

Decentralised Governance



A meeting in Mendha-Lekha.



Both agricultural land and fish (and other natural resources) are now collectively owned in Mendha-Lekha.

‘We elect the government in Mumbai and Delhi, but we are the government in Mendha-Lekha!’

Mendha-Lekha village in Maharashtra was one of the two first villages to legally win community rights over their forests. Its adivasi communities earn substantial incomes through sustainable use of their natural resources and share this wealth equitably for village reconstruction. In fact recently, all residents of the village voluntarily donated all of their agricultural land holdings to the gram sabha (village council) to prevent private ownership of a vital resource.

The decision further strengthens the gram sabha, enabling it to better protect collective interests of food, water, shelter and education from threats from both within and outside the village.

In Nagaland, a series of workshops were held across the state by the government to understand the challenges of delivering government services, which led to the **‘communitisation’** of welfare schemes, rather than their privatisation. Within this, the communities can take the ownership and management of institutions across sectors, such as health (including traditional healing), education and power.

What examples like Mendha-Lekha, communitisation in Nagaland and the participatory budgeting process of Pune (exhibit 13) show is the need for an alternative politics that focuses on direct and delegated democracy, where decision-making starts at the smallest unit of human settlement, in which every human has the right, capacity and opportunity to take part, and is respectful of the needs and rights of the currently disprivileged. Such a politics would provide due space to individuals, but within the umbrella of collective priorities necessitated by the need for social and environmental justice.



A traditional healers' group in Sendenyu, Nagaland.



A community health centre in Khuzama, Nagaland.