ABSTRACT

The research study attempts to highlight various issues of social inclusion and exclusion of the marginalized sections of society i.e. STs/SCs and women in decentralized governance (PRI) in the State of Manipur with special reference to four Gram Panchayats of Imphal East-1 district. It examines the underlying issues of representation and participation of women, SC and ST members in the Panchayati Raj institutions by assessing their awareness of Panchayati Raj, their perception of Panchayati Raj, their participation in Panchayati Raj programmes as functionaries and as beneficiaries and the extent to which they are benefited in different areas of operation of Panchayati Raj institutions. It also examines the issues of distribution of benefits (goods and services) associated with the Gram Panchayat and the relationship between vulnerability and access to/use of benefits. Finally, it analyzes the extent of the empowerment of Women, SCs and STs and the consequent reaction of the dominant groups thereof. It considers participations, accountability, transparency and capacity building as conditions necessary for the inclusion and the subsequent empowerment of the traditionally excluded groups such as the SCs, STs and Women as well as development as an outcome of their empowerment. Three dimensions of development outcome such as effectiveness, equity, and sustainability, which are assumed the results of empowerment, are also explored separately in this study.

Methodology adopted for the study includes using a data base assembled for a group of 4 GPs from Sawombung CD Block, Imphal East-1 district in Manipur. Villages large and small, as well as single-caste-dominated and mixed-caste villages are represented in the study. The selected villages were studied using two integrated methodologies – one an extensive questionnaire based survey and the other an intensive anthropological investigation. In the extensive survey overall, 200 respondents were interviewed using a pretested list of questions. Additionally, 12 persons holding official positions in PRIs, both current and past, were interviewed in the selected villages by trained village investigators. The intensive survey was conducted in the purposively selected 4 revenue village Panchayats (1 village in each of the four Gram Panchayats), and sought to draw out from respondents their understanding and interpretation of how and why exclusion or inclusion occurs.