

(chapter 11

Quality of Governance, Decentralization and Institutional Reforms

11.1 Human Development and Governance

Human Development (HD) is defined as, the improvement of human conditions so that people live longer, healthier and fuller lives. Over the years, the concept of Human Development has come to incorporate all the various things that are directly connected with peoples' well-being, such as health, nutrition and education, widening of choice and empowerment, share in governance and participation, environment, political freedoms and cultural rights (Human Development Report 1997, 2004).

One of the biggest challenges of achieving HD is governance. What is governance in the context of HD? *Governance for human development relates to the management of all such processes that, in any society, define the environment which permits and enables individuals to raise their capability levels, on one hand, and provides opportunities to realise their potential and enlarge the set of available choices, on the other. These processes, covering the political, social and economic aspects of life impact every level of human enterprise, be it individual, the household, the village, the region or even the nation as a whole. It covers the state, the civil society and the market, each of which is-critical for sustaining human development. The State is responsible for creating a conducive political, legal and economic environment for building individual capabilities and encouraging private initiative. The market is expected to create opportunities for the people. The civil society facilitates the mobilisation of public opinion and people's participation in economic, social and political activities for sustaining an efficient and productive social order* (National Human Development Report, 2001; p. 114).

The criticality of quality governance in achieving HD is one of the most important factors influencing the nature, direction and process of social transformation of society. The National Human Development Report of 2001 pointed out the binary elements of the idea and practice of quality governance. The binary elements distinguish between good and poor governance (see box 11.2).

The Report cited above also commented on governance across States in the Country (India) and remarked that States that are rich in mineral resources are not necessarily industrially developed, and those with rich cultivable lands, and assured irrigation are often lagging behind in agricultural development.. There are States in the country that, in the recent past, have seized the governance initiatives to register important gains in human development, while others squandered opportunities despite their natural advantage and favourable initial conditions (ibid 115-116). What is the position of the State of Meghalaya in the context of governance and Human Development? The chapter will address and deliberate question.

Box 11.1: Defining Governance

United Nations Development Programme

Governance is viewed as the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations, and mediate their differences.

World Bank

Governance is defined as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources. The World Bank has identified three distinct aspects of governance (1) the form of political regime; (2) the process by which authority is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development; and (3) the capacity of governments to design, formulate and implement policies and discharge functions.

Commission on Global Governance

Governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflict or diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action may be taken. It includes formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their interest.

Source: National Human Development Report, 2001, p. 115

Box 11.2: Binary Elements of Quality Governance

Good Governance	Poor Governance
Can help secure human well-being and sustained development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could well erode the individual capabilities, as well as institutional and community-capacities to meet even the basic needs of sustenance for large segments of the population

Source: Ibid

The rest of the chapter is organised in the following manner. Section 11.2 discusses the system of governance in Meghalaya. It analyses political governance by discussing the different political authorities in the state. It discusses economic governance specifically by analysing the issue of rural development and planning. Section 11.3 discusses how to reform the existing structure of governance. It proposes a model of developmental planning at the grassroot level. Section 11.4 discusses the concrete steps that will facilitate institutional reforms.

11.2 Governance in Meghalaya:

The State of Meghalaya is unique. It is so because of the matrilineal descent practised by its three major tribes, the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos. It also enjoys a different political status and position as per the Constitution of India. Meghalaya falls within the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Under this specific Constitutional arrangement the State has three-tier political administration: the State Legislative Assembly and its modern bureaucratic organisation, the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs), and the Traditional Institutions. It is important to highlight the structure and function of each, and the relationship among them to understand political governance and decentralisation, and development (see Box 11.3, Box 11.4, Box 11.5, and Box 11.6).

11.2.1 POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

The brief description of each institution in different boxes shows that political governance in the State is in one way different, and also very intricate and complex. The complexity of governance is because of the existence of more than one political authority.

Box 11.3: Meghalaya Legislative Assembly

Authority

- As per the Constitution of India it is the highest legislative body in the State

Stability

- Resilient and able to cope with the politics of coalitions and consensus in the emerging multi-party system of governance
- Sessions are not disrupted and function smoothly

Contributions

- Introduced and enacted Acts, and Rules and Regulations
- Members of the Opposition have been raising issues and have also demanded explanation from the ruling government on decisions it takes which affect the people and the State

Concerns/Challenges

- Number of Members in the Opposition sometimes too few
- Reconciling the industrial policy, developmental and economic needs of the State and its impact on the environment in a sustainable manner
- To articulate and introduce comprehensive policy on development including sustainable development
- Addressing critical issues like land ceiling, people's participation in development, and evolving a functional model of development that relates with the context of the State.

Box 11.4: State Government and Its System of Administration

Authority

- Represent the State and its people
- Decision-maker, controller and administrator of every aspect concerning welfare, security and social justice

Stability

- Unlike in the past, the present politics of coalition and adjustment among various parties has brought about a comparatively more stable government
- The Anti-Defection Law and the subsequent clause of downsizing the number of Ministers has been an effective instrument of stability
- Frequent changes of Portfolios of Ministers are less and that has contributed to stability in the administration because changes and transfers of government functionaries at various levels are also less

Contributions

- Formation of separate Departments dealing with specific aspects and division of the State into different administrative units: Districts, Sub-divisions, and Community and Rural Development Blocks and aspects of State functions.
- Formation of Autonomous Organisations/Bodies as another way of specific response for development

Concerns/ Challenges

- The politics of coalitions has led to creation of a number of Commissions, Boards, etc for political accommodation.
- Overlapping of functions and conflict of decisions between departments and commissions may hamper development.
- Inter-departmental coordination and concerted effort, and macro perspective on development are lacking.

Box 11.5: The Autonomous District Councils

Authority

The power of law-making in certain specified fields such as management of forests other than reserved forest, inheritance of property, marriage and social customs, to assess and collect land revenue and to impose certain specified taxes

- Control the traditional institutions in matters relating to Election and Succession of Chiefs and Headmen.

- Paragraph 12A of the Sixth Schedule provides that if the State Legislature and a District Council make laws on the same subject and any part of the law made by the District Council is repugnant to the law made by the State Legislature, the law made by the State Legislature shall prevail.

Contributions

- Resolving disputes and conflicts of election and succession of Chiefs and Headmen.

- Resolving boundary disputes among various villages and local domains.

- Settlement of disputes on inheritance.

Concerns/Challenges

- Conflict with traditional institutions in so far as being a superstructure.

- Policies and actions of the District Councils in various matters, particularly relating to transfer of land, taxation, issuing of trading license, financial management and forest management, have not been entirely free from criticisms. There are concerns that certain actions in these matters are against the spirit of the Sixth Schedule; that is protection of the indigenous people.

- Over-staffed.

- Its relevance in the present form, structure and function.

Source: Power to People in Meghalaya, and Autonomous District Councils

Box 11.6: The Traditional Institutions

Authority

- Regulate, control and manage land, forests, trade and customary practices of the society

- Confirmation of Election and Succession of Headman! Village representative

- Authority is derived from traditional legitimacy

Stability

- As a traditional political body it is stable

Contributions

- It is closer to the people since it is part of the social system of the society

- Provides immediate relief to the people in crisis or during an emergency

- Solves conflicts and disputes

- Maintain social order and tranquility

- A supporting institution for the government in the implementation of developmental programmes

Concerns/Challenges

- Internal conflicts and disputes on Election and Succession of Chief and Headmanship are on the rise

- Conflict with Autonomous District Councils Act on Election and Succession of Chief and Headmanship

- Boundary disputes between two or more traditional institutions

- Transfer of land and forests, taxation, and collection of revenue

- Transparency and accountability

- Lack in formulation of judicious and progressive rules and regulations in the management of natural resources

Source: A Sociological Understanding of Khasi Society, 2002

In recent years we observe that the complexity of political governance due to existence of three separate political bodies and each wanting to control the other leading to tension and strain among them. Two of these institutions (The State Legislative Assembly and the Autonomous District Council) are based on modern democratic principles whose members are elected on the principle of adult franchise, the structure is modern-bureaucratic organisation, and function is defined by rules and regulations. The third institution (Le., traditional institutions and locally known as Syiemship, Doloiship, Sardarship, Lyngdohship, and Wahadadarship in Khasi Hills, Doloiship in Jaintia Hills and Nokmaship in Garo Hills) is based on customary beliefs and practices, and traditions. They are involved and engaged in economic development, administration of justice, and regulating social order. The only difference is that traditional institutions have to function within the given rules and regulations of the Autonomous District Council and the State Government, and the State Legislature laws prevail over the laws of the District Councils. It may be noted that the Constitution does not prescribe traditional institutions as a level of governance and it only talks about appointment / succession of Chiefs and Headmen on which the District Councils have power to legislate. In the Sixth Schedule areas, the Constitution provides for village / town committees or councils. (The State of Mizoram has abolished traditional institutions). However, the traditional institutions have resisted changes towards modernization although such changes may make them more democratic or accountable to the people. Ultimately it is the authority of the State Government that prevails, and overwhelmingly determines the process of development in the State.

11.2.2 ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

The Constitution of India provides the basic framework for responsibilities between the Centre and States in planning and functions. In 1950 the Government of India set up the Planning Commission, and it is guided primarily by the Fundamental Rights guaranteed by, and the Directive Principles of State Policy embodied in, the Indian Constitution which enjoin upon the government to ensure:

- that all citizens can have an adequate means of livelihood
- that the ownership and control of community's resources are so distributed as to best subserve the common good, and
- that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment (Bhattacharya 1989:311).

Embedded with the core values from the Constitution of India, the Planning Commission's role is defining the development planning for the country. It has been carrying out this responsibility since then (Shreerajan 2001, pp. 43-44). Besides, as commented by the same author, Meghalaya as one of the smallest States of the Union of India follows the pattern of centralised planning, though professing to follow decentralised planning. The State is categorised as 'Special Category State', receives grants to the tune of 90% of its plan allocation from the Central Government due to its weak internal resource base. The structure and the process of development planning in the State can be described below:

1. Different departments of government prepare sector-wise plan projections, which is compiled at the State level by the department of planning
2. There is a Planning Board and its role is mainly advisory
3. The Cabinet of the State Government approves the approach and details of the plan
4. The plan is taken to the Planning Commission of India, New Delhi for discussion and consideration.

Theoretically, the plan document should incorporate the district plans prepared by the district planning and development committee headed by a cabinet rank minister belonging to the district. There are other notified representatives both elected and otherwise, besides, the district heads of line departments. The Chief Executive Member of the District Councils concerned and the Deputy Commissioner (administrative head in the district) are the vice-chairmen. The District Planning Officer as Secretary, services the committee. There is no planning structure at the subdivision or Community and Rural Development Blocks in the State. The Planning set up at the district level is also weak and poorly staffed (ibid, p.44).

In the context of rural development planning and implementation in the State, the structure and process is as follows:

1. At the Government level, there is the Secretariat of Community and Rural Development of which is an administrative Department. The Secretariat deals with all the policy and related matters of the Government in relation to Community & Rural Development and all correspondence with the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. It also deals with all Establishment matters relating to Gazetted Officers, in the appointment, transfer, etc.; constitution of Block Development Committee and other Committees and sanction of schemes etc. (other than those specifically delegated to subordinate offices). It also monitors plans and programmes.
2. For administration and supervision purpose there is the Directorate of Community & Rural Development. The Director is the over-all controlling authority of all the Block Agencies and is responsible for the effective administration and implementation of all the programmes both State and Central undertaken by the Department. While the Director of Community & Rural Development is the Head of the Department, he is assisted by a team of Officers and Staff who run the day to day works of the Department as a whole.
3. At the district level there are Deputy Commissioners (D.C.) and Project Directors, DRDA, with their supporting staff who are responsible to the Department to apprise on the progress of the implementation of the works/programmes from time to time. Extensive touring is required of them to be undertaken for supervision in the implementation of the schemes and also to monitor the functioning of the Block Development Officers. The DRDA (District Rural Development Agency) and the Development branch of the D.C. office cater to various functional requirements.
4. Coming down to the Block Level, the entire State has been divided into 39 Blocks in order to provide development to the rural villages/areas and bring the administration closer to the people. Each Development Block is headed by an Officer called the Block Development Officer who is assisted by Extension officers in the field of Agriculture, A.H. Veterinary and Engineering. They undertake survey work, prepare schemes with plans and estimates and so on for approval and sanction. Each Block is divided into 15 Gram Sevak Circles in order to achieve success in the sphere of development at the grass root level. Each circle is under the charge of a Gram Sevak. There are also a few Gram Sevikas.

The Community & Rural Development Department is implementing different programmes and schemes for economic and social development of people in rural areas with a view to increase the income level and quality of life of the rural people. The programme/Scheme being implemented by the Department includes the Centrally sponsored schemes, like Swarnjayanti Gram Samridhi Yojana, Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (not in vogue after 2008), Indira Awaas Yojana, National Social Assistance Programme, and State Schemes such as Community Development Schemes, Assistance to Small Farmer/Marginal Farmer, Special Rural Works Programme, Construction of Rural Roads Programme and Chief Minister Special Rural Development Scheme (Government of Meghalaya). The

implementation of the schemes is carried-out as follows:

1. The Centrally sponsored schemes are launched by the Govt. of India and are implemented by the DRDAs through the Block Development Offices, as per guidelines prescribed by the Govt. of India
2. The members of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly have two specific schemes under their control. The schemes are general in nature and are implemented through the village councils but through the office of the Deputy Commissioners
3. At the State government level are the Departments, which formulate the annual plans and implement both State and other Centrally sponsored schemes. A department is divided into head office, district heads, sub-divisional heads, and at the Community Block. At every level it is managed and controlled by government functionaries, and the highest authority is the Minister in-charge

The process of implementing rural development programmes is carried-out by the department of Community and Rural Development, and also supported by the District Rural Development Agency (DRDAs). The lowest unit is the Community and Rural Development Blocks (C & RD Blocks). A similar system of controlling and managing like other departments is followed. The only difference at the C & RD Blocks is that there were two committees which selected beneficiaries and schemes to implement Centrally sponsored schemes and the State schemes. The two committees are the Block Development Committee (BDC) and the Block Selection Committee (BSC). Recently, the Government constituted one Committee namely, the Block Development and Monitoring Committee (BDMC) to decide upon schemes, beneficiaries and to monitor the schemes.

Under the MREGS (Meghalaya Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme), Village employment Councils (VEC) and Area Employment Councils (AEC) have been constituted.

The State has been implementing various schemes under Central Sector (100 percent Central funding) and Centrally sponsored schemes (mostly 90 percent Central share and the other 10 percent to be borne by the State; some schemes range from 50 percent to 75 percent share from the Centre). Besides, for infrastructure development and schemes under the NEC, financial assistance comes from the Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR) (90 percent as grant and 10 percent as loan raised by the State). The development status of the State and gaps in infrastructure may be seen at Box 11.7.

Table 11.1: Existing Structure and Function: Planning and Development in Meghalaya

Hierarchy	Role	Remarks
Cabinet	Highest decision making body	Takes all decision regarding plans proposals
State Planning Board	Advisory	Not very effective, and selection of members based more on political appointees than professional planners ¹ .
District Planning and Development Committees	Planning	Weak, lack of staff, and its recommendations not taken into consideration ² .
Community and Rural Development Blocks	Plan and implement rural development programmes	Used for implementation of schemes/programmes
Village Councils	Plan village employment under MREGS.	Used by the government for implementing of schemes

Source: Shreerajan, 2001. *Perspectives on Development in Meghalaya*. Shillong: State Institute of Rural Development

Table 11.2: Existing Structure and Function: Implementing Developmental Schemes in Meghalaya

Hierarchy	Role	Remarks
Departments	Decides and implement	Lack of coordination among them. Too many players in the field
District Head	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Guide line departments ▪ Leadership and control of DRDAs and the C&RD Blocks ▪ Monitor and evaluate on-going schemes, and assess their implementation and impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Depend on the quality of administrative leadership of the Deputy Commissioner of the District ▪ Overburden with both judicial and development matters
Community and Rural Development Blocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implementing rural development schemes ▪ Coordinate with line departments, and oversee the on-going schemes ▪ Have to work along with members of BDCs and BSCs (now BDMC and MLAs) ▪ Sanctioning authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Depend on the quality of administrative leadership of the BDOs ▪ Overburden with too many schemes and programmes ▪ No control on the actions of the BDCs and BSCs members due to lack of defined Rules and Regulations
Village Councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implementing schemes, selection of beneficiaries ▪ Interact with government departments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Its not a development body as such ▪ Women and youth are excluded

Source: Shreerajan, 2001. *Perspectives on Development in Meghalaya*. Shillong: State Institute of Rural Development.

¹The recent constitution of the State Planning Board has shown shift towards professionalism.

²The recent constitution of DPDCs has shown shift towards broadbasing.

Box 11.7: Development Status

1. Population Below Poverty Line

- The Below Poverty Line Censuses showed that in 1996-97 the poverty ratio was 54 percent and in 2002 it was 48.9 percent³.
- There are questions about the reliability of the data. The Planning Commission, GOI uses Assam's poverty ratios for the North Eastern States.

2. Roads

- 53 percent of habitations as on 10th December, 2008 are connected with roads.
- The road density is 36.4 km/100 sq.km as on 31st March 2006⁴.

3. Health

- 10 functional hospitals, 28 Community Health Centres, 104 Primary Health Centres, and 405 Sub-Health Centres
- One doctor for 5080 persons, and 137 beds per lakh population
- Infant mortality rate during 2005-07 is 56 per 1000 live births⁵.

4. Water Supply

- Out of a total of 8636 habitations, 8204 habitations have been fully covered for provision of potable water supply

5. Education

- According to the Census 2001, literacy rate is 63.3 percent

6. Rural Electrification

- As on 31.03. 2008 the number of villages electrified is 3428 out of total 5782 villages (Le. 60 percent)⁶.

Source: Government of Meghalaya. 2005-2006, Annual Plan-Draft Proposals, pp. v - ix, unless otherwise stated.

The Autonomous District Councils decide upon the implementation of grants given to the state Government under article 275(1) of the Constitution and also specific awards, if any, under the Finance Commission Awards. The Members of the ADCs select and decide the implementation of their schemes. The traditional institutions do not have any scheme but only implement them if they obtain funds or are selected by the departments of the State or by the public representatives. Within the traditional institutions, the village is the unit through which such schemes are implemented. The village council as the highest authority is utilized by the State in the implementation of the schemes, for example, selection of beneficiaries or selection of sites. The village councils consist only of adult male members, and represented by the headman and executive members. In general, traditional institutions are outside the system of the State government except only for implementation (See table 11.1 and table 11.2).

The development status as described in Box 11.7 is a presentation of the realities of the State at the macro level. At the micro level, it is found that the situation of development is far from satisfactory.

³Please see www.megcnrd.gov.in

⁴as per data provided by the Secretary, PWD (R & B), Govt. of Meghalaya, July, 2007.

⁵SRS Bulletin, October, 2008

⁶Power Department, Government of Meghalaya, Shillong.

Scenario I: In the book, *Human Development In Khatar Shnong* (a cluster of more than 40 villages located in the Shella-Bholaganj C&RD Block of East Khasi Hills District), the main findings are:

- The number of thatched roof house is 66.12 percent out of the total of 1222 households
- The average life expectancy of the villagers is 60 years, and the number of aged population after the age of 60 years is 4.75 percent out of the total population of 5705 persons. The reason is lack of basic health facility and poverty
- The literacy rate is 49.13 percent.. A majority of the literate population had completed only class VI
- The public health system does not exist, in a practical sense; buildings are there but without medicine, nurse or doctor. People have to trek on foot to access health care and also have to spend money and lose one day's wage
- There are 126 physically challenged persons without any basic care and opportunities to develop themselves
- The number of landless households is 59.95 percent out of the total of 1222
- Proportion of households with approximate household income per annum below Rs.10,000/-is 67.17 percent
- 62.50 percent of villages are not accessible to drinking water, and have to collect water by trekking to water sources located far away
- Government linkage and delivery is poor in the area (Nongkynrih 2000, pp. 27-72)..

Scenario II: Recently, under the Community Development Extension Programme (CDEP), Department of Sociology, North Eastern Hill University, a number of village programmes were organised with the villages in many parts of Khasi-Jaintia hills. In such programmes, a participatory assessment of village situations was conducted. Some of the findings we are sharing as part of understanding governance and development from the field. A socio-economic survey was conducted between December 2004 and February 2005 with the support of one of the partners of CDEP, the Langkymma Rural Development Organisation, Nongkulang, West Khasi Hills District.. The methodology applied was the survey method, and the participants were the village councils, village elders, young people and women. A few aspects have been selected from the findings, and are as follows:

- The area of study falls under the Ranikor Community and Rural Development Block. The survey was conducted in seven villages selected randomly by the partner of CDEP. The villages are Amarsang, Pormawdar, Thateja, Nonghyllam, Longumsur, Nongjri, and Kulang.
- The area is one of the most isolated, educationally and economically backward in the State. Except for few land owning families who have either sold-off the plots of land to coal traders or are involved in coal mining and have accumulated wealth, the rest of the population is poor.
- The distance of the villages from the city of Shillong is approximately 160 kms. The pucca road extended till Ranikor, and a few kilometers further on. The rest of the journey one has to cover by a very bad road meant only for heavy vehicles. Out of seven villages, 4 villages can be reached on foot, and the time taken is between 2 and 6 hours. Communication is so difficult that it hampers movement of people and goods for trade and other purposes. Villages complained that in case of sickness it takes hours to reach a health centre. During the monsoons

the villages are cut off because of very bad roads, bridges are broken and not repaired, and landslides add to the problem.

- The total number of households in the seven villages is 357 and the total population is 2276 persons. The average number of persons per household is between 5 to 7 persons. Out of the total number of households, the number of households owning land is 159, and the number of households not owning any land for economic activities is 198. The landless households are given plots of land for residential purposes free but have to lease the land for economic activities.
- Except for two villages having primary, upper primary and high schools, the rest of the villages only have a primary school. Religious organisations and Village councils manage these schools. The number of illiterates in seven villages is 165.
- The working population of the villages is either engaged in agriculture or daily wage earners. The approximate income of the majority of the households in the villages is between Rs.1 000 - Rs.1500 per month.
- A Sub-Centre is located in one of the villages, but the health centre does not have adequate supply of medicines, without a nurse and doctor. It has not been able to provide the necessary services. The seven villages do not have any person trained as community health worker to provide immediate medical support to the people
- The villages have their system of water supply by using the village water sources for drinking and other purposes
- Only one village is connected with electricity
- None of the villages have any proper sanitation system
- On linkages with government departments in the last one-year, it is found that none of the villages had any contact with department of health, fishery, agriculture, veterinary and animal husbandry, Soil, and border area development. Only 4 villages had some contact with departments of education, social welfare, public health engineering, and block development office and gram sevak/sevikas
- None of the villages have any information on the programmes of the government
- The public distribution system is irregular and the quality of items supplied was bad

Besides the information above, the survey gathered specific information on problems faced by women, youth and the villages in general. According to the women the problems they encountered daily in their lives and seriously affecting them are:

- Overloaded with household chores, and also working to support the family
- Due to lack of proper and basic health facilities, the health of the mother and child are seriously affected
- Male drunkenness and consequential domestic insecurity

The younger population of the area aged between 15 to 25 years also stated that they are facing problems. The problems identified by them are:

- Substantial number of young people are illiterate and without any functional skills. They cannot be gainfully employed to generate income
- Limited employment opportunities in the area is another factor that is affecting them

The villages, in general, are poor and economically backward because of compounded problems like lack of good roads, bridges, health facilities, lack of educational institutions, and marketing of goods is major problem because it is not linked with good roads and availability of transport system.

Scenario III: Another perspective of understanding of good or poor governance is by examining the linkage between villages and the government departments. Below we have selected a number of cases and presented in different boxes. Two cases are from the report on, *Understanding Land Ownership and Management Systems of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Societies of Megha/aya* (Jamir and Nongkynrih, 2002), sponsored by IFAD. Linkage assessment between the people and the government is divided into four broad categories; high, medium, low, and very low.

The problems faced by the rural folks in the rural areas are factors that impede economic development in general and human development, in particular. Besides, there are other factors that impede the process of development in the State of Meghalaya. In the assessment made by Shreeranjana (2001) in his book on *Perspectives on Development in Megha/aya*, the factors are caused by the structure of governance, and they are:

- Lack of genuine participation in planning, policy and decision making
- An environment of cautious approach of governance which may mean inaction, or slow-action; or weighed action, sometimes vested or interested action
- Centralised planning; and lack of meaningful experimentation
- 'Top-down' and 'target-oriented' approach in implementation
- Creation and mushrooming of programme specific agencies
- The findings of monitoring and evaluation are either non-existent or hardly put to use. That is monitoring and evaluation is very poor - practically non-existent
- Lack of accountability of the implementing agencies either to the Government or to the people has been the single major cause for diversion of funds in developmental programmes (Shreeranjana, 2001: 36-54).

Box 11.8: Village and Government Linkages

1. Emangre Village of South Garo Hills

The villagers ranked the health department as high, the Block development Officer as medium, Departments like education, social welfare, public health engineering, and Public works as low, and very low linkage departments are veterinary, agriculture, and forest

2. Mandalgre Village of East Garo Hills

Except for the village head none of the government departments are in high linkage with the people. The Block development office comes second as medium, Departments like health, education, agriculture, and gram sevak are in the category of low linkage, and the rest of the departments like social welfare, forest, Public health engineering, and public works are very low

3. Balupara Village of West Garo Hills

The departments of education, soil conservation and public works have high linkages with the village. Two departments of block development office and social welfare in the medium category. Low linkage departments are health, veterinary, agriculture, forest, and public health engineering

4. Myrung Village of Ri Bhoi District

The village has very low contact with almost every department of the State. The reasons are due to the fact that the road connecting the village with the rest of the State is very bad, no access to drinking water, no electricity, no health care facility, fertile land but lack in functional skills on agriculture, veterinary, fishery, and have no information on government rural development schemes. But party-based politics is fragmenting the villages into opposing groups leading to further poverty and backwardness.

Source: Report on Understanding Land Ownership and Management Systems of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Societies of Meghalaya, (Jamir and Nongkynrih, 2002).

Box 11.9: Views of Gram Sevaks and Sevikas of Khasi-Jaintia Hills on Village and Government Linkages

Market is very far and added with no roads it is difficult to transport the produce and goods

Livestock keeping is another additional economic activity but benefit is low. This is because livestock are vulnerable to disease, and the veterinary office is located far away, it is difficult for them to access it

Low access to health care facilities

Low access to government departments, and low access to information on various community development schemes

Some village headmen, and few politically connected individuals usurp the schemes meant for the people

Most of the poor people do not have agricultural land and they have to lease the land at very high

Source: Focus Group Discussions during the Training on SGSY Scheme, 2004

Box 11.10: Village and Government Linkages in Barato and Adjoining Villages of Jaintia Hills

Located approximately 120 Kms from the city of Shillong, and falls under the Jaintia Hills District, it is one of the backward areas of the State.

- 75% are landless and very poor
- Women faces more difficulty because of illiteracy, lack of health care facility, have to work and generate income, and manage domestic chores.
- Low literacy and low functional skills of the population.
- Water is a major problem and one has to walk 2 to 3 Kms on foot to collect water.
- The area is highly vulnerable to malaria.
- Since villages are bordering the State of Assam, villagers are facing many problems like... Assam Police would take away their agricultural implements, take away their cattle or goods brought from the market.
- Low accessibility to health facilities, people have to go to Jowai (district headquarters) for any ailments. The expenses are very high and families find it difficult.
- Contact with various departments is low.

Source: Women of Barato and adjoining villages, 2003

Scenario IV: Similarly the report on *Rural Poverty in Meghalaya* (Saxena, 2002), which examines the nature of poverty, dimensions and possible options, highlighted that one the problems is governance. The report observes that in Garo Hills, *the concentration of power is located in Tura and among limited groups/classes of people. These groups are some of the Officer rank of government servants, few contractors, few established business families and minor politicians of little scruple* (Saxena 2002, p.34). It further elaborates that, *the entire character of State power is elite dominated. The block offices that are the nodal point for the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes are visited only by a handful, those who are closely connected to political parties. Thus the actual poor continue to remain on the periphery of such programmes, the benefits of which are being cornered by dominant groups in the rural areas* (Ibid. 34).

Summing up the discussions and relating it to Human Development it is found that there are different types of constraints. These constraints are seriously affecting and impinging on the process of achieving Human Development. One of the major constraints is governance, because governance is centralised planning, domination of State and departments in the implementation process, it is not 'people centred' nor location specific, lack of factual data, and lack of effective monitoring and evaluation system. The constraints emanating from the existing structure of governance require to be reformed. It is only by reforming and performing that the desired human development can be achieved in the State.

11.3 Reforming the existing Structure of Governance

Human Development can be achieved by reforming some aspects of governance. To introduce and implement such reforms there are necessary and imperative conditions which the State Legislative Assembly and the State government have to fulfil, and these are:

1. Recognize and accept the need to reform the existing framework of economic governance;
2. Acceptance of and will to introduce the concept of participation of the people including women, youth and men in decision-making processes concerning with development;

3. Acceptance of and will to formulate, take resolution and implement the new Acts, Rules and Regulations related with economic governance.

Unless the three conditions are fulfilled, transforming the existing system of governance will be counter-productive. Reforming begins with changing the attitudes and behaviour of those in authority, and they change that specific part within the system of governance. Considering that the conditions are met and fulfilled the government can introduce and implement the Village Participatory Development Planning (VPDPs) as the legitimate planning and development body. The reason for suggesting the introduction and implementation of the VPDPs is because it is a people's body and it is participatory. The following sub-sections will further elaborate on VPDPs, and other reforms envisioned.

11.3.1: The Village Participatory Development Planning - A Model

Transforming the State in general and the villages in particular will not happen unless and until the people are involved and become the owners. Ownership by the people is the critical element, and ownership is derived from active participation of the people. The Village Participatory Development Planning is the body which embodies the true meaning of participation both in theory and practice.

Vision

- Enabling and ensuring the participation of the poor to enhance quality of life

The Principle of VPDPs

- People's participation and ownership
- Transparent and accountable to the people and the State
- A voice of the voiceless
- Pro-women, pro-youth, and pro-poor
- Non-political and secular

Relationship between Village Councils and VPDPs

The village council as a traditional institution with the sole political and administrative authority regulating and managing social order of the village or intra-village affairs, and its politico-judicial affairs continues. But as a traditional institution and according to customs and traditions, only male adults are its members. It excludes women and young people, and the physically challenged persons. It is difficult for village councils to act as a participatory development body because customs and traditions do not permit. A separate development body for the village is important, and the VPDPs is the only alternative. The separation between political and economic governance at the village level will be more beneficial, and will engineer social transformation particularly human development.

VPDP Membership

- Every male and female residing permanently in the village, and above the age of 18 years is a member of the VPDPs.

Management of the VPDPs

- VPDP is a non-hierarchy committee, and decision-making is not based on numerical strength but on the principle of consensus
- The members select the Chairperson to preside over the meetings without any power to decide independently. In the absence of the Chairperson the VPDPs can select any member to chair the meeting. One condition which have to be followed and that is the headman of the village and other office bearers of the village council cannot hold two positions that of village councils and VPDPs.
- The VPDPs select from among them a secretary (preferably female or a youth having basic education) for one year. The Secretary maintains records of the proceedings.

- The VPDPs select from among them a Finance Secretary (preferably a village school teacher or a person with basic education). His/her responsibility is maintenance of books of accounts, bank records, and does not have independent authority on development funds or other matters related with finance. Once a year the accounts are audited by the State government and any other independent bodies.
- Office – holders of the VPDPs are paid monthly honorarium by the VPDPs.
- In the case of big villages the formation of VPDPs has to be done by following another process. Usually in such villages it is found that a cluster of political-administrative units are formed in the village. The process of formation should be that each of the units would form separate Unit-wise VPDPs. Each Unit-wise VPDP through its representatives will form the village VPDPs, and each unit will present their own plan, leading to the collation of the Village VPDPs plan. The Village VPDPs will select two representatives to represent in the Circle.

Regulations and Rules of VPDPs

- VPDPs can also evolve rules and regulations which deal with specific context and needs like meetings, absence, reporting, local contributions, forming of specific sub-committees on health, education, water, natural resource management, women and children, youth, etc. The sub-committees are under the authority of the VPDPs.

The Role of VPDPs⁷

- Plan, think, decide and act collectively
- Collect and prepare report on village data and information
- Formulate Village Annual Plans and strategy for implementation
- Responsible in the dealing with land related issues affecting the landless and the poor in the village
- Identify target groups or beneficiaries
- Assessment and Management of Natural Resources and its sustainability
- Identify and prioritise needs and demands
- Identify and select individual beneficiaries whether BPL or APL for various development schemes/ projects/programmes of the government
- Raise local contributions for its own development, and must contribute at least 5% out of the total project cost in creation of immovable assets in the village, and is also responsible in the maintenance of such assets, and apply for support from other sources.
- Identify, prepare and implement village – based projects/schemes of the government, and Local Area Development Schemes of the MP/MLAIMDCs or any other schemes. In case of building of infrastructures the VPDPs is the authority to decide, and not impose externally by any departments or any authority
- Monitor and evaluate projects/schemes of individuals, groups or village, and send its report to the concerned departments
- Village Disaster Management and Mitigation
- Interact with NGOs/Government Institutions
- Facilitate Self-Help Groups, potential entrepreneurs and micro-enterprise, village associations for the youth and women
- Prepares annual reports with audited statement of accounts

⁷The recent Village Employment Councils (VECs) under the Meghalaya Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MREGS) could be analogous to the VPDPs and require expansion and customisation.

VPDPs in the Government Structure of Decision-making Processes

In the context of the present structure of governance, the presence of the people in the Government is observed at the Community and Rural Development Blocks. Villages or the Gram Sevak Circles within the C&RD Blocks do not select such persons. The identification and selection is exclusive and non-participatory, and the function and role of the erstwhile Block Development Committees (BDCs) and Block Selection Committees (BSCs) and the present Block Development and Monitoring Committees (BDMCs) are blurred and give too much space for dominant groups to take advantage. The alternative would be to re-structure. The reforms can be carried-out by adopting the following suggestions:

1. Within the existing structure of the C&RD Blocks the 'Circles' are already divided. The VPDPs under each Circle can form a Cluster of VPDPs. The role of the Cluster of VPDPs in a Circle is to meet and select two members each (male and female) as its representatives to the BDCs, and these representatives are for a five-year term. The Block Selection Committees should be done away with. The selection is not based on numerical strength but on consensus. The same members and the same VPDPs which have been selected once will not be entitled to represent again, but other members and others VPDPs have to be given with opportunity of representing the Cluster.
2. Representatives of Circle VPDPs, the Block Development Officer, Officers of Line-departments, representatives of the C&RD Blocks Gram Sevak and Gram Sevika will form the C&RD Block Planning Committees (C&RD BPCs). The BOO will be the Ex-officio secretary, and the Chairperson will be elected from among the members of the Board. The role and function of the Board is to assess the plans of the VPDPs, and prepare a comprehensive plan document. The plan document is submitted to the District Level Planning Committees (DCLPs) for discussions and decision. The C&RD Block PBs will also select two non-official members from among the representatives of the various Circle VPDPs for the District Level Planning Committee and the BOO form part of the team since he/she is the ex-officio secretary. The C&RD Block through the BDMCs will sanction the plan and implemented through the VPDPs.
3. The State Government has to formulate and notify the Rules and Regulations with regard to the role and function of the VPDPs and BDMCs. The general practice of issuing guidelines or sometimes delaying in the issuing of guidelines or the guidelines are very vague that it allows members of such committees at the C&RD Blocks to think, and act inappropriately, and instead of promoting development create confusion, fragmentation of social relationships, and benefits the dominant individuals or groups at the expense of the poor and the marginalised sections of the villages in the State. The Rules and Regulations must be specific and clear. For example, it is the role of the BDMCs to visit the villages or the individual beneficiaries before sanctioning of the schemes, and also to monitor and evaluate after sanctioning. The BDMCs must own the responsibility in case of mismanagement or mis-utilisation of funds by beneficiary villages or groups or individuals. The Rules must ensure that such actions are punishable by law. The BDMCs and the VPDPs are accountable to the public and the State, and must provide public information by displaying the lists of beneficiary villages, groups, and individuals along with amount sanctioned.
4. The District Level Planning Committees must monitor and evaluate the role and function of the VPDPs at the village levels, and the BDMCs at the C & RD Blocks. It should have the authority to interfere if such committees misuse and mismanage the funds or violate the rules and regulations. Its authority is such that it can stall the process of implementation until matters are resolved.

11.3.2 Success Stories: Participatory Planning And Development

In this section, we report a few models of participatory planning and development that have been shown to be successful in uplifting the socio-economic conditions of the rural poor in the state.

Box 11.11: Case I - Village Development Committee of Nongpriang

Location

Nongpriang village is located to the South of Shillong, and falls under the Sohra Civil Sub-Division. The village is located in the deep gorges below the Cherrapunjee upland plateau. To reach the village, one has to trek three thousand steps along the deep slopes, at times at an angle of eighty degrees. It takes normally one hour for the villager to trek down and may be more while climbing up. Like all rural villages in the State the village council is the highest authority and it takes all the decisions concerning every aspect of life of the village.

Pre-2002

Prior to 2002 there is hardly any initiatives taken by the village council to transform the people, and the reasons are because of:

- Lack of understanding and co-operation among themselves
- The role of the village council is not clear, and at times it is misled by other forces from outside
- Village fund is not accountable
- There is no participation of people except few
- Village leaders do not visit government departments to seek support
- Villagers lack functional skills, information, and exposure
- No plans to improve the basic infrastructure like footpath, sanitation, water, etc
- Villagers have to pay the annual tax on residential land to the land owners

Initiating and Forming of the VDC

The process of transformation in the village is taking its root because of the initiative taken by Khatar-Shnong Socio Organisation, a Community Based Organisation of the area. The forming of the Village Development Committee has imbibed the spirit of ownership and responsibility of the villagers for development. The village council in one of its meetings took a decision on separation of responsibilities. The role and function of the VDC is development, and the village council's role and function is law and order, and juridical affairs.

After 2002

On the 19th of April 2002 the VDC Nongpriang was formed. Young people are leading it and with the support of the elders from the village. The VDC has open separate account in a bank, it has been initiating activities and brought about attitudinal and behavioural change. We cite some examples below:

- Self-appraisal on the problems and backwardness
- Woman is an equal partner in decision-makings
- Active participation, consensus decisions, regular savings for the village fund
- Utilisation of funds is accounted and transparent
- Stopped paying the annual tax to land owners
- Government schemes implemented and monitored
- Capacity building and functional skills training
- Confident to visit and interact with departments of the government
- Formed Self-Help Groups
- Formulated Village Plans and implementing them
- Contribution of Rs. 101- per family to purchase land, and to convert it into community land
- Improvement in footpath, school building, water sources are few examples

Source: VDC of Nongpriang, and Khatar Shnong Socio Organisation

Box 11.12: Case II - Natural Resource Management Groups (NarmGs) under NERCORMP

The North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas, sponsored by the International Fund for Agricultural Development, Rome, is transforming the rural areas in two districts of Meghalaya (West Khasi Hills and West Garo Hills). The formation of NarmGs based on the principles of participation, accountability, transparency, and consensus decision-making is changing the face of the rural poor in general, and the women in particular. The examples below are self-explanatory.

West Garo Hills District

1. Capabilities and Confidence

The capacity to negotiate and persuade by NarmGs of three clusters; Chandigre, Agindarengre, and Babadaur has brought about positive result. In 2003-2004 the Meghalaya Electricity Board provided the three clusters with electricity connection.

2. Partnerships and Trust

The good practices and the effective system of participatory management of NarmGs have won the trust and confidence of the District Rural Development Agency. The agency invested Rs.13 lacs in 2002-03 as, a support to the livelihood activities undertaken by NarmGs

3. Advanced Knowledge, Judicious Decision and Conservation: Sasatgre Village

Jhum is an integral part of life of the Garo society. Over generations, the society have been practising jhum, and also evolved its traditional system of allocating jhum lands. After the formation of NarmGs, the village population gradually appreciated and understood the need of sustaining the natural resource. The introduction of the 3-Dimension Model on land use mapping transformed the decision-making with regard to use of jhum lands. The impact is such that the villagers decided that, out of the total 120 hectares of jhum lands used has been reduced to 51 hectares hence. It is also first village in the North East India where the model was applied and used

4. Enhancing Quality of Life

Across clusters NarmGs are initiating, creating, promoting and managing various activities like community assets- schools, water supplies, roads, etc. People are learning new skills and applying them in generating income, and have also acquired and learned about savings and thrift, and are moving towards entrepreneurship

West Khasi Hills District

One of the most important issues faced by the project in the district is land ownership. In most of the project villages the land is privately owned, and substantial number of the village population are landless. Initially this factor impeded the process, but with the formation of NarmGs it changes the situation.

1. Mawrynniaw Village

The Agreement Between Muson NarmGs and Diengngan Clan

- The clan hand over its authority on plots of land where the spring tapped chambers have been constructed and the surrounding catchment areas
- Landless households are allotted an area of 2500sq.meters as homestead land at Rs.5/sqm either at one time payment or in an installments basis at a period of two years
- Users of Jhum land pay Rs.500 per annum, and can access and use the same plot for as long as they wish
- Livestock rearing like piggery and poultry are exempted from any tax and specific areas allocated for such activities. Cattle rearing is permitted outside the settlement area and clan levy taxes according to number of heads of cattle

11.4 The Way Forward: Making Institutional Reforms a Reality

One of the good processes to achieve Human Development in the State is by way of re-defining and re-structuring the existing structure and its functions. This is insufficient because in a democratic state without legal sanction there is no legitimacy. Without such legitimacy there can be no accountability and transparency of action of actors individually, collectively, and the state government. The actions by individuals, collective and institutions like the State government have to be guided by the legitimate rule of law. Such rule of law is subjected to a code of conduct subject to a court of law in case of any breach. The National Human Development Report also remarks that, *efficient governance requires efficient institutions. The efficiency and effectiveness of institutions, in turn, depends on its delivery mechanism and the supportive framework of rules and procedures, each of which has to work in harmony with the other to discharge the functions and the roles for which the institutions have been created. Only then would one expect the institutions to meet their stated objectives and fulfil their assigned responsibilities in managing the affairs of society* (NHDR, ~001 :118). To ensure the redefined and restructured function with legal legitimacy and authority, and also to see that it is accountable and transparent, the State government of Meghalaya must formulate, introduce, and pass the following Acts, and Rules and Regulations.

1. The Meghalaya Village Participatory Development Planning Act
2. The Meghalaya Block Development Committees Rules and Regulations
3. The Meghalaya Community and Rural Development Block Planning Committees Rules and Regulations⁸
4. The Meghalaya District Level Planning and Development Committees Rules and Regulations⁹

Before the commencement of any resolutions it is the responsibility of the State government to formulate the Blue-print of such Acts, and Rules and Regulations. The State initiates the process of wider consultations at various levels such as: C&RD Blocks, District headquarters, and at the State headquarter it organises consultations with organisations, experts, and with various departments. The suggestions from a wide spectrum of audiences are collated and integrated into a draft document, the same is shared with the public through local newspapers and media. This is followed by government resolutions and implementing of such Acts, and Rules and Regulations.

The reforms at various levels, and their legitimisation require another set of reforms in the area of the civil service. According to the National Human Development Report, *"clear demarcation of responsibilities between the law and order machinery and the machinery entrusted with the task of catalysing development in partnership with local level self-governing bodies. The coordination of different public and para-statal agencies engaged in development is critical for getting most out of the limited resources, for minimising overheads and checking duplication of effort. Moreover,, excessive loading of responsibilities on some branches of civil administration, for instance, the District Collectorate which has been reported to be overseeing 167 development schemes at the block level in one instance, not only undermines the overall institutional capacity to deliver but also compromises on the quality of public interventions in what are clearly the critical areas of human development. To a large extent, the task of the development administration would become easier if procedural steps are taken to make available information, as a matter of right, to the citizens"*. (NHDR, 2001:129). The same applies to Meghalaya.

⁸The Meghalaya Block Development Committee and The Meghalaya Community and Rural Development Block Planning Committee may be merged as one but truly representative body.

⁹Merging functions of all Planning and Implementation of Development Projects Committees.

The civil service needs to be reformed in the following areas.

- Carry forward the Right to Information Act in letter and spirit.
- At the District Level there should be a separate office for judicial matters and headed by person trained in the specific area.
- The Deputy Commissioner should focus more on developmental aspects of the administration. His/her tenure should be fixed for three-years, and commensurate by rewards and promotion on merit. The Deputy Commissioner must have the quality of administrative leadership, and one who is committed to development. The normal procedure of selecting any civil servant from the rank should be done away with. The privilege of enjoying better incentives is also link with discipline in case of misconduct, and malfunctioning. The same should be followed in the case of the Block Development Officers. The additional aspect concerning the BDOs is that they need to be well-trained in the area of participatory development, and other administrative areas like planning, monitoring, evaluation, and applying of modern technology in the administration.
- Infrastructural facilities at the district headquarter and block level is imperative because it enables quality performance and quality governance.

Table 11.3 Framework of a Reformed Structure: Development Planning and Implementation

Committees	Composition	Planning Role	Implementing Role
Village Participatory Development Planning (VPDPs)	Residents of a Village above 18 years of age	Prepare and formulate village plans	Selection of beneficiaries, implement, monitor and evaluate
Circle-wise VPDPs	Two representatives each from every VPDPs	Collect village-wise village plans, and select two representatives to represent them at the C&RD Blocks Planning Committee and BDCs	None
C&RD Block Planning Committees	BDOs ex-officio Secretary, Circle VPDPs representatives, Line departments, representatives of Gram Sevikas/Sevaks	Assess, evaluate, and collate the Village-wise plans, and also select two representatives besides the BDOs as representatives to the District Level Planning Committees	Does not implement but provide technical support, monitor and evaluate the function of the VPDPs
District Level Planning Committees	Deputy Commissioner as the Chairperson, District Planning Officer as the Ex-officio Secretary, Districts heads of departments, DRDAs Project Directors, Sub-Divisional Officers, and Representatives from the C&RD Blocks Planning Boards	Assess and collate the C&RD Blocks Plans proposals, and prepare the final draft and submit to the Department of Planning located at Shillong for final approval, and necessary action	Monitor and evaluate the functions of the C&RD Blocks, BDGs, and VPDPs Authority to take corrective measures Guide and support on-going programmes, and coordinate with line departments