

Chapter 17

Reaching Out to the People: The Role of *Leikai Club* in the State of Manipur (India) in Achieving the MDGs

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Introduction

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of United Nations (UN) report that human development ought to be designed to achieve certain fundamental values in development by eliminating poverty, hunger, disease and more through eight defined goals by the year 2015 (UNDP 2011). However, human development should include enjoying political and civil freedoms to participate in the life of one's community which is not an MDG's goal but an important global objective included in the Millennium Declaration (Deneulin and Shahani 2009, UN 2005, United Nation 2008). Hence, Guthrie (2008) mentions the essences of community participation and the need to transfer responsibilities to local community for achieving the goals. It also mentions a significant point that grass-roots-based governance through voluntary associations became more effective in serving people's end through the process of decentralisation and public-private partnership. To achieve the principles of good governance, such participation in the development circle has recently been emphasised as the foundation for sustained and equitable development. Effective participation by all stakeholders, especially at local levels of government, has come to be viewed as a necessary condition for good governance.

Conceptually, decentralisation and revival of grass-roots governance by a community institution is envisaged as a form of a panacea in the ongoing effects of globalisation.¹ At the same time, neighbourhood organisations that are relatively less developed with respect to the formal institutions of local self-government often provide varieties of public goods which have the potential for partnership. Such organisations mediate between the local residents and formal government bodies and large service institutions. Downs (1981) classifies two forms of neighbourhood-based

¹ refer to Peter L. Berger, Richard John Neuhaus (1999)

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organisations based on their nature of orientations and range of functions. The first type of voluntary groups focuses on a single issue, and their constituency is limited to active members or users.

The second type of neighbourhood organisation is a neighbourhood-representative organisation (NRO). An NRO is a local voluntary group managed by local residents that seek to represent all residents, regardless of their personal involvement. NROs pressurise government agencies to become more accessible and more responsive to residents. Furthermore, NROs traditionally become involved in a variety of community issues. In NROs, those who are not official members and who may not contribute towards the collective goods are nevertheless viewed as part of a constituency and are free to benefit from these collective goods. This chapter focuses and comments on the second type of neighbourhood organisation – NROs.

Such an organisation, with tradition-based group solidarity, has an appealing form of self-expression and is potentially an attractive and effective strategy in these neighbourhoods. It operates through cooperative behavioural norms, consensus and values, thereby promoting trust among individuals. This underlines the task of self-development and voluntary societal problem-solving mechanism in a neighbourhood. These forms of collective actions through community leadership of the informal neighbourhood can be seen as exiting forms of social capital (Bowles S & Gintis H, 2002).

Putnam (1993) defined social capital as the ties, networks and norms that are generated when individuals learn to trust one another, make credible commitments and engage in cooperative endeavours. The spirit of cooperation and tendency to form associations can be observed in voluntary associations. In India, the importance of social capital in achieving the Millennium Development Goals has been emphasised in XI Five-Year Plan¹ through the urban and rural bodies under the 74th and 73rd amendment of Indian Constitution. To implement the centrally sponsored scheme that relates to the MDGs, these institutions of local governance interact with the neighbourhood organisations that are rich with social capital. Primacy of neighbourhood organisations and local institutions of governance has also been recorded by the 9th Report of Second Administrative Reforms Commissions. The report observed that institutions that are rich in social capital and the local governance institutions should strive to work in resonance with each other in achieving the state goals.

However, to achieve the MDG goals by 2015 in India, various challenges have also been identified. Persistent inequalities, ineffective delivery of public services, weak accountability systems and gaps in the implementation of pro-poor policies are the major bottlenecks to progress said experts' meeting in Delhi to suggest solutions to accelerate progress on the MDGs.

To bridge this gap in achieving the ends, social capital as a concept can directly be deployed to reanalyse the idea of *leikai club* (neighbourhood associations) and its role in achieving MDGs, in solving various social demands and so forth in the Indian state of Manipur. The point that needs to be clarified here – the so-called MDGs of the UN of 2000 – rarely highlights the embedded meaning behind the term 'social capital'. The strength of the MDG report of the UN is that it constantly used global terms like *local*, *grass roots*, *projects* and *community*. The point is that there is a serious need to reinvestigate the loopholes of the MDG report of the UN. tion)

among the Meitei community of Imphal Valley in Manipur. There is a paucity of anthropological, sociological or ethnological data on *leikai* and *leikai clubs*. Most of the information and comments on *leikai* and *leikai clubs* are based on personal observations during the field work conducted in the years 2008–2010. Imphal, the only class I city and capital of Manipur, is a rapidly growing urban area and a bustling town. This neighbourhood association has been in existence for 70 years in its present form. This descriptive chapter is based on close study of eight *leikai clubs* and other general observation and explores the various implications of social capital. *Leikai clubs* have a positive historicity for their active participation in the social, economic, cultural and political life of the state which is now part of their lived world. This chapter concludes – at what extent and at which strength – these *leikai clubs* can replicate the objectives of India's position with regard to the MDGs, like eradication of poverty and combating HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases, and become partners in development for an effective and efficient deployment in reaching out to the people in a crisis-ridden state.

Understanding the Conflict Situations and *Leikai club* in Manipur: Information and Observation from the Field

Manipur, in India's northeast, conjures an image of a natural landscape dotted with sociopolitical crises. It has an area of 22,327 km² with a population of about 2.29 million (2001 census) covering its nine districts. Currently, the state is known for a near total breakdown in governance, unemployment, corruption, unending insurgencies, ethnic clashes and AIDS. Some assume that Manipur is on the track to be labelled as 'failed state' (Mazumdar 2007; Meghalaya Times 2009).

The per capita income of Manipur in 2007–2008 is of rupee 15,270 (US \$ 340) at 1999–2000 prices (Government of Manipur, 2009) and hence an economically backward state. Of the workers in Manipur, 52.19% are engaged as cultivators and agricultural labourers (Government of Manipur 2009). Along with this, more than a dozen insurgency groups operate in the state. With 408 deaths in the year 2007, Manipur remains the second most conflict-ridden state in the northeast, behind Assam, with 437 fatalities (Unnithan 2008). An estimated amount of US \$4,437,532 is lost every day to the state exchequer due to strikes, blockades and shutdowns called by different groups across the state (Nagaland Post 2010). The state capital Imphal faces acute problems related to drinking water, sanitation, power and communication. Citizens hardly get even 6 h of power supply a day. Thus, the situation is even worse in rural and remote areas (Government of India 2008).² Therefore, Millennium Development Goals will have no meaning for Manipur, until and unless such service delivery system is revamped for societal development.

The current situation may be due to lack of governance in the process of getting things done by the state. The question is whether to accept the status quo or challenge the discourse. Is the process of partnership in community participation in the governance process really taking place in the state? And how do individuals and communities sustain themselves in all these conflicts?

In such situations, people often fall back on community-based informal network substitute systems which form the basis of coping strategies (Woolcock and Narayan 2000). One such neighbourhood organisation in a *leikai* (locality/hamlet) within the *Meitei*³ community in Manipur valley is the *leikai club* that has almost all the features of a modern organisation in its structure yet functions like a traditional institution.

The multi-lineage *Meitei* local community is closely knit within its own kinship structure along with an ideal of collective life under its cultural system. A *leikai*'s territory, though more or less defined, is not determined by strict adherence to legal territorial demarcation. The space of a *leikai* has a structural and behavioural value that can be understood through the *Meitei*'s system of kinship, social norms, ritual and residential pattern. Another aspect of the *leikai* space is the kind of solidarity extended to a physical space for a pseudo-kinship structure. All the residents of a *leikai* may not have blood relations yet their relations are governed by the greater kinship norms (Irina 2008). In an informal understanding, 5–6 *leikais* or even more form a village/town, taking *yum* (house) as the smallest unit.⁴

In every *leikai*, it is now a norm to form a *leikai club* – a neighbourhood platform with its office building, library, halls, sport ground, etc. The space of a *leikai club* is now made mandatory through the invocation of a consensus among the people and preserved for a specific *leikai*. It works on the norm of a bureaucratic structure-written rule, hierarchy, division of work, commitment and neutrality, yet flexible on social norms. It is the choice of adjoining families between two *leikais* to join any club while the services are always overlapping. Based on field observation, a club can cover up to 500 houses and a minimum of 100 houses.⁵

The governing body of the club is democratically elected annually or biannually from the local people. Most of the executive members have the age average group of 28–35 years, and the advisory committees are formed by the senior members of the community. If a *leikai club* has executive members below this age group like in early twenties, the *leikai club* is seen to be in the lowest phase of functioning in its overall stages. It has a president, secretary, executive committees with different portfolios and volunteers. None of these members get paid for their work; all services are provided voluntarily by the community members.⁶

For organising activities of the club, necessary funds are made through contributions and donations from the resident/community members. The amount of donation varies with the choice and capacity of the individual's income, family status and so forth. Besides, the *leikai club* also organises charity or fundraising shows and events. Seeking funds from state authorities is very rare by the *leikai clubs*. Therefore, *leikai club* remains a generic term among the people, different from the western concept of club as a group who meets for social, sporting or leisure purposes or an organisation offering benefit to its subscribers. One has to be very clear here in the concept of *leikai club*. The nature of the function is delivering and helping the various needs which a state cannot provide to its citizens rather than as a source of entertainment.

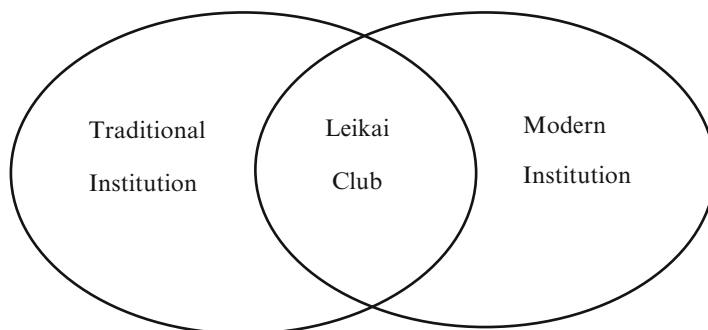


Fig. 17.1 Functional and structural overlapping

The existence of *leikai club* can be explained due to inherent communitarian value system among the *Meiteis*. The *Meiteis* have collective responsibility for the actions of the community that responds to their diverse historical legacies, diverse adaptation to internal and external pressures and differing interactions and relationships with the state. There are also at the local level traditional informal institutions (*Lup*) called *keirup*,⁷ *shinglup*⁸ and *leirup*,⁹ and the villagers are members of these organisations (Brown R 1975).

A *leikai club* seems to be the modern evolutionary version of these traditional institutions with the emergence of modern democratic norms (see Fig. 17.1) and demands to gain legitimacy from the state. As of today, these *leikai clubs* are registered bodies under the Co-operative Societies Act. Their establishments were done much earlier like the citizen club in *Soibam Leikai* which was established in 1958 but registered in 1970. It has been observed that renewal of registration has not been a necessary agenda for many of the clubs, as they still work independently with a notion of traditional authority.

The oldest registered club in the state is the New Popular Club, Moirangkhom Makha Yumnam *Leikai* (Reg. No 8 dated 20.10.55).¹⁰ In Manipur, there are 3,279 affiliated/registered/unregistered youth clubs or *leikai clubs* of Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK). In Imphal East and Imphal West district, there are 1,041 *leikai clubs* afflicted to NYK as of 9 September 2008.¹¹

Leikai clubs, in their small initiatives, attempt to improve the socioeconomic condition of the community by providing a source of income. They have built marketable spaces, like shops, which are rented out to needy families to start small entrepreneurship entities and earn a living which, in turn, generate funds for the club as well. Through these funds, the *leikai club* organises various cultural and social gatherings annually for the *leikai*. In these events, community members take part voluntarily both in physical and monetary terms. Involvement of community members in the activities mentioned above helps in the development of a strong community solidarity. Based on my interviews, this small informal interaction further becomes the basis to join networks among women, like *marup* (micro saving

credit system) among the *leikai* women, to strengthen their financial status in times of need. *Leikai clubs'* executive members do have monitoring activities for the public distribution system of the *leikai*. This helps in effective and accountable delivery of the public basic food security.

On 7 October 2008, Dharmalaya Social Welfare Club, popularly known as *Nahabam Club* in Imphal East, constituted a committee of 12 members to run and manage the Old Thumbuthong Water Supply Scheme installed near the *leikai club* along with the Water Supply Department. This is the first of its kind in any urban area where the local social capital is being utilised by the Manipur government. It manages 383 household consumers, and their function includes collection of water tax, control over the drilling of water pipes and levying fines over misuse of water. Besides this, many community ponds and water tanks are managed and controlled by a *leikai club* to provide safe and clean water. Such good practices by this *leikai club* can easily be replicated in other areas in Manipur.

Leikai Clubs and Their Roles with Regard to MDGs

Though *leikai clubs* have institutionalised participation utilising local resources and building up local capacity in terms of civic leadership, building trust, reduction of transaction cost, social volunteering, cultural development, etc., their participation and bridging with state formal governing process remain sceptical. Recognising its very nature of *leikai clubs* as community representatives in the delivery of services, due roles as partnership in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Total Literacy Campaign of the National Literacy Mission, National Health Mission, Total Sanitation Campaign and Bharat Nirman are given as initiated by the government to achieve the MDGs. In the latter pages, this chapter selectively examines and cautiously comments on some of the social roles and social responsibility of *leikai club* with regard to few of these above programmes.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Total Literacy Campaign of the National Literacy Mission (Achieving Universal Primary Education)

Under the 'universal elementary education for all', community participation is given due emphasis. *Leikai clubs* have been involved in the construction of schools and libraries and play a healthy role in promoting adult and primary education. Recently, the *Nahabam Club* constructed a primary school building for its community. The idea was to provide formal education at a minimum distance. The initiative has been able to raise the level of enrolment of children from the community at the lower level of educational hierarchy. Such management of these schools has been taken over by the government over a period of time. Examples can be drawn from the

‘junior primary school’ in Bhramapur Laljilakpa *Leikai* or the ‘primary school’ near Citizen Club in Soibam Leikai and many more that were initially established by the efforts of *leikai club* and later became a state-managed educational institution.

It may be said to be in due recognition of such works, two representatives of *leikai club* are members of the ‘National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education’ commonly known as Midday Meal Scheme in two of its committees – Village Education Committee and School Development Management Committee. However, based on my field work, the community members were least involved or fully aware of the details of the programmes. Similarly, in Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), the roles of organising community awareness campaign are done in partnership with the *leikai club* members otherwise called as Club in the official paper of SSA which is only a 1-day affair. A report on SSA concludes:

Monitoring and supervision of the activities in the schools in their respective jurisdiction should be enhanced in order to provide accurate data. A transparent and pro-active system is needed for effective monitoring and evaluation of the schools, especially those in the interior parts of the state (ISWAR 2009)

National Health Mission (Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases)

The state of Manipur is among the worst affected by HIV/AIDS in India and has become a serious health emergency (see Table 17.1). The state has a high incidence of drug addiction and HIV among its youth, and at the same time, young boys and girls from the state win the highest number of medals in the National Games (IANS 2007). The movement of sports through the *leikai club* system has been a tool to control the drug use and motivate youth for a healthy and disciplined lifestyle at the grass-roots level. It is unfair to ask youth to change their beliefs and behaviours without also providing community support for these changes. Especially when reproductive and sexual health issues are controversial and/or taboo, it is critical to bring other community members into the process so that they, too, can support a healthy change.

Table 17.1 Epidemiological analysis of HIV/AIDS in Manipur

1. Period: September 1986–August 2010			
	Sero-surveillance	Sentinel surveillance	Total
Number of blood samples screened	343,539	74,098	417,637
Number of positives	30,055	6,317	36,372
Number of females	9,733		9,733
Number of AIDS cases	4,589		4,589
Number of deaths	645		645
Serpositivity rate per 100 samples	8.75	8.7	8.71

Source: Manipur Aids Control Society (2010)

NRHM was launched for the North-East States including Manipur State on 8th November 2005. However, it is only in the year 2010 that the village Health Action Plan was formed which also includes the leikai club functional executives, namely, the executive secretary of the *leikai club*.¹² Lack of monitoring and supervision has been also identified as one of the reason for the weak implementation of NHRM in the state. Data triangulation through community monitoring is an essential activity under NRHM, but is completely neglected in the State. But the role of leikai club are also included in a community monitoring committee is yet to start. There is no data analysis and feedback system except that of a State NRHM Quarterly Newsletter. And nobody knows anything about what is happening where.

Total Sanitation Campaign and Bharat Nirman (Ensure Environmental Sustainability)

125 *leikai clubs* collaborated with the Imphal Municipal Council for the 'Zero Garbage Campaign' which started on August 24, 2010. Besides this, three *leikai clubs* in a ward under the leadership of councillor and guidance of local MLA organised an awareness meeting then a house-to-house campaign by each *leikai club* and then the removal of litter from different locations from the ward with the assistance of the *leikai club*. However, this campaign was just for 2 months, and the government has not widely published 'the Manipur Municipalities (Cleanliness and Sanitation) Model by-law, 2009' in local papers. Along with these, there are more than ten *leikai clubs* in a ward in which these three *leikai clubs* cannot capture enough community audience at a meeting. While most of the responsibilities from the by-law are given to the NGOs which are profit motivated rather than not-for-profit motivated, the government could have given the whole responsibility of garbage management to *leikai club* members. Every *leikai club* has an annual cleanliness and sanitation campaign which helps in keeping the communities' environment clean and free from communicable diseases.

Conclusion

The potential of *leikai clubs* (social capital institution) as a mechanism for building a sustainable society in Manipur is not disputed. The practice and functions of leikai club can be seen as a case of good practice which need not only qualify against policy, project or programme actions but lead to improved human relations (ensuring inclusion of the voice of the poor in the overall development process). It is indeed observed that recognition of *leikai club* as an institution rich in social capital with regard to MDGs is to locate service provision more locally and also brings in new providers more importantly from outside the government. However, this form of decentralising programmes is more demand driven, and their approach is more instrumental rather than tailoring to the local specific

needs. Concerns for community members' choice and information accessibility about their rights and options and the procedures for gaining access to service providers must be taken care.

In fact, Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) under Bharat Nirman, a mandatory reform of community participation bill 'Manipur Municipality Community participation Act, 2010' was passed by the state assembly without any debate in the public domain. Here, the act reflects more of contracting with the private agencies rather than the community partnership. The act mentions to institute 'Ward Area Committee' which among other members includes two persons representing the civil society from the ward, nominated by the state government. But here the explanation of the term 'civil society' is too broad. Instead of democratisation, what the act actually does is bureaucratisation by opening a window for vested interest to operate.

It is true that state has started recognising its role in its policy framework, but one has to understand that '*community participation occurs when a community organizes itself and takes responsibility for managing its problems. Taking responsibility includes identifying the problems, developing actions, putting them into place, and following through*' (Cheetham 2002, p. 4). It can be said to be a failure of the state governance to fully equip the community with the information and tools of programmes and schemes of MDGs. The gap between the normative prescription and the functional aspect of community participation in the state governance strategy remains a challenge in building capacity and institution of MDG. Government backed by donor agencies is only seen in a hurry to adopt community participation with no sense of real ownership by this community. Besides this, understanding of *leikai* which is an urban area (as per administrative setup¹³) may not be enough with the background of neighbourhood literature derived from western or European world where there are sharp contrasts in terms of the physical form, residential densities and in relation to ideas of community and kinship. Therefore, a challenge still remains in achieving the MDG until the gap of bridging these communities through *leikai clubs* takes place truly in the deeper sense of community participation. What role these *leikai clubs* can play as partnership in governance and development and how they can relate to the other institutions of governance and public administration have to be clearly sorted out. The lack of citizen's access to information related to MDGs programmes and schemes is still a challenge to build the capacity development of *leikai club* volunteers and executives. In fact, such existence of vibrant community institutions which have control over local knowledge and legitimacy of the community can further strengthen the MDGs.

Notes

1. Government of India, XI Five-Year Plan, p. 251.
2. 29.3 % of rural and 59.4 % of urban households have access to drinking water. But, 33.58 % in rural and 22.58 % of urban households fetch water from faraway places. Further, 67.21 % of rural and 42.86 % of urban households do not have proper drainage system. In addition, 30.3 % of the rural and 88.2 % of urban households have access to electricity. For further

- details, see Government of India 2008, North Eastern Region: Vision 2020, Annexures, Vol. III, p. 123–24.
3. The majority ethnic group settled in the valley area of Manipur.
 4. This information is based on intense observation during field work in the years 2008–2010.
 5. Based on the rough estimate of the number of households contributing help of any kind to the *leikai club*.
 6. Based on an interview with Adhikarimayum Basantakumar, former secretary Brahmapur Youth Club on March 20, 2009.
 7. Keirup was a military organisation for war and protection of village.
 8. Shinglup helped the bereaved family with wood, money and labour.
 9. Leirup is in charge of developmental functions – building of roads and bridges, digging canals, etc.
 10. Based on the data obtained from the Societies Registration Office, Lamphel.
 11. Based on the official record of NYK obtained during field visit to the NYK office in Lamphel on September 9, 2008.
 12. National Rural Health Mission, State Program Implementation Plan (SPIP) 2010–2011 p. 14.
 13. This utilises the definition of urban given by census of India 2001.

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