

Rural Infrastructure Development through Community based Social Organisation: A Case Study of the Awang Sekmai village in Manipur

Doreshor Khwairakpam, R. Shankar, Mahua Mukherjee

The settlement infrastructure in most of the rural areas across the country is not well developed as compared to urban areas. Various Five Year Plans of Union Government undertook numerous schemes and programs considering the rural infrastructure development in both physical and social sectors, though objectives under such schemes and programmes are rarely fulfilled. Community participation in rural development schemes bring greater success in addressing appropriate issues with quality delivery. Social organisation plays a very important role in the overall development of rural life. The Awang Sekmai village from Imphal-west in Manipur is an example where a traditional social organisation namely *Awang Sekmai Schedule Caste Development Committee* (ASSCDC) is actively involved in the social and economic welfare of villagers. This organisation plays a very important role in infrastructure development, economic growth and self sustaining livelihoods for the villagers. This paper is about the ASSCDC, its organisational structure, role in rural infrastructure development and other social initiatives like sports in the Awang Sekmai village. The methodology of this research paper includes group discussion, interviews, field observation and household survey.

Keywords: Social organisation, Rural Infrastructure, Community Participation.

Introduction

India has a population of 1210 million out of which approximately 68 percent of population lives in rural areas as per 2011 census report. Still, rural infrastructure facilities are very poor as compared to urban areas in the country. Countries like India, Malaysia, Indonesia etc. are dominantly rural in nature and do not have proper infrastructure facilities e.g. road connectivity, drinking water supply etc. (World Economic Situation and Prospects, 2012). Enough attention has not been paid to rural infrastructure develop

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ment (Meenaksh, 2008).

A review on the society, economy and physical infrastructure like water supply and road connectivity etc. brings out the severity of problems associated with rural infrastructure in India. A large number of people living in rural areas are below poverty line (BPL) and continue to fight a hopeless battle for survival, nutrition, health and education. The policies adopted so far concentrated only on economic growth and not on equity and equality; and have widened gap between rural and urban areas (Patel, et al, 2002). In 1999 survey (The 54th round of National Sample Survey) on access to safe drinking water in rural India, it was found that about 50% of households have access to tube well/hand pump, 26% by wells, and 19% by tap. Only 31% of rural households reportedly have sources of water within their own premises and rest to go out to fetch their drinking water (Planning Commission, 2007). Another major issue in rural areas are poor quality of water due to chemical and bacterial contamination from chemical fertilizers and lack of sanitation. Though safe drinking water has been extended to about 85% in Indian urban and rural populations by Government of India, significant challenges still remain providing sustainable services to rural people (University of Cambridge, 2002).

Road network is indispensable for movement of people and goods for economic development, trade and social integration of any country. Improvement of internal road connectivity within rural areas is of priority. Generally the village roads leading to towns and cities are neither constructed properly nor maintained; condition of village roads is worse than that of the towns/cities. Most of the village roads are kutcha; total length of village Panchayat roads is 670107 km in India, out of which 135331 km is the total surface road and remaining 543776 km of roads length are 'kutcha' roads (Ministry of Road Transport and Highs Transport Research Wing, 2008).

The Awang Sekmai village from Imphal-west in Manipur and a traditional social organisation- the Awang Sekmai Schedule Caste Development Committee (ASSCDC) are the pivotal context for discussing a few success *mantras* for rural infrastructure development programmes in India.

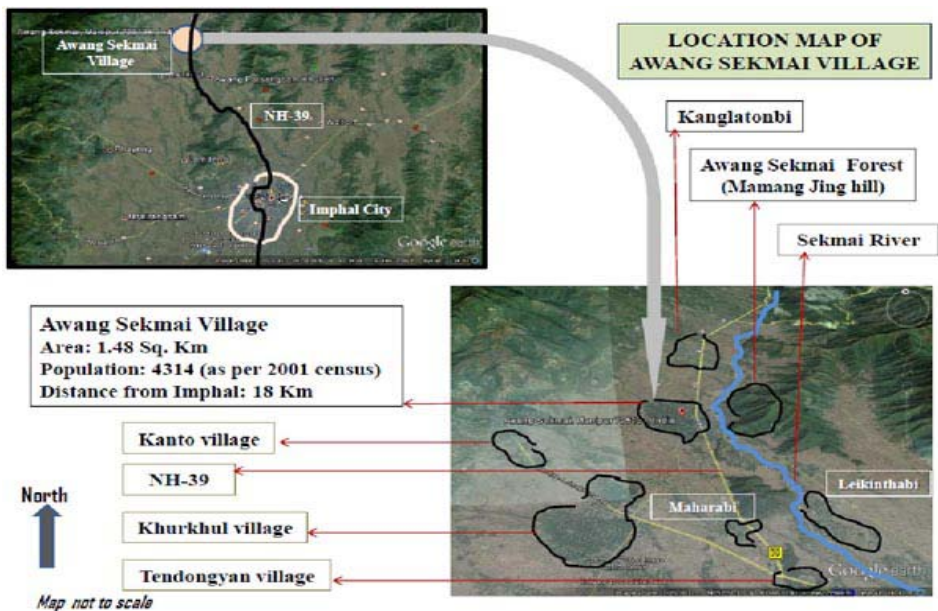
Study Area: The Awang Sekmai Village

The Awang Sekmai village is located in the Imphal West district of Manipur. Total area of the village is 1.48 sq. km. and population of 4314 as per 2001 census. The village lies in the foothill of the sub-Himalayan range in the north east of India at latitude of 24°56 45.28 N and longitude 93°52 41.73 E. The village is in a valley surrounded by the Mamang Jing hill in north, the Koubru hill in western side and the Mahadeba hill in south (fig 1). The temperature range varies from 0°C to 36 °C. The average temperature is about 20.04°C and the annual average rainfall is 1413 mm. Five perennial rivers are flowing through this village which originate from foothill of the Himalaya- they are Keram, Sendrangkhong, Buksu, Lai and Sekmai Rivers.

This is an old settlement and developing very fast. Historically, the inhabitants of this village were descendants from the seven kings who came from the Keibul during the time of King Khagingamba (1597-1652) and settled down and named the village as Sekmai (Khwairakpam, 2012). The Awang Sekmai village is located on the National

Highway no. 39 (NH 39) and 18 km away from the heart of Imphal city. The NH-39, one of the two lifelines of the state of Manipur, passes through the village and provides an opportunity to create commercial activities. It also acts as an economic node for neighbouring villages such as Khurkhul and Kanto in the south western part; Tendongyan and Maharabi villages in the south eastern part; Kanglatongbi and Motbung villages in the northern part and Leikinthabi in the eastern. The surrounding villages are dependent on Sekmai Bazar for day to day economic activities (Field survey, 2012). This village has primary schools and health care facilities. The village people are hard working and helpful to each other; and that gets reflected in the nature and role of the ASSCDC, a community based welfare society.

Figure 1: Location of Awang Sekmai village, (Based on Google Earth Map)



Socio-Economic Profile

People of Awang Sekmai village belong to the Lois Scheduled Caste with different traditional attires as compared to other villages of Manipur. The villagers follow Hinduism with localised traditional rituals. The villagers have their own temple for the God known as *Ima Koubru* which literally means the protector of the village who lives in surrounding hills (as narrated by eldest person of the village; Khulakba, 2012). Agriculture, forestry, smaller piggery farm, local liquor production, etc. are major livelihoods for villages (Fig. 2, 3, 4 and 5). The *yu* (local liquor) is used as mandatory item for any traditional and festive occasion. The majority of households are engaged in agriculture and local liquor production. Also small piggery firms help in improving the socio-economic status of the village.

Education

The overall literacy rate in the village is 74.5 %. The male and female literacy rates are 82.3% and 66.8 % respectively (District Statistical Report, 2009). There are total eight schools in the village as shown in Table 1 and Figure 8.



Fig.2: Housetypes of Awang Sekmai village



Fig. 3: Piggery Farms at Awang Sekmai village



Fig. 4: Yu (Local wine) processing



Fig. 5: Waste from Yu processing used for pig feed

Image Credit: Doreshor K., 2012

Table 1: Schools at Awang Sekmai Village

Sl. no	Name of School	Level	Supported by
1.	Nilapatma High School	Class VI to Xstandard	State Government
2.	Tula Sing Primary	Lower class to VIII standard	State Government
3.	Mayailambi Primary School	Lower class to III standard	State Government
4.	Luwangbung Primary School	Lower class to V standard	State Government
5.	Kangeibung Primary School	Lower class to V	State Government
6.	Aka English School	Lower class to Xstandard	Private
7.	Right Step English School	Lower class to Xstandard	Private
8.	Kishor Institute of English School	Lower class to Xstandard	Private

Based on primary survey done by First Author, 201

Sport Clubs

There are seven clubs in this village which are promoting sport activities in their own *leikai* (colonies). Each *Shinglup* can consist of more than two *leikai*. Annual sport meet are conducted during holi festival which act as a platform for competition among the villagers (Refer Figures 6 and 7). These clubs are registered under state government and well regarded for their sports activities. Sometimes the president and secretary of these clubs are invited to resolve social issues within their own colony. These clubs are well organised and maintain systematic transparent administrative framework. Selections for posts of president, vice president, secretary and treasurer, are done through consensus of

all executive members of clubs. All young males are considered as executive members of the club. The location of the education centres and clubs is shown in Figure 8.



Fig 6. Recitation Competition conducted by Awang Sekmai Club during Holi, 2012



Figure 7. Race of Phiran Pai conducted by Awang Sekmai Club during Holi, 2012

Image Credit: Doreshor, K., 2012

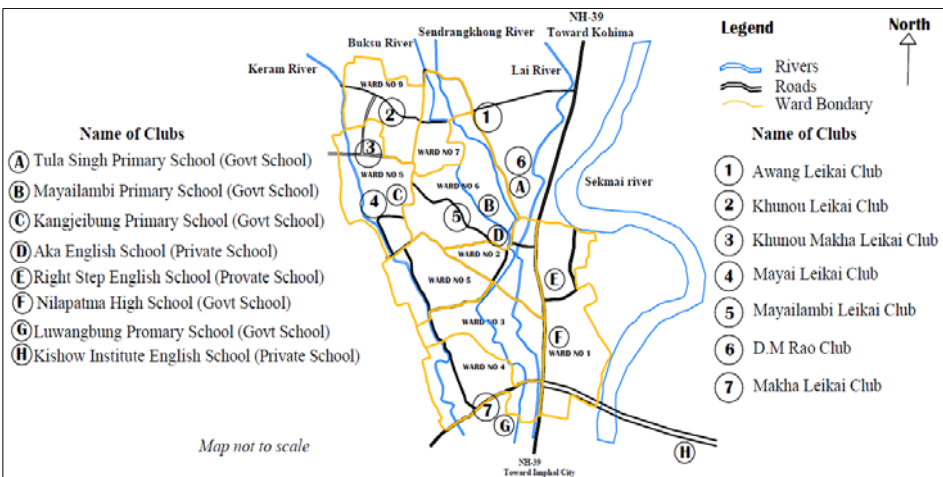


Fig 8: Location of Education Facilities & Clubs at Awang Sekmai Village

(Based on Map provided by Town Planning Department, Government of Manipur, 2011 and Field Survey)

Infrastructure Facilities

The village has problems with physical infrastructure facilities. Major issues are access to safe drinking water and improvement of internal roads connectivity. The main sources for drinking water are ponds, rivers and wells.

Source of water: The main sources of water supply are wells and perennial rivers passing through this village. The quality of water is good enough for household purposes. There are four public wells for drinking water located in ward numbers 1, 4, 8 and 9 and are well maintained by the villagers. However certain part of the village is facing problems related to fetching of water. Location of the existing river, ponds, wells and other amenities (playground, temple, health centre and market/bazar) available in this village

is shown in Figure 9.

The Awang Sekmai Scheduled Caste Development Committee (ASSCDC)

The Awang Sekmai Scheduled Caste Development Committee (ASSCDC) is an unregistered body and formed by traditional society of this village. It was established on 4th May 1977. There are 21 *shinglups* (Shing mean wood and Lup mean organisation; and together they mean group households in a locality) in this village and two persons of each Shinglup are compulsorily nominated to ASSCDC. The members will represent their shinglup for three years and fresh nomination will come from each shinglup again.

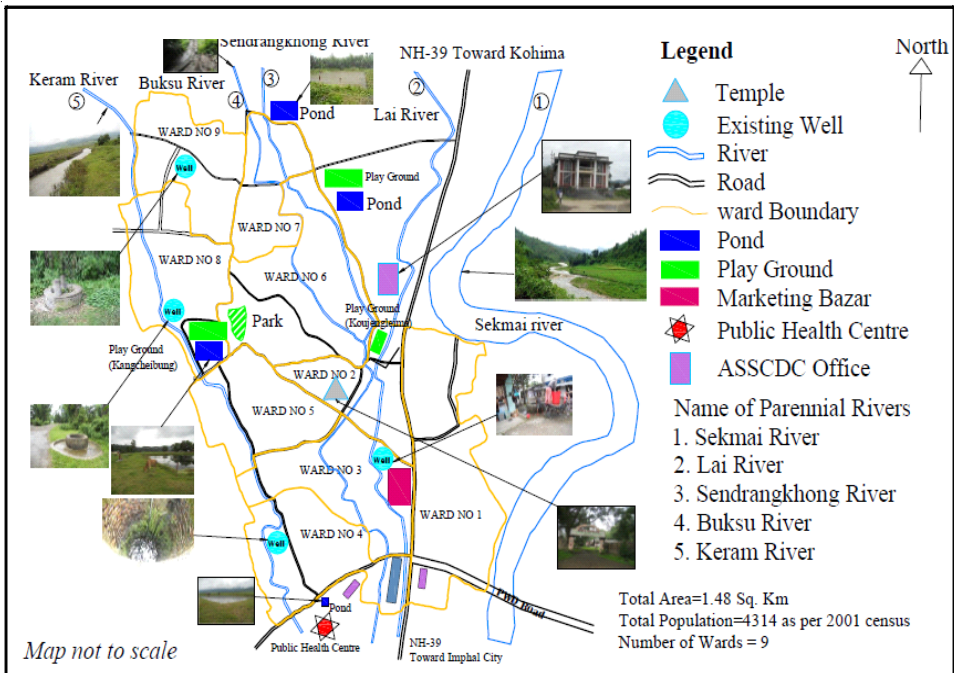


Figure 9: Location of Infrastructure Facilities in Awang Sekmai Village
(Source: Based on Map provided by Town Planning Department Map, Government of Manipur, 2011 and Field Survey)

There is a written and published constitution with clear objectives set for this organisation. The process of election for various posts (president, vice president, general secretary, asst secretary, and treasurer) is through democratic consensus among members. At present there are 42 members. Since the natural resources within the village area belong to the village. The conservation, preservation and management of the natural resources is the responsibility by the village community. The objectives of community are mainly related to resources management.

The objectives of the ASSCDC are:

1. to unite people of different shinglups and to protect and manage community land and resources.

2. to take up development of internal roads, education, and sports and promoting local culture.

3. to encourage meritorious students by awarding cash prizes for top ranked students in tenth and twelfth standard among the villagers.

The ASSCDC earns revenues from leasing the quarries and the forest. Timbers from forest and truck loads of coarse aggregates from quarry are being sold at reasonable prices through tender basis. Financial loan extended to villagers of the Awang Sekmai village is another source of income for this organisation. They provide this loan facility for one year period with low interest rate. The revenue collected from quarry tenders for the period of 2011-13 is Rs. 4,60,000 and money lending to shinglups brought Rs. 4,32,048 as revenue during 2010-11 (ASSCDC, 2012). The organisation has taken up many infrastructure development programmes in last decade; e.g. drinking water and internal metal roads.

Source of Water: The ASSCDC give priority to safe drinking water to villagers through construction of public wells and tanks in all wards. The process of purification of ground water at public well is next future plan of the ASSCDC. Awareness campaigns for preservation of water bodies (ponds and wells) and rivers, and operation and maintenance of water sources will be their future activity so that the source of water remains free from contamination.

Internal road connectivity: The total roads length in this village is 15.36 km approximately as per the estimates of the first author and measure on Google earth on 15th September, 2013. Black topping of roads in most of the village areas with an investment of Rs. 5,80,290 in 2009-11 was done for the road length of 3.84 km. The percentage of black topping of road length covered by ASSCDC is 25% till now. The cost of black topping of internal road was Rs. 151117.18/- per km. Nongthonban Road construction with an investment of Rs. 39,500 in 2010, and Sekmai Quarry Road repair with an investment of Rs. 51,000 in 2010 (ASSCDC, 2012) are also part of the road infrastructure. Physical progress of black topping over internal roads in different wards is shown in Figures 10 to 13.



Fig. 10: Pucca Road in ward No 6



Fig. 11: Pucca Road in Ward No 7



Fig. 12: Pucca Road in ward No 4



Fig. 13: Pucca Road in ward No 5

Image Credit: Doreshor, K., 2012

The ASSCDC took initiative to construct internal roads in wards no. 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. Remaining internal roads are planned to be constructed by the ASSCDC in next few years. The internal roads' map in Sekmai Village is shown in Figure 14.

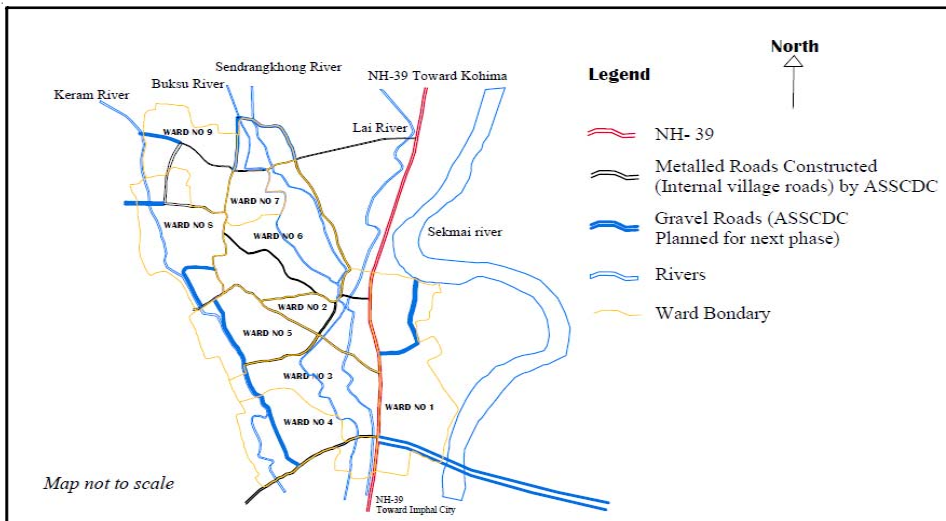


Figure 14: Map showing location of Internal Roads

(Based on Map provided by Town Planning Department, Government of Manipur, 2011 and Field Survey)

Social activities of the ASSCDC

The ASSCDC takes care of various socio-economic activities in this Sekmai village other than infrastructure development. It promotes and encourages younger generation of this village in the fields of education, sports and culture.

Education sector: The organisation encourages and motivates younger generation and students to compete in the field of education. They facilitate free coaching to learn basic computer skill and provide guidelines for higher study of professional course/programme

by hiring expert and through counselling. They are planning to develop library centres at different clubs. This organisation spent Rs. 53,000 for free coaching to students and awarding meritorious students in class ten and twelve standard in 2011 (ASSCDC, Financial Progress Report, 2012).

Excerpts from Interview of Key Members of the Organisation

Discussion held with key members (President, General Secretary and Treasurer) of the organisation elaborate many roles played by the ASSCDC. Based on past experiences of rural development, this organisation understood the value of community participation for successful implementation of any programme. This gets reflected in setting up of representative administrative body to carry out the tasks to fulfill basic need and to offer brighter future to the villagers. Relevant excerpts from interview with different key persons held by the first author are given below:

The President: Firstly, the organisation is working for village development voluntarily yet in a responsible fashion. Funds are generated through various activities to carry out different tasks. It is working successfully on improvement of village roads since 2008. The organisation has strong and enough manpower to implement the programmes as the village people are involved for the same. Though the state government has shown little interest in development programme for this village (except the MGNREGA scheme), the ASSCDC takes care of basic needs of the village and is committed for welfare of the society.

The General Secretary: The administrative system of this organisation is set up by society of villagers (shinglup). Historically, the eldest male person of this village was head and started influencing to form a group of people for the protection of village land. That is how the organisation was set up in 1977. All members are elected from all shinglups for a period of three year and are working voluntarily. The organisation maintains hierarchical administrative positions starting from president to executive members and pays no salary to any member. The administrative part of the organisation is well structured and creates a transparent work culture among its members and makes it acceptable to the villagers.

The Treasurer: This organisation has sufficient amount of money for the rural infrastructure development programs. Revenues are generated out of tender/lease amount for quarry, forest (Mamang Ching Hill) and money lending to villagers. This organisation does not receive any fund/aid from any organisation (non/ government) for any development work.

Households Survey Findings

Primary survey was conducted in all nine wards. About 90% of the households appreciated works done by the ASSCDC in the last two years. About 80% of households are below poverty line (PBL) and depend on agriculture. The organisation helps the households through lending a fixed amount of money to households at low interest rate for a year.

There are only four wells in this village in ward number 1, 4, 8 and 9 for domestic purposes. The existing ponds in ward number 3, 4, and 8 are also in use for domestic

purposes. However, the remaining wards depend on the rivers for various purposes like washing clothes, bathing, etc. The existing wells and ponds are shown in Figure 9.

The maximum numbers of households (80 to 90 percent) responded positively on the quality of the work undertaken by the ASSCDC. Around 4 to 8 percent households have reported that works done by the ASSCDC is average whereas the rest ranked the works done by the ASSCDC as bad. Table 3 shows the satisfactory level (%) of the beneficiaries from the household survey conducted.

Table No.3: Household Survey Feedback on Post Project Situation

Ward No.	Infrastructure Available		Satisfaction Level on Black topping of Road (%)			Suggestion/ Comments	Legend	
	Well	Pond	Bad	Average	Good			
1.	Green	Red	NA	NA	NA	(1) The ASSCDC initiatives are appreciable and they are good works for the village. (2) The villagers need the followings in future <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Street light on roads, • Construction of public wells in all wards • Library in all wards. 	Green	Available
2.	Green	Red	5	5	90		Red	Not Available
3.	Green	Green	NA	NA	NA			
4.	Green	Red	NA	NA	NA		NA	Not Applicable
5.	Green	Red	NA	NA	NA			
6.	Green	Red	05	10	85			
7.	Green	Red	0	10	90		NA	Not Applicable
8.	Green	Green	06	04	90			
9.	Green	Red	02	08	80			

(Based on Primary Survey, 2012)

Further Conclusion

The initiative of the Awang Sekmai Scheduled Caste Development Committee (ASSCDC) is to improve quality of life of the villagers. This is a unique traditional society based organisation in Manipur taking up rural infrastructure development programmes through involvement of villagers. Its sincere and dedicated work culture brings out many positive outcomes. This can be used as a model for several other social organisations and villages to step forward in uplifting the status of rural infrastructure. The scheme of micro finance by giving small loan to needy villagers at low interest is another remarkable step towards economic sustainability of the village.

The systematic and transparent administrative system of the ASSCDC is the primary reason for its success. Representation of executive members to governing body of the ASSCDC from each shinglups makes it more acceptable to the villagers. Accountability and responsible attitude of the members of governing body of the ASSCDC ensures effective implementation of any development programme for welfare of the society.

Suggestions and Recommendations

In order to take up more programmes in future to make the Awang Sekmai as a model of sustainable village, proper auditing should be done and record must be maintained for future reference. There should be more transparency and accountability of the key personnel to the villagers. This is the only way to continue with success in future projects. The environmental impact of quarrying and deforestation need to be studied seriously to continue with sustainable livelihoods. Simultaneous afforestation programme is utterly important. Some key persons from the village should ponder over holistic rural planning during the time of planning and implementing the individual development programmes.

The economic activities should continue only after proper impact analysis; otherwise the revenue resource may dry up and irreversible environmental degradation may cause harm to the village. Retired government personnel and other experienced/ knowledgeable persons can be adopted as voluntary advisory board members from time to time.

Finally, participation of common people of the village is very important in the process of planning and at the stage of implementation for effective and efficient project outcome. Community awareness and participation is the key for successful infrastructure development in the long run. In view of this, it is suggested that the community awareness and participation programme may be organised on regular basis.

Proper documentation of information and data management will encourage other researchers to learn lessons and spread the message for helping development works in other rural pockets.

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