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## IBDLP: Attempt to improve livelihoods

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By H H Mohrmen

Governments both state and central are livelihood providers; it is the duty of the government as enshrined in the Constitution to provide basic human needs to its citizens. And since independence the country has launched a series of programmes and schemes to fight against Poverty, Ignorance and Disease but the battle is not yet over. Schemes like MGNREGS etc., are targeted to achieve that goal. The State government too has launched several schemes to help improve the livelihoods of people.

Many schemes were initiated to eradicate poverty by targeting the poor and needy people of the state, but most of these schemes failed miserably because they were either not properly conceived or badly administered. Ultimately they had no impact on the livelihoods of people. Not only the State Government's schemes went down the drain but even centrally sponsored schemes aimed at improving the livelihoods of those living below the poverty line failed to reach the expected target. It was then that the State Government under the leadership of Dr Mukul Sangma came up with a new programme to tackle this most important problem of the state.

When the Government came up with the Integrated Basin Development and Livelihood Promotion Program (IBDLP), I was amongst those who publicly criticized the program and called it a non-starter. I questioned the effectiveness of a programme based on river basins when water in most of the rivers in the East and West Jaintia hills district are polluted. I predicted that the project would fail because in the case of Jaintia hills all the river basins are not conducive for any livelihood activities.

I took a small part in the IBDLP and was able to understand the concept and the approach of the programme. That helped me get a better idea of the programme. But there are also concerns lest this also fails if those involved in implementing the programme especially the officers do not understand the idea behind the IBDLP.

First of all I was able to understand that although river basins are the basis on which the programme was formulated, the larger objective is to improve the livelihoods of people. IBDLP is not another Department of the Government but it is a programme that adopts a different approach to help improve livelihoods based on three important pillars; building entrepreneurship, improving governance, and natural resource management. The Government has also constituted and instituted various agencies like the Meghalaya Basin Development Agency, Meghalaya Institute of Entrepreneurship, Meghalaya Institute of Governance (MIG) and Meghalaya Institute of

Natural Resources (MINR) to achieve this goal.

So how will IBDLP be able to improve the livelihoods of people when almost all programmes and schemes initiated by both the central and state governments have failed? IBDLP works on mission mode. The programme formulators have a clear concept of what they are going to do, when they replaced the word 'beneficiary' with the word 'partner' while referring to the target group. For some this may sound insignificant but this itself is an effort aimed at changing the mindset of the people from just being beneficiaries who always expect doles from the government to a partner in the project to improve their livelihoods and also help improve the economy of the state.

This programme is expected to bring change because it is based on partnership not only between the government and the citizen of the state, but a partnership between the different government departments, NGOs and other stake holders. At the inter-departmental level, the word is 'convergence' and again this in itself is huge shift in the government approach to implementing schemes and projects. In the new approach the goal of the various government departments is to jointly create many successful stories of farmers becoming entrepreneurs and not merely successful stories of different government departments' achievements. In short, at the end of the day the goal is to produce people's success stories in partnership with the government.

IBDLP is also different because the programme intends to improve livelihoods of the people by striking at the root of the problem. Unlike previous government programmes, the staff involved in the programme are trained to understand poverty and different aspects of poverty. The staff of Basin as the programme is commonly known by the people are also trained on different livelihood intervention tools and how to convert a partner to a successful entrepreneur. In the past, schemes and programmes were launched without the staff of the departments having any training to understand poverty and different livelihood intervention tools. In the IBDLP, however the implementers are clear about the concept and approach and they know what they are doing, so it is no longer a case of groping in



the dark. The Government also understands that livelihood is a not an issue that it can take lightly; hence it has involved Institutes like the Institute of Livelihood Research and Training (ILRT) of the BASIX group to conduct a series of training for people who are the driving force of the programme.

The staffs and partner NGOs are even trained to conduct surveys on livelihood activities or livelihood portfolio mapping of the villages before suggesting any livelihood intervention in the area. The Enterprise Resource Persons (ERPs) and staff of the Basin Development Units (BDUs) are also expected to conduct Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with the community to be able to understand them before suggesting any interventions for improving their livelihoods. Previous government schemes and programmes failed because, though ‘beneficiaries’ (as they used to call them) were trained on the livelihoods that they were supported for but their competency was not assessed before making the intervention. In the IBDLP program, before suggesting any intervention a partner(s) has to undergo training on the livelihood activity that he or she wishes to pursue. After that a series of interviews and assessment tests like focus behaviour event interview (FBEI) are conducted to assess the capacity of the partner before he or she is supported.

A common problem that different line departments face in their livelihood promotion effort is market linkage. Many a time after the intervention, farmers are able to scale up their production but the problem is marketing the excess products. The staff working in the programme and the NGOs are also trained to intervene at different levels of the production chain which includes market linkage. They are also trained to support the entrepreneurs to go for value addition if need be.

Water is not only the central idea on which the programme was formulated, but the 10 missions which include Livestock mission, Apiculture Mission, Energy Mission, Forestry Mission, Green Mission, Horticulture Mission,

Sericulture and Weaving, Tourism, Water and Agriculture Mission, of the program are based on sustainable use of natural resources available in the state. At the inter-department level, convergence is the key word but it is also an area where the stakeholders need to put more effort to achieve their goals. In many cases convergence of different department schemes can be used to improve livelihoods. Different government departments have different schemes, but do not have the tools or know how to assess the competency of the partner(s) before any support is given. It is here that the Basin can come in because IBDLP staff and partner NGOs are also trained to help partners build and support their institutions like SHGs, Joint Liability Group (JLGs) and even Farmers' Producers' Organisation (FPOs).

In the brief period that our NGO has been partnering with MBDA, my observation is that if the government really wants IBDLP to have an impact on the livelihoods of people, there are many issues that need to be addressed immediately. There are cases where even nodal officers do not have the basic idea about the program; this has to be corrected. Convergence is also not happening as expected, because departments are reluctant to join the programme for fear of not getting due credit for the success of the project. IBDLP is not about which department gets the credit for the success of the project; rather it is about how departmental cooperation can help the people. It is about the success of the state government's effort to improve the livelihoods of the people. No wonder implementing the IBDLP is a challenge and the Chief Minister should be aware of this.

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