

Economic Development in the Rural Areas of Nagaland under the Initiative of Village Development Boards (VDBs)

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Abstract: Nagaland has been a self-sufficient, self-sustaining region all throughout history. When we talk about the transformation that occurs in the socio-economic sector, we are basically dealing with the term modernization where people are striving to attain a better standard of living and all the modern means that a person possesses to have a better and more efficient way of livelihood. In the above context of the economic developmental scenario, Nagaland is still in a progressive stage which has seen a facelift with the attainment of Statehood in 1963 and the rural development department becoming a full fledged directorate in 1978-79 which gave birth to Village Development Boards. In Nagaland, economic development has undergone various phases, changes and challenges since the attainment of its Statehood with different policies, programmes and planning be it in the educational, infrastructural or agricultural sectors. Thus, this paper tries to bring out the economic development in rural Nagaland through the Village Development Board's initiatives and highlights some well-performing Village Development Boards in Nagaland.

Keywords: Nagaland, Village Development Boards, policies, programs, village, grassroot level, agriculture, agri-link road, communitization

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INTRODUCTION

"Development is largely a matter of the dynamism of individuals and of a local community. These can be supplied only by generating local, responsible initiative and multiplying human energies. Development, therefore, requires rapid growth of human talents and opportunities to employ them". (Bag, 2001: 9)

In the context of India where it is often stated that India is made up of villages, where 212.6 million individuals living in rural communities in 1901 has increased to 721.17 million (Kapur, 2019) major development in the socio-economic sector started with the setting of the planning commission and the introduction of the First Five-year plan where Government of India gave major emphasis on Community Development Programmes which also acts as a welfare of the rural population. It is a multi-faceted programme designed to attract active community participation and initiative in the developmental process for all round development touching every section of the population.

India, as a country is made up of villages so is the state of Nagaland with 1285 recognized Villages and 2, 50, 315 tax paying tax-paying as of the Department of Rural Development annual administrative report 2018-2019 and a rural population of 71.03% as of 2011 census (Census info of India 2011: Nagaland profile). The Department of Rural Development which was initially started as a cell of the Planning and Coordination Department in the early 1950s, has become a full-fledged Development Department with its Directorate in Kohima, capital of Nagaland since 1978 and has been carrying out different developmental programmes and policies for improving the living conditions of the rural population. The Rural Development Department got leverage with the establishment of a unique institution called Village Development Boards (VDBs) in fact; the idea of grass-root level planning at the village level became a reality with the inception of Village Development Boards in 1980-81 in Nagaland where every rural developmental activity is carried out through this institution.

During the transition process in the rural economy with the establishment of Rural Development Department, initially, developmental programmes have undergone several policy reforms to make it receptive and adoptable to the Naga society. The policy reforms were carried out under the influence of political changes, traditional socio-economic practices and other requirements in order to make rural developmental programmes effective. Regardless of the fluctuations in the dynamics and effects of reforms in rural development, the Five year plan of the Indian Government starting with the Third Five year Plan (1961 – 1966) and with Nagaland attaining statehood in 1963 had played a key role for designing and implementing rural development policies, strategies, and programs. All these programmes achieve its purpose with the establishment of rural development department and mobilization made possible with the establishment of Village Development Boards in Nagaland.

This study is conducted on a sample of 11 villages from 11 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 during field investigation.

There are few issues concerning data inconsistency and methods applied on the villages in this study that pose limitations and affect the analysis. The availability and comparability of secondary data concerning most aspects of villages in Nagaland is very limited where the possibility of compiling consistent and comparable statistical data on the socio-economic situation in the Naga villages was limited. Such insights about the socio-economic context on Naga villages could have helped, better explain some of the research findings.

Some of such inconsistent data are due to manipulation of data, the mentality of the villagers and the general hesitation of providing information. The only tangible data collected were from Government departmental offices, through structured questionnaires and personal interviews.

Due to the mentioned weaknesses in maintaining consistent statistical data within the institution itself, it is not possible to provide concrete generalized conclusions. However, the size of the sample size and the random sampling approach adopted on 11 districts across Nagaland allows to draw conclusions that are reliable enough to represent the situation and can be used as a foundation for further studies. Case study can also be done on the target villages which would result in a narrower definition of the Village Development Boards and would further strengthen the analysis outcome.

AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Every rural developmental policy in one way or the other is based on agriculture as most of the rural population depended on it for livelihood or for survival though it differs from region to region. Agriculture, being the most important component of a rural way of life, received a great considerable

external financial assistance during the Planning era in India in order to keep balance growth between food production and population growth.

W.A. Elits stated, "...that economic development in a country is not possible without agricultural growth, and that the industrial and other sectors of the economy are wholly dependent on the agricultural sector since the demand for manufacture and services depended on the size of the economic surplus which was wholly derived from agriculture".(Cited in Bag, 2001:11)

Nagaland remains an agricultural community with majority of the population living in rural areas and depending heavily on agriculture for its livelihood which is also evident with most of its culture and traditions centered on cultivation practices. Rice remains its staple food, it occupies about 70 percent of the total cultivated area and constitutes about 75 percent of the total food grain production in the State. Thus, besides wood exploitation and mining, agriculture represents the major source of livelihood in rural areas. The department of rural development is involved in the development of rural agricultural community through the grassroot level organization - Village Development Boards. All recognized villages thus through Village Development Boards mobilize resources and implement the agricultural schemes and programmes along with a strong village community support. Apart from supplying of agricultural tools and implements, one of such scheme which has visible impact on the rural agricultural community would be the Agri-link road constructed under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Agency (MGNREGA) throughout 1238 recognized villages in Nagaland (Directorate of Rural Development:: 2017, *Detail Village Development Board (VDB) fixed deposit (FD) Nagaland 2016-2017*. Government of Nagaland). Approach roads were constructed and linked to every khels or colony in the village and roads leading to their fields were also constructed which really boosted agri and allied activities. It really minimized the time and energy to a great extent and also modern technology and transportation could be used conveniently.

Significant contributions can also be seen among the illiterate rural poor cultivators, to whom training imparted help them improvise the method of cultivation by incorporating new technology like rearing fish in the cultivated field or other agro-allied activities, adopting new tools and implements, and machines supplied by the Rural Department that results in more production and efficient way of cultivation.

INFRASTRUCTURE, ROAD AND TRANSPORT IN RURAL AREAS

In Nagaland, the means of communication and transportation network is solely terrestrial road and is the main significant restriction on its developmental activities especially due to its hilly terrain and steep slopes throughout the territory with slight exemption on rural areas under Dimapur districts. The hard road routes follow the rest of the districts connecting even to the remotest regions of the state. The length of state highways in Nagaland, India from FY 2003 was 398 kilometers its highest was in 2013 with 1204 kilometers which decrease to 722 kilometers in 2016. The length of national highways across Nagaland in India from FY 2003 was 369 kilometers which increase to 1547 kilometers in 2017(<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1078391/india-length-of-highways-nagaland/>). Village development Boards in every district have been taking immense initiative in this regard for achieving the desired development which can be seen with the increasing approach roads all throughout the district villages in Nagaland.

FOOTPATHS, WATER TANKS AND DRAINAGE

At the village level though there is a clear difference with village areas nearer to district headquarters. The idea of hygiene, health and sanitation has been well maintained with Village Development Board

in most villages taking initiative along with NGO bodies like village youths and students' union. Basic necessities like water supply and water tanks in most villages are well taken care of in the surveyed villages having two common water tanks on average. Even if we have to draw a line between east and west, western areas can be characterized by a superior economic complexity to that of the eastern areas with most of the population working in the secondary and tertiary sector of the economy while in the east the population predominately engaged in the primary sector of the economy. However, there are not much differences in infrastructural development under village administrations.

VEGETABLE AND ANIMAL PRODUCTION

Nagas have remained depended on nature for their subsistence. Domestication of animals and growing vegetables has been an art of their regular practices. Still, Vegetation and animal husbandry has been very much in vogue in Nagaland, especially in villages. Every household in the village practice domestication of animals and has a gardening area for vegetation or the practice of one is certain. With the inception of Village Development Boards in Nagaland we can witness these practices transitioning to a commercial product. Village Development Boards by availing different governmental funds and schemes has built market sheds located mostly on the highway side in their own village jurisdiction, and also provide loan to villagers who wish to take up animal husbandry, which in turn has enabled in generating income for many villagers. Pigs, cows and chickens were the most common form of animal husbandry in Nagaland.

NEW AVENUES OF DEVELOPMENT: TOURISM

Tourism which has been a source of economic boost in many countries has also found its place in Nagaland where the department of Tourism came into being as a fully-fledged Directorate of Tourism about three decades ago in 1981. This new avenue has faced many hurdles in the past due to insurgency, lack of proper infrastructural facilities and travel restrictions to the state. However, with the sheer effort of the state government Tourism department has recently started growing remarkably with much compromises on the above hurdles and is becoming a promising sector in boosting the state's economy.

Touristic potential has been gaining significance in Nagaland due to its rich and diverse cultural heritage as well its geographical locations. Communitization of rural tourism assets to the village community through Village Development Boards has also proven an efficient way of generating employment opportunities for rural youths with the establishment of tourist lodge, home stay, guest house and village beautification scenery which in turn improve village economy in general through tourist attraction.

NATURAL RESOURCES AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Nagaland is a small state but natural resources are bountiful and most of it is untapped with forest covering 13,345 (80.49 percent) of Nagaland total area of 16,579 sq. km as of 2014, as shown from Government of Nagaland portal.

According to survey conducted by Envis Centre on Eco – Tourism hosted by the Department of Science & Technology, Sikkim sponsored by Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change, Government of India, Coal occurs in Nazira coalfields (North of Dikhu River) in Borjan and Tiru Valley, Mon district, Limestone occurs in Phek district, Nickel ferrous chromite ore occurs in ultrabasic belt at Pokhpor, Tuensang district. Occurrences of thin lenses of chrysotile asbestos near Panchimi and Kurani in the Tugu valley and Pyrites in Mokokchung and Tuensang districts are reported. For petroleum and natural gas, ONGC has delineated a number of prospective oil structures in the foothills

where sufficient prognosticated resources (600 million tonnes) hydrocarbon have been forecasted. Out of these, a reserve of over 20 million tonnes with recoverable reserves of approx. 6 million tonnes has been established from Changpang oil fields. In Chumukedima area, three number of oil exploratory wells have been completed with no commercial outflow.

Exploiting the forest resources has always been one of the major economic development coordinates and wood the major income provider for the rural population. Thus every villagesurveyed from all the eleven districts of Nagaland under this study has a village community forest reserve, protected and manage by the Village Council Chairman (VCC) and Village Development Board (VDB) for the village welfare and developmental activities in the village.

WELL-PERFORMING VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARDS IN NAGALAND.

The following are some of the well-performing Village Development Boards under this study:

- i) **Alayong village:** The village is under the administration of Longleng District recognized by the State Government in 2002 and has 126 household with 1032 total population and has received the best performing Village Development Board (VDB) in Longleng District during the year 2016-17 and also best performing Open Defecation Free (ODF) on 2nd October 2018. The village obviously has a well-functioning Village Development Board and its meetings were held consistently depending on the work. The village has 5 Self Help Groups (SHGs), 284 Job card holders, 1 Vehicle (sumo), community hall, community forest, 3 common water tanks and approach roads and footpaths were constructed connecting all through the village.
- ii) **Punglwa village:** The village is under the administration of Peren District and is located 18 kms north from the District headquarter. The Village has about 280 household with around 1300 population. The village had received award for best performing Village Development Board at block level. There are 13 Self Help Groups (SHGs), community land, community hall and developmental works like water tanks, public toilets, drainage and linked roads were well constructed and maintained through community effort under VDB initiatives where meetings were held 6 to 7 times in a year or sometimes depending on the work.
- iii) **Longwa village:** The village is under the administration of Mon District and is located 42 kms east from the district headquarter. The Village was recognized by the State Government in 1981 and as of 2019 has 744 household with 5673 population. The village is located on a border with Myanmar and one interesting features is they received benefit from both the country in the form of educational institutions, water tanks etc. There are 45 Self Help Groups (SHGs), village forest where final decision for its usages rest with the Angh (Chief). The village is located on a beautiful hill top where tourism is booming through Village Development Board initiatives like construction of tourist lodge, village beautification projects and so on.
- iv) **Anatongre village:** The village is under the administration of Kiphire District and is located 25 kms north from District headquarter, recognized by the State Government in 1979. The village has 674 household and about 3600 in population as of 2019. The villagers mostly practice jhum/shifting cultivation. Village Development Board meetings were held 4 to 5 times in a year or depending on the work, the village has 17 Self Help Groups (SHGs), a community forest, two common water reservoirs, community hall and developmental works like water tanks, public toilets, drainage and linked roads were well constructed and maintained under VDB initiatives.

- v) **Phek village:** The village is under the administration of Phek District. The village has 694 household and about 2744 in population as of 2011 census. Terrace cultivation is one of their major occupations besides horticulture and animal husbandry. The Village Development Board has been actively working with the villagers in bringing income generation avenues like ginger cultivation, piggery and weaving apart from building various approach roads, footpaths, water tanks, protection wall etc. The board is also working to commercialize local products like fruits, vegetables and locally made arts and handicrafts. In the words of Chivozo soho he was able to get a profit of Rs 2 lakh from his piggery farm in 2018 which he started with Village Development Board fund (personal communication). This is one amongst the many success stories.
- vi) **Wapher village:** The village is under the administration of Tuensang District and is located 20 kms south from District headquarter, recognized by the State Government in 1982. The village has 287 households and about 1,986 in population as of 2019 census. The villagers practice jhum/shifting cultivation. Village Development Board meetings were held monthly, the village has 9 Self Help Groups (SHGs), 2 community forest, two common water reservoirs, a community hall and developmental works like water tanks, public toilets, drainage and linked roads were well constructed and maintained under VDB initiatives.
- vii) **Jotsoma Village:** The village is under the administration of Kohima District and is located about 8 kms west from District headquarter. The village has 2,458 in population as of census 2011. Village Development Board has been actively involved in building village roads, village beautification projects, protection walls, water tanks, public toilets besides working on to provide avenues for local commercial goods. The village is also performing well in the tourism sector. The Village also received award 3 times for best performing Village Development Board in Nagaland.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion Nagas have been living in community as far as the oral tradition can uphold as such, village ownership or community ownership of land still exist. Collective actions through community initiative are always a common trait among the Nagas and Village Development Boards has been one such institution at the village level where village development depends on the community as a whole. In order to gain meaningful and sustainable development in Nagaland, certain existing reality needs to be considered like the ethos of social structure, community practices, traditional skills and modes of livelihood and occupation in order to yield a better result in executing the different programmes and policies. Thus, the existence of a functioning Village Development Boards in each recognized villages in Nagaland looking over all the developmental activities from footpaths, water supply, drainage, village road to the individual household have influenced the more positive intentions to engage in common activities for the village and rural areas which in turn strengthen the bond of community which the Nagas revere with utmost importance. The existence of Village Development Boards in every recognized village in Nagaland has been playing the role of planning and initiators, working out the different developmental activities that suit the village be it roads, footpaths, drainage, water tanks or other income-generating activities for the community by Self Help Groups (SHGs) and individuals such as farming, piggery, horticulture etc. From this study, one can also suggest that if the institution is given more importance where Village Development Model Rules are adhered to effectively one can expect more changes in the rural economic scenario in Nagaland.

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