

PERSPECTIVES

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Fix accountability

Our thromdes are not living up to their mandate.

As a part of the local government, thromdes were instituted to facilitate proper town planning and development. Their formation was to promote self-governance, share power with the people and to develop local resources and capabilities.

But this is not how the big thromdes, those classified as class 'A' are today functioning.

A performance audit on the thromdes of Thimphu, Phuentsholing, Gelephu, and Samdrupjongkhar found that these towns lack complete, accurate and reliable central registry on sources of revenue resulting in revenue loss that run into millions.

Weak internal controls in Gelephu, Phuentsholing and Thimphu Thromde had resulted in Nu 20 million in revenue going unaccounted for. Inadequacy in thromde land administration had resulted in revenue leakage worth Nu 31.4 million in Phuentsholing and Nu 0.225 million in Thimphu Thromde.

The audit authority found thromdes lacking strategies to achieve financial sustainability despite a policy on financial sustenance in place. As appears to be the tradition with audit observations, the thromdes have not acted upon past audit findings and implemented corrective actions to improve the revenue management systems.

Such a state of towns run by elected leaders is disturbing. Thromdes that are responsible for delivering utility services to its residents, which is among its main responsibilities, are losing revenues that are required to deliver these very services.

The audit authority identified institutional weakness to perform its job and inadequate governance for huge revenue loss and leakages. Decentralisation is a tool of empowerment. It is about accountability because it allows direct participation of people in the development and management of their wellbeing.

So when decentralised institutions such as the thromdes are instead of maximising resource use losing millions of ngultrums due to poor governance, we are defeating the purpose of instituting local governments. And when it is unable to address revenue leakage, the aspiration for thromdes to become sustainable remains an illusion. The audit authority observed the thromde's growing dependence over the years on government subsidy. Perhaps, it is this dependence on subsidies that has led to complacency in the thromdes.

But complacency has consequences. For instance, the audit authority observed that the thromdes of Thimphu and Phuentsholing have charged sewerage charges to residents whose buildings have no sewer line connections. Thimphu Thromde had not installed water meters in 102 households in Babesa, Olakha and Lungtenphu area availing its water services resulting in non-levy of water charges and revenue loss of Nu 20 million. Nine-car washing units in Olakha area and 34 households in Dechencholing Dangrayna provided with thromde water were also not levied water charges. But Thimphu Thromde charged residents even though water bills reflected no water consumption.

Such serious lapses from the thromdes should concern the people and policy makers. It is time to fix accountability.