

# **The Case of the Powerful, Powerless State**

**Unpacking the layers of State Capacity from the  
Bottom Up**

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# State Capacity and India : 3 commonly cited problems

## The Policy Problem

- India has good policy but poor implementation- the “Flailing” State
- Implementation is about incentivization
- Plumbing reform/ disciplining reform
- Accounting as accountability

## The Political Economy Problem

- Political will and the question of *interests*
- Even political will is no match for bureaucratic wherewithal

## The Poverty Problem

- Fiscal constraints – we cannot “invest in the State” it is too big and too inefficient

# The field and the file on India's bureaucracy



# The Powerful, Powerless Bureaucrats

- *“We are just post officers.”*
- *“What suggestions can I give? My first priority is to implement orders.”*
- *“Sarkar Chahti hai to bahut kuch kar sakti hai” (If the State wants, it can do a lot)*



# The Solutions State – Reinforcing the rules

- Outsourcing – The consultant, the new “State” – PMU/ TSU
- Technology (command & control)
- The “citizen” as the “labharthi”, the bureaucrat as the problem



***Feeding the low equilibrium model***



# State Capacity Initiative

## Public Purpose & Public Value

- Two pathways to start conversations about norms and values:
  - Civil Services Training
  - Regular surveys and discussions

# Building an ecosystem

## Reflecting on Norms and Values

**Training for Meghalaya Civil Service Officers:** Essential Knowledge for Field Administrators; Values and Skills for the 21st Century Civil Servant

### Some highlights:

- **Reflections on values:** *“I would like people to know me as a good person who is also an able administrator, in that order.”*
- Exercises on writing an independence day speech, role-playing a typical day in the BDOs office, recognizing social inequalities through a “diversity walk”.
- In class survey to understand shared norms on teamwork, information sharing and collaboration, perceptions of citizens.

# Public Administration and Competencies

- **Cohort study of Meghalaya Civil Service Officers:**
  - Long term study to understand the evolving motivations, norms and values of a critical cadre of civil servants throughout their career. How do key milestones such as promotions, the shift from the field to the secretariat, or assignments requiring new domain knowledge impact the everyday working life of public administrators?
- **Competency mapping and utilization:**
  - Integrated with the long-term study.
  - Initiative to map, measure and develop competencies of officers in line with the goals of Mission Karmayogi
  - Parallel development of human resource systems to enable hubs of learning about the professional development of public administrators



# Embedding for the long term: Institutional & Organisational Design

- **Institutional re-design of the Meghalaya Administrative Training Institute (MATI)**
  - Building a culture of research and collaboration.
  - Developing capacities for the production of locally relevant case studies on good governance.
- **Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Sustainable Natural Resources Management and Livelihoods**
  - Instil purposeful learning and evaluation at the core of the organisation's mission right from inception.
  - A rare case of a public institution with an Organizational Development Plan outlining strategies for honing appropriate skills and values for current and future employees.
- **Meghalaya State Capability Forum**
  - Hosted by the chief minister and attended by ministers and senior bureaucrats.
  - Brings together politicians and administrators to envision long term pathways

# What is State Capacity

## 4 Propositions

1. State capacity is about policy *and* implementation. It is about design *and* regulatory practice
2. State capacity is about systems that fix their own pipes. It is not a plumbing problem but about public institutions and systems that are *active, nimble, innovative, iterative, integrative, and adaptive*
3. Similarly, strong *institutions, organizations and systems* get their incentives right. What is needed is a *shared vision* of the *legitimate purpose* of the organization and the establishment of *values and norms* to incentivize and sustain performance and accountability
4. State capacity cannot be an *if only, then* story. It can start with the possibility of building state capacity *inspite/despite* but will only be sustained if public systems start to work *because* of social and political engagement and accountability (outcome-based legitimacy)