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Status and Role of Village Development Board Secretaries in Nagaland

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Abstract

Rural development in Nagaland is still young; it intensified only with the inception of Village Development Board in 1980. Village Development Board has gone through various phases, changes and challenges since 40-plus years of its inception. It is widely stated that the actual concept of rural development through active participation at the grass root level i.e., village community began to take shape with the enactment of 'Nagaland Village and Area Council Acts of 1978' and the constitution of the Village Development Board. This paper examines the role and status of a Village Development Board Secretary and its implications on present Nagaland. This paper also made attempts to identify some overriding challenges in the system and to suggest some areas where attention can be drawn to remove some obstacles hampering the smooth functioning of the system.

Keywords: Nagaland, Village Development Board Secretary, Rural Development, Kütsapo village.

Introduction

Rural development according to the World Bank publication is a process to improve "living standard of the masses of the low income population residing in rural areas making the rural development process self-sustaining." (Singh, 2004)

The importance of rural developmental approaches has a wider perspective rather than merely creating incentives for agricultural or resource-based businesses. Education, health and well-being, roads, entrepreneurship, social infrastructure etc. all plays an important role in developing rural regions. Thus, the objective of rural development is to find ways to improve rural lives with the participation of rural people themselves, so as to meet the required needs of rural communities both qualitatively and quantitatively. Thus rural development strategies should be well integrated with traditional values, skills, crafts, occupations and also be aware of the aspiration of the villager's needs, constraints, limitations, and inherent capabilities. One such aspect of rural developmental programmes can be seen through Village Development Boards introduced in Nagaland in 1976 where Village Development Board (VDB) Secretaries along with their members look after all the developmental activities of their respective villages.

Studies from different perspectives have been carried out on Village Development Board and rural development in Nagaland by several people (Imnayongdang, 1986; Ao, 1993; Karmakar & Banerjee 2008; Mero, 2015; Sekhose, 2017). However specific studies on Village Development Board Secretary have not been done. Hence the objective of this study was to assess the status and role of the Village Development Board Secretaries in Nagaland. The methodology employed for the study includes village surveys, observation and interview methods, group discussion and analyzing documents collected from the various departments.

The study was conducted on a sample of 11 villages, one from 11 different districts across the state of Nagaland. The data have been

collected through semi-structured and structured questionnaires, interviews and personal discussions with Village Development Board Secretaries and villagers in the confined sample villages. This paper tries to study in more detail and bring out the present working system of the Village Development Board with a special focus on the role of the VDB Secretary, and its impacts and suggests possible measures for improving the programme.

Background of Village Development Board (VDB)

An attempt to study or evaluate the significance, functions and development of Village Development Board must go back to its genesis, keeping in tune with the initial objectives and changes that occur with its development. The idea of a Village Development Board was first conceptualized by the late Vamuzo- the former Chief Minister of Nagaland. While addressing the inauguration of the advisory committee on ecology, culture and socio-economic development of Nagaland on 31st January, 1991, Vamuzo said, "It was always my concern that the Government programmes should be welfare-oriented and accordingly I had introduced the concept of VDB….."[1] Nyekha, former CPO President expressed that late Vamuzo was raised in a village background, and was adequately equipped with knowledge of village tradition and people at the village level. He further added that transferring and posting of A.M. Gokhale as Deputy Commissioner of Phek District in 1976 when Nagaland was under President's Rule was instrumental in taking forward the idea of the Village Development Board.[2] According to Mrs. Vamuzo, her husband met Gokhale before he could take charge of his office, at the circuit house, Kohima during which Vamuzo shared his vision to strengthen the village institution. Gokhale also took an equal interest in the programme.[3] Thus Gokhale worked out the modalities and translated the concept of this noble development programme into a reality. This programme became successful when Vamuzo's regional party, United Democratic Front (UDF) which was renamed later as Naga National Democratic Party (NNDP) came to power from 1977-1982 under the Chief Minister of Vizol Angami (1977-1980) and J.B. Jasokie (1980-1982) and Vamuzo was made the Minister in charge of Finance and Rural Development.[4] Village Trustee Board was the first

name A.M. Gokhale suggested on meeting the Kütsapomi villagers at Kütsapo village on December 5, 1976 but changed it to development instead of trustee on the request of Dükhüyi Vadeo and thereon Village Development Board was formed on an experimental basis on December 11, 1976.[5] On seeing the success of the Kütsapomi Village Development Board, a mass campaign was launched in 1980 to expand the coverage of this unique institution throughout the State during the 7th plan period i.e., Rolling Plan which came into effect from 1978-1980. Village Development Board is where, therefore, the concept of decentralization gradually constituted and institutionalized into the remaining parts of the State with the enactment of Village Development Board Model Rules, 1980 (Department of Rural Development, Government of Nagaland).

Ever since the constitution of the Village Development Boards (VDBs) in all the recognized villages of Nagaland, the concept of Community Development Programmes has intensified on a large scale. The Department provides income-generation and sustainability programmes and services to 1285 Village Development Boards (VDBs) across the State (as of 2019). It is through the involvement of the Village Development Boards that several major schemes and programmes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY), Grant in Aid (GIA), Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY/NRLM), and Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF) are being successfully implemented and its resources mobilized at the grass-root level. 99% of villages in Nagaland have been connected by roads through the difficult terrains and almost every village has a community hall and educational institutions. Several villages have attained 100% housing coverage and most of the villages now have the basic infrastructure requirements at their convenience (RD annual administrative report, 2018-2019). Village Development Board (VDB) has made Nagaland the pioneer in the country's concept of decentralized planning where active participation of the village community at the grass root level was sought in the developmental process.

The state of Nagaland has been exempted from the preview of the 73rd Amendment of the constitution due to the existence of traditional local self-government bodies like the Village Councils and the Village

Development Boards. (Manual of Rural Development Department Nagaland, 2016). It is in this context that the village council assumes significance and its powers and duties as enshrined in the said Act, provide to constitute a Village Development Board (VDB) and also to formulate village development schemes to supervise proper maintenance of water supply, roads, forest, education and other welfare activities.

Composition of Village Development Board Committee

The Village Development Board Committee's compositions, powers and functions are subjected to the directives of the Village Council which may be issued from time to time certain processes as laid under the Village Development Model Rule 1980 (revised). As enshrined under Village Development Model Rule 1980; *"the Village Development Board shall also, subject to such directives as the Village Council may issue from time to time, formulate schemes, programmes of action for the development and progress of the Village as a whole or groups of individuals in the village, or for individuals in the village, either using the village community or other funds"*. Village Development Board management committee members are selected by the Village Council among whom one is appointed as the VDB Secretary.

Qualification, Eligibility and Tenure of VDB Secretary

Education is an important factor where English remains the official language of the state. The Village Development Board Model Rule, 1980 also specified matriculation or above as the minimum educational qualification to be eligible for the post of Village Development Board Secretary. From this study, data was collected from eight Village Development Board Secretaries across the state, two are graduates, five are undergraduates and one is under matriculation. Through observation, one can find the more efficient and effective working of village development in areas where Village Development Board secretaries and committee members are composed of more literate persons.

Under Village Development Model Rule 1980, the Village Development Board managing committee should include females of not less than ¼ of the total members and as a result, one can observe

the active participation of womenfolk in the institution. In recent years, we also see a female Village Development Board Secretary, Manni Konyak from Wangti village under Mon district who is considered the first female to be selected as Village Development Board Secretary in Nagaland. In some of the surveyed villages, women even established their own Village Development Board women's branch where they utilize 25% of the fund allotted to them and use it independently for the welfare of womenfolk in the village.

Thus the Village Development Board Secretary can either be a male or female who can play the role of an agent or link between the government and the villagers in matters of village developmental activities and disbursement of State and centrally sponsored schemes and in carrying out other programmes. Most or all governmental activities reached the villagers at the grassroot level through Village Development Board. It is also the duty of the Village Development Board Secretary to give an account on fund usage, management of state and centrally sponsored funds and schemes and also clarify when questions arise.

The Village Development Board Secretaries also play an important role in the Management of funds, loan applications, withdrawal of funds, and bringing out new programmes and projects for the welfare of the village along with the other members. The tenure of the Village Development Board Secretaries is 3 (three) years unless decided otherwise by the Village Council.

Table 1: Schematic Growth of Village Development Board Secretaries in Nagaland from 1980-2019

Years	Total no. of VDB secretaries
1980	885
1981	875
1982	879
1983	886
1984	861
1985	866
1986	865
1987	952
1988	1001
1989	972
1990	972
1991	1001
1992	1017
1993	1025
1994	1025
1995	1036
1996	1037
1997	1034
1998	1039
1999	1049
2000	1049
2001	1049
2002	1049
2003	1072
2004	1083
2005	1086
2006	1089
2007	1097
2008	1113

2009	1128
2010	1128
2011	1143
2012	1175

2013	1175
2014	1175
2015	1238
2016	1238

2017	1238
2018	1285
2019	1285

(Detailed list of Village Development Boards (VDBs) 1980-81 to 2016-2017 and Annual Administrative Report 2018-19, Rural Development Department, Kohima, Nagaland)

Village Development Board: Members and Meetings

All permanent residents of a village form the general body of the Village Development Board. The Village Development Board are to hold at least two general body meetings in one financial year. During these general body meetings, the concerned Village Development Board Secretary who is designated as Secretary of the Management Committee of the Village Development Boards, shall lay before the General Body all details regarding the Village Development Board Schemes implemented under various programmes, money drawn, loans issued against fixed deposit Security, the interest of fixed Deposit drawn, manner of utilization of interest amount and any other issues concerning the Village Development Boards on which the General Body may like to seek clarification. Village Development Board committee Meetings is an important and integral part of this institution where different projects, programmes and plan for village welfare are brought out in the form of resolution which are implemented only after debating from the monthly public meetings. The Village Development Board Model Rule, 1980 also specified management committee meet to be held on the same date every month. However, findings from this study suggest otherwise where meetings were held depending on the necessities and in some villages only once in a year.

Findings from this study conducted on 55 respondents (general members) from 11 villages of 11 districts in different corners of Nagaland show less or no participation from the villagers which may be due to a lack of awareness, ignorance or failure on the part of Village Development Board Secretaries in notifying the general body of the meetings.

Table 2: Percentage of general body meeting attendees

General Body meeting	Regular attendee	Not so regular	Never attended
Percentage of general body meeting attendees collected from surveyed villages which are to be held twice every one financial year in accordance with VDB model rule of 1980	10%	38%	50%

Source: Field survey 2017

This study shows the drawback of the Village Development Board Secretaries and their failure to-

(i) To draw people's participation in the Village Development Board Meetings.

(ii) Failure to create awareness amongst the villagers about the Village Development Board Model Rule 1980 where it is clearly specified that two general body meetings are to be held every financial year.

(iii) To give wide publicity of the said meeting date.

Findings from this study suggest most of the villagers and even some Village Development Board Secretaries are not even aware of such meetings and meetings were held only among the Village Development Board management committees at their own whims depending on the necessities. Thus it becomes only an institution managing state and centrally sponsored funds and in turn, failed to exert influence on the community. This can be affirmed by the findings from the eight Village Development Board Secretaries where only two interviewees out of eight Village Development Board secretaries interviewed are aware of the purpose of the Village Development Board in villages (see figure 3).

Role of Village Development Board Secretaries

The Village Development Board Secretaries play the mediator role between the Government and the villagers. Most of the Village Development Board Secretaries with exception to some Government employees are stationed in their respective villages which makes it easier to comprehend the needs and requirements of the villages. With the approval of the Village Council Chairman, all village developmental activities are carried out through the Village Development Board which can be considered the developmental agency of every Naga village.

Apart from dealing with different developmental activities in the village and acting as agents between the government and the villagers. He/she is also responsible for keeping the records which may be inspected by any members of the village in the monthly public meetings. A cash register showing transactions of saving and current accounts and cash withdrawals made under Grant in Aid, State and Centrally Sponsored Schemes and other developmental programmes of the Village Development Board are also maintained by the Secretary. This is done to limit discrepancies in the usage of funds and schemes and he/she is answerable to the public and the village council on such matters if questions arise. Thus he/she plays a dual role. The role of Village Development Board secretaries is more immense in some villages with a larger population as their responsibilities not only lie in development or in simply following guidelines but other social factors like dealing with the villagers and the government officials at different levels such as BDOs, DRDA etc. From this study, the average age of the secretaries is in their 40s and the oldest being 75 and the youngest is 33 years of age through data collected from 8 Village Development Board secretaries across different districts in the state.

Table 3: Opinions of Village Development Board Secretaries on Village Development Boards

Sl no.	Sample villages	Whether VDB has helped the growth of the village economy	Whether VDB is providing employment opportunities to the villagers	Whether VDB is successful in checking the migration of rural youths	Awareness on the objective and purpose of VDB's existence
1.	Sohomi	Yes	Yes	No	No
2.	Losami	Yes	Yes, to some extent	Yes, to some extent	Yes
3.	Phek village	Yes	Yes, to some extent	No	No
4.	Alayong	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
5.	Punglwa	Yes	Yes	No	No
6.	Poilwa	Yes	Yes	No	No
7.	Anatongre	Yes	Yes	No	No
8.	Wapher	Yes, to some extent	Yes, to some extent	No	No

Source: Field survey 2017

Remarks and Conclusion

The results of the study are analyzed and discussed here. Through this study, one can find that there is an obstacle in not following the formal procedure regarding the conduct of business laid under the Village Development Board Model Rule, 1980 and that it needs to be adhered to. This is evident from the fact that some villages held hardly any meeting in a year, and publicity of general body meetings which the Village Development Board Secretary has to publicize widely has not been carried out in all the sample villages. One of the villages out of the 9 sample villages, the Village Development Board Secretary is under matriculation which is questionable in terms of eligibility criteria under the Village Development Board Model Rule 1980 thus hampering village economic planning and growth. The above-mentioned are just some of the facts of some villages in the state, if we are to take more villages and consider studying, the manipulation and negligence of such nature may be more. Apart from strictly adhering to the laid down Village Development Board Model Rule, 1980, recommendations can also be made on establishing training institutes for Village Development Board Secretaries where they can be prepared and well-equipped about the system for further efficiency in the working system.

With the direct involvement of Village Development Boards (VDBs) in the planning and implementation of the development at the grass root level, there is no denying the fact that there has been a facelift in the rural economic scenario of the State. Despite the loopholes, it is without doubt, that the rural economy in Nagaland has improved with the involvement of Village Councils and Village Development Board Secretaries in tapping the skills and abilities of rural youths and in constructing and providing basic necessities in rural Nagaland, not forgetting the management of funds and schemes sponsored through State and Centre alike for village developments.

Endnotes

1. *Speeches of Vamuzo, Chief Minister Nagaland, December 1990-November 1991 Volume-II.* Government of Nagaland. P. 7.
2. Sovenye Nyekha, 57 years (former Chakhesang Public Organization (CPO) President) also a close associate of Late Vamuzo, Suthozu village, Phek District during an interview conducted at Kohima on 27/03/2017.
3. Sano Vamuzo, 78 years, wife of Late Vamuzo, during an interview conducted at her residence in Kohima on 14/11/2018.
4. Op. cit.
5. Dükhüyi Vadeo, 69 years, First Village Development Board Secretary, who also worked close quarter with Gokhale at the initial stage of Village Development Board establishment, Kütsapo village under Phek District during an interview conducted at his residence in Kütsapo village on 29/11/2018.

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