# Environmental Governance to New Environmental Governance (NEG): A Trajectory of Governance Actors in Sikkim

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*Abstract*

*A shift from Government to Governance has affected the perspectives on different aspects of policy making including environmental policies and management. Relieving the pressure of governance from the state authority, acknowledging and involving multiple actors in the sphere of governance. This paper while highlighting on the changes in the nature of governance and its impact on environmental policies and management in Sikkim would present a study of the move from centralised decision making to decentralised 'polycentric' approach to governance.*

**Keywords: Government, Governance, Environmental Governance, New Environmental Governance (NEG) in Sikkim.**

## INTRODUCTION

For a long time, policy and decision making was regarded as the domain of state led government institution. The 'Government' as an agency of the state through its various organs dominated the sphere of managing the process of public policy. Over the years, nature of administration has changed.

With Administration and Management undergoing transformation with addition like New Public Administration (NPA) and New Public Management (NPM) state's role would get complemented by other agencies like the market and civil society organizations. This change in the administrative and management field has had impact on different spheres of activities related to public welfare. These changes led to transformation in decision and policy making processes.

A paradigm shift had taken place with decision making getting decentralised and thereby a shift emerged from Government to Governance. Where Government refers to a state institution with the monopoly over policy making; 'Governance' relates to not the institution but the process of decision making.

## GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNANCE:

Governance refers to the set of decisions and processes made through the leadership of the 'government' which refers to an office or an authority; and with application of liberal democratic ideals, governance involves the will of 'the people'. (Fasenfest, 2010)

It is a move from an overpowered and overburdened institution, the state to a system of non-reliance on hierarchical structure of organization, to a network-oriented system of decision making. It comprises a collaborative effort between private and public actors. The reason for such a development has been credited

to the increase in diversified social problems, decentralization, development of information and communication technologies and others. (Sundstrom & Jacobsson, 2007)

Since decolonization, third world or developing countries have taken a journey to establish self-determination through self-government. Later, adoption of policy of liberalization opened up possibilities to new methods of public service delivery, depending on foreign aid and policies through international organizations. Some of these measures, for instance the Structural Adjustment Programmes proposed for a 'new conventional view' which called for the state to be involved in service delivery only where necessary. Giving the state a 'provider role' and not the sole agency of service delivery. (Batley, 1994)

The idea was not to make the role of the state less important; it would still be one of the main agencies of public service delivery, just that it would not be the sole agency. Such an idea expected to establish more agencies in service delivery public, private and 'third sector'. It advocates for moving away from traditional mode of service delivery. It would be making the government a catalyst and facilitator in delivery of public goods and services. Government would still function but would have a *steering* role focusing on raising resources and focusing on agendas through a democratic political process and the private sector and the third sector would be engaged in organizing the production of goods and services. (Osborne & Gaebler, 1993)

The catalytic role of the government as proposed by Osborne and Gaebler (1993) centres on the argument that the government cannot be replaced by the private or the third sector which are voluntary in nature. Services can be handed over to the other sectors, but the idea of governance cannot. When it comes to policy management, regulation, taking collective decisions, ensuring equity public sector is better at it.

This change has been induced by the neo-liberal philosophy, which in terms of the role of the state (government) is premised on the idea of *"rolling back of the state",* and letting in voluntary sector like Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), thereby making way for *'popular participation', 'participatory development'.* (Jayal, 1997)

This move away from the centralised concept of decision making has been termed as *'governance'.* Governance refers to *'a change in the meaning of government referring to a new process of governing; or a changed condition of ordered rule: or the new method by which society is governed'* (Stoker, 1998) Stoker further presents five propositions for what governance entails, which are: *firstly,* Governance refers to set of institutions and actors that are drawn from but also beyond government; *secondly,* Governance identifies the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues; *thirdly,* Governance identifies the power dependence involved in the relationships between institutions involved in collective action; *fourth,* it refers to autonomous self-governing networks of actors; *lastly,* views government as an institution enabled to use new tools and techniques to steer and guide. (pp. 217,218)

The move from government to governance makes the process of decision making as more participative and innovative. The call for inclusion of different agencies like voluntary groups, community-based organizations broaden the base of decision making by including more interests into the field. This helps to empower the grassroot and community organizations as well. Cutting down the role of the state also refers

to what is termed as 'De-bureaucratization', whereby the part of decision-making powers is decentralised and delegated to other agencies.

With emergence in complexity of issues of varied nature social, economic, political; new trends in administration and management of the same have emerged; and delegating, decentralising, sharing, collaboration and partnerships have stood out as methods through which the diffusion of gap between public, private and voluntary sectors seem to fade away. This collaborative effort is also known as 'Network Governance', providing for an alternative model of governance. In this connection, *'governance refers to a self-organizing, interorganizational networks characterized by interdependence, resource exchange, rules of the fame and significant autonomy from the state'.* (Larsson, 2017)

The objective of governance in this respect is to make policy making and implementation transparent, participative, efficient and effective. This also proposed the concept of 'good governance' which offers 8 (eight) principles of not governance but 'good governance' which are participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness and responsibility, consensus, equity and inclusiveness, efficiency and effectiveness and accountability. (Prabakaran, 2011)

Such has emerged in the field of environmental decision making. The act of decision making is now not only the domain of the hierarchical institutions of administration; but now various actors and interaction among them have led to collaboration among actors of different origins. In environmental governance, non-governmental actors have emerged to become influential in policy making. A shift has occurred in the field of environmental governance since the late 1970s; recognition has been given to 'multi-level governance', 'multi-actor' governance. (Driessen, Dieperink, Laerhoven, Runhaar, & Vermeulen, 2012)

The next section shall be based on these notions of governance in terms of environment.

## GOVERNMENT, GOVERNANCE, ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE AND NEW ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE (NEG):

Environmental decision making, green policies, green governance has been the focus of governments all over the world, with the increase in environmental problems induced by causes arising out of anthropogenic activities which have added onto environmental problems already being caused by natural forces.

Governance which is an act of decision making by the participation and involvement of multifarious actors, including the state institutions; have broadened its base with innovation in decision making process especially in terms of environment. 'Green Movements', 'Environmentalism', 'Ecologism', 'Deep Ecology', 'Sustainable Development', which have led to transformation in practices of environmental decision making. With increase in problems related to the environment, the stakeholders in environment have also increased, as such, environmental governance through state led initiatives are not considered to be adequate. Many other means of environmental conservation and decision-making pertaining to the environment have been brought into the system.

Environmentalism in India and many third world developing countries are connected to a wide array of social attributes; and thus, environmental policies formulated through conventional methods are deemed as inadequate. Wider interest representation is sought in environmental governance, which has been reflected in environmental movements. Such movements in these regions have taken the form of social resistance which has seen participation of marginalised communities who participate in the movements advocating for survival and security. 'Politics of survival' is what the environmental movements in India known as. As Ramachandra Guha has exclaimed the reason for the emergence of environmental problems is because of the **Age of Ecological Arrogance;** with authorities devising developmental plans based on natural resources, neglecting the long-term effect it would have on the environment. This has been one of the reasons for the emergence of environmental concerns in India. (Guha, 2000, 2014)

It makes it imperative for state structures to look for alternatives to environmental decision making; innovative and non-conventional methods of policy formulation are sought in governance of the environment today; hence, New Environmental Governance (NEG). NEG draws upon the above characteristics as well. Drawing upon the idea of the interrelatedness of the ecology and the people, several new aspects have been instilled in environmental governance. New strategies for mitigating environmental problems have been devised. Moving away from the conventional method of governance, new environmental governance works towards incorporating principles like *collaboration, integration, participation, deliberative styles of decision making, adaptation and learning.* (Holley, 2017)

Governance as defined by Commission on Global Governance as, *"the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and co-operative action may be taken. It includes formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceived to be in their interest".* (Komori, 2010) Following the definition, the concept of governance exudes certain characteristics, *firstly,* governance implies the involvement of state and non-state actors functioning through networks; *secondly,* governance relies on dynamic process and non-reliance on static institutional arrangements; and *thirdly,* providing a steering role to the governance mechanisms; which would result in collective outcomes. (Osborne & Gaebler, 1993, p. 32) (Komori, 2010, p. 04)

New method of governance is not just about the strategies of policy formulation and implementation; it is about acknowledging and inculcating values which comprise the conventional and non-conventional ways involved in ideas behind environment and the need for its protection. It follows the agendas of the institutions catering to objectives pursuing socio-economic developmental agendas; and also, values, culture and traditions of communities involved, if sustainable development is to be made holistic and a reality.

To address environmental concerns, governance mechanism has opened up to ideas such as reflexive, resilient and adaptive governance. It marks consideration of relevance of the issue and also the place in problem mitigation. NEG advocated for a reliance on alternative models of governance.

Addition of new concepts like the above have definitely led to innovative practices in governance. Earlier decision-making involving Government and the act of governance was seen as similar, as the act of governing was premised on state institutions and hierarchical structures following an authoritarian procedure, the new form of governance would not only ensure the participation of state and non-state actors, but it also considers these actors participating through networks. (Kim, Halligan, Cho, Oh, & Eikenberry, 2005) Similarly, Larsson (2017) has mentioned the concept of governance as 'network governance', highlighting the role of civil society actors in public policy making and working through collaboration as one principal idea. This he believes empowers the actors for collective action in development and also play a role in implementation of policies.

## NEW ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE (NEG) IN SIKKIM:

Sikkim a small state in the Eastern Himalayan region of India is considered to be the richest biodiversity-endowed states in India. The state has made its name in various fields and one unique accolade the state has earned is, it the first 'Organic State' in the country. Along with this, the state has also welcomed developmental agendas; balancing it out with the intention of fostering environmental sustainability through adoption of UN initiated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). (FEWMD, 2016)

In, Sikkim, there has definitely been a move from government led decision making to governance. The move from government to governance and new governance in environmental decision making is evident in the way environmental concerns are being addressed through various governance practices. Since early 1990s, development policies in Sikkim, has led to changes in governance pattern as well. State led development and conservation practices have managed to open up its doors to non-state actors, and non-conventional methods of decision-making. Stakeholders in development have proliferated so has the stakeholders in environmental conservation.

Rich in biodiversity and a hub for resource-intensive developmental projects; the state is identified as a region which is vulnerable to various natural calamities. The reliance on natural resources for development of state has created a dilemma among stakeholders. On one hand, development is sought and on the other conservation of environment for human security in terms of their homeland, livelihood and also cultural values. So, to mitigate the anthropogenic and natural causes of environmental concerns, the state has initiated strategies involving state, non-state actors and networks which work through the principles of New Environmental Governance (NEG).

Addressing environmental concerns and upholding the sanctity of the environment has been prioritised by the governing institutions. Environment in Sikkim like most Himalayan states in India and also most developing countries have deeper connection to the lives of the people and vice versa. As such, over the years, local community participation through activism, contribution through traditional knowledge and experience, community participation in preservation and conservation through cultural practices have been made a part of the governance paradigm.

State initiatives have reflected the inclusion of non-state actors and contributions of local people. The initiative of state mechanism on environmental policies have been built upon the connection shared between the environment and the people of Sikkim. The new governance paradigm takes into consideration the importance of resource-based development, but it also considers the significance the environment has to lives of the people and the intrinsic value of the environment itself. The concept of 'deep ecology' have been advocated through the policies.

New Environmental Governance advocates for not just independent governance but a collaborative governance. It provides a platform for people from different walks of life to participate in governance, through a collaborative and collective effort. The reason behind participation of the people may differ, objective is common. Collective action, associations and organizations and their significance in environmental issues have received a lot of attention. Since natural resources are collectively shared, its protection also seeks collective effort. In such context, motivation for participation has different reasons, one reason as pointed out by Mancur Olson, collective action arises based on human behaviour which induced by self-interest as they are considered to be rational-egoist and are concerned more with benefits, if not individuals would not participate. (Olson, 1965) While another reason for collective action is trust and reciprocity among the people; it established the idea on the capability of the individuals outside of the government to solve emerging social problems on their own. Taking upon the arguments of rational choice theorists that government employees are self-seeking actors, and so their action towards protection of resources would bring about collective action. They are collective outcomes of individual actors. (Morcol, 2014)

Challenging government policies through collective action has been going on in Sikkim since the early 1990s. State environmental policies has initiated a collaborative effort. Collective contribution of the community cannot be ignored either. New Environmental Governance in Sikkim has incorporated various strategies in collaborative effort towards environment. With the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the state has embarked on a journey to fulfil agendas of economic development and environmental sustainability; latter which cannot be achieved without the contribution of the community.

Community participation has been sought through strategies like Joint Forest Management Committees, Himal Rakhshaks (Guardians of the Mountains), Sacred Groves; providing autonomous functioning to the community groups and also through collaborative measures along with the state actors; also, reliance on Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) to combat and mitigate environmental issues to pursue adaptive models of governance. The adaptive method has been undertaken in governance of environment in Sikkim; the local communities affected by the changes in environment have learnt about the changes and adopted approaches to adapt to the changing circumstances based upon their local knowledge and experiences, especially in terms of climate change.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), provides a wholesome approach towards the study of nature. It stands apart from the western notion of environment which is human centred. It takes under it the significance of humans and non-humans, basically all creatures comprising the ecology. TEK is defined as *"all types of*

*knowledge about the environment derived from experience and traditions of a particular group of people".* (Ingty, 2017)

TEK is premised on the patient observation of the natural world and its patterns, an approach relying simply on indigenous knowledge and experience and advocates for no distinction between disciplines like philosophy, history, sociology, biology and anthropology. (Pierotti & Wildcat, 2000) Adoption of TEK in governance provides an ethical approach to addressing issues concerning the environment; it looks to make the governance process an ethical and inclusive process, whereby the concern of nature and humanity as a whole can be addressed through the participation of indigenous people contributing through traditional practices and traditional knowledge.

UN initiatives through Agenda 21 has provided for indigenous people and their knowledge to be included in planning for environment. Chapter 15 of Agenda 21 emphasises on paving a way for the participation of women and also the utilisation of traditional methods and knowledge of indigenous people and the local communities in environmental management and resource management. Local, state, national and international legislative process should consider the traditional knowledge of the local indigenous people and their community. (Agenda 21)

A reference to Article 371F of the Indian Constitution can be made here; pertaining specially to the State of Sikkim, this article provides for safeguarding rights of minorities with special regard to Lepcha-Bhutia in state Legislative Assembly; and also, that the rights and interests of the minorities are to be safeguarded through social and economic advancement. (https://necouncil.gov.in) This has been one of the grounds on which community based environmental actors have emerged in the state. The state initiatives on development are accused to have caused environmental disruption, threatening not just the landscapes but the lives and identity of the community as well; prominent from the slogans that were hailed during environmental activism *'Save Sikkim, Save Article 371(f)'.* (Little, 2008) The violation of such rights of indigenous communities has in a way compelled them to come forward and participate in mainstream governance; and also, has made the state institutions realise the importance of involving them to foster a holistic and inclusive governance.

A traditional practice of local governance in Sikkim, the *Dzumsas* which are local governance institutions and do not form a part of the state machinery; through their efforts have been able to avert development induced environmental damage. Special reference to communities adhering to Dzumsa tradition the Lachungpas and Lachenpas of North Sikkim; have managed to find a common ground in denying entry to such developmental projects into their region, for the purpose of safeguarding their sacred land. The Dzumsas have successfully played the role of steering institutions as Osborne and Gaebler had advocated for actors in governance to be like. These institutions have successfully established the authority of local agencies, ensuring effective collective action to safeguard the community and the environment.

Such mechanisms give opportunity for policies relevant to the issues be formulated which would provide for governance to be effective and efficient. New environmental governance advocated for collective action,

participative governance, collaboration; as a new form of governance, it also calls for reliance on governance practices dependent on traditional and cultural approach to understanding nature, which are different from the legal-institutional methods of governance but are now seen to supplement the same in decision making in different parts of the world. Adopting the principles of NEG as mentioned previously have reflected in environmental governance in Sikkim. It has significantly contributed to the enhancement of environmental governance in the state.

## CONCLUSION:

The move from government to governance have impacted the management of environment. The emergence of non-state actors in governance is prevalent in different spheres of activities; however, in environmental governance it provides for a platform to many voices and interests within the community. The emergence of New Environmental Governance (NEG) has further enhanced this move and has made local communities and affected communities a part of the governance process as actors influencing the decision-making process and not as mere passive participants. In Sikkim, the involvement of the indigenous people, local communities and vulnerable sections like women have found way into the governance through collective action, collaboration, participation. It has witnessed environmental activism from inside and out, with participation emerging in various forms. Collaboration between the Government and NGOs; state-initiated NGOs, the dissatisfaction with the governance procedure and the misrepresentation of the people and unfair implementation of development policies have led to the emergence and proliferation of non-state actors like community organisations. Such, non-state actors have successfully garnered support from national and international non-state actors in environment as well, for they represent similar ideas of conservation and representation of community. Governance mechanism now represent a poly-centric approach towards resource management and environmental governance through NEG. Advocates of environmentalism have asserted the values of the environment which is intertwined with culture of the people, thereby enhancing the governance process through the empowerment of vulnerable sections of the society affected by increasing environmental concerns.

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