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A Study of Citizen Satisfaction on Municipal Services in Aizawl City

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Abstract : Untill recently, Aizawl was called a cluster of villages or a big village. It is the capital of Mizoram (Land of the Mizos), which is a tiny mountainous state in north-east India. The population according to 2011 census was 2,93,416. The traditionally based village governing institution known as Village Council has administered village administration since 1954. These councils were entrusted with multi-functions as per multitudes of acts and regulations passed by the government from time to time. In fact, it was not a development body and had performed line agency functions for implementing various policies of the different government departments. So, the necessity of strengthening the local body was felt throughout a very long period. In 2008, Aizawl Municipal Council was formed as per Article 243 of the Indian Constitution. A survey was conducted to find out the level of people's satisfaction on municipal services such as solid waste management, regulation of land use and construction of building, management of parking lots, licensing regulations, property tax, etc. The paper analyses the people's perception and satisfaction with the new urban local body, i.e. municipal council and a comparative study of the pre-AMC and post-AMC is attempted.

Index Terms - **village council, satisfaction, development, urban local body, finance commission, urban local body**

I. INTRODUCTION

Aizawl the capital of Mizoram (Land of the Mizos) lies between latitude 23°43'38"N and longitude 92°43'04"E. The area is 457 Sq Km (176 Sq mi) and the population according to 2011 census is 2,93,416. The traditionally based local governing institution known as Village Council has carried on the administration of the local area since 1954. Village Council was constituted in every locality of Aizawl. Just prior to the inception of the municipal council, Aizawl was divided into 63 Village Councils and these councils exercises authority based on Mizo customs and traditions and was entrusted with multi-functions as per multitudes of acts and regulations passed by the government from time to time.

In July, 2008, a constitutionally based urban local body known as Aizawl Municipal Council was formed according to the Article 243(P-G), Part-IXA of the Indian Constitution. The first election to the municipal council was held on November 2010. The municipality has been set up in Aizawl in conformity to the reform agenda of Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) which has insisted the implementation of the 74th Constitution Amendment Act (CAA) in its letter and spirit along with the effective association and engagement of Urban Local Body in urban management functions including service delivery function by parastatal agencies. JNNURM selected Aizawl as one of the 63 cities for implementation of massive city modernization scheme. The reform mission under this scheme also aimed at all special agencies that deliver civic services in urban areas are either transferred to the AMC and platforms are created for accountability to ULBs for all urban civic service providers in transition. It was launched in 2005 for a seven-year period (up to March 2012) to encourage cities to initiate steps for bringing phased improvements in their civic service levels.

In the domain of urban administration in Aizawl, a different line departments of the Government of Mizoram deliver urban services:- water supply by Public Health Engineering Department, distribution of power by Power & Electricity Department, urban poverty alleviation by Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation Department, urban forestry by Environment and Forest Department, roads and bridges by Public Works Department, Fire Services by Home Department, promotion of cultural, educational and aesthetic aspects by Education Department, cattle pounds, prevention of cruelty to animals by Veterinary Department, etc. Authority was seldom exercised in the same manner across different fields. Village Council performs line agency functions in the implementation of various policies of the different government departments. In 2014 an amendment was made in the Village Council Act (VC Amendment Act 2014). The new VC amendment provided a gram sabha, one-third women's reservation, state election commission to conduct local body elections, extension of VC term of five years from the previous three years, and a whole lot of development functions. But the changes made did not affect the urban area of Aizawl as the urban local body was already in place for a few years and it only affected the rural areas as well as notified towns of Mizoram. The challenge beforehand is whether the new urban local body, i.e. the municipal council replacing the Village Council would be as effective as it had been predicted or legally mandated, especially with regard to Mizoram, where the system in place was a traditionally based local-self governing institution i.e. the Village Council. Therefore, the study aims at finding out the people's perception and the satisfaction level with the new urban local body.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mizoram was characterised by a strong grassroots democracy in the past. In the recent times there is no genuine devolution of administrative and financial powers to these bodies. Under the existing framework, Village Councils remain only field agencies for execution of state programmes (Zahluna, 2008). Village Council which was embodied with great powers and authority under the District Council now has been transformed into a mere figurehead under the Local Administration

Department with bureaucrats and government officialdom (Lalsangliani, 2008). The state government is lacking political will on its part and is reluctant to hand over power to the AMC; various state government line departments are reluctant to hand over functions to the AMC; financial constraints also limit transfer of functions from the state government to the AMC. There is a need to spread awareness about the AMC and its current problems so that political pressure is exerted on the state government to make the AMC a truly democratic and an efficient Urban Local Body (Chhuanawma). Various experts and institutions have advocated the use of citizen surveys for measuring local government performance (Hatry et al., 1992; Miller & Kobayashi, 2000; Miller & Miller, 1991a; Webb & Hatry, 1973). With decentralization, governments are brought closer to the people and citizens can realize whether or not the local governments are fulfilling their expectations. If individuals are satisfied with their local officials' performance, they may express greater support for the system (Hiskey and Seligson, 2003).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper analyzes the people's perception and satisfaction with the quality of services provided by the new urban local body, cross-checking the satisfaction level of the people during the pre-AMC and post-AMC days. A survey was conducted to find out how far has the ULB act as the instrument of good urban governance. What is the level of people's satisfaction with the municipal services in the sectors which are already transferred to the ULB? Subjects already transferred to the ULB by the state government are - solid waste management, regulation of land use and construction of building, management of parking lots, licensing regulations, property tax, birth and death register, etc. There are 19 wards in Aizawl, each ward consisted of several localities. Self-administered structured questionnaires were distributed in 39 localities, choosing at least one locality up to four localities in some wards and a maximum of 854 valid questionnaires were collected.

IV. VILLAGE COUNCIL IN MIZORAM

It is a body provided in the para 4 sub-para (4) of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution given in article 244(2). It is the lowest administrative unit in the state. The administration of a village by a hereditary chief was replaced by the Village Councils all over Mizo District Council (Mizoram) when the Lushai Hills District (Village Council) Act, 1953 was passed on 1st December 1953, which has received the assent of the Governor of Assam on the 29th November 1953. To be able to act as the court of justice at the district and village level, the Lushai Hills Autonomous District (Administration of Justice) Rules 1953 was enacted giving birth to the District Council Court and the Village Council Court respectively. The new enactment has divested the traditional powers of administration and disposal of justice by the chief and council of elders in the villages.

4.1 Composition

There are three functionaries in a Village Council, namely – President, Vice-President and a Secretary. The executive functions are vested in these functionaries. The President and Vice-President are elected by the members from amongst themselves by a majority of votes. The Secretary is appointed by the State Government on the advice of the President. He is not the member of the Village Council. A village should have at least 30 houses to have Village Council with 3 members and village having more houses will have more number of members as per provision of the law. The number of members may vary according to the number of houses in the village and a Village Council may also be constituted comprising one or more villages. Out of the total number of members of the Village Councils one-third should be nominated by the Executive Committee and the rest must be elected by the adults of the village (VC Act, 1953). With the increase in population and households in the villages, the act has been amended number of times and number of members of Village Council varied accordingly. The numbers of members as per the amendment 2014 were as follows:

- (a) For Village not exceeding 200 houses, there shall be 3 (three) members of which one woman member.
- (b) For Village with 200 – 500 houses there shall be 5 (five) members of which one woman member.
- (c) For Village with 500 - 1000 houses there shall be 7 (seven) members of which two women members.
- (d) For Village with more than 1000 houses, there shall be 9 (nine) members of which three women members.

4.2 Qualification of members

In order to be qualified as a member of the Village Council, a person must be-

- (a) A member of a Scheduled Tribe
- (b) At least 25 years of age
- (c) Eligible voter in the village respectively
- (d) Should not be an existing Village Council member elsewhere
- (e) A person of sound mind
- (f) Not convicted of an offense under the Lushai Hills Autonomous District (Administration of Justice) Rules, 1953 or under any law being enforced in India or three years must be elapsed since his conviction.

4.3 Duration of Village Council

Unless sooner dissolved, the Village Council shall continue for three years from the date appointed for its first meeting. The State Government may extend or shorten the term of Village Council for a period of not more than 18 months. All members of the Village Council shall hold office during the pleasure of the State Government i.e. during the life of the Council. A member elected or nominated to fill the emptied/vacant seat shall hold office for the remaining period before the end of the existing Council.

4.4 Functions

Village Council is a local self-governing institution inheriting the function and of the Mizo Chiefs' and council of elders exercising authority based on traditions and customary practise of the Mizos. Based on the different acts and regulations of the

Mizo District Council, Union Territory government and the State government, there have been different functions of the Village Council.

It is indeed a very old practise that domesticated animal's stray in the streets of the village without keeping them in confinement. The Village Council has the authority to levy animal taxes, control straying of animals on the road, seize animal trespassing on land or property causing damaged and, such seizure will be announced through the village crier. When the owner collects the animals, fines will be collected at the rate as the government may specify from time to time (Animal Act & Rules, 1980&82). Straying of domesticated animals doesn't happen anymore and this act has become obsolete in course of time. Exception are dogs and cats.

Village Council Court is set up for the trial of suits and cases between the parties all of whom belong to Scheduled Tribe or Tribes within such areas based on customary practices (Administration of Justice Rules, 1953). Cases which are petty in nature such as drunk, brawling, fighting in the streets, etc.

The Village Council must specify a time for cutting of jungle, a date for burning of jhum-land, clearance of jungle for a firebreak to prevent spreading of fire, to prevent outbreak or sparks of fire from catching houses or properties located nearby (Village Fire Rules, 2001).

The State Government may create a forest into Village Forest Reserve, Protected Forest Reserve or Reserve for the benefit of village community. The order of creation may be sent to Village Council concerned for announcement to the people through Village Crier (Tlangau) (Forest Act, 1955).

The Village Council have the power to distribute land within the boundaries of each Village for jhum cultivation, according to the laws framed by the State Government.[under paragraph 3 (1) (d) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India (Jhuming Regulation, 1954). The Village Council can allot sites within its jurisdiction for residential and other non-agriculture purpose with the exception of shops and stalls which include hotels and other business houses of the same nature (VC House Site Act). The VC may evict the unauthorised occupant of the house site and may order demolition of the building or impose a fine not exceeding Rs. 5/- (House Site Act, 1953 and Land Settlement Act, 2000).

New development functions have been entrusted to the Village Council as follows:

- (i) To formulate village development schemes, to supervise development works received from the State Government through various agencies.
- (ii) To help various Government agencies in carrying out development works in the village.
- (iii) To take up development works on its own initiative or on request by the Government.
- (iv) To convene regular social audit for successful implementation of development works in the village.
- (v) To collect property tax as prescribed by the State Government.
- (vi) To realize registration fees for each litigation within its jurisdiction.
- (vii) To raise fund for public utility within its jurisdiction by passing a resolution subject to the approval of the State Government.
- (viii) To administer relief and rehabilitation to the people during calamities.
- (ix) To assist the State Government in public distribution system.
- (x) To initiate or assist the State Government in all preventive measures on the outbreak of an epidemic or infectious disease.
- (xi) To co-operate with Government officials in charge of any of the above functions within its jurisdiction.

Besides, the Village Council have powers to call 'Hnatlang'(Community Labour) in the interest of the public. Any person in violation of the order of 'Hnatlang' shall be liable to 'Run'(compulsory fine for escaping public service work) not exceeding (Rs. 50 per hnatlâng day) unless exempted. A person more than 60 years and below 15 years is exempted to do any Hnatlâng and shall not be allowed to represent in the Hnatlâng. Every person have the option of commuting his obligation to render service under hnatlang on payment of cash compensation not exceeding (Rs 25/-) per hnatlâng day. Each Village Council is responsible for the sanitation of the Village. A Sanitation Committee is appointed by the Village Council (VC Act, 1953).

V. TRANSITION FROM VILLAGE COUNCIL TO MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

Village Council is a very old local self-governing institution set up to suit the traditions and customary practise of the Mizos. The relevancy of Village Council in the decentralized and globalized world and the inadequacy of this institution to deliver new norms of development are questionable. In fact, Village Council was not a development body as the structure and legislative provisions were not designed to carry out socio-economic development at the grassroot level, we cannot expect VC to perform complex functions and responsibilities. Financial inability was one of the largest barriers; VC almost totally depends on the fiscal transfer from higher level governments such as the central and state governments. Local revenue was almost absent as the resource base of the VC was very limited and there was no revenue assignment except minor charges and fees until 2014.

In 2012-13, the own tax revenue of the VC in Mizoram was 0.010 per cent to the own tax revenue of the state government. The State Government District Planning Committee (DPC) which was formed on 2007 according to Article 243-ZD of the Indian Constitution and reconstituted in 2013 with different nomenclature as 'Aizawl District Rural Development Committee (DRDC)' was not actually strengthened to fulfil its objectives such as having a framework of multi-level planning; crystallization of local needs and objectives, formulation of district plan and incentive fund/separately earmarked to meet the local aspirations. Technical support to the Village Council for the preparation of plan documents and integrated plans is absent. The

draft plan prepared by the DRDC is forwarded to the General Administration Department for administrative approval and expenditure sanction and not to the State Planning Board which may integrate the plans from all districts.

There are different Centrally Sponsored Schemes and State Flagship Development Programme implemented through different parastatal bodies and agencies. The Central and State Governments devise separate delivery mechanism for such schemes with or without nominal involvement of Village Council. A wide gap between Village Council and State Government was a big problem as there is no intermediary local government, i.e. district or block level. Allocation of State plan fund to the VC was not transparent and destructive politicization in distribution of public goods hampers the whole system (Chhuanawma, 2013).

The ineffective and unsystematic Village Council in view of allocation of resources, planning, financing, and implementation of different government programmes necessitated the empowerment, strengthening and decentralizing the local body as there was no well laid-out legal structure and devolution until 2014 when an amendment was made in the Village Council Act (VC Amendment Act 2014), but urban local body was already in force at that time.

5.1 Aizawl Municipal Council

Municipal Council is a decentralized democratically elected body, armed with development functions and equipped with grants by the Central Finance Commission (CFC). It provides attractive packages such as Gram Sabha, three tier bodies, district planning committee, the State Finance Commission, one-third reservation of seats for backward community and women. With the Aizawl population attaining 3,00,000; Aizawl Municipal Council had been elevated to the Aizawl Municipal Corporation in 15th October 2015. It is empowered with the provisions of the 74th Constitution Amendment Act, 1992 (74th CAA, 1992). Twelfth Schedule with 18 items is the domain of the ULB in India. AMC's main mission and vision is to provide the basic amenities to the general public of Aizawl City as follows:

- 1) To provide basic civic amenities in the jurisdiction of Aizawl Municipality.
- 2) To collect Tax and Non- Tax revenues.
- 3) Issue of Trade/Food Licenses.
- 4) Maintenance of Public Places like Parks / Gardens, etc.
- 5) To provide access to Socio-Economic databases
- 6) To provide Citizen Centric (Govt. to Citizen) services, and E-Governance applications.
- 7) Market access and E-commerce
- 8) Generation of employment
- 9) To use IT tools for sustainable regional development

At present, AMC looks after management of transportation terminals, regulation of land-use and construction of buildings, solid waste management, cemetery and burial grounds, management of parking lots and property tax.

5.2 Local Council

The Local Councils are created within the geographically divided territory of Aizawl based on the Local Council Rules, 2010. These localities are the administrative and political unit in a geographically compact area, which had earlier been a part of a Village Council before the constitution of a municipality. During the pre-independence period in Mizoram, each village had a traditional institution of autocratic chieftainship along with council of elders to manage village affairs. The Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council, created in 1952 democratized the village administration by enacting the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) Act, 1953. This has been adapted by the Union Territory Government and State Government of Mizoram with its subsequent amendments and in operation even within Aizawl city until 2008. There are 83 localities or local councils in Aizawl. The strength of local council is five members in a locality of 1500 voters or less, seven members in a locality comprising more than 1500 voters and 9 members comprising above 1500 voters. They perform general functions such as common civic services and common benefit of the community and other matters according to the Mizo traditions, customs and practices (Rules, 2010) (Neihzovi, 2007).

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the survey we asked five questions on Likert five point scales, on a scale from 1 to 5 with 1 being the most satisfied and 5 is the least satisfied. There were several variables in the questionnaire to determine the level of citizen's satisfaction on the sectors already transferred to the AMC by the State Government such as solid waste management, regulation of land use and construction of building, management of parking lots, licensing regulations and property tax of AMC and the statistical analysis is done on these items/functions.

6.1 Solid Waste Management (SWM)

In solid waste management the citizen were asked their perceptions on the availability and sufficiency of street bins, the system for collecting and disposing of solid waste within the city, removal of garbage, cost of service and proper awareness system before new policy is started by the government, e.g. How to use two bins – bio-degradable and non-degradable. The survey has shown that numbers of citizens who are very satisfied with the AMC services are comparatively much higher than services during VC, which are 76.39% and 23.61% respectively. People who are neither

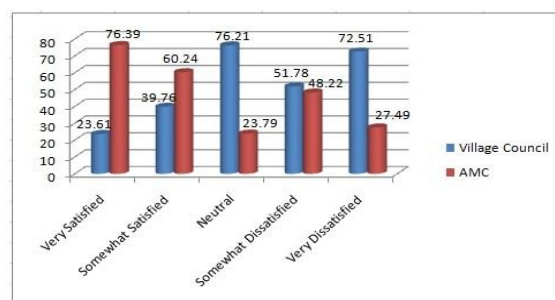


Figure 1: Citizen Satisfaction in Solid Waste Management

satisfied nor dissatisfied during Village Council are 78%. Moreover, the dissatisfaction level during Village Council governance is at 76.21% and it is 23.79% only in post-AMC. From the survey results, we know that modern local-self government, i.e. Municipal Council delivers better service in terms of solid waste management than the Village Council. This is because systematic garbage collection and dumping (solid waste management) based on public-private partnership takes place only after 2009 when Aizawl gets its municipality. Within the AMC area the waste generated per day is 159.88 metric tons out of which 60.75 MT consisted of bio-degradable waste or 38% of the total wastes, 62.35 MT, i.e. 39% is recyclable wastes and 36.77 MT or 23% composed of inert ash and debris. The waste generated per capita per day is 495 grams. SWM in the urban area has considerably improved with the formation of the ULB as per 74th CAA. The 12th Finance Commission (2005-2010) has earmarked 50 per cent of the ULB grant for SWM schemes in public-private partnership mode. The SLB target level for 2010-11 was 60% and has been raised to 83% in 2015-16.

6.2 Land and Building

The survey tried to find out the satisfaction level of the citizens on strict enforcement of regulation on land use and construction of building, whether it is already late in having strict building regulation when the city area is already congested. The impression of the citizen on whether there is political influence while enforcing building regulation by the AMC and the effectiveness of AMC in monitoring after building permission is given. While we have very satisfied citizens at the level of 64.38% during the AMC period, during the Village Council days, it is only 35.62%. And similar to the variable above, there are more dissatisfied people during the Village Council days which come to 56.64% and post-AMC is only 43.36%. The reason for high level of satisfaction in the AMC governance is the set up of Aizawl Development Authority (ADA) in 2006 which has started implementing building regulations in Aizawl and later ADA was succumbed to the AMC.

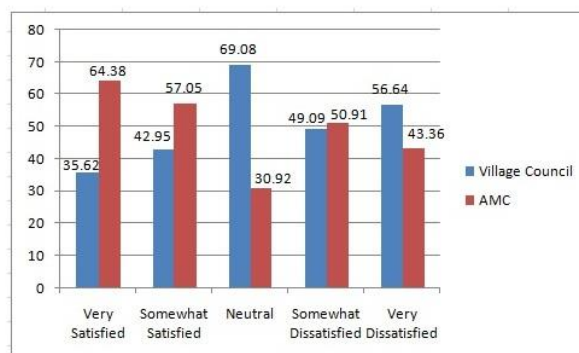


Figure 2: Citizen Satisfaction in Land & Building

6.3 Licensing Regulation

In the area of licensing regulation, the survey intended to find out the level of people’s satisfaction on the provisions of the trade license issued by the AMC. Whether there is any harm caused by the trade license to the Mizo Society as it was initially opposed on the ground that it opens the avenue for the non-Mizos to conduct trade, and, whether the implementation of trade licensing is detrimental to the safety of the Mizo traders. Trade licensing was vehemently opposed by the Mizo traders and non-governmental organizations on the ground that it provides a platform for the non-Mizos to pursue trade without limitations. Historically, non-Mizos are not permitted by the colonial government and the subsequent governments to do trade without the permission of the government. In this aspect, the survey result has shown that the satisfaction level of the people is high in AMC days with 61.54% and during Village Council it is 38.46%. Meanwhile, the level of highly dissatisfied people is 57.96% in post-AMC and Village Council is 42.04%.

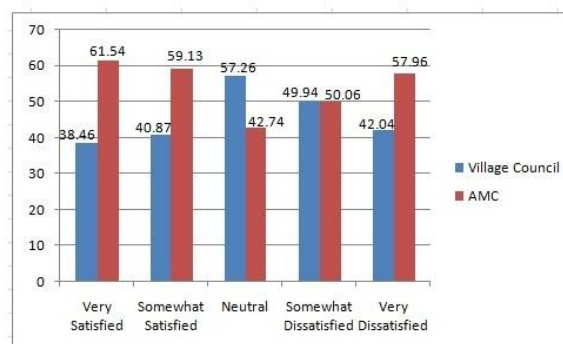


Figure 3: Citizen Satisfaction on Licensing

6.4 Parking Lots

Survey questions were asked on the utility of the Ch. Chhunga bus terminal and about the services rendered in the premise of the terminal such as the departure timing for Maxi Cab service. The questions were about the frequency of parking areas in the city, the rate of parking fee collected and the system of collecting parking fees within the city area. The satisfaction of the users/people in the post municipal council is much higher than the past - 60.09% and 39.91% respectively.

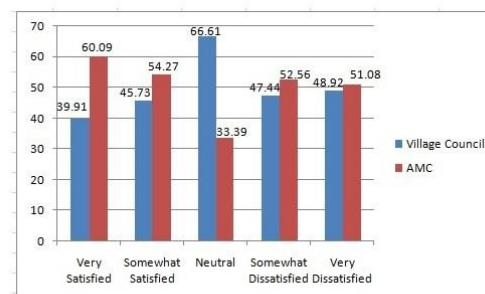


Figure 4: Citizen Satisfaction in Parking Lots

6.5 Property Tax

On 8th October 2012, collection of Property Tax was assigned to Aizawl Municipal Council from Land Revenue & Settlement Department, Govt. of Mizoram with retrospective effect from 7th August 2011. The questions were on the citizens’ convenience to pay property tax, about the rate of property tax collected and the level of reluctance among the people to pay taxes. The most satisfied per cent is comparatively high in the post-AMC than during the Village Council days, i.e. 66.01% to 33.99%. And the citizens are dissatisfied with the Village Council than the Municipal Council.

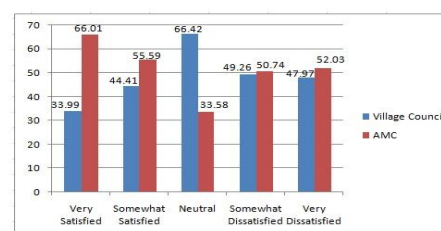


Figure 5: Citizen Satisfaction on Property Tax

A consolidated survey on citizens satisfaction on these functions have highlighted that in all the functions carried out by

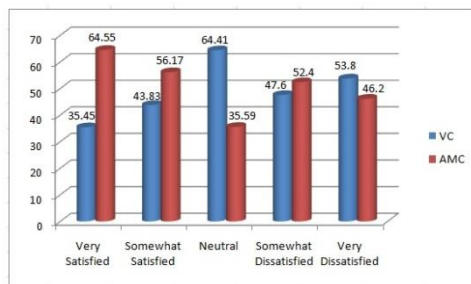


Figure 6: Consolidate

VII. CONCLUSION

In the Mizo Hills, there is a provision of a local self-governing institution at the local level known as Village Council in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution. Among the 3fs such as funds, functions and functionaries; Village Council is endowed with multiple functions without corresponding funds and functionaries. They were the guardian, helper in times of need, administer all matters relating to the welfare of the village people, engaging community labour for public benefits, distribute jhum land and house site for residential purpose, custodian of justice, prevention of outbreak of fire in the territorial jurisdiction, etc. Amendment in the Village Council is made on certain times and the latest development in the act was inserting certain provisions relating to empowerment of local self-government in the rural areas particularly one-third women's reservation, collection of property tax, conduct social audit, raising of funds for public utility, formulation of development schemes, relief and rehabilitation works, prevent outbreak of epidemics, public distribution system, supervise development works from multiple agencies and various development processes. VC has become a development body ready perhaps to deliver development and local governance.

However, in 2008, for Aizawl urban area, urban local body with a background of article 243 P-ZG of Indian Constitution was set up with the insistence of JNNURM which is an urban renewal scheme launched in 2005 all over India. Since then state government has reluctantly jumped to introduce the urban local body. Mizoram government is very slow in devolving and transferring powers and functions specified in the 12th Schedule of the Indian constitution primarily due to the ULB being in an incipient stage and also due to financial constraints. The transferred functions to the ULB are solid waste management, regulation of land use and construction of building, management of parking lots, licensing regulations and property tax.

Since municipal council is a more organized and compact urban local body, the services rendered by this body is commendable. It is equipped with state finance commission, women's reservation, central finance commission (CFC) grant, three kinds of body, gram sabha, etc. With the help of its subsidiary body local council at the local level, there is a network of urban governance system with better people's participation thereby indicating good urban governance. AMC was among the nine States out of 29 in India which was found eligible for getting the performance grant from CFC during 2014-15 (PIB, 2015). The survey has shown that in all aspects, the satisfaction level of the citizen is intense in post-AMC than pre-AMC. Neutral level in Village Council is much higher than the post-AMC. Majority of the respondents are not aware or ignorance of the works undertaken by the VC or the VC's work is so minimal that it does not affect the people at least in terms of development and is not noticeable by the citizens. After all, many functions of the VC have not been applicable in the Aizawl town area and were becoming obsolete, such as, distribution of jhum land and prevention of outbreak of fire in the jhum area, as majority of the citizen's occupation in the town area is tertiary sector. Distribution of house site for residential purpose also is no longer applicable in the town area because land is scarce and most of it already belongs to private property. However, the citizens are not satisfied with various services rendered by the AMC as well. Discriminatory nature of the implementation of building regulation by AMC, blurred relationship between AMC and non-state actors; Licensing Regulation Act- 2012 of the AMC have been passively objected by the non-state actors on the ground that the regulation isn't safe for the locals as it opens avenue for the non-tribal to possess trade license in Mizoram. In the initial years of inception, payment outlet for Property Tax was not provided in the heart of the city, it was difficult to pay taxes. The solid waste management system in Aizawl is still unscientific; open dumping of waste, no treatment, burning of waste causing pollution.

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