

Dimapur's poor get alms from Communitization

Al Ngullie

The beginning of 2010, Chief Minister of Nagaland Neiphiu Rio, unveiled his dream for a food-sufficient Nagaland by year 2020. The mantra has become a regular highlight in his public statements since then. The chief minister's 'vision' is widely understood to mean that the state's agriculture and allied sectors have to be developed on war-footing and harnessed if within one decade Nagaland is to have progressed from "consumer society" to "exporting society".

The chief minister's emphasis that Nagaland's sole commercial district, Dimapur, is the all-important nucleus of all development-centric endeavours, has not been missed. "If Dimapur is doing well the state economy is healthy or vice-versa," the chief minister told officials and village leaders during a recent meeting of the Dimapur District Planning and Development Board (DPDB). The DPDB is the highest decision-making organization of the state government tasked with matters of development and planning, at the district level. And, the chief minister said, Dimapur being the commercial hub of Nagaland, it has a colossal role to play in impacting overall economic development of the state.

The last five-year estimate on the rural human development index for Dimapur district hovered around 0.73 – the highest of Nagaland's districts. The development indicators of five-years that were used to arrive at the figure were sieved from the greater scopes of existing rural assets and systems – annual grain production, outreach of primary education, sanitation and irrigation systems and so on; in brief, the existing socio-economic assets.

With Dimapur as the standard, the Nagaland government made clear that to attain economic growth, "social capital" will have to be capitalized on – participation of villagers and the community at the village level, in the government's objective to develop.

Toward the stated objective, the Nagaland government announced "a perspective plan for 2020" – optimized agriculture production and gradual building of an agri-industrial scheme of market revolving around the local rural economy. The 'perspective plan', as expected would employ the principles of a now well-known system Nagaland state is credited with pioneering – Communitization.

The system of Communitization

Deeper understanding of Dimapur's rural development processes within the ambit of 'impact' can be had through understanding the concept of 'Communitization'. In 2002, the Nagaland government introduced through the Nagaland Communitization Act/Communitization of Public Institutions and Services Act, 2002, the now-tested system of communitization, of all public institutions and services. 'Communitization' simply means the village or community's participation and social ownership in the development and implementation process.

With the Communitization Act, the Nagaland government handed over ownership and management of the service sector hitherto governed and implemented by the state's agencies – healthcare, water, power, education and bio-diversity management among others – to the local community.

Since communitization, public services and the task of implementing developmental schemes have been entrusted on village/community-level local organizations. For instance, village education committees (VECs) came into being to oversee education in the villages/local areas; village development boards (VDBs) to oversee development of rural infrastructure. For each sector within the community, delegated bodies were instated: village or urban health committees (VHC) or management boards for instance. The change saw marked improvement of services and their delivery to the common man; greater check and accountability over government funds meant for infrastructure and development; and a leap in the quality of rural management.

Seven years after the Nagaland Communitization Act came into force, Nagaland government was honored with the United Nations' Public Service Award in New York, the United States, for innovative use of social capital, i.e., communitization.

If gauged by the results government-sponsored poverty-alleviation programs have borne, Communitiza-

tion in Dimapur district has been generally "reasonable". Dimapur being the tacitly accepted standard, village-level functionaries across the state have been the pivot around which development objectives for the rural poor in a given district revolved. And with the introduction of the institution of village councils (or Panchayats) and village development boards as implementers, the government has now 'reserved itself' the role of facilitator over essential public service sectors such as health, education, power, rural tourism and water supply. Here, the village development institutions led by councils are entrusted the task of overseeing implementation of government's schemes at the village/local area level.

Examples: 'No food, but roof at least' Today, it is unusual to come across

... without any other prospect save one day-wage, whichever hand that has reached out to feed, remains the kindest hand yet.

In Dimapur a thatched hut (except for granaries, field hearths or cattle shelters) that passes for any proper family's dwelling. No doubt, there are also many of those who are compelled to 'rough out' when the elements of nature strike. But as a popular dictum in Dimapur goes: 'food to eat I have none but a roof I have, to keep me dry and safe when work comes.' The allegory may be drawn to one of Nagaland's best know rural projects specifically targeting the rural homeless, the Indira Awas Yojna (IAY). "At least the hungry are not homeless," an elder from Diphupar village commented wryly when asked for his opinion on rural schemes.

The IAY is one of the most 'heard-about' in the state as is in Dimapur district. The Nagaland government is pushing the IAY offering rural housing models based on local living requirements and local-low cost technology. A special aspect of the IAY for Nagaland is the consideration given to the localized but diverse tribal,

VDBs and VCs organize day-to-day execution of project works. So far, VDBs of the four administrative blocks of Dimapur (Medziphema, Dhansiripahar, Kuhuboto and Niluland with about 200 villages spread among them) have taken up at least 7718 works under the NREGA alone. These works by and large comprise of paving agriculture link-roads connecting village market-areas with the district's highways and then into the retail centers of Dimapur town. Other need-specific undertakings such as irrigation canals, drinking water-supply ways, piping and even marketing sheds have been undertaken at the village level. Under NREGA the works in Dimapur's villages have been listed at around 4, 065. The work-in-progress was informed to be at 3653 at the time of filing this report.

Due credit is given to the village

development boards and village-level implementers in Dimapur for the marginal 'improvement' of NREGA implementation in fiscal year 2009-2010. In 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 Nagaland was criticized for her poor 'NREGA performance' to which government leaders attributed various reasons (including that of not being conversant with the guidelines). Decisions taken at the grass-root level (VDBs etc) are understood to be more pragmatic considering they are taken by those associated with the ground-realities of rural life itself. Till date, Nagaland's VDBs generally have to their credit about 3,19723 Lakh households provided with employment from the rural-employment scheme from the total funding of Rs. 465.21 crore and about 4065 'completed' need-specific projects (irrigation, piping etc) from an expenditure of around Rs. 438.98 Crore. The NREGS outreach for Dimapur shows that 0.383 Lakh households were provided with em-

of crumbling infrastructure so synonymous with Nagaland's public service systems is best reflected – for instance – by the condition of government schools in Dimapur's villages. From Chumukedima to Diphupar, Kuhuboto to Khetovi, the fringes of Medziphema to the Bor-Lingri villages, government primary schools are, to say the least, in 'sorry' conditions. In fact, the sight of depilated, sack-patched, crumpled government school "buildings" at any given village is so common that citizens in Nagaland (leave alone Dimapur) have a common phrase for description: "Cowshed." In fact, the Media in Dimapur regularly report on statements of even government ministers and politicians causally referring to government primary schools as "cowsheds." Remoteness, lack of access to proper roads and communication and general dearth of government-funds are some of the chief hindrances in the path of education for all.

While communitization of the implementation-system has certainly increased the chances of the villager subsisting on hand-to-mouth options at least, there are some critical areas the system has not touched – long-term employment. Rural unemployment, under-employment and disguised employment are the district's current challenge. As pointed out earlier (The Morung Express, June 2 edition, front page), the 11,838 BPL families in Dimapur district continue to subsist mostly on daily day-wage ("Hajira"). This illiterate and poverty-stricken community can only do small, day-to-day menial tasks for a very nominal wage – the current rate this Reporter found, is a measly Rs. 70 a day. "A kilogram of rice is Rs. 7 so I buy 3 kilograms to last me and my two children at least two days so by that time, I would have found another day-job," said a poor, but 'optimist' villager from Dhansiripahar block.

The absence of long-term solution for the unemployed, underemployed or disguised-employed in Dimapur's rural sections has also led to exploitation by illegal immigrants and labourers from other states.

The cheap labour is largely attributed to the bludgeoning floating population from Assam – mostly illegal Bangladeshi immigrants – and migration of Nagas from rural areas of other regions of the state. Illegal Bangladeshi immigrants enter the district from Assam through the porous borders – and entrench themselves in the design of Dimapur's Naga villages. In almost every Naga village in Dimapur district (leave alone the central commercial town) there are hundreds of illegal immigrants working in Naga farms as "Hajira" workers.

An estimate (no official data could be obtained or was informed to be available) put the number of Bangladeshi illegal immigrants at roughly 1lakh in Dimapur alone, till 2006. Due to the large unemployed floating population, a day-labourer is only too willing to work 10 hours in the paddy fields for a pathetic Rs.50 to Rs.60 a day.

The district's rural "lower-working-class" in Nagaland comprise of an estimated 1, 84, 490 persons. And with high competition from other 'non-Naga' populations, for few employment openings, the plight of the estimated 11,838 BPL families in Dimapur district can only mean sorer. The number has translated into stretching the state's public service systems including health and power infrastructure.

On the brighter side, through Communitization the average villager is more aware of the benefit government and development schemes represent. The on-hand 'participation' and experience in community endeavours have heightened the rural people's consciousness of the state's role and their own in the uplift – or ruin – of a governed socio-political people. Dimapur district is Nagaland's only link to the world outside. With the only rail and air connectivity and infrastructure in this hilly state, proper resource-management and economic facility are expected to be in place in Dimapur at least at accepted standards. But while basic commercial support systems are in place – transport and marketing linkages – the greater challenges are the general lack of service infrastructure, population discrepancies and a virtually non-existent resource base that are needed to optimize rural resources to develop the rural peoples.

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2010 Omololu Falobi Award for HIV Prevention Community Advocacy

Bobby Ramakant – CNS

"Omololu Falobi lived life only for 35 years. Yes he was in a hurry. He was a visionary. For those who knew him they would realize that this conference was part of his vision. M2010 is a turning point where it has become glaringly obvious that developing and rolling out new HIV prevention technologies is as much about community voices, politics, media, culture as it is about science. That's what Omololu thought of, that's what he dreamed of" said Manju Chatani Gada, at the closing ceremony of the International Microbicides Conference (M2010) in Pittsburgh, USA. Manju represents AVAC: Global Advocacy for HIV Prevention, African Microbicides Advocacy Coalition (AMAG) and has demonstrated a rich experience of community-centric responses to AIDS globally.

"Omololu was killed in October 2006 in Lagos, Nigeria. He was a powerful international activist, a gifted journalist, a friend, a father, and a force to be reckoned with when it came to community activism. He founded and led the Journalists' Against AIDS in Nigeria (JAAIDS) and was instrumental in establishing several coalitions including the New HIV Vaccine and Microbicides Advocacy Society. His vision was of Africans to have a say in the issues that affected their lives and community advocates everywhere to be involved in shaping the response to AIDS" said Manju Chatani Gada.

"The field is growing fast and changing and many new faces are in this room. Perhaps many of you may not have been privileged to know Omololu. But rest assured, some project you know of, some network you are part of, some journalist who has covered your research, was touched by him. His vision lives in the form of Omololu Falobi Award for Excellence in HIV Prevention Community Advocacy" said Manju Chatani.

The award was created to have an ongoing legacy to recognize the commitment of HIV prevention research advocates. The award was established by the African Microbicides Advocacy Group (AMAG), in partnership with AVAC, the Global Campaign for Microbicides (GCM), Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS) and the New HIV Vaccine and Microbicides Advocacy Society. We thank a number of supporters including AMAG, AVAC, Family Health International (FHI), Global Campaign for Microbicides (GCM), NHVMAS and the joint United Nations programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)

While sharing her memories of how the screening committee selected the 2010 Omololu Falobi Award for HIV Prevention Community Advocacy, Manju Chatani Gada said: "One member of the screening committee said 'it was an easy choice. He is an epitome of science meets advocacy'. The 2010 Omololu Falobi Award for HIV Prevention Community Advocacy goes to Charles Shagi from Tanzania."

"Omololu was an incredible man" said the inaugural recipient of 2008 Omololu Falobi Award for HIV Prevention Community Advocacy Lori Heise. "Charles' enthusiasm is infectious and he has been committed to helping recruit and mentor new people to the movement to expand the range of HIV prevention options," said Lori Heise, former Executive Director of the Global Campaign for Microbicides and one of the inaugural recipients of the award and member of the 2010 selection committee. "We need more people like Charles who can ably bridge the gap between researchers and community members."

I couldn't have agreed more for having had the privilege to work closely with Omololu in early 2000s on HIV prevention advocacy. Lori was indeed a symbolic choice for thousands of people at least who are committed to push HIV prevention advocacy on daily basis.

The 2010 recipient of Omololu Falobi Award for HIV Prevention Community Advocacy, Charles Shagi, is a community educator who developed innovative ways to link women in Tanzanian villages with life-saving HIV prevention information and with HIV prevention research trials. Charles Shagi, a Program Officer for the African Medical and Research Foundation based in Mwanza, Tanzania, was honored for his significant contributions to developing and sustaining community engagement and education programs that empower women and their communities to advocate from themselves and to become vital partners in HIV prevention research trials.

"Bringing HIV prevention research to communities is an essential part of our work to develop new HIV prevention options for men and women," said Sharon Hillier, Microbicides 2010 Co-chair and a member of the award selection committee. "Charles embodies what this award was created to recognize: leadership, commitment and passion in community advocacy. He works tirelessly not only to help women advocate on their own behalf and to become involved in research, but also to educate and empower researchers to understand the needs of women, their families and communities."

Charles works tirelessly not only to help women, their families and their communities advocate on their own behalf and to become involved in research.

"I am very humbled to accept this award, and for me, it really underscores the value this field put on the importance of reaching out to the women – in the villages of Tanzania and around the world – who participate in these trials" said Shagi. "This award is important because it proves that people do care about them. It is the courage of those women that is being honored today. I look forward to continuing to share the voices and experiences of vulnerable women with the research and advocacy communities."

"I urge all HIV prevention researchers to listen to the community. There is need for all of us to change attitude, but especially the researchers and our leaders since we have a long walk left. Communities should be at the center of research, not at the periphery," Shagi added.

The Omololu Falobi Award highlights the essential role of community advocacy and leadership in HIV prevention research. It celebrates the life and values of the late Omololu Falobi, a long-time HIV advocate and journalist who founded Journalists Against AIDS in Nigeria, was an instrumental pioneer member of the Nigerian Treatment Access Movement, and co-founded the New HIV Vaccine & Microbicide Advocacy Society. Omololu was killed in Lagos, Nigeria in October 2006. The award was conceived as an ongoing legacy that recognizes his commitment and lasting contributions to HIV prevention research advocacy.

"Omololu was a visionary leader and activist, who accomplished much in his too short a life. He dedicated himself to powerful advocacy for HIV and HIV prevention research in Nigeria, Africa and worldwide," said Funmi Doherty of NHVMAS in Nigeria. "It is gratifying to see his ideals and vision live on through this award. I know he would be immensely proud of the work that Charles and the past recipients are doing to simultaneously advance human rights and HIV prevention research."

Shagi was chosen from among an impressive group of almost 20 nominees by an independent international panel of HIV prevention research advocates, policy makers, and scientists. The selection committee noted his instrumental role in pioneering new ways to bring the voices of community members and participants into the research process.

Charles and his colleagues have also documented and published peer reviewed articles about their model for community representation and participation in HIV prevention trials among women. This research is an important guide for those working on community engagement plans for HIV prevention trials around the world. (CNS)

Bobby Ramakant – CNS

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Dear Medokhriëü Pfükri (Akhriëü),

Wishing you a very happy birthday. As the day that we are so blessed to have, returns, may the good Lord grant you the desires of your heart. May you live longer than a hundred years and become the oldest living grandma someday. May you never grow tired of being you. May you grow more to be a blessing for us, your friends, your family and your people. May each step that you tread take you a step closer to your dream. And may your dream bear the fruits of success.

Here's wishing you many many and many happy returns of the Day. (12/06/010)
From Aduon + Brothers & Sisters.



A day-wage worker tends a patch of paddy-field in a village in the outskirts of Dimapur. Developmental schemes are in place but have made only a small impact on the low-returns and 'high-stress' rural economy of Dimapur's "lower-working-class" section.

social, traditional and local requirements. Under IAY, citizens in Dimapur's rural areas are provided tin roofing sheets; houses are constructed and guided by the community; contributing free labour and materials such timber and split bamboo matting for 'walls'.

Nagaland's performance in implementing IAY is considered by many to be a "100%" success scheme and the agreement echoes in many a villager's story. During receiving the Bharat Nirman Award, Nagaland's Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development Pangnyu Phom opined that through the IAY '100 percent' housing in many villages have been achieved. The poorest of the poor citizens are being given "an identity" in the dignity of owning an own house. Denizens from various villages in Dimapur said they receive CGI sheets in an annum through Village Development Boards or Village Councils.

There are a few constraints though. For instance the about 200 established villages in Dimapur are mostly without proper communication network or roads. Inaccessibility has also led to some villagers not receiving their quota. "I heard that tin sheets would be given to us but I still live in a thatch house," a villager from a Western Sumi village told this reporter. And there are others who are not sure if the NREGA or IAY are actually in implementation. "Yes, we have received some tin sheets about a year ago" and "adha-puoa" (about half-a kilogram) of rice the previous year," Heka, a villager from Dhansiripahar said. But, sustained, long-term results and economic security and self-sufficiency for the villager remain a virtually insurmountable challenge.

Whatever facility the Dimapur villager has for now is transitory, alternative and exigency-based rather than sustained subsistence.

Seemblance of "progress"

However, the perennial problem