



## Aizawl's Localised Community Interventions against COVID-19 crisis

### COVID-19 status in Mizoram



*Aizawl City at sunset*

Mizoram has eased the lockdown since the start of July. The state was in a total lockdown prior to that for almost an entire month. The overall case stands at 384 as on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2020, with most cases being detected in returnees from other states. Mizoram has been extremely cautious with the unfolding of the crisis and has fared a lot better in comparison to most states. Let us delve deeper and look at how the capital city, Aizawl is responding to the crisis.

### Decentralised Structure within the City Administration

Aizawl has taskforces formed across all its local areas termed as Local Council Task Forces to fight against the crisis. Before going on to explain what the taskforce does, let us understand about Local Councils. The municipal wards in Aizawl are further split into localities termed as Local Council areas. The Local Council are the erstwhile village councils, which are the traditional community governance structures still being followed actively. The Local Councils have a chairman and 3-4 members elected by the community belonging to the Local Council area. The Local Council chairman and members primarily look after the development of the Local Council area. The chairman represents the views and decisions taken, to the respective ward councillors during the ward committee meetings that are held. So, on an overall account, Local Councils are formally recognised decentralised traditional citizen consultative platforms that are completely integrated with the city governance structure.

### Local Council machinery in action against the COVID crisis

This structure has enabled the setting up of task forces at the local council levels across the city during the crisis. The addition is that, apart from the chairman and members of local council,

the task force also has local resident volunteers, health workers, the church and Young Mizo Association (YMA) representatives working in full coordination. These taskforces are authorised to manage the crisis in its respective areas. The taskforces are supported by respective ward councillors of the Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC) and State Government officials for any form of necessary administrative support. The taskforce has been distributing food, enforcing social distance norms and spreading awareness through various means such as social media, local news channels etc. A councillor from AMC has added that, “All required facilities across the city have been set up under the purview of the government with the help of multiple local task forces. It is owned by the government, but municipal subordinates, Local Councils chairmen and members are overseeing day-to day functions”.

### **Key roles enacted by the Youth and the Church**

Aizawl has a largely young population, and this is very much evident if one visits the city. The youth are engaged in a culture revolving around volunteering through the church and culturally active groups such as the YMA. The YMA conducts awareness and other local voluntary activities, and this has been in practice for a long time now. This has thus, led to active participation of the youth across the city in various relief and support activities through YMA, taskforce, college groups and the church.



Aizawl Theological College, an ecumenical seminary of the Presbyterian Church in Aizawl

The church is the backbone to the city or otherwise the Mizo society to be more precise. It has always played a major role in many of the activities that take place in the city. During the COVID crisis, a councillor from the AMC confirmed, “The government has involved local officials and church leaders to turn church halls into quarantine centers. Even in my ward, 10 churches have been designated as community quarantine centers”. Thus, it can be inferred from these accounts that the churches across the city have been identified for using the premises as quarantine facilities.

Mizos live within a very close-knit society wherein everyone knows one another, especially within the local council areas and local church groups. This also has in a way helped in keeping a check on one another from flouting norms and supporting families in need of help. The city is known for the discipline it shows even in normal times and for its abidance towards rules framed by their respective Local Councils and YMA groups.

### **Key takeaways from Aizawl's model**

Cities cannot underestimate the importance of hearing out and responding to the voice of its citizens. This needs to be acknowledged formally by forming platforms within the city governance structures wherein the citizens of various communities can put forth their views regarding various relevant matters and issues. Unless the city governments take this into full consideration and enact the same, the city will not be able to promote a bottom up approach to governance. This also affects the resilience of most communities in the city, especially during such crisis. Aizawl has set a best practice on this front and it is high time for most of the cities across the country to figure out how to empower its communities.