Conflict and Development - Implications for Democracy and Governance

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Concept Note

It is generally agreed that if overall human conditions are to improve, there must be an increasing emphasis on Human Resource Development through good governance. Appropriately, such development provides for increase in productivity, enhances competitiveness and supports economic growth. However the process, by definition, is very complex. The United Nations with its four decades of experiment and experience in economic, political, social, cultural and humanitarian affairs, has formulated important perspectives on human resource development. Basic to the United Nations perspectives is the need for an integrated approach.An integrated system supports a comprehensive inclusive policy by providing sustained and equal opportunities to all. This allows societal acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies. Society as a whole benefits. This approach puts primary emphasis on the enabling conditions that must exist to support democratic governance dedicated to Human Resource Development in any country.

The United Nations has identified five enabling conditions that help to support sustainable development and consequently advance human well-being and development through good governance: *Peace, economic growth, sustainable environment, justice and democracy*.

Peace is thus a fundamental prerequisite. It allows for systematic examination of existing institutions and their relationship to sustainable development. Peace also provides opportunities for creation and support of new institutions and institutional relationships which enhance the ability of countries to accelerate their path to achieving sustainable development. **Economic growth** is the engine of development. Without economic growth there can be no sustained increase in societal wealth. It is important to note that sustained economic growth should be complemented with appropriate designs for equality of opportunities and income distribution policies.

The current state of the environment is a cause of major concern. The last four decades of development effort, while contributing to increased well-being, has also had an unintended consequence of environmental disintegration and decay. As environmental degradation affects the quality and quantity of all human life, environmental protection is a basic building block for all forms of human resources development. Development and environment are not separate concepts. Environment is a resource for development. If people are a state's principal asset, then their well-being defines the course of development, and their characteristics determine the nature and direction of **sustainable human development**. However, where discrimination, fanaticism, intolerance, and persecution exist, along with poverty, sickness and illiteracy, the consequences are also familiar: social disaffection, separatism, micro-nationalism and conflict. **Social justice** at the national and international levels is an imperative, for only under an elevated form of social justice can the full potential of human resources development be realized.

Democracy can make Governments more responsive to popular concerns and provide added incentives for transparency in decision-making through (a) promoting appropriate forms of comprehensive popular participation (b) protecting the capacity, reliability and integrity of core State institutions including the civil service (c) establishing the political legitimacy of Governments, and (d) ensuring accountability to citizens. Democracy serves as the only standard for good governance.

Almost all the parameters seem to presume Peace as an achievable standard for the effective functioning of the other parameters. If so, what happens to areas where peace is a distant reality? .In situations where conflict take institutionalized dimensions through public opinion, dissent,cessesion, mass movement and insurgency it becomes imperative for the institutional spaces dedicated to human resource development to claim legitimacy from democratic governance. In such contexts, human resource development may ultimately lead to a peaceful life with the four accompanying enabling conditions such as Economic growth, sustainable human development, Social justice, Democracy and this will only be possible through effective governmental practices in the context of a developmental democracy.

The politics of democracy in North east India appear to have failed miserably to address issues in human resource and the angst of hundreds of ethnic minorities who inhabit the land mass earlier known as Assam. Fermentations of ideas have led to conflict and fragmentations, consequent to the creation of seven separate states. Today, by bracketing the eight northeastern Indian states, with its diverse tribes, customs and cultures, into what is called the 'North-East', we tend to ignore the distinct identity and sub-national aspirations of these ethnic groups. More so, such clubbing together of the region, in an attempt to look at it as a single entity, has led to stereotyping of the problems that plague the area. The fact that each state has a different set of location-specific concerns and grievances often gets blurred in the scheme of things of policy framers and government leaders who are supposed to address these issues.

In our collective hurry to bring about "peace" in its narrowest sense, we forget to delve deeper into the primary reasons that have brought about this climate of disharmony and armed conflict. North-East was first integrated into the geographical boundaries of the new nation-state of India after the British left India in 1947. This region with its diverse mosaic of multiethnic identities was subsumed through the efforts of a homogenizing Indian State without trying to understand its inherent propensity to be a nation-state in itself. Vast racial, cultural, and historical differences cannot just be wished away. Being a frontier region inhabited by tribes who have migrated from Central and South East Asia, it remains a distant land mass almost cutoff from the rest of India except for the chicken neck that joins this region to the rest of India. Technology might have taken care of aviation, rail routes, information and communication but how does one bridge the emotional and psychological gap? Affirmative actions on the part of the nation state have failed because of a myopic vision which seeks to camouflage real issues of dissent through cosmetic patchings. Reservations, subsidies, technological and modernization projects, pumping of government funds aimed as a complete development package of the so called backward area, have only led to further misappropriation, impoverishment and disharmony. In fact, the resultant chaos caused by the rich getting richer and poor getting poorer has brought out the complexities of class dynamics within a so called egalitarian tribal social structure. Insurgency and its economic viability is nowhere as rampant as in North-East, surrender packages

which were designed to abate conflict have only spawned more non-descript militant outfits devoid of ideology. The message given is as though unless one resorts to violence one cannot be heard. For every one militant surrendering, there are three others joining. Under the backdrop of such a scenario, the worst victims are the people and the basic standards of human resource with supportive infrastructure,

There may be innumerable socio-cultural, political and historical reasons that can be cited while explaining the present scenario of dissent and security crisis. The primary among them is the conception of a so called "north eastern perspective" to understand a region not only of extreme diversity in terms of culture, ethnicity, and historical traditions, but economically too they are at different stages of growth. As Professor Udayon Mishra points out that present day Assam, made up primarily of the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys and presents a very different picture when placed with the neighboring states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, Nagaland, and Arunachal. Assam had a deep and wide ranging cultural intercourse with the rest of the Indian sub-continent centuries before the other hill regions came to know of the so called "mainstream". When most of the other regions were living on a subsistence economy, Assam was engaged in Trade and commerce with neighboring Bengal and state formation had taken place (Amalendu Guha, 35). In this sense the context of Assam's alienation and deprivation is more than socio cultural; it is also more importantly economical. Fall in the standards of economic existence as well as in the basics of human conditions has resulted into low self esteem and identity assertion vis–a–vis a "mainstream Hindi hinterland" which is viewed as the main hurdle in Assam's battle for economic survival. Agreeing to the historical validity of the above view one can still theoretically assume the continuity of north east identity inherent in its geographical location, commonality of historical experiences not to mention the uniqueness of its cultural forms and institutions. And Today it will not be wrong to also reiterate the recent trends in North east India that not only reflect globalization finding strong roots through media glitz , economy of conspicuous consumption and aspirations for FDI but as in words of Milton Singer 'the little traditions'are in the process of universalization of its cultural forms .This is not just in a blind effort to emulate the 'greater tradition ' of 'mainstream India' but also to reiterate and construct its own niche of unique cultural forms that is "Northeast'. In this sense it can be easily assumed that given the right combination of developmental strategies and policy interventions traditional roots of dissent that are embedded in the traditional structure of identity assertions found in the multiethnic mosaic can be overtaken by the overwhelming forces that emanate from globalization ,through categories that create a global citizen with a global voice.

In the context of North East it is specifically significant to ask the connotations of peace in its different manifestation and its resulting consequences on the functioning of democratic governance given the vulnerability of its geographical position vis-à-vis the proximity of rogue nations that act as catalyst to its volatile outbursts not to mention the conflict and shifting series of loyalties embedded in its multiethnic structure which makes it difficult to control the sub-national aspirations of communities which have existed as independent nation-states historically. Negotiations of democratic governance constantly face the challenge of legitimacy when confronted with issues of development.

How does one govern a region where development maynot always mean a desirable option and issues more complex and divisive in terms of identity and ethnicity

becomes more dominant. The fundamental question is Does one wait for Peace to prevail before development measures are adopted by democratic governance or is developmental governance the only way for Peace? .Good governance is necessary not only to bring about changes in allocation and alignment of powers and resources within government and the wider society, but also to address root causes of conflict and create an environment for sustainable peace building.

Issues

1.Study governmental practices in North east India and its developmental governance through an evaluation of both ,the TOP down (Implementation) approach and its bottom up (Participation) counterparts. Institutions need to be evaluated on the basis of their contribution to either of these categories .It is proposed we can explore the strategic framework provided by PTD (Peace Through Development) approach through the participatory governance embedded in PRI focusing on the building of partnerships on long-term development, governance and peace building among government actors, local civil society groups and the public.

2 Comparison of structure, function and processes between Traditional Institutions of governance and Modern democratic and constitutional governance.

3 Need based study of institutions that can bridge the gap between communities and provide sustainable mechanisms of arbitration, negotiation and dialogue for peace.

4 Identify areas of human resource development that can lead to PTD approach. The approach puts primary emphasis on creating enabling conditions that must exist to support human resources development in any area .

Research Plan

1. Identify the most vulnerable districts of northeast in terms of Underdevelopment, Poverty, and Insurgency and try to evaluate a possible linkage between them.
2. Extensive field work in the proposed universe to identify the possible reasons for the present state of affairs, and demarcate areas of intervention in terms of infrastructural support which might lead to an improved standard of life.

3 Arrange for camps and cultural programmes in collaboration with local NGO's, civil society initiatives and the traditional *namghar* in vulnerable areas in an effort to revive traditional cultural life and also bridge the cultural difference with mainstream India. These gatherings can also focus on sensitization and awareness on issues of public concern like innoculation, mother-child health, STD, Micro-credit, panchayat system etc through street plays and skits organized through local initiatives. These camps will also serve as the main agencies through which information regarding development policies can be disseminated.

4. Once we have identified the major areas of infrastructural support, say, Health, Education, etc., we will document and evaluate the performance of public services in these areas on the basis of the feasibility of productive implementation of different development schemes like NREGS (National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme), IWLDP (Integrated Waste Lands Development Programme, CRSP (Central Rural Sanitation Programme) etc.

5. Effective Local Participation can be ensured by identifying self-help groups, NGO's, and government institutions that are already operating, with emphasis given to groups that represent marginalized communities.

6. Recommendation of various means by which the nearest Townships or Urban centers can be motivated to extend their services and resources to the areas identified.

7. Generate public awareness on the issue of capacity building and empowerment of existing institutions, as a means to develop human resource rather than a top-down approach of human resource development. This can be done by organizing a platform which can accommodate different voices and stake holders like local NGO's working in the grass root, media, civil society, government officials and youth who can then identify specific areas where support is essential.

8. An important focus of the project will be areas concerning women, children, youth and the aged primarily to motivate them towards peaceful well being by diverting their interest towards cultural creativity, capacity building, gainful innovations and occupation. The supporting infrastructure will ensure enabling conditions conducive for such an outlook.

9. Finally, recommend and document an integrated state policy on Governance in North East through feasible policy measures with minimum dispensable funds from outside the state (i.e. concentrating on funds that can be generated from within given that other infrastructural conditions are supportive) and local participation.

Aim of the Project

- Extensive data collection in the proposed universe to identify areas for infrastructural support that can empower already existing traditional institutions that can act as effective partners in democratic governance.

- Identify social, cultural, political and economic institutions that can support human resource development at the grass root level as a means to combat insurgency and conflict.

- Once we have identified specific areas to deliver infrastructural support, we would like to document a precise plan as to how the implementation can take place through local initiatives (say, groups representing marginalized communities, or other categories like women, youth, older people, petty traders, sharecroppers etc.) and empowerment of already existing institutions.

- Understand the ability of Formal and Elected institutions like panchayats to address sensitive issues of Human Resource Development, social opportunities, conflict management and rehabilitation.

- Propose areas of empowerment and capacity building of democratic institutions like Panchayat, and local judiciary.

- Provide suitable support to local institutions like *Namghar* to bridge the emotional and psychological gap with mainstream "India", through cultural participation emphasizing connectivity**.**

- Unearth and examine efficacies of rural development schemes regarding poverty alleviation, employment, sanitation, health, irrigation etc. through documentation of aspirations of non-political party formations and other local groups representing interests of marginalized communities and social categories.

- Identifying local NGO's, non-political party formations and individual initiatives in both rural and urban Assam in terms of commitment to social services, accountability and history of interventions who can be involved in the interventions that may result from our recommendations**.**

- Documentation of the prevailing status of democratic governmentality in north east , with an aim to identify the areas that need special attention and the recommendation for effective implementation of an integrated policy on human resource development which will lead to peaceful well being, economic growth, sustainable development, justice and democracy.