Grassroots Level Planning & Governance in Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD)

Study conducted by - the ant
Commissioned by - unicef
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### List of abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ABSU</td>
<td>All Bodo Students Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIET</td>
<td>Action for Inclusion and Empowerment</td>
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<td>ANC</td>
<td>Ante-Natal Checkup</td>
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<td>AP</td>
<td>Anchalik Panchayat</td>
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<td>BDO</td>
<td>Block Development Officer</td>
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<td>BLT</td>
<td>Bodoland Liberation Tigers</td>
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<td>BPF</td>
<td>Bodoland People’s Front</td>
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<td>BTC</td>
<td>Bodoland Territorial Council</td>
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<td>CEM</td>
<td>Chief Executive Member</td>
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<td>DPC</td>
<td>District Programme Committee</td>
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<td>DRDA</td>
<td>District Rural Development Agency</td>
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<td>EM</td>
<td>Executive Member</td>
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<td>FFC</td>
<td>Fourteenth Finance Commission</td>
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<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
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<td>GP</td>
<td>Gram Panchayat</td>
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<td>GPDP</td>
<td>Gram Panchayat Development Plan</td>
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<td>GRS</td>
<td>Gram Rozgar Sahayak</td>
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<td>IAY</td>
<td>Indira Awas Yojana</td>
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<td>ICDS</td>
<td>Integrated Child Development Scheme</td>
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<td>IDeA</td>
<td>Institute of Development Action</td>
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<td>IDI</td>
<td>In Depth Interview</td>
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<td>MCLA</td>
<td>Member of Council Legislative Assembly</td>
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<td>MGNREGA</td>
<td>Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act</td>
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<td>MoS</td>
<td>Memorandum of Settlement</td>
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<td>NERSWN</td>
<td>North East Research and Social Work Network</td>
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<td>NRHM</td>
<td>National Rural Health Mission</td>
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<td>NRLM</td>
<td>National Rural Livelihoods Mission</td>
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<td>NSAP</td>
<td>National Social Assistance Programme</td>
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<td>P&amp;RD</td>
<td>Panchayat and Rural Development</td>
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<td>PMAY-G</td>
<td>Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana- Gramin</td>
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<td>PRI</td>
<td>Panchayati Raj Institution</td>
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<td>SC</td>
<td>Scheduled Caste</td>
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<td>SECC</td>
<td>Socio-Economic Caste Census</td>
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<td>SHG</td>
<td>Self Help Group</td>
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<td>ST</td>
<td>Scheduled Tribe</td>
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<td>TCLCC</td>
<td>Territorial Council Level Coordination Committee</td>
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<td>the ant</td>
<td>The Action North East Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund</td>
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<td>VCDC</td>
<td>Village Council Development Committee</td>
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<td>VCDP</td>
<td>Village Council Development Plan</td>
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<td>ZP</td>
<td>Zilla Parishad</td>
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Acknowledgement

The study involved different stakeholders who are associated directly or indirectly with local governance in Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD). The stakeholders are from different physical areas distributed across the districts of Chirang and Kokrajhar. In order to identify, reach out and arrange for interviews and discussions with the varied stakeholders, the researchers received a lot of support and help from individuals and organisations in the two districts where the data for the study was drawn from.

First and foremost, the study team is very thankful to the staff associated with different projects of the ant who helped in identifying the VCDCs to be covered in the study and setting up the interviews and FGDs for the researchers. The names of the staff from the ant who helped us during the data collection process are- Rwmwi, Akramul Haque, Habibur Rehman, Shankar, Jarin, Sanjib, Laxmi, Nasir, Jayanta and Hero.

We are also very thankful to Ms. Bhaotina Mushahary and her team of Action for Inclusion and Empowerment (AIET) for their help with field work in Kokrajhar District. The researchers also received help from Mr. Rajesh of NERSWN with field work in Gosaigaon Block of Kokrajhar.

A few officials at the BTC Secretariat helped the researchers in setting up interviews with senior officials of the BTC administration; we are very grateful to them for their kind assistance.

Above all, IDEA the ant is grateful to all the stakeholders who participated in the study- VCDC/TCLCC Chairmen and Members, MCLA, Monitoring Committee members, government officials, Civil Society Organisation heads, community members and members of women’s groups, who have shared their time and provided us with valuable insights into the current state of decentralised governance in BTAD.
Preface

Decentralization stands for the transfer of authority and responsibility from central to intermediate and local governments. Local governments are intended to foster development, reduce poverty and consolidate democracy at the grassroots level. Participatory decisions taken by the local governments, due to their closeness to the local constituency are expected to better reflect the preferences of the people, especially that of the poor and vulnerable.

Different countries have different structures for decentralised governance. Even within India certain regions with distinct characteristics such as tribal areas are governed locally under different structures to best protect the interests of the local people. In Assam, the four districts administered by the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) do not follow the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) system of local governance as these districts are governed through the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. In the areas governed by the BTC, local governance takes place through institutions called the Village Council Development Committee (VCDC) at the village level and Territorial Level Coordination Committee (TCLCC) at the BTC Legislative Assembly constituency level.

With a long term vision to realize the Sustainable Development Goals at the grassroots level through effective and vibrant local governance institutions, this study has been commissioned to Institute for Development Action (IDeA) by UNICEF. The study seeks to understand the current functional structure of local governance in the areas under the jurisdiction of BTC. The study also covers the process of delivery of government welfare schemes through local level institutions in the BTC areas under its scope. The study report intends to bring out the gaps in local governance highlighted by the different stakeholders who have been part of the study and suggest their recommendations to make local governance in BTC areas more effective and efficient.

The IDeA team members who had conducted the study are- Ms. Enakshi Dutta, Mr. Ronald Basumatary and Ms. Jennifer Liang.
Chapter 1
Introduction

1. Context

India is a democratic federal republic, and thereby promotes decentralization and distribution of powers, which is achieved through the functioning of local governments at the intermediate and village levels. Decentralization of powers is essential as the closer the government is to the people, the more responsive it would be and hence enable effective administration. Even before India’s independence, the concept of ‘Gram Swaraj’ or village self-rule was propagated by Mahatma Gandhi. He believed that “India’s soul lives in villages” and wanted India to follow a Panchayat Raj- a decentralised form of government where each village is responsible for its own affairs.

The Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution, Article 40, instructs the State to take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government. In 1958, the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee recommended a three-tier Panchayat system: Gram Panchayat at the village level; the Panchayat Samiti at the Community Development Block Level; and the Zila Parishad at the District level. In pursuance of these recommendations, the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution was made in 1992. The changes made in the Constitution gave a new dimension to the system of governance at the local level in the country. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act defined the role that the Panchayat bodies could play in promoting economic development and social justice in the villages and in improving services essential for better community life. The inclusion of Schedule 11 raised hopes that these bodies would be entrusted with the implementation of schemes on subjects included therein. The states would be expected to devolve 3Fs (Funds, Functions and Functionaries) at the grassroots level.

Elections have been held and the relevant functions have also been devolved, as intended, in most states. However, the extent of financial devolution varies from state to state. In some of the states, there still prevails confusion in regard to the nature of the transfer of functions, finances and functionaries to these bodies related to the subjects enumerated in the 11th Schedule. It was expected that local bodies would become financially independent along with
a constitutional guarantee of existence breathed through five yearly elections. However, financially, the local governments are largely dependent on State Governments. iv

To achieve inclusive growth, it is crucial that the poor are integrated with the dynamic sectors of growth. Representing the people at the lowest level i.e. the village, the elected representatives of the Panchayats can feel the pulse of the people and understand local conditions best. The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are eminently suited for service delivery as they can ensure equity, inclusiveness, accessibility, transparency, local participation, accountability and sustainability in the provision of services. v Thereby, Panchayati Raj system has been able to involve the marginalized sections of the country including women in the process of governance. The Constitutional specification of the role of Panchayats in ‘planning for economic development and social justice’ and ‘implementation of schemes’ towards these ends, and further, the critical role assigned to the ‘Gram Sabha’ in development planning are the essential buildings blocks for creating a more just, equitable and vibrant society. vi

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 provided guidelines and directives for bringing uniformity in PRIs throughout India. As such, the Assam Legislative Assembly enacted the Assam Panchayat Act’ 1994, providing for a three-tier Panchayat system as per the guidelines of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992.

2. Panchayat and the BTC
The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), responsible for the governance of a contiguous and specifically demarcated area called the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) was created under the provisions of the amended Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. In the year 1949, when the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution was framed and passed by the Constituent Assembly for the non-scheduled areas of the North East, tribal customs reigned supreme in these areas. At the time of its framing, the 6th schedule did not create provisions for democratic aspects of local governance at the village level.
Since, the BTC has been formed within the framework of the Sixth Schedule, the Panchayat system which existed before the signing of the Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) ceased to exist post the assumption of office by the Council. Under the new arrangement, the powers of the Panchayati Raj Institutions would rest with the Council. However, an administrative void was created at the grassroots level after the village panchayats ceased to exist. Thus, in the year 2006, a year after the first BTC election took place; two local bodies were created in the lines of the PRI called the Territorial Constituency Level Coordination Committee (TCLCC) and the Village Council Development Committee (VCDC).

UNICEF (Assam Unit) in collaboration with State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development (SIPRD) Assam is working towards strengthening local governance in Assam. With a larger vision of ‘Institutional strengthening of governance mechanism for improved decentralization at the grassroots in Assam’, UNICEF is keen to extend its support towards strengthening the local level planning in autonomous district councils, which is outside the purview of the PRI system. It is starting this work with a focus on BTAD, it being one of the largest Autonomous Council areas in Assam covering four districts.

3. Terms of Reference for the study

the ant is a Non-Governmental Organisation established in the year 2000, based in Rowmari village of Chirang district of Assam. It works directly in around 300 villages across 6 work clusters in Chirang district bordering Bhutan. This area falls under the BTAD and the ant works primarily with the poorest and marginalised in villages, irrespective of community, class or religious affiliations. Its activities can be divided into 6 thematic areas: empowerment of women & girls, promoting community health, child & youth development, remote areas development program, peace and justice promotion and building sustainable livelihoods.

With long years of experience of working in the community, the ant set up an initiative called IDeA (the Institute of Development Action) over 10 years ago in 2007 to share its learnings with the larger voluntary sector in the North East region and specifically to train and help build the capacity of other NGOs. IDeA currently trains and supports small NGOs to enable them to become more effective, responsible and responsive public institutions. It works closely with community based organizations and has been instrumental in capacity building of more than 150 small NGOs and has over 30 partners from various parts of Northeast. Apart from trainings, IDeA also carries out research and studies, consultancies for evaluation of projects &
programmes, strategic planning and helps build systems of finance & governance in organisations.

IDeA-the ant has thus been commissioned by UNICEF to conduct this study and contribute towards achieving the larger outcome of strong grassroots level governance in Assam.

**The long term vision:**
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be localized at the community level through strengthening of the community platforms.
- Understand the situation at the ground level, of the enabling policy environment and programmes in Autonomous Council Areas with focus on children and women.

**Objectives of the study:**
- Understanding the planning & implementation mechanisms of the Autonomous District Councils at the grassroots level with focus on BTAD.
- Identifying the capacity gaps towards enhancing grassroots level planning and governance in BTAD.

This study seeks to initiate the preparatory work of trying to understand the situation at the ground level, to understand the enabling policy environment and programmes in BTAD with focus on children and women. This will inform the situation of community-based platforms thereby leading to insights on how strengthening of local institutions will help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

**4. Physical area coverage of the study**
The BTAD is made up of four contiguous districts- Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri. However, primarily due to the limitation of time the area for collection of data has been limited to 2 representative districts of Kokrajhar and Chirang under the Bodoland Autonomous Council. As the study aims at looking at the policy and systems within BTAD, being under the same administrative set up all the four districts would be mandated to have the same set of policies and systems.

**5. Methodology**
As a first step towards supporting better planning and effective implementation of the plans, an understanding of the existing structure, systems, policies and also identify the capacity gaps and challenges in executing grassroots level planning and implementation in the BTAD areas
is needed. This would be useful to build appropriate strategies and capacity enhancement support to achieve the objective of strengthening local level planning in autonomous district councils. The study was thus geared towards building this understanding. The key stakeholders identified for generating the required insights and information are as listed below:

1) VCDC / TCLCC Chairman/Members,
2) BTC elected representatives
3) Civil Society members,
4) Women’s Groups,
5) Community Monitoring Committee members, and
6) Government and Council Officials.

The data that had been gathered from the field was collated and analyzed and the key observations and findings were then drawn up.

Data was gathered using a mixed-methods approach, triangulating data from qualitative and secondary sources. The methodology comprised of both components of secondary research as well as empirical study. Each of these methods is explained here:

**Secondary research**

Secondary data review was done to generate the constitutional and legislative position of the entire structure and process. This included studying the planning mechanisms, fund flow for schemes and the way the schemes are designed and implemented.

- A desk review of secondary sources included the 73rd Amendment Act, the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994, the history of formation of BTC and demarcation of BTAD, the history of the movement etc.
- Mapping of other studies and researches on the timeline of changes in governance systems in the area and its implications
- A desk review of policy documents at BTC related to planning and rural development, other relevant documents (sample VCDPs, etc.) to inform the current practices
- Review of materials outlining the role of SIPRD and its guidelines and materials on grassroots governance and planning.

**Empirical study**

For the empirical study, in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGD) with key stakeholders through pre-developed schedules were conducted to generate the required
information. The idea was to elicit feedback from all levels of stakeholders - lawmakers, executive, implementers and the community - to inform on the existing policies, system, gaps and challenges.

In order to ascertain the appropriate stakeholders and acquire a nuanced understanding about the existing system, a meeting was held with the UNICEF team and also with members in the BTC secretariat. Both the meetings guided the study team to finalize the list of respondents to be included in the empirical study and also get the contacts and support for the one-to-one interviews. The Interviews and FGDs were thus conducted using interview guides which were developed for each category. The guides are enclosed as annexures.

- **In–depth interviews**: VCDC Members, Block officials, Officials of the district administration and the Council Officials and Members were interviewed along with key CSO members.

- **Focus group interviews/discussions**: FGDs and group discussions were held with community members to understand in-depth the process of grassroots planning and the view as a group of the current effectiveness and challenges regarding functioning of the local governance structures and implementation of social security schemes.

The table below gives a list of the respondents covered in this study and the methodology used to elicit the data:

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<tr>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
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<tr>
<td>In-depth Interviews</td>
<td>VCDC Chairmen / Member</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Block Development Officer</td>
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<td></td>
<td>PD - DRDA</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BTC Secretariat staff looking after planning and/or Rural Development.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>MLC/TLCC</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Heads of Civil Society Organisations</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus Group Interviews</td>
<td>VCDC Members and Monitoring Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus Group Discussions</td>
<td>With community and/or Self Help Groups</td>
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- **Validation Workshop:** Once the first draft report was written after the field work, a validation workshop was conducted with some of the key respondents. The workshop was held at Rowmari, Chirang on the 1st of February, 2019, which was attended by 35 participants. The findings of the study were presented to the group and the participants helped in validate the accuracy of the compiled information and also in drawing up the recommendations. This workshop was well appreciated by the respondents as they felt they got a chance to voice their thoughts and grievances.
Chapter 2: Structure of Governance in BTAD

Based on the desk review and the information gathered in the in-depth interviews and groups interviews, the Governance Structure of BTAD has been drawn. The secondary information available on Governance in BTAD is scanty and scattered and even at the official level documents which could provide precise information on the same could not be accessed. Thus, this chapter has been written collating the information from various sources.

After years of sustained agitation, the Bodoland Movement gave way to signing of the Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) between the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), Bodoland Liberation Tigers (BLT), Government of India (GoI) and the Government of Assam on 10th February, 2003. As per the terms agreed upon under the MoS, the autonomous self-governing body called the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) was created which would be responsible for the governance of a contiguous and specifically demarcated area called the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD). The BTAD included the newly created districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri and in order to provide constitutional protection to the newly created autonomous council, the BTC was created under the provisions of the amended Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. After the signing of the MoS and subsequent amendment to the provisions of the Sixth Schedule, on 31st October, 2003, the Government of Assam adopted the MoS and resolved to extend legislative, executive and financial powers with respect to 40 subjects of the government to the BTC. The BTC became functional on 7th December, 2003, comprising of 12 provisional Executive Members.

1. Physical area under the BTC administration

The physical area under the jurisdiction of the BTC, called the BTAD, is situated in the North-Western part of Assam on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra. The BTAD is made up of four contiguous districts- Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri covering a total area of 8970.00 sq. km. carved out of 8 existing districts of Assam, namely- Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur. Earlier, these 8 districts constituted 35% of the total area of Assam. However, after the formation of the BTC 40% of the total area of these districts came under the administration of the BTC.
The boundary of the BTC in the North is shared by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, in the East is the Panchnoi River of Sonitpur district of Assam; in the South the boundary is shared with parts of Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur districts of Assam; and in the West is the Sankoch River.

The four districts under the administration of BTC are composed of 9 subdivisions in total. At the time of signing of the MoS, the number of villages under BTAD was 3082. An additional 95 villages were under contention and negotiations after the signing of the MoS lead to the inclusion of 13 additional villages to the BTAD, taking the total number of villages to 3095. According to the 2011 census, the total population of BTAD is 31,51,047, of which 33% belong to the Scheduled Tribe (ST) category.

2. Composition of the BTC Legislative Assembly

Under the Sixth Schedule, an Autonomous District Council cannot have more than 30 Members; but as the BTC has four districts under its jurisdiction, a provision has been added to para 2(1) of the Sixth Schedule through a constitutional amendment by virtue of which it can have up to 46 Members in the Council. Currently the BTC has 46 Members in the Council, of which 40 are elected on the basis of adult suffrage. Of the 40 elected Members, 30 Members are reserved for the Scheduled Tribe, 5 are reserved for non-tribal communities and 5 are of open category to all communities. The Governor of Assam nominates 6 Members from among the non-represented communities in the BTAD area, of which at least 2 have to be women. All the Members are known as the
Members of the BTC Legislative Assembly. Both the elected and nominated Members enjoy the same rights and privileges including voting rights.

As 40 Members have to be elected to the BTC Legislative Assembly, 40 constituencies have been created within the BTAD where elections are held according to universal adult suffrage. The term for the Members of the Council is 5 years, unless the Council is dissolved before the completion of the term. The Council sessions are presided over by a Speaker and Deputy Speaker who are elected by the Council through a simple majority.

3. The Executive Council

The executive functions and the overall administration of BTC are vested in the Executive Council. The Executive Council is similar to the Cabinet in the State and the Central Governments. The Executive Council carries out the day to day functions of administration according to the laws framed by the BTC Legislative Assembly. The Members of the Executive Council are called Executive Members (EMs); the EMs are headed by the Chief Executive Member (also referred to as Chief) who is supported by the Deputy Chief Executive Member (also referred to as Dy. Chief). The Chief Executive Member (CEM) is elected by the Council Members. The EMs are appointed by the Governor of Assam on the recommendation of the CEM and each Member of the Executive Council is given the charge of specific portfolios under the BTC. The MoS highlights that the Executive Council can constitute of at the most 12 EMs, a CEM and a Dy. CEM; thus in total the Executive Council of the BTC can consist of 14 Members at the most.

For protocol purposes, the Chief Executive Member and the Dy. Chief Executive Member of the BTC are equivalent to the Cabinet Ministers in status and the Executive Members are equivalent to the Ministers of State of the Government of Assam. The Executive Council is thus responsible for implementation of all the executive orders and policies issued in the name
of the BTC as well as for the implementation of all the development schemes in the four districts under the jurisdiction of the BTC.

4. Administrative structure of BTC

Although the Executive Council is the apex executive body of the BTC, its executive functions are exercised through the Principal Secretary of the BTC. The Principal Secretary is an officer of the rank not below that of Commissioner / Secretary to Government of Assam. The sanctioning powers of the Government of Assam is vested with the Principal Secretary of the BTC and sanctioning powers of a particular department, is conferred on the senior-most officer of the department, who may be designated as Director of the BTC for that department. The Principal Secretary and other officers exercise their powers under the overall guidance and supervision of the BTC.

Under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule, the civil administration of the BTC is placed with two authorities, i.e. the Deputy Commissioner (representing the Govt. of Assam) and the
Executive Council of the BTC. The Inspector General of Police (IGP) for the 4 BTC districts is responsible for the administration of law and order. The Council enjoys legislative and administrative autonomy over the subjects under its jurisdiction but it does not control the district administration.

5. Framework for Local governance in BTC

In the year 1949, when the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution was framed and passed by the Constituent Assembly for the non-scheduled areas of the North East, tribal customs reigned supreme in these areas. Thus the 6th schedule does not create provisions for democratic aspects of local governance at the village level. This is because in the early years of the constitution there was no thought on creation of local governments at the village, block and district levels through the democratic process of elections. The idea of local self-government with two or three tier Panchayat structure germinated only 8 years after the framing of the Sixth Schedule with the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report in 1957. Since, the BTC has been formed within the framework of the Sixth Schedule, the Panchayat system which existed before the signing of the MoS ceased to exist after the Council assumed office. Under the new arrangement, the powers of the Panchayati Raj Institutions would rest with the Council. However, an administrative void was created at the grassroots level after the village panchayats ceased to exist. Thus, in the year 2006, a year after the first BTC election took place; two local bodies were created in the lines of the PRI called the Territorial Constituency Level Coordination Committee (TCLCC) and the Village Council Development Committee (VCDC). The TCLCC would function at the Anchalik Panchayat (AP) level and the VCDC would function at the village level in the lines of the Gram Panchayat (GP). Currently, a two tier local governance structure exists in the BTC in the form of TCLCC and VCDC and the Council subsumes the role of the Zilla Parishad. Currently there are a total of 408 VCDCs which covers 3066 villages in the BTAD.

Local governance at the village level in BTAD takes places through the Panchayat & Rural Development Department of the Council. At the district level, the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) is responsible for the administration of local governance and implementation of development schemes through the Block Development Office at the Block level. The Block Development Office is the most important point of administrative contact between the BTC and the VCDC. Most of the administrative communication by the BTC or different departments relating to orders, guidelines, and sanction of schemes etc. to the VCDC is done through the
Block Development Office. All the development schemes implemented by the VCDC are routed through the Block Development Office.

The TCLCC, on the other hand, plays a monitoring role to the VCDC and works in tandem with the Block Development Office. The TCLCC coordinates directly with the Council or the different departments of the BTC with regard to implementation of development schemes in their respective constituencies.

6. Composition of TCLCC and VCDC

The TCLCC which is a body constituted at the BTC Legislative Assembly constituency level constitutes of a Chairman and Members. All the Chairmen of the VCDCs which fall within the constituency are the Members of the TCLCC. The Chairmen and Members of the TCLCC are not elected through a democratic process. The BTC authority has the discretion to appoint the Chairman and Members of the TCLCC. It is highlighted in the guidelines for the constitution of TCLCC that it should have Members from the ST/SC community if such communities are present under its jurisdiction. One woman Member from the largest community of the area under its jurisdiction should be appointed by the TCLCC. The BDO of the concerned Development Block is a Member Secretary of the TCLCC. The tenure of the TCLCC is co-terminus with that of the BTC; however on public allegation of misappropriation their tenure can be ended by a simple 1/3 majority or outrightly removed by the BTC authority.

Usually a VCDC has jurisdiction of 7 to 10 villages which covers a population in the range of 4000 to 7000. A VCDC is composed of a Chairman and at least one representative Member from each of the revenue villages under it. An officer of the rank of accredited engineer at the Block Development Office is given the position of Member Secretary at the VCDC; however this position has remained on paper and has not been functional. Since the VCDCs are
functioning in an ad-hoc basis, they have not been provided with any permanent staff to carry out the day to day functions. Currently, the Gram Rozgar Sahayak (GRS) who is a village level staff under the MGNREGA has been attached to the VCDC and function as the secretary of the VCDC. They undertake all administrative tasks of the VCDC and act as a link between the VCDC and the Block Development Office.

The Members and the Chairman of the VCDC are not elected through a democratic process by the public; instead they are selected by the BTC authority. Since the 1st BTC elections held in 2005, the Bodoland People’s Front (BPF) has been consistently able to gain majority and form governments under the leadership of Shri Hagrama Mohilari; hence the VCDC Members have so far been appointed by the BTC from among the cadres of the BPF. Since the Members of the VCDC are nominated by the BTC, their term is co-terminus with that of the BTC i.e. 5 years. However, on serious public allegation of moral turpitude or misappropriation of public money, the Chairman or any Member can be removed by a simple 1/3 majority opinion of the Members or can be out rightly removed by the BTC authority.

7. Roles and responsibilities of VCDC

One of the fundamental challenges of local governance in BTAD is that the roles and responsibilities of the VCDC are not defined clearly. There is lack of detailed guidelines regarding the roles and responsibilities of the VCDC. The guideline for constitution of VCDC under BTAD only states that-

“The body of VCDC will assist in rural administration and upgrading of vital statistics, assist in preparation of job cards and keep safe custody of MGNREGA records, preparation and updating of BPL list and many other works that may be assigned by the BTC authority in due course of time”

As vague as the above statement might be, it fails to provide any description of the functions of the VCDC. However, through interactions with VCDC Members and Chairmen this study found out that the VCDC currently performs the following functions-

1. Facilitate development planning of villages under the VCDC through the GPDP exercise.
2. Execute development schemes such as MGNREGA and PMAY-G at the village level
3. Identify beneficiaries through gram sabhas for the National Social Assistance Scheme (NSAP)
4. Undertake surveys and data collection to identify BPL households and development gaps in the area

5. Identify beneficiaries for subsidized or free material under different schemes provided by line departments of the BTC administration
Local governance is made up of political and institutional processes through which decisions are taken and implemented at the local or village level. Under the concept of local governance, the people at the grassroots are provided with ownership of their resources, undertake decisions (including development planning) at the local level and are responsible for the implementation of the decisions. Such a framework under which the people at the village level govern themselves either directly or through representatives is believed to be pivotal for preservation of traditional community institutions at the local level, equitable development and for the government services to reach the most underprivileged households.

As in other parts of the country, the PRI system existed in Assam including the geographical area which now constitutes the BTAD. However, after the signing of the MoS between the BLT, ABSU, the Government of India and the Government of Assam, the PRI system ceased to exist in BTAD areas under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Under the Sixth Schedule, which covers the tribal areas of North Eastern states of India, autonomy is provided to tribal District Councils and Regional Councils to govern their own affairs and safeguard their land rights through their customary laws. The prime objective of the Sixth Schedule is to empower the local tribal councils to protect their customs, traditions and land rights, rather than with the prime objective to facilitate ‘development’ at the local level. To achieve this objective, the District Councils can establish Village Councils which can govern and provide justice according to customary laws at the village level. Thus, the PRI system has not been integrated into the Sixth Schedule areas with the caution that it might infringe into the functions of the Village Councils.

Although the BTC was constituted under the Sixth Schedule and the functions of the PRI was subsumed by the Council, customary laws and traditional village level institutions were largely no longer practiced by the Bodo community. Moreover, the area under the BTAD is much more communally diverse compared to other Scheduled areas of the North East and a single set of customary laws for local governance through Village Council was not seen to be feasible. Thereby, after the formation of the BTC as the PRI system ceased to exist in BTAD and as there were no customary institutions to function at the village level, a void was created with respect to local governance.
Thus, in order to fill the gap and facilitate local governance, the VCDCs and TCLCCs were created at the Gaon Panchayat and Anchalik Panchayat levels respectively in 2006. The newly created institutions were however not under the provisions of the PRI system as they ceased to exist under the Sixth Schedule; neither were they functional according to the customary laws. After letting the VCDCs and TCLCCs function for many years on an ad hoc basis, the BTC Legislative Assembly passed the ‘Bodoland Village Council Bill’ to create statutory local governance institutions at the village level in 2012. However, the Bill is yet to be approved by the Governor of Assam and the VCDCs and TCLCCs are yet to find a clear framework to function under. Hence, currently the local governance structure in BTAD is not clearly defined with specific objectives, responsibilities and functions. By engaging with different stakeholders of grassroots governance, the study has been able to find out the current functional structure of grassroots governance in BTAD, which has been described in this chapter.

Stakeholders at all levels were open and provided meaningful insights on the functional governance and the role of VCDC’s in implementation of schemes in the BTAD. During the data collection process in Chirang and Kokrajhar districts, important stakeholders such as- 1) VCDC Chairman/Members, 2) Council Member, 3) civil society heads, 4) women’s groups, 5) Community Monitoring Committee members and 6) Government and Council officials were interviewed. Most of them were very cooperative and candid in their sharing and the interest and willingness to improve the system was apparent at all levels. The data that was gathered from the field has been collated and analyzed and the key observations and findings have been drawn up in this chapter.

1. Constitution of VCDCs

The process through which an administrative or government body is constituted has a direct impact on the nature of its accountability and functions. As it had been discussed in the earlier chapter, the Chairmen and Members of the VCDCs are not elected by the public through an electoral process as is the case under the PRI system. The BTC authority has the prerogative to appoint or select the Chairmen and Members of all the VCDCs in BTAD. The current practice is that the party which enjoys majority in the Council and forms the BTC government appoints the VCDC Chairmen and Members from among the active party cadres at the Primary level. Usually the Chairman who is regarded as the guardian of the VCDC is selected first and then in consultation with the Chairman the other Members of the VCDC are selected.
Since the Bodoland People’s Front (BPF) have won the last 3 terms in the BTC since 2005, they have been influential in the appointment of the VCDC Chairmen and Members. The study found that the important stakeholders that have been involved in the selection process of the VCDC Chairmen are- a) Party Primary Committee, b) Party Block Committee, c) Respective MCLA (if from the same party), and c) Village public. It was learnt that the Block Committee plays a very important role in the selection of the VCDC Chairmen and Members.

The process which has mostly been followed is that nominations are called from among the party cadres at the Primary level. When there are more than one nominations, a Gram Sabha is called to generate consensus on the suitable candidate for the post of Chairman. However, most times no consensus is generated in the Gram Sabha and it is then that the stakeholders from the party decide on a particular candidate to be the Chairman. At this stage, in order to resolve the conflict among the aspiring party cadres, higher authority within the party such as MCLA and District Level Committee are involved. After the Chairman is selected and appointed by the BTC authority, he/she is then announced to the public.

Due to this party-based selection process of the VCDC Chairmen which is not very transparent, the accountability of the Chairmen and the Members can tilt towards the party and its cadres, rather than to the general public. Unlike elections, where one has to garner majority votes to be re-elected or be elected in the first place, here a Chairman can continue to be in office even without majority support of the public. This can result in biases in the allocation of government development schemes in favour of the households with party affiliation. On the other hand, since the Chairmen of the VCDCs
themselves are at the mercy of the BTC authority, they are uncertain of their future as they might be removed from office even if they enjoy the popular support of the people.

2. Roles and responsibilities of VCDC

One of the major challenges with regard to local governance in BTAD is that there are no guidelines which clearly highlight the roles and responsibilities of the TCLCC and the VCDC. It was found that even the VCDC Chairmen and Members are not clear about their roles and responsibilities as they have not been provided with any relevant documents by the BTC administration. The guideline for constitution of VCDC only highlights that the VCDCs- ‘will assist in rural administration… and many other works that may be assigned by the BTC authority in due course of time’.

Currently, instead of being an institution for local governance, the VCDCs have been assigned the role of a last mile service delivery institution of the BTC administration. The VCDCs act as an extension of the Panchayat & Rural Development (P&RD) Department and execute the development schemes implemented through the DRDA at the village level. The VCDCs currently execute 3 Central Government schemes- a) MGNREGA, b) PMAY-G, and c) National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP). Many of the VCDCs however reported during the study that they were not provided with any MGNREGA work during the period 2016-2018. Along with the execution of the mentioned schemes, the VCDCs also act as the village level extension of the line departments. Often the departments tap into the VCDC if they have to distribute subsidized goods to the public according to certain criteria. The departments either provide the goods directly to the VCDCs to be distributed among the public according to the exclusion/inclusion criteria or ask the VCDCs to provide beneficiary list to the departments. Departments such as Agriculture and Handloom and Textiles have been making use of the VCDCs in this regard. Another role that the VCDCs play is that of collection of household and area level data to identify the potential beneficiaries of the government schemes and development needs of the area under the jurisdiction of the VCDC.

Apart from implementation of development schemes assigned to them, the VCDC also undertake development planning through the Village Council Development Plan (VCDP) exercise once every year. During this exercise 3 Gram Sabhas are to be facilitated by the VCDCs to discuss the development needs of the area and undertake development planning. However, as the practice on the ground goes, the Gram Sabhas are mostly procedural and the discussions are restricted to projects related to MGNREGA.
3. Local level development planning in BTAD

Local governance stands for the empowerment of people at the village level to govern their own affairs and decide their own development priorities. Thus identification of key development challenges in the area and planning for their solution based on available resources happen to be one of the core functions of a local government. Under the PRI system, the Gram Sabha ought to be at the center of the development planning process. The Gram Sabha constitutes all the residents under the Gram Panchayat who are above 18 years of age and whose names are included in the electoral rolls of the Gram Panchayat. As the VCDCs are modeled on the Gram Panchayats under the PRI system, Gram Sabhas ought to be an integral part of the development planning process in areas under their jurisdiction.

Under the PRI system, it is recommended for convenience that the Gram Sabha be held at least 4 times in a year. It was known through the study that over the last few years the Gram Sabhas are being held more regularly. This has been the result of the introduction of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) campaign by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj. Through the GPDP process the Gram Panchayats have to undertake comprehensive planning for economic development and social justice in their respective GPs for the utilization of the 14th Finance Commission (FFC) fund. The GPDP campaign was initiated in Assam in 2015-16 and has been undertaken by the GPs since. Likewise, the GPDP exercise is facilitated by the VCDCs in BTAD and is known as the Village Council Development Plan (VCDP). However, the VCDCs do not receive the 14th Finance Commission fund, for the utilization of which this exercise is primarily carried out. Through this exercise the VCDCs can undertake development planning in relation to the 29 subjects whose powers have been devolved to the PRI under the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. According to the guidelines, 3 Gram Sabhas are to be held during the GPDP exercise, during which specific activities are to be taken up by the VCDCs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities taken up by VCDCs in different stages of VCDP process</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities to be taken up</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Data validation of Mission Antodaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Review current activities and fund utilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Approval of Annual Plan of FFC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities taken up on ground</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Selection of beneficiaries for the Old Age Pension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- FFC is not applicable to VCDCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Gram Sabha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Presentation of schemes and fund of line departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Presentation of poverty reduction plan by SHGs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Prioritization of Schemes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Segregation of the GPDP plan according to different programmes such as MGNREGA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Approval of annual plan by the Gram Sabha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Consolidation of schemes to be taken up under MGNREGA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Approval of annual plan by the Gram Sabha</td>
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With regard to the VCDP exercise, it was shared by the VCDC Chairmen and Members that currently the activities are being taken up for the sake of it as the plans are not implemented or the necessary resources are not provided to the VCDCs for their implementation. They shared that the expectations of the people are raised due to annual planning exercises as different projects are taken up under various government schemes. It was shared that the schemes taken up in the earlier annual plans were not implemented as the schemes were not sanctioned by the higher authority. So, the faith of the people and that of the VCDC on the planning process such as VCDP has waned and the participation of people in such a process has reduced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Involvement of Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| VCDC         | • They facilitates the entire process  
               • The exercise is taken up by the VCDCs in a ritualistic manner and not in the spirit of it  
               • The schemes are selected by the VCDC from the 5 year plan created by them in 2015-16  
               • Planning is concentrated only for MGNREGA in most of the VCDCs and other problems of the village are not discussed  
               • Adequate allowance / budget is not provided to the VCDCs to facilitate the VCDP exercise |
| General Public | • The knowledge of the public about the VCDP process and its role in village development is lacking  
                   • The active participation of the public during the planning process and Gram Sabhas in minimal |
| Women’s groups such as SHG’s | • Participation of men during the Gram Sabhas is very low  
• Even if the public attend the Gram Sabhas, their actual participation during the discussions is very low  
• SHGs and women’s federations have been provided with larger responsibility in village development planning in VCDP process of 2018-19  
• Participation of SHG members constitute the largest share of all participants in the Gram Sabha  
• They are used as platforms to identify potential beneficiaries under government schemes and for preparation of village poverty reduction plan  
• However, their actual participation in the Gram Sabhas is still low  
• It is unclear how their Poverty Reduction Plan is going to be implemented |
|---|---|
| Government line departments | • Although the VCDP process is supposed to converge all the line departments related to the 29 subjects under the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution, the participation from the line departments is very low.  
• Hardly a few line departments are represented at the Gram Sabhas  
• Although the schemes are verbally shared at the Gram Sabhas by the participating representatives, no written list of schemes is shared with the public  
• The VCDCs are unaware of any mechanism through which the implementation of plans can be followed up with the line departments |
| Civil Society and NGOs | • There is a scope to involve NGOs for mobilization of community and preparation of poverty reduction plan according to the guidelines  
• Some NGOs have been able to participate in the VCDP process and aid in the preparation of poverty reduction plans and Individual Beneficiary Scheme under MGNREGA  
• However, openness to engage with the NGOs in VCDP process has not been seen at the end of the VCDCs |
Although since 2015-16 clearer guidelines and processes has brought about frequent engagement of the public in the planning process; it is showing signs of turning ritualistic rather than actual improvements in grassroots level development planning and implementation.

4. Implementation of development schemes through VCDC

As had been discussed earlier, three rural development and social protection schemes are implemented through the VCDCs; they are- MGNREGA, PMAY-G and NSAP. These are the schemes which are implemented by the PRI system

4.1. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

The Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA) was notified on September 7, 2005. This act provides every rural household with the right to have at least 100 days of unskilled work in their immediate vicinity i.e. GP or block. It is a demand driven programme where the households have to self-select themselves and apply for job cards; on receiving a job card the adult members (18-60 years) of a household can demand for work. Work has to be provided within 15 days of the submission of work application to the VCDC or GP, and if work is not provided within 15 days of application, unemployment allowance at the rate not less than 1/4th of the wage rate is to be provided to the household for first 30 days. The works to be taken up under MGNREGA has to be planned and prioritized by the Gram Sabha which is to be facilitated by the VCDC or GP. The current wage rate under MGNREGA in Assam is Rs. 189/worker/day.

In the BTAD, MGNREGA is implemented on ground through the VCDCs with assistance from the Gram Rozgar Sahayak (GRS). It has been found in the study that the VCDCs have had to dedicate most of their time and effort towards the planning and implementation of MGNREGA. To understand the on ground role played by the VCDCs in the implementation of MGNREGA, the entire process has been divided into three parts i.e. planning, approval/sanction and implementation of the planned works. The role of the VCDCs and the observed gaps in the implementation of MGNREGA in BTAD has been highlighted below-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Role of VCDC</th>
<th>Observed gaps on ground</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Plan for schemes through Gram Sabha</td>
<td>1. Backlog of already planned or incomplete works</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Planning:
The planning and prioritization of work to be taken up under MGNREGA is to be done by the Gram Sabha and has to be facilitated by the VCDCs. However, it was observed that the planning process has weakened and both the people and VCDC office bearers are not interested to undertake new plans as no work under MGNREGA had been sanctioned in most of the VCDCs covered in the study in the year 2016-17 and 2017-18. The VCDC Chairmen shared that work had been halted in many Development Blocks due to ‘over expenditure’, but they do not know what it means and how it occurred as the job card holders had not even been provided with full employment. On being asked the reason for halting MGNREGA work, a Block Development Officer (BDO) in Chirang district explained that since there was a budget cap of Rs. 10 crores per year per block and MGNREGA work in many Development Blocks had been halted on reaching the permissible expenditure.
With regard to the planning process, the village people who were part of the study shared that although the works to be taken up are planned and prioritized in the Gram Sabha, when the works are finally approved, they end up being very different to the original plan approved by the Gram Sabha. Thus they suspect that the before submitting the plan to the Development Block Office, the VCDCs change them in a manner which suits them. However, on this, the VCDC Chairmen shared that even though they submit the plan to the Block office, the plan get changed as most of the plans submitted by them do not qualify under the technical specification according to the guidelines. This illustrates that there is a lack of understanding of the technical guidelines by the VCDC office bearers.

**Approval:**
The VCDCs do not have any role in the approval process of the MGNREGA plans. The MGNREGA plans submitted by the VCDCs are vetted at the Block level and sent to the DRDA, who in turn forwards the consolidated plans to the District Programme Committee (DPC) which is chaired by the Principal Secretary of BTC in all the 4 districts of BTAD. After the plans are approved at the district level the State Government prepares a state plan and budget and shares it with the Central Government for allocation of budget.

As highlighted earlier, no funds had been released to carry out MGNREGA in many BTAD Blocks in the year 2016-17 and 2017-18. This has impacted both the planning process and the subsequent implementation of MGNREGA work as the workers shared that they had lost trust that they will be paid for their work under MGNREGA.

**Implementation:**
When the workers submit application for work to the VCDCs, they are supposed to provide the workers with employment within 15 days of application. However, as no work had been sanctioned in many of the VCDCs during 2016 to 2018, minimal employment could be provided to the workers. The VCDC Chairmen/Members and the public stated that since 2015, not even 50 days of annual employment has been provided to them, although it is a right under MGNREGA to receive at least 100 days of employment per year. The workers shared that they have not been provided even with unemployment allowance which they are supposed to get when no work is provided within 15 days of work application.

Both the VCDC Chairmen and workers shared that the wage rate of Rs. 189/day/worker is too low and so the workers do not participate in carrying out the work fully. The VCDC Chairmen
shared that the workers do not work for the entire duration needed to complete the work, and so the work taken up under MGNREGA remain unsuccessful. In which case, in order to complete the works the VCDCs hire tractors and excavators and pays them by taking a share of the wages from the workers. Also, as some of the work require land filling and tractors have to be used going against the guidelines of MGNREGA, the VCDC Chairmen and workers shared that they get into an understanding that the workers will keep a portion of the wage and give the rest to the VCDCs to cover the cost of the tractor. Although both the VCDC Chairmen and workers feel that such kind of understanding is necessary to get some important work done in the village, it creates room for corrupt practices and misappropriation of fund by the VCDCs.

4.2. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana- Gramin (PMAY-G)

In the year the 2016, the Central Government restructured the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) into the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana- Gramin (PMAY-G) with the intention to provide housing to all homeless and people living in kucha or dilapidated houses by 2022. Eligible beneficiaries under PMAY (G) includes all the houseless and households living in zero, one or two room kucha houses as per Socio-Economic Cast Census (SECC) - 2011 data, subject to the exclusion process. In Assam, the beneficiaries of the scheme receive Rs. 1.30 lakhs through cash transfer in different installments to build a house of 25 sq. meters in area, which they have to complete within a period of 1 year.

With regard to PMAY-G, the VCDCs mainly play the role of a facilitator in validation of the priority list of beneficiaries, which had been prepared based on the SECC – 2011 data. Apart from identification of beneficiaries through the Gram Sabha, the VCDCs have to facilitate the process of house construction and assist the beneficiaries in case they face difficulty in house construction. The roles played by the VCDC with regard to PMAY-G and the gaps observed on the ground have been highlighted bellow-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification of beneficiaries</th>
<th>Role of VCDC</th>
<th>Gaps observed on ground</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The priority list is prepared based on the SECC-2011 and shared with VCDCs</td>
<td>1. The community people allege that the VCDCs have entered unqualified households to the priority list and left out deserving households</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Gram Sabha updates the list based on ground reality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30
1. The final approval is provided to the priority list by a competent higher authority and not the VCDC
2. The list is shared with VCDC to be publicized

3. VCDCs share the final priority list with Dev. Block office

2. The community people allege that some households have got houses under both IAY and PMAY-G

1. The study came across cases where the beneficiaries were asked for bribes for house construction

1. The VCDCs have to facilitate the construction of houses and assist the beneficiaries

Identification of beneficiaries:

The beneficiaries of PMAY-G are selected by the P&RD department at the Center based on their housing status, such as houseless, living in zero, one or two room kucha houses based on the SECC-2011 data, in that order of priority based on the exclusion criteria. At this stage, the VCDCs and the Gram Sabhas play an important role of ground truthing the priority list prepared based on the SECC-2011.

It was found in the study that Gram Sabha were held to discusses the priority list of beneficiaries and the names of households which do not qualify under the criteria were deleted and deserving households which had been left were added to the priority list and shared with the Dev. Block Office. However, at this stage, most of the common people who had participated in the study shared that during this process some of the VCDCs had added unqualified households to the list whereas some of the deserving households were left out. However, it was also observed during the study that even the common people were not aware about all the criteria through which households are included or excluded in the priority list. The community people also alleged that some of the households have been provided with houses under both IAY earlier and now under PMAY-G.
Approval:
After the Gram Sabha prepares the priority lists under different categories such as SC/ST, Minority, General etc., they share the list with the Development Block Office for approval. The final priority list is approved at the district level after grievance redressal and the VCDCs have no role in the final approval process.

Implementation:
To ensure smooth and effective implementation of PMAY-G, the VCDCs are supposed to assist the beneficiary households in construction by connecting them with material suppliers and masons. The VCDCs are supposed to monitor the progress of house construction and help the households if they are not able to progress with the construction activities.

However, the VCDC Chairmen and Members shared that they are not able to support the beneficiary households as they do not have adequate staff in the VCDCs. In a particular VCDC in Kokrajhar district, it was found that the VCDC takes complete responsibility for households who are not able to progress with house construction and have been able to complete construction of most of the houses. The beneficiary households withdraw the money transferred to them for house construction and give it to the VCDC and the VCDC takes complete responsibility of construction and completion of the house. This particular VCDC has completed one of the highest numbers of house constructions under PMAY-G in Kokrajhar district. During the implementation, one of the gaps that came across was the demand for bribe for house construction by some of the VCDCs. Some of the community people shared that they had been asked for as much as Rs. 30,000 to receive housing under PMAY-G. This has been happening because the community is not aware that the category-wise priority list of beneficiaries cannot be bypassed by the VCDCs and even if they do not pay any bribe, the VCDCs have to compulsorily construct houses for households whose names are in the priority list.

4.3. Implementation of schemes related to women and children:
In our communities, women and children are vulnerable to various health, social and economic hazards which have a detrimental impact on their wellbeing. Acknowledging this fact, both the Central and the State governments of India have been implementing different schemes to try and insulate the women and children from such vulnerabilities. Field work during the study showed that out of the different government initiatives for women and children, three have the broadest outreach on ground; they are- a) Reproductive and child care under National Rural
Health Mission (NRHM), b) Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), and c) National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM). The schemes related to women and children are implemented by the respective departments through dedicated outreach workers and not through the local governance institutions such as the VCDC. The VCDC Chairmen and Members shared that although they have been told that they can undertake planning related to different subjects, including women and child welfare, they are unaware of clear guidelines to coordinate with line departments which implement schemes related to women and children. On the role of VCDC in women and child welfare, one of the VCDC Chairmen said, “We can undertake planning for women and child welfare such as the need for ICDS centers; however we cannot get the work done ourselves or monitor their implementation”.

With regard to the current state of implementation of schemes related to women and children, the interactions with community, Civil Society members and VCDC office bearers reflect the following:

- Implementation and monitoring of schemes and initiatives related to women and children are currently not under the purview of the VCDCs. The VCDCs can identify need to construct outreach centers such as ICDS centers similar to the Gram Panchayats, but since they do not have access to Finance Commission funds, they cannot undertake the same. The extension workers under women and child welfare schemes such as Anganvadi and Asha workers do not report or coordinate with the VCDCs. It was shared by the community people that issues and schemes related to women and children are rarely discussed in the Gram Sabhas.

- On implementation of ICDS, the community people and VCDC office bearers had to say that there are various gaps, such as- dilapidated ICDS centers, absenteeism of Anganvadi workers, lack of adequate food supplies and their sub-standard quality. The community people in most of the VCDCs complained that the Anganvadi workers do not turn up at the centers to provide pre-school education at the centers. As a result, the mid-day meals are also not provided to the children. In some of the VCDCs it was found that the Anganvadi workers had got married and move to a different village, due to which they do not turn up at the ICDS centers. The community people shared that instead of cooking mid-day meals, the Anganvadi workers distribute the supplies directly to the households. The beneficiaries
of the scheme shared that the food supplies distributed to them is minimal and even the quality of food supplies is poor.

- With regard to schemes related to women such as maternal health, the community people shared that the Asha workers do their work and assist the pregnant women for checkups and institutional deliveries. However, in some VCDCs the community people complained that the Asha workers are not proactive and instead they have to be called to assist the pregnant women for Ante-Natal Checkups (ANCs) and deliveries. The study found that since the incentives for Asha workers are tied directly to the services they provide successfully, it drives them to carry out their work in most places.

5. Participation of women in grassroots governance in BTAD

On the role of women in local governance, a VCDC Chairman from Chirang district said, “If there is good representation of women in the VCDC, then the women in the community find it convenient to share their problems and needs with the women Members and get them discussed in the VCDC or in the Gram Sabha”. Very true to this statement, the community women shared that if women are represented in the VCDCs as Chairmen or Members they find it much more convenient to share the problems and needs of women and children with the VCDC. The women who were part of the study also shared that as women, they know the problems and needs of the households better than the men, and thus their voices should be represented in the VCDC and the Gram Sabha. In the study, although the current level of participation of women in local governance in BTAD is not very active, there are some very positive examples of women’s participation and signs of increasing women’s participation in local governance. The key findings of the study on the current status of women’s participation in local governance in BTAD are-

- **Representation of women in VCDCs**: VCDC Chairmen shared that 30% of the Members in a VCDC has to be women as opposed to 50% reservation for women in Assam under the PRI system. However, on the ground it was found that many of the VCDCs did not have 30% representation of women among its Members. In one such VCDC, the community women shared that out of 10 Members, 2 women Members had been selected, but since one of them had left the membership only one woman Member is currently part of the VCDC. Since there is very low representation of women in the VCDCs, the women Members shared that they do not get any space in VCDC meetings to voice their opinions.
Four women headed (Chairman) VCDCs were covered in the study, out of which, in one particular VCDC in Chirang district, the community provided very positive feedback on the performance of the Chairman (actually a Chairwoman). They shared that the woman head took charge only around mid-2018, but since then she has managed to stop the other VCDC Members from taking any money from the PMAY-G beneficiaries and she visits the beneficiaries herself along with the GRS.

- Women’s participation in Gram Sabhas: The study found that the Gram Sabhas are being held more frequently in recent years in BTAD after the introduction of the VCDP exercise. Along with that, the attendance of women in Gram Sabhas has increased, which was observed by the researchers in one of the Gram Sabhas which was attended as a part of the study. A VCDC Chairman stated that these days 95% of the attendees in the Gram Sabhas are women. However, both the VCDC office bearers and the women themselves observed that when it comes to active participation in Gram Sabha proceedings, the women lag behind. During the two Gram Sabhas which were attended as a part of the study, it was found that no women came forward to voice their needs and opinions.

- Participation of SHGs in local development planning: According to guidelines, women’s institutions such as SHGs and federations are supposed to play an active role in the formulation of Village Council Development Plans. In the VCDCs covered in the study, starting from this year, the SHGs and women’s federations part of the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) have been involved in the development of village level poverty reduction plans. The SHGs are also supposed to be actively involved in the village level planning of schemes such as MGNREGA. The SHGs are provided with templates which they can use to identify: a) potential beneficiaries under different government schemes, b) individual infrastructural needs, and c) community infrastructural needs. During interactions with the SHG members who were part of the process, it was found that the women could identify the potential beneficiaries under schemes such as NSAP. However, the women were not clear about how they should plan for the individual and community infrastructural needs. The women shared that they have been asked to only fill up the SHG planning forms and submit them to the VCDC office. No discussion took place during the Gram Sabhas on the consolidated poverty reduction plans submitted by the SHGs; also the women were not provided the scope to participate in work planning for MGNREGA.
Benefit of having women in VCDC: Respondents across all levels strongly agreed to the fact that the women have a very important role to play in VCDCs and there is a great need for women Members. The key benefits identified by most are:

- Women Members play an important role in hearing the voices and views of the women of the villages. The women find it difficult to express their views to the male Members and so having women Members in the VCDC makes it more accessible to the women of the community.

- Women VCDC Members will be able to express the needs of women and children better at the Gram Sabha and other planning meetings.

- The women take care of the family and understand the needs of the family and the village better and can bring these perspectives into the VCDC.

- It was also stated by a few that the men think about big things and big goals- but women think about small things and the need of the family first- the men think about roads, house etc., but women think about health, education and needs of the children and home. Hence, these can improve if there are women Members.

Chapter 4:
Recommendations and Conclusion

During the study, along with discussion on the functioning of the local governance institutions in BTAD and their challenges, the different stakeholders such as VCDC and TCLCC office bearers, the general public, government & council officials, MCLA and the Civil Society members were asked to provide recommendations to make local governance in BTAD more vibrant and effective. Based on their responses, the most recurrent recommendations have been highlighted below-

1. Legal and institutional strengthening of VCDCs: Currently, the VCDC and the TCLCC are ad hoc local governance institutions. Under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule, the District Councils can constitute Village Councils at the local level, which needs approval from the Governor of the State. With the intention to turn the VCDCs into statutory bodies, in the year 2012, the BTC Legislative Assembly had passed the ‘Bodoland Village Council Bill’. The bill would create statutory village councils which would facilitate local governance in BTAD. However, the bill is yet to be approved by the Governor of Assam and the VCDCs and TCLCCs
continue to function on an ad hoc basis with no legal recognition. Due to this, no elections can be held for the formation of local government in BTAD and the roles and responsibilities of the VCDCs and TCLCCs remain unclear, which has turned them into weak local governance institutions.

In this light, all of the different stakeholders involved in providing their inputs for the study have stated that the local governance institutions in BTAD should be strengthened by turning them into statutory intuitions. For this, the Governor of Assam has to provide his/her approval to the ‘Bodoland Village Council Bill, 2012’ which is still pending or any other subsequent bill which seeks to strengthen the local governance institutions i.e. the VCDCs and TCLCCs in BTAD.

“As of today, the VCDC is just like an intermediary to deliver the schemes rather than a ‘governing’ body to engage in local level governance”- said a Civil Society member from Kokrajhar.

2. Election of VCDC/TCLCC Chairmen and Members through democratic means: The VCDC and TCLCC Chairmen and Members are selected by the BTC authority, which gives an indirect authority to the political party with majority to select their cadres as office bearers of VCDC and TCLCC. This process of selection makes the office bearers of local governance institutions in BTAD accountable to their party and party leadership rather than the people. The public and members of the civil society are of the opinion that this has led to corrupt practices in some VCDCs and biased allocation of government welfare schemes in favour of households which are affiliated to the party. On the other hand VCDC Chairmen and Members have shared that they are constantly uncertain about their tenure as they are not elected and the party leadership can remove them at any moment if they cannot fulfill party interests.

Thus, all the stakeholders who had participated in the study, including the VCDC Chairmen and Members unanimously were of the opinion that elections should be held to form local governments at the local level. All the stakeholders believe that if elections are held, the VCDCs will have more legitimacy among the public, have a fixed tenure, enhanced roles and responsibilities, and more access to resources. It is believed by everyone that if elections are held in BTAD similar to the Panchayat elections, the VCDCs will be more accountable to the people and will be able to serve the needy more effectively.
“If elections are held there are fixed terms; whereas now as we are selected, we do not have a fixed term. We do not have the power to even last the full term and are always at the mercy of the BTC authority” - male VCDC Chairman, Chirang District

3. Clear functions of grassroots institutions such as VCDCs and TCLCCs: Currently, as the situation stands, the powers and functions of the VCDC / TCLCC and the roles and responsibilities of the office bearers of these institutions are at best, ambiguous. Instead of taking on the role of local governance, the VCDCs currently act as a village level extension center for the BTC government and the different departments. The VCDC / TCLCC Chairmen and Members do not have any manual or document which clearly describes their roles and responsibilities. The VCDC office bearers shared that due to this ambiguity, they are not able undertake proper development planning for their areas as they do not know which departments/subjects they can undertake local planning for.

The stakeholders felt that along with making the VCDC a statutory institution, its powers and functions should be clearly highlighted so that the office bearers can execute their responsibilities effectively. The VCDC Chairmen suggested that a proper manual on their roles and responsibilities should be made and shared with them when they assume office.

“If a VCDC is to function effectively, we should be given the powers related to all the departments which are under BTC; the work that is related to area development, should be given to us. Only then we will be able to develop our area. Just by working on MGNREGA we cannot develop our area” - VCDC Chairman, Kokrajhar District

4. Devolution of financial powers to VCDC/TCLCC: For the local governments to function effectively, they should be empowered, financially. The local governments should have their own resource envelope which they should be able to utilize for local development with the consent of the public. The VCDCs are not provided with any financial resources which they can allocate to address the priority development needs of their respective areas. In BTAD, under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule, the financial resources such as Central and State Finance Commission funds which ought to flow to the local governments in Non-Scheduled areas is utilized by the Council. The study found that the VCDCs do not have any financial provisions to even take care of their bare minimum operational needs.
Thus, the VCDC office bearers and all other stakeholders were of the view that the VCDCs should be provided with funds - firstly, to cover their office expenses and then also to undertake development work in their area without having to wait for the sanction of a line department or the BTC administration.

“Financial powers should be provided to the VCDC. For example, if a bridge is broken in a village and just a few tractors of land filling can do the work, but since they have to depend on the BTC for funds, they cannot do that. Instead they have to keep waiting for the schemes to be sanctioned by the BTC” –Civil society member, Kokrajhar

5. Provisions for adequate infrastructure and staff for the VCDC/TCLCC: Currently, the VCDCs and the TCLCCs are infrastructure strapped and severely short of human resource. Most of the VCDCs covered in this study in Kokrajhar district did not even have an office. The VCDCs in both Chirang and Kokrajhar which did have offices were short of very basic infrastructure such as tables, chairs, toilet facilities, electricity connection etc. Except for one VCDC which used their personal computers, none of the other VCDCs covered under the study had computers with internet connection to undertake office work. Moreover, apart from the Gram Rozgar Sahayak (GRS), the VCDCs do not any staff to execute administrative work. The government officials who participated in the study too were of the opinion that the VCDCs are not able to execute their work due to shortage of dedicated staff as a result of which the implementation of development schemes gets stuck.

The stakeholders who participated in the study felt that the infrastructural and staff requirements of the VCDCs should be fulfilled which will have a positive influence on their work. The Civil Society members and Government officials recommended that each of the VCDCs should have computers with internet connectivity, as the VCDCs have to regularly upload data related to implementation of development schemes online and check for project sanctions.

“There is no legal electricity connection in our office because we do not have money to pay for it. We have to steal electricity by hooking into the electricity line - now tell me if I am a thief or is the government a thief?” –male VCDC Chairman, Chirang District

6. Financial incentives for VCDC Chairmen and Members: The VCDC Chairman and Members are not provided with any financial incentives or salary by the BTC or the Assam Government and yet they are expected to give their time to carry out their roles and
responsibilities. One of the Project Directors of DRDA who was interviewed shared that currently the VCDC Chairmen and Members cannot be held responsible to carry out their work as they are not paid any incentive. Even, the VCDC Chairmen shared that they cannot allocate tasks to the Members as they are not provided with any salary and have to take care of their own livelihood. Thus, this leads to lack of accountability among the VCDC Chairmen and the Members and even the government officials cannot hold them responsible for not executing their responsibilities as no incentives are provided.

Thus, provision for financial remuneration for the VCDC Chairmen and Members was a recurrent theme which emerged during the course of this study. All the stakeholders who participated in the study were of the view that VCDC Member and Chairmen should be paid salaries for carrying out their responsibilities. The VCDC Chairmen and Members have to attend different meetings and undertake work site visits for which they incur travel costs, for which it was recommended by the stakeholders that the Chairmen and Members should be paid travel allowances. The stakeholders believed that if financial remuneration is provided to the VCDC office bearers their level of motivation would rise and there will be a reduction in corruption at the local level.

“And then you call us corrupt. How can we help but be corrupt when nothing at all is provided to us to function and yet we are expected to do all this work? For example, two or three days before the launch of any scheme, suddenly banners arrive at our office with orders to put it up all over for the information of the public. But do these banners have legs? Can they go and fix themselves up on trees and walls? How am I expected to go and put up all these banners without even giving me a single nail? I have to hire people and send them on bikes to put them up, they have to be paid, petrol has to be put in their bikes….How am I expected to manage all this? If there are no funds, I will have to manage from somewhere if I have to do the work. Then, you call us corrupt” - VCDC Chairman, Chirang

7. Enhance transparency and people’s participation in local governance in BTAD:
Community members and the civil society members who participated in the study shared that the functioning of some of the VCDCs is not transparent. The common people shared that VCDCs lack transparency in different aspects such as selection of VCDC Chairmen and Members, planning and prioritization of MGNREGA work, allocation of PMAY houses, selection of beneficiaries for subsidized goods etc. The common people and civil society
members also shared that participation of people in development planning undertaken through the Gram Sabha is poor. The people attend the Gram Sabhas but their active participation by taking part in the discussions and planning exercise is weak due to lack of awareness.

The Civil Society members felt that in order to achieve enhanced transparency and people’s participation in local governance in BTAD, the capacity and awareness of community will have to be enhanced. Currently, the SHGs are being actively involved in grassroots planning by the government which is a positive step. However, their participation in Gram Sabhas was seen to be low, which needs to be increased through effective trainings and capacity building. NGOs can play an active role in enhancing transparency and people’s participation in local governance by building awareness and people’s capacities to participate in local planning. The VCDC office bearers should also be encouraged to actively involve the community and be transparent in their functioning.

“They take the bare minimum attendance and take up the works under MGNREGA which suits them and then proclaim that they have the support of the people through the Gram Sabha”- said a villager during an FGD in Chirang District

8. Women’s participation in local governance: Assam is one of the states in the country which has reserved 50% of the seats in Panchayat elections for women. Similarly, the VCDC Members shared that 30% of the Members in a VCDC has to be women. However, this ratio was not seen to be implemented by all the VCDCs. In a VCDC covered under the study in Chirang district, only 2 out of 10 Members were women; in another VCDC in Kokrajhar district out of 15 Members, only 2 were women. Even during the Gram Sabha, although the turnout of women is over 90% of the total attendees, active participation of women is lacking.

Women’s representation in the VCDCs should be strictly ensured according to the guideline by the BTC authority. Moreover, the SHG members who participate in the Gram Sabhas should be trained to actively participate in local planning and also to ensure accountability on the part of the VCDCs.

“The women take care of the family and understand the needs of the family and the village better, which is why women should be represented in the VCDCs. Also, when the VCDCs have good representation from women, the village women will be able to share their needs
better with the VCDC through the women Members” – said a woman during an FGD with women at a village in Chirang district

9. Capacity building of VCDC Chairmen and Members: There were genuine appreciation from the village people regarding some of the VCDC Chairmen who they see as being honest and not charging any money from the beneficiaries for benefits from government schemes. However, in spite of good intent and incorruptible, their technical capacity to execute effective grassroots governance remains low as the VCDC Chairmen and Members have not been trained.

Civil society members suggested that VCDC Chairmen should be identified and sent for exposure outside of the area to observe best practices in local governance to motivate them to do effective development work in their areas. They also suggested that the Chairmen should be exposed to best practices in different schemes such as MGNREGA so that they can implement them effectively to reap maximum benefit.

“Some of the VCDC Chairmen and Members are proactive and willing to do good work but they do not know how to do that- so we are planning to take them for an exposure visit outside and show them good work happening outside the state” shared a Civil Society member based in Bongaigaon

10. Timely and effective sanctioning of schemes: Apart from provisions of necessary resources and capacity building inputs to the local governance institutions such as the VCDC, one of the most effective motivating factors remains timely sanction of schemes and funds. Both the VCDC office bearers and community people shared that the most demotivating thing for them is the non-implementation of schemes by the government. Due to non-implementation of development plans undertaken by the Gram Sabha and the VCDCs, both the community people and the VCDC Members have ended up having low faith in the planning process.

Thus, the development schemes should be sanctioned by the Central and State government on time for local governance to function effectively. When the schemes become infrequent and irregular, VCDC Members lose their motivation to carry out their responsibilities and the community people lose their interest to engage with the schemes such as MGNREGA. This has a negative impact on the functioning of local governance. Moreover, better convergence of
the different line departments with the VCDCs should be ensured so that the planning undertaken by the Gram Sabha through the GPDP exercise can be implemented on time.

“Every year we conduct Gram Sabhas to understand the needs of the villages; we take the help of the Gaon Burhas and plan for the schemes to be taken up in each of the revenue villages. But till date, none of the schemes that we have taken up have been successful” – said a VCDC Chairman in Chirang District

Conclusion
In order to ensure effective local governance, the grassroots institutions which facilitate local governance have to be empowered, transparent and effective. This study points out to serious challenges in local governance in BTAD areas. These challenges range from structural ones such as the VCDC and the TCLCC not being constitutional or statutory bodies to functional ones such as the lack of transparency in the functioning of some of the VCDCs. The structural weakness in the constitution and functioning of VCDC and TCLCC negatively impact their motivation to undertake development work, which in turn result in poor implementation of development schemes. In the end it is the general public and the poor who the government welfare schemes ought to benefit the most who end up being the most deprived.
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Annexures

1. In-Depth Interview Schedule: VCDC Members

Date: ____________________

General Information
Name of VCDC: _________________ Respondent’s Name: __________________________
Designation ______________________ Located at (village) _________________________
Block: __________________________ District _____________________________________

Interview schedule

a) What is the process of formation of the VCDCs?
b) What are the roles and responsibilities of a VCDC? What are the specific functions of the Members of a VCDC?
c) What are the planning processes followed by a VCDC for development of the area under its jurisdiction? How are the development schemes implemented through a VCDC?
d) What are the financial authorities and responsibilities of the VCDC?
e) What is the process through which funds flow to the VCDC and how are they channelized on ground?
f) What are the different schemes executed through the VCDCs and how?
g) How are the schemes implemented by the VCDC monitored to ensure effective delivery?
h) What are the schemes related to women and children being implemented through the VCDCs? How do the planning and implementation of such schemes take place at the VCDC level?
i) What authority and functions related to infrastructure development does the VCDCs enjoy? What is the process through which infrastructure development projects are undertaken?
j) What infrastructure development projects have been undertaken under your VCDC in the last 1 year?
k) What are the systems of engagement of the common citizens’ in the VCDCs planning process as compared to the Gram Sabhas and GPDP plans under the Panchayati Raj System?
l) When was the last ‘general body meeting’/Gram Sabhas held by the VCDC with the common people and what were the outcomes? How are feedbacks from such meetings integrated into your plans? (Probing Questions)
m) What are the processes through which the VCDCs coordinate with the block and district level offices?
n) How does the GPDP developed by you integrate at the district level with the district plan? What is the process?
o) What are the challenges faced by the VCDCs in planning and executing development programmes at the village level? Categorize at- state, council, district and village levels.
p) What are the trainings provided to the VCDC Members to help them in delivering effective services to the citizens? Do you think these trainings have helped you? What recommendations would you suggest?
q) What recommendations would you suggest in order to make the local self-governance more effective?

2. In-Depth Interview Schedule- District and Block Government officials

Date: _____________________

General Information
Name of Department: _______________ Respondent’s Name: _______________
Designation __________________________ Located at __________________________
Town/Village: _______________ Block: _______________ District _______________

Guiding Questions
a) What are the different programmes/schemes you are implementing?
b) Could we know of a few schemes primarily focused on women and children? To what extent are these meeting the needs? If not met satisfactorily, what are the underlying reasons?
c) Under the BTC, is the mechanism for implementation of developmental schemes? Is the current mechanism effectively enabling programmes schemes reach village community? If no, why? What are the constraints?
d) What is the coordination mechanism of the Block office/ DC office with the VCDC’s?
e) What are their specific roles and responsibilities of the VCDC’s in terms of planning and implementation of the development programs/schemes?
f) What is the planning process for development of villages? What is the level of engagement of villagers in the planning process?
g) Are Gram Sabhas being held and GPDP plans being made? What has been the experience of such gram sabhas?
h) What are the constraints in making people engage in grassroots governance? What efforts are being made to make people engage in grassroots governance?
i) What would be your suggestions on enhancing grassroots governance in BTAD?
3. Interview Schedule - Civil Society members

Date: __________________________

**General Information**

Name of Respondent: __________________ Org. Name: __________________________
Designation: ___________________________ Location: ____________________________
District: ___________________________ Areas of work: ____________________________
Geographical area covered: ____________________________

**Interview schedule**

a) What is your opinion on effectiveness of grassroots governance in the BTAD Area. Do you think the current functioning of the VCDCs is addressing the development needs of the BTAD area? If not why?

b) What is the current process of planning and implementation of area development/development schemes being carried out by the VCDCs?

c) Do you think that the VCDCs have mechanisms in place to take into account the voices of the common citizens for area development planning? How is it different from the process under the Panchayati Raj System of Gram Sabhas and GPDP?

d) To what extent are the civil society organisations and members involved by the VCDCs in the planning process and execution of development programmes/schemes?

e) What according to you is the state of implementation of schemes related to women and children through the VCDC? In what ways can it be made more effective?

f) What is the state of infrastructure development such as roads, community areas etc. under the VCDC? Has the momentum of infrastructure development increased after the creation of the VCDCs?

g) What do you think are the bottle-necks and opportunities in the structure and functioning of the VCDCs?

h) Are there any duplication/confusion between the functioning of the BTC/VCDCs and the district administration in planning and implementation of development schemes?

i) What recommendations would you suggest for the functioning of the BTC and the VCDCs to be more inclusive and effective?

j) What role do you think the civil society organisations can play in making the grassroots planning mechanism in the BTC more inclusive, effective and vibrant?
4. Interview schedule- Council Members/officials

Date: ________________

General Information
Name of Member: __________________________ Designation: _____________________
Constituency: ___________________________ Portfolio: ___________________________

a) What role does the BTC play in strengthening local self-government in the BTAD areas?
b) What are the systems in place under BTC to ensure effective decentralised governance?
c) What role does the BTC have in appointing VCDC Members? How does the appointment process take place?
d) Compared to the Panchayati Raj system, what do you think are the similarities and differences in decentralised governance in the BTC?
e) Under the decentralised governance mechanism of BTC, how are schemes implemented at the village level Vis-a-vis the line departments, district administration and block development office? Do you think any duplication takes place during the implementation of development schemes?
f) How does the council coordinate with the VCDCs with regard to plan formulations (GPDP) and integration of GPDP into larger BTC level plans?
g) What do you think are the most important advantages of having a VCDC structure at the village level of decentralised governance?
h) What according to you are the most important schemes being implemented in the BTC areas through the VCDC? Are there any specific schemes being implemented only in the BTC areas?
i) What are the steps do you think need to be taken at different levels (VCDC, BTC, State) in order to make decentralised governance more vibrant in the BTC areas?

5. FGD Guide- SHG and Women’s Federation members

Date: ________________

Introduction
a) Explain purpose of discussion
b) Interested in personal experiences and views
c) Encourage participants to express his or her views on each topic as well as respond to the views expressed by others
d) It is alright to disagree with others
e) Participants do not have to respond to an issue if they do not feel comfortable doing so
f) Views to be kept confidential
The purpose of today’s discussion is to talk about how grassroots level planning has been undertaken in the BTAD area. In addition we would like to understand the current service delivery mechanism of the government schemes. As you must be aware that the Panchayati Raj System implemented since 1992 is about local or self-governance, we would appreciate your sharing on the functioning of VCDC as a grassroots governance institution. We would like to know of your views, opinions, issues and constraints and specific recommendation towards strengthening grassroots governance and enhance service delivery.

General Information

Name of the Location: _____________________ VCDC name __________________________

Block ___________ District ________________ No. of Villages _______________________

No. of households_______ Total Popn. ________ population details: SC __ ST __ OBC __ Gen __

Participant details

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Guiding Questions

a) How are VCDC’s formed? What kind of work do they do in your village?
b) Are women a part of the VCDCs? If not, why not?
c) What are the advantages of having a woman Member in the VCDC?
d) How do the gram sabhas take place at the village level? Are women’s voices heard in the Gram sabhas? Has there been any change?
e) What are the differences and similarities between the earlier Panchayat system and the current VCDC model? What has been your experience?
f) In the Panchayat system, certain Panchayats have reservation for women? Is this system there in the VCDC? Do you think it should be implemented here too?
g) What do you think of the services and development schemes being implemented in the village? What are the services in the village which are most beneficial to the villagers?
h) What is the state of schemes related to women and children in your villages? Are they beneficial? How can they be improved?
i) What good experiences have you had while engaging with the VCDC? What are the positive developments that your village has seen after the formation of BTC and VCDC?

j) As extension workers how can the VCDCs enable you to carry out your responsibilities and duties more effectively?

k) What would you recommend in order to make the VCDC more vibrant? How can the VCDC be more inclusive towards the women?

6. FGD Guide - villagers and extension workers

Introduction

Date: ___________________

a) Explain purpose of discussion

b) Interested in personal experiences and views

c) Encourage participants to express his or her views on each topic as well as respond to the views expressed by others

d) It is alright to disagree with others

e) Participants do not have to respond to an issue if they do not feel comfortable doing so

f) Views to be kept confidential

g) Explain the necessity to audiotape

h) Take verbal consent (for both FGD and audio-taping)

i) Any questions before we start?

The purpose of today’s discussion is to talk about how grassroots level planning has been undertaken in the BTAD area. In addition we would like to understand the current service delivery mechanism of the government schemes. As you must be aware that the Panchayati Raj System implemented since 1992 is about local or self-governance, we would appreciate your sharing on the functioning of VCDC as a grassroots governance institution. We would like to know of your views, opinions, issues and constraints and specific recommendation towards strengthening grassroots governance and enhance service delivery.

General Information

Name of the Location: __________________________ VCDC name____________________________

Block ______________ District ________________ No. of Villages ______________

No. of households ______ Total Popn ________ population details:  SC __ ST __ OBC __ Gen __
### Guiding Questions

a) How VCDC’s formed and what are their roles and responsibilities?
b) In what way have you ever engaged with the VCDCs as common citizens and extension workers? Could you describe your experience of engaging with the VCDC?
c) What are the differences and similarities between the earlier *Panchayat* system and the current VCDC model? What has been your experience?
d) What has been the process of making development plans for your village and has there been any engagement of the villagers in the process? If there has been engagement how? If not do they think it should happen and what would be their suggestions?
e) What do you think of the services and development schemes being implemented in the village? What are the services in the village which are most beneficial to the villagers?
f) What is the state of schemes related to women and children in your villages? How do you think it can be improved?
g) What good experiences have you had while engaging with the VCDC? What are the positive developments that your village has seen after the formation of BTC and VCDC?
h) As extension workers how can the VCDCs enable you to carry out your responsibilities and duties more effectively?
i) What would you recommend in order to make the VCDC more vibrant?
Article 40, The Constitution of India.

Such a detailed arrangement for governance in rural and urban areas does not exist in any Constitution of the functioning democracy. See M V Pylee, Constitutions of the World (Universal Law Publishing, 2000).

Gulati writes, “At a minimum, one hope, the State legislations would not use the authority the new Constitutional provisions confer on them with regard to the devolution of functions and finances to the local bodies to unduly constrain or interfere with the autonomous functioning of these elected bodies - not any more than they would like to see the central government interfere with the functioning of the state governments even though most of the states have depended on central budgetary transfers of finance half, or even more, of their annual budgets” see I S Gulati, “Financial Devolution to Local Bodies” 29Economic and Political Weekly2622 (1981). The comparison of the scheme of devolution of power and functions between the central and state government on the one hand, and the state government and the local bodies on the other, is not apt, as would be shown later in this article.


Id. at 69.

Id. at 68.