

Empowering Communities Through Local Governance: A Study On Communitization Of Elementary Education In Nerhema Village

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Abstract: Communitization is a process of transferring authority and responsibility to local government for resource management at the grassroots level. Communitization is a model of governance which empowers the community and fosters local ownership by decentralizing power to the community for local management of public services. Communitization also aims to be inclusive, ensuring that the local and marginalized people could participate in decision-making processes (resource mobilization). Communitisation focuses on community participation, self-governance and collective decision-making for overall development of public sectors.

Within this backdrop, the present paper aims to analyze how communitization empowered the local governing bodies and in turn promote community participation. The paper will explore how the rich social capital inherent in the society has facilitated the process of communitization in Nerhema village of Nagaland, particularly elementary education.

Key Words: Village governance, community participation, education, decentralization, social capital, communitization.

1. INTRODUCTION

Community Participation is an important aspect of a democratic government. It is a governing strategy that promotes active involvement of community members in planning, implementing and managing governing activities that benefit the community. Community participation is an outcome of decentralisation and as decentralization aims at transferring power and authority to the lower levels of government for effective service delivery, community participation enhances people's participation in governance and addresses the issues and concerns at the local level for effective governance. Community participation in local governance is crucial as it foster democratic values, improve public service delivery, increase local participation in decision making process, enhance accountability and increase transparency in governance besides many others. Mwankupili and Msuli (2020) maintained that the involvement of the community in governance enhances better service delivery (Mwankupili & Msilu, 2020, p. 33), and similarly, the communitization strategy which was introduced by the Government of Nagaland have showed progress and development in providing public services to the different corners of Nagaland.

1.1 Local Government:

Local government refers to a system of administration where elected representatives at the grassroots level assist the central and state government in administration and other important activities. Local government involves local autonomy, local leadership, local participation, local accountability and local development. It is a grassroots level government which manages and administers the local affairs at the local level. L. Golding defines local government as "the management of their own affairs by the people of a locality".

Appadorai (1975) defines local government as the “government by the popularly elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular place or district (Appadorai, 1975, p. 287)

Local government is necessary as “governance without inclusive people’s policy are inadequate and lacks crucial component of governance” (Anar, 2017, p. 70). Anar also stated that “people on top are insensitive to the needs of the people on the ground so local governance is advocated as a mechanism which would responds to the aspirations of the ordinary citizen” (Anar, 2017, p. 70).

Local government believes that local knowledge and local interests are essential ingredients for democratic decision making. They are also necessary for efficient and people-friendly administration¹.

1.2 Communitization of Elementary Education in Nerhema Village

What is Communitization ?

Communitization is a governing strategy that aims at promoting local governance by incorporating local people in decision making process. Communitization was first introduced in 2001 by R.S. Pandey, the then Chief Secretary of Nagaland. It refers to the process of delegating authority, responsibility and resources from the state to the local community. It is a partnership between the government and the community to manage and administer public institutions for better delivery of public services.

According to Pandey (2010) defines communitization as “empowerment, delegation, decentralisation and privatization at the same time” (Pandey, 2010, p. 16). He calls communitization as the third way of governance that empowers the user community to perform the role of “a partner, assister, monitor and supervisor” (Pandey, 2010, pp. 15-16).

Usou and Ozukum (2023) defined communitization as a vehicle of decentralization which “transfers powers and responsibilities to the local government to participate in decision making process for the overall development of the local bodies” (Usou & Ozukum, 2023, p. 310).

The communitization programme introduced in 2002 has created partnership between the government and the local community to collectively work towards management and development of government institutions at the local level.

2. Research Strategy and Methodology

This paper has drawn observations and analysis from the field work conducted in Nerhema village which falls under Kohima district of Nagaland. Nerhema is a village under Chiephobozou sub-division and it is divided into three sub-villages namely; Nerhema, Nerhe-Model and Nerhe-Phezha.

The researcher administered exploratory research design and employed semi-structured interviews to collect information about the functioning of elementary education in different schools under communitization programme. The study also relied on secondary sources to understand the communitization programme on a larger scale. The present paper will analyse how communitization empower local governance and promote community involvement in decision making process. The study also aims to observe the functioning of local government in enhancing effective delivery of public services at the grassroots level.

2.1 Schools in Nerhema Village:

- i. Nerhema:
 - Govt Primary School: 01
 - Govt. Middle School: 01
 - Private school: 01
- ii. Nerhe-Phezha:
 - Govt Primary School: 01
- iii. Nerhe-Model:

¹ Chapter Eight: Local Governments (Online Web) Accessed on 2nd June 2025 <https://ncert.nic.in/textbook/pdf/keps208.pdf>

- Govt. High School:01
- Private school: 01

2.3 Local Governance: Communitization of Elementary Education in Nerhema Village

The state government through Nagaland Communitization of Public Institutions and Services Act of 2002, delegate power and functions to the local authorities for public services and activities like education, water supply, power, health etc. Through this Act, a local governing body called as School Management Board (SMC) earlier known as Village Education Committee (VEC) was set up in 2003 to monitor and manage education and its related activities in the village.

Following the implementation of the Act, elementary education came under the purview of the community. Through the Act, VEC was formed in the village to manage, direct, supervise the administration and academic section and also to ensure community participation in the public sectors.

The VEC became the legal local authority to manage education sector, particularly elementary education. And as envisaged, the schools received support and contribution from the community under communitization programme. Communitization empowers the village community to own the government elementary schools in the village as its own, thereby enhancing local participation in developing the institutions in various ways (Shukla & Zetsuvi, 2006, p. 127). Similarly, in Nerhema village, after the implementation of communitization programme, significant contribution was witnessed from the village community towards development of elementary education and education sector.

2.3 Structure of School Management Committee (SMC)/VEC

VEC (now renamed as SMC) is headed by an SMC chairman who is elected by the Village Council comprised of other 8 members with representatives of members from 8 khels of the village when it was first set up. VEC/SMC committee comprises of members from each school, representatives from parents, church and village council. AT present, there are 16 SMC members; 10 male members and 6 female members - 2 from Village Council, 2 parents' representative, 3 church representative, 2 male teachers, 2 female teachers, 1 women leader representative and 3 from others". One-third of SMC seats is reserved for women. Communitization system of governance promoted local governance as well as women involvement in management and governing aspects.

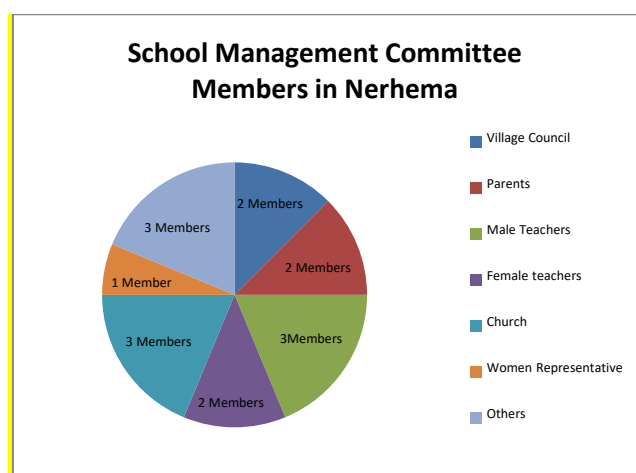


Figure 1 Error! Use the Home tab to apply 0 to the text that you want to appear here..1 **Structure of School Management Committee in Nerhema Village**

i. Role of SMC in Local Governance under Education Sector

The School Management Committee is the governing body constituted by the Village Council for management of education and its related works in the village. SMC plays an important role in managing, supervising and controlling the schools and ensures administrative and academic development. It also ensures community participation and promoted a sense of ownership of the public institutions among the people (Pandey, 2010, p. 125). The SMC performs a range of responsibilities ranging from checking regularity of teachers', disbursement of salary, appointment of private

teachers, ensuring universal enrolment and retention, utilization of funds for school development, and generating support from the village community etc.

SMC execute developmental various activities for development of education sector and this can be seen in the following initiatives. During the course of fieldwork, it was learnt that supply of Mid-day Meal to students became regular. Taking an instance, in GPS Nerhe-Phezha, the school ensures regular supply of meals to students and the school also adopted indigenous methods for mid-day meal activity. In 2023, an indigenous Bee-Keeping project was initiated with the objective to harvest honey for students' meal/lunch².

In another occurrence, the SMC chairman of Nerhe-Phezha along with the committee, constructed and repaired old classroom ceiling of the lone Government Primary School. The SMC chairman also took care of the expenses procured for school roof painting. Interviews with the school teachers and village members revealed that in many occasions, the SMC himself assumed financial responsibility whenever any developmental activities are taken up. Besides the involvement of the SMC in development, it also ensures availability of teachers and appoint temporary teacher in times of need for smooth functioning of classes.

ii. Role of Parents in Education Sector

Through communitization, involvement of parents towards children's education increased in the recent years. Parents' body became a significant component of the education sector. There is also representative of parents in the SMC governing body, which became a determinant factor for parents' participation in SMC meetings as well as school parents meeting and other functions.

The course of fieldwork revealed the active participation of parents towards children's education and school development. It was learnt that during special school functions, parents voluntarily render free service in areas like – cleaning school campus, prepare meal, provide fruits and vegetables for mid-day meal etc. The teachers of both GMS Tekhuzie and GPS Nerhe-Phezha acknowledged the parents for their active contribution towards the school and for their dedicated care of the school kitchen garden.

A teacher of GMS Nerhe-Phezha pointed out,

“While waiting to pick their children, parents make good use of their time by cleaning the school premises –removing weeds and cutting the grass. On some occasions, parents bring fruits and vegetables for the students and teachers to share/prepare as lunch³”.

The involvement of parents in governance has garnered more attention of parents towards their children's education. From providing advice to cleaning the school premises, the parents render more support and cooperation towards children's education and school development after communitization.

iii. Role of Teachers towards School Development

As educators, the teachers play an important role towards student and school development. Teachers are the academic mentors as well as role models who foster academic and personal growth of the students. Teachers play a vital role not only within the classroom but also in shaping the future generations by equipping the children with the knowledge, skills and values essential for life. As Mullai has rightly stated that teachers are the “moral agents of change in society and this role must be carried out openly and unconsciously (Mullai, 2017, p. 1)”.

In the schools of Nerhema village, the teachers carry out crucial responsibility in imparting education to students and also actively contribute to the overall development, as well as to the improvement of schools as a whole. The course of interviews uncovered and disclosed various instances of teachers' involvement in the development of students and schools, and some of which are mentioned below:

² Interview with Keso, Head Teacher on 23rd April 2024

³ Interview with Shürho on 23rd April 2024

- In the different schools – GMS Tekhuzie, GPS Nerhe-Phezha and GPS Ciesebou, to increase enrolment of students, the teachers along with SMC members go for door to door campaign enrolment drive to identify drop-outs or non school going children
- Shortage of teachers is a concerning issue in the village schools as it disrupts the classes. Very often the Village Council, along with the SMC and school teachers addresses the issue by appointing temporary private teacher through Village Council Fund. In certain instances, the school teachers themselves tackle the situation and given below are two instances that highlight the contribution of the teachers to enhance smooth functioning of classes:-
 - i. In GPS Nerhe-Phezha, an amount of Rs 2000/- was collected by the teachers to arrange private tuition fees for the students to prepare for Class 5 Board exam.
 - ii. In GMS Tekhuzie, in the year 2021-2022, when there was shortage of teachers, four (4) teachers voluntarily collected a sum of Rs 8000/- to pay for a proxy teacher for a period of 3 months.

iv. Role of Community In Education Sector

As stated earlier, the communitization programme created a partnership between the government and the user community which made the village community, the co-owner or co-manager of the various government institutions at the local level. With the involvement of the community in management of the activities, the village body started to take keen interest in the development of the public institutions and collectively work to ensure smooth delivery of public services.

Communitization has created a sense of ownership and this in turn encouraged the community to freely contribute towards the development of the public institutions in particular, and the village in general.

A respondent remarked,

“When the government gave its approval to establish a primary school in Phezha, we were approached by the village leaders asking for some portion of land to build the school. As we had no government or private school, we, the land owners willingly donated the land for school construction without any hesitation. We gave the plot of land without free of cost because we believe what we were doing is for the betterment of the future generation⁴”.

Ozukum (2017) in her work highlighted the functioning of the Village Council in regulating teachers’ duties and infrastructure building as well as appointment of temporary Hindi teacher to meet the need of the school (Ozukum, 2017, p. 94). Similarly, in Nerhema, interviews with the villagers revealed the contribution of the Village Council who displayed good governance by providing assistance when the school and the village were in dire need of it. In 2023, in Nerhe-Phezha, the village council paid a sum of Rs 8000/- to a private teacher for a period of 4 months when the science teacher (from GPS Nerhe-Phezha) underwent B.Ed training in 2023 and later the salary was paid by the concerned teacher⁵.

In another event, in Nerhe-Phezha, when the school constructed water tank- (Two 1000 litres each) under PIG-NECTAR, the villagers provided free tin roof material, free timber and arranged free sand gravel and boulder to the school. Besides this, one SMC member mentioned that whenever the schools organized study tour for the students, individual members of the village willingly contribute cash and kind and also provide scholarship to poor students during admission⁶.

3. Conclusion

Communitization has facilitated decentralisation of power and promoted local governance in various sectors especially elementary education. The partnership between the government and the local community has enhanced the involvement of the community in local governance and the active participation of people has brought about significant development in education sector in Nerhema village. This process empowered the community to manage the resources and help in channelizing the rich social capital to enhance smooth delivery of public services. As no one knows a village better than the people living in it, by providing authority and responsibility through local governance, the village witnessed better

⁴ Interview with Rulho on 22nd May 2024

⁵ Interview with Keso on 23rd April 2024

⁶ Interview with Neise on 22nd May 2024

delivery of services in education sector. The involvement of the village community in decision making and managerial activities has enabled them to address the concerns and meet the needs of the people. The rich social capital inherent in the community has enabled the people to render selfless contribution towards the school and to work together for the development of its community.

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