welcoming nature with an empathetic attitude fetched her support from the women community and also from other members of Panchayat. Junti was unanimously encouraged to contest in the Panchayat elections in the year 2018 which led her way in becoming the first Mahila (woman) President from an SHG. When asked about the impact of the convergence project on her work as the Panchayat President, she said, "It has become quite natural for me to consider and give priority to demands from the CBOs."

Junti's dedication and determination to bring a much-required development in her village was visible when she gave permission to set up a temporary office for the CLF & VOCC within the Panchayat office premise. "As an LRG member under the project, I have always understood the demands of SHG women. It is an inclusive demand that includes the poorest of the poor. So, it is of great help. Hence, whenever there is a demand from SHG women, I try my level best to incorporate it in the Panchayat plan." She reaffirmed that her stint in the PRI-CBO Convergence project was an enterprising experience.

Junti Hazarika, with SHG members, Katoni Gaon

Building Soft Skills

The effort of Mentors along with Internal Mentors resulted in the LRG members working together effectively, managing the VO affairs on their own, and getting engaged in healthy and progressive discussions with multiple stakeholders. These activities enhanced their bargaining power, negotiation skills, teamwork, analytical capacity, decision-making, communication, and relationship building skills. With these acquired skill sets LRG members could regularly discuss and negotiate with the PRI officials & line departments. LRG members now knew:

1. How to interact and behave with multiple stakeholders – communities, PRI officials, and line departments.

2. How to deal with externalities and to take timely support from the Mentors if required.

For instance, Sharmila, recollected how during her training days, certain skill sets helped her motivate other SHG women to harness their abilities and participate in planning processes. She also got the knack of motivating people and developed her inter-personal skills and organizing skills. She was also bold enough to decline the offer to contest as a ward member as she didn't want to confine herself in a ward and rather wanted to work for the entire GP. Similarly, as an Internal Mentor for two GPs, Simi Bora spoke about how soft skills helped her in enabling women to open up, "Women often might not explicitly talk about their problems. However, if one listens to them carefully it is easy to identify and address problems."

Convergence of Governance

For better utilization of resources, convergence across departments is essential. This called for establishing contact points at different levels for better coordination between stakeholders. Such convergence between CBOs, PRIs, and line departments took place through health camps, veterinary camps, re-enrollment programs for school dropouts, and literacy programs for SHGs. Rina Karketta (Internal Mentor, Raha block, Nagaon) said that, in addition to the personal challenges in her family, she had a difficult time with the VOs and Panchayat officials in making them understand the importance of community involvement in village development

activities. It took a lot of time and pursuit to convince them that it is important to work with the SHGs. "Today, in many GPs, CBOs, and government bodies work in tandem with each other", she said. While working as an Internal Mentor in Pub Chaiduar of Biswanath district, Numi Bora realized that none of the women were aware of the government benefits meant for weavers. She helped weavers secure loans at subsidized rates by providing information about different government schemes available for women. A proud Numi said, "Now they (women weavers) work on weaving machines that help them produce large quantities of fabric. Apart from the local market consumption, they also get to sell the woven fabric at various outside marketplaces. Women are now aware that they can approach the government when they need help in terms of marketing their produce. Being a weaver myself, it makes me extremely happy to see women run successful weaving enterprises."

Rina Karketta
(Internal Mentor, Raha block, Nagaon)
with residents in Katoni Gaon

Integration of VPRP into GPDP

As a result of extensive community mobilization and sensitization through combined efforts by the CBO federations, LRG members, Internal Mentors, and NRO team, communities from both blocks actively participated in VPRP creation.

The Plan was successfully integrated into GPDP. Many demands were sanctioned and implemented including setting up of cycle stand in schools, installation of solar streetlights, construction of waiting sheds, temple walls, VO office within the premise of Panchayats, pavement of roads, creation of new ponds, de-siltation of old ones, and tree plantation drives.

Such positive outcomes gave a boost to people actively involved in the program including the LRG members and Internal Mentors. When the demands are met, it not only gives confidence to the community in general but also boosts the self-esteem of the women and the poor.

The role played by the empowered and federated community institutions is worth mentioning. VOCC created during this phase was now in charge of engaging with VOs and PRI officials. GPDP of 2019 was a complete community involved endeavour with minimal participation of external mentors.

Newly paved road, cycle stand and street light in Katoni Gaon

STATUS OF VPRP

The recent VPRP exercise carried out in 78 GPs and 3 VDCs in the year 2019 for 2020-21 witnessed demands cutting across all major components. In Assam, the focus was majorly on two components - Public Goods, Services & Resource Development Plan (PGSnRDP) (formerly known as Basic Infrastructure and Resource Development Plan (BIRD)) and Social Development Plan (SDP). These plans were integrated under two major components such as Gram Panchayat's Annual Action Plan (AAP) and long-term 5-year plan.

Under PGSnRDP, with a large portion of the area under flood zone, the focus was conservation and optimum usage of water such as river bund development. Women related development activities such as VO building, SHG activities, and livelihood expansion programmes such as weaving centres, were given focus too. These were relatively new set of demands compared to the earlier VPRPs. Another major component being the Social development plan which focused largely on the school dropout and re-enablement, and literacy campaign.

A major thrust was also given to rural electrification where 1964 plans were integrated out of 3780 demands. Similarly, health, sanitation and drinking water also witnessed an integration of 2060 plans out of 3911 demands. A majority of demands related to agriculture and allied services such as minor irrigation, water management, and watershed development were integrated. A total of 1255 demands were integrated against a demand of 2639 plans, under this category. Under Women and Child development, 577 plans were accommodated. Other infrastructure demands such as roads, culverts, bridges, ferries, waterways, and other means of communication saw incorporation of 2317 plans against the demand of 3988 plans. In terms of natural resources and environment, a considerable amount of focus was given on land improvement, soil conservation, social forestry, and maintenance of community assets. A good number of plans under these categories were also integrated.

Under the Social Development Plan (SDP), the re-enrolment of school dropouts benefiting students, education department, VOs, and VDCs were incorporated in almost 13 GPs and 3 VDCs. Similarly, Female Adult Literacy campaign benefiting anganwadis and schools was given priority to integrate in 36 GPs and 3 VDCs. Campaign on plastic-free Panchayats benefiting the residents of GPs, bazaar committee, and agriculture department has also been given priority with 17 GPs along with 3 VDCs integrating such demands.

Overall, Phase 2 locations in Assam came together to plan a holistic development plan that focused on individual and community needs such as infrastructure, sustainable asset creation for natural resource-based livelihood activities, and education.

Conclusion - Phase 2

Role Enhancement

Leadership development was a significant outcome in Phase 2 of the project. The program significantly increased the human capital and network in rural communities. This was best illustrated by Sharmila who has transformed from being a VO member to an LRG member and later to an Internal Mentor. As a high-spirited individual, she was always looking for a platform to interact with PRI and line department officials. However, with limited scope and opportunity, her abilities and skills were seldom used. Under such a scenario, the convergence project opened the windows of her life's ambition. She got selected as an LRG member and quickly took the responsibility of discharging her responsibilities. Her keenness and quick learning skills helped her pick up skills which were required to become an Internal Mentor. While sharing about her experiences Sharmila said, "In my journey as an LRG member, I have acquired the knowledge and skills to lead the SHG women to get their demands fulfilled. Today, I am confident that along with the office bearers of VOCC, we could easily interact with the Panchayat and line departments and do wonders."

With regard to this Chandan Borbora said, "After the Mentors left, LRG members filled that space very aptly as they were the ones who were actively involved in the field level mobilization during the project phase. I can recollect that SHGs, guided by the LRG members played a huge role in the social inclusion initiative. A long pending information of about 20% households left out of SRLM SHG network were identified and included."

Women who were part of this project reported an improved self-esteem, enhanced confidence, and increased aspirations. Junti Hazarika said, "The PRI-CBO Convergence project has empowered 'Baido' (women) in our villages and today, SHG members are aware of their entitlements and have started availing the same. There is an increased participation of women in Gram Sabha meetings. They show a keen interest in participatory planning process. This project has highlighted the importance and need of political participation and is helping in the overall development of Panchayat!"

After the withdrawal of Kudumbashree NRO from Phase 2 project locations, LRG members were attached with Social Mobilization - Institution Building - Capacity Building (SM-IB-CB) vertical of SRLM, and an honorarium is paid on a monthly basis. Though the project started with an emphasis on volunteerism with no monetary incentive for the first three months, the importance of LRG members was recognized and incentivized towards the closure. Chandan Borbora added that an honorarium is an important aspect for helping the community cadre in sustaining the convergence project in the long run.

SCALE-UP – PHASE 3

The project was further expanded to 19 blocks in ten districts in the third phase later in 2019. In this phase, Kudumbashree NRO had a chance to work with both GPs and Village Development Councils (VDCs) (Karbi Anglong district -2 VDCs and West Karbi Anglong district - 1 VDC) since the project locations had a mix of both plains and hilly tribal areas (6th Schedule areas). The Karbi Anglong district has a hilly terrain surrounded by forests, with multiethnic tribal communities speaking many languages.

While the Pilot phase and Phase 2 project locations had three-tier GP system of local governance, Karbi Anglong had two-tier VDCs under the Autonomous Councils which were different in terms of structure and functioning. With such changes in demographics and local systems of governance, the strategies to initiate the PRI-CBO Convergence project also had to evolve over the initial days. It was decided that conscious efforts had to be made for interacting with line departments, VDCs, and CBOs to make them understand and align with the convergence project. Initial efforts focused in orientation on the service delivery of essential departments including education, health, and agriculture. An early activity with the local community was the re-enrollment of the school dropouts in Karbi Anglong under the guidance of Mentors and LRG members. This created a momentum of participatory action among the SHGs. This initial experience with the tribal communities was an encouraging and enriching one. Overall, in this phase, carefully designed interventions were employed to address social issues and delivery of public goods & services so that the community cadre including Internal Mentors, LRG members, VOCC members and coordinators got exposed to various local institutions, and their operations.

Name of the districts	No. of blocks	No. of GPs/ VDCs	No of Professionals	No of Mentors
Goalpara	2	8	1	1
Naogaon	3	15		1
Hojai	1	5	1	1
Biswanath	2	10	1	1
Karbi Anglong	2	2 VDCs	1	1
West Karbi	1	1 VDC		1
Jorhat	2	10	1	1
Majuli	1	5		1
Dhemaji	2	10	1	1
Tinsukia	3	15	1	1

Scale-Up (Phase 3) Profile

Unique Experiences

Under this setting, Mentors and Internal Mentors had to deal with a challenging environment having a mix of ethnicity, languages, customs, and culture. Mafida Begum (Internal Mentor, Lumbajong Block, Karbi Anglong) though a native resident from Assam recollected that even for her, coping up with the Karbi way of life was difficult initially. "When I started working with people, I didn't know what to say. I learned by talking and observing others. Now I work with people from various ethnic groups. I don't understand much, but I can make sense of what they say", she said.

Mafida Begum (Internal Mentor, Lumbajong Block, Karbi Anglong) with residents of Karbi Anglong

Jonathan gave a political perspective of the location and highlighted that Karbi population are traditional and conservative. "They usually don't subscribe to the modern systems. For instance, if a piece of land is grabbed and occupied by an outsider, it is a matter of huge concern for them, but they are least concerned about documentation of land ownership rights", he said. The villages in this district retain the kingship system with no administrative power entrusted on them. Yet the communities want them to get involved and decide on the community plans and decisions. In this context, GP or VDC system is mostly for namesake with limited involvement or power in core decision making processes.

Set in this backdrop, their participation in the convergence project was a tough task as the SHG women and villagers didn't find a lot of significance for VDC. Every plan had to be approved by MACs. MACs, on the other hand, have biases based on vote bank and accordingly their priorities would find its way in the implementation of development initiatives.

Internal Mentor Chitramani Bora conducted many sessions to mobilize women to participate in Gram Sabhas. She said, "Women are not aware of the importance of political participation. The LRG members had to make sure that SHG members are made aware of its importance".

Major Outcomes of Phase 3

• Awakening of Political Consciousness

Simi Bora (Internal Mentor, Titabor block, Jorhat) is proud to work for the PRI-CBO Convergence project despite staying away from family. "I miss my daughter. But I am also very happy to see Assam develop. My village is developed now. I wish to see the same change in other parts of Assam too." From a stage of no political consciousness in people in general and women in particular, there was a gradual spread of awareness through the convergence project. The community got to know their local political leaders and duties to be performed by them. This paved the way to make the local leaders and government institutions more accountable and responsible for working towards holistic development of the villages. In this regard, Chandan Borbora said "They (the women SHGs) are now an empowered community and the idea of demanding their rights and entitlements have been imbibed in them very strongly. Thanks to the ribbon exercise as it was vital in making them aware of their entitlements." Similarly, Chitramani Bora said,"Women were not aware of the importance of political participation. LRG members made sure that SHG members are made aware of its importance." Apart from visiting homes and educating women about their rights, Chitramani also conducted sessions to mobilize women to participate in Gram Sabhas.

"I miss my daughter. But I am also very happy to see Assam develop. My village is developed now. I wish to see the same change in other parts of Assam too."
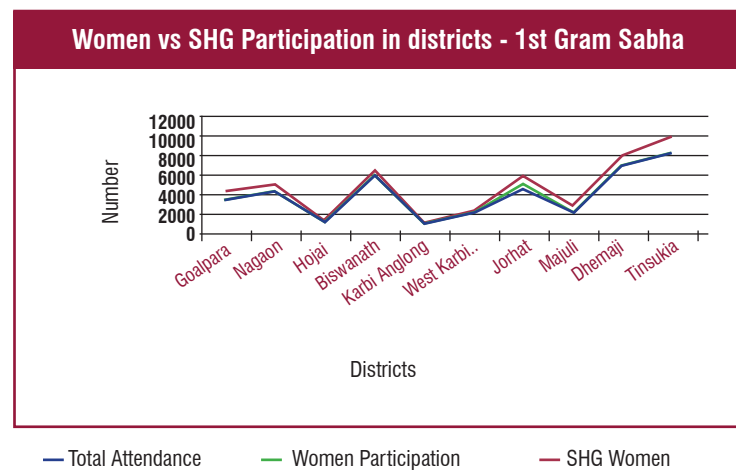

Simi Bora
Internal Mentor, Titabor block, Jorhat

Below graphs are an indication of Political consciousness among community from Phase-3 locations

Total Gram Sabhas in districts

— Total Gram Sabhas in Different Districts
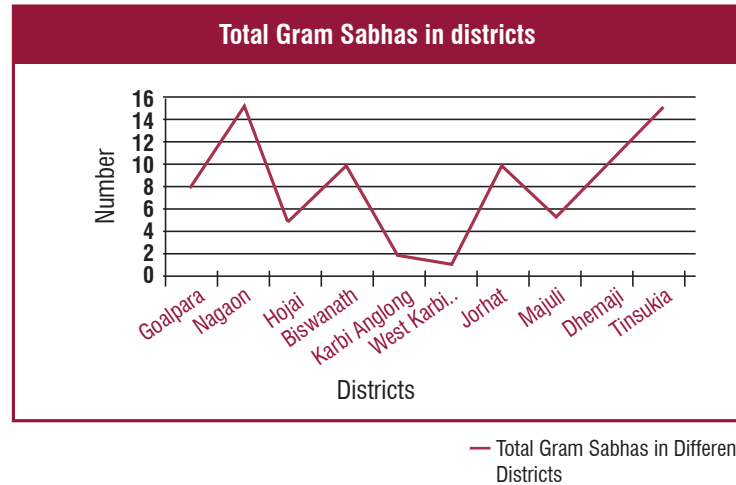
WHAT THE GRAPH INDICATE

- Goalpara – 4322 people participated from 8 GPs
- Nagaon - 4984 people participated from 15 GPs
- Hojai - 1314 people participated from 5 GPs
- Biswanath - 6439 people participated from 10 GPs
- Karbi Anglong - 965 people participated from 2 GPs
- Karbi West - 2283 people participated from 1 GP
- Jorhat - 5901 people participated from 10 GPs
- Majuli- 2825 people participated from 5 GPs
- Dhemaji- 8017 people participated from 10 GPs
- Tinsukia - 9972 people participated from 15 GPs

Women vs SHG Participation in districts - 1st Gram Sabha

— Total Attendance   — Women Participation   — SHG Women

WHAT THE GRAPH INDICATE

- Women participation in the Gram Sabhas saw an overwhelming response among all the districts.

Re-enrollment of school dropouts

In coordination with VOs, NGOs working on education, and VDC members, school dropouts were re-enrolled in Karbi Anglong. Though education was given priority in the communities, children struggled to find time to study due to household chores. Therefore, enrollment alone was not the only focus of the program. There was a continuous need to work with local NGOs, child helplines, and VDCs to work with children and enhance their skill sets. To address the challenge of kids travelling from faraway places like Menmejir RSTC and Boithalangsu RSTC to reach school, a hostel was built in the school. Hiranwala Sangma (VO Secretary, Kenchi, Karbi Anglong) spoke about these initiatives in detail. In one of their meetings with the community, demand for the enrollment came from parents themselves and the list of interested students was prepared. Schools were then approached, and the admission fee was born by the VO. Similarly, books and uniforms were sponsored by few teachers. "Currently those re-enrolled students are regularly attending classes", she said. Overall, the project witnessed the re-enrollment of 13 students in Karbi Anglong and 17 students in the West Karbi Anglong district.

Re-enrolled students with LRG, CBO Members, and Teachers, Jalpara, Karbi Anglong

Literary Classes

Illiteracy was widespread among women which also made them hesitate to participate and speak in meetings. This also held back many women from other activities of SHGs like managing savings, working with banks – cash deposit and withdrawal etc., read and analyze numbers. To address these challenges, the convergence project in partnership with school teachers and LRG members conducted basic literacy classes for SHGs on daily basis.

An adult Literacy session in progress, Karbi Anglong

Rapport Building with Community

The community were passive stakeholders in VDC activities with minimum role in decision making processes and monetary affairs of the village. Despite the communities having strict reservations towards the PRI system, Mentors managed to build a smooth relationship with them. Internal Mentors rapport with SHGs enabled them to prepare GPDP in the name of VDCDP which was uploaded in the same format as GPDP. "Women are not aware of the importance of political participation. The LRG members had to make sure that SHG members are made aware of its importance", recollected Chitramani Bora of her experience of working with the community. Internal Mentors like her went from house to house educating women about their rights and mobilize them to participate in Gram Sabhas. Since there is no single platform like that of a Panchayat body in this district, Internal Mentors had to make sure all problems are brought to the notice of VDCs and then taken up to the respective government departments, with active participation of the community. Mafida Begum recollected how she would engage the community in interactive sessions and help them map the resources to identify problems in the village. "I come from a minority community. I know the difficulties these women go through when they have to come out and work. When I work with different communities, I am well aware of their cultural background. I try to understand their perspective to identify the shortcomings. Only then I can motivate them", recalled Mafida.

Trust building

Relentless efforts are underway to ease the tensions between MACs and CEM. With regular discussion and support provided by ASRLM an institutional platform has to be created

where VOs, MACs, and CEM come together to discuss and decide on development priorities. The experience of ASRLM in getting a CLF building constructed with the money sanctioned by CEM gave impetus to bring in more of such initiatives through the convergence project. To build trust over the new institutional setup, Mentors are engaged in continuous discussions to raise more authorized capital from: Hill Area Development Fund Programme (HADP), MLA development fund, Tribal sub plan, and MP LAD (Member of Parliament Local Area Development) Fund.

PRI-CBO CONVERGENCE PROJECT IN ASSAM - A FIVE YEAR ENCOURAGING JOURNEY

As the project expanded, the roles played by different actors also evolved. Experiences gained during Phase 2 gave confidence to the project team and motivated them to innovate new techniques to apply in new geographic areas.

Abhijeet Deka – (Block Project Manager (BPM), Dhekiajuli block, Sonitpur) said, "Now LRG members can become a Community Resource Person (CRP) of SRLM too and selection from LRG pool has started. We have already recruited 5 to 6 people from that pool. We are asking them to participate in the regular VO/CLF/SHG meetings and in the GPDP activities. LRG is an important resource to retain within the community."
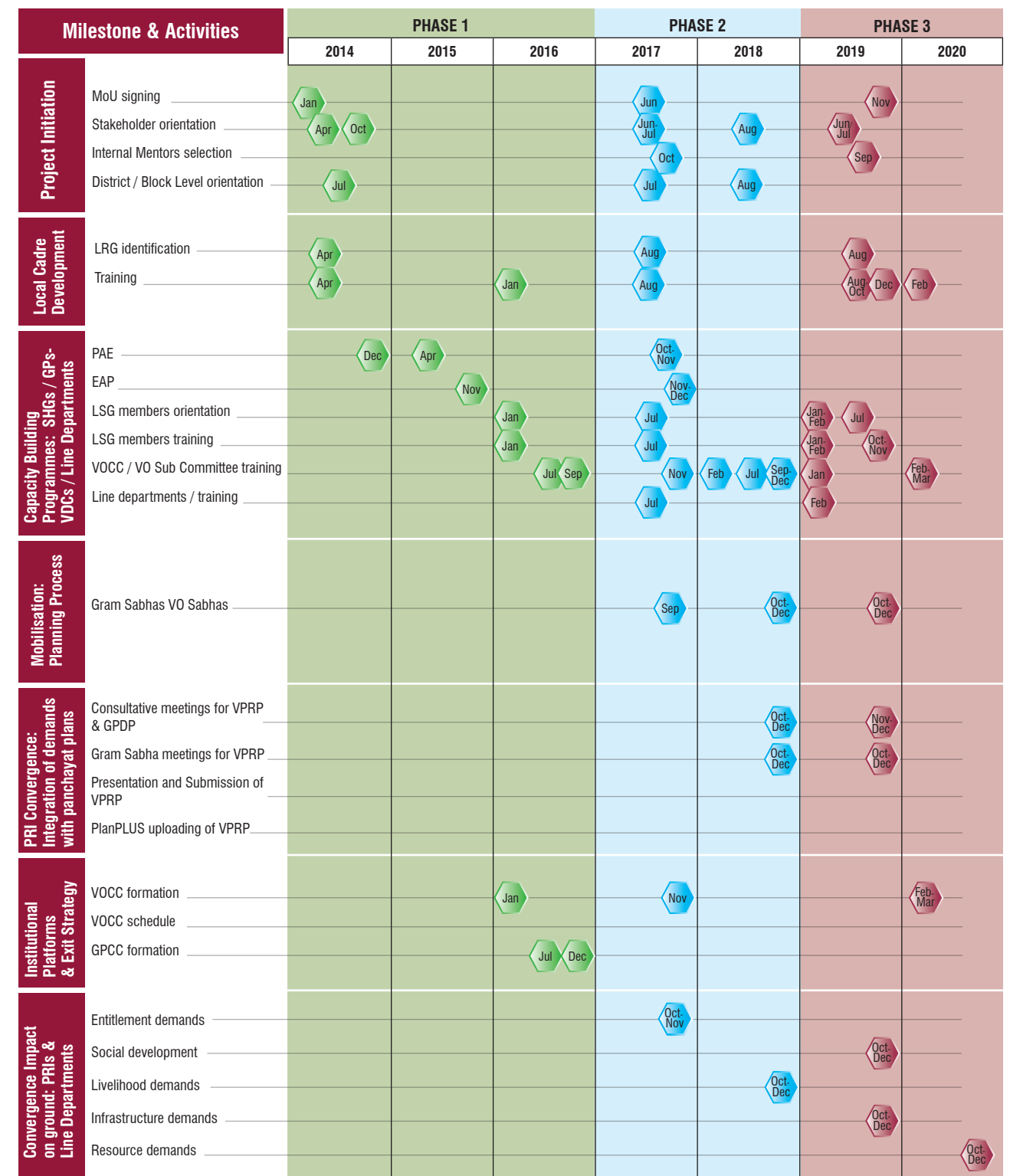

Abhijeet Deka
Block Project Manager (BPM),
Dhekiajuli block, Sonitpur

LEARNING

The success of the convergence project in Assam for more than 5 years now has provided ample space and scope to foresee challenges related to several areas. The need for nurturing volunteerism in order to sustain the VOCC is an area for immediate concern. At the same time, efforts to engage the Panchayat officials continuously should be done simultaneously. The PRI-CBO Convergence project has also led to the understanding of the importance of digitizing data related to nearly 12000 SHGs. It was an exponential growth from just around a hundred SHGs in the initial days to thousands at the end of the five-year intervention. Going forward it will be important to manage data coming from each group with good tools, and the use of technology in data management could fetch effective results.

Overall, the PRI-CBO Convergence project has become a vehicle for learning and triggering systemic and lasting changes in rural pockets of Assam. A critical aspect of the approach followed by them was building the capacity of local stakeholders – notably organisations of poor rural women to actively participate in local self-governance. The significant progress and the encouraging prospects achieved are due to a number of factors including the personal commitment of Mentors, LRG members, Internal Mentors, the engagement of government staff, and the active participation of community in development issues. The project has also been useful in identifying components which are easily replicable and the ones which need to be altered to suit different project locations. On a whole, the project managed to achieve; establishing smooth and cordial relationship between institutions, tracking entitlements at SHG level, mobilization of women outside SHGs, increasing community participation, and making the new governance system more sustainable and inclusive.

TIMELINE OF PRI-CBO CONVERGENCE PROJECT IN ASSAM

Milestone & Activities		PHASE 1			PHASE 2		PHASE 3	
		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Project Initiation	MoU signing	Jan			Jun		Nov	
	Stakeholder orientation	Apr, Oct			Jun, Jul	Aug	Jun, Jul	
	Internal Mentors selection				Oct		Sep	
	District / Block Level orientation	Jul			Jul	Aug		
Local Cadre Development	LRG identification	Apr			Aug		Aug	
	Training	Apr		Jan	Aug		Aug, Oct, Dec	Feb
Capacity Building Programmes: SHGs / GPs-VDCs / Line Departments	PAE		Dec	Apr	Oct, Nov			
	EAP		Nov		Nov, Dec			
	LSG members orientation			Jan	Jul		Jan, Feb, Jul	
	LSG members training			Jan	Jul		Jan, Feb, Oct, Nov	
	VOCC / VO Sub Committee training			Jul, Sep	Nov	Feb, Jul, Sep, Dec	Jan	Feb, Mar
	Line departments / training				Jul		Feb	
Mobilisation: Planning Process	Gram Sabhas VO Sabhas				Sep	Oct, Dec	Oct, Dec	
PRI Convergence: Integration of demands with panchayat plans	Consultative meetings for VPRP & GPDP					Oct, Dec	Nov, Dec	
	Gram Sabha meetings for VPRP					Oct, Dec	Oct, Dec	
	Presentation and Submission of VPRP							
	PlanPLUS uploading of VPRP							
Institutional Platforms & Exit Strategy	VOCC formation			Jan	Nov			Feb, Mar
	VOCC schedule							
	GPCC formation			Jul, Dec				
Convergence Impact on ground: PRIs & Line Departments	Entitlement demands				Oct, Nov			
	Social development						Oct, Dec	
	Livelihood demands					Oct, Dec		
	Infrastructure demands						Oct, Dec	
	Resource demands							Oct, Dec

A woman engaged in a livelihood activity, Tripura

TRIPURA

Tripura is a small landlocked state located in the Eastern part of India. It shares its border with Bangladesh in the North, South, and West & the Indian states – Mizoram and Assam on the East. The social composition of the population of Tripura is diverse with around one-third of the population belonging to the Scheduled Tribes (STs). As per the 2011 census, indigenous tribes of the state comprise of 19 communities which constitute 31.05% of the state's population. Agriculture[12] is the mainstay of Tripura. Due to the hilly terrain of the state, many tribal people are dependent on Jhum[13] cultivation. Industrial development is limited to tourism, handicrafts, and handloom.

S.No.	Item	Detail
1	Population (2011 Census)	36.74 lakh
2	Density of population	350 per sq km
3	No .of Districts	8- Dhalai, Gomati, Khowai, North Tripura, Sepahijala, South Tripura, Unakoti and West Tripura
4	Area	10,486 Sq Km
5	Literacy	87.22%
6	Occupation	Agriculture, Horticulture, and Floriculture

Source: Directorate of Information Technology, Government of Tripura, 2020

[12] 64% of total employment in the state is engaged in Agriculture. A wide variety of Horticultural / Plantation Crops are produced in Tripura like Pineapple, Orange, Cashew nut, Jackfruit, Coconut, Tea, Rubber, Forest Plantations (www.tripura.gov.in).
[13] It is a practice of cultivation where a piece of forest land is cleared and then the crop is cultivated. The clearing of land is done by burning the trees so that soil is rich in potash and other minerals to sustain the crop.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Tripura has a rich political history. The state was ruled by 185 kings before it merged with the Indian Union in October 1949. It gained full statehood in January 1972 as per the North-East Area (Reorganisation) Act, 1971. With the elections for local bodies in 1978, decentralization of power found its way within the state. Following the 73rd Amendment, three-tiered Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) were constituted in Tripura. Alongside, a movement was brewing to safeguard the interests of the diverse tribal communities who felt threatened by the increasing influx of non-tribal groups in the state. Thus, the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) was established in 1979 in order to protect and ensure higher autonomy for the tribal communities. (Directorate of Information Technology, Tripura, 2020).

Subsequently, in 1984, the special provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution were extended to the tribal areas in the state of Tripura. Thus, there exist two institutions—

Women in traditional attire, Dumburnagar R.D Block, Dhalai

Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) and Village Council (VC) working towards enhancing local self-government. The table below gives details of the decentralization set up in the state:

S.No	Item	Details
1	Subdivisions	23
2	Rural development blocks	58
3	Gram Panchayats + Village Councils	591
4	Jilla Parishads	8
5	Nagar Panchayats	9
6	Municipal Councils	10
7	Municipal Corporation	1

Source: www.tripura.gov.in

Though PRIs have undergone several phases of decentralization prior to the 73rd Amendment, participation of women in these local governance processes has remained limited. The Act provides scope for their active political participation (50% reservation in Panchayat elections). This has brought out a positive change with respect to the role of women in society. There aren't outright objections to women coming out in public domain and taking part in politics. However, studies reveal that the traditional role (of being a mother, homemaker) assigned to them has restricted their effective participation in local development (Ghosh, 2008).

One of the ways strategized by Government of Tripura to ensure women's participation leading to their empowerment was to establish the Tripura Rural Livelihood Mission (TRLM). The Mission aims to attain social and economic empowerment of rural poor and women through the formation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) (Directorate of Information Technology, Government of Tripura, 2020).

ROLE OF SELF-HELP GROUPS

Over the years the demography in Tripura has changed significantly. Tribal communities have lost their lands to non-tribal groups from outside the state, particularly migrants and refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan and then Bangladesh. Losing access to land and resources, the economic conditions of the tribal communities worsened over time. The change in demographic composition triggered wide-ranging changes in the economy, culture, and social organisation of the tribal people. For instance, the nature of Jhum cultivation, widely practiced by the tribal people, changed and the period of Jhum cycle reduced considerably owing to reduced availability of land for cultivation. This, in turn, affected productivity and thus, economic security of the people who were dependent on it. On the other hand, the plight of the non-tribal groups, mostly Bengalis, was impoverished and poverty levels were high. In this backdrop, formation of SHGs acquired significance. Though SHGs formation started in 1999 the real SHG movement started around 2003-04 (Datta, 2016). Presently there are around 15,661 SHGs in Tripura promoted under National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) (Ministry of Rural Development, 2020). The SHGs provided access to financial linkages through bank accounts and small microcredit loans at a lower interest rate. The groups provided substantial support to women to address their immediate financial requirements.

Though the activities undertaken by SHGs contributed in access to finance and in practicing livelihood activities leading to economic gains, their role in society remained low. Our informal discussions with the local people in the initial days of field work revealed that most of the SHGs are confined to monotonous activities of income generation. The regularity of SHG was evident from the documentation available about their weekly meetings, savings from each member, internal lending rotation, recoveries of loan, and maintenance of proper books of accounts. They were not engaged in many activities concerning village development. Furthermore, women also lacked confidence in voicing their opinions outside their SHG network.

In light of the above, substantial efforts are being made by the state to strengthen rural self-governance and livelihood base for the poor, especially women. To effectively address the issues of poverty alleviation, women empowerment, and holistic rural development, there is a need to strengthen the existing grassroots institutions and create synergy among them to work together. The convergence of different Community Based Organisations (CBOs) with Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) will enable better planning and effective functioning of grassroots level institutions. Set in this backdrop, the PRI-CBO Convergence project was conceived and implemented in 2 blocks of Gomati district and was later scaled up to 12 blocks across South Tripura, Gomati, and Dhalai districts.

Phases	Name of Districts	No.of Blocks	No.of GPs/VDC/VC	No.of SHGs	No.of LRG members	No.of Mentors	No. Of Internal Mentors
Pilot Phase	Gomati	2	52 GP/VCs	899	228	12	-
Scale - up Phase	Gomati, Dhalai, South Tripura	4	82 GP/VCs	2495	395	4	33
	Dhalai	4	100 GP/VCs	3075	525	4	32
	South Tripura	4	90 GP/VCs	2450	391	4	22

Profile of PRI-CBO Convergence Project 2016 – 2020

West Pilak GP, South Tripura

LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT WHAT THE ACT SAYS

In Tripura, there exist two types of legal frameworks for local self-government:

1. Panchayati Raj Institutions (Covered under Parts IX & IX A of the Constitution) &

2. Sixth Schedule (Areas with significant population of Scheduled Tribes, which are governed by the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution)

PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS (PRIs)

PRIs are established through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, under the 11th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Tripura Panchayats Act, 1993, was enacted by the Tripura Legislative Assembly, to bring in conformity with the purpose, substance, and direction of this Act, which came into force on 24th April 1993. The Act is similar to the PRI laws of other states, outlaying a three-tiered institutional structure, consisting of Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the intermediary (Block) level, and Zilla Parishad at the District level.

Some of the major functions transferred to the PRI institutions in Tripura are listed below:

1. School Education
2. Social Welfare & Social Education
3. Social Welfare
4. Water Resource Department
5. RD (Panchayat) Department
6. Pensions

Gram Panchayats(GPs) being the lowest level of the grassroots local self-governance system is entrusted with 12 obligatory duties, 26 other duties and 25 discretionary duties. GP is headed by Pradhan and the Up-Pradhan. These two members are responsible for the general administration and finance at Gram Panchayat level. Pradhan and Up-Pradhan are selected from a pool of elected ward members (who cannot be more than 15 in number) in the GP's first meeting.

Gram Sabha (GS) consists of all voters of Gram Panchayat area. It shall be the responsibility of the Pradhan to convene the meeting of the Gram Sabha or the Gram Sansad as the case maybe. Every meeting of the Gram Sabha shall be presided over by the Pradhan and in his/her absence by the Upa Pradhan (with prior official approval from Gram Panchayat) with a quorum of 1/5th of the voters of the Gram Sansad. Below the Gram Sabha, there is Gram-Sansad (Ward Sabha) whose main function is the selection of beneficiaries and selection of sites of the works to be done. GP makes plans for the village based on the active participation of people through Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha. Every GP shall hold at least one Gram Sabha in a year.

The Panchayat Samiti (PS) comprises of directly elected members from territorial constituencies and the Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) and the Pradhans of GPs within the block. There shall be a minimum of nine members and a maximum of 15. The Chairman and the Vice-Chairman is elected by its members in the first meeting. Every PS shall hold a meeting in its office at least once in two months. The primary functions include: the preparation of an annual plan by considering the GPs (in the Samiti area), plan annual budget, and submitting it to Zilla Parishad after consolidation.

Zilla Parishad (ZP) has its members comprised of directly elected members from territorial constituencies in the district, MLAs, and the Chairman of all PSs within the district. The Sabhadhipati (one of the directly elected members) and Sahakar Sabhadhipati of the ZP are elected by its members in the first meeting. Every ZP shall hold a meeting in its office at least once every three months. The District Magistrate (DM) or ADM attend meetings and participate in deliberations. The primary functions of ZP include all the subjects concerning GPs and PSs.

A government constituted planning committee (DPC) in every district is to consolidate the plans prepared by ZP, the GPs, the PSs, Notified Area Authorities (NAA), Municipal authorities (MA) and any other local authorities in the district and to prepare a draft development plan for the district as a whole. The CEO of ZP is the Secretary of the DPC; a Minister of cabinet rank nominated by the Chief Minister is the Committee Head. The primary functions of ZP include: the matters of common interest of ZP, PS, GP, NAA, MA, and other local authorities – in the matter of sharing water, physical & natural resources,

integrated development of infrastructure, and environmental conservation.

PRIs receives fund from the following sources –

a) Contributions from the central and state govern ments, including funds for the implementation of Central and State sponsored schemes.
b) Contributions from the Zilla Parishad or Panchayat Samiti to the GP.

c) Loans or grants by governments or any other organization.

d) Taxes, duties, or any such amount collected by the Gram Panchayat within its authority.

SIXTH SCHEDULE PROVISIONS

TTAADC was first constituted under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India, and the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council Bill, 1979 was passed by the Tripura Legislative Assembly on March 23, 1979. The Autonomous District Council was constituted through a vote by secret ballot on January 15, 1982, under the 7th Schedule of the Constitution. Subsequently, with the objective of entrusting more responsibility and to give more power to the TTAADC, provisions of the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India were extended to Tripura from 1st April 1985 by the 49th Amendment of the Constitution. Within the powers conferred by the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District - Administration Rules, 1988 was made with the approval of the Governor of Tripura. Two-thirds of the geographical area and one-third of the population of Tripura falls under Sixth Schedule areas, administered by the single-tier Village Committees (VCs) of TTAADC.

TTAADC (alternatively known as ADC or Autonomous District Council), consists of 28 elected members and 2 nominated members and headed by its Chairman who is chosen by theelected members. Executive functions are managed by the Chief Executive Member, who is supported by 9 executive members. The TTAADC has five Zonal offices, 40 Sub-Zonal offices (Block Advisory Committees), and 527 elected Village Committees.

Following this, the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District (Establishment of Village Committee) Act 1994 was passed by the TTAADC, from where VCs derive their power and responsibilities. The Executive committee of TTAADC has enforced it through a Gazette notification in December 2005. Post notification, Village Committee - Administration Rules, 2006 was made by the Executive Committee, based on which the VC discharges its functions. The Village Committeeisthesingle tierof local self-government in ADC areas. Village Committees derive their power and responsibilities from the TTAADC (Establishment of Village Committee) Act, 1994 and discharge their functions according to the provisions of TTAADC Village (Administration) Rules, 2005.

The VC consists of 7 to 11 elected members, as prescribed on the reference to the population of the VC determined on the basis of the register of residents of the village. There is reservation for ST and Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the VCs proportionate to their respective 'population of the area'. One third of the members of the VC are reserved for women on rotation basis. VC meets once in a month. Its primary functions include - Health care, Water, Hygiene and Sanitation, Infrastructure development, Social development activities, Education, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, and Forestry.

Similar to the Gram Sabha in PRIs, the VC has to identify and constitute such number of Village Sansads within the VC area as may be convenient. Immediately after the constitution of Village Sansad, the VC shall give intimation in detail to the Zonal Development Officer (ZDO), who is responsible for multiple VCs in an area. Every VC shall hold within the local limits of the Village at least one meeting for the Village Sabha in a year.

The TTAADC covers about a third of the total population and two thirds of the total area, as well as about 85 of the Tribal Sub-plan (TSP) areas. The peculiarity of the TTAADC is that all the villages under it are not geographically contiguous. TTAADC is under the administrative control of the Governor. The Sixth Schedule endows TTAADC with legislative, judicial, executive, and financial powers, as listed below:

Administrative

1. Allotment, occupation, and use of land other than reserved forests; Management of forests outside reserved forest area; use of canal and Cherra (stream) water for agriculture; Jhum

cultivation; Public health and sanitation; Village Committee or council etc.

2. To establish or manage Primary schools, Dispensaries, Markets, Cattle pounds, Fisheries, Ferries, Roads, Road transport, and waterways.

3. State Government may entrust functions relating to agriculture, animal resource development, community projects, co-operative societies, social welfare, village planning, fisheries, plantations, and so on.

Legal

1. Framing laws in the following matters with the approval of Governor: in heritance of property of scheduled tribes, marriage and divorce where any party belongs to a scheduled tribe, social customs of scheduled tribes.

2. Regulation of money lending and trade.

Financial

1. The Council gets a share of Forest royalties and royalties from licensing or lease for the extraction of minerals granted by the State Government.

2. The Council has the powers to levy and collect the taxes

a) for maintenance of schools, dispensaries, or roads,

b) on entry of goods in to markets and tolls on passen gers and goods carried in ferries,

c) on animals, vehicles, and boats etc.

RESOURCES OF THE TTAADC

Apart from collection of its own revenue by the District Council through Trade license, Market auction, Bank Interest, Sale proceeds of Industry, Fishery, ARDD and PWD levy etc., the following share of taxes is placed by the State Government - Professional tax- 25%, Land Revenue- 40%, Agriculture Income Tax- 50%, Forest Revenue- 75%, Motor Vehicle Tax-25%, Gas Royalty - 30%.

LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT–
ON GROUND

HISTORY OF RURAL DECENTRALIZATION

Tripura has a long tradition of local self-government. It existed in the form of village institutions based on tribal customs which took all the important decisions of the community and also resolved disputes among the community members. These institutions were socially legitimate but not truly democratic as women were not allowed to participate in these councils. However, with time, there was a gradual decline in the role of traditional village councils and in 1929 the last king of Tripura, Bir Bikram, initiated an act, which made a considerable departure from the traditional way of governance. Under the act, a number of contiguous villages were grouped together. With the merger of Tripura with India the process further developed. Leaving behind the traditional way of governance, the Government enacted the Tripura Panchayati Raj Act, 1959. With this act, the age-old village council was abolished. Following this, the entire structure of local self-government was changed (Chakraborty, 2018).

The political party in power had a deep influence on the functioning of PRIs in Tripura. Despite several attempts made in the post-independence era to make planning, development, and decision making democratic, Panchayats largely remained in statute books. However, the year 1978 was a watershed movement in the history of rural governance in Tripura as the Left Front government came into power. Territories of villages were reconstituted, elections were conducted through secret ballot, Tripura Block Panchayat Samitis Act was passed, separate Directorate of Panchayats was created, and training programmes were initiated to for capacity building of LSG

members. The strong presence of Communist party in local self-government was evident from such initiatives. In this regard Dr. Jayanta Choudhury (Associate Professor - National Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (NIRD & PR), North Eastern Regional Centre, Guwahati) affirmatively stated that importance of decentralization to local self-governance was given top priority during the left rule. "The emotions and sentiments of the tribals are merely recognized by the governments every time but efforts to address are almost non-existent."

During the Congress rule in 1988, there was a major change in the functioning of PRIs in the state. Block Development Officers (BDOs) were appointed to supervise the functioning of Gram Panchayats. (Athreya, 2006).

In conformity with the purpose, substance, and direction of the Constitution, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, the Tripura Panchayat Act, 1993 came into being. The goal of the Act is to bestow Panchayats with functions and powers which enable them to function as vibrant institutions of local self-government with greater autonomy. However, progress made in this front has been slow and weak. For instance, the previous (2013-2018) government's Gramodaya Mission which aims to recreate agro rural India through comprehensive economic rejuvenation and people's participation also encountered many challenges. The meticulously planned village transformation project was headed by the CM along with four ministers including representation from the Rural Development ministry and four external members from various line departments / think-tanks working on the issues

> "De-centralization is a tough word and no one wants to de-centralize once power comes in."

Dr. Jayanta Choudhury
Associate Professor, NIRD & PR-North Eastern Regional Center, Guwahati

related to the state. These in turn created biases among the people involved as they belonged to different service departments holding different positions. Moreover, this kind of initiative got limited to the consolidation of village issues at the block level. There were no serious discussions and deliberations on the issues of development from the ground level. The approach has remained top-down with little effort made to initiate planning from the grassroots level. In this regard Dr. Jayanta said, "De-centralization is a tough word, and no one wants to de-centralize once power comes in."

INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE AND DEVOLUTION OF POWER

In Tripura, Village Panchayat is known as Gram Panchayat (GP) in the PRI areas and Village Council (VC) in the 6th Schedule areas. The existence of two parallel institutions in the governance of rural areas often leads to friction because of conflict of interests and power struggle between them. Geographically, GP's jurisdiction is smaller than VC's jurisdiction. Yet, the hierarchical structure is the same. Dr. Jayanta said, "To understand in simplicity, VC at Gram level is equiva-

lent to GP; Zonal office at block level under 6th Schedule area maybe looked at as equivalent to Panchayat Samiti in the PRI area and similarly ADC at District in the 6th Schedule area an equivalent to the Zilla Parishad."
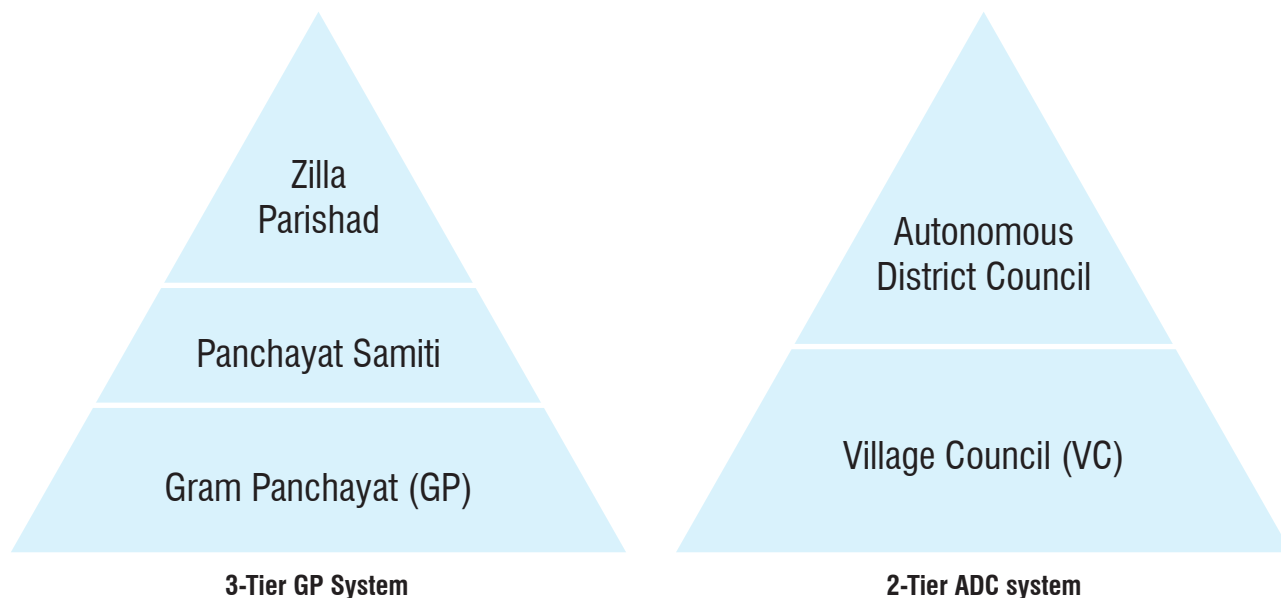
In this institutional setup, ADCs have to manage both the urban and rural local bodies. Each of these bodies has their own roles and responsibilities when it comes to their development agenda. However, due to lack of dedicated attention and support to both bodies, institution building controlled by ADC has further led to the weakening of the whole institution. This has paved way for creation of a new institution called District Planning Committee (DPC) headed by a Minister from Rural Development as the Chairman. Since the administrative arrangement of this committee is not as per the ADC act, its efficacy is at stake. Under this scenario, the state takes control over funds and makes all the vital decisions on behalf of the committee. This according to Dr. Jayanta was a contradiction to the idea behind decentralization which emphasizes on the autonomy of the grassroots institutions.

Though the functioning of ADC structure at ground level looks similar to that of three-tier GP system, the power remains centralized at the state level, and Chief Executive Member (CEM) continues to act as a Minister rather than being an executive officer. Likewise, devolution of function is also similar to that of three-tier GP system. In ADC, rural secretary is equivalent to Panchayat secretary. Financial powers have a similar hierarchy where VC is equivalent to GP.

However, there exists a constant tussle between ADCs and the state as there is confusion in matters of decisions that are to be made.

A village in Tripura

3-Tier GP System

- Zilla Parishad
- Panchayat Samiti
- Gram Panchayat (GP)

2-Tier ADC system

- Autonomous District Council
- Village Council (VC)

The concentration of power with ADC has grown with time. As ADCs are present across all the districts, they continue to take charge of entire rural governance. It was only during the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in the state, the hegemony of ADC's in all matters was highlighted by the communities. Prioritization of plans, schemes, and fund flow was pre-planned and implemented in villages depending on the priorities set by ADCs.

The complex nature of planning process in the state is not free from the control of the central government and state government. Though planning starts from the village level institution, it has to pass through different levels before getting implemented. In addition to the already existing frictions and power struggle between the multiple institutions, the introduction of Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) under the 14th Finance Commission added more complications. With no guidelines to prepare development plans, each village has adopted a different approach to draft its development plan. This in turn also has led to a difference in the priorities given to plans at different levels of bureaucratic setup. Dr. Jayanta explained, "The problem is magnified in Tripura as the existence of special rules and acts for Scheduled areas in hilly regions restricts the uniform functioning of institutions across the state. Under this scenario, the gap between the gram level planning and the district level administration is bound to grow under the GPDP regime. The bottom-up approach with clear

specification of the functions to be performed at each level calls for an 'integration' between these institutions."

In the implementation phase, though there are clear specifications on functions to be performed by each institution at every level, harmony between institutions is often disturbed. Any development agenda can only progress when the concerned institutions work in coordination and cooperation.

Additionally, the state assembly election in 2018 was challenging for the LSG bodies wherein the selection of the people has made a considerable impact on the previously elected bodies. Village Development Committees (VDCs) were formed in many GPs/VCs. The members of this committee were not elected representatives and selected based on the affiliations with the party in power. There was massive violence and GPs / VCs in many regions were disturbed. As many incumbent Panchayat members had to go underground due to the violence, the VDCs gained more influence in the functioning of the local bodies. Elections for both GPs and VCs were planned for 2019. However, due to increasing political pressure members of some GPs resigned. By-elections were held in these GPs. In VCs however, no byelections were held even though members resigned. Meanwhile, in GPs where no members resigned, VDCs continued to exercise power bypassing them. Finally, in July 2019, elections for GPs were held. Elections in VCs are yet to take place. In this backdrop, the next step under the PRI-CBO Convergence pro-

ject was to get the new office bearers acquainted. According to Dr. Jayanta, a good amount of effort would also need to go into the capacity building of the new PRI officials, on a continuous basis in order to get the new office bearers acquainted.

FUND ALLOCATION TO INSTITUTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Limited fund allocation, untimely transfer of funds, and lack of awareness among the community regarding budget allocation meant for village developmental activities has been one of the biggest hurdles in making the institutions efficient and effective. Centre, state, and other development agencies including District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), Indo-German Development Corporation (IGDC), and Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) are sources of funds for institutions of local self-government in Tripura. However, either due to delay in the transfer of funds or its unutilization due to lack of awareness, the impact of various development initiatives has been lagging behind. Dr. Jayanta mentioned that there was funding for GPDP from the 14th Finance commission which was supposed to be utilized by both VCs and GPs but very few VCs received any such funds. However, the FFC fund received by a few VCs has not been utilized in many such areas. On the contrary, some of the other states in the NE region where there is no established three-tier system, funds are being pooled from various sources for the purpose of GPDP participation. NIRD, an institution responsible for capacity building of local self-governments also got funds for capacity building projects meant for GPDP. Jayanta said such facts highlighted the need to make grassroots institutions more participative and informed in nature so that the funds are effectively utilized for the cause of development. In Tripura, 30% of the money from the budget is allotted to VCs as part of Village Development fund, which are entrusted to prioritise plans and accordingly allocate fund for each work. In reality, VCs often ran out of money due to untimely disbursement of funds leading to delay in implementation of developmental work. In this regard, Mr. Shirshendu Debbarma (BDO, Dumburnagar) stressed that the flow of fund in VCs was minimum when compared to GPs in the block. Also, this fund was insufficient to meet even 40% of material costs incurred under the MGNREGA scheme. No funds were received from 14th Finance Commission (FC) in the Dumburnagar block. However, Mr. Debbarma is hopeful that the funds will be received from the 15th FC as the deliberations are underway.

"Funds in VCs is very minimum compared to GPs. It is insufficient to meet even 40% material costs incurred under MGNREGA."

Shirshendu Debbarma
Block Development Officer (BDO), Dumburnagar Block

POLICY INTERVENTIONS FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Policy intervention is a requisite to bring progressive and enduring change. It also provides stability for formal institutions to function both effectively and efficiently. Though the policies and programmes undergo changes in terms of names, structure, and reach, few of them were continued throughout as it gained prominence within the community. For instance, the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) of 2005, is now called Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), has been a successful programme towards creating 100% Open Defecation Free (ODF) villages. Also, for mobilizing women for improving their economic and social status many government schemes have promoted the concept of SHGs. With time, different governments have promoted and re-launched improved versions of the schemes. In Tripura, two different programmes were envisioned to promote institutions of women under North East Rural Livelihood Project (NERLP) and NRLM. With the completion of NERLP in 2019, TRLM absorbed the institutions of NERLP under its ambit. Though the merger took some time

for seamless integration, the programme started witnessing positive outcomes.

Although many schemes and programmes are implemented for promotion of local development, there still exists a gap in integrating community participation in policy design for strengthening participatory democracy. Despite few challenges, one aspect which has remained constant is governments in power have always been supportive of various programs under ADCs and other development initiatives undertaken by international development agencies.

The complex institutional setup coupled with the challenges in coordination between them while dispensing their responsibilities have been the biggest step to take forward in Tripura's local governance structure. Though the progressive reforms brought by the various governments contributed significantly in the earlier phases of decentralization, notable impact of their initiatives needs to be speeded up. While decent devolution of powers happened in the past, there is an urgent need to invest in Panchayats and the officials in terms of capability development. There are efforts already been in place to shift from the bureaucratic way of execution to more participatory through elected representatives. The strong base of SHG networks built over a time with coordination of Tripura State Rural Livelihood Mission (TSRLM) provides an effective and efficient platform for participatory local governance.

MGNREGA work in progress, West Pilak GP, South Tripura

EXPERIENCES FROM PROJECT LOCATIONS

The PRI - CBO Convergence project was implemented in the state of Tripura in the year 2017 with SHGs acting as grassroots CBO structure for the intervention. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between TRLM & Kudumbashree National Resource Organisation (KS NRO) in December 2016.

PILOT PHASE

Moving beyond the conventional landscape of working in Gram Panchayat areas, Kudumbashree NRO got an opportunity to work with both VCs and GPs in Tripura. Matabari and Kila blocks of Gomati district were selected for the pilot intervention. A total of 50 GPs and VCs were selected. While 16 VCs in Kila block were identified for the pilot phase, Matabari block had 10 VCs and 24 PRIs. A team of 12 Mentors from Kudumbashree NRO were deployed to Tripura in January 2017 to train and work with the community network and local governments in these two blocks.

Though Mentors from Kerala had years of experience working in states like Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Karnataka they were visiting Tripura for the first time. With a one-day orientation in Trivandrum, they left to attend a two-day workshop with Block Project Managers (BPMs) of project blocks in Tripura. This helped them connect with the TSRLM team and understand of its structure. This also sensitized Mentors about the SHG structures, their functional effectiveness, Panchayat bodies and their work with the CBOs. In the end, they were sent for a Field immersion for a week which provided a platform for them to meet with SHGs, BDOs, line department officials, teachers from anganwadis, Panchayat officials and to attend VO meetings. It helped them gain grassroots information about project locations.

With this preparation, Mentors then attended a state level orientation with all key stakeholders that included State & District Project coordinators along with TSRLM staff. They were then assigned their respective blocks and chalked out a roadmap for project implementation in consultation with Block level coordinators through a two-way consultation process.

In the initial days of the project, Mentors dedicated adequate time in; understanding the problems faced by SHGs in discharging duties entrusted on them, prospects of taking initiatives for their development, and ways to improve their leadership qualities. This phase of the project was the most crucial and challenging period for both the Mentors and the communities. For Mentors it meant building trust among SHGs members, expanding their avenues of participation in decision making processes, making them skilful and infusing leadership qualities. This in turn would enable few of them to act as foot soldiers under the project and trigger discussions on village development. For the communities, especially for SHG members, it paved way for improving knowledge about a myriad of subjects ranging from availing their entitlements to recognizing their potential and their ability to take decisions in crucial matters pertaining to village development.

Name of the district	No.of blocks	No. of GPs/VCs	No of Professionals	No of Mentors
Gomati	Matarbari	10 VCs	4	12
		24 GPS		
	Kila	16 VCs		

Pilot phase Profile

Mentors from Kerala (L-R): Shani Ponnan, Bindu Sanoj, Leelama Babu, Omana Satheeshan

Initial Experiences

Project Terrain

The hilly terrain of the project villages was a huge challenge for community mobilization. Villages were scattered with limited transport facilities and were far from GP offices. This in turn reduced people's motivation to commute to Panchayat office or line departments to present their problems. Despite prior planning by the Mentors to reach the villages, there were delays or postponement of the scheduled activities which were to be carried out as part of the project.

Usha Shaji (Mentor Resource Person, Kila block) recollected one such experience, "Once we had gone to Uttar Barmura village for SHG mobilization. By the time we were returning to base after work, the road had vanished due to rain! We also have to wait for the vehicle to get fully occupied to start from a place", she added. The same was true for women from the community who were not able to participate in the meetings though they were interested, due to the difficulty in travelling from one place to another. Similarly, Sindhu Renin (Mentor Resource Person, Kila block) said that her first visit to a ward in Kila block was very memorable. "When I reached the community, I was about to faint and the people poured a bottle of water on my head to get me back to consciousness", she said. As the project progressed, Mentors and LRGs members figured out ways to overcome some of these difficulties either planning their schedules better or staying back in the communities overnight. This also helped them built a better rapport with the villagers.

Socio-Cultural set up

The unique socio-cultural setup and challenging geography (67% of land area under forest cover) of Tripura posed a huge challenge in bringing holistic development at the grassroots level. The population in these villages belonged to different socio-cultural backgrounds[14] which often led to conflict of interests among the people. Usha said, "In the initial days, it was very difficult to get women for the activities due to their involvement in the traditional rituals which consumed more than 15 days in a month." Later through continuous awareness and interactions, their involvement in the project activities started increasing. She said, "It is certainly a cultural change we brought within the community through this project and now these women come back and tell me that they are confident and happy to come out and work." Sindhu added, "The Bangla speaking people and other tribal communities are generally not in good social terms. But for the PRI-CBO Convergence project, they had to come together. To enable this was a major challenge." Mentors and LRG members also had to align their field routines to suit that of the community, like visiting women in agricultural fields.

Ethnic composition and language constraints

Mentors had to be extra conscious and sensitive with the communities because of their unique socio-ethnic composition (different ethnic groups have their own customs, cultural practices, rules, and special administrative powers). Interactions between communities were limited to exchange of goods and financial transactions. Absence of a common language[15] also added to the challenge. Mentors had to often use gestures while speaking in Hindi to convey their messages. Usha Shaji recalled she had to tackle a unique problem while working in Darjeeling and Kolimada areas. While the community spoke Molsum language, the Block Mission Coordinator (BMC) spoke only Bangla. The usual translator for the community was an LRG member and she only knew Kokborok. Lack of a common language was a major challenge while conducting capacity building programmes for the community women. A translator fluent in the native language and Hindi/English was always taken on board to help during the training. This consumed a lot of time in capacity building activities. Hiran Mala Chakma (Internal Mentor, Durgachowmuhani Block, Dhalai district) shared how she would motivate LRG members to overcome some of these challenges themselves. "I tell them that just like the way I managed to overcome the language barrier to work with different ethnic groups, they too can overcome their fears and obstacles. Now, these women come back and tell me that they are confident and happy to come out and work."Sindhu Renin who faced similar problems recalled how she worked around, "It was my linguistic curiosity; along with the help of the LRG members that helped me navigate these communities."

Rapport Building

In order to establish a trustworthy relationship with the community, selection of LRG members was a crucial step. With the identification of a person from within the community, Mentors were able to create a smooth entry point for the project activities. It was important to respect the time and space of the SHG women and hence time and place of meetings were arranged as per their (women's) convenience, usually in the villages. Despite all precautionary methods taken, some of the women became very conscious and often spoke in a guarded manner. Only with time, they became free and frank in expressing their views to the Mentors. This rapport building activity took around 6 months. Usha Shaji recollected that the time spent by them with the communities during the poojas, festivals, and in the agricultural fields. This made them accept Mentors as part of their community which was an important aspect in garnering support for the project activities.

Bindu Sanoj (Mentor Resource Person, Satchand R.D. Block South Tripura District), who has been working in Tripura since 2017 spoke about how she gained the trust of the community. "Initially, the family members had many inhibitions. For instance, one of the LRG member's husband was unwilling to send his wife to work as he felt the villagers would talk ill of her. In such situations, I would talk about my journey from Kerala to Tripura. I could gain their trust by sharing my personal experiences. Towards the end of such conversations, the family members were happy to send their women to work." Similarly, Sindhu explained that traditional games involving women organized by her during community meetings helped a lot in breaking culture and language barriers.

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[14] The GPs in the plain areas of the State consists of non-tribal populations with a greater number of Bengali speaking communities. The VCs in the ADC areas (tribal population in the hilly, forest areas) have typical customary practices and languages specific to each tribal community. Hence neighbouring communities speaking different languages lived isolated from one another though tribal people had many things in common.

[15] The communities spoke either KokBorok, Sabrum, Halam or Bangla which limited the scope of exchange of information or knowledge among the people.

Bindu Sanoj (Mentor Resource Person) interacting with LRG members in West Pilak GP, Jolaibari block, South Tripura

Major Outcomes of Pilot Phase

Improved participation of Women in Democratic platforms

The convergence project brought a positive change in attitude with respect to women's role in society. There is no longer any strong objection in their minds about their ability to come out of domestic boundaries and take part in decision making processes. They also found themselves comfortable interacting with the PRI officials.

In an interview with Kallol Roy[16] (Block Mission Coordinator, TRLM, Amarpur block) said, "Initially the focus of SHG women was on financial security but the PRI-CBO Convergence project had opened up the possibility of linkages to line departments in their minds". Women spoke about their problems in Panchayats and SHGs. Tamal Badiya (Upa-pradhan (Panchayat Vice President) West Pilak), one of the villages in Jolaibari block expressed how women who were initially hesitant to go to Gram Sabhas were now more confident and shares an improved rapport with the PRI officials. These participations in Gram Sabhas were a stepping stone for initiating discussions on entitlements and deliveries on various services. Sindhu said, "I witnessed the transformation of women from just attendance in the register to active participation in the Gram Sabhas through their involvement in meetings and rallies."

Dialogue on Development schemes and Access to Entitlements

Through participatory tools like Participatory Assessment of Entitlements (PAE) and Entitlement Access Plan (EAP), women became active participants in initiating discussions on development issues in their SHG meetings and working towards reforming public service delivery. On this front, Ruma Rudrapol (LRG member, Amarpur block) said, "Through PAE, we were able to reach out to every household in the village and map access to entitlements. This also helped make women aware of various government (both central and state) schemes, e.g., Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), Atal Jal Bharat Mission, Ayushman Bharat, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)[17] etc."

Pooja Sinha (LRG member turned I-Mentor from Matabari R.D block, Udaipur district) said she was able to understand the gamut of problems women faced in her village only when PAE exercise was conducted. "Despite the availability of many development schemes, they do not claim their rights due to lack of awareness." She visited every SHG and explained the availability of various schemes and benefits exclusively meant for women. These conversations motivated many women to raise their voices to claim their entitlements. Rima Burman (LRG member, West Pilak, Amarpur block) spoke about how EAP was one of the useful tools of PRI-CBO Convergence project that helped women understand the gap in their entitlements and work towards a timebound mechanism of target setting for data consolidated through PAE. "With the help of 'Roshni ki Kahani' exercise, we were able to estimate the coverage of various schemes in our SHG network. We discussed with VOs about the gaps, consolidated demands and set targets giving priority to the poorest of the poor." Targets under MGNREGA, Ayushman Bharat, SBM etc. were set to be achieved in three-month periods.

Sindhu added, "The ribbon exercise, part of PAE had a positive influence on women. Looking at the number of ribbons on each other's hands, women were able to discuss and understand various programmes and the ways to access the same. It was good to make the beneficiaries speak in their own language motivating other women to participate in the meetings and be aware of their entitlement and access them."

[16] Works with TRLM for past three years and has been involved in the project during the scale-up phase.
[17] ICDS: It is a government programme which provides food, preschool education, primary healthcare, immunization, health check-up and referral services to children under 6 years of age and their mothers.

PAE in progress, Bampur GP, Gomati

No. of the Blocks	No. of SHGs covered in PAE	No. of VOs covered in EAP
14	7844	391

Status of PAE & EAP exercise conducted in the Pilot Phase

To build capacities of multiple stakeholders on different occasions, Mentors played a crucial role in bringing this change by continuous support and handholding through various capacity building programmes. The table below provides information on the outcome of capacity building activity carried out in the project.

No. of Local Cadre Trained	No of Internal Mentors Trained	No. of VO Members Trained	No. of PRI Members Oriented
1404	87	344	556

Capacity Building - Pilot Phase

Strengthening Community and Institutions

The existence of Village Organisations (VOs) under NRLM is to empower women to take ownership of community structures being created. In Tripura, their work however has been restricted to thrift & credit activities of micro-finance. The PRI-CBO Convergence project played a crucial role in developing the VOs into well-structured formal entities / organisations. Usha Shaji recollected that there were only 300 odd SHGs when they started working in the Kila block and half of them were dysfunctional. "We trained the LRG members about their role and basic functioning of LSG very consciously and ways to deal with the community to help SHGs identify social issues of the vulnerable families." With guidance and technical

support from Mentors and LRG members, VOs were, through various tools under the project (PAE, EAP & VPRP) strengthened to formalize their ways of functioning and emphasize on streamlining meetings and its conduct (introduction while conducting meetings, agenda setting, listing of activities to be undertaken, closing remarks, minutes keeping, follow up etc). Usha said the importance of working together as a unit and to take the demands to the Gram Sabha has become a key motivation for the VOs these days. This improved the efficiency of the functioning of VOs helping them plan and keep track of their actives over the course of time. For example, as per the TRLM guidelines, while the VOs had to conduct two meetings in a month, one of them often went without any productive outcome other than spill over on to bookkeeping activities from the previous meeting. As the project progressed, VOs started using the monthly meetings in more productive ways by identifying social issues of their village and deliberating on solutions. Usha mentioned that the importance of preparing their own VPRP as an important aspect of local development was understood by the SHG women and VOs. In Tripura, the VOs were instrumental in identifying issues like the microfinance debt crisis, alcoholism, domestic violence, and lack of schools and finding solutions. In South Tripura, VOs could come up with a Social Development Plan – initiating action on a gamut of issues like putting an end to child marriage, re-enrollment of school dropouts, cleanliness & sanitation. Formalization of processes has also helped improve their interaction with PRI bodies and line departments.

On similar lines, Sindhu's sharing her Kerala experience among the VO members and Panchayat officials during the VO meetings inspired many in thinking seriously about their village development. "Many a time, the meetings were organized by the ward members and we tried meticulously to make them understand that VOs are powerful institutions in demanding, negotiating, and working with the Panchayat officials."

In terms of operations, almost all the VOs are now able to exhibit a sense of autonomy in their operations. Most of them are able to mobilize funds internally in order to meet their regular day to day expenses such as conducting meetings,

Damayanti Debbarma (LRG Member)
orienting VO leaders, Dumburnagar R.D. Block, Dhalai

awareness campaigns, and training programmes. In case of additional fund requirements, many VOs have learned to find new sources through their networks. Though there has been an increase in political pressure on CBOs in the recent past, VOs have by far managed to maintain their structural and financial autonomy.

Discourse on Development with Local Self Governments

While VOs played little or no role in enhancing the functioning of the Panchayats initially, the project helped improve their association with the PRI bodies. By creating entitlement plans and VPRPs through participatory ways, the VOs were able to win the confidence and trust of the PRIs. Through their presence in Gram Sabha in hundreds, women were also able to demonstrate their reach across communities. These factors helped them have a better say in the functioning of Panchayat vis-à-vis village development across the project locations. "We LRG members work along with VOs on village development by visiting various line departments to monitor the progress of the demands submitted and then discuss among the SHGs during the VO meetings in order to take a resolution for further target setting", Rima Burman said. Improved participation of CBOs increased the coordination among themselves

VO Orientation, Dumburnagar R.D.Block, Dhalai

and between the authorities thereby making the process more transparent, effective, and flexible. "The need for a mutually beneficial relationship was clearly understood both by the SHGs and the PRI bodies. For instance, when the PRI officials in certain Panchayats were initially struggling to mingle with Molsum or Kokborok speaking communities, the VOs helped them reach out to them. While the Panchayats can rely on SHG networks for preparing beneficiary lists, the SHGs need the support of the PRIs to include demands in GPDP."

SCALE-UP PHASE

Inspired by a positive community response towards working with the local self-governments, TRLM decided to expand the PRI-CBO Convergence project to other districts. The scale-up phase was not just about geographic expansion of project areas but also about strengthening local institutions. 10 blocks spread across three districts of Dhalai, Gomati, and South Tripura were selected. These areas covered a total of 167 GPs and 128 VCs.

No. of the Districts	No. of the Blocks	No. of GPs/VCs	No. Of Professionals	No. of Mentors from Kerala	No. Of Internal Mentors
3	12	295	4	12	87

Scale-up phase Profile

As a strategy to develop internal resources and strengthen the engagement of SHG community, Kudumbashree NRO decided to form a new pool of Internal Mentors from the existing pool of LRG members to roll out the project activities and handhold new LRG members in the scale-up areas. Out of the 100 Internal Mentors selected from the pilot phase, 88 of them continued to work under the PRI-CBO Convergence pro-

ject in the scale-up locations. Internal Mentors were trained to manage 2-4 blocks in the newly introduced project areas[18]. Mentors from Kerala were gradually withdrawn from block level responsibilities and were reassigned supervisory roles at district levels allowing Internal Mentors to take up more responsibilities in the field.

EAP exercise in progress, Bampur GP, Gomati

TRAINING OF LOCAL CADRE – A CASE STUDY OF SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

Rima Burman, LRG member from Amarpur block had an initial orientation about the PRI-CBO Convergence project immediately after selection. This theoretical training helped LRG members like her to get oriented towards i) the purpose of PRI-CBO Convergence project ii) interaction points and activities with line departments (anganwadis, ICDS) and PRI bodies, and iii) welcoming of PRI members. After this, she was asked to visit the field especially anganwadis[19] in the locality and collect information about all issues. Rima identified a few issues. She was then encouraged to find solutions to the issues she had noted down during her earlier field visit. A brainstorming session with her Internal Mentors helped her strategize the solution towards the identified issue. Later, she was trained in PAE & EAP tools which helped her prepare a calendar of activities along with two EC members of VOs for training of SHG groups. This was part of a strategy by Kudumbashree NRO to build the capacity of local women groups to independently work in project initiatives. Rima went back to her field and resolved the issue by initiating the formation of Mothers committee[20] among the SHG mothers while she worked with them on PAE & EAP tools.

[18] This was major progress in the entire scale-up phase of the project as the women who were once hesitant to step out in the public sphere had now got empowered to actively participate in development processes. This also led to building a robust social capital among the I-Mentors and LRGs.

[19] Anganwadi Centres: Anganwadi is a rural child-care centre and it is part of ICDS in order to manage child hunger & malnutrition.

[20] Mothers of children registered in Anganwadi Centres together form a group known as Mothers Committee (MC) that helps in management and supervision of ICDS scheme, mobilization of beneficiaries and counselling. MC is one of the CBOs by itself.
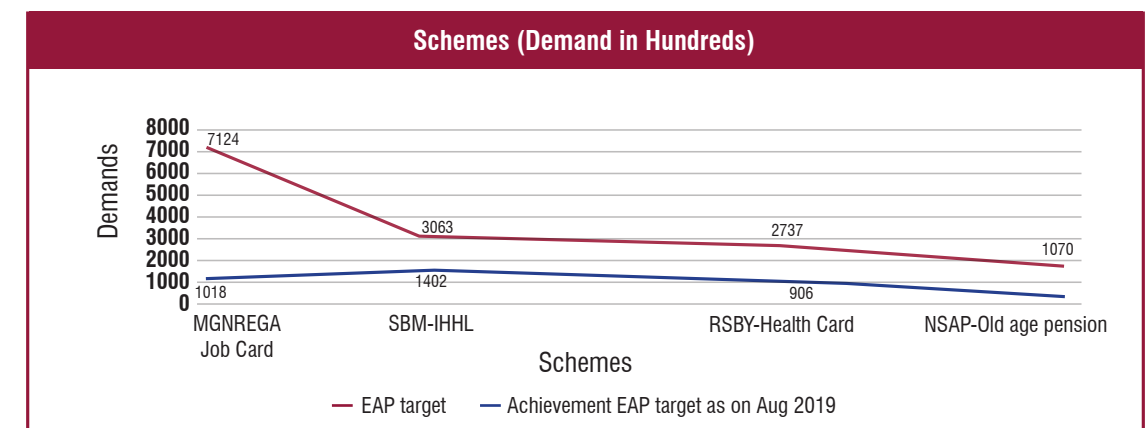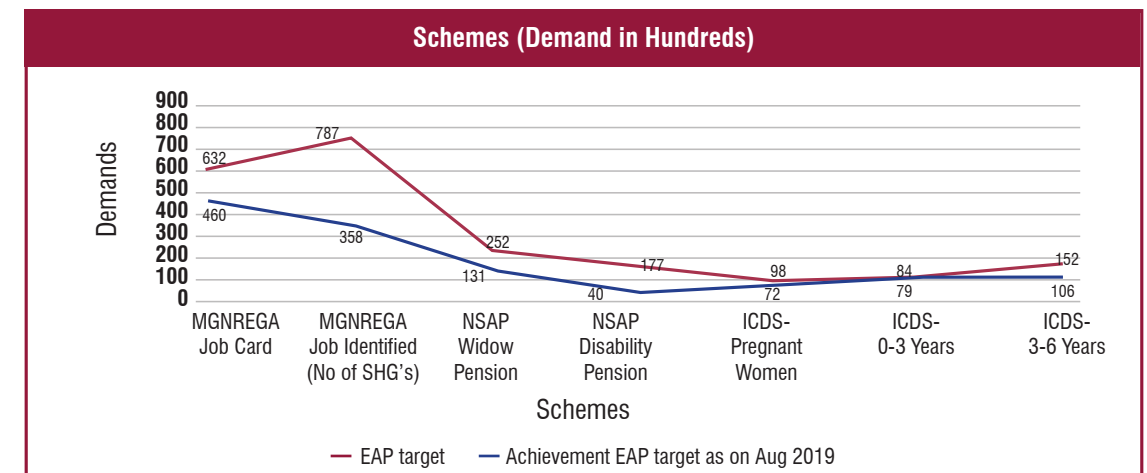
Status of plans post EAP exercise in 2018 during Scale-Up

WHAT THE GRAPHS INDICATE

- Target set during EAP exercise in the year 2018 for different government schemes such as MGNREGA Job cards, Health Insurance, Pension, Widow benefits, Disability benefits, and ICDS benefits.

- The Status of achievement in the above graph indicates the success of VOs with PRIs and line departments in setting and achieving targets through direct interaction and effective coordination.

- Better progress was witnessed with schemes (More than 60% achievement) that include – MGNREGA Job card, NSAP Widow pension, ICDS programmes.

- Moderately performed schemes (Less than 60% achievement) include - MGNREGA Job identified / Demand, Health Card / Insurance, Old-age pension.

- Overall, the achievement indicates better performance in centrally sponsored schemes than the state intervened programmes such as MGNREGA – Job demand / identification.

- The highest gap in the deliveries was found in the Job demand and Job identified under MGNREGA.

Swapna (Mentor Resource Person) interacting with Internal Mentors

Development of Local Cadre

One of the biggest successes of the project was instilling a sense of volunteerism among women who work for their village development. The women who volunteered as LRG members during the initial phase of the project had no remuneration. Since villages in Tripura were mostly scattered, initially it was a huge challenge to motivate them to work without pay. Since this was also a time-consuming activity, there was also pressure from their families for them to stop working. However, the PRI-CBO Convergence project provided a platform for many women to get involved in activities concerning the larger village community. The opportunity to work directly with Panchayats and the willingness of PRI officials for engaging LRG members in decision-making processes infused a lot of satisfaction among them, motivating them to continue working. Hiran Mala Chakma recollected what kept her go-

ing while working as an LRG member, "My motivation comes from the Mentors who have trained me. If they can come fromfar-off states and work towards the development of our villages, I feel that it is my responsibility to work for the development of my state." Bindu Sanoj (Mentor Resource person of Satchand R.D.Block) felt that despite women in the Northeast being extremely outgoing and proactive, she still had to face some initial resistance from families in letting them come out and work. 'Initially, the family members had many inhibitions. For instance, a mother-in-law was worried as to who will look after the child if her daughter-in-law leaves for work. In such situations, I would talk about my journey from Kerala to Tripura. I could gain their trust by sharing my personal experiences. Towards the end of such conversations, the family members were happy to send their women to work."

No. of Internal Mentors trained	No. of LRGs trained	No. of VOs oriented	No. of Local Government Institutions Oriented
84	1194	443	173GP, 122VC

Capacity Building: Scale-Up Phase

"The concept of LRG has created a sense of volunteerism for their collective development in the minds of women. This would eventually strengthen the TRLM mission on ground."

Kallol Roy
Block Mission Coordinator – TRLM, Amarpur block

Improving Community Participation

A true sense of community participation was developed through the strategy of continuous training of the office bearers of VOs at the very initial stage itself in the newly expanded areas of scale-up phase. This immensely contributed to the expansion of the sphere in which women participated in local governance. A bottom-up approach for holistic development of villages was a central idea. This meant local people especially women participated in decision making about strategy and selection of priorities in their local areas. Murshida Be-

gum (Internal Mentor, Rajnagar Block, South Tripura District) has mastered the art of inspiring women to become part of SHGs and local development. "I explain to them the need for pro-active participation of SHG members in identifying the problems faced by them as a community. I help them realize that the Panchayat officials cannot reach every doorstep and hence it is important for us to participate in the Gram Sabhas to voice the concerns." Dipti Jamatia (I-Mentor, Amarpur block, Gomati district) realized that she had to keep herself up to date about government schemes and other related information if she had to educate fellow women. She recollects, "Before becoming an LRG member, I was not aware of anything. I was a busy homemaker. I have learned not to feel ashamed to ask questions. I ask my Mentors when I don't know something. I also try to gather as much information as possible from government and Panchayat officials." In addition to the improved and enhanced participation of women in the governance mechanism, the convergence project built a robust social network (Social Capital) among them. The coming together of different SHG groups widened the social circle of women who could now confidently travel to new villages to involve more members in the project. This also broke the social differences and prejudices they had in the initial phase of the project.

In this regard Kallol Roy stated that SHGs now focus on personal development, upliftment of the family, supporting the neighborhood as well as contribute towards community development. He said, "If the project continues for more time, the outreach would enable many more didis (sisters) to get into this system which would add more vigor to this on-going movement. TRLM can bank on this premise further to add-on livelihood interventions by bringing in more line departments and provide training in both farming & non-farming activities." The support extended by SRLM officials played an instrumental role in the scale-up phase. Regular updates about the project activities and its remarkable impact were regularly shared with the BDOs and other rural development officials by SRLM team. This further helped in streamlining interventions and support required from the BDOs.

Sensitizing the Scale-Up Terrain

Effectiveness of the local government institutions play a crucial role in determining proper functioning of three-tier system. However, most of the GPs in the state have been dysfunctional post the state assembly elections in 2018. Elections for VCs were scheduled to take place in March 2020 (Elections were not over due to COVID 19 lockdown and these VCs were under Governor's rule at the time of writing this paper). In one of our interviews, the BDO of Dumburnagar stated, "There is a mandate for development review meeting with VC Chairman and Block Advisory Committee to be conducted every month at the block level as per the guideline enshrined for Block Advisory Committee. However, due to the absence of the VC Chairman or Officer-in-charge, these meetings are expected to happen only after the elections. In addition to this, there is heavy political influence on the Panchayat committees." Further, Dr. Jayanta stated, "The first and major task post elections will be to impart training for GPs, PRI officials, and VC Chairmen. This in turn will consume time and resources for a continuous capacity building." The new government at state is still evolving following which the mode of convergence at grassroots level and its effective functioning will take place.

In order to overcome this hurdle, an innovative exercise was organized in the project locations. All the newly elected PRI officials and key representatives of line departments were invited, introduced, and appraised about the progress of the project by the VOs in all the areas. This welcoming event was a huge success and helped build rapport among all the stakeholders, post elections. Mentors are also optimistic about participation of women from SHGs in the up-coming VC elections.

Major Outcomes of Scale-Up Phase

Strengthening Development Plans through Community Participation

Incorporation of Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP), an integral tool of the PRI-CBO Convergence project which takes into consideration the demand plan prepared by the SHG community network in a participatory manner, helped greatly improve Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP)[21] prepared by the Panchayats. For example, requirement of streetlights & playgrounds in the remote interior villages like Shibbari, Dhanachandra, Shyamraicherra in Durga Chowmuhani block which would have been normally left unnoticed by GPs were incorporated. Besides this, other aspects like identifying and linking eligible women from communities to work on MGNREGA projects helped convince the PRI officials in consolidating and integrating VPRPs with GPDPs and make the process more holistic.

The project helped enable the SHGs to make their own plans as part of VPRP process under the guidance of Mentors, Internal Mentors, and LRG members who in turn helped empower these women groups to take ownership and follow up with the Panchayat and line departments for implementation. Rima Burman spoke extensively about how demands are consolidated at VO level, included in the VPRP, and then presented to Panchayat to incorporate into GPDP during the Gram Sabha. This was reviewed further on consecutive VO meetings to demand action as per priorities. The diverse domains in which women's participation grew with time and continuous capacity building was evident when SHGs in GPs/VCs developed comprehensive demand lists as part of VPRP[22].

The consolidation of demands for livelihood, entitlement, resource, basic infrastructure development, and plans to address social development issues were part of VPRP. Gathering information on these aspects required continuous interactions, discussions, and exchange of information among the SHG members, which removed their inhibitions about the convergence project. This was one of the most powerful outcomes of the entire project as it managed to empower SHG members. The Mentors and LRG members focused on skill building and trained the SHGs to develop VPRP plans in a systematic manner. The demands (in form of schemes and entitlements, public goods and services, and social development) were listed under VPRP.
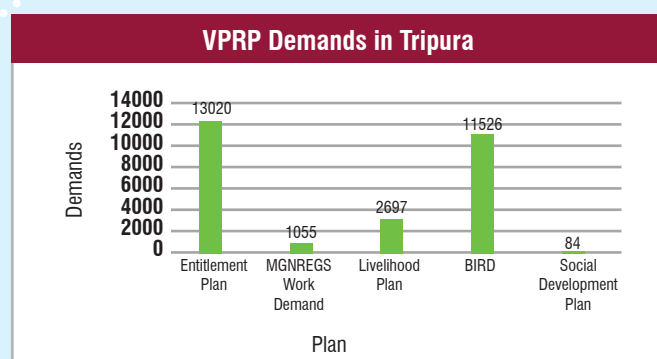
[21] GPDP - The Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) campaign will be an intensive and structured exercise for planning at Gram Sabha level through convergence between Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and concerned line departments of the State. Gram Panchayats have been mandated for the preparation of Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) for economic development and social justice.
[22] This was introduced in the year 2017 (pilot phase). During this period initiatives were made to integrate it with GP2RP. It was only in 2018, when GPDP (Comment: GPDP by the Central Government was launched 2015) was introduced by the Central Government, VPRP was to be integrated with GPDP.

PAE exercise in progress

STATUS OF VPRP

VPRP Demands in Tripura

Plan	Demands
Entitlement Plan	13020
MGNREGS Work Demand	1055
Livelihood Plan	2697
BIRD	11526
Social Development Plan	84

The recent VPRP exercise carried out with 155 GPs and 117 VCs in the year 2019 for 2020-21 witnessed demands cutting across all major components. Though there was no integration done under Entitlement, the participatory exercise collated the demands from 5350 SHGs. Dhalai district had the highest entitlement demands (59%), followed by South Tripura (27%) and Gomati (14%). Highest demands came for Individual Household Latrine (IHHL) under Swachh Bharat Mission - Gramin (SBM (G)) which was around 36% of the total demand. It was quite natural that the demands for electricity in the remote tribal areas also topped the list with 3047 demands made under Ujjwala. Old age pension and Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana Gramin (PMAY-G) demands stood at 1643 and 1505, respectively. Since there was better coverage for certain schemes such as unmarried women pension, job cards and ration cards, these schemes had comparatively lower demands which were 33, 721, and 324 respectively. 14 demands under PMAY and 23 under job cards were integrated into GPDP.

Under MGNREGA Work demand, 96% of the total demand fell under Category 'A' focused on public works for natural resource management. The nature of demands was largely related to land levelling, construction, and maintenance of ponds and Agri bund construction. Overall land levelling was the popular demand under MGNREGA across the state. The demand for the plantations of betel nut, rubber, and mango were the major plans under the Category 'B'. Overall, 29% of the demands, i.e., 307 out of 1055 demands were incorporated into GPDP.

Plans for the Livelihood were prepared at VO level from 98 GP/VCs. Animal husbandry being a common activity in both the plains and the hilly terrain had the highest number - 1667, almost 64% of the total demands. There was a significant demand under fisheries (almost 447) from Dhalai and South Tripura districts. As part of promoting rural entrepreneurship, Tailoring and Handicrafts were popular and around 247 demands (9%) were made. Based on the available data from Dhalai and Gomati district, 16% of Livelihood demands were integrated into GPDP.

Basic Infrastructure and Development witnessed the highest demands. From 11526 demands, 3394 were incorporated into GPDP. There were demands made from 410 VOs and those demands came from 15 sectors of 29 subjects in the XIth schedule. 18% of the demands were for streetlights under the rural electrification programme. 17% of the demands were related to minor irrigation, water management, and watershed development especially canals, wells, and tube wells. There were also demands from other major sectors including drinking water, health and sanitation, maintenance of community assets, poverty alleviation program, common infrastructure such as roads, culverts, ferries, bridges, waterways, and other means of commutation. There were also plans made for social forestry and Women & Child development. Overall, demands from 11 out of 15 sectors were incorporated, which was around 29%. This was based on the data available from Dhalai and Gomati district.

Under Social Development Plan, major issues dealt with were Alcoholism, Domestic violence, Child-marriage, Drug addiction, and Illiteracy. Major stakeholders such as CBO members, GP/VC members, para-legal volunteers, and local law enforcement authorities rigorously planned to address these major issues. While Child marriage intervention plans were submitted in all the 3 districts by 12 GP/VCs, plans on literacy and overcoming drug addiction were submitted in 4 GPs/VCs of Dhalai, Gomati & South Tripura.

Overall, Tripura made a sincere attempt to integrate VPRP into GPDP which was phenomenal.

Presenting VPRP to Pradhan in Gram Sabha by VO head in West Pilak GP, South Tripura

Shaktishali VO of Kalajaree VC was one of the VOs that actively participated in the VPRP planning process. One of their most pressing demand was the repair of the road connecting Monobokto para to Tribargo para. It was an unpaved road, unfit for vehicular movement. During monsoons it turned muddy and slippery, posing a danger to the local residents of Monobokto para. With the primary school on the other side of the road, children in this para used to indefinitely miss school during monsoons.

In the past, locals had brought the issue to the notice of the Panchayat. But other than this they did not know what else could be done. On 19th October 2019 a VO meeting was held to prepare infrastructure plan as part of VPRP. Members unanimously agreed that repair and reconstruction of the road connecting these two paras be included as it affected almost 120 families in the village. They also consulted the ward members during the

Ward Sabha and received their support to go forward with this demand. On 22nd November, leaders of ShaktishaliVO submitted the VPRP to be incorporated into GPDP during Gram Sabha. But the VO members also knew that simply submitting the plan was not enough. The VO president and secretary took turns to visit the Panchayat office every week to follow-up. They also held a special meeting urging the need to repair the road before next year's monsoons and suggested including the work under MGNREGA.

Finally, in January, the Panchayat agreed to start the work of repair, under MGNREGA. By the end of February, the work was completed, and the road is now levelled and paved. The VO members consider this to be their biggest achievement till date.

Komala Rani Molsmon, president of the VO proudly says, "We had no idea we (SHG women) could play such an important role in improving the lives of so many families in our village. This small victory has encouraged Shaktishaali VO to take up more challenging problems in the village."

Monobokto Para to Tribargo Para, before and after road repair

Democratic Platforms, a Forum for Development Dialogue

Historically, in Tripura, Gram Sabha meetings happened regularly. However, it was largely a one-sided affair with no or limited participation from the community. Under the convergence project, these meetings have become participatory with more villagers, especially women attending and putting across their views. Dipti Jamatia (Internal Mentor, Amarpur Block, Gomati District) recollected how during the initial days of the project women were not aware of Panchayat functionalities. "People in the villages believed that Gram Panchayat is only meant for the ruling political parties." She had to explain to them that any individual who is above 18 years has the right to take part in the Gram Sabha meetings. Improved participation in Gram Sabhas also resulted in better plans being presented to the Panchayat for incorporation into GPDP. For example, in one of the Gram Sabhas at Kekmacherra GP, Ambasa block, women convinced the Panchayat officials to prioritize the construction of an Anganwadi building instead of a road.

The enhanced participation of women in Gram Sabhas was evident when SHGs were mobilized to participate in Gram Sabha meetings held between October & December. This mobilization was possible only because of the willingness and interest expressed by them during the initial phase of the capacity building activities. This was a remarkable achievement in the entire project as it broke the erst-

while practice of limiting women's participation to domestic chores. Furthermore, the ability to express their views in a public sphere instilled a great sense of confidence in women. The demands specifically pertaining to women found their way in plans formulated. The identity crisis of women slowly got eroded and the power of collective action found its way in the project areas.

Through these efforts, Gram Sabhas saw a drastic improvement. The number of participants from 1241 in October 2018 improved to 1863 in October 2019 in Ambasa block. Similarly, there was an increase from 1147 to 2113 in Durga Chowmuhani block during the same period. VPRPs were submitted to Pradhan's in GPs and Chairmen in the VCs in the Gram Sabha meetings. VPRP incorporated GPDPs were finally uploaded in the national portal under the MoPR & MoRD.

Gram Sabha in West Pilak GP, South Tripura

S. No	Name of the Districts	No of GPs/VCs	Number of GP/VCs where GS were held	Total Attendance in Gram Sabha	Total Women Participation	% SHG
1	Gomati	88	56	6098	4863	79.3 %
2	Dhalai	82	77	6913	5315	79.3 %
3	South Tripura	100	96	14993	12133	75.66 %

Status of Gram Sabha Participation in Tripura 2019

Convergence with Line Departments

It was out of a similar GPDP in 2018 that some of the demands got prioritized and funds were sanctioned. In Bampur GP of Amarpur block, one such plan that got implemented was the renovation of anganwadi centers and the construction of a new compound wall and kitchen. This was done to monitor the kitchen for hygiene, sanitation, and its overall environment. This led to the identification of the actual needs of anganwadis (through a need assessment undertaken by the project team with the support of line department officials). This example showcased the effective convergence of the line departments and the CBOs in meeting the expected demand. Dipti Jamatia (Internal Mentor, Amarpur Block, Gomati District) said, "I am happy about the active participation of SHG members along with LRG members in coordinating with the line departments. Anganwadis are open now and under the ICDS program regular health camps are organized." Similarly, Rima Burman mentioned many similar outcomes like children's park, foot bridge, and new roads in Thacherra GP, Amarpur block. It also instilled confidence among the people in the power about collective participation to identify, demand, implement and monitor public service delivery.

In the above-mentioned case, it was the coming together of Panchayat, education department, and ICDS which was witnessed. Kallol in this regard stated that the awareness on entitlements & schemes has increased a lot and the PRI officials including Pradhan are now very conscious while dealing with the demands of CBOs.

Recognition of CBOs

Before the project began, VOs/SHGs were considered as institutions involved merely in lending money and recovery. Panchayats never considered the CBOs as entities which could add value in what they do. However, as the project progressed, Panchayats were able to recognize their work. "It took some time, but definitely there has been a change in perception about SHGs, that it takes part in the village development rather than being just standalone financial institutions", Deepshika Khatoniar (Tripura State Project Coordinator, Kudumbashree NRO) stated. This change in perception had a lot to do with VOs and SHGs being able to add value to the Panchayat's work. As each household had at least one member in an SHG, the Panchayat recognized that their reach to all households could be greatly enhanced by partnering with active SHG networks. "Besides enhancing access, the SHG networks also helped the Panchayat in facilitating reach to beneficiaries for government schemes and programmes, preparing comprehensive VPRP plans which could be incorporated into the GPDP, identifying social issues and even organizing events and campaigns in communities such as health camps, education awareness programs, Bal Sabhas, literacy campaigns and so on", Vaiklasori Molsmon (Internal Mentor, Dumburnagar R.D.Block) shared.

The positive changes brought through the convergence project were appreciated by members of local self-governments too. For instance, Tanmal Baidya from being a normal resident to a ward member and then the 'Upa-pradhan' has witnessed the PRI-CBO Convergence project through various lenses. In our interview with him he said, "I have been a normal villager – then a ward member – and today being a PRI-official, I had the opportunity to see the entire transformation, the way this project improved the confidence of women and institutional delivery. This is phenomenal. I am a lucky person since I got to become the 'Upa-pradhan,' when more women are participating in the village development and so our efforts are recognized in most of the households in this GP."

"I am going to recommend to the state to replicate this model in all other villages."

Tamaal Baidya
Up-Pradhan West Pilak GP, South Tripura

PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

As a final step of PRI-CBO Convergence project, efforts were put in for the creation of Gram Panchayat Co-ordination Committee (GPCC) / Village Organisation Co-ordination Committee (VOCC). However, this final milestone did not fully materialize due to various hurdles towards the final stages of the scale-up phase. As a whole PRI-CBO Convergence project has succeeded in empowering women in the project villages. However, in order to ensure the sustainability of the project activities even after the withdrawal of Kudumbashree NRO from Tripura, a local pool of community cadre including Internal Mentors and LRG members were trained, who are capable of going out of their blocks and emulating the processes in other Panchayats. They are the development leaders created for the state within the state, especially women who are confident, vocal, and knowledgeable about the local institutions. With prior experience and knowledge about the project goals, they are able to work with ease and confidence.

Dipti Jamatia
Internal Mentor, Amarpur Block ,Gomati District

"All the states should have LRG members and internal mentors. Local people are well versed with the local situation and have better access to the community."

"If we women do not demand our rights, who else would do that for us?"

Hiran Mala Chakma
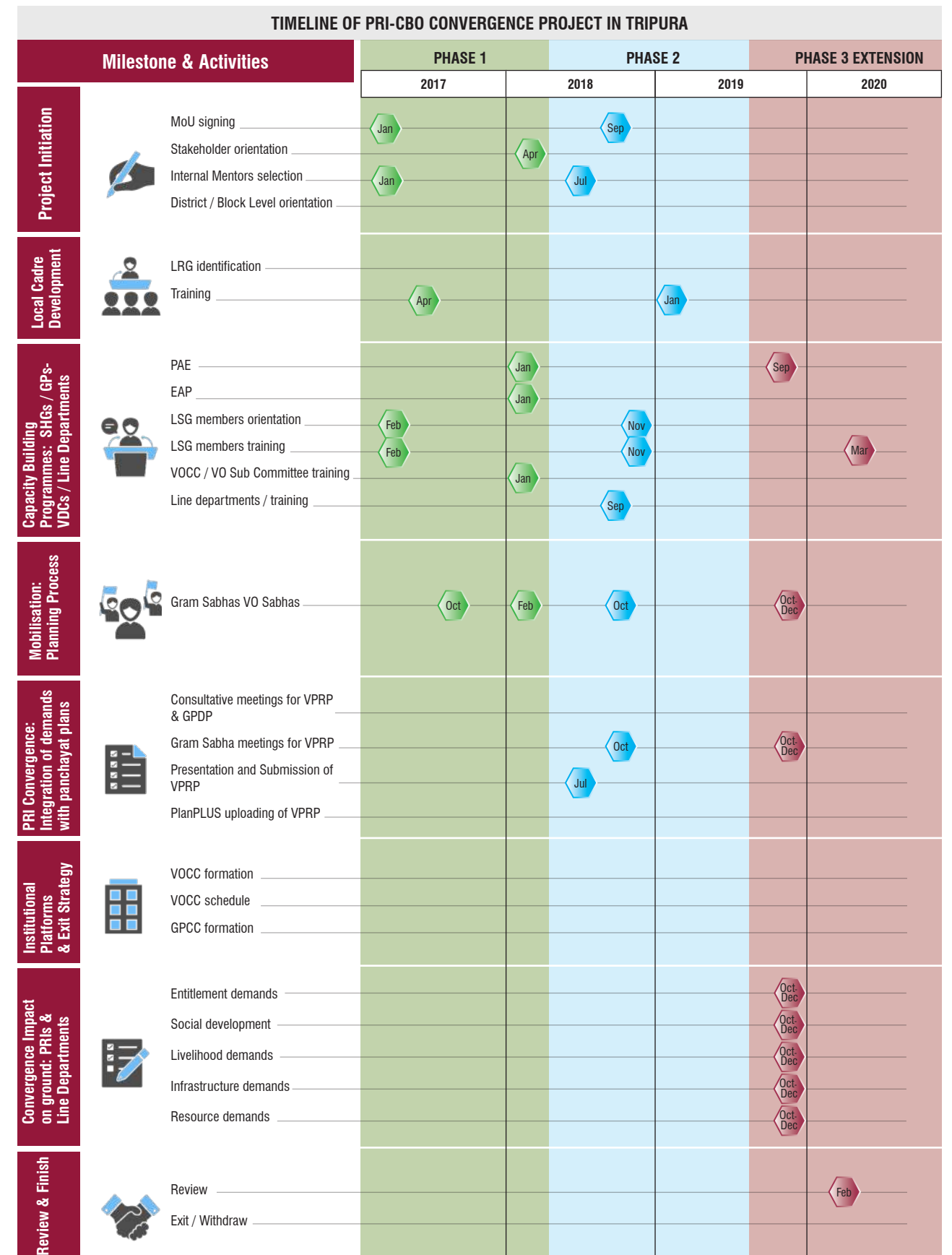Internal Mentor, Durgachowmuhani Block, Dhalai District

In the last phase (January- March 2020) of the project, training was given to Internal Mentors and LRG members to build capacities of the women in organizing and functioning on their own. This included – working with VOs in convening meetings, training programs, PAE, EAP & VPRP tools / exercises, minutes recording, Panchayat & line department coordination, monitoring the demand status of GPDP and entitlement targets. This was a conscious exit strategy so that the cadre of LRG members and Internal Mentors of these blocks will function as independent units once the resources of Kudumbashree NRO which includes Mentors and Field professionals are withdrawn in April 2020.

CONCLUSION

Tripura has fared well in implementing the PRI – CBO Convergence project. In addition to this, recent efforts by TSRLM in coordinating with the SHGs under this PRI-CBO Convergence project have provided a platform for them to improve the effectiveness of all the stakeholders involved. For instance, the elected representatives of PRIs are now more than aware to execute centrally and state-sponsored schemes. However, continuous training on capacity building will help keep up the momentum going. The effective negotiation with block offi-

cials in prioritizing demands of the entitlements and schemes is an area for improvement though there is an encouraging change in the mode of dealing. Similarly, the demand for the funds from the blocks and the disbursement for the same depends on the prioritizing abilities of the PRI officials. Such demands should target developing social capital rather spending on just asset creation.

Bala Sabhas in Tripura is a successful movement that enhanced women's participation in the Gram Sabhas too. Funding towards developing more such groups through SHGs would be a positive drive. The current synergy among the CBOs and line departments must ensure the formation of convergence committees for better coordination on a regular basis. In recent times, communities have stressed the need for unbiased priority setting and decision making without political influence. The PRI-CBO Convergence project areas has been sensitized for issue-based priority setting through mapping exercises and the Panchayats are expected to work on inclusive social development in the coming Gram Sabhas and GPDPs.

TIMELINE OF PRI-CBO CONVERGENCE PROJECT IN TRIPURA

Milestone & Activities		PHASE 1 (2017)	PHASE 1 (2018)	PHASE 2 (2018)	PHASE 2 (2019)	PHASE 3 EXTENSION (2020)
Project Initiation	MoU signing	Jan		Sep		
	Stakeholder orientation		Apr			
	Internal Mentors selection	Jan		Jul		
	District / Block Level orientation					
Local Cadre Development	LRG identification					
	Training	Apr			Jan	
Capacity Building Programmes: SHGs / GPs- VDCs / Line Departments	PAE		Jan			Sep
	EAP		Jan			
	LSG members orientation	Feb		Nov		
	LSG members training	Feb		Nov		Mar
	VOCC / VO Sub Committee training		Jan			
	Line departments / training		Sep			
Mobilisation: Planning Process	Gram Sabhas VO Sabhas	Oct	Feb	Oct	Oct/Dec	
PRI Convergence: Integration of demands with panchayat plans	Consultative meetings for VPRP & GPDP					
	Gram Sabha meetings for VPRP			Oct	Oct/Dec	
	Presentation and Submission of VPRP		Jul			
	PlanPLUS uploading of VPRP					
Institutional Platforms & Exit Strategy	VOCC formation					
	VOCC schedule					
	GPCC formation					
Convergence Impact on ground: PRIs & Line Departments	Entitlement demands				Oct/Dec	
	Social development				Oct/Dec	
	Livelihood demands				Oct/Dec	
	Infrastructure demands				Oct/Dec	
	Resource demands				Oct/Dec	
Review & Finish	Review				Feb	
	Exit / Withdraw					

SHG managed farm, Angtha village

MANIPUR

MANIPUR AT A GLANCE

Located on the eastern side of Northeast (NE) India, Manipur shares its borders with the states of Mizoram, Nagaland, and Assam, in India and international boundary with Myanmar. Manipur or 'A jewelled land' derives its name from its topography, an oval valley surrounded by nine hills [25]. The existence of a wide variety of flora and fauna and a melting pot of cultures makes the region of great ecological and cultural importance. Bamboo cultivation is one of the biggest industries in the state with over 3000 square kilometres of land area under cultivation, one of the largest in India. The table below gives details of the profile of the state.

S. No	Details	Figures
1	Population	2,855,794 lakhs
2	Area	22327 Sq. Kms
3	Literacy	76.94%
4	No. of districts	9 districts: 5 in Hills; 4 in Valley
5	No. of Autonomous District Councils	24
6	Occupation	Agriculture and allied activities

**Source: Census of India 2011
(Census Population 2021 Data)**

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[25] For more details, please visit: Suresh Ediga, Manipur – The Jewel of India: North East India Part 3, Faculty.

Manipur state can be geographically divided into the hill region and the valley region. The hill region comprises of five districts viz. Senapati, Tangmenglong, Churachandpur, Chandel, and Ukhrul. The valley region comprises of four districts viz. Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, and Bishnupur. Thus, the hill districts occupy around 90 % (20089 sq. km) of the total area of the state. The valleys form the remaining 10 % (2238 sq. km).

Manipur is home to diverse ethnic groups who could be classified (broadly) into three main groups: the Meiteis, Kukis, and Nagas. While Meiteis and Meitei Pangals (Muslims) constitute a majority of the population in the valley, Kukis and Nagas are a majority in the hills (Haokip, 2017).

A resident from one of the project locations, Manipur

LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT
WHAT THE ACT SAYS

In Manipur, the following are the main frameworks of local governance which are of importance to this paper.

1. Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI)- For the constitution and organisation of Panchayats as units of Local Self-Government (LSG) in the rural areas of Manipur and for matters connected therewith and incidental thereto under the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994.

2. Village Authority (VA) - Areas with a significant population of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the hilly regions, which are governed either by the traditional inheritance or by the provisions of the Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956.

3. The Manipur Hill Areas Autonomous District Council Act, 1971 - For the establishment of six Autonomous District Councils for the administration of villages in the hill areas in the state of Manipur.

MANIPUR PANCHAYATI RAJ ACT, 1994

PRIs are established through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, under the 11th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, came into force with effect from 24th June 1994. A two-tier PRI system was established at the village and district levels administered by local bodies. First elections to the Zilla Parishads (ZPs) at district level and Gram Panchayats (GPs) at village level were held in 1997.

Gram Panchayat (GP)

There shall be constituted a Gram Panchayat for every Gram Sabha. Every Gram Panchayat shall, by the name notified in the Official Gazette under section 13, be a body corporate having perpetual succession and a common seal with power to acquire, hold and dispose of property and to enter into contracts, and shall, by the said name sue and be sued.

The Gram Panchayat constituted under sub-section (1) shall be notified in the Official Gazette and shall be deemed to have been constituted from the date of its first meeting. Every person shall be entitled to be included in the list of electors of Gram Panchayat if he is not less than eighteen years of age on the date of its publication under sub-section (1) and is ordinarily resident within the area of the Gram Panchayat.

A Gram Panchayat shall consist of the Pradhan and such number of directly elected members as may be notified from time to time by the State Government and one member for every 350 population or part thereof of the Panchayat area shall be elected as a member of such Panchayat.

Zilla Parishad (ZP)

The Governor shall, by notification in the Official Gazette establish a Zilla Parishad for a district and having jurisdiction over it, with effect from such date as may be specified.

The Zilla Parishad shall consist of

(a) the members directly elected from the territorial constituencies in the district under section 50:

(b) the members of the House of the People and the members of the State Legislative Assembly representing a part or whole of the district whose constituencies lie within the district, and

(c) ten percent of the Pradhans of the Gram Panchayats in the district.

The elected members of the Zilla Parishad referred to in section 50 shall, as soon as may be, elect two members from amongst themselves to be respectively Adhyaksha and Up-Adhyaksha. The Adhyaksha convenes, presides over, and conducts meeting of the ZP.

Responsibilities of PRIs

AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITY
Principal Secretary (RD&PR)	Administers the overall monitoring and implementation of schemes relating to PRIs
Zilla Parishad (elected body)	Preparation of Plan for economic development and social justice of the District
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	The CEO is appointed by the State Government and carries out the policies and directives of the ZP
Gram Panchayat (elected body)	Preparation of Annual Plan and Annual Budget
Panchayat Secretary (PS)	The PS is appointed by the State Government for keeping of records and maintenance of Accounts

Source: Annual Technical Inspection Report,
Office of the Principal Account General (Audit), Manipur, Government of Manipur

LEVEL	COMMITTEE	POLITICAL EXECUTIVE
Gram Panchayat	Production	Pradhan is the Chairman
	Social justice	
	Amenities	

LEVEL	COMMITTEE	POLITICAL EXECUTIVE
Zila Parishad	General	Adhyaksha is the Chairman
	Finance, Audit & Planning	
	Social justice	Up-Adhyaksha is the Chairman
	Education & Health	Chairman is elected from the members of these Committees
	Agriculture & Industries	
	Works	

Source: Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 (Annual Technical Inspection Report,
Office of the Principal Account General (Audit), Manipur, Government of Manipur

District Planning Committee (DPC)

'As per Section 96 of the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 State Government is required to constitute a District Planning Committee (DPC) in each district to consolidate the plans prepared by the Panchayats and Municipalities in the District and prepare a draft development plan for the district as a whole.' The DPC shall consist of:

(a) Adhyaksha of the Zilla Parishad (Chairperson)

(b) Members of the House of the People representing the district

(c) Members of Legislative Assembly who are elected in the district

(d) Such number of councilors as may be specified by the government from the member of councilors of Nagar Panchayat and Municipal Councils in the district

(e) Chief Executive Officer.

MANIPUR (VILLAGE AUTHORITIES IN HILL AREAS) ACT, 1956

The Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956, came into force on 18th April 1957, vide Notification No.S.R.O.88, dated 7-1-1957 Gazette of India, Pt, II, Sec.3, p.43. It extends to the whole of the hill areas of the Union territory of Manipur.

Every Village Authority shall be a body corporate by the name

of the village for which it is constituted and shall have perpetual succession and a common seal and shall by the said name sue and be sued, with power to acquire, hold and dispose of property, both movable and immovable, and to contract and do all other things necessary for the purposes of this Act.

Constitution of Village Authorities

1. For every village having twenty or more tax-paying houses, there shall be a village Authority (VA) consisting of-

    (a)   five members, where the number of tax-paying houses in the village is not less than twenty but is not more than sixty,

    (b)   seven members, where the number of tax-paying houses in the village is more than sixty but is not more than one hundred,

    (c)   ten members, where the number of tax-paying houses in the village is more than one hundred but is not more than one hundred and fifty,

    (d)   twelve members, where the number of tax-paying houses in the village is more than one hundred and fifty.

2. The Chief Commissioner may, having regard to the general interests of the people of any village as also to the demand, if any, from the people of that village for an elected Village Authority, declare, by notification in the Official Gazette, that the village shall have an elected Village Authority, and thereupon the members of the Village Authority of that village shall be elected in accordance with the provisions of this Act and rules made thereunder.

3. Where no declaration under sub-section (2) has been made in relation to any village the members of the Village Authority of that village shall be nominated by the Chief Commissioner.

4. Where there is a Chief Khulakpa in a village, he shall be the ex officio chairman of the Village Authority of that village; and where there is no such Chief or Khulakpa in the village, the chairman of the village Authority of that village shall be elected by the members of the Village Authority from among themselves.

Election of members of Village Authorities

The election of members of the Village Authority of a village shall be on the basis of adult suffrage, that is to say, every person who is a citizen of India and who is ordinarily resident in the village and is not less than twenty-one years of age on such date as may be fixed by rules made under this Act, shall be entitled to be registered as a voter at any such election.

Chief or Khulakpa

Chief or Khulakpa shall be the ex officio Chairman of the Village Authority of that village. Under his chairmanship, the Village Authority shall be:

    (a)   Responsible for maintenance of Law and Order of the Village.

    (b)   Proportionate distribution of land for every year's cultivation.

    (c)   Responsible to settle village disputes (Village Authority also acts a Village Courts)

    (d)   Implementing the development programmes of the government in the Village.

The VA shall meet at least twice decided by the members and Chairman of the Village Authority. A notice duly signed by Chairman and Secretary to be put up a week prior to the meeting. It shall be the responsibility of the Secretary to convene the meeting of the Village Authority or the Village Assembly as the case may be.

The term of office of members of a Village Authority shall be three years from the date appointed for its first meeting.

Functions of VA

- The maintenance of movable, immovable assets / resources and institutions within the village
- The construction, repair, and maintenance of roads, bridges, channels, buildings
- The establishment, maintenance, and management of dispensaries
- Public Health and Sanitation.
- The establishment, maintenance and management of primary schools, and the construction and repair of all buildings.
- Establishment, maintenance and management of markets and fairs, repairs, and building connected therewith.
- The construction, repair, and maintenance of embankments, and the supply. Storage and control of water for agricultural purposes.
- The supply of and control of pollution of water for drinking, cooking, and bathing purposes.
- The preservation and reclamation of soil.
- The preservation, protection and improvements of livestock, and prevention of animal diseases.
- The initiation, inspection, and control of relief works.
- The allotment, occupation or use, or land acquired for public purposes, for agricultural purpose or grazing.
- The management of any forest not being a reserved forest.
- The regulation of the practice of Jhum cultivation or other forms of shifting cultivation.

Duties of VA

- It shall, to the best of its ability maintain law and order and for that purpose exercise and perform the powers and duties general
- Can arrest any person who obstructs the VA in performing its task, planning to commit a crime or already has committed a heinous crime
- To constitute Village Development Committee a statutory body to assist Village Authority in executing development policy in village
- Identification of beneficiaries for the development program of the government, help formulate and supervise village development work
- The utmost duty of the Village Authority is to maintain law and order in the village. If any crises arise within the village, they play an important part in warding off the situation
- Village Authority oversees the distribution of land for every year's cultivation. They have to see no one claims permanent ownership of the land

A resident carrying firewood
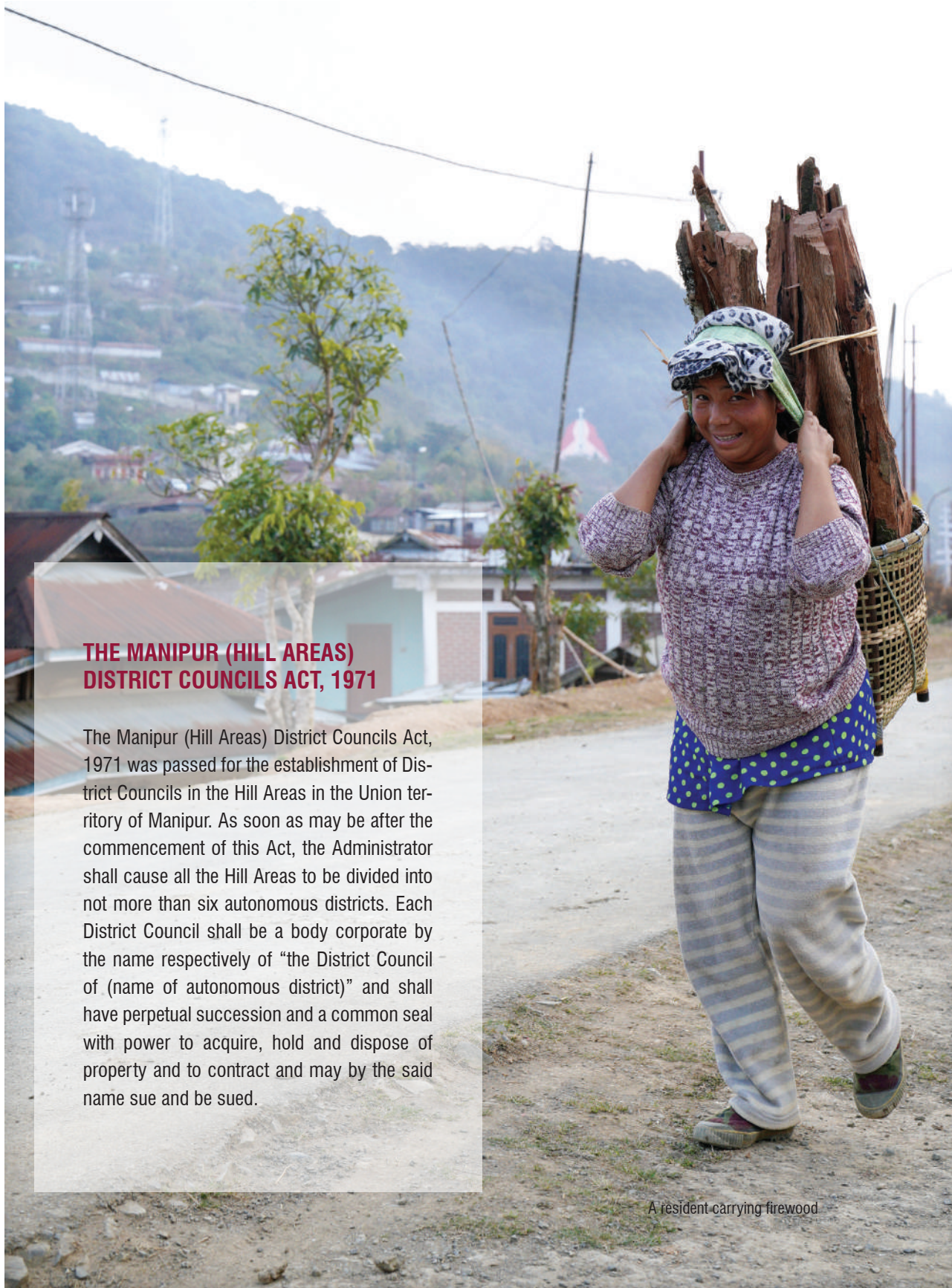
THE MANIPUR (HILL AREAS) DISTRICT COUNCILS ACT, 1971

The Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act, 1971 was passed for the establishment of District Councils in the Hill Areas in the Union territory of Manipur. As soon as may be after the commencement of this Act, the Administrator shall cause all the Hill Areas to be divided into not more than six autonomous districts. Each District Council shall be a body corporate by the name respectively of "the District Council of (name of autonomous district)" and shall have perpetual succession and a common seal with power to acquire, hold and dispose of property and to contract and may by the said name sue and be sued.

Constitution of District Councils

1. For each autonomous district, there shall be a District Council as from such date as the Administrator may, by notification in the Official Gazette, appoint on this behalf.

2. The total number of seats in the District Council to be filled by persons chosen by direct election on the basis of adult suffrage from territorial constituencies shall be not more than eighteen.

3. The Administrator may nominate not more than two persons, not being persons in the service of government, to be members of any District Council.

Chairman and Vice-Chairman

A District Council shall, as soon as may be, choose two members to be respectively Chairman and Vice-Chairman thereof and so often as the office of Chairman or Vice-Chairman becomes vacant, the Council shall choose another member to be Chairman or Vice-Chairman, as the case may be.

Officers and staff

For every District Council, there shall be a Chief Executive Officer, who shall be appointed by the Administrator.

Functions of District Councils

1. Subject to such exceptions and conditions as the Administrator may make and impose, the following matters shall be under the control and administration of a District Council, namely: —

(i) the maintenance and management of such property, movable, and immovable, and institutions as may be transferred to that Council by the Administrator,

(ii) the construction, repair, and maintenance of such of the roads, bridges, channels, and buildings as may be transferred to that Council by the Administrator,

(iii) the establishment, maintenance and management of primary schoolsand the construction and repair of all buildings connected with these institutions and in stitution of scholarships,

(iv) the establishment, maintenance, and management of dispensaries,

(v) the establishment and maintenance of cattle pounds including such functions under the Cattle-trespass Act, 1871 (1 of 1871) as may be transferred to that Council by the Administrator,

(vi) the establishment, maintenance and management of markets and fairs and the construction, repair, and maintenance of all buildings connected therewith,

(vii) the supply, storage, and prevention from pollution of water for drinking, cooking, and bathing purposes,

(viii) the construction, repair and maintenance of embank ments and the supply, storage, and control of water for agricultural purposes,

(ix) the preservation and reclamation of soil,

(x) the preservation, protection and improvement of live-stock and prevention of animal diseases,

(xi) public health and sanitation,

(xii) the management of such ferries as may be entrusted to the charge of that Council by the Administrator,

(xiii) the initiation, inspection and control of relief works,

(xiv) the allotment, occupation or use, or the setting apart of land, other than land acquired for any public purpose or land which is a reserved forest, for the purpose of agriculture or grazing or for residential or other non-agricultural purposes or for any other purposes likely to promote the interests of the inhabitants of any village or town situated within the autonomous district for which that council is constituted,

(xv) the management of any forest not being a reserved forest,

(xvi) the regulation of the practice of Jhum or other forms of shifting cultivation,

(xvii) any other matter which the Administrator may, in consultation with the Hill Areas Committee, entrust to the District Council in the field of agriculture, animal husbandry, community development, social and tribal welfare, village planning, or any other matter referred to in section 52 of the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963 (20 of 1963).

2. It shall be competent for a District Council to recommend to the Government of the Union territory of Manipur legislation relating to the following matters in so far as they concern members of the Scheduled Tribes, namely:

(a) appointment or succession of Chiefs,

(b) inheritance of property,

(c) marriage and divorce, and

(d) social customs.

Powers of taxation

Notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in any other law for the time being in force, a District Council shall have the power to levy all or any of the following taxes within the autonomous district for which the Council is constituted, that is to say:

(a) taxes on professions, trades, callings, and employments,

(b) taxes on animals, vehicles (other than mechanically propelled vehicles) and boats,

(c) taxes on entry of goods into a market for sale therein and tolls on passengers and goods carried in ferries,

(d) taxes for the maintenance of schools, dispensaries or roads, and any other tax falling under List II of the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution which the Legislature of the Union territory of Manipur may, by law, empower the District Council to levy.

Machi Village

LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT— ON GROUND

BACKGROUND TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Manipur for long had a traditional system of village administration under chieftaincy. Villages existed as independent units with their own systems and functions based on customary practices. The village chief managed local administration assisted by a council of elders. He was also the owner of the entire village land. All disputes were settled by the chief who primarily followed the customary laws which governed the people (ShokhothangHaokip, 2013).

Traditionally, the valley region was ruled by the Meitei kings. The kings inherited rights from their fathers. All the villages were managed directly by the kings through officials appointed by them. The villagers had no power in terms of village administration and local self-governance. The hill region on the other hand had two major tribes, Kukis and Nagas. They had two major systems of governance. While the Kukis followed the Chieftaincy system, among the Nagas, there were groups following the 'Khulakpa' system where the traditional chief belonging to a particular clan continued to inherit their position from their fathers, and groups following a democratic form of village administration system where the village chief was elected. The latter was however rare. While the village Chief used to be from the same clan, the members of the village council normally come from multiple families, in the Khulakpa system.

Manipur came under British rule in the year 1891. By the 1920s they were controlling most of the valleys. However, they could not impose any new rules for the villages in the hill region as the tribes in the hills were not ready to accept any new forms of administration in their villages. "This also marked the first instance of state trying to impose governance systems to the self-administrated villages in the hill regions. However, this did not change much on ground as the villages continued with the Chieftaincy model among Kuki community and Khulakpa model among Naga community", said Dr. Janghkhomang Guite (Associate Professor, Department of History, Manipur University).

"The Manipur Constitution Act, 1947, established a democratic form of government with the 'Maharajah' (King) as the executive head and a legislature constituted by election based on adult franchise. The Legislative Assembly so constituted was dissolved after the integration of the state with the Dominion of India in October 1949. It became as a part 'C' state under the Indian constitution with effect from 26-1-1950" (Dipanjan Chaudhury 2005).

"This also marked the first instance of state trying to impose governance systems to the self-administrated villages in the hill regions. However, this did not change much on ground as the villages continued with the Chieftaincy model among Kuki community and Khulakpa model among Naga community."

Dr. Janghkhomang Guite
Associate Professor, Department of History, Manipur University

During this time, the Kuki National Assembly (KNA) (established in 1946), raised the demand for a separate state for Kukis. This phase also experienced tensions between various ethnic communities in the valley and hills. There were increasing differences in aspirations among the people of Manipur. "This rift could be largely attributed to a plethora of policies adopted and pursued by the State Government and largely endorsed by the majority community" (Shokhothang Haokip, 2013).

In 1956 through the Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, the State Government attempted to bring in some changes in the administration of the villages. The attempt was to bring in democratic principles within the traditional village administration system. Even though the Chiefs or Khulakpas were officially selected as the Chairman of Village Authorities, it gave an opportunity to the villagers to elect the Secretary and members. The Village Authority was vested with ample powers including Law & Order, Civil & Judicial control within the village in line with the traditional structures. Though the Kuki community was hesitant in accepting the change, the Naga community was largely open. Even today, Chieftaincy is the dominant system being followed by the Kuki community. "The Panchayat system in Manipur was introduced in 1960 under the provisions of the United Provinces Panchayat Raj Act 1947, which was extended to the state. Under the Act, a two-tier system of local governance was introduced in the state. The State Government enacted the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act in 1975 which provided a three-tier system of Panchayat comprising Gram Panchayats at the Gram Sabha level, Panchayat Simitis at the block level and Zilla Parishads at the district levels, besides Nyaya Panchayats for judicial purposes" (Dipanjan Chaudhury 2005). Thus, while the PRIs started functioning in the valley areas, Village Authorities started functioning in the Hill areas.

DECENTRALIZATION

"In conformity with the 73rd constitution Amendment Act of 1992, the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act 1994 was passed on 23rd April 1994 by repealing the Act of 1975. The new Act has provided for the constitution of a two-tier Panchayati Raj in the valley areas, the Gram Sabha at the village level and Zilla Parishad at the district level. The Act of 1994 was amended substantially in 1996 to accommodate Gram Sabha (GS) at the village level having a population of not less than 3,000 and not more than 6,000" (Dipanjan Chaudhury 2005). The Act also provided reservation of seats for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population and women for better representation of minority. "Even though the Panchayat bodies were empowered to work for the socio-economic development of their respective areas, they were unable to work effectively for the development of the villages due to lack of funds from Central Government and also because of the conflict between elected members of the Panchayat and bureaucrats of concerned departments" (The Hindu Centre).

The Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, 1971 resulted in the constitution of six autonomous districts (hill areas) - Sadar Hills Autonomous District, Manipur North Autonomous District, Manipur East Autonomous District, Manipur West Autonomous District, and Tengnoupal Autonomous District. The ADCs continued to discharge their functions (17) till its suspension in 1988. Not happy with this development, all District Councils and Tribal Students Union formed a Sixth Schedule Standing Committee to pressurize the government for extension of the Sixth Schedule. "In partial fulfilment of this demand, the Government of Manipur brought in Third Amendment to the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act in 2008 by enhancing its functions to twenty-six. By and large, the district councils were not given legislative and judicial powers, but only limited executive and financial power" (ShokhothangHaokip, 2013).

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Traditionally, women used to shoulder the responsibility of the family. They played a major role in economic activities. However, as far as local development process and village administration were concerned, they had little say. A male dominated patriarchal system was in practice among the trib-

Tuishimi bazar

al communities. Women used to exercise their political right as voters but choose candidates as per their husbands' will. Though they were aware of the existence of the Panchayat, they had little knowledge about its various functions. Most of them also had no idea about reservation of seats for women in Gram Panchayats. Lack of experience in administrative work, poverty, illiteracy, traditional family values, and male dominance minimized their level of participation in local governance (Grace Kamei, 2021).

However, after the introduction of PRIs, participation of women in local politics showed a positive trend. "A meaningful number of participation of women becomes much more visible after first General Panchayat elections which were held on 31st January 1997 both for Gram Panchayat and Zilla Parishad. The composition of women in panchayats in both levels was around 36% of the total seats which is more than the normal reservation of seats (i.e. 33%). Altogether 598 women representatives were elected" (Sanasam Amal Singh, 2019). Women becoming Panchayat representatives have increased their participation in the political arena. The number of women voters has also increased steadily over the years. The recent electoral rolls in Jan 2021 have confirmed that female voters outnumbered male electors by 55,172 (1006581 voters out of a total of 1958087 voters in Manipur) (Sanasam Amal Singh, 2019).

Elected women representatives of Gram Panchayats, 2017

Sl. No.	Name of District/Block	Pradhans of Gram Panchayats (GP)					Members of Gram Panchayats (GP)				
		WR (Gen)	ST	SC	UR	Total	WR (Gen)	ST	SC	UR	Total
I	IMPHAL EAST										
	1.Imphal East-I	8			3	11	90	3		42	135
	2.Imphal East-II	9			2	11	78	2		47	127
	3.Jiribam	2				2	14	3	4	3	24
	Sub-total	19			5	24	182	8	4	92	286
II	IMPHAL WEST										
	1.Imphal West- I	9				9	69	2	4	35	110
	2.Imphal West-II	4			2	6	46	1		22	69
	Sub-total	13			2	15	115	3	4	57	179
III	THOUBAL										
	1.Thoubal	9			1	10	111	2		26	139
	2.Kakching	5				5	54	2	2	19	77
	Sub-total	14			1	15	165	4	2	45	216
IV	BISHNUPUR										
	1.Bishnupur	4			2	6	40		1	14	55
	2.Moirang	4				4	34	1	1	16	52
	Sub-total	8			2	10	74	1	2	30	107
	TOTAL	54	0	0	10	**64**	536	16	12	224	**788**

WR= Reserved for Women, UR= Unreserved, SC= Scheduled Caste, ST= Scheduled Tribe

Source: Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department, Govt. of Manipur -
Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj institution: A case study of Manipur by Sanasam Amal Singh

STATUS OF SELF-HELP GROUPS

Even though the SHG model was formally introduced in Manipur fairly late, ideas related to self-help groups have existed here for long. 'Marup' was one such traditional savings institution where each member contributed a fixed amount to a saving pot at specific intervals. Amount accumulated at the end of each interval was given to a member through random selection, rotation basis or bid. Lending a helping hand to one another economically or socially has been an integral part of Manipuri society. This was evident in sharing of workforce for agriculture, extending help in cash or kind during cultural events like marriages and so on (Sharma & Sharma, 2019). This principle of cooperation might have had a good impact on how women perceived the importance of SHGs when they were more formally introduced in the state.

Empirical research study on SHGs in Imphal East conducted by Sharma and Sharma found that, "Despite the SHG movement starting late in Manipur, it brings an important aspect of development within the mindset of women, in particular, to uplift them out of the age-old vicious cycle of poverty." SHGs today play an important role in the lives of distressed, poor, and downtrodden women members to raise their income and standard of living. Over a period of time, SHGs have become an indispensable institution.

SHG Managed Farm, Angtha village

FUNDING

For the Kukis, welfare of the community is taken care by the chief. However, the traditional Chieftaincy is a stumbling block for progressive development under a democratic regime. It makes the Chief the owner of all the resources coming to his village including state sponsored schemes and funds. The Chief used to have control over the funds for education, health, job cards other development programmes, and utilizing it for the holistic development of the village has always been a challenge. His word in the Village council is final as far as village development is concerned. One of the other challenges for the government to bringing in the development programmes aggressively was that these villages are also very scattered with each village having just between 50-100 households. Due to these factors, the development of the Kuki villages was affected adversely.

On the other hand, the villages of the Naga community saw a major change as they started benefiting through the 1956 Act by bringing in a democratic system within the traditional practices. Among the Khulakpa community, each and every family of the clan owns a piece of land for cultivation. The ownership of land by a family can be shared within the clan. So, the exclusive ownership right for the clans and the families is a customary one among the Naga community. Similarly, government sponsored schemes and funds being rooted for development programmes especially in the creation of assets & resources, schools, and hospitals are relatively better than the Kuki community.

Though the Panchayats are functioning in the valley areas since 1978, local planning and development have not been highly effective due to inadequate funds. "Even the schemes funded by the Central Government fail to take off as the funds do not reach in time" (The Hindu Centre).

Similarly, for the district councils, each one has a fund called the Council fund. The council funds received are generally utilized for the purpose of the construction and maintenance of public buildings, roads etc.The budget approved by the district administration is generally based on the preparation by the deputy commissioner. The allotment of funds by the Legislative Assembly is based on i) the proposed budget and ii) the discussion and approval with the Hill Areas Committee. "The taxes collected by the district council from betel shops, GST, and others are passed on to the district administration. Even professional taxes collected from employees of the district council are submitted to the administration of the district council" (The Hindu Centre). "Another source of fund for the local bodies is the amount recommended by the Central Finance Commission. However, the 14th FC did not make any recommendation for the District Councils on the ground that it is entitled to the grants under Article 275. The amount received under Art. 275 are meagre and all the funds provided under this provision cannot be assigned to the District Councils. The State Finance Commission must be specifically tasked to make recommendations to improve the financial health of the local bodies and their total reliance on the State Government must be resolved" (Dr. R. K. Nimai Singh, 2021).

POLITICAL INTERFERENCE

Like most other states, in Manipur too, the Chairperson or Vice Chairperson of the District Councils cannot perform their duties without the strong support of both the ruling party in the state as well as at the Centre. The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy in their piece 'Decentralization, Governance and the Institutional Framework of Development in different regions of Manipur' noted, "The district council does not possess the financial, administrative and functional powers of an effective local self-government. … although Rule No. 98 of the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Rules, 1962, envisages a relationship between the village authority and district council, it is more administrative rather than democratic."

Autonomous Councils were created to provide hill districts the autonomy and freedom of choice for their own development considering the local culture and sentiments. However, it lacks in delivering this basic objective. The involvement of District administration has interfered with this autonomous planning and the performance of the village administration. "The autonomy granted to the district councils under the Act remains elusive. The survival and functioning of these district councils greatly depend on the State Government and the district administration devolving powers and finances and not interfering in the function of the councils" (The Hindu Centre).

TRAINING

Various training and capacity building programmes for LSG institutions are on-going under the State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD). For the FY 2019-20, Manipur Government has strategized and approved plans & budget under various categories. A few of the modules under which expenses budgeted are Capacity building & Training of GPDP focusing on various schemes - centrally sponsored schemesand state sponsored schemes and activities taken up by 16 line departments on the 29 matters listed in the 73rd amendment.

- At State level - Directorate of Rural Development (RD) & Panchayat Raj (PR) Staff, SIRD Staff, National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) Staff, Officers of line departments, SHG Federation, AG Officials, Retd Accountants, Academician, Ex-ZP Adhyakshas, Right to Information (RTI experts)

- At District level - ZP office Staff, Officers of line department, SHG, Members of ZP, DPC Members, Ex ZP Members, PO / APO / IT Manager / AO DRDA etc.

- At Block level - RD & PR Block Office Staff, PA, Panchayat Secretaries, Gram Rozgar Sevak, Data Entry Operators, Academicians, Knowledgeable Retd persons, Distinguished individuals who have done exemplary works for GP, Pradhans, Ex Pradhans from each Block, 1 ward member from each GP etc.

- At Village level - Facilitators from each Village Authority. Besides this, training for E-enablement of Panchayats (using computers) and E-Governance support groups is also an important component.

[26] For more details, please visit   https://www.panchayat.gov.in/documents/20126/62145/Manipur+19.20+annex.pdf/74793603-d390-3405-eef3-ab8bb74d4a42?t=1555322423597

A training session in progress

SIRD, Manipur has conducted over 947 training in different flagship programmes of the Central Government including the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Recurring Fund of Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA), Law and Justice, Other Training Courses (OTC) which had seen participation of over 40,439 attendees from 2017-18.

In the year 2018, Government of India awarded the SIRD, Manipur under the Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, the Best Performing SIRD in North East India.

ELECTION

Overall, the Chieftaincy and Khulakpa system is followed widely among the hill region of Manipur. However, within the Khulakpa system, there is a practice of i) inheritance, ii) selection of ex-officio chairman and, iii) elections prevailing among the Naga group. To adopt the Village Authority Act, the district administration has to conduct elections on a regular basis and declare the results officially. The attempt of the Manipur Hill Areas Acquisition of Chief's Rights Act, 1967, was to abolish Chieftainship in the hill areas. However, "Chieftainship prevails with all its rights and privileges in the hill areas. Thus, democratization of village councils through elections

as well as statutory representation for women remains one of the most contentious issues in decentralization governance in the hills. Dilution of the Chief's powers is conflated with undermining of autonomy of the tribes ever since Chiefdom became synonymous with territorial authority for the clan as a whole" (The Hindu Centre).

Prof. Jangkhomang noted that, "In the valley areas, in-line to the provisions of the PRI Act, State Election commission has the role for supervision, direction, and control of the elections to the Panchayat bodies". On the other hand, the Manipur Village Authority (Hill Areas) Act, 1956, determined the number of members of a village authority based on the number of tax paying households. This act also introduced the provision for elections to the Village Authority. This was controversial because earlier village Chiefs used to nominate its members and is still being followed in many villages (The Hindu Centre).

Set in this backdrop, the Panchayati Raj Institution – Community Based Organisation (PRI- CBO) Convergence project was implemented in Manipur, which is discussed in detail in the next section.

EXPERIENCES FROM PROJECT LOCATIONS

The PRI- CBO Convergence project was initiated in December 2017 with the Manipur State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MSRLM) in one block each across 2 districts in Manipur. In January 2018, a State-District-Block level stakeholder orientation was conducted, following which Mentors were posted in the project area which covered Machi block in Tengnoupal district and Keirao Bitra block in Imphal East district, with 3 Mentors working with 155 LRG members and 775 SHGs.

PILOT PHASE

The geography of Manipur's undulating terrain has had a large role in the evolution of the state's economic, social, and political structures. Manipur's hilly region comprises of around 60% of the total area of the state, while plains cover the remaining 40%. The state has five hill districts and four valley districts. Most of the population lives in the hilly region and agriculture is the primary livelihood activity. The hills are home to predominantly tribal communities, with as many as 30 notified tribal groups[27], each characterized by their unique social customs. The plain and valley regions are dominated by the Meitei community.

No. of Districts	No. of Blocks	No. of GPs / VDC/VC	No. of SHGs	No. of LRG members	Project Duration
2	2	38 VA,12 GPs	775	155	From December 2017

Pilot Phase Profile

Machi Village

[27] Data from Tribal Research Institute (TRI), Government of Manipur based on the 2001 Census Figures excluding Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul Sub-Divisions of Senapati District.

STAGE 1:
Leveraging Livelihood Activities for Mobilization

A Village Organisation (VO) level orientation conducted along with the MSRLM helped identify the LRG members from the community. This was followed by detailed training with the SHGs on the i) Need for participation in governance process and ii) Imparting awareness on Central and State-sponsored schemes and entitlements.

State	No. of Local Cadre Trained	No. of VO Members Trained	No. of PRI Members Oriented
Manipur	155	224	45

Capacity Building Undertaken as part of PAE & EAP

Preeti Haridas (Mentor Resource Person, Machi Block Chandel District) with LRG members

Initial work in the field revealed that the regular approach of using Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) as an entry point activity was not yielding favorable results in Manipur. This was because the average days of employment provided per household was just 12.47 in FY2017-2018 as against the 100 days required[28]. Through field observations, Kudumbashree NRO realized that there was a need for resilient Livelihoods (LH) opportunities in the hills and steps to address gaps in delivery of services such

"The work (of PRI – CBO Convergence project) is the same as that of other states. However, we had to find an appropriate way to do it."

Rathi M.R.
Mentor Resource Person, Machi Block, Chandel District

as livelihood training and capacity building. Thus, the project strategy was tweaked, and Livelihood was used as an entry point to the community.

Rathi M.R. (Mentor Resource Person, Machi Block, Chandel District) said that the SHGs were largely inactive and women were not aware of their rights and entitlements. "The work (of PRI – CBO Convergence project) is the same as that of other states. However, we had to find an appropriate way to do it."

The PRI-CBO Convergence project also aimed at providing financial linkages to VLFs (Village Level Federations)[29] and collect baseline data with MSRLM to address the issue of LH at the household level. This was facilitated by conducting a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) on livelihood at the SHG and VLF level. The participatory exercise also assisted the

[28] There is a Progress card published in the MoRD. https://nrega.nic.in/netnrega/homestciti.aspx?state_code=20&state_name=MANIPUR
[29] Federation of SHGs form a VLF.

district and MSRLM in developing a database of livelihood activities that were related to farm, off-farm, and entrepreneurship. Crucially, the engagement helped the women in the SHGs to think beyond thrift and credit by improving their awareness of their entitlements, and the available schemes and programmes from various departments. The initial project focus began in the villages in the hilly areas (Machi block) and was then extended to the valley areas.

Livelihood Mapping in progress, Angtha village

Process: Livelihood Mapping

1. A planning meeting was conducted with the state and block level teams to finalize the module. Teams provided inputs based on their knowledge of livelihood (farm/off-farm/entrepreneurship) activities undertaken in their respective blocks.

2. At the village level, the team briefed the elected representatives (sarpanch, up-sarpanch, ward members) on the objective of the livelihood mapping exercise. They explained how it could benefit their village development and how to liaison with line departments. Concerned block teams, LRG members and Mentors were involved in every step where work is conducted in close coordination with the cluster coordinator of the block.

3. A meeting with the VLF executive members on the objective and importance of the livelihood mapping exercise was conducted. Care was taken to ensure that no promises were made to the community regarding loans or financial benefits that they were eligible for after the exercise. The date and venue for the exercise with the respective SHGs was fixed during the VLF meetings.

4. The livelihood mapping exercise was conducted with SHGs, Mentors, LRG members, active women and Cluster Coordinators. The participatory exercise was intitially led by Kudumbashree NRO Mentors and after a few exercises, selected LRG members took over with handholding by Mentors, thereby training the local cadre too as part of the LH mapping process.

5. The data generated at the SHG level was consolidated at the VLF level and afterwards the VLF president and secretary authorized the document (signature and VLF stamp). Later, a copy of this was shared with the elected representatives of the village by the VLF members.

Girija N.
Mentor Resource Person, Keiro Block, Imphal (E) District

This strategic leveraging of livelihood activities as an entry point helped bring in all the active stakeholders on board. Furthermore, owing to the coordination with the various departments, line department convergence was also enabled at the start of the project, in contrast to this outcome which was usually realized towards the end of the project.

"When we tried to identify the problem with Manipur, we realized women were very energetic but needed a sense of direction to utilize their skills."

When Girija N. (Mentor Resource Person, Keiro Block, Imphal (E) District) started work in Manipur she noticed that women in the Northeast were outgoing and fairly empowered. Men encouraged and supported women to go out and work. Girija recollects, "When we tried to identify the problem with Manipur, we realized women were very energetic but needed a sense of direction to utilize their skills." Activities like livelihood mapping and dream village mapping inspired not just women but also the Panchayat members to become active participants in the development activities.

Girija facilitating a Livelihood Development Plan preparation Angtha village
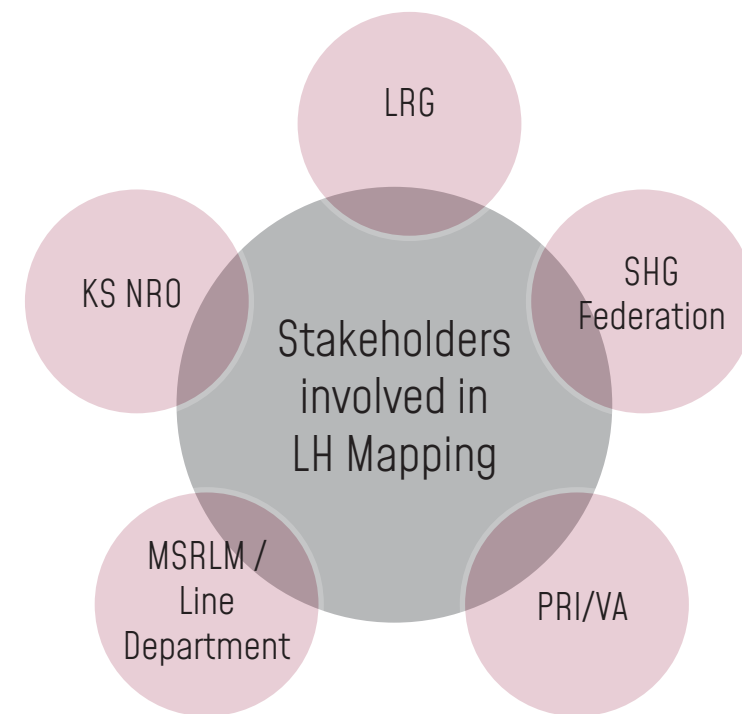
Roles of the stakeholders involved in the process are detailed below highlighting the importance of convergence to strengthen rural livelihoods and community stewardship for village development.

• LRG members played an important role in the mapping exercise as they were involved right through the process, from start to completion. They conducted the exercise at the SHG level, assisted in arranging meetings with the elected representatives, VLF and SHG groups, and helped spread awareness among the local community. This was a huge activity for them and a great immersion exercise soon after the initial training as part of the PRI-CBO Convergence project. This helped them learn many aspects of the project like mobilization, engaging the community, sensitization etc.

• For the VLF it was a great organisation building exercise. Planning, coordinating, and organising the entire exercise at such a large scale provided them with a great of deal experience in managing processes in a systematic manner which helped them evolve as an umbrella organisation.

• For the local bodies, the exercise acted as a bridge between them and the community. They utilized this opportunity to get closer to the community and streamline their relationship through constant dialogue. The activity also helped to identify women community leaders who can further help the PRIs / VAs in taking the community initiatives forward. They also got the opportunity to understand the relevance of the data generated through this exercise which could be used to make informed decisions and better planning in local development.

• The MSRLM / line departments benefited from the huge database generated as part of the activity, which they could further use for the implementation of programmes and schemes targeting the right beneficiaries.

• The District collector was appraised regularly about the field activities through which he could get a better understanding of the field realities. It has also helped the District Planning councils in chalking out various programmes. Local cadres were called to present the data during such meetings. For example, Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) started to implement various programmes across villages including distribution of seeds, training in farm-related activities, capacity building exercises etc.

• Kudumbashree NRO through their Mentors helped provide the necessary hand-holding support to the SHGs, VLFs, and PRI bodies in bridging livelihood-related gaps.

The case of Keirao - Bitra block: Enabling action with line departments

By September 2018, the outcomes of LH mapping were encouraging. Though initially envisaged for the hill villages of the project area, other villages in the plains also conducted the exercise, recognizing its potential as a tool for mobilization at local level. This resulted in a Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) for 2019-20 where the Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP) included the outcomes of the LH mapping exercise. Though initially the LH data was not incorporated in GPDP, consultative meetings were conducted to include LH demands based on the data collected. Panchayats took the initiative and approached line departments and MLAs to take the matter forward. As a result of the consultative meetings, demand was then taken to one of the line departments (Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK). This led to 6 months of continuous engagement on various knowledge and training programmes which is a testament of the impact of the LH intervention.

In August 2018, MSRLM personnel along with the Block Development Officer (BDO) approached KVK and presented the data of the SHGs in Keirao-bitra block, Imphal East district. KVK showed interest in utilizing the data on VLFs and SHGs in order to include it in their programmes for the rest of the year's (2018-19) activities. KVK then initiated a full-fledged four-day Mushroom training with 30 SHG women members of Keirao-bitra block. The programme included value chain management, vermi-composting, value-added products, and market linkages. After the initial training, there was a snowball effect with other communities, recognizing the potential of the training. S. Moli Bala Devi (Programme Coordinator, KVK, Imphal East District) shared, "If one group was provided with the training, then other groups would definitely approach us. This paved the way for different training programmes."

S. Moli Bala Devi
Programme Coordinator, KVK, Imphal East District

Soon, KVK started contacting active women groups regarding centrally sponsored training programmes. "We have covered 10 hectares of demonstration on the cultivation of rapeseed, green gram, black gram, and different varieties of field pea. They are very adaptive to all the instructions we give them and follow them meticulously, send us photos. This keeps motivating us."

Importantly, S. Moli Bala Devi shared how KVK has accepted the VLF as crucial partners for technology transfers and field demonstrations. "VLF group leaders have become an added asset for us. They are one of the main target groups and active participants for new technologies. We are also encouraging them to be part of seed banks as part of a climate contingent plan." The women are also exposed to various on-going research and infrastructure from universities. VLF members are setting an example to other groups in the district by adopting the best practices along with guidance from KVK experts.

On their successful seed production programme and the future of the project, the KVK Programme Coordinator shared, "We gave them inputs and they had good produce. The Central University is going to buy the produce now and this would double the income of the farmers."

Subashini Devi
LRG member, Angtha, Imphal (E) District

Furthermore, over 600 VLF group members gained from awareness programmes sponsored by the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers on the importance of organic fertilizers, compost making, judicious use of fertilizers, and integrated nutrient management for different crops. The Agricultural Skill Council of India is also training various farmers and accrediting them as Master trainers in these blocks. Based on the overwhelming participation and interest from the community, in February 2020, KVK invited MSRLM staff along with active and progressive farming members of VLFs for a Scientific Advisory Committee meeting. This was a stakeholder consultation. Various training programmes and demonstrations based on their inputs have been incorporated into the plan for next year.

"After discussion with Village Level Federation (VLF), we approached Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) and Central Agriculture University (CAU) and received various training."

From the perspective of the local community, an SHG member who cultivates pineapple on her land shared how the project has helped her revive her ancestral farm. Being a member of the SHG bolstered her confidence and offered her new avenues. Various training programmes and interactions with the agriculture department that was facilitated through the PRI-CBO Convergence project gave her an understanding of pineapple cultivation through organic farming techniques which helped her pursue it as a lucrative livelihood activity. "I have availed loan from our VLF and invested Rs. 20,000 on 2 acres of land. I am expecting an income of Rs. 80,000 minimum from this cultivation for next 4 years."

SHG Managed farm, Angtha village

STAGE 2: Improving awareness on Rights & Entitlements and Increasing Participation in Local Governance

With local communities in the project areas experiencing improvements in their livelihood options, the PRI-CBO Convergence project made important in-roads into the community. In March 2019, the project kick-started the Participatory Assessment of Entitlements (PAE) exercise in all the GPs and conducted capacity building training for the LRG members on available schemes and entitlements at the GP level. By August 2019, 452 SHGs and 31 VLFs had completed the PAE exercise.

The project not only helped the SHG women participate in local governance, but also equipped them with knowledge on their rights and entitlements, and importantly the means to avail benefits provided by the government through various schemes. It enabled the SHG women to shift from just thrift and credit activities to decision making and planning for holistic village development.

CASE OF ANGTHA

Angtha is one such Gram Panchayat in the Top Chingtha cluster[30] in East Imphal district where the PRI-CBO Convergence project has been very successful. It has eight wards in four villages with a population of around 8000 from 2500 households. There are three to four major communities which include Tangkhul (ST), Muslims, and Hindu (Meitei community) with a literacy rate of 90%. After the implementation of PRI-CBO Convergence project, Angtha GP witnessed a huge transformation in the Gram Sabha participation and demands made through VPRP. During a field interview, Thiyam Manihal Singh (Pradhan, Angtha GP, Top Chingtha cluster), who had worked closely with MSRLM and Kudumbashree NRO to implement the project, noted how there was a drastic shift in the participation of women in governance, from a mere one-third in 2018 to more than three-fourth in 2019. Though women have been vocal and active in other spheres, they

were absent in matters of governance. However, with training and capacity building, the SHG women have become more assertive.

Angtha GP is not the only GP to witness this transformation. Structure and functioning of CBOs across project areas changed for the better. After one year of the project, LRG members in the project locations have adapted their approach based on an understanding of the limitations of GPs. Women consult with GPs for every action plan and mobilize collectively to realize their demands – either by working with line departments or with the communities. Taorem James (Block Mission Manager, MSRLM, Top Chingtha cluster In-charge) shared that the project has been very successful in these valley areas.

Taorem James
Block Mission Manager, MSRLM,
Top Chingtha Cluster In-charge

Thiyam Singh shared that the 2019 GPDP witnessed a combination of demands which ranged across social development, livelihoods, and entitlements - anganwadi centers, VLF / VO offices, cowshed / duck sheds, vermi-compost, garbage bins, public toilets, Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) / Chief Minister-giHak-shelgiTengbang (CMHT) / Old-age pension / Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awaas Yojana (PMAY-G) and bank linkages for SHGs. This is in stark contrast from the 2018 GPDP which had predominantly individual demands. Thiyam is confident that 500 out of 800 demands in

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> "Today, our GP is witnessing good knowledge sharing among the communities and collective decision making in village development."

the uploaded GPDP is likely to get sanctioned from the block office due to their 2018 performance. About these transformative changes in community-led governance, he said, "Even my interaction with the SHGs have changed a lot and I cannot sit idle. Today, our GP is witnessing good knowledge sharing among the communities and collective decision making in village development."

Thiyam Manihal
Pradhan, Angtha GP, Top Chintha cluster

STAGE 3: VPRP – A Potential tool for Local Planning Process

In September 2019, Kudumbashree NRO conducted a workshop on preparing GPDP with all the stakeholders at the state, block and district level as a precursor for the actual GPDP preparation. However, a roster for the Gram Sabha meetings from the State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) was circulated shortly thereafter and as per this, Gram Sabhas were to be conducted as usual in October. A majority of the blocks had not completed the VPRP preparation by this time. In an extraordinary example of community ownership of village development, triggered by their increased awareness and interest in governance, the women, and men in some GPs in the project area demanded an extension of the Gram Sabha meetings in order to present a better planned VPRP for GPDP. This provided a good ground for the SHGs to actively involve themselves in the VPRP exercise. While the GPs were yet to get clarity about the whole GPDP process and had decided to go ahead with the proceedings as per the schedule, the SHGs demonstrated exceptional attitude in requesting a postponement of Gram Sabha so that better plans could be sub-

mitted. Owing to this community demand, the district administration decided to postpone the GPDP exercise. Finally, the SHG members prepared holistic VPRPs in the project villages, and this set the tone for the creation of a transformed women community in villages.

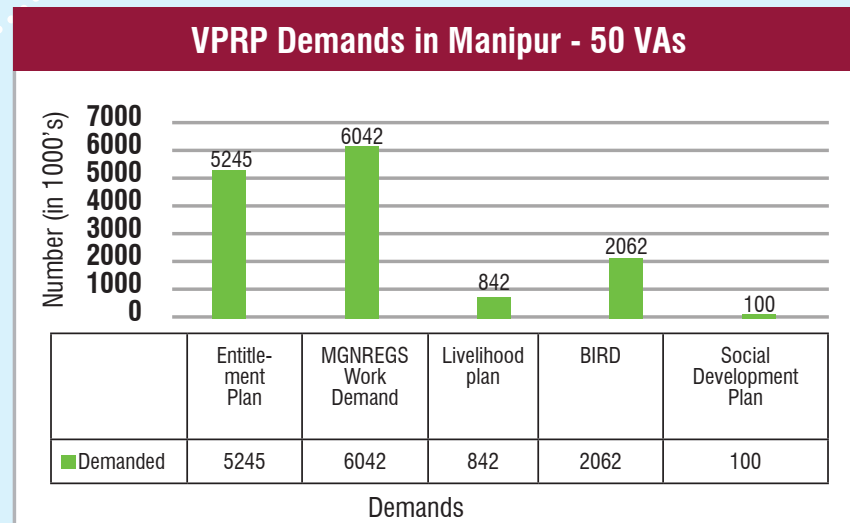| No. of LRGs Trained	No. of VOs Oriented	No. of Local Government Institutions Oriented
155	60	12 GPs & 38 VAs

Capacity Building undertaken as part of VPRP

The joint platforms developed in the process helped the GPs in better planning and prioritization of community demands. Until then in Manipur, there was no such planning. It was a completely new experience for the office bearers of GPs, calling Gram Sabhas and interacting with SHGs and their federations for incorporation of community demands in village development.

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[30] The project was implemented in five GPs out of six GPs in Top Chingtha cluster

STATUS OF VPRP

VPRP Demands in Manipur - 50 VAs

Number (in 1000's)

	Entitlement Plan	MGNREGS Work Demand	Livelihood plan	BIRD	Social Development Plan
Demanded	5245	6042	842	2062	100

Demands

The VPRP exercise carried out with 50 VAs in the year 2019 for 2020-21 witnessed demands cutting across all major components. Though there was no integration done under Entitlement Plan, the participatory exercise witnessed the involvement of 593 SHGs. Nearly, 62% (3234) of demands came understate sponsored schemes and about 38% (2011) came forcentrally sponsored Schemes (CSS). Since the coverage of SBM was low, it saw the highest demand, around 17% under CSS. The newly introduced State Health Insurance scheme (CMHT) saw the highest demand, around 53% under SSS. The other major demands were Ration cards (822), Manipur Old Age Pension Scheme (1247), and Caregiver allowance – CMST (108).

Similarly, under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 473 work demands from Keirao block was integrated. Around 92% of the total demand came for Category 'B'

(5572) as the individual assets for vulnerable sections were focused on. It consisted of demands such as Piggery shed and Poultry shelter. There were also demands under the Category 'A' (340) comprising of irrigation canal, drainage, land development, and specific plantation demands. According to the data from Keirao block, 7.8% of demands were integrated in GPDP.

Under the Livelihood plan, the highest demands came for farm-based activities (354) and Off-farm activities (353) which constituted approximately 42% of the total demand. Since programme blocks were agrarian in nature, Agriculture and Horticulture were the popular demands under farm activities while Animal husbandry and fisheries formed the majority under off-farm activities. Under Non-farm activities, Weaving and bamboo craft had 135 demands generated.

While the Public Goods, Services, and Resource Development Plan witnessed an overall demand of 2062 from 50 GPs/VAs, 37 demands from 12 GPs got integrated. It was a collective effort of 52 VLFs that covered demands under 10 sectors of 29 subjects of the XIth schedule. The highest demand was for Rural electrification (34%) that included demand for more streetlights to enable mobility at night. There was 28% of Health and Sanitation related demands as the services were inaccessible in many villages.The demands connected to minor irrigation, water management, and watershed development witnessed 27% of the overall demand. Rainwater harvesting for both public and private was popular too. Overall, 2% of Infrastructure demands got integrated into GPDP.

Social Development Plan saw a major thrust and specific issues such as drug abuse, accessing yarn for weavers, market for tribal women, household domestic violence, water problem, waste management issues, and children's engagement in extra-curricular activities were prominent demands from the VLFs. Major stakeholders included Anti-drug clinic, Village legal aid clinic, MSRLM, Youth clubs, PHC, and VA bodies that addressed drug abuse issues. Plans were submitted in 2 GPs in Keirao and 15 villages in Machi. Similarly, local bodies along with SRLM came together for children's engagement and it witnessed sports plans being submitted for 84 children and tuition plans being submitted for 65 children in Keirao block. Out of 6 GPs where plans for proper waste management were submitted, 2 GPs initiated the activities in Keirao block. 75 women vendors from 9 villages participated in the market space initiatives. For household domestic violence, 2 GPs prepared and submitted the plans in Machi block.

Raji Krishnakutty
Mentor Resource Person, Keiro Block,
Imphal (E) District

IMPACT, LEARNING AND FUTURE STEPS

Prior to the PRI-CBO Convergence project, the participation of women in Gram Sabha was very limited. Voluntary groups like Meira Paibi, a social activist women group and Youth Clubs existed even before SHGs in Manipur. However, they seldom worked with LSG institutions because of their activist nature of functioning. However, with improved awareness through capacity building activities, the interest in governance gained momentum. Now Meira Paibi, conducts rallies and actively participates in village development issues. In fact, almost 90% of the Meira Paibis are SHG members and are aware of their rights and entitlements owing to the activities conducted during the project. The PRI-CBO Convergence project ensured collective action utilizing the merits of the Local Self Government (LSG) structure and participatory exercises with all stakeholders. This in turn helped streamline and organize the demands for improved village development planning and implementation. Through increased collective participation and by utilizing platforms like Gram Sabha and institutions like line departments, the women empowered themselves and started to participate actively in the space of political action. The project helped the Meira Paibis gain a new perspective of working with the government.

Techa Hongsha, one of the retired teachers from Khangshim village who is an active LRG member under the PRI-CBO Convergence project stressed the fact that, informed women have motivated the VAs to perform better. "…because of the awareness among community about rights and entitlements, the Panchayats cannot do 'jugaads' anymore." She also mentioned that there is a long way to go and they are in the process of becoming responsible citizens through the base they have created over a period of time through movements and women group mobilization.

Techa Hongsha
LRG member (Rtd. Teacher), Khangshim village

The pilot phase of the PRI-CBO Convergence project has been a boon for individual households and villages. However, there is still scope for further action as the traditional functioning of GPs are yet to devolve enough authority to Pradhans. In our interview, Thiyam, Pradhan from Angtha GP who is also a committee member of the Manipur state Panchayat Parishad shared that he understands the limitations of the existing GP system where the ground reality requires Pradhans to approach the line departments through the BDOs and not directly. This needs a lot of improvement, he feels, since the freedom to plan and execute the community led local village development is limited. He also stressed on the need and importance of the budget allocation. The willingness to spend for the local self-governance is yet to catch up like other states since there is no direct budget allocation to Panchayats in Manipur. Learning from his exposure visit to Kerala in March 2019, Thiyam is actively campaigning for the need for local planning and development through the networks of the community women, along with 160 other Pradhans and Zilla Parishad members. This change in community stewardship is encouraging.

Thiyam is happy that the GPs have become a vibrant entity due to the dynamic and enthusiastic community of women. The GPDP process helped PRIs work more closely with the community. He realized that the capacity building which happened through the participatory exercises was very useful which would otherwise have taken time under SIRD or any other agencies.
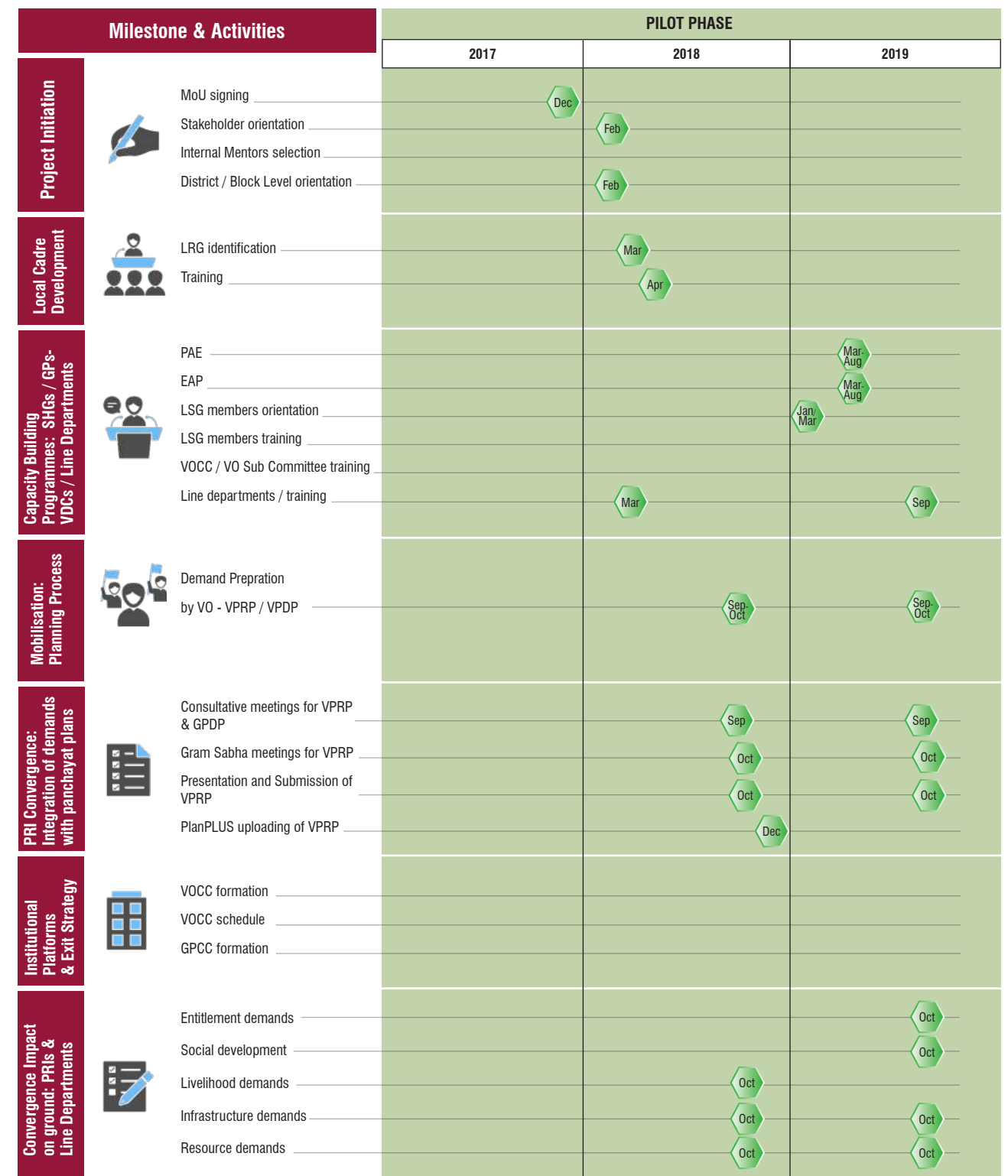
The communication flow within the grassroots institutions has strengthened considerably which is very important in terms of information dissemination and planning of developmental activities. From the perspective of the MSRLM team, Taorem shared that the response from the stakeholders through the pilot has been very motivating, "The PRI-CBO Convergence project contributes to achieving the multi-facets goals of rural development in the villages." This has now spread to other communities who are keen to form SHGs and be involved in the project, especially to form federations at the village level. Encouraged by the community interest, MSRLM is also planning to form Cluster Level Federations and then Block Level Federations as the next step.

VO Members with Rathi M.R.

Overall, the PRI-CBO Convergence project benefited both the valley and the hill regions in its own way. VAs in the hill regions had the opportunity to engage with the communities and creative partnerships resulting in a paradigm shift in development in places like Machi. This change in approach also allowed women to participate in the village assembly in certain areas. Similarly, SRLMs toowas able to reach out to communities for expanding programmes like MGNREGA. They have started meeting VOs, initiating discussions, and prioritizing demands sensing the benefit of this partnerships.

TIMELINE OF PRI-CBO CONVERGENCE PROJECT IN MANIPUR

Milestone & Activities		PILOT PHASE		
		2017	2018	2019
Project Initiation	MoU signing	Dec		
	Stakeholder orientation		Feb	
	Internal Mentors selection			
	District / Block Level orientation		Feb	
Local Cadre Development	LRG identification		Mar	
	Training		Apr	
Capacity Building Programmes; SHGs / GPs-VDCs / Line Departments	PAE			Mar/Aug
	EAP			Mar/Aug
	LSG members orientation			Jan/Mar
	LSG members training			
	VOCC / VO Sub Committee training			
	Line departments / training		Mar	Sep
Mobilisation: Planning Process	Demand Prepration by VO - VPRP / VDPP		Sep/Oct	Sep/Oct
PRI Convergence: Integration of demands with panchayat plans	Consultative meetings for VPRP & GPDP		Sep	Sep
	Gram Sabha meetings for VPRP		Oct	Oct
	Presentation and Submission of VPRP		Oct	Oct
	PlanPLUS uploading of VPRP		Dec	
Institutional Platforms & Exit Strategy	VOCC formation			
	VOCC schedule			
	GPCC formation			
Convergence Impact on ground: PRIs & Line Departments	Entitlement demands			Oct
	Social development			Oct
	Livelihood demands		Oct	
	Infrastructure demands		Oct	Oct
	Resource demands		Oct	Oct

Weaving in progress, Thenzawl village

MIZORAM

SERCHHIP

MIZORAM AT GLANCE

Tucked between the Indian states of Assam, Manipur, and Tripura and sharing its international boundaries with Myanmar and Bangladesh, Mizoram is a region of amazing grace - charming people, ancient cultures, and bountiful nature.

The present Mizoram was part of Assam and known as Lushai District of Assam. With the implementation of the North-Eastern Area (Reorganisation) Act in 1972, Mizoram became a Union Territory and as a sequel to the signing of the historic memorandum of settlement between the Government of India and the Mizo National Front[32] in 1986, it was granted statehood in 1987.

Mizoram has a large percentage of tribal population (around 95%), with a very impressive literacy rate coupled with a unique trajectory of governing itself. The democratic model of governance is of recent origin as for long it has celebrated the concept of Chieftainship.

S. No	Details	Figures
1	Population	1,091,014 (Census, 2011) (95% are tribes)
2	Area	21,087 sq km (91% is under forest)
3	Literacy	91.58% (2011)
4	No.of districts	11
5	No. of Autonomous District Councils	3
6	Occupation	Agriculture, Horticulture, and Floriculture

Source: Government of Mizoram

[32] The party was born out of the inadequate response by government during the Mautam famine that hit the state in 1959-60. The simmering Assamese domination and neglect of Mizo people during the famine left a deep bitter impact in the latter's mind. The Mizo National Famine Front was formed for famine relief in 1959 which eventually changed to Mizo National Front (MNF) in 1961.

Aizawl - Capital of Mizoram

During the pre-British era, village administration in Mizoram was carried out by hereditary Chiefs. The Chief was assisted by elders of the village who were called 'Upas'. He had supreme authority over the villagers and his word was law within the village limits where he governed. The Chief was a benevolent ruler, guardian, leader, and defender of the people. Decisions made by the Chief were guided by established customs. And above all, there were elements of democracy and social justice in the village community (Zahluna, 2008). There had been no administrative interlink or relation between the villages under the different Chiefs, and each and every jurisdiction was autonomous by itself. The importance the villagers had and the deep connection they shared with their Chief was invaluable. Our conversation with Dr. Jangkhongam Doungel, who was a member of Autonomous Council of Lunglei district and Professor & Former HOD, Department of Political Science, School of Social sciences, Mizoram University, revealed the emotional and unshakeable belief he has about the position of Chief. "My father was a Chief of one of the villages. In my growing up years, I have seen him travelling to far-flung villages across the rivers to collect tax. He used to return home late in the night. My mother used to be very worried and often scolded him as he returned late travelling across forests habituated by wild animals. My father used to say, "…the animals, the flora and fauna in this village are my subjects. They will never harm their Chief." Such was the ownership of Chiefs in their villages in those days." With a sigh, he further added, "Now everything depends on politics. Today, I'm also attached to a party because of my father only. Due to over- politicization of many issues, there is a decline of ownership in his mind as well."

The villages were once self-governing units and avoided dependence on outside assistance. However, with annexation by the British administration, there were gradual changes in the liberties enjoyed by the Chief. The duties to be carried out by Chiefs decreased and there was a drastic decline of their powers and positions. The political awakening by the youth for a more democratic form of local governance in the early 1920s paved for further change. Mizo Common People's Union, Mizoram's first political party was formed in 1946. The Party was later renamed as Mizo Union. In Dr. Dongel's view, Mizo Union emerged mainly to abolish Chieftaincy. They were the first ones to form ADCs after the elections. Post-independence, for the governance of hill areas in Assam, District Councils (DCs) were formed. The DC's gradually reduced the special privileges enjoyed by the Chief. Such continuous changes set the ground for setting up of Village Councils (VCs) in 1954 (Zahluna, 2008). The VCs came into existence by Lushai Hills District Act, 1953. They started functioning from 1954 (Shyamkishor, 2016).

VCs brought a significant change in village administration. It replaced the traditional political institutions and widened the political horizon of people which included election and

representation. By 1956, Chieftaincy was completely abolished from Mizoram (Zahluna, 2008).

Village administration by Chief was replaced by democratic administration through VC. The overall supervision came under the control of DCs. DCs made all laws and regulations for the administration of villages. It took care of conduct of elections in VCs, announcement of election results, appointment of President, Vice-President and Secretary, and also dissolving the VCs in unforeseen situations. Till the 3rd term of VCs elections[33], Mizo Union (MU) won in majority in villages. In a span of a decade, major changes took place in the state in terms of the emergence of new political parties; regrouping of villages in the wake of political uprising and armed revolt brought by United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UMFO); heavy influence of Congress party; change in loyalty of the VC members towards Congress and drastic reduction in number of VCs (Zahluna, 2008).

At the beginning of the 1970's Lushai Hills were characterized by great famine, which broke the economy of the villages. Ration supplies from the government were inadequate, and discontent among people grew day by day. The pressure by people, pushed the government to form 3 regional DCs.

A vegetable seller, Serchhip, Mizoram

These DCs had full liberty in managing the affairs of the VCs. The government has little or no control over the management of these VCs. Post attainment of the status of Union Territory (UT), there are two sets of VCs - one which is administered by Government of Mizoram and the other administered by three regional DCs of Pawis, Lakhers and Chakmas(Lalsangliani, 2008).

The government created a new department called Local Administrative Department (LAD) to administer the VCs which fell under its jurisdiction. The VCs which worked under LAD gradually lost their powers as the bureaucrats had a deep influence on their functioning. VCs were no longer the representatives of people and they became an institution ran by bureaucrats (Lalsangliani, 2008).

Set in this backdrop, where the entire nation adopted the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1993, Mizoram was given the option to implement or not to implement the act. It chose Autonomous District Council (ADC), District Council (DC), and Village Council (VC) rather than Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). These institutions came under the Fifth[34] and Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution to incorporate their traditional customary laws in governing the people (Shyamkishor, 2016).

In accordance with the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution, an Autonomous District Council was set up with a Regional Council comprising the then Pawi and Lakher areas (which now became divided into three Autonomous District Council of Lai, Mara, and Chakma). "Accordingly, the Lushai Hills District Autonomous District Council (afterward renamed as Mizo District Council) legislated as Act called the Lushai Hills District Council (afterwards renamed as Mizo District Council) legislated as Act called the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) Act, 1953" was passed. Further the government abolished Chieftainship" (Mizoram State Annual Plan for RGPSA 2013-14).

VILLAGE COUNCIL

(Extracts from the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) Act 1953)

VCs are divided based on number of households: Category I: VC having 401 households and above. Category II: VC having 301 – 400 households. Category III: VC having 201 – 300 households. Category IV: VC having 101 – 200 households. Category V: VC having below 100 households.

Elected Members or Executive Body

There shall be a President, a Vice President, a Treasurer, and a Secretary in each Village Council and the executive functions of the Village Council shall be vested in these four.

1. The President and the Vice president shall be elected by the members of the Village Council by a majority of votes.

2. There shall be a Secretary of the Village Council who may be appointed or dismissed by the State Government "on the recommendation of the executive body" of the Village Council.

3. The Secretary shall not be a member of the Village Council. Neither the President nor the Vice-President of the Village Council shall be eligible to hold office of the Secretary of the Village Council.

Tenure of Membership

1. All members of a Village Council shall hold office during the life of the Council: Provided that in the case of a fresh election due to dissolution of a Village Council under section 25, the members so elected shall hold office during the remaining term of the Village Council.

2. A member elected to fill a casual vacancy shall hold office for the remaining term of office of the member whose seat falls vacant.

The system of Local Self - Government (LSG) in Mizoram is different from the PRI system followed in other states. Each village in Mizoram has a VC Comprising of an appropriate number of elected members which is headed by the VC President. They are village level units to deal with the local administration in accordance with the tribal customary laws and the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) Act 1953 as well as other relevant laws enacted by the State Legislature from time to time. Since the state has been exempted from implementation of this 73rd Constitution Amendment, the PRI system followed by other states has no relevance in Mizoram, which still follows the single-tier VC system.

[33] 1st term elections of VCs (there were 369 VCs) were held in 1954; 2nd term election (384 VCs) in 1957; 3rd term election in 1960.
[34] 'The Fifth Schedule of the Constitution deals with the administration and control of Scheduled Areas as well as of Scheduled Tribes residing in any state other than the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. Tribal habitations in the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir have not been brought under the Fifth or Sixth Schedule.' https://vikaspedia.in/social-welfare/scheduled-tribes-welfare/fifth-schedule-areas

3. If a member absents himself continuously in three consecutive meetings of a Village Council without permission of the Village council, the village council may in a meeting specially convene for the purpose, declare his seat vacant after giving him an opportunity for a hearing and in such case, the Village council shall communicate the decision to the State Government (As amended in 2014).

Duration of Village Council

Every Village Council, unless sooner dissolved under the provision of section 25 of this Act shall continue for 5 (five) years from the date appointed for its first meeting.

Budget of VC

The Village Council shall acquire funds via the following means:

1. Village Council Fund

2. Power to collect Property Tax

Village Council Fund

Village Council Fund - There shall be formed for every Village Council a fund to be called Village Council Fund. Any collection authorized by law other than District revenue and taxes made in a village for the good of the people shall be paid into the said Fund. The President shall be the treasurer of the fund and the list of the collection shall be kept by the Secretary. This account shall be opened for inspection by any subscriber to the collection.

Power to collect Property Tax - The Village Councils are empowered to collect property tax within their respective jurisdictions on such items, and at such rates, as may be determined by the State Government from time to time. Provided that Village Council may appoint a Treasurer from amongst the members who shall keep developmental grants and other funds exclusive of a collection authorized by law, and maintain the accounts there of which will be liable to inspection by the Village Council in its sitting and by an official authorized to do so by the government

Village Assembly

(Gram Sabha is called Village Assembly in context to Mizoram)

A body consisting of persons registered in the Electoral Rolls relating to the Village Council.

Constituting authority

Ordinarily, a Gram Sabha will be convened and presided over by the President of the Village Council.

In Mizoram, there are no explicit directions for the conduct of Gram Sabhas. However, certain guidelines have been provided in the functions and powers delegated to the Village Council President.

Extent / Villages

All the Households within the Village Council's Jurisdiction.

In Mizoram, only one member from a Household attends the Gram Sabha. This is usually the head of the Household. In his/her absence, another member attends on behalf of the family.

Meeting

In a year, a minimum of three Gram Sabhas is to be convened by the Village Council.

Convening

Ordinarily, a Gram Sabha will be convened and presided over by the President of the Village Council.

Gram Sabha (Village Assembly)

Every Gram Sabha shall:

(i) approve the annual plans, programmes, and projects for social and economic development in respect of the village concerned before such plans, programmes, and projects are taken up for implementation.

(ii) be responsible for the identification or selection of persons as beneficiaries under poverty alleviation and other programmes.

Executive Body Meeting

A President of the village council shall summon the meeting of the executive body whenever necessity arises and when two-thirds of the members in writing request him to summon a meeting.

There shall be at least 6 (six) Village Council meetings at regular intervals in a calendar year. Resolution made in such meetings shall be properly recorded and shall be signed both by President and the Secretary.

Power and Duties

The Village Council shall have the following powers and duties

- To formulate village development schemes, to supervise development works received from the State Government through various agencies.
- To help various government agencies in carrying out development works in the village.
- To take up development works on its own initiative or on request by the government.
- To convene regular social audit for successful implementation of development works in the village.
- To collect property tax as prescribed by the State Government.
- To realize registration fees for each litigation within its jurisdiction.
- To raise funds for public utility within its jurisdiction by passing a resolution subject to the approval of the State Government.
- To administer relief and rehabilitation to the people during calamities.
- To assist the State Government in public distribution system.
- To initiate or assist the State Government in all preventive measures on the outbreak of an epidemic or infectious disease.
- To co-operate with government officials in charge of any of the above functions within its jurisdiction.

Regulation of Hnatlâng

- Each Council shall have the power to exempt any person or persons from Hnatlâng at its own discretion. The reason for exemption shall be recorded in writing. No person who is 60 years or above shall be compelled to do any Hnatlâng.
- Any person below 15 years shall not be allowed to represent in the Hnatlâng.
- Every person shall have the option of commuting his obligation to render service under Hnatlâng on payment of cash compensation in lieu of it at a rate to be fixed by the Village Council not exceeding (Rs 25/-) per Hnatlâng day.

Collection of Taxes

- The (State Government) or any Officer authorized by it in this behalf, shall either appoint tax collectors or allot the work of collection of taxes to suitable persons, specifying their duties and any other matters connected with the collection of taxes.
- Collection of Taxes shall be done strictly in accordance with rules or under the instructions and directions given by the (State Government) authorized by it in this behalf.

Sanitation Committee

Each Village Council shall be responsible for the sanitation of the Village. A Sanitation Committee shall be appointed by the Village Council if necessary

- Every Village Assembly shall: approve the annual plans, programmes, and projects for social and economic development in respect of the village concerned before such plans, programmes, and projects are taken up for implementation.
- Every Village Assembly shall: be responsible for the identification or selection of persons as beneficiaries under the poverty alleviation and other programmes.
- A Village Assembly will be convened and presided over by the President of the Village Council.
- Quorum of a Village Assembly shall be 10% of the registered voters of the latest electoral roll of the Village Council.
- Every Village Assembly shall be responsible to safeguard and preserve community assets.
- The Village Assembly and the Village Council shall be consulted before making resettlement and rehabilitation of persons affected.
- There shall be at least 3 (three) Village Assembly meetings in a year. (As amended in 2014)

Functions assigned to Village Council in Mizoram

A. General Function

- Allotment of land for house sites.
- Allotment of land for annual Jhumlands.
- Control of stray animals. With fines imposed on owners.
- Power to enforce social works for common benefits of the community in which every household has to participate by obligation, with fines imposed on those who do not comply with the social work order.
- A Village Council functions as a Village Court and is competent to try cases of civil and miscellaneous nature falling within the purview of the village or tribal laws and customs.
- In criminal cases also a Village Court can try cases falling within the purview of tribal laws and customs and offences of petty nature, such as petty theft and pilfering mischief and trespass of petty nature, simple assault and hurt, affront and affray of whatever kind, drunken or disorderly brawling, public nuisance, and simple cases of wrongful restrain and is competent to impose fine which may extend to Rs 500 (Rupees five hundred) according to the nature of offence.
- A Village Council looks after and managed burial ground.
- A Village Council looks after Environment & Forest like, supply reserve and safety reserve and protect wildfire.
- Publicize matter relating to Civil Supplies, Government policies and Government programme to public.

B. Core Functions

- Streetlights are fixed at the points selected by a Village Council (VC)
- Public Water Points are fixed at the places selected by a V/C
- Public Water points at natural sources are under the control of a V/C
- A V/C looks after Village Cleanliness and Sanitation.

C. Developmental Functions

- Grants received from the Finance Commission for the Scheme i.e. Water Supply & Sanitation are implemented through Village Councils.
- Schemes under Rural Development Programmes are mostly implemented through Village Councils.
- Village Council President is the Village development Committee Chairman in the Village.

D. Revenue

The only source of revenue collected by the Village Councils is animal tax. In the meantime, the State Government is intending to empower the Village Councils to impose and collect taxes from the following:

- Firewood and all kinds of thatches and stones or sands collected from the areas of Village Councils.
- Toll on roads and bridges constructed and maintained by the Village Councils.
- Fees on registration of cattle in the Village.
- Fees on opening of tea stalls, hotels, sweetmeats etc.
- Fees on registration of dogs.
- Collection of local market fee.

E. Election

- Election to the Village Council is regularly conducted by the State Election Commission of Mizoram.
- There is no restriction for women to contest in the Election and many of them have been chosen as the leaders of Village Councils.

'Furthermore, VCs also function as Village Court and are competent to try cases of civil and miscellaneous nature that falls within the purview of village or tribal laws and customs. In criminal cases also a Village Court can try cases falling within the purview of tribal laws and customs and offences of petty nature[35]. This feature is unique to VCs as they hold judicial powers which PRIs do not possess' (Mizoram State Annual Plan for RGPSA 2013-2014).

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[35] Such as theft and pilfering mischief and trespass, simple assault and hurt, drunken or disorderly brawling, public nuisance, and simple cases of wrongful restrain and is competent to impose fine which may extent to Rs 500 (Rupees five hundred) according to the nature of offence.

Way to the house of an SHG member, Thenzawl village.

LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT–
ON GROUND

STRUCTURE OF THE SYSTEM – LAD VS ADC

The VCs that came under government control were administered by LAD. This department is unique to Mizoram as it is not found in any other state. LAD of the State Government has no say in the ADC areas. Thus, each of the ADCs has its own LAD department to supervise VC functioning and activity (Dongel, 2019). Currently, there are only 2 districts in Mizoram that come under the 6th schedule namely Lawngtlai and Siaha. Similarly, Lai ADC, Chakma ADC, and Mara ADC are the three ADCs that control the VCs in these 2 districts and not the State Government. In other districts, the LAD controls the VCs. In every district headquarter; there is a District LA Officer (DLAO). He/ she looks after all the VCs in the district. The development activities of VCs are reported to the Directorate of LAD by DLAO. The concerned Secretary above the Directorate reports to the Minister. It is a full-fledged development department. In the PRI - CBO project location Serchhip too, everything is done through DLAOs.

The structure in the ADC is that – District legislative set up is equivalent to state legislative set up comprising of Members of District Councils (MDC) like Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) in the state, Chairman of ADC is equivalent to Speaker in the state legislative assembly, Legislative secretary under Chairman is equivalent to Legislative in the assembly, Chief Executive & Executive members are an equivalent to CM and Cabinet Ministers in the state. Executive members are given portfolios and assisted by the concerned officers. Assent to be given by the Governor for the ADCs, in the matters of policy and, rules. Once assented by the Governor, it

is published in the gazette of the State Government. Hence, for governing these councils under 6th and non-6th schedule areas, there are two different authorities – State Government and ADCs.

The government and DCs over a period of time have not shown interest in improving the status, condition, and effectiveness of the VCs. VCs have now become a tool of political parties (Prasad et al, 2003)[36]. Such developments have pushed the state to consider devolving more powers to the VCs by repealing the existing VC Acts. Processes are underway to come up with a new act with changes in the functions carried out by VCs. A draft bill has been prepared and is in consideration of the government (Mizoram State Annual Plan for RGPSA 2013-2014).

The biggest strength of PRIs in comparison with VCs is that PRIs have constitutional status, while VCs are created by enactments of the Government of Mizoram. In many ways, PRIs are above and ahead of VCs[37]. In this regard, Dr. Dongel said, "If PRI is adopted, then there is a chance of devolution of powers and responsibilities in line to 11th schedule. In fact, PRI can be adopted but with a different name as the term PRI has become allergic for tribal people here in hill districts. But certainly, there is a scope to adopt the system. It will be good to incorporate the powers and responsibilities of PRI into the system here." However, he had reservations with regards to a complete switch over to the three-tier system. "People of Mizoram are happy with two-tier VC system. In the VC system, the function is monitored by LAD at the state level and ADCs in 6th scheduled areas. So, a district monitoring in a three-tier system would be a difficult one to implement."

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[36] Prasad R.N. and Agarwal A.K, Modernization of Mizo Society, Mittal Publication.
[37] They lack political and financial decentralization which in turn impedes in the holistic and inclusive development of villages.

> "It will be good to incorporate the powers and responsibilities of PRI into to the system here."

Dr. Jangkhongam Dongel
Professor & Former HOD, Department of Political Science, School of Social sciences, Mizoram University

VCs as key institutions in the governance of villages was reiterated by the villagers throughout our field work. For instance, it was highlighted that the village developmental works, funded by Central Government, State Government, and international agencies are implemented by the President of VCs and other key VC members. In short, no work can be implemented without the approval of VCs.

In addition to the above-mentioned institutional set up, the crucial role played by civil society organisations was acknowledged by the people. Social service holds immense significance in the life design of Mizos. It is so intertwined in their lives that not doing anything for common good is considered to be wrong. This principle followed by Mizos has set an example for being self-reliant and reduce overreliance on state institutions for every purpose.

Hnatlâng is a social service work done without payment. This kind of work has been in existence since the Chieftaincy times itself. Under this, a member from each family has to participate in common development works. For instance, construction of a fire brigade wall to restrict the entry of wild animals near human settlement area, cleaning of villages/streets, helping people in need, construction of house for people who can't afford are some examples of the initial stage activities of Hnatlâng. On occasions when the family fails to practice Jhum cultivation due to unforeseen situations, Hnatlâng is called by Young Mizo Association (YMA) to take care of that family. Over a period of time, calling of Hnatlâng has become a regular practice, which is even followed by VCs. Penalties are imposed if a family fails to participate in Hnatlâng. A mandatory provision has been made to include Hnatlâng in the VCs.

Mizoram has provided ample scope for the functioning of civil society organisations. Young Mizo Association (YMA)[38] is one of such organization that handles social and other issues associated with the Mizos. It also assists local authorities in maintaining community discipline. In the course of our field work, we understood that YMA is an influential organisation that has a say in most community issues. The government recognizes the invaluable work done by the organisation and never underestimates its position and power in the state. YMA is considered almost as an equivalent to VCs as it is engaged in most of the developmental activities. The composition of YMA is also universal. It consists of young men and women from different churches above 18 years of age.

Thus, the existence and effective functioning of VCs and YMA are very typical to local governance in Mizoram. YMA has the ability to resolve any kind of dispute or unrest that emerges at the VC level as it is non-political in nature and functioning. That said, YMA is so intertwined in the lives of Mizo's, Dr. Dongel also shared his concerns about its future role. "Though YMA is a non-political body, there is a possibility for political parties to involve it for their activities. There has been a case in the past when a former YMA President became MP twice and once MLA. In the current pool of Ministers too, one of them is a former YMA secretary. So, whether the individual is interested or not the politics is interested in him."

[38] Young Mizo Association (YMA) is a non-political, voluntary organization, established on the 15th June 1935 at Aizawl, Mizoram. The membership of this organization has increased over the years. The main activities of the organization includes: imparting adult education, promotion of afforestation, conservation of culture and heritage, construction of houses for the poor, and many more. Their sphere of activity touches upon almost every aspect of civil life. (National Informatics Centre, Mizoram State Centre, 2020).

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Women in the traditional structure of Mizo society were discriminated against in all spheres of social life. Their status and role were that of a marginalized group where they were subservient to and lived at the behest of the male members of the society. However, with time there are many positive transformations in their position. Thanks to the combined forces of Christianity, education, and developmental efforts in the state (Lalhmingpuii et al, 2014).

STATUS OF SELF-HELP GROUPS

Self Help Groups (SHGs) in Mizoram have been in existence since the Development of Women and Children (DWCRA) program which was introduced under the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). It was replaced by the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY) in 1999. As per a study by Margaret Lalbiakthang (2020), most of the existing SHGs are promoted by the government and very few are promoted by NGOs, banks, and self. One of the major problems in the functioning of SHGs is that most of them are not yet linked with banks, which is the basic requirement for the success of SHG movement. However, financial linkage for SHGs still is a great challenge in Mizoram where banking facilities in villages are very limited (Lalbiakthang, 2020).

CHALLENGES IN CURRENT GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

In recent times Government of Mizoram has shown keen interest to adopt the PRI system. For this, they have constituted a committee called Mizoram Local Government (Panchayati Raj) Committee to re-frame and amend the VC Act. This Committee works to explore the possibilities and way to incorporate the key points of the 73rd amendment which will be applicable to tribal communities in the hill districts. The Minister of LAD is the Chairman of this Committee and other members include LAD officials, Public Administration Department, think-tanks, and academicians. While initiatives are underway to implement three tier PRI system, there exist reservations for not implementing the same in its original form. Also, the PRI system will be implemented (in case if gets approved and accepted) only in the non-6th schedule areas. The 6th Schedule Areas will not follow the new governance mechanism as they are covered under ADCs and not by the state. It

was decided in the last meeting held in March 2020 that the present VC election will be conducted as per the current act of VC and held between August to September 2020. There also exists some skepticism about three-tier system being more corrupt. Dr. Dongel however differs, "Three-tier GP system ensures that there is village level administration and decisions are made at village level and not at the district level."

Meeting with Dr. Jangkhongam Dongel at his office

FUNDING

Our field study revealed that funding remains a critical issue in the current governance setup. Unlike the PRI system, there is no systemic funding for programmes or projects in the VC system. Some of the VC members stated that LAD pays honorarium to VCPs and members. This according to them is insufficient as the range of work done by them is more compared to the remuneration they receive. Thus, there is an urgent need to attract funds from District Rural Development Agencies (DRDA), Block Development Office (BDO), and development agencies. Also, efforts should be made to release the funds on time so that developmental work is carried out uninterrupted. This will make the VCs more effective and harness their potential to the maximum extent.

WOMENS' REPRESENTATION

Though the VC Act provides scope for women to contest VC elections, they do not have any reservation of seats for women. This is not the case with PRIs. Thus, decision making power lies with men. However, some positive changes have been witnessed in recent times. Earlier there was no women representation but now they have been elected. In 6th scheduled areas there is representation of women in-line to three-tier GP but it is not 1/3rd. In non-6th scheduled areas too, there is reservation for women, but not 1/3rd again.

DEFECTION

Modern democratic institutions though having broadened the scope of people's participation, have over a period of time become political in nature. In the course of interaction with the locals, we learned that there have been many instances of defections. A respondent said, "Members of VCs have jumped from one party to another purely with selfish motives." Those who have experienced administration under Chieftaincy said, "When we compare this system of administration to the traditional Chieftaincy, the difference is that loyalty towards Chief had to be there irrespective of the personal reservations." Yet, they acknowledged that the current system gives the opportunity to keep a check on the President of VC. "The President of VCs are answerable to the public; their position is at stake if they fail to perform well during their term in office."

TRAINING

In the non-6th schedule areas, LAD, BDO, SIRD, PR, and DRDA organize training for VCs in regular intervals. This enhances the skillsets of the members. Also, the advantage of getting trained by multiple organisations adds more value to the experiences, diversity in approach, and themes covered. In the 6th Scheduled Areas, this training is solely imparted by LAD of ADCs. Thus, there is limited exposure to the training themes.

ELECTION

Before the appointment of Election Commission (EC), elections were conducted by the LAD of state/ADCs. This changed once the State Election Commission (SEC) came into being in 2010 after Aizwal Municipal council was established. The conduct of elections[39] in both the 6th and non-6th scheduled areas is the responsi- bility of SEC (State Election Commission, Government of Mizoram, 2020). No doubt there has been progress in the way elections are conducted with minimal problems. There exists a near unanimity of opinion about the presence and functioning of SEC. Retired IAS officers, former bureaucrats, former chief secretaries, and central service staff with a reputation have strong faith in the institution.

Set in this backdrop, the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) – Community Based Organisation (CBO) Convergence project was implemented in Mizoram, which is discussed in detail in the next section.

EXPERIENCES FROM
PROJECT LOCATIONS

Serchhip Aizawl road

The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Kudumbashree NRO (KS NRO) and Mizoram State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MzSRLM) in October 2018 led to the deployment of eight Mentors from Kerala to Mizoram. Thereafter, a scoping study was done to map the status of Community Based Organisation (CBOs) and their interaction with the LSGs. The results were presented to SRLM at the state and districts level. This culminated into a detailed orientation programme for the district and block level LSG staff through District Mission Managers (DMMs) and Block Mission Managers (BMMs). The orientation concluded with an exposure visit to Kerala that included teams from MzSRLM along with BDOsfrom LAD and Project Director from District Rural Development Agency (DRDA).

PILOT PHASE

Cultural Dynamics

Being a mountainous region, villages in Mizoram are usually scattered far away from one another. Each village is unique with its own distinct community and social characteristics[40]. The lives of Mizo people revolve around their villages. Mizo as a language is the uniting factor within multiple groups of the Lushai[41] tribes. With their own distinct identities and concepts of village development and history of functioning as independent units, an entity like the GP with a group of villages in

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[39] Elections for VCs under State Government are held every 3 years whereas the same is held once in 5 years for VCs in the 6th Scheduled areas (Autonomous District Councils).

[40] Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology National Informatics Centre, Mizoram State Centre.
[41] Lushai tribe, referred to as Lushais are believed to be the last of the Mongoloid tribes to migrate to Mizoram, settling in the Mizo hills. http://https://mizoram.nic.in/

the PRI system seemed a challenge at the start of the project. However, a strong community feeling among the people of Mizoram cut across villages acted as a positive factor for initiating the project.

In the existing VC system, the on-ground power of Village Councils (VCs) is limited. The state machinery plays an active role in decision-making. Even when the VCs put forward proposals, decision making happens only at the block level. For instance, the beneficiaries identified at the village level (identified through consultations with villagers, especially women) for various development programmes are approved at the block level. The prevailing system does not have a bottom-up approach for village development.

In terms of inter-village dynamics, the population is largely heterogeneous. In most districts like Mamit, there are communities like Chakmas, and Bru along with Mizos forming the majority. In a departure from this norm, the PRI – CBO Convergence project location of Serchhip district is unique. There is only one homogeneous tribal community named Mizo across both the blocks, Serchhip and East Lungdar.

With a dominant tribal language in the project area of Serchhip district and limited Hindi-speaking community members, communication was a critical first step for project implementation. Despite assistance from community facilitators from MzSRLM, identifying a translator within the community was an initial challenge.

Difficulties with transport facilities coupled with language barriers did not stop Mentors from mobilizing the local community. Mini Varghese (Mentor Resource Person, East Lungdar Block, Serchhip) emphasizes that it was important to pick up the local language to work in different places. "When we speak in their local language, people trust us and also become eager to listen to us."

STAGES OF PILOT PHASE

The project in Mizoram could be broadly categorized into three key stages – Stages 1, 2 & 3. In the first stage, LRG members were identified and trained as foot soldiers. The next stage involved them going into the community and creating awareness among women and the poor. This prepared the

"When we speak in their local language, people trust us and also become eager to listen to us."

Mini Varghese
Mentor Resource Person,
East Lungdar Block, Serchhip

community to actively engage in the participatory planning Tools - PAE and EAP in the final stage.

STAGE 1: LRG – Foot Soldiers as the Primary Local Cadre

In January 2019, a detailed training for Community Facilitators (CF) of MzSRLM was provided by the Mentors with the objective of taking the PRI - CBO Convergence project to village level. The training exercise began with a stakeholder meeting, and orientation that included Village Organisations

(VOs), Village Council Presidents (VCPs), VC members along with the large, state-wide social organisations such as i) Young Mizo Association (YMA)[42], ii) Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Paw (MHIP)[43], and iii) Mizoram Upa Pawl (MUP)[44]. Voluntary community service is an intrinsic part of Mizo culture and life. So, it was a logical step to involve large NGOs in the implementation of the project. The concept of Local Resource Group (LRG) members as 'Foot Soldiers' was introduced to these stakeholders and once the LRG members were identified by the VOs working along with the CFs, the next step in March 2019 was a block-level training for them. This involved conceptual training with an overview of their roles and responsibilities, required soft skills, inter-personal skills, and organizing skills.

The LRG members were immersed in the field for the first three months, which helped them gain experience of village-level dynamics from the PRI - CBO Convergence project perspective. They attended a second round of training between June and August 2019 and were given an on-the-job training in a phased manner covering various topics. The topics included – Participatory Assessment of Entitlement (PAE), Entitlement Access Plan (EAP), Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP), Gram Sabha (GS) mobilization, livelihoods mapping, toilet and sanitation mapping, training module to VCPs and members, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

State	No. of Local Cadre Trained	No. of VO Members Trained	No. of PRI Members Oriented
Mizoram	105	80	37

Status of Community cadre and PRI Officials Trained

This period saw village transformation due to the effective functioning of LRG members along with VOs, VCs, line departments, and social organisations. To streamline the activities, it was decided to strategize the schedule of work along

with SRLM (BMMs & State Project Coordinator (SPC)) with clearly defined quarterly targets which were then monitored during the monthly review meetings. This ensured a proper communication channel being established as part of a standard operating procedure. This also addressed the administrative issues between villages, blocks, and clusters. There were 25 villages under 4 clusters in the project block of Serchhip.

Mini Varghese
(Mentor Resource Person, East Lungdar Block, Serchhip District) interacting with LRG members

Impact of LRG members in the Community

I. Institutions and its Effectiveness

The coordination and communication between the MzSRLM, Kudumbashree NRO, and VOs improved and outreach to the community increased through the presence of LRG members on the ground. Along with the role of women in the community, the role of departments & institutions in the government also became more visible to the community in the process. People started accepting and seeking interventions of the local bodies and departments as they started recognizing them. A letter from BDO to all VCs was circulated to ensure VOs under MzSRLM are provided enough time for their discussion during the Gram Sabha meetings. On this matter, Vanlalhmachhuana (Block Development Officer, Serchhip R.D. block, Serchhip district) said that, "The VOs participate and come up with specific subjects which are important to the women or

[42] Young Mizo Association (YMA) is a community voluntary organization, established on the 15th June 1935 in Aizawl, Mizoram. It has members from almost all the families of Mizoram state. It focuses on the social issues around education, health, senior citizen's welfare, forests, conservation, nutrition, sanitation and hygiene.
[43] Most Mizo women are part of the MIZO HMEICHHIAIMSUIKHAWM PAWL (MHIP), an NGO working primarily for the upliftment of women. It focuses on the vulnerable, poor, illiterate, handicapped and mothers through Anganwadis. They have also constructed houses for needy women, and works on social issues such as drug abuse and alcohol addiction. On the livelihood front, they provide training on weaving, tailoring and other handicrafts.
[44] Mizoram Upa Pawl, also known as the elders' association or association for senior citizens, is a large NGO that is well established across Mizoram. https://mizoram.nic.in/

Vanlalhmachhuana
Block Development Officer, Serchhip R.D. block, Serchhip district

the village as a whole and they put up the agenda for discussion in the Gram Sabhas. This systemic engagement has tremendously improved the confidence among the community."

II. Impact of VOs on Local Bodies and Line Departments

Through the PRI-CBO Convergence project activities, the need to increase the effectiveness of women's participation in the village was emphasized. In general, the number of women participating in economic activities for the benefit of self, family, and the community increased and they also became more confident. Women who were initially hesitant to step out of their homes started realizing the importance of participation in the village development. This proved to be the first success of the project. This also encouraged the line departments. For instance, banks started increasingly recognizing VOs

and came forward to provide loans. "The loan applications of women groups are now treated with importance and instant approvals are becoming a norm. This is because of the trust they could earn through their participation in various activities in the village. Even the line departments like agriculture, horticulture, and sericulture started engaging with the women groups", said Vanlalhmachhuana.

III. Improving Awareness among Women & the Poor

The PRI-CBO Convergence project not only made women aware of their rights and entitlements but also encouraged them to actively participate in the Gram Sabha meetings. Duha (Village Council President (VCP), Chingchip South) recalled how a committee was formed to make Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) and how the committee ensured the inclusion of demands from the poor of the poorest, "...to prioritize the demands, we all (including YMA and other social organisations) had a joint meeting before we submitted it to our BDO and are hopeful to get sanctions as everyone is pushing a bit within their capacity." Usually, funds are received for Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in addition to the 14th Finance commission from the State Government through LAD. Hence, plans in GPDP were prioritized by keeping this in mind and about the past experience of funds being received. The idea was to ensure that spending on development activities be more than the previous year's.

Duha
Village Council President, Chingchip South

IV. Building Collaborations with Existing Voluntary Networks

The Mizo society has a great network of voluntary organisations that tie very closely with their way of life. State-wide NGOs like YMA and MHIP work in tandem with the VCs from the state to the village level. The PRI-CBO Convergence project has been extremely successful in working with these existing voluntary networks for building mutually beneficial relationships and taking the project activities forward. LRG members guided by Mentors played a crucial role in building these partnerships across project locations.

Collaboration of the project with YMA has helped the communities avail many benefits like the Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vadana Yogna (PMVVY), disability schemes such as ADIP [45], and Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS). Under Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), the community has been able to avail new toilets as well as restore existing ones. Similarly, under Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana Gramin (PMAY-G), the SHG families have been able to avail the benefit of pucca (solid / permanent) houses. RLC Lalrinfela (Joint Secretary of YMA, Thenzawl village) said, "VCs are no more functioning based on preferential treatment and we track them to see whether they execute the activities in a democratic manner." On working with the VCs and LRG members, he added, "Thenzawl village is the largest producer of handloom. So, we are now planning to work with the VC and intervene for subsidies and to get yarn at a cheaper price. Thanks to the LRG members who are constantly educating and opening our eyes in these matters."

As far as MHIP is concerned, members from this women's network were also identified as LRG members for the project. MHIP has four Office Bearers (OBs) and 20 Executive members and this team envision the schedule and agenda for its functioning. LRG members along with the Mentors played a vital role in prioritizing social issues in MHIP agenda. The project also triggered the minds of LRG members to look at specific social issues in the Mizo community. They were able to bring certain issues specific to individuals and families to community notice and consent of the members of MHIP was taken before prioritizing these issues for action. A longtime issue of alcohol and drug abuse was identified under this project. Various awareness sessions and workshops were

RLC Lalrinfela
Joint Secretary, YMA

conducted by inviting officials from the health care department to improve the impact of delivery. The same programme has also been extended to the schools. Other awareness programmes the MHIP is working on include issues around HIV, Scrub Typhus, Malaria, and Tobacco use.

STAGE 2: Transformation of Individuals through PAE-EAP Exercises

Through August 2019, LRG members along with the office bearers (OBs) of VOs began working closely with the existing SHGs by conducting PAE and EAP exercises as the first level of activity. With LRG members acting as facilitators, the PAE process helped identify the number of beneficiaries through a ribbon exercise. This enabled working with many SHGs in the villages across Serchhip block. The activity mobilized women who actively began participating in community development. A call was taken to focus on Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) and to identify the beneficiaries for new toilets as well as the refurbishing of existing toilets. Unlike other states, Mizoram does not have a Cluster Level Federation (CLF) system as each village forms a separate unit and there is only one VO in a VC. Hence, the consolidation of PAE data happened at each VC level and then was used to prepare the Demand plans.

[45] Scheme of Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase / Fitting of Aids and Appliances. http://disabilityaffairs.gov.in/content/page/adip.php

THE CASE OF LALDING SANGI

Lalding Sangi
VO Asst. Secretary, Keitum village

Laldin Sangi has been an active member of the CBO network for many years. She is proud that her husband supports her work. "The activity plan for the next day is usually made at night by all family members. Sup-

porting women has been a culture across Mizo tribal communities", she said. Their SHG provides finances to all members, without prioritizing, on a rotational basis. Their functioning as a unit has instilled the habit of savings among the women members who otherwise used to spend more earlier. The money made from the group has largely been utilized for children's education which they considered most important. She did like to get trained on the functioning of VOs but was hesitant to become an LRG member as she could not be mobile. However, Laldinsangi's attitude of being a result-focused woman helped her become a 'Community facilitator' for SRLM. In her role, she actively thinks about village development processes. "It is not necessary for a public gathering to hold an Executive Committee (EC) meeting. Instead, women can make their own decisions to make the meetings more productive."

Under PRI-CBO Convergence project, VPRP was made involving all the stakeholders. In Mizoram, based on the field experience of Kudumbashree NRO team, 'Social development' was identified as the key need. A special initiative was undertaken to address social issues in VPRP demands in addition to the focus on Entitlements, MGNREGA Job cards, and Infrastructure demands such as SBM toilets.

State	No of GPs/VC	Entitlement Plan	Public Goods Services and Resource Development Plan	Social Development
Mizoram	37	37	37	11

Capacity Building Undertaken as part of PAE & EAP

States	No. of LRGs Trained	No. of VOs Oriented	No. of Local Government Institutions Oriented
Mizoram	105	40	37 VC

Status of Community Cadre, VOs and PRIs trained / oriented

STAGE 3: Leveraging Social Development Plan for Mobilization

Unlike many other states where MGNREGA was used as a mobilization tool in the community, Social Development plan was chosen to bring together the community in Mizoram. This was because the SHG federations along with Mentors and LRG members identified traditional practices such as consumption of locally brewed alcohol, smoking bidis (local cigarettes,) chewing tobacco, and consumption of betel nuts as a major social problem deteriorating the health of present and future generations. Since many of these practices were also integral to the socio-cultural lives of Mizos, it was difficult to get rid of them easily, despite the community being aware to an extend of their ill effects. Thus, by bringing together various non-governmental and government organisations along with women SHG networks, the PRI-CBO Convergence project initiated a community driven mobilization campaign against alcohol and other substance abuse.

Approach

The team used a three-pronged approach: awareness creation in schools, sensitization of the community and involving concerned government departments.

SENSITIZATION & AWARENESS

Education was used to sensitize school children about drugs and effects of substance consumption. With support from the school principal and teacher, information was also circulated among parents with the help of VC and VO. To widen impact, President, YMA, was approached to sensitize children of the village. All discussions with stakeholders were taken up by LRGs with guidance from Mentors. LRGs with support of VC President and VO members conducted several initiatives for children of the village.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The programme worked with the community to increase awareness on numerous health problems. Showing initiative, the women collectives came up with the idea of discussing and learning about health risk related to substance use. Training was conducted for the women of the village in association with Health Department where the facilitator (PHC Doctor) emphasized risks related to abuse and preventive measures.

CONVERGENCE WITH DEPARTMENTS

In order to avoid unlawful activities, SHG federation in connection with Excise and Narcotics Department have organized orientation programs for people to learn about the legal aspect of these activities. Additionally, a Programme was also conducted on illegal trafficking of drugs in East lungdar where school children, members of village council, village president, civil society and personnel from concerned department were present to spread legal awareness.

Impact

• In Serchhip District, the number of villages that took up the issues is as follows: alcohol abuse - 10, tobacco abuse among school children - 06, illegal drug trafficking - 02, impact on women's health by excess use of abusive substances - 04.

• Activities conducted such as awareness creation through campaigns, poster rallies, and slogans were a new approach in rural Mizoram. Thus, the community showed enthusiasm and a positive response.

• Orientation and one-day programs on adolescent and women's health led to their reflecting on daily matters related to their health and environment. Programs conducted under the banner of women's health and substance abuse increased community consciousness.

• Community developed an understanding about the consequences and criticality of alcohol-related issues.

• Initiatives on social issues in association with concerned government departments helped create a sense of confidence among community members.

Anti Alcohol Campaign, Serchhip R.D. Block

PRI-CBO CONVERGENCE PROJECT OUTCOMES

A. Creating a Local Pool of Community cadre

Traditionally, women used to actively participate in all kinds of economic activity across the state and are a vital part of the local economy. However, taking part in public action is limited and most do not go to Gram Sabha meetings. In fact, representation of the family is made by the male member of the household in Gram Sabha. With the activities under the PRI-CBO Convergence project, the SHG women became increasingly active. LRG members succeeded in spreading awareness on the roles and effectiveness of SHGs, Gram Sabhas, and collective action for village development. Earlier, there was no communication between SHG women groups with VCs. Today, the LRG members are the bridge between VCs, SHGs & NGOs like YMAs.

Lalrizovi
LRG Member, Keitum village

B. Visible Decentralization at Local Level

In the project locations, the confidence of women increased as they started being involved in various community exercises driven by BDOs through VCs. The women who work on a voluntary basis were self-motivated to work on the PRI-CBO Convergence project and both the government departments and VCs found them very reliable. For instance, the Antodya survey which had earlier been conducted through VCs alone now also involved SHG women who were able to efficiently facilitate the conduct of the same. Vanlalhmachhuana noted that, "Initially the VCs were the preferred channel of the Rural Development Department for carrying out any activity. However, the increased reliability of women SHG networks has been of great help as they are able to assist us in our activities in the villages." The work with the well-informed and sensitized units of SHGs and YMAs encouraged the VCs in inviting them to collectively plan and utilize funds for village development, he added.

C. Improved Participation of Existing Voluntary Networks

While the partnership of voluntary networks like YMA, MHIP, and VCs is not new, the PRI-CBO Convergence project gave the system a new impetus, revitalizing the partnership. It strengthened the existing networks to be more systematic and efficient. The Mentors from Kudumbashree NRO guided and empowered the SHG women. Numerous workshops conducted for VCs and the NGOs (voluntary networks like YMA & MHIP) under this project improved their functioning. Regarding the strengthening of these institutions, Vanlalhmachhuana noted that, "This partnership (between VOs, VCs and voluntary networks) has enhanced the capacity of these networks and took it to a new level of effectiveness, in a more systemic way."

Scheme - centric - Interventions by YMA

Under the Social Development component of PRI-CBO Convergence project, there are many initiatives undertaken like awareness programmes on Drug abuse, Malaria prevention, HIV, anganwadi management, and so on. Earlier it was only the concerned government departments who initiated them in the community. However, through the project, YMAs started involving themselves more actively in these initiatives and eventually got transformed into the role of trainers. They even instituted monitoring plans by working with LRG members who look after anganwadis (visit by YMA volunteers to check the provision of mid-day meals, quality of food etc.) "We have never been aware of such good schemes available for children's development. Under this PRI-CBO Convergence project, we are not only are aware but are also now being invited for school functions to replicate these kinds of initiatives. People are more aware of our activities", said RLC Lalrinfela. On how the collaboration has helped YMA evolve as an organisation, he further added, "As an outcome of various interactions and training, we as a social organisation are aware of various entitlements & schemes."

Capacitation of Women by MHIP

The association of Mentors and LRG members of the PRI-CBO Convergence project with MHIP has helped make the women in these networks more aware of their rights and entitlements. Maggie C Zosangpuii (Circle Horticulture officer, Thenzawl village) who is also an MHIP member for 9 years shared, "I can say more than 75% of MHIP members are now aware of many rights & entitlements including centrally sponsored schemes such as i) oldage pension ii) benefits of disabilities iii) health insurance."

Maggie C Zosangpuii
Circle Horticulture officer, Thenzawl village

Members from multiple voluntary networks in a meeting, Serchhip R.D. Block

In Thenzawl village, weaving is a cottage industry, with 75% of the MHIP members, roughly around 2300 households owning looms. It is the largest manufacturing cluster within Mizoram, with exports to other districts. LRG members from MHIP decided to spread awareness on practices such as taking care of eyes, respiratory health, and other health issues among weavers. Due to their work schedules, it was difficult to involve all of them in a single session. Hence several custom-made workshops were conducted. On working with Mentors and LRG members as part of the PRI-CBO Convergence project, Maggie noted that, "Mentors are a knowledge bank, infusing energy among the members and SHG women. The MHIP leaders are being educated continuously and hopefully, they will become resourceful within a year."

The activities of LRG members along with Mentors have motivated MHIP members to actively participate in the Gram Sabha meetings. From an earlier situation of zero participation of women in Gram Sabhas, to 100% attendance of MHIP members in Thenzawl village is a great achievement. The mobilization helped break the norm of one male person attending the Gram Sabha per family and saw massive participation of women in 2019. Maggie elaborated, "MHIP members becoming active in local development were the outcomes of various awareness activities and there are now more women members being elected to VCs. In the past, the voices of women could not get recognized but now our voice is increasingly being heard by men in prioritizing issues and taking decisions. It is a blessing to our community, and we are very thankful to the PRI-CBO Convergence project."

Weaving units in Thenzawl Village

D. Convergence of Line Departments

Based on various activities including PAE, EAP, and VPRP, the LRG members took up few entitlements and a short-term target was set. They started coordinating with various line departments in order to meet the demands for various beneficiaries which included construction of fishponds and leaning of community farms among others. Under the able guidance of Mentors, LRG members were able to initiate talks with the Horticulture department and understand various programmes and schemes available for the community. The Horticulture department worked with many villages, providing training on i) pest management ii) soil treatment, iii) distributing seeds iii) post-harvesting and disseminating information about various new initiatives. In addition to this, training programmes on flower arrangement, mushroom cultivation, and kitchen gardening were also arranged.

Maggie C Zosangpuii who is the Circle Horticulture officer of Thenzawl village (also an MHIP member) works with three villages for training purposes. She said, "In future we will be relying more on the SHG groups to impart more training on different crop cultivation, awareness on pest management, limitations of chemical use, organic farming techniques, and so on."

This offers a classic example of convergence of various institutions – PRIs, CBOs, HOSMAC, and NGOs for holistic village development. Speaking about the potential offered by the convergence along with the collective action of community members, Maggie shared, "The PRI-CBO Convergence project has impacted the horticulture sector too and the women in these villages are leading better lives. In Thenzawl village itself, the soil was not cultivable due to its acidic nature and most of our vegetable demand was met by importing it from outside. The project has created a linkage between our department and women, and they are now able to grow their own organic vegetables after our training programmes."

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Towards the end of the pilot phase, VPRP was reviewed through joint meetings with the VCs and other stakeholders, consolidated and integrated with GPDP during the Gram Sabhas between October to December 2019.

State	Convergence Intervention GP/VC/VDCs	Plans Uploaded in Plan Plus*
Mizoram	37	24

Status of plan uploaded

Under the project, many more Below Poverty Line (BPL) beneficiaries who were outside the CBO networks were identified and included. This was possible due to the increased participation of women from all sections of the society in various exercises and workshops including PAE and EAP. Women who are the beneficiaries of Vulnerability Reduction Fund (VRF) were naturally part of SHGs. However, the PRI-CBO Convergence project also included women from the APL families in the CBOs.

Another main impact of the project has been an increase in awareness of schemes and programmes in the community. This sensitized the community for collective action. For instance, activities under MGNREGA were initially targeted to benefit the influential sections in the community (for individual farmland activities or individual family benefits) which has changed now, shifting the focus to community - based works that could benefit all in the village. This is seen as a serious change in the village development approach. Lalmaunpia Zasai (Cluster Coordinator, MzSRLM) noted that, "The dynamics of convergence depends on the role of women being part of CBO activities."
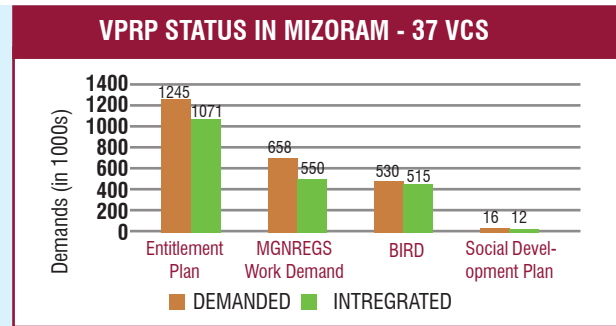

MGNREGA Project, Thenzawl Village

STATUS OF VPRP

VPRP STATUS IN MIZORAM - 37 VCS
- Demands (in 1000s): 1400, 1200, 1000, 800, 600, 400, 200, 0
- Entitlement Plan: 1245 / 1071
- MGNREGS Work Demand: 658 / 550
- BIRD: 530 / 515
- Social Development Plan: 16 / 12
- DEMANDED / INTREGRATED

The recent VPRP exercise carried out with 37 VCs in the year 2019 for the 2020-21 witnessed demands cutting across all major components. Under the Entitlement plan, out of 1245, 1071 plans got integrated with GPDP. It indicated the community's preparedness to access sanitation programmes (IHHL under SBM), old age pension programmes, and PM's housing programmes (PMAY-G). A transition from firewood to gas stoves was evident based on an overwhelming demand for it through the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (249 demands). Though the extension of the coverage of Job cards looks positive, the demand from the community was less as the majority of them were able to access it earlier too. However, the Work demand through MGNREGA saw huge demand, especially under Category A (404 demands) and Category B (169 demands). On-farm and Off-farm related activities such as orchid plantation, terrace cultivation, piggery shed, and poultry saw a 96% incorporation of demands (550 out of 658). Out of 530, 515 plans were integrated under Public Goods, Services & Resource Development Plan. Rural electrification made up 47% of it and roads, bridges, culverts, ferries, and waterways constituted 13.5%. A considerable amount of demand was on health & sanitation related activities. The other major component being Social development that focused majorly on alcohol & drug abuse among youth & children. The rest of it included demands towards HIV/AIDS & Environment conservation, especially waste management.

Overall, the project locations in Mizoram came together to plan a holistic development that not only focused on individual needs such as housing, insurance, and toilets, but also sustainable asset creation for natural resource-based livelihood activities.

Going forward, there are some suggestions from stakeholders which they believe would be the key to taking the project ahead. Lalmaunpia Zasai suggests to formally integrate LRG members as part of VO networks even after the end of the PRI-CBO Convergence project period. This he believes will help monitor the functioning of VOs and sustain the project on its on in the long run. This could also increase the ownership of the VOs in keeping up the urge to be a part of VCs in planning, prioritizing, and decision making, he added. There is also a growing consensus among many NGO office bearers that women associated with the NGOs in Mizoram in key positions should be allowed to proactively be involved in CBOs. Lalrinfela noted that many regulations restricted the enrollment of women in SHGs based on factors such as being a government employee, earnings above a certain level etc. He envisioned a division less inclusive participation and quoted that, "This group of women can become the leaders of those organisations too since their potential has been witnessed by the community now."

As far as PRIs are concerned, Mizo society is yet to fully adopt the model. Though the local governments have huge potential, VCs are not powerful and are not able to function fully like other states that have the PRI system in place. They rely on the government machinery at the state level or heads of departments to take decisions for them. However, the PRI-CBO Convergence project is an ongoing movement for making the VCs more active stakeholders in local governance. This will certainly provide a whole new energy to development activities at the block level. On this, Vanlalhmachhuana shared his views, "In principle, these are people at village level who know their problems. Sitting in my block headquarters, trying to frame policies to address those issues is difficult as I am not able to travel to all the corners of the villages. So, the decisions made by VCs after working in tandem with local CBOs especially women-based VOs are good as they will be able to come up with the right solutions for their local problems. I am looking forward for the transition to the PRI system soon."

TIMELINE OF PRI-CBO CONVERGENCE PROJECT IN MIZORAM

Milestone & Activities		PILOT PHASE		
		2018	2019	2020
Project Initiation	MoU signing	Oct		
	Stakeholder orientation	Oct		
	Internal Mentors selection			
	District / Block Level orientation	Oct		
Local Cadre Development	LRG identification		Jan	
	Training		Feb	
Capacity Building Programmes: SHGs / GPs-VDCs / Line Departments	PAE		Mar-Apr	
	EAP		Sep	
	LSG members orientation		Sep	
	LSG members training		Sep	
	VOCC / VO Sub Committee training		Feb	
	Line departments / training		Oct	
Mobilisation: Planning Process	Gram Sabhas / VO Sabhas		Sep Oct	
	Mobilization of community by VO		Oct-Nov	
	Demand Prepration by VO - VPRP / VPDP		Nov	
PRI Convergence: Integration of demands with panchayat plans	Consultative meetings for VPRP & GPDP		Oct-Nov	
	Gram Sabha meetings for VPRP		Oct-Nov	
	Presentation and Submission of VPRP		Oct-Nov	
	PlanPLUS uploading of VPRP		Nov-Dec	
Institutional Platforms & Exit Strategy	VOCC formation			
	VOCC schedule		Sep	
	GPCC formation			
Convergence Impact on ground: PRIs & Line Departments	Entitlement demands		Oct-Nov	
	Social development			Feb-Mar
	Livelihood demands		Oct-Nov	
	Infrastructure demands		Oct-Nov	
	Resource demands			

Local cadre of the PRI - CBO Convergence project with members from CBOs, Tripura

CONCLUSION

Kudumbashree National Resource Organisation (KS NRO), through the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) - Community Based Organisation (CBO) Convergence project has been successful in identifying and mobilizing women and marginalized sections of the society across the project states of Assam, Tripura, Manipur, and Mizoram to become active participants in local self-governance, and in the process been able to foster a sense of 'togetherness' within the community and among the CBOs and PRIs. For the Kudumbashree field teams consisting of Mentors and Field Coordinators, this has been a valuable learning experience, to work within a diverse set of cultures and traditional practices across project locations in the Northeast (NE) and yet make an impact through rigorous process-oriented training & capacity building of communities and institutions. The project was also deeply involved in setting up institutional mechanisms to support the indigenous tribal communities in the hills & valleys of NE. Along with empowering communities, the project went a long way in improving local governance ecosystems by empowering PRIs and elected representatives. The creation of Village Organisation Coordination Committees (VOCCs) and Gram Panchayat Coordination Committees (GPCCs) will help ensure the project remains sustainable in the long run and CBOs and PRIs work in close collaboration.

The project locations in NE gave Kudumbashree NRO an opportunity to work with a multitude of local governance systems including Village Development Councils (VDCs) in Assam, Village Councils (VCs) in Tripura & Mizoram, and Village Authority (VA) in Manipur in addition to the regular three-tier Gram Panchayat (GP) system. This was an enriching experience for the team. The development of Internal Mentors as a pool of local cadre further instituted the project as a community owned initiative, ensuring its sustainability and helping improve participation from the local community.

State	Blocks	Districts	GP	VC/ VDC/ VA	SHGs	VOs	LRGs	Internal Mentors	Mentors	Professionals
Mizoram	2	1	37	37 VC	595	40	105	-	8	5
Manipur	2	2	12	35 VA	775	55	155	-	3	5
Tripura	12	3	155	117 VC	8020	455	1404	87	12	4
Assam	23	12	165	3 VDC	2136	1461	665	52	8	7

Project Profile from the Northeast

OVERALL EXPERIENCE FROM NORTHEAST

The PRI-CBO Convergence project of Kudumbashree NRO was initiated in Assam in the year 2014, Tripura in 2017 followed by Manipur and Mizoram in 2018.

During the initial stages of the project, the State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLMs) of individual states were new and were working hard to get things done on ground. Though the work done was not on a large scale, the organisational building efforts had started seeing results in terms of state-wide expansion of SHG networks and Village Organisations (VOs). These organized units on-ground were ready to work with the convergence project with full zeal. The involvement of women's organisations and their enthusiastic participation in the process-oriented, activity-intense PRI-CBO tools was the first step of mobilization in Manipur & Mizoram.

Manu Shankar (Program Manager, PRI-CBO Convergence project, Kudumbashree NRO) shared his overall experience of working in NEas below:

• NRLM provided a lot of attention to the young SRLMs and handhold them to create effective women-led organisations at the grassroots.

• The project helped Village Organisations (VOs) evolve as effective entities in terms of conducting meetings, organizing discussions, recording Minutes-of-Meetings (MoMs), negotiation, monitoring, and evaluation.

• It is not only the women network which came together but also the bureaucracy and with their enhanced outreach helped improve role of community in the development process, especially in Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura.

• In the project states, various service departments found their community interventions become effective since the project helped disseminate schemes more effectively, improve access and find the right beneficiaries through SHG networks.

• Though the officers were well qualified, and infrastructure was good, it was the PRI-CBO Convergence project that acted as a bridge between the community and the government machinery through the networks of community women especially in the states of Manipur, Mizoram & Tripura.

• The traditional village administration systems – Village Councils (VCs) in Mizoram & Tripura, and Village Authority (VA) in Manipur could not bring on board the community for participatory planning & development. The PRI – CBO Convergence project helped the community realize that the local bodies are available for them to approach, discuss, negotiate, and prioritize their needs. Livelihood mapping exercise in Manipur is a classic example where the Chairman of VA came forward to participate and help the community. Similarly, VCs in Mizoram gained credibility among the communities through various social development programmes including campaigns against alcoholism.

• The project also created a sense of responsibility among the community to participate in local village planning and development processes as they started realizing its benefits.

• The project states have a lot of potential as the local governments are organized, especially in Mizoram and the PRI-CBO Convergence project will enhance participatory planning in the future too.

"The project also created a sense of responsibility among the community to participate in local village planning as they started realizing its benefits."

Manu Sankar
Program Manager - Convergence, Kudumbashree NRO

REFLECTION FROM STAKEHOLDERS IN THE FIELD

• SRLM units from individual project states and the PRI-CBO Convergence project teams were able to seamlessly collaborate for the development of state specific modules for community mobilization, capacity building, VO creation, and institutional linkage.

• The SHG networks consisting mainly of women from the communities were infused with great enthusiasm as the poor and marginalized sections in the villages started participating actively in its activities. This led to the creation of inclusive VOs. The creation of VOCCs and GPCCs at later stages helped create a bridge between the CBOs and PRIs.

• VOs became more vocal and began initiating healthy negotiations with GPs and line departments to incorporate Village Poverty Reduction Plans (VPRPs) into Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs). They also became aware of the functioning of bureaucracy and other government machinery which helped them strategize as a unit, plan, and work their way in the system.

• In addition to VPRP, continuous assessment of relevant social / community development issues such as alcoholism, domestic violence, school dropout, illiteracy, child marriage, lack of financial autonomy, malnutrition etc. also began finding a place in deliberations during regular SHG and VO meetings.

• Individual demands of people began transforming into collective planning for the family, neighborhood, and village as a result of a more informed and socially conscious community. This has brought about a sense of togetherness, collective living, and hope for the future.

• The project helped improve basic skills of community members like basic literacy, awareness of government programmes and projects, filling of applications for entitlements, follow up with government departments, and escalation of complaints if necessary.

• Most importantly, communities across project locations had the opportunity to voice their demands and access entitlements through local planning and execution.

> "The PRI - CBO Convergence project helped transform the preparation of GPDP from just a paper exercise into a community-driven exercise."

Ms. Sarada G Muraleedharan IAS (Principal Secretary, Local Self Government Department, Government of Kerala) noted that while traditionally there were many initiatives such as Health committees, Water committees, Sanitation & Hygiene committees, Nutrition committees etc. which were envisaged to improve the quality of local self-governance on the ground they never really took off due to the lack of empowered and informed communities. The National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) led Kudumbashree anchored PRI-CBO Convergence project helped change this. "The PRI-CBO Convergence project helped transform the preparation of GPDP from just a paper exercise into a community-driven exercise. It was a wonderful opportunity to tie various SHG networks in the states with the newly emerging Gram Panchayat (GP) local governance initiatives that came out through GPDP", she said.

Sarada G Muraleedharan
Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Kerala

LSG MANTRA OF PRI-CBO CONVERGENCE PROJECT IN NE

- Improved participation of women and the poor in local governance.

- Gave them voice and space to articulate their concerns.

- Ensured local needs were met.

- Entitlements & benefits were channeled effectively to the much needy among the poor and the marginalized sections of the society.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM INDIVIDUAL STATES

The Northeastern states of Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, and Manipur presented a unique set of challenges and opportunities for the Kudumbashree NRO field teams. Each state had its own unique community structures and a multitude of local self-government structures like PRIs, ADCs, VCs, and VAs.

In Assam, the project saw an exciting trajectory with improved participation of women in local governance to creation of VOCCs. Working with the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) of Karbi Anglong was an enriching experience for Kudumbashree NRO.

In Tripura, the team had to deal with multiple cultures, languages, and customs along with poor participation of women in local governance. The overwhelming cooperation by SRLM led to the development of Vulnerability Reduction Plans (VRPs) for a state-wide approach to reach larger communities. This was a new paradigm in extending the collaboration across stakeholders.

In Manipur, the role of women in village economy and shouldering responsibility of family was an undeniable fact. It was however a new experience that these women had to be mobilized for the first time for holistic village development programmes. Livelihood as an entry point paid off.

In Mizoram, it was about dealing with an educated society struggling with a major social issue of alcoholism. The project helped bring in convergence for social development through community based organisations such as the Young Mizo Association (YMA) & Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHI). The existing community volunteering culture unique to Mizoram (Hnatlâng) helped the project greatly in mobilizing youth and women to become active participants in project activities.
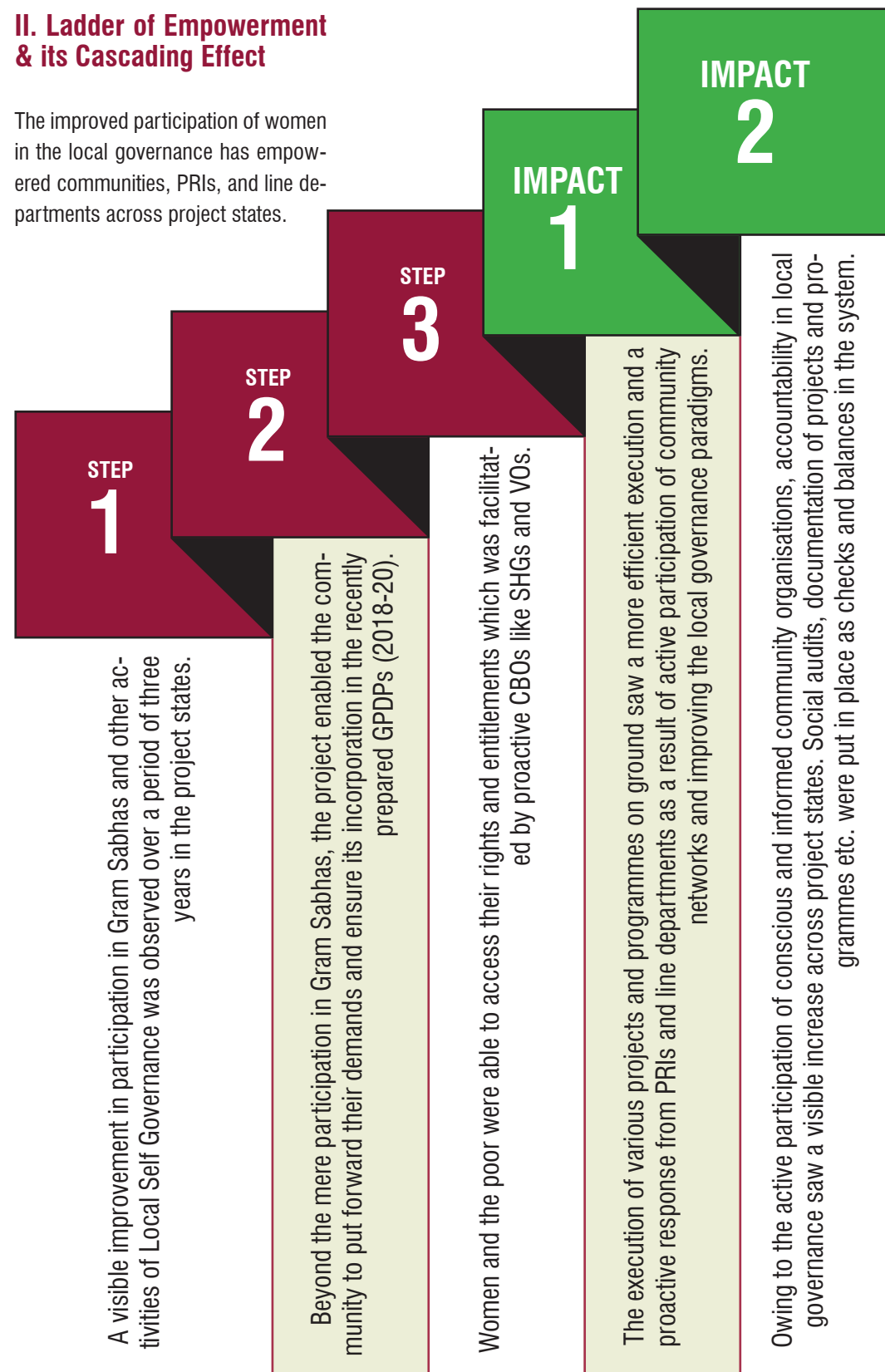
KEY IMPACTS

I. Strengthening of PRIs

As the PRI-CBO Convergence project was initiated and Mentors from Kerala traveled to remote project locations, they realized that not only were the CBOs inactive or absent in some locations, but PRIs in many areas were also disorganized or dysfunctional. In this regard, Sarada G Muraladheeran noted, "The members of the PRIs are also part of the community from which he/she is coming in. The marginalization that hits the community is hitting the PRIs as well." During the time of its implementation, Mentors and Field Coordinators from KS NRO were able to train and capacitate the elected representatives and other PRI officials helping them carry on with their regular duties and responsibilities more efficiently and effectively. This also helped better utilization of 14th and 15th Finance Commission funds by the PRIs by bringing community participation right into the center of the local self-governance initiatives.

Junti Hazarika, Panchayat Presient, Katoni GP with SHG and VO members, Assam

II. Ladder of Empowerment & its Cascading Effect

The improved participation of women in the local governance has empowered communities, PRIs, and line departments across project states.

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

IMPACT 1

IMPACT 2

A visible improvement in participation in Gram Sabhas and other activities of Local Self Governance was observed over a period of three years in the project states.

Beyond the mere participation in Gram Sabhas, the project enabled the community to put forward their demands and ensure its incorporation in the recently prepared GPDPs (2018-20).

Women and the poor were able to access their rights and entitlements which was facilitated by proactive CBOs like SHGs and VOs.

The execution of various projects and programmes on ground saw a more efficient execution and a proactive response from PRIs and line departments as a result of active participation of community networks and improving the local governance paradigms.

Owing to the active participation of conscious and informed community organisations, accountability in local governance saw a visible increase across project states. Social audits, documentation of projects and programmes etc. were put in place as checks and balances in the system.

WAY FORWARD

In order to reap the full benefits of the PRI-CBO Convergence project and enable revolutionary changes in local self-governance across India, 'systematization' of the project learning, and outcomes has to take place. "The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) & the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) needs to work in tandem with each other to achieve the same. It also requires the community networks that have been built through this project to be able to institutionalize the relationship with the local government", noted Sarada G Muraleedharan.

At the organisational level, Kudumbashree NRO is aiming to support not only the partnering states but also the NRLM in implementing the nation-wide expansion of VPRP and its integration with GPDP. In this regard, Sajith Sukumaran (Chief Operating Officer– Kudumbashree NRO) said that, "Kudumbashree NRO supported NRLM in conducting the first level of training where senior resource persons were trained in the states and Union Territories. This was followed by community level resource person training. Currently, GPDP preparation is underway in all the village local governments in the country."

Towards institutionalization

In this direction, there have been a couple of national level Consultation workshops and a few key takeaways were:

- Ensuring participation of women from the NRLM SHG networks in various local government structures (VOs, VOCCs, PRIs) and constant exchange of information between them.

- Integration of PRI-CBO Convergence project activities with Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) since the Central Finance Commission (CFC) and MGNREGA are the primary sources of funding for local governance initiatives in almost all the states other than Kerala.

- Improving participation of women in MGNREGA and involving them in the planning process.

- Creating space for articulation for SHGs and their federations within the local governance structures.

The success of the project relies greatly on the optimization of processes in line with the prevailing socio - political conditions of individual project locations. This has been phenomenally executed by the NRO field teams along with the SRLM units, SHG networks, and the local governments across project states. These efforts have initiated a community-driven responsive local governance system at the grassroots level.

Sajith Sukumaran
Chief Operating Officer, Kudumbashree NRO

"Currently, GPDP preparation is underway in all the village local governments in the country."

ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

AC - Autonomous Council

ADC - Autonomous District Council

ADS - Area Development Society

ASRLM - Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission

BDO - Block Development Officer

BIRD - Basic Infrastructure and Resource Development Plan

BMM - Block Mission Manager

BPL - Below Poverty Line

BPMs - Block Project Managers

BTC - Bodoland Territorial Council

CAA - Citizenship Amendment Act

CBO - Community Based Organisations

CDS - Community Development Society

CEM - Chief Executive Member

CF - Community Facilitator

CLF - Cluster Level Federation

CSS - Centrally Sponsored Schemes

DC - District Council

DDRS - Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme

DLAO - District Local Administrative Officer

DMM - District Mission Manager

DRDA - District Rural Development Agency

DWCRA - Development of Women and Children

EC - Election Commission

EM - Executive Member

FC - Finance Commission

FGD - Focused Group Discussion

GoI - Government of India

GoK- Government of Kerala

GP - Gram Panchayat

GPDP - Gram Panchayat Development Plan

GS - Gram Sabha

HH – Household

ICDS - Integrated Child Development Services

IGDC - Indo-German Development Corporation

IRDP - Integrated Rural Development Programme

JICA - Japan International Cooperation Agency

KS NRO - Kudumbashree National Resource Organisation

KSSP - Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad

KVK - Krishi Vigyan Kendra

LAD - Local Administrative Department

LH – Livelihoods

LSG - Local Self-Government

MA - Municipal Authority

MAC - Member of Autonomous Council

MDC - Member of District Council

MGNREGA - Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

MLA - Member of Legislative Assembly

MoM - Minutes-of-Meeting

MoPR - Ministry of Panchayati Raj

MoRD - Ministry of Rural Development

MoU - Memorandum of Understanding

MP LAD Fund – Member of Parliament Local Area Development Fund

MSRLM - Manipur State Rural Livelihoods Mission

MzSRLM - Mizoram State Rural Livelihoods Mission

NAA - Notified Area Authority

NCHAC - North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council

NE - Northeast

NERLP - North East Rural Livelihood Project

NHG – Neighbourhood Group

NRLM - National Rural Livelihood Mission

NRO - National Resource Organisation

OBs - Office Bearers

PDS - Public Distribution System

PGSnRDP - Public Goods, Services & Resource Development plan

PLDP - Panchayat Level Participatory Development Programme

PMAY-G - Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awaas Yojana

PMVVY - Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vadana Yogna

PPC - People's Plan Campaign

PR - Panchayat Raj

PRA - Participatory Rural Appraisal

PRI - CBO Convergence project - Panchayati Raj Institution-Community Based Organisation Convergence project

PRI - Panchayati Raj Institution

RD - Rural Development

RGSA - Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan

RTI - Right to Information

SBM - Swachh Bharat Mission

SC - Scheduled Caste

SC – Standing Committee

SDG - Sustainable Development Goal

SEC – State Election Commission

SGSY- Swarnjayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana

SHG - Self-Help Group

SIPRD - State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development

SIRD - State Institute of Rural Development

SPEM - State Poverty Eradication Mission

SRLM - State Rural Livelihood Mission

SSS - State Sponsored Schemes

ST - Scheduled Tribe

TLP - Total Literacy Programme

TRLM - Tripura Rural Livelihood Mission

TSC - Total Sanitation Campaign

TSP - Tribal Sub-plan

TTAADC - Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council

UT - Union Territory

VA – Village Authority

VC – Village Council

VCP - Village Council President

VDC - Village Development Committee

VDC - Village Development Council

VO- Village Organisation

VRF - Vulnerability Reduction Fund

VRP - Vulnerability Reduction Plan

WCP - Women Component Plan

YMA - Young Mizo Association

ZDO - Zonal Development Officer

EM - Executive Member

VDC - Village Development Committee

RTI - Right to Information

RD - Rural Development

PR - Panchayat Raj

RGSA - Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan

ZDO - Zonal Development Officer

PRA - Participatory Rural Appraisal

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