



FORMATION OF AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL LEADS TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN TRIBAL AREAS OF ASSAM

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Abstract

The preparation and execution of development plans at grassroots levels for their own advantage is referred to as decentralized planning. The local government is responsible for creating plans and implementing development programs for the community it serves. To facilitate decentralized planning, Article 243ZD of the Indian Constitution mandates states to form District Planning Committees that are tasked with drafting District plans by integrating the plans of panchayats and municipal entities. However, this constitutional provision does not extend to certain regions of the country. The three-tier panchayati raj system and municipal bodies do not apply in some areas, which are detailed in the sixth schedule of the Constitution. Instead, an alternative framework of local self-governance known as the Autonomous District Councils is in place. The primary objectives of the sixth schedule are to safeguard the interests of tribal regions by establishing constitutionally recognized local governance systems. Key aspects of the sixth schedule include executing development initiatives, protecting tribal customs, regulating activities within tribal regions, and granting judicial authority to District Councils in those areas. In Assam, three Autonomous Councils have been established under the sixth schedule of the Constitution: (1) Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), (2) North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC), and (3) Bodoland Territorial Areas District (BTAD). Each of these autonomous councils is formed through elections and focuses on advancing the development of tribal regions related to their respective councils, primarily addressing local demands and interests.

The present paper tries to highlight the planning structure and importance of people's participation in formulating development



plans under sixth schedule of the constitution. The study is mainly based on secondary information from various sources.

Keywords-Constitution, autonomous council, sixth schedule, tribal.

Introduction

The term decentralized planning refers to the process of preparing and executing development plans at the grassroots level for the benefit of the local community. It is the responsibility of local government to create plans and implement development programs for the constituents it serves. To facilitate decentralized planning, Article 243ZD of the Indian Constitution mandates states to establish District Planning Committees, which are tasked with drafting District plans by integrating the plans from panchayats and municipal bodies. However, this constitutional provision does not apply to certain regions of the country. The three-tier panchayati raj system and municipal bodies are not relevant in specific areas that are outlined in the sixth schedule of the Constitution. In these regions, an alternative system of local self-governance is known as Autonomous District Councils. The primary objectives of the sixth schedule of the Constitution are to safeguard tribal areas and their interests by establishing constitutionally recognized local governance structures. Key provisions of the sixth schedule include the implementation of development initiatives, the preservation of tribal traditions, the regulation of activities within tribal areas, and the provision of judicial authority to District Councils in these regions.

Objectives of the study:

The study is based on the following objectives:-

- To highlight the decentralized planning in the grass root level.
- To find out the importance of people's participation in formulating decentralized planning.
- To point out Economic Development in Tribal Areas of Assam
- To find out the benefit of common masses from the sixth schedule of the constitution.



Methodology:

The study is mainly based on secondary information particularly from various publication of state Govt. of Assam, various journals, books, Statistical hand book of Assam.

Discussion:

In Assam there are three Autonomous District Councils constituted in terms of the sixth schedule of the constitution. (1) Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), (2) North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NHAC) (3) Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD). All these autonomous District councils are constructed through election process and works for the development of tribal areas of the respective autonomous District council, mainly emphasis on demand for local needs and interests.

1) Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC):

The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council covers total geographical area of 10,434 sq. kms. According to the census of India, 2001 the population of KAAC stands at 8.1 lakhs and dwelling over 2563 villages. The literacy rate is 60 percent. The district has three sub-division-Diphu, Bokajan and Hamren and 11 development blocks. There are 30 members of KAAC of which 26 elected and 4 nominated. Chairman and Deputy Chairman elected by council for 5 years. There is an Executive Council for the KAAC, consisting of a Chief Executive Member (CEM) and 10 Executive Member. There is a speaker for the council. There are 5 senior civil service officers working in KAAC, namely, the secretary of the council and four Deputy Secretaries. There are thirty departments and one separate finance department of the council. Each village has a hereditary headman who can be removed only through impeachment. The centrally sponsored schemes for rural development are implemented through the DRDA which is a separate Agency. The Chief Executive Member (CEM) is also chairman of DRDA and the principal secretary of the council is Executive Director.

The Current Planning Mechanism of KAAC: The development commissioner of the Hill Areas Development department serves as the coordinating body within the Assam government for planning the autonomous council. This department issues directives for the preparation of annual plans, which the council uses to instruct its department heads to draft plans that are then consolidated and



presented to the council. Traditional village leaders are also involved in the formulation of the annual plan. The council submits its plans to the development commissioner, who then integrates them into the Hill Area Development Programs. In crafting the annual plan, the council adheres to all regulations and guidelines set forth by the Planning Commission of India, while also giving special attention to local needs and priorities. The council implements all centrally sponsored schemes, central initiatives, North Eastern Council (NRC) projects, and externally funded schemes that relate to the assigned subjects and departments, following the norms and directives of the Government of India. Funds are allocated on a biannual basis, specifically in April and October, and the council is required to provide utilization certificates to the corresponding Heads of account.

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2) North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council(NCHAC):

The NCHAC encompasses a total land area of 4,890 sq km, with 90% of this area covered by forests. The population, which totals around 200,000 individuals, is made up of 13 different communities that are spread out across various small settlements in the North Cachar Hills District Autonomous Council. In this area, even a cluster of six homes can be considered a village. The council is divided into two subdivisions: Haflong and Maibong, along with five development blocks. There are 27 members on the NCHAC, 23 of whom are elected, while 4 are nominated. The council elects a Chairman and a Deputy Chairman for a term of five years. Additionally, there is an Executive Council within the NCHAC, which is comprised of a Chief Executive Member (CEM) and 9 Executive Members. Traditional village councils, made up of all heads of households and one government-appointed gaon borax, also exist. Due to the small size of many villages and the fact that most communities live in scattered locations while practicing shifting cultivation, no village-level bodies are currently established. The administrative and planning framework of the NCHAC mirrors that of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, thus there is no need for separate explanation regarding the NCHAC.

3) Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD):

The BTAD spans an area of 8,790 square kilometers and comprises four districts: Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, and Udalguri. Established through a memorandum of settlement on February 10, 2003, between the Government of India, the Government of Assam, and the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), the BTAD serves as a self-governing organization for Bodo regions. The primary goal of the BTAD is to meet the essential needs of the Bodo people, including their economic situation, education, language, and the safeguarding of land rights, as well as the socio-cultural identity of the Bodos and facilitating rapid infrastructure development within the BTAD area. An amendment to the 19th paragraph of the sixth schedule led to the formation of an Interim Executive Council for the BTAD by leaders involved in the Bodo movement, including the signatories of the



Memorandum of Settlement. The sixth schedule of the Indian constitution, following an amendment, granted specific provisions for the BTAD. The amended second paragraph stipulates that the BTAD will have a maximum of 46 members, of which 40 are elected through adult suffrage—30 reserved for Scheduled Tribes (ST), 5 for non-ST, 5 open to all communities, and the remaining 6 nominated by the Governor, who hold the same rights as the elected members. The Executive Council (EC) for the BTAD consists of 12 Executive Members, including the Chief Executive Member (CEM) and the Deputy Chief Executive Member. The Executive Council has comprehensive authority over the officers and staff, allowing it to create positions with the agreement of the state government and appoint individuals to positions not filled through the Assam Public Service Commission (APSC). In terms of administration, the BTAD is led by a principal secretary who carries out executive functions, supported by a director in charge of each Development Department. There are four secretaries within the BTAD, one located in each district. Each district has a District Planning Committee (DPC), with the Project Director, DRDA serving as the member secretary. Bodo has been designated as the official language of the BTAD; however, Assamese and English are still used for official purposes. The BTAD includes block constituency-level coordination committees that operate similarly to Anchalik Panchayat. In urban regions, Town Committees are present. Reports indicate that 415 village councils have been established in the BTAD area. The State Government of Assam allocates funds to the BTAD based on its population, providing around Rs 300 crore annually for planning, which is disbursed in two equal installments, in April/May and September/October. From these funds, the BTAD distributes district-wise allocations, approximately Rs 95 crore for each district.

The Current Planning Mechanism:

By following the guidelines of district plan issued by the Govt. of Assam, the BTAD prepares its annual plan, which is a sub-set of the state plan approved by the planning commission. The BTAD prepares a plan for every legally transferred subject. In order to augment its internal capacity to plan and prepare a 5 or 10 year plan for development, the BTAD has approached the North Eastern Regional Institute Tezpur, which has prepared the Bodoland 2020 vision



document. For local planning, the concern Authority of the BTAD has requested the Govt. of Assam to send officers to assist in making plan preparation. BTAD is also currently taking the help of retired planning officers.

Powers and Functions of the BTAD:

The Amendment of the sixth schedule in 2003, additional powers were given to the BTAD and various departments brought in the jurisdiction of the BTAD such as agriculture, animal husbandry and veterinary matters, primary education, higher secondary including vocational training, college, fisheries, flood control, food and civil supply, handloom and textile, health and family welfare, irrigation, labour and employment, land and revenue, sericulture, small, cottage and rural industry, social welfare, soil conservation, sports and youth welfare, statistics, tourism, transport (roads, bridges, ferries and other means of communications, tribal research institute controlled and financed by the State Government, urban development-town and country planning, weights and measures and welfare of plain tribes and backward classes, with the prior assent of the President, For the performance of executive functions, more than 40 departments have been attached.

State Level Councils:

In 1995, Assam created 3 Autonomous Councils through state law and in 2005, again 3 more similar councils were created which are as follows-

Sl Nos	Name of Council	Year of formation
1	Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council(RHAC)	1995
2	Lalung(TIWA) Autonomous Council(LAC)	1995
3	Mising Autonomous Council(MAC)	1995
4	Thengal Kachari Hill Council	2005
5	Sonowal Kachari Council	2005
6	Deori Council	2005



Conclusion:

The study reveals that the Indian Constitution keeps the provision of formation of Autonomous Council through the sixth schedule as a safeguard of tribal community in hill districts; of course, creation of BTAD is a special case of Indian constitution. Decentralized planning and creation of a framework for genuine participation of people in the development process is imperative. The challenge arises in doing so within the special decentralized governance structure that exists at present.

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