

STATUS OF PANCHAYATI RAJ STATE PROFILE –ASSAM

1. Introduction:

Assam has, at present 21 districts under the Normal or General Areas covered under Part IX of the Constitution and the following districts under the Sixth Schedule :

(i) Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)

- a. Kokrajhar
- b. Chirang
- c. Bagsha
- d. Udalgiri

(ii) Hill Areas

- a. Karbi Anglong
- b. North Cachar Hills

1.1 Assam has a very strong historical background of local self government. The villages in Assam had a strong Panchayat in different names or forms since long past. Assam was one of the pioneer States in India to enact Panchayat Act and establish Panchayati Raj in the State when the Assam Rural Panchayat Act, 1948 was passed. This Act was amended and replaced by the Assam Panchayat Act, 1959, the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1972, the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1986 and finally the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 which incorporated the provisions of the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 of the Constitution of India. The Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 received the assent of the Governor on the 22nd April 1994 and elections were held in October 1996, for establishing a three-tier Panchayati Raj system in the State at the village, intermediate and district level.

Table 1:

Level of Panchayat	Name used
District Panchayat	Zilla Parishad
Intermediate Panchayat	Anchalik Panchayat
Village Panchayat	Gaon Panchayat

2. Basic Statistics concerning Panchayati Raj in Assam:

Table 2:

Number of Panchayats at each level:

1	Zilla Parishad	20
2	Anchalik Panchayat	188
3	Gaon Panchayat	2223
	Total	2431

Table 3:

Number of Elected Panchayat Representatives at each level:

3-A: Gaon Panchayat

	No. of elected representatives				
	Gen.	SC.	ST	Women	Total
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>
Total no	20862	1254	782	8977	23453
Percentage	93.28	3.38	3.34	38.28	

3-B: Anchalik Panchayat

	No. of elected representatives				
	Gen.	SC.	ST	Women	Total
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>
Total no	1982	80	86	791	2148
Percentage	92.27	3.73	4.0	36.83	

3-C: Zilla Parishad

	No. of elected representatives				
	Gen.	SC.	ST	Women	Total
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>
Total no	362	10	18	135	390
Percentage	92.82	2.56	4.62	34.62	

Table 4:
Statement showing district wise number of blocks and Gram Panchayats

Sl.No.	Name of the District	Number of Blocks	Number of Gram Panchayats
2.	Bongaigaon	5	66
3.	Dhubri	14	172
4.	Goalpara	8	81
5.	Barpeta	12	133
6.	Nalbari	9	70
7.	Kamrup	16	160
8.	Morigaon	5	89
9.	Nagaon	18	236
10.	Jorhat	8	111
11.	Golaghat	8	102
12.	Sibsagar	9	118
13.	Dibrugarh	7	93
14.	Tinsukia	7	88 (2 no of G.P falls under town committee)
15.	Darrang	7	79
16.	Sonitpur	14	158

17.	Lakhimpur	9	81
18.	Dhemaji	5	65
19.	Cachar	15	163
20.	Karimganj	7	96
21.	Hailakandi	5	62
	TOTAL General Areas	188	2221
HILL AREAS			
1.	Karbi Anglong	11	-
2.	N.C.Hills	5	-
	Total	16	

BTAD	
1.Kokrajhar	14 Dev. Blocks Fully (vide Notification No.PDA.226/2004/6 dtd.5.4.2004)
2.Cirrang	
3.Bagsha	
4.Udalguri	
	26 Dev. Blocks partially (vide Notification No.PDB.226/2004/7 dtd. 5.4.2004)

Table 5: Basic information about Assam

1.	Area of the State	78438 Sq.Km.	
2.	Density of Population	340 per Sq.Km.	
3.	No. of districts	27	
4.	No. of Revenue villages	26247	
5.	Total population (as per 2001 Census)	266.55 lakh	
		Male	Female
		137.77 Lakh	128.78 Lakh
6.	Sex Ratio per 1000 males	935 Females	
7.	Rural population	232.16 Lakh - 87.10 %	
8.	Urban population	34.39 Lakh - 12.90 %	
9.	Literacy percentage – Total	64.28 %	
		Male	Female
		71.93 %	56.03 %
10.	BPL families in rural areas(As per National Sample survey 2000-01	40 % (approx.)	

Dimension 1: Effective Devolution of Functions:

Legislative devolution of functions:

The Assam Panchayat Act 1994 devolved several individual functions that to the three levels of Panchayats as follows:

Gaon Panchayats:

- a. The planting and preservation of trees on the sides of all public roads in the village subject to mutually agreed terms and conditions between the village Panchayat and the authority which maintains the road in case the road is not maintained by the village panchayat itself;
- b. The lighting of public roads and public places in areas other than built-up areas;
- c. The opening and maintenance of public markets other than markets which are classified as Anchalik Panchayat markets;
- d. The control of fairs and festivals other than those classified as Anchalik Panchayat fairs and festivals
- e. The opening and maintenance of public landing places, halting places and cart-stands and of public cattle-sheds;
- f. The opening and maintenance of public slaughter-houses;
- g. The opening and maintenance of reading rooms;
- h. The establishment and maintenance of wireless receiving sets, playgrounds, parks, sports clubs and centers of physical culture;
- i. The opening and maintenance of literacy centers and centers for imparting social education; and
- j. the construction of works of public utility and the provisions of other facilities for the safety, health, comfort, convenience, culture or recreation of the inhabitants of the village:

(Under the activity mapping for the first phase there are lots of other activities)

Provided that nothing in this clause shall apply to water supply for non-irrigation purposes and to sewerage.

Section 50: Power of Anchalik Panchayat council to provide for certain other matters. – Subject to the provisions of this Act and the rules made hereunder, a Anchalik Panchayat council may, within the limits of its funds, make such provision as it thinks fit for carrying out the requirements of the Anchalik Panchayat in respect of measures of public utility other than those specified in Section 112, calculated to promote the safety, health, comfort or convenience of the inhabitants of the Anchalik Panchayat:

Provided that nothing in this section shall apply to water supply for non-irrigation purposes and to sewerage.

Section 90: Functions of Zilla Parishad:

1. The district Panchayats shall advise the Government on all matters concerning the activities of village Panchayats, Anchalik Panchayat councils in the district as well as

on all matters relating to the development of the economic resources of the district and the services maintained therein for promoting the culture and welfare of the inhabitants of the district.

2. in particular, it shall be the duty of the district panchayat to perform the following functions, namely:
 - a. advising the Government on all matters relating to the services maintained by and all development schemes undertaken by all village Panchayats and Anchalik Panchayat councils in the district as well as those agencies in the district, which are under the administrative control of the Government;
 - b. watching the progress of the measures undertaken by the Government, village Panchayats, Anchalik Panchayat councils and departmental agencies in respect of the services and development schemes aforesaid;
 - c. advising the Government on matters concerning the implementation of any provision of law or any order specifically referred to by the Government to the district Panchayats such as-
 - (i) classification of markets as village panchayat markets and Anchalik Panchayat markets and fixing rates of contribution payable by one authority to the other;
 - (ii) classification of fairs and festivals as village panchayat fairs, village panchayat festivals and Anchalik Panchayat fairs and Anchalik Panchayat festivals;
 - (iii) classification of public roads (other than roads classified by the Government as National Highways, State Highways and major district roads) as Anchalik Panchayat roads and panchayat village roads;
 - d. Advising the Government on all matters relating to development of road transport.

Section 89: General Powers of district Panchayats:

For the purpose of efficiently performing its functions under this Act, every district Panchayats may, within the limits of its jurisdiction;

- (a) undertake such measures as it deems necessary;
- (b) collect such data as it seems necessary;
- (c) publish statistics or other information relating to various aspects of the regulation or development of the activities of Anchalik Panchayat councils and village Panchayats in the district;
- (d) Require any Anchalik Panchayat council or village panchayat to furnish such information as may be required by it in relation to the measures undertaken by that Anchalik Panchayat council or village panchayat for the regulation or development of its activities and such other matters as may be prescribed.

Status of Activity Mapping:

The Government of Assam, Department of Panchayat and Rural Development issued a Notification No. PDA.336/2001/Pt/80 dated 26.7.2002 which was published in the Assam Gazette on 13.8.2002. The notification stated as under:

“The Governor of Assam is pleased to devolve the functions of 29 subjects to be assigned to the Panchayati Raj Institutions as follows in the first phase of the process of devolution.

The activities of 29 subjects as per mapping of activities among Zilla Parishad, Anchalik Panchayat and Gaon Panchayat and as contained in Annexure 1-29 are transferred to Panchayati Raj Institutions with immediate effect. The activities, sources of funds and the functionaries required to assist the Panchayati Raj Institutions at the three tier, Zilla Parishad, Anchalik Panchayat and Gaon Panchayat are also specified in Annexure I-29.”

Annexures about Activity Mapping for the 29 functions listed in the Eleventh Schedule were enclosed with the Notification. The Activity Mapping specified, separately for the three tiers of Panchayats, the Activity devolved, source of fund and the functionaries which were to assist the PRIs.

The Activity Mapping for Agriculture including agriculture extension is as follows:

Table 6:

Activity	Source of fund	Functionaries to assist the PRIs
a. To prepare a comprehensive crop plan for the district with a view to ensure multiple cropping to achieve self sufficiency in rice, pulses and oil seeds	Own resources of Zilla Parishad	Officials of Zilla Parishad, Technical staff of District Agriculture Office
b. to propagate adoption of new technologies	Own resources/convergence of Govt. grant, if available	Technical officials of the Agriculture Deptt. In the district
c. To organize Kisan Melas, Fairs, Exhibition etc.	Own resources/Govt. grants if available	Officials of Zilla Parishad, District Agriculture Officer
d. To arrange award for progressive farmers in different categories like Agriculture, Horticulture etc.	Own resources	District Agriculture Officer
e. to coordinate and converge support services for development of agriculture	Extra fund not required	District Agriculture Officer and officials of allied deptts. and Cooperation .
f. To arrange exposure visits for the farmers outside the state	Own fund/govt. grants if available	District Agriculture Officer
a. To prepare agriculture credit plan for the district(Credit support)	No extra fund required	District Agriculture Officer, officials from the Zilla Parishad
b. Ensure timely credit availability with particular reference to Kisan Credit cards(Credit support)	To be mobilized from financial institutions under various govt. programmes	District Agriculture Officer
a. To assess losses(Calamity relief)	Own resources/government	Officer in charge of Relief in Deputy Commissioner's Office, District

b. To monitor and supervise relief operation	grants if available	Agriculture Officer, officials from Zilla Parishad, Deputy Director(Supply)
c. To motivate and ensure crop insurance schemes and coordination	Own resources	Officials from Insurance Company, District Agriculture Officer and officials from Zilla Parishad
d. To conduct quarterly review progress and development	No extra fund required	Officials of Zilla Parishad , officials of Agriculture deptt. In the District.

Activity Mapping has been undertaken similarly for other functions also. However, this has not been accompanied by devolution of funds and functionaries who work exclusively for Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Activity Mapping done has also largely remained on paper since most of the Departments did not issue orders operationalising it. It is ascertained that only 6 Departments, namely, Education (Elementary and Secondary), Soil Conservation, Handloom & Textiles, Power, Agriculture and Veterinary have so far issued orders putting the Activity Mapping into effect.

A High Powered committee headed by the Additional Chief Secretary has been constituted which is constantly reviewing the steps taken by various departments in order to ensure functional, fiscal and administrative devolutions to the PRIs. It has so far held 3 meetings, the last being on 19.8.2006.

Status of DRDAs:

DRDAs are yet to be merged with the Zilla Parishads and are chaired by the District Collector. The Collector Executive Director of the DRDA. For the implementation of any programme, priorities have not been fixed but works selected are distributed equally throughout the jurisdiction. The district panchayat has no power to decide upon the funds given to the village panchayat.

The chairman of the district panchayat is the Chairman of the DRDA.

Dimension 2: Effective Devolution of Functionaries:

The structural pattern of functionaries of Panchayati Raj Institutions, as per the provisions of the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 is as follows:

Staff of Zilla Parishad

Table 7-A:

Sl.No.	Designation	Number
1.	Chief Executive Officer	1
2.	Chief Accounts Officer	1
3.	Chief Planning Officer	1
4.	Office Staff	8
5.	Jr. Engineer	1
6.	Tax collector	1

7.	Driver	1
8.	Grade IV	6
	Total	20

Staff of Anchalik Panchayats

Table 7-B:

Sl.No.	Designation	Number
1.	Executive Officer or Secretary	1
2.	Office Staff	3
3.	Tax collector	2
4.	Grade IV	3
	TOTAL	9

Gaon Panchayat staff

Table 7-C:

Sl.No.	Designation	Number
1.	Secretary	1
2.	Tax collector	1
	TOTAL	2

A separate Panchayat Administrative and Technical Service has not been created.

Dimension 3: Effective Devolution of Finances:

Prior to 1994, village Panchayats and Anchalik Panchayat councils were empowered by rules to accord administrative sanction for estimates which have been prepared and approved by competent technical authorities without any financial limit as per the rules issued under the Assam Panchayat Act, 1958. Now under the rules relating to execution of works issued in G.O.Ms.No.286 RD dated 31.12.1998, Village Panchayats can accord administrative sanction only to estimates upto Rs. 1 lakh. Any estimate beyond the above limit has to be sent to the District Collector for administrative sanction.

Extent of devolution of financial powers to Panchayats:

As per Section 94 & 95 of APR Act 1994 Zilla Parishad has taxation powers in addition to collected revenue from statutory grants like Government of India Finance Commission grant, State Finance Commission Grant and Development grants. Few District Panchayat also derives income from their own properties like lands and buildings.

Quantum of untied and programmatic funds that reaches each Panchayat:

Financial Resources with Gaon Panchayat

House tax, Profession tax, tax on agricultural land for a specific purpose and advertisement tax

Fees on licenses, permissions and services rendered.

Income by growing trees, orchards, medicinal plants etc in the village waste land.

Income from the Panchayat assets through rents and lease.

Assigned revenue like Local cess, entertainment tax, stamps duty, grant from State and Central Finance Commissions.

Grant under equalisation and incentive fund.

Development grants under various Government sponsored programmes implemented through village Panchayats.

Financial Resources with Anchalik Panchayat

Local Cess Surcharge

Fees on licences issued and permission given by the Anchalik Panchayat

Rents/lease amount collected from out of the property of the Anchalik Panchayat.

Social Education Grant

Central Finance Commission Grant

State Finance Commission Grant

Funds of schemes such as Sampoorna Grameen Rojgar Yojana, MPLADs, MLACDs, Self Sufficiency Scheme and Central Rural Sanitation Procaine schemes, implemented through Anchalik Panchayats.

Financial Resources with District Panchayat

Twelve Finance Commission grants

No fund Eleventh Finance Commission used by the Zilla Parishad

Total allocation from the Government of India under the Eleventh Finance Commission grants for Panchayati Raj Institutions was Rs. 23344.75 lakh during the five year period of 2000-01 to 2004-05 @ Rs. 4668.95 lakh per year. Out of this amount, a total amount of Rs. 115,05.881 lakhs + Rs.166.01 lakhs = Rs.16671.89 Lakhs have already been released to PRIs. The allocation of funds under database management as per EFC recommendations is being implemented centrally at State Head Quarters.

Details of own revenues:

Details of quantum of own revenues collected are to be ascertained.

Details of Twelfth Finance Commission Grants:

The total allocation from the Government of India under the Twelfth Finance Commission grants for Panchayati Raj Institutions is Rs. 52600.00 lakh for the period 2005-06 to 2009-10 @ Rs. 10520.00 lakh per year. Out of this, the State has so far secured only the first six monthly installment of 2005-06 of Rs. 26300.00 lakh only.

The proposed allocation of funds on an yearly basis among the normal/sixth schedule/B.T.C. areas is as follows:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Normal areas | - Rs. 8472.81 lakh |
| 2. Sixth Schedule areas | - Rs. 764.80 lakh |
| 3. B.T.C. Kokrajhar | - Rs. 1282.39 lakh |

Rs.10520.00 lakh

Normal Areas: The funds under normal areas are distributed in the ratio of 10:30:60 to the Zilla Parishads, Anchalik Panchayats and Gaon Panchayats. As per guidelines, district wise distribution of funds under Normal Areas is made on the basis of 2001 Census population covering rural areas.

B.T.C.Areas & Sixth Schedule Areas: The funds under the B.T.C. and Sixth Schedule areas are to be implemented by the Development Blocks.

In regard to the use of the Fund Transfer Monitoring Software, the collection of the Bank Account numbers of all the Gaon Panchayats, Anchalik Panchayats and Zilla Parishads is going on.

Establishment of SFCs and their reports:

The first SFC in Assam was constituted in 1994 to make recommendations on devolution of funds to the Panchayats for five years from 1996 – 97 to 2000-01. Its recommendations are as follows:

Resource Sharing

Share of state taxes for transfer to Local Bodies was recommended at 2 percent in each year

No non-plan transfers of funds ought to be made to local bodies other than through giving them a share of State taxes

Assignment of Taxes

10% of Motor Vehicles Tax was recommended to be devolved to Rural Bodies.

House tax ought to cover new house holds on the basis of floor area, revision and assessment of house tax in every five year.

Allocation

No change is recommended for *inter-se* distribution.

Share of Motor Vehicle Tax for urban areas ought to be on the basis of number of vehicles in the areas while share to rural local bodies to be made on the basis of population of each rural local body as per latest census.

Grants

Local Bodies should be provided with grants- in-aid for 2000-01 by State Government at par with the TFC Grants for 1999-2000.

Local Bodies to be given debt relief against existing government loans.

Funds of Rs. 4167.50 Lakhs as per the award of Tenth Finance Commission be distributed equally in each year from 1996-97 to 1999-2000 as grants-in-aid by state to each local body on the basis of population as per 1971 census out of the funds allocated under the State Plan.

Powers and Functions

Assignment of functions contemplated in the XI and XII Schedule of the Constitution to Panchayat Raj Bodies and Municipal Bodies is not recommended.

Subject for registration of birth and death certificate is recommended to be transferred from Health & Family Welfare Department to Local Bodies.

Policy

A High Powered Committee headed by the Chief Secretary of the State Government may be constituted to review the flow of funds to local bodies in every six months.

Gram Panchayats may be re-constituted to have population between 6000-8000.

Permanent arrangement may be made to monitor the follow up action on the recommendations of the Finance Commission.

In view of the difficult financial position of local bodies no fresh recruitment may be made.

Panchayat elections maybe held regularly.

A Tariff Commission may be set up for streamlining the existing rates, taxes etc. of the local bodies and also to look into the service conditions and staffing pattern of the Urban Local Bodies.

The second SFC was constituted on 18.04.2001 to make recommendations on devolution of funds for five years from 2001 – 2002 to 2005-2006. The details of the 2nd SFC are to be ascertained. The State Finance Commission made 260 recommendations of which 60 are accepted in principle as mentioned in the Action Taken Report placed before the Legislature.

Third SFC has been constituted on 6th February 2006.

Manner of transfer of funds to Panchayats:

The SFC grant is not being regularly released to the Panchayats. This has seriously affected the functioning of the Panchayats. The State government should be made to honour its commitment and it should be watched by the Estimates Committee of the Legislature.

At present the implementation of the recommendations made by Second SFC is left to the discretion of the State government.

Dimension 4: Gaon Sabhas:

The powers and responsibilities of the Gaon Sabhas under the law are as follows:

Approval of the annual development plan of the Village Panchayat.

Approval of the list of beneficiaries for individual oriented schemes and the places selected to construct community assets.

Review and advise on the progress and implementation of the development programmes.

Supervision and monitoring of quality of works implemented by the Village Panchayats through social and technical audit.

Consideration of annual audit report and accounts.

Promotion of social integration and religious harmony.

Conduct social audit,

In every Gaon Sabha meeting receipts and expenditure of the current year, works taken up, the vouchers of all the purchases, acquitances, salary paid to the panchayat staff, measurement book etc should be placed for public scrutiny. The funds allocated to the Village Panchayat for development and other schemes should be checked to know whether the allocated funds are utilized properly

There is no provision for Ward Sabhas at the Ward level. Four Gaon Sabhas are to be held in a year. The dates for these meetings are fixed, namely, 26th January, 1st May, 15th August and 2nd October. Initially the quorum for the meeting of the Gram Sabha was fixed at 1/3 of the voters of the Gaon panchayat and later it was reduced to 10%. There is no provision for Mahila Sabha meetings before the Gram Sabha meetings.

Dimension 5: Planning

District Planning Committees:

District Planning Committees have been constituted. The Chairperson of the ZP chairs the DPC. The District Planning Committee consists of:

- a. The members of the Council of States who are registered as electors in the district;
- b. The members of the Legislative Assembly of States who are registered as electors in the district;
- c. Chairman of the district panchayat, and
- d. Mayor of the municipal corporation or chairman of the municipal councils having jurisdiction over the headquarters of the districts.

It is ascertained that consolidated draft district plans are not prepared. It is also ascertained that guidelines have not been issued for their functioning. No experts or institutions have

been nominated to assist them. There is no practice of each Panchayat preparing perspective Five Year Plan and Annual Plans.

In the absence of a Panchayat Sector Window in the budget, the State does not indicate the extent and type of available resources to each Panchayat in order to facilitate planning.

Dimension 6: Implementation

The Gaon Panchayat Chairperson is directly elected. The vice-Chairperson is indirectly elected.

There are no Citizen Charters issued for Panchayats, though they are available for a few departments, such as Rural Development.

There are five standing committees at the district panchayat level. Each committee has specific functions to perform. Each committee has five members including chairperson as specified by district panchayat and elected by the district panchayat from among its elected members.

Dimension 7: Parallel Bodies

At the village Panchayat level, apart from the statutory committees under the Panchayats, the following other separate and distinct bodies have also been formed, namely, Village Education Committees and Watershed associations. The Forest department has also constituted village forest committees as parallel committees.

The DRDA exists at the district level as a separate and distinct body.

Dimension 8: The Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA)

Not applicable in Assam

Dimension 9: Reservations for Women

The category-wise percentage of elected women representatives is to be ascertained. Details of how many women get elected to non-reserved posts is also to be ascertained.

Rotation of offices in all these categories in all three tiers is done once in 5 years.

Seats shall be reserved for women belonging to the SC and the ST from among the seats reserved for the persons belonging to the SC and the ST which shall not be less than one-third of the total number of seats reserved for the persons belonging to SC and ST.

There is no provision to bar persons standing for Panchayat elections on the ground that they have more than two children.

Safeguards against removal of women sarpanches through no-confidence motions, if any, are to be ascertained.

Dimension 10: Reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

Details of the percentage of SC/ST representation may be seen in Table 3. Details of how many SC/STs get elected to non reserved posts are to be ascertained. There is no information of any pernicious practices, such as immediate tendering of resignation forced on SC/ST sarpanches.

Dimension 12: Panchayati Raj Jurisprudence

There has not been any effort at harmonization of other laws with State PR acts.

Dimension 13: Annual Report on the State of the Panchayats (Including preparation of a Devolution Index)

Though all the CEO of Zilla Parishad has been instructed to prepare Annual Report, but the provision has not yet been incorporated in Assam Panchayat Act. The district panchayat shall prepare in such form and at such time each year as may be prescribed, an annual report giving a true and full account of its activities during the previous year and copies thereof shall be forwarded to the Government. The Government shall lay on the table of the legislative assembly all such reports together with their comments thereon.

All CEOs have been instructed to prepare Annual Report covering basic statistics of PRIs, Devolution, Gaon Sabha, Annual Action Plan, Budget, Election status, Audit, Account keeping, Staff, Fund flow, implementation of different schemes, revenue collection, training, any other innovative measures taken by PRIs and constraints faced by the PRIs.

However, it is evident that such reports have not been prepared on a regular basis. The Department of Panchayati Raj also does not prepare an Annual Report of the department.

Dimension 14: elections

The term of the Panchayats in the State expired in October, 1997. However, the State Government put off the Panchayat elections citing different reasons such as the then ongoing Budget session 1998, subsequent monsoon rains, the law and order situation in the State and then the Census operations. The State Government decided to hold elections in November, 2000. However, passing orders on a petition filed in the High Court at Guwahati, the Hon'ble High Court directed the State Government that before the notifications for elections were issued, the State Government should dispose off the petitions containing a plea for not holding Panchayat elections in Mising Autonomous Council Areas. Elections in the State could be held only in the year 2002.

The superintendence, direction and control of the preparation for electoral roll for and conduct of all elections to the Panchayats has been vested in a State Election Commission consisting of a State Election Commissioner who has been appointed by the Governor under the provisions of sub section (1) of section 114 of the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994. The Commission will conduct all the Panchayat elections and by-elections within the State. Subject to the superintendence, direction and control of the State Election Commissioner, the Deputy Commissioner shall co-ordinate and supervise all works in the district within his

jurisdiction in connection with the conduct of all elections to the Panchayats. The tasks assigned to various bodies in respect of elections to Panchayats are as follows:

Table 8:

Delimitation of constituencies	State government
Reservations and rotations	State Election Commission
Qualifications of candidates	State government
Trying of election disputes	Jurisdictional district judge's court

It has been reported that the electoral roll of the legislative assembly is adopted for Panchayat Election. Provisions exist for disclosure of election expenses and for filing annual property statements, for elected representatives.

The Commission is also responsible for superintendence, direction and control of preparation of electoral roll and for conducting elections of local bodies including District Planning Committee

Dimension 15: Audit

The audit of accounts maintained by Village Panchayat is done by Director of Local Fund Audit. In respect of Anchalik Panchayats, the audit is done by Local fund Audit Department. The District Panchayat audit is done by Local Fund Audit Department.

The accounts of Anchalik Panchayats and District Panchayats have been completed upto 2004-05. Audit of accounts have been completed for the year 2001-02, 2002-03, 2003 -04 in respect of all 12,618 Village Panchayats, 385 Anchalik Panchayats and 29 District Panchayats.

There is no separate Public Accounts Committees (PACs) for reviewing audit paras of Panchayats. There is no separate Fiscal Responsibility Act for elected local authorities.

Panchayat accounts are maintained by the Panchayat Secretaries. There are a few instances of such responsibilities being outsourced. Details of the extent of automation and computerization of Panchayat accounts are to be ascertained.

Dimension 16: Social Audit

Provisions have been made for the conduct of Social audit of Panchayat work by Gaon Sabha. The Village Panchayat and other executing agencies shall make available all relevant documents including the muster rolls, bills, vouchers, measurement books, copies of sanction orders, photos before, during and after the execution of the work and other connected books of account and papers to the Gaon Sabha/External Agencies for the purpose of conducting the social audit.

Dimension 17: IT enabled e-Governance

The Panchayat & Rural Development Departments has already started the process of computerization of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in Assam under the database programme of the grants awarded under the Eleventh and Twelfth Finance Commissions.

The customized Software for maintenance of Audit & Accounts of the PRIs (PRISM) has already been developed, tested and found successful. The Networking and Training and installation of hardware is going on up to A.P. level covering all the Block Development Offices under 20 Nos. Zilla Parishads of Assam and it is expected to complete within in 31st December, 2006.

It is expected that all the Panchayati Raj Institutions in Assam will be connected through V-SAT under the grants awarded by the TFC.

Dimension 18: Capacity Building & Training

The State Institute of Rural development, State Level Composite Training Centre at Jorhat and 3 Zonal level Extension Training Centres imparts training to the Elected Panchayat Representatives. A Video-conference facility has been established to strengthen and augment the training capacity of the State Institute of Rural Development. During 2005-06, 40623 elected representatives were trained in 99 courses, 493 functionaries were trained in 16 courses and 16183 officials of Development Blocks, DRDAs and Line Departments were trained in 32 courses.

Elected representatives of Panchayats are functionaries are deputed to attend the training programmes in different institutes of the country. Officers working at different levels are deputed to participate in national level workshops and training programmes .

Special courses for women representatives have also been organized at the State and Zonal level. The SSIRD also has been organizing training programmes and workshops for women representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions at the State level.

UNICEF extended financial support to the SIRD to organize training programmes for the newly elected representatives of PRIs during the year 2002-03. The SIRD has also started orientation programmes for the representatives of PRIs and Gram Sabhas in association with the Department of Health & Family Welfare, Assam under the Sector Investment Programme supported by the European Commission. A total of 3717 participants participated in the programme.

Chairpersons and members of PRIs have also participated in training programmes conducted by the National Institute of Rural Development at Hyderabad. The SIRD had also organized a workshop on strengthening of PRIs where elected representatives of different districts of Assam interacted with the Chairperson and the members of the Assam Administrative Reforms Commission on various issues relating to the strengthening of Panchayati Raj System in Assam.

Funds given by Ministry of Panchayati Raj

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj sanctioned a grant of Rs. 1.55 crore grant to the State Institute of Rural Development, Guwahati, for capacity building of elected representatives and functionaries of PRIs in the State in December 2005 and released Rs. 77 lakhs as the first installment in December, 2005. Rs. 17 lakh was released to the State as Central grant in February, 2006 for carrying out training and awareness programme on implementation of Jana Kerosene Pariyojana in Assam.

Visit of Minister of Panchayati Raj

The Union Minister of Panchayati Raj visited the State on a Panchayati Raj tour during 9th to 11th September, 2006. He visited Gaon Panchayats, Anchalik Panchayats and Zilla Parishads in Dibrugarh and Goalpara districts. At the end of his visit, a Joint Statement was also signed with the Chief Minister of the State Shri Tarun Gogoi, outlining the steps to be taken by the State Government and the Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj for further strengthening the Panchayati Raj Institutions in the State.