Chapter IV

DECENTRALISED PLANNING PROCESS IN ASSAM

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter we are making an attempt to unfold the gradual development of different institutions under the umbrella of decentralised planning in Assam. In the first few sections (namely 4.1 through 4.4) we are giving a descriptive and critical account of the different organs of panchayati system as it existed in Assam prior to 1986. In section 4.5 we will try to evaluate the working of the same institutions prior to 1986.

1986, in our opinion, may be regarded as a watershed in the process of formalisation of panchayati raj institutions in Assam. It is in this year that the
Government of Assam had set up decentralised planning machinery at the state headquarters and planning cells at the district level. Moreover, a Sub-Divisional Planning and Development Council (SPDC) has been set up to propose and oversee the implementation of sub-divisional plan. Section 4.6 and 4.7 deal with a brief background of decentralised planning process from 1986.

The local government institutions in the state of Assam had been in existence in some form or other during different periods of history. It is contended that there were local government institutions not only during the British period but even prior to that. It is pointed out that the 'Sarumel', the 'majumel', the 'dekamel', and the 'gabharumel' that existed during the time of Ahoms were powerful local government institutions; that the Bodo-Kacharis had village committees which were responsible for the construction of irrigation works.¹

A closer examination of these reveals that the 'mels' that existed during the Ahom period were not local government institutions. They were concerned with the settlement of disputes of different character. Moreover, these local bodies were generally overshadowed by personal rule of the feudal nobles who constituted the hierarchy of

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the Ahom administration as well as a system of centralised monarchy.

During the British rule, however, the traditional form of these bodies underwent some change and officials such as the Mandals, the 'Gaonburahs', the Mouzadars and the Tohsilders became the new leaders in the villages. In this process of change these panchayats-like institutions (such as Sarumel and the Dekamel) lost their existence. The tradition of self-help continued, though in a smaller way, inspite of centralisation of administration under the British rule. The 'Satras' and 'Namghars' of Assam continue to disperse justice and resolve village disputes even to this day.

The present system of local self-government in Assam is a creation of the British. Prior to 1826, when Assam was annexed by the British, there were practically no local government institutions.

4.2 Local Boards

Till the introduction of the system of local self-


administration through Panchayats, local boards functioned at least in all the plain districts of Assam. The history of this institution goes back to 1915 when under the provision of Assam Local Self-Government Act one local board in each sub-division was established. Majority of the members of the boards were elected (like legislative council), but a small proportion of them were nominated from either officials or non-officials and were appointed by the Commissioner of divisions subject to the approval of state government. Local boards could elect non-official vice-chairman and chairman as well with the approval of the government.

The local boards were authorised to appoint district engineers, health officers and sanitary officers. Secondly, two or more boards were permitted to combine together for the appointment of common establishment. Thirdly, boards were permitted to combine together for the appointment of common establishment. Thirdly, boards were permitted to levy tolls on new bridges and to manage primary and secondary education. Moreover, boards were authorised to levy special tax for the construction of railway, subject to several limitations.

Subject to rules, the local boards had to provide, within the sub-division, for the construction, repair and maintenance of roads, embankments, bridges, waterways and
other works except a few main lines of communication which were under the management of P.W.D. These boards also maintained under them dispensaries including veterinary units, besides adopting proper measures for sanitation and health. If the surplus income from ponds and ferries and other taxes and tolls levied under the Assam Local Self-Government Act 1879, fell short of requirement, the income was supplemented by annual grants from provisional funds. With the repeal of Local Self-Government Act, 1953 the local boards were abolished and their functions were taken over by the panchayats, enacted under the Assam Panchayat Act, 1959.

4.3 Development of Panchayats

The Panchayat, as a local unit of administrative machinery, goes back to antiquity in Assam and the institution, although continued to function in different forms during the Ahom period, had acquired a legal status during the British administration only. When the British took the administration of Assam, a properly organised panchayat or council appeared to have functioned from 1825 to 1828 with regular sessions. In the middle of 1828 when Maniram Dewan became Revenue Seristader under captain Nuefville, the former council or Panchayat was split up

into three different organs: (i) Sadar Panchayat or Borpanchayat; (ii) Saru Panchayat, and (iii) Charochari Panchayat or Council.5

It was the Assam Local Self-Government Act, 1915, that provided the rural self-government in Assam on legal basis. The Act also brought into existence Statutory Panchayats. The Panchayats were controlled by the Deputy Commissioner when they dealt with the problems not concerned with local boards and by the local boards when they performed functions delegated by the local board.6

The panchayats under the 1915 Act were not a success. Therefore, a separate legislation, the Rural Self-Government Act, 1926 was enacted. The Act provided that in each village there should be a village authority consisting of nine members, elected by adult franchise. Under exceptional circumstances the Panchayat may be a single member panchayat.7 However, the Act did not provide a machinery for the villages to undertake the management of their own affairs and to develop a capacity

In order to activise the working of panchayats the State Government appointed a Committee in 1953\textsuperscript{8} under the chairmanship of Balwantrai Mehta. The Committee recommended that panchayats should be established throughout the State in a period of two years and the total number of primary panchayats might be from five to fifteen.

In accordance with the recommendations of the Mehta Committee, the Government of Assam had set up a three-tier panchayati raj system, namely, gaon panchayat, anchalik panchayat and mahkuma parishad in the rural areas in 1959. The 1959 Act, envisaged formation of gaon panchayat at the block level and mahkuma parishad at the level of sub-division.

It may, however, be mentioned that although the structure of the panchayats under the Assam Panchayat Act, 1959, broadly followed the pattern of the Mehta Committee, it had a few significant differences. Firstly, there was no Zilla Parishad at the district level, but in lieu thereof, a mahkuma parishad had been established in every sub-division. This deviation is partly due to

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., p. 24.
\end{footnote}
行政和部分是历史原因。第二，mahkuma Parishad有一个非官僚主席，and Deputy Commissioner was included as an ex-officio member，whereas the Mehta Committee had suggested that the Collector should be the chairman of the mahkuma Parishad so that the task of coordination might become easier.9

The working of the panchayati raj bodies was revived by the study team10 and some of the recommendations made by the team were incorporated in the Assam Panchayat (Amendment) Act, 1964. The 1959 Act, replaced the subdivisional development board and local board through the introduction of mahkuma Parishad. The system was in existence till 1973. In 1973, the Panchayat Raj Act (1972) abolished the intermediate body, i.e., the anchalik panchayat and retained mahkuma Parishad and gaon panchayat. The Panchayati Raj Act 198611 reorganised the two-tier panchayati raj bodies (1972) to three-tier pattern of panchayati raj bodies, namely, gaon panchayat, anchalik panchayat and mahkuma Parishad in place of gaon

panchayat and mahkuma parishad (1972). The new structure is same with 1959 Act.

4.4 Comparative Study of Panchayat Legislations

The Panchayati Raj Act, 1959, replaced the Block Advisory Committee in the 1959 set up; the 1972 Act abolished the anchalik panchayat and introduced two-tier system, and 1986 Act re-established the 1959 Act's structure with certain modifications. The structure of panchayati raj bodies in various Acts is as follows:

1) 1959 Act                        1972 Act

Gaon Anchalik Mahkuma
Panchayat Panchayat Parishad

1986 Act

Gaon Anchalik Mahkuma
Panchayat Panchayat Parishad

2) Population to be covered under a Gaon Panchayat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1959 Act</th>
<th>1972 Act</th>
<th>1986 Act</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>15,000-20,000</td>
<td>6,000-8,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3) Tenure (for all the tiers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1959 Act</th>
<th>1972 Act</th>
<th>1986 Act</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4) According to the 1959 and 1986 Acts, all the presidents of the gaon panchayat were the members of anchalik panchayats and all the presidents of anchalik panchayats were the members of mahkuma parishads. But according to the 1972 Act, as anchalik panchayat was abolished, so there was a provision of councillors (one councillor from each gaon panchayat area) directly elected as members of mahkuma parishad. One significant departure in the 1972 Act from the 1959 Act and 1986 Act was that no M.P. or M.L.A. whose constituency fall within the area of mahkuma parishad has been associated with the mahkuma parishad as executive members.

4.4(i) Powers and Functions of Mahkuma Parishad

The parishad tendered its advice to the government on development activities, allocation of funds to different blocks and served as an administrative channel between the state government and the blocks. The broad functions of the parishad can be summarised as follows (1959 Act and 1986 Act):

i) scrutinize and approve the budget of the anchalik panchayat;

ii) review the working of anchalik panchayat from time to time;

iii) give guidance or assistance to anchalik
panchayat;

iv) coordinate the work of anchalik panchayats;

v) advise the government in distribution and allocation of funds and grants to different anchalik panchayats;

vi) advise the Deputy Commissioner or sub-divisional officer (civil), as the case may be, in the distribution of rural development funds,

vii) advise government in drawing up of the district plan;

viii) administration of sub-divisional cadre of panchayat employees, etc.

In 1972 Act, instead of mere supervisory and coordinating functions, mahkuma parishad was charged with more executive and financial powers to enable it to achieve an effective control on and coordination of the sub-divisional departments, as well as to ensure effective guidance among the panchayati raj bodies, i.e., the gaon panchayat at the lower level.


The functions and responsibilities of the gaon panchayat and anchalik panchayat were very wide. The activities which could easily be executed at the village level without impinging upon the other panchayats, were
allocated to gaon panchayats; activities of interest to several gaon panchayat, and those requiring higher technical skills were responsibilities of anchalik panchayats. In specific terms, responsibilities of gaon and anchalik panchayats were under nine different heads with a number of sub-heads under each. These were:

i) sanitation and health;
ii) public works;
iii) education and culture;
iv) village defence;
v) administration;
vi) welfare of the people;
vii) agriculture and forest;
viii) breeding and protection of cattle, and
ix) village industries.

4.4(iii) Finance (1959 Act)\textsuperscript{13}

The gaon panchayat and anchalik panchayat had special funds, namely, gaon panchayat fund and anchalik panchayat fund. The proceeds of taxes, fees, and contributions from the state government, including share of land revenue and other sums raised by the panchayat itself were credited to the gaon panchayat fund. Similarly, all money collected or received by the anchalik

\textsuperscript{13} A sample of an Anchalik Panchayat (Income & Expenditure) is given in Appendix 'B', tables 4.2. & 4.3.
panchayat formed a part of the anchalik panchayat fund.

Over and above these two level bodies, two more special funds, namely, 'the Sub-divisional Rural Fund' at the sub-divisional level and Assam Rural Development Fund at the state level had been created. The Deputy Commissioner or Sub-divisional Officer (Civil) in consultation with the mahkuma parishad was empowered to distribute the fund.

The gaon panchayats were required to prepare annual budget estimates of their receipt and expenditure and forward them to the concerned anchalik panchayat for approval. Similarly, the budget of anchalik panchayat was sent to mahkuma parishad for approval.

According to 1972 Act, the mahkuma parishad and gaon panchayat met their expenditure from mahkuma parishad fund and gaon panchayat fund respectively. Moreover, the executive officer of the sub-division distributed the sub-divisional Rural Development fund each year in consultation with mahkuma parishad.

4.4(iv) Organisational Pattern

The organisational chart given at page 100 presents the organisation of panchayat raj operated at different levels, namely, state, district and below. However, these
| Table 4.1  |
| Organisational Structure of Panchayat and Community Development Department of the Assam State (Secretariat Level) |

**Agricultural Production Commissioner-Cum-Secretary (P & CD)**

- **Director (Panchayat & CD)**

- **(State Level)**

  - Dy. Director (Training)
  - Dy. Director (Panchayat)
  - Dy. Director (Hills)
  - Dy. Director (Composite)
  - Joint Director (Panchayat & CD)
  - Special Officer (AI NCP)
  - Special Officer (Grass Feeding)
  - Asstt. Development Commissioner

- **(Mahanama Parishad Level)**

  - Secretary (Standing Committee)
  - Secretary (M.P.)
  - M.P. Planning Officer

- **(Block Level)**

  - Block Development Officer

  - E.O. (Veterinary)
  - E.O. (Agriculture)
  - Sub-Inspector (Statistics)
  - Senior Gram Sevak
  - E.O. (Co-op.)
  - E.O. (Panchayat)
  - E.O. (Overseer)
  - E.O. (Woman & Child)

- **Veterinary Field Asstt.**

- **Gram Sevak**

Source: Director of Panchayat and CD, Assam State, 1979
levels had been interlocked with each other though the administrative hierarchy which flows from the state headquarters to gaon panchayat. The different administrative tiers for purposes of carrying out the different development programmes through panchayat raj bodies were (i) secretariat, (ii) directorate, (iii) sub-division, and (iv) block.

Whereas, the non-officials elected in panchayat raj bodies were closely associated with the administration of the programmes at the sub-division and at the block levels, they are not so much involved at the higher levels of administration, i.e., secretariat and directorate.

The organisational pattern though seems to be interconnected, yet it was reported to us in our field work that the officials working at levels above the mahkuma parishad are not so much helpful in ensuring efficient implementation of various programmes.

However, it cannot be denied in retrospect that the growth of panchayati raj bodies in this state has been quite steady, although the state government has not been prompt enough to effect necessary changes from time to time.
4.5 An Evaluation

Politically, the Panchayati Raj Acts of 1959 and 1972, became a democratic process, making an average citizen more conscious of his rights than before. Administratively, it bridged the gulf between the bureaucratic elite and the people. Socio-culturally, it generated a new leadership and new outlook. From the development angle, it helped rural people to walk in a new path of their livelihood.

The Assam Panchayati Raj Act 1972, was enacted with the idea of involving panchayats with some development works. Accordingly a provision was made in the Act for transfer of institutions/works/programmes of development departments along with fund, officers and staff to the mahkuma parishad as and when government consider necessary and expedient to do so. But most of the major departments did not agree with this principle as it remained a pious hope.

14. The 1986 Panchayati Raj Act is not yet being implemented.
16. Major development departments did not appear to have agreed in principle and spirit to get their respective schemes implemented at the panchayat level. Some minor schemes were reported to have been transferred. Schemes transferred by sericulture, veterinary, cottage industries and health departments were in name only. Had the agriculture department transferred its schemes a vast field of activity would have open for the panchayat institutions.
In the 1986 Act also, the mahkuma parishad has not emerged as a full fledged planning and implementation body. No mention has been made about transfer of plan schemes to panchayat institutions for planning and implementation. The mahkuma parishad (different from subdivisional Planning and Development Council) seems to be subordinate body of the SDPC. The chief executive councillor (according to 1972 Act) of the mahkuma parishad is an ex-officio member of the SDPC. Peoples' participation in the planning and implementation process is sought to be achieved by associating peoples' representative in the council. But only three social workers (till now no one is nominated) is too meagre for decentralised planning.

4.5 An Evaluation

Ever since its inception, panchayati raj institutions in the state of Assam appears to have been working to some extent satisfactorily, specially when compared with its position in some other states. Panchayat raj system by their special ability organised the people to participate in the developmental activities like construction of road and bridges in rural areas, distribution of relief goods to the flood/storm damaged people, rationing of government supplied food and non-food products, drinking water supply to the problem areas, etc. etc.
The implementation of the block and district projects and schemes ultimately depend on the response of the village and village panchayats. Traditionally, it may be said that the system has established its roots in the larger socio-political and administrative structure of the state and has the element of continuity which is so vital for the growth of any organisation. The impact of panchayati raj bodies is also reflected in the process of decision-making at the local level and in the process of social change, although slow, in rural social structure as a whole. Despite these favourable arguments one does notice, however, certain constraints that need to be tackled for achieving the desired objectives.

The participation of its members and that of officials both in gaon panchayat and mahkuma parishad have been much below the desired level. The members in general do not evince much interest in matters connected with development.

The participation of members belonging to the weaker sections namely, scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and women in raising matters concerning their own welfare are far from satisfactory. This is mainly because they are only interested to the schemes and programmes of grant and subsidies. But as the panchayati raj bodies have limited resources, they cannot satisfy the minds of those
members. Moreover, most of the members were not given a respectable status due to their inefficiency and illiteracy.

The pattern of income and expenditure appeared to have not undergone any substantial change in terms of taking up of new projects or programmes in concerned with general welfare. There is also instance of not getting salary upto more than two years by the employees of panchayati raj bodies: Initiative was lacking in the sense that only such activities and programmes had been undertaken for which grants-in-aid were made available from the government. A few activities had been undertaken on local initiative and resources.

A major portion of expenditure of the panchayati raj bodies was incurred for administration and establishment. In the absence of a consistent pattern of income and expenditure, these bodies find it difficult to keep a satisfactory level of efficiency. Local resource mobilisation in terms of tax collection and raising of revenue by panchayat themselves was relatively meagre. In some panchayats it is seen that they do not have made any fruitful attempt to raise their own resources for which grants-in-aid are not made available.

17. As shown in Appendix 'B'
from the government.

It can be said that regular visits by the state officials can help the government in understanding the routine problems faced by the panchayati raj bodies. If they guide them on various matters it will go a long way in improving their general performance.

The panchayats are, at present, performing a few functions mainly due to inadequacy of resources. The edifice of the entire panchayati raj administration is based on such foundation which can only be strengthened and stabilised by people's confidence and co-operation. If the panchayats fail to provide even the most essential services, people will naturally develop scepticism towards these institutions. If the people are convinced that panchayats are constituted for their interest, they will unhesitatingly submit to taxation imposed by these authorities. But the irony of the fact is that, in spite of few performance there is no noticeable improvement either in the quantity or in the quality of local services. In some cases the increase of expenditure is due to the mismanagement of certain services or due to an increase in the cost of materials, labour and high salary bills.

People may not grudge in paying taxes, provided
timely intimation is sent. Therefore, tax demand notice should be regularly posted without allowing any arrear to accumulate. Such a measure has two desirable effects. Firstly, it will eliminate the chances of temporary misappropriation of public money by the tax collectors. Secondly, it will reduce accumulation of tax arrears. Pay-at-the-counter system will not only reduce the chance of arrears accumulation but will deprive the rate payers also of the convenient plea that 'they are not paying because the tax collector has not come to collect it'. It is also necessary to provide for penal measures against tax delinquents.

Again, panchayati raj bodies did not exercise their discretion judiciously in the matter of remission of taxes. Remission ought to be given to give relief to tax payers who are in real distress.

Valuation seems to be a dark spot in tax administration by the local authorities. Valuation is generally done by an assessor, mostly who is inexperienced, untrained and inefficient. Without a proper machinery to check it, valuation is always open to abuse. Rental value of a holding should be assessed in relation to market value.

As an instance of under-assessment of tax by the Sibsagar Mahkuma Parishad, we give the following examples:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Brick Field</td>
<td>Rs. 500/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rice Mill (5 HP-10 HP)</td>
<td>Rs. 200/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rice Mill (10 HP-above)</td>
<td>Rs. 300/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Petrol/Kerosene Depot</td>
<td>Rs. 300/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cinema Hall</td>
<td>Rs. 300/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Licence Fee (Tea Manufacturing)</td>
<td>Rs. 1000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Land Revenue and Local rate</td>
<td>Rs. 0.45 per capita (from Director of Panchayat)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above rate, to our knowledge on the basis of our field investigation, has been fixed about a decade and a half back. Meanwhile, the price indices have gone up by more than three-fold. Now, therefore, it will appear that in real terms the taxation has been very much regressive in character. Secondly, the fixation rate as given above seems to have no connection with the rate of income of the tax payer. It can be reasonably argued that during the last 15 years the income of the firm/individual has, at least, in nominal terms also increased. In other words, the taxation has been very much inelastic in character.

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18. Inspite of our best effort we could not get the exact date from which these rates were determined by the Mahkuma Parishad. However, it was not less than 15 years old assessment.

19. The Whole Price Index 1975-76 was 173.0 and in 1988-89 it was 435.3 (Base 1970-71 = 100), Govt. of India, Economic Survey 1990-91, Table S-61.
In the light of the foregoing evaluation and on the basis of our field study we may suggest the following steps which may be taken for further improvement of the activities of the Panchayati Raj System:

1) The election process should be mandatory to be held at regular intervals to panchayati raj bodies in order to involve people’s participation in the planning process.

2) The interaction between official functionaries working at the State level on the one hand and mahkuma parishad and lower level bodies on the other, should be integrated in cohesive manner.

3) The expenditure of these bodies needs to be re-oriented by isolating expenditure on administrative items on the one hand and development activities on the other.

4) An integrated service cadre having people from different backgrounds and experience have to be created to discharge their functions effectively.

5) Training to different office bearers should be regularly maintained. Moreover, the village people should also be made aware through proper propaganda about the role of the panchayati raj institutions.

6) Panchayat raj has to contribute towards
strengthening the planning process at the micro level and overall rural development.

7) It has to improve the access of the (poor) beneficiaries to the appropriate decision-making bodies. It is clear that the power structure which exist today in our rural areas should be changed in favour of the poor.

Part B
POST 1986

4.6 Decentralised Planning in Assam

4.6(i) Introduction

The Government of Assam set up decentralised planning machinery at the state Headquarter and planning cells at the district level. Also, in each sub-division of the plain districts, a Sub-divisional Planning and Development Council (SPDC) has been set up. This council has the authority to propose and oversee the implementation of sub-divisional plan. The sub-divisional plan, however, is first drafted at the official level by a Core Group constituted in each district Headquarter and then placed before the SPDC for approval.20

The Core Group is chaired by the Deputy Commissioner and consist of District Planning officer as the Vice-Chairman, the Sub-Divisional Officers (Civil) and Sub-Divisional Planning Officers of the sub-divisions, the Project Director, DRDA, as members. The Senior Planning Officer of the district acts as Member-Secretary of the Core Group.

A small organisation in the Deputy Commissioner's office headed by District Planning Officer serves as permanent secretariat for the Core Group as well as for SPDC. Besides, the District Planning Officer, the secretariat consists of the Senior Planning Officer, 2 Assistant Planning Officers, 2 Research Assistants and other supporting ministerial staff.

4.6(ii) Composition of Sub-Divisional Planning and Development Council

The composition of the Sub-divisional Planning and Development Council (SPDC) consist of a Cabinet Minister as Chairman, the Divisional Commissioner as Alternative Chairman, the Deputy Commissioner as Vice-Chairman, the District Planning Officer as Member Secretary, the Senior Planning Officer as Joint Secretary; SDO (Civil), M.P. and M.L.As, Chief Executive Councillor of the Mahkuma Parishad, Chairman of Municipalities/Town Committees, Project Director, DRDA, Sub-Divisional Planning Officer,
two Economists, one representative from Lead Bank of the sub-division, one representative from State Planning and Development Department and three social workers as the members of the SPDC. 21

4.6(iii) Approach of Decentralised Planning in Assam

At the initial stage of decentralised planning, top down approach has been followed in the sense that at first a divisible pool fund is determined in State headquarters and then distributed among the sub-divisions as per requirements, potentials and priorities of the sub-division taking into consideration the level of development. At the sub-divisional level, projects are formulated within the schematic allotment from given headquarters on the basis of the local needs and priorities of the locality.

Identification of Schemes

All the schemes under different sectors are classified into two categories, i.e., state level and sub-divisional level schemes according to some pre-set criteria. The scheme which concern the lives of common people particularly in the economic sectors of agriculture, veterinary, fishery, minor irrigation, cooperation, cottage industries, etc. and rural health,

elementary education, social forestry, village roads in the social service sector have been taken up under decentralised planning on the sub-divisional level.

The state level schemes are the following:

a) Schemes which are implemented in fixed locations, but designed to benefit the whole state;

b) Schemes which are highly technical in nature and require constant supervision and guidance from superior officers and experts at the state Headquarters, and

c) Projects and programmes relating to generation and distribution of power, medium and major industries, university education, professional and technical education, research and training, state highways, ports and inland water-ways.

For the year 1988-89, sub-divisional level schemes have been identified afresh. The principles adopted for reclassification of sub-divisional schemes are as follows:

i) Schemes which are to be implemented in all or most of sub-divisions;

ii) Beneficiary-Oriented schemes, viz., IRDP, NREP, etc.

iii) Minimum Needs Programme Scheme.

iv) Schemes under education.
4.6(iv) **Disaggregation of Fund**

During the year 1987-88, 20 per cent of the allotment in respect of general areas of the state was earmarked for decentralised planning. Out of this amount, 10 per cent was set apart as untied fund. The objective of this amount is to meet special problems of needy subdivisions. The remaining 90 per cent was distributed to different sub-division on the basis of the following formula:

- 50% on the basis of total population
- 20% on the basis of total geographical area
- 13% on the basis of Scheduled Tribe population
- 7% on the basis of Scheduled Caste population

A new formula has been adopted for 1989-90 for distribution of fund for each sub-division as shown below:

- 80% on the basis of total population
- 15% on the basis of total geographical area
- 5% on the basis of backwardness.

In 1987-88, identified schemes under 22 sectors and sub-sectors of development were finally brought under decentralised planning. For the year 1988-89, sectors like IRDP and NREP have been included, while Khadi

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programme excluded considering the fact that allotment made under state sector is mainly for maintenance of staff. In 1989-90 in place of NREP, JRY schemes included and in 1990-91 again Khadi and village industries introduced. The sectors included under decentralised planning are shown in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2**

Sectors Included Under Decentralised Planning in Assam during the year 1990-91

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Sectors</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Land Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Minor Irrigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Soil Conservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Animal Husbandry and Veterinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fisheries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Forest (Social Forestry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Panchayat and Community Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Co-operative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sericulture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Handloom and Textile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Rural Roads (M.N.P.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Secondary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sl. No.</td>
<td>Name of the Sectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Elementary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Adult Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Sports and Youth Welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Rural Water Supply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Housing Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>House Sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Integrated Rural Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>JRY (in place of NREP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Khadi and Village Industries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6(v) **Basis for Distribution of Funds (Sectoral Allotment of Fund)**

The sectoral fund-size of a sub-division is determined on the basis of various criteria relevant to each sector. Some of the broad criteria adopted for determining the sectoral size of each sub-division are as shown in Table 4.3.
Table 4.3
Criteria for Determining the Sectoral Size of Sub-Divisional Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i)</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Net sown area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii)</td>
<td>Fishery</td>
<td>Water area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii)</td>
<td>Animal Husbandry</td>
<td>Cattle population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv)</td>
<td>Panchayat</td>
<td>Number of Gaon Panchayat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v)</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Backlog in Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi)</td>
<td>Road</td>
<td>Deficiency in respect of roads per 100 sq. km.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii)</td>
<td>Sericulture</td>
<td>Number of families engaged in Sericulture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viii)</td>
<td>Handloom</td>
<td>Number of Weaving Cooperative Societies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ix)</td>
<td>Water Supply</td>
<td>Villages having no drinking water supply facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x)</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Population per doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xi )</td>
<td>Co-operation</td>
<td>Number of Gaon Panchayat Somabay Samities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After determination of the sectoral size of the sub-division on the basis of the above criteria, actual allotment of fund is adjusted taking into consideration the spill over work, continuing expenditure and work (committed liabilities), needs, potentialities and
requirement of the sub-divisions.

4.6(vi) Planning Methodology

The planning methodology followed for the preparation of decentralised sub-divisional plan in Assam is as follows:23

The Planning and Development Department communicates to the Deputy Commissioners the tentative quantum of fund likely to be available for the preparation of draft plans for the sub-divisions for a year by April/May of the preceding year. The Deputy Commissioners in turn, inform the District Heads of the Development Departments about the likely amount of funds for the preparation of the draft sub-divisional plan of the next year.

The District Heads of the Development Departments prepare the draft sub-divisional plan and submit to the Core Group for examination. After examination, the Core Group places the draft sub-divisional plan before the SPDC for approval. The approved draft sub-divisional plans are forwarded to the concerned heads of departments and Planning and Development Department within 31 August for integration with the draft annual plan of the State.

After finalisation of the State's annual plan by the Planning Commission, a similar process starts. A sub-

divisionwise schematic allotment proposed by the Heads of the Development Departments are forwarded to the Planning and Development Department in February/March. The Planning and Development Department examines the sectorwise allotment and suggest adjustment whatever necessary. After receipt of the approval of the subdivisional allotment from the Planning and Development Department, the Heads of the Development Departments communicate the schematic allotment to their district level officers for the preparation of annual operation plan. The District Heads of Departments prepare projects/schemes, etc. The Core Group scrutinizes the operational plan as submitted by the District Heads of Department and places it before the SPDC. The SPDC approves the sites selected, target fixed, list of beneficiaries, institutions, societies etc. for the implementation of the programme. The Deputy Commissioners forward the approved operational plan to the Heads of the Development Departments. After the approval of the operational plan, the District Heads of Development Department prepare detailed proposals/schemes for obtaining sanction.

4.7 An Assessment

Assam has gone a step beyond the district level by introducing decentralised planning at the sub-divisional
level. In the initial stage it is obvious that the State would face a lot of problems. However, the State has already experienced a number of difficulties in the implementation of decentralised planning due to a lack of trained and experienced personnel. The problem of personnel is to some extent fulfilled and could be overcome through training. Besides these, there is a silent resistance for decentralised planning process on the part of some political functionaries and from the bureaucracy. There is the lack of commitment on the part of some officers who are supposed to guide, nurse and implement the process. In our opinion, if the administrators and political activists do not come forward with a whole hearted image, then, decentralisation will not surface in the state in the real sense.

Decentralised planning would be successful only when it is adopted from the very grass-root level. It would be more realistic and need-base when priorities are decided at the bottom. But it is seen that priorities are decided at the State Headquarters and there is a variance with the priorities decided at the SPDC level. Unless the SPDC has the power to suggest changes in the sub-divisional plan prepared by the district level officials, keeping in view an integrated perspective of development of sub-divisions, the district planning effort would not be much of success.
Except associating, public representatives, i.e., M.Ps, M.L.As, etc. people's involvement in the planning process could not be established till now. Social workers or workers of voluntary organisations are till now not nominated by the Government. Likewise, two members as economists or researchers also have been lying vacant in most of the SPDCs. People's participation is a sine-qua non for the reflection of actual need and aspiration of the people. Moreover, in plan formulation, Panchayati Raj institutions are not given an appropriate forum except that the Chief Executive Councillor and the Secretary of the Mahkuma Parishad are mere members of SPDC. Unfortunately, officers at the field level are not sincere enough to deliver inputs to the people in due time. There is also lack of integration and coordination among the officers at field level.

There are large number of centrally sponsored schemes like NREP, RLEGP, etc. which have been adopted in the subdivision without due examination and consideration of the outlook of the people. For example, the wage paid in RLEGP schemes is much lower than the existing market wage and so the scheme has not been really successful in Assam. As a result, funds are either inefficiently absorbed or do not go to meet the objectives for which it is meant. Operational flexibility, therefore, should be introduced
to suit the local needs without compromising the original purpose.

In our field work we have also been observed that similar nature of schemes are taken up by more than one development department apparently for different purposes but in reality for the same. For example, the P.W. departmental and NREP schemes are simultaneously implemented in the same locality for the same purpose, viz. road, without coordination of the two departments. Such lack of coordination, as we have noted above, in the matter of implementation of different schemes at the sub-divisional level may, in our considered opinion, be corrected, perhaps, provided they are implemented at the district level.

In particular our field investigation shows that the planning at the sub-divisional level suffers from the late sanction of schemes; lated release of funds of the sanctioned schemes, etc. These difficulties, in our opinion, may be at least lessened, if not totally eliminated, if planning and its implementation is done at the district level.