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MELBOURNE

COVID-19

1ST WAVE HANDBOOK : NAGALAND

ORIENTAL
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY



COVID-19

First Wave Handbook: Nagaland

Akumsungla Aier
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Heritage Publishing House

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Foreword



This research project began in 2019, before any of us imagined that our lives would be turned upside down by COVID-19. Our research team at the University of Melbourne — comprising Dr. Anne Décobert, Dr. Dolly Kikon, and Dr. Michael Breen — had been in communication with leading researchers on peacebuilding in Nagaland, Dr. Wati Aier and Dr. Aküm Longchari. Together, we aimed to explore and develop opportunities for collaboration with Naga communities in India and Myanmar. We secured a grant from the Statelessness Hallmark Research Initiative at the Melbourne Law School, University of Melbourne. Focused on community-led peace initiatives and dialogues on the ground, our project was scheduled to start in 2020. But COVID-19 brought our plans to a halt. Countries shut down and our research plans were stalled due to travel restrictions. While we knew that this would impact the course of our research, it also gave us an opportunity to explore a new research methodology, to focus on teamwork, and to realign our focus in ways that strengthened collaboration between scholars in India and Australia.

As the pandemic continued to wreak havoc across the world, national priorities and focuses underwent major transformations. By late April 2020, India had the highest numbers of new and active cases in the world, and the pandemic was already creating major health and socio-economic consequences for local communities. In particular, the

impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups — particularly Adivasis/ Indigenous people and Dalits — was immense.

As India shut down in March 2020, migrant workers were disproportionately impacted by the national lockdown. Before the pandemic, many people from Nagaland State and elsewhere in Northeast India worked as migrant workers in metropolitan cities across India, mostly in the hospitality industry. After the national lockdown in 2020, many migrants lost their jobs and were forced to return home. It was estimated that by June 2020, more than 18,000 migrants had returned to Nagaland from different parts of the sub-continent. The lack of basic infrastructure in Nagaland meant that community leaders, religious institutions, traditional associations, and civil society organisations rendered assistance and organised health care and other social support for the returnees.

At the same time, tribal migrants from Northeast India who were working in cities across the sub-continent suffered racist attacks and physical abuse, as they were perceived to carry the virus because of their east Asian physical appearance. Derogatory terms like “Chinese virus” were hurled at Naga migrants in metropolitan cities and some were refused entry at grocery stores and other food outlets. In some cases, Naga migrants were evicted from their rented accommodation. Experiences of discrimination and stigmatisation added to the immense distress and suffering of Naga migrant workers who had lost their sources of income, with many being made to feel that they were unwelcome in their own country.

At the University of Melbourne (UoM), the research team felt that it was important to document the experiences and resilience of Indigenous people during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Oriental Theological Seminary (OTS) Principal, Dr. Joshua Lorin, welcomed the idea of a research collaboration between UoM and OTS, to work on a community-centred research project. Our media partner in this project was Morung Express under the leadership of Dr. Aküm Longchari. He was extremely

gracious and kind in guiding us towards media reports and allowing us to use the Morung photo archive for the purpose of this research.

Together with the OTS research team, led by Dr. Sashi Jamir, Dr. Panger Kechu and Dr. Akumsungla Aier, we redesigned the research project to document and focus on the experiences of the Naga migrant communities, local responses, and links between issues of vulnerability, citizenship, and identity during a global health crisis. We redesigned the methodology of the research, keeping the local context and priorities in mind, and focusing on the development of research partnerships across India-Australia. For the UoM research team, this also meant redirecting the international fieldwork budget (intended to cover travel and fieldwork costs for our UoM team members), so that it would cover the costs of employing local researchers and conducting local workshops and events.

To implement the project, we set up a formal partnership between the UoM and OTS in Nagaland. OTS recruited and managed nine field researchers — OTS students, social workers, and journalists. Each field researcher was tasked with conducting four interviews with migrant returnees or local service providers. The OTS team managed the fieldwork schedules and took the opportunity, through this work, to highlight aspects of care and ways to be responsible researchers. All ethical questions about fieldwork research and safety on the ground were managed jointly by the UoM and OTS teams, as equal partners. Before the beginning of fieldwork, our team at UoM and OTS also conducted a training workshop, during which we worked with the field researchers to familiarise them with ethics protocols, as well as interview guides that we had developed collaboratively. The OTS team also conducted workshops with COVID-19 responders and caregivers as the basis for this Handbook, which includes stories and lessons learnt from COVID-19 in Nagaland State.

Instead of centering the Australian COVID-19 experience as *the* framework to design and frame the research questions, we were

mindful to respect the Naga researchers at OTS and their perspectives in the research project. This meant respecting the local culture and perspectives emerging from the ground during this period of crisis. The OTS team stepped up and made the project more meaningful through their leadership and deep, contextual knowledge. Exploring the relationships between issues of identity and citizenship in Nagaland emerged as a key theme, with research interviews uncovering a layered political history of discrimination and violence. In addition, experiences of vulnerability and resilience emerged as important findings of this project and are documented in this Handbook.

This research journey and the resulting Handbook are a joint project, one that underlines solidarity and trust as the foundations of effective and meaningful collaboration. Our journey highlights the importance of research ‘with, for, and by’ Indigenous people. This Handbook would have never been possible without the leadership of our Naga partners — OTS and Morung Express. All too often, international research partnerships reproduce systemic inequalities between ‘Western’ institutions and researchers and counterparts in the Global South — with supposedly ‘collaborative’ research being in many cases led by Western institutions and researchers, and Global South counterparts being reduced to implementors, participants, or (even worse) mere ‘data’.

We always intended to develop a respectful and equitable research partnership that recognised the leadership of our Naga partners. But COVID-19 generated a situation where local leadership in research was no longer just an abstract goal but a very practical necessity. This Handbook demonstrates what scholarship by Indigenous leaders looks like in practice. At the same time, the realities of the pandemic and our conversations with our partners compelled us to be creative and to adopt solidarity and trust as foundations of our research approach.

The need to work in collaboration within a difficult and uncertain context meant revising expectations and deadlines, as we all struggled with the wide-ranging impacts of COVID-19. This meant that Anne,

Dolly, and Michael tried to adapt strict institutional frameworks to on-the-ground realities and worked with our funders to give people the space and time needed to cope with an evolving and unpredictable situation. The resulting work and collaboration depended very much on the understanding and flexibility of our funders at the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness, Melbourne Law School, and we remain very grateful for their support.

Throughout this journey, as we at UoM and our partners at OTS together negotiated the challenges of research during a global pandemic, we also found commonalities in our experiences of life and care in a time of crisis. There were many challenges we faced together at a personal level, including the illness and loss of loved ones, as well as ongoing uncertainties and travel restrictions. As we learnt that OTS was turned into a quarantine center to provide care and support to migrant returnees, the situation in Melbourne was also unfolding in response to the needs of the local community. As researchers and teaching staff at UoM, we were also faced with new challenges to adopt to online pedagogy, provide care for students, and struggle with uncertainties as Australia went into long periods of lockdown and extreme travel restrictions. While the context of the 'local' might have been different, the feelings of uncertainty and fear were similar, as the two teams shared their thoughts on the research and the unfolding situation on the ground.

It is in such moments that empathy can also become an important research tool. This project taught us that patience, generosity, and empathy are necessary for developing meaningful research collaborations. By forging solidarity and mutual respect, research partners develop two-way learning processes with community elders and researchers. An important takeaway from this research is reflecting on listening as a research methodology. The experiences of Naga migrants who returned home are painful ones. The long hours of interviews and uninterrupted conversations led by fellow Naga

researchers were infused with empathy. Their example shows us how listening is central to Indigenous research frameworks, and provides a basis for ethical, engaged research. More generally, our relationship with our research partners in Nagaland has been the driving force of a research process that showcases how we can develop respectful, collaborative, and effective international partnerships.

Melbourne, February 25th, 2022

Dolly Kikon and **Anne Décobert**

Acknowledgement



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their archival images on Covid-19 for purpose of publication here. Our heartfelt gratitude to the Dimapur Area Ao Baptist Churches and Civil Societies, Muslim Organization, Vivekananda Welfare Society, Rotary Club, Western Sumi Baptist Association, Sisterhood Network and Lotha Baptist Church, Dimapur who enthusiastically participated in the symposium organized by OTS in order to listen and garner first-hand information from the frontline workers. A note of thanks to the State Covid War Room, Government of Nagaland, for willingly providing data related to migrant returnees and official quarantine facilities. Finally, but not the least, we are grateful to the Principal of OTS, Dr. Joshua Lorin and the Academic Dean Dr. James Kalong, for their faith in us to embark with full freedom on this project even while being constantly supportive.

This work truly exhibits a spirit of collaborative engagement and it will be a remiss if we do not acknowledge our living God for not only planting this project on us but also bringing along our way, the right people with rich resources, and the environment needed to see us through this project.

Akumsungla, Panger and Sashi

Editorial Preface



“**M**arwari Patti has been sealed!” A person almost shrieked. The same person remarked, “now we have the first case of corona virus in Dimapur.” This was around April 21 and 22 of 2020. Another person browsing through WhatsApp messages pointed out that the infected person was vacationing in Kolkata, showing the pictures circulated in the Social Media. The information of the infected person was now frantically circulating in all the Social Media platforms. On the basis of the information strewn, people soon began “contact tracing” based on the assumption that the person was found in one of the most popular medicine shops in Dimapur. In many households, people were questioning why this infected person had to visit Kolkata during such times! Then the news followed that the person has been transported to Guwahati. The fear caused by this news was palpable, triggering fear and chaos and exposing the unpreparedness of the State of Nagaland to respond to such a contagious pandemic. The State, then, had neither RT-PCR testing lab installed nor facilities for Rapid Antigen testing. Complete “lockdown” of the State was put in place on March 22, 2020, as the immediate measure for addressing the pandemic. This lockdown provided the authorities time to ponder and come up with practical strategies for tackling the situation.

The initial days of pandemic in Nagaland State was characterized by fear, lockdown, inundation of Internet news and loads of community grapevine. Then on May 22, 2020 the first returnees of Naga migrants

reached Dimapur from Chennai – a total of 1469 people consisting mostly of blue-collared workers, students and a few others. Another 18,797 people followed these first returnees in a couple of weeks. Many quarantine centers were established all over Nagaland districts and many local communities, tribal organizations and churches played key and active roles during this crisis. OTS too ran a quarantine center during the first wave of the pandemic, hosting 82 migrant returnees from Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu.

Just as the “first wave” was simmering down a proposal from the UoM came to OTS, supported by the Morung Express to jointly study and document the impact of Covid-19 in Nagaland on the theme of identity, citizenship, and vulnerability. The partnership endeavored towards three outcomes: 1) To publish article for academic journals. This part was to be initiated by the UoM. 2) To furnish a Handbook on Covid-19 in Nagaland. OTS took this task. 3) To organize a photo exhibition on Covid-19 in Nagaland. The project took its wings by January 2021.

This Handbook fulfills the second objective in the partnership. As the work began on this project, the “second wave” (Covid-19 Delta) struck the State. It not only slowed down the process but also put the project team in dilemma, namely, whether the project should cover the “second wave” as well. However, in the process, the team decided that it would be difficult to document a phenomenon that was just unfolding. At the same time, the resources to cover the “second wave” was quite thin. Thus, this Handbook focuses specifically on the “first wave” of Covid-19 in Nagaland.

In order to garner the lived experiences of people and capture ground realities, the project team chose 9 field researchers who conducted 4 interviews and subsequently wrote four stories each, as a way of analyzing the interviews. They were all competent researchers with a Master’s degree in different disciplines. Among these researchers, two were journalists. Before the researchers began their work, the project

team organized three seminars (two over Zoom and one physical meeting). One of these seminars was with the UoM team. A pilot test using the guided interview questions was conducted before the actual work begun. There were three supervisors from OTS who guided these researchers. The task was to conduct the research and send the content of the interviews – transcripts and stories – to the UoM team. The interview transcripts and stories were then analyzed by UoM team members Dr. Anne Décobert and Dr. Matthew Mabefam, who identified key findings, lessons learnt and recommendations. This were then discussed with and finalized with the input of the OTS team. Six stories from this field research have been included in the Handbook. Besides this, the project team also organized a symposium on September 11, 2021 with the theme: “Listening and learning on Covid-19 experiences from caregivers.” The idea for this symposium was to learn first-hand how the local communities, NGOs, and churches engaged themselves during this crisis. There were seven groups that participated in this symposium: Dimapur Area Ao Baptist Churches and Civil Societies, Muslim Organization, Vivekananda Welfare Society, Rotary Club, Western Sumi Baptist Association, Sisterhood Network and Lotha Baptist Church, Dimapur.

The intention of this Handbook is archival and data-oriented in nature. Thus, it is mostly descriptive. It contains expressions of people’s Covid-19 experiences in poems, art works, and stories. It also includes images, statistical data, and certain recommendations. The editors of this Handbook hope that this modest work will provide a glimpse of the Covid-19 first wave for the later generation as well as encourage the present generation to act wisely during times such as this.

The Migrant Returnees' Stories

*Go Back to China – A “Foreigner” Among One’s Own**

The lack of private-sector jobs in Dimapur drove Zian** in search of work to Kolkata. He worked there for three years as a customer care executive. One of the things he liked there was the varied work options and beamed about meeting people from other parts of India, which enriched his experience. Being a friendly and open-minded man, he built a good rapport with the locals. While he was enjoying his stay there, it was disheartening that people were ignorant of Nagaland as a part of India: *“This is the cause of racism towards Nagas.”* Though he did not face personal racism, he asserted it was one of the main problems Nagas generally faced and reckoned it peaked during the pandemic. The locals in different cities were hurling racial slurs at them: *“Chinese,” “Go back to China,”* and *“Covid virus carriers.”* Ergo, discrimination ensued as they were not allowed entry to grocery stores, evicted from homes, denied treatment at hospitals, and few beaten up. His biggest fear was falling sick because he knew there was little to no possibility of him getting treated.

Unlike many of his friends, he was able to work from home, and his company paid him half his regular pay. Though that was not enough, and he struggled financially, his mental health was the most affected. Racism and discrimination inflamed the longing to be with family

* This story is transcribed and narrated by Kipangwala Jamir.

** Pseudo name

members and the need for compassion. Insecurity and helplessness engulfed him, and he remarked that those were common feelings among Nagas during the pandemic. Instead of the callous indifference experienced, he wished there were unity and solidarity in battling the virus. He grieved, *"The virus never affected us, but it was the attitude of the people towards us that wore us down."* They remained silent amidst racist attacks and *"were used to it"* because sensitizing them would only lead to more altercations, endangering their safety.

The pressure to decide to stay back or go home forthwith was amounting. News of the virus spreading and poor conditions of the quarantine centers contributed to the distress. It made him question the credibility of the state government. Simultaneously, they ran out of money to pay for rent and other needs. Moreover, they feared that if they failed to go home when the state government provided help, they would be stranded indefinitely.

When he didn't receive immediate aid like money and food from the West Bengal government, he felt a slight pinch of discrimination: *"We are from the same country even though we are from a different state."* However, he praised the arrangement of free transport to the two Nagaland houses in Kolkata and thought it was the best they could do at the time. In times of crisis such as the pandemic, he believes that each state government should be responsible for its citizens. Each state must out for its people, and he felt it was appropriate: *"At such times, won't we help our people first?"* He added that he felt safer receiving help from the Nagaland government. However, in essence, he remarked that the central government helped them by providing funds to the state government.

Before returning home, he received financial aid twice from the Nagaland government. After reaching home, he received a call from Emporium Nagaland, an initiative to help migrant worker returnees. They offered a three-month free of cost vocational training on airlines, hotel management, and cruise ships with assured job placement



Ganeshnagar Quarantine Center

nationally and internationally. Though he appreciated the scheme, he was disappointed at the reservation of the training for selected returnees. His friends had not received a call. Besides, he felt that there could be more vocational options: *“I think they should do better, or they should give more options.”*

When he returned home in September, the government quarantine facilities were unavailable. He noticed that local administration became careless and irresponsible after a few months of strict vigilance during the lockdown. They only checked his temperature and sent him off to do a home quarantine. He questioned, *“What if I had the virus? Wouldn’t I have endangered lives?”* The village council checked on him once to see if he was following the quarantine protocol. Many village councils in different neighborhoods arranged quarantine centers, but family members provided the food. He recollected many NGOs, churches, women hohos, and individual families’ assistance to the quarantine centers and beamed that they served excellent food. Some schools and colleges volunteered to be quarantine centers, and he wished other similar institutes followed their examples.

A lack of data on migrant workers from Nagaland complicated the situation during the pandemic. He asserted a need for more credible career counseling centers and training institutes with job placements

in Dimapur. Such institutes should have their trainees or employees registered for accountability that would also be expeditious for the government when faced with any problems or crises in the future. Migrant workers should also register themselves with the Naga Student Union, their tribal unions, and churches. Registering migrant workers, he iterated, would be an impetus towards security and greater accountability.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted serious difficulties and vulnerability manifested in severe ways for Naga migrant workers. With the nationwide lockdown implemented, they lost jobs, housing, and income, resulting in high mental distress. Vulnerability amplified due to crowded unkempt quarantine centers and sub-optimal health services, causing a disproportionate risk of infection. The indifferent treatment based on racial and cultural differences unearthed and accentuated the disintegration between Nagaland and India. The treatment as ethnic outsiders revealed the life-long struggle of marginalization and neglect by the Indian government. Holding Indian citizenship provided no security and protection. The bid to help migrant workers, caused division among states and subsequent distrust among people, accentuating the problem of being stateless or statusless in one's own country. Despite the difficulties endured and as challenging as it was, they focused on surviving, and it became a question of the survival of the fittest.



*Just a Migrant Worker**

Artang** grew up in the village but had to go out of the state in order to earn money for his family. He is twenty-five years old, the only son and the eldest among the siblings. His father passed away while he was still young, and he had to take up the responsibility to look after his mom and three younger sisters. He stopped his education after completing his 10th standard due to financial constraints. Having to take up the role of the bread winner of the family at a young age was not easy. He wanted to protect his sisters from the dangers of going out of the state because it is common knowledge how Nagas especially girls are treated by those in the mainland.

With his educational qualification, he knew it will be very difficult to get a well-paying job within the state, but he tried a couple of times in the army and police recruitment. But he could not get through despite him doing very well in the tests, due to unfair selection system. Feeling frustrated with the system, he started looking for opportunities outside the state. He had to earn money to take care of his mother and three sisters, and the private sector in the state pays very less. With that salary it would not be possible to look after his family. All these reasons finally pushed him out of the state.

When he left the state and ventured out into the city, he went through some shaky experiences. Some ignorant mainlanders would

* This story is transcribed and narrated by Tewe u Mero.

** Pseudo name

ask him weird questions about Nagas, and he tried his best to clear the misconceptions they had concerning our people. And he also had first-hand experiences of being treated like an outsider. Initially, he worked in Gujarat but due to ill-treatment at work place he left that job. He was picked on constantly because he was the lone Naga in that work place. After that terrible experience, he left for Delhi and started working at an ice-cream and milkshake parlour. Things were a bit better and so he worked there for more than a year until the pandemic hit and lockdown was imposed. With that, he lost his job. Stranded in Delhi with a few friends, they had a very difficult and trying time.



There was no income and the daily expenses were high. So, it was a constant struggle to make ends meet. The fact that he diligently saved half of his salary every month after sending money home helped him and his friends for a while. But finally, all his savings were exhausted and he ended up asking money from home. During the difficult period, the Nagaland House, Delhi helped them with weekly ration. He was very grateful for that timely help. The Delhi government did not extend any type of assistance because he was just a migrant worker there. The Nagaland government finally arranged transportation and he was able

to come back home. Apart from the assistance from the government agencies, he received help from Ao church Delhi in the form of food.

After reaching the state, he spent about 39 days at two quarantine centers, one at Zuketsa and other at the village. He spent more than the required days at the quarantine center because the COVID-19 test results took time. At both the centers the church and the youth society along with generous individuals provided food and took care of the returnees. The quarantine center in the village was not sponsored by the government but it was set up by the different organizations and bodies of the village.

With the experiences he had during the pandemic he looks forward for the government to create more employment avenues for the youth so that they won't have to go out of the state. When young people go out of the state, it is very easy for them to go astray and spoil their lives. He was also concerned about the fact that in the government sector, money usually ends up playing a role in securing jobs. So, he wishes for transparency from the government. And for the migrant workers who have returned to the state, he would like the government to help them find alternative means of earning a livelihood.

*Not Naga Enough**

Bina** left Dimapur because she felt that it had no place for high school graduates like her. Moreover, the exposure and the experience of a metropolitan city attracted her. Hence, she left home for Delhi in 2015 and worked as a hostess at a family restaurant cum nightclub. In 2019, she moved to Kolkata and worked as a staff assistant in a leather factory until the COVID-19 pandemic. Coming from a broken family and lack of financial support left her choiceless to pursue further education. The prejudice she endured because of her background made her feel excluded. The Nagaland government also contributed to her hardship. There were no work opportunities for someone like her. It killed her spirit and discouraged her. Such bias from within her own community evoked hostility towards them. For others, she left as a *failed* Naga, and to her, she left the *judgemental* Nagas behind.

The pandemic made her the most vulnerable than she had ever been in her life. She lost her job because the factory she worked in closed. Without an income, she could not pay her mess fee at the hostel she lived. Moreover, it was running out of food and came to a point when the pantry was empty. The uncertain duration of the lockdown and mobility restriction caused high mental distress. Unlike her friends, there were no family members to turn to for financial help. Besides, living in a country

* This story is transcribed and narrated by Kipangwala Jamir.

** Pseudo name.

unsafe for girls and women added to her vulnerability. Her biggest fear came true when she got an ear infection during the lockdown. She had no money to visit a doctor and consulted a pharmacist who prescribed painkillers. It has affected hearing loss in her right ear. These difficulties caused her depression, and at one point, eating became a problem.

Racial and cultural differences made the Nagas victims of racism and discrimination. The Indians outrightly reminded them they did not belong: “Go back, this country is not yours.” The suspicious stare, mistreatment at grocery stores, and racist comments dehumanized them. Treated as sub-citizens, they received no political attention and social security. It exposed the racial, cultural, and linguistic exclusion of Nagaland as a part of India. These problems challenged their Indian citizenship, and it created anti-India sentiment.

News of financial help from the state government made her ecstatic. Yet, her application failed. Even after repeated attempts at communicating with a supervisor, there was no response. The criteria maintained the recipient to be a Naga migrant with an active bank account. Unable to receive the money left her dejected: “Was I not Naga enough to receive the money?” There was no accountability from the government. Huge funds provided by the Indian government to the state were no secret. Thus, the failure to receive the money felt like a betrayal and lack of integrity. After she returned home, there was no help from the government. Ergo, the tiniest bit of hope she had in the government shattered. Even the skills training provided by the government required a higher secondary certificate. Hence, they were irrelevant to her. Nagaland, it appears, is no place for a high school graduate from a family background like hers.

She quarantined at Medziphema, a better facility than many other quarantine centers in Dimapur. Unlike other centers, they had spacious rooms and clean bathrooms. For the first twelve days, different churches provided them good meals. But, the government-provided meals were either half-cooked or rotten. Their complaint met with a reply that they

should be grateful for the food as bad as it was. It put their health at risk, and they suffered from diarrhea. Instead of feeling supported, they felt like a burden to the government. They also exceeded their stay of the fourteen-day quarantine to a month. All attempts to get an answer for the extension fell on deaf ears. Though they tested twice for the COVID-19 virus, the result remained unknown. Relentless attempts to get the result received callous responses. Hence, the lack of empathy felt like imprisonment and increased their mental stress. Besides, accused as coronavirus carriers in Nagaland, they faced further discrimination. Leaving a *failed* Naga, she returned a *virus carrier* Naga.



The village council provided good care and succor at the village quarantine centers. Besides, they visited every migrant returnee's home and gave financial help. The NGOs, particularly the churches, filled the loopholes of the state government. Regardless of family, economic, and educational background, Bina hopes for equal treatment. The state government is accountable for every Naga, no matter where they live. She envisions unity among Nagas not only in times of crisis but generally.

Nagas in helpless conditions face exclusion by fellow Nagas and the state government. The eligibility for social acceptance in Nagaland depends on economic, family, and educational background. It reveals a lack of integration among Nagas and calls for political innovation, creating opportunities or welfare based on needs. Besides, the lack of job opportunities in Nagaland pushes them out to cities where their ethnic identity becomes a target for racism. It highlights the Indian government's failure to integrate the unique racial, cultural, and linguistic differences of Nagaland as a part of India. The lack of values of inclusivity in both governments produces marginalization. Hence, it creates a lack of belonging either in Nagaland or outside it. Thus, it aggravates citizenship issues and challenges the Naga identity. The negligence during the pandemic amplified vulnerability among the most vulnerable.

Covid-19 Experience in Creative Expressions

Comic Art

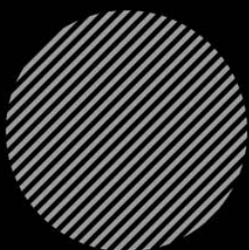
INTRODUCTION

My name is Manentila Jamir and I am a freshman at Taylor University in Indiana. These images are taken from an animation project I made in my art class in 11th grade in response to the first wave of the coronavirus.

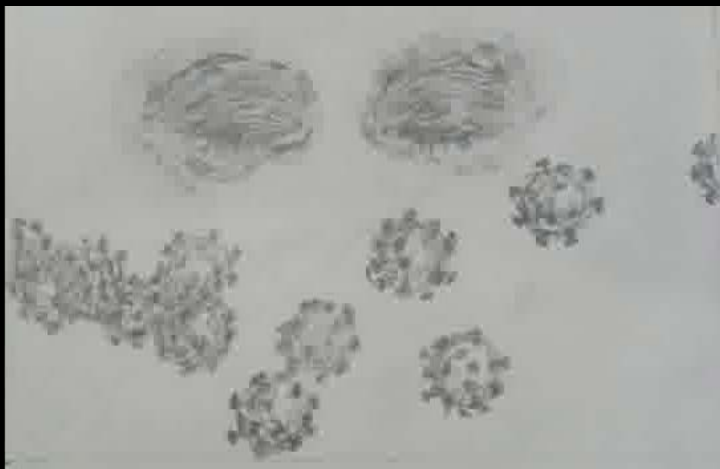
I wanted to make a fantastical portrayal or combine some fairy tale elements because the experience felt a bit surreal for me. To capture the essence of its dreamlike manner, I added details like that of Pandora's box and loosely personified the virus. While I drew inspiration from William Kentridge by using the erasure of graphite and charcoal to emphasize on the gestures and dynamics, it is lost without the transitions present in digital format.

Through this piece, I hope to exhibit an experience that emotionally impacted me. As the coronavirus still continues to impact the world, I wanted the end to be more ominous instead of closing with a happy ending like most fairy tales so the end of the animation signifies the end of a dream or perhaps the beginning of reality. I think continuation is more fitting though.









The end?

An Invisible Threat

Suddenly humanity is a Threat
Everyone has become our foe;
We're in a war against an invisible enemy,
We're no longer citizens but "Soldiers" in a conflict.

The practice of losing every day
Losing our loved ones made us overwhelmed with grief.
We're incarcerated as birds in cramped cages
Where, every visitor becomes an unwelcomed virus.

As our invisible enemy gambols outside
From my window I see a pedestrian lane on empty road.
It reminds me of times before the drama and the trauma,
The times I didn't spend alone.

I wonder if human race would come together
Embracing this wakeup call and to overcome this desolation;
Before it strikes us with its wrath,
And leave us with none.

Chenithung Jami*

* A student at Oriental Theological Seminary, Dimapur-Nagaland.

My Brother's Keeper



When the country first began shutting down owing to a novel virus that threatened humanity, a huge number of people returning from beyond the state of Nagaland were left

feeling unwelcomed, stigmatized, and received very little compassion. It made me recall Cain's indifferent response to God's inquiry of the whereabouts of his brother Abel (Genesis 4:9): "What do I know? Am I my brother's keeper?" Murder was not the intent in this case but a chorus of, "what do I know? Am I my brother's keeper?" seemed to be the response of those within the safety of the state where Covid-19 positive cases were yet to rise in number. Nagaland, a state that calls itself "for Christ" and occupied by a Christian majority, is not immune to the instinctive reaction to become defensive when the unknown confronts it. But the achievement of safety for oneself at the expense of leaving so many returnees stranded and uncared for contradicts the Christian call to stewardship. In a state such as ours, healthcare facilities are not the best and the capacity to host a huge number of people returning home in the hope for security, care, and support seemed too unrealistic a task for the government to pull off on such short notice; morals, ethics, and faith were put to the test.

Tucked away in the outskirts of Dimapur lies OTS, who had to send her students home due to the pandemic. Like all other institutions around the world, she had to bring her normal activities to a halt and wait in anticipation for the unfolding of events. I was among the students who had to be sent home. As I watched the days go by in isolated passivity, OTS translated hopeful anticipation to active living out of faith. She offered her chapel hall and academic complex to be used as quarantine facilities which soon hosted about a hundred people returning from beyond the state. The faculty, ground workers, and some students, dedicated their lives to serving the returnees until they were given the medical clearance to return to their respective homes. The holy sanctuary truly became a refuge for the unwelcomed, scared and weary. This selfless act of stewardship, empathy, and compassion meant to me an undoing of Cain's denial to accountability and stewardship of his brother, Abel. In the loud noise of panic, stigma, and images of

funeral pyres that overwhelmed the news, the image of beds lined up in the chapel left me edified and challenged.

I am my brother's keeper,
I am my sister's friend.
I am a servant,
To self-interest I will not relent.
My master calls me
To a love so free,
No comfort this world offers
Can outweigh the price He
Paid for this family.
This Body; you and me.
Keepers, to be.

Lhüselü Rhakho*

* A student at Oriental Theological Seminary, Dimapur-Nagaland.

A Wish

I wish I could access the world like my brothers,
But I was confined to these four walls.
I was getting to know the world a little better (reluctantly) through
education,
But the pandemic came and I am again confined to these four walls.

My brothers even though they're at home,
They are not bound by the four walls.
My brothers can access and learn anything through Internet,
But here I am confined to pots within the four walls.

Even though I am bound by these four walls,
I wish to learn and explore the world like my brothers.
So, I asked my father, "Can I have access to the Internet?"
He replied, "You can when your brothers are done using"
but they never did!
He added, "Girls are not safe at internet" but he never told me
"Why we are not safe out there?"

Casper Chang*

* A student at Oriental Theological Seminary, Dimapur-Nagaland.

It's Not the Walls, But the Mind that Limits Oneself

Leemei Sophia Laktühü*



* A student at Oriental Theological Seminary, Dimapur-Nagaland.

Love and Faith in the Time of Covid-19

The world became silent and dark.

Life became full of uncertainties; fear overtook every human life. In those moments of fear and uncertainties, Covid-19 attacked my family.

We were hesitant to tell our neighbors and relatives. We feared going to hospital not because we were scared of the doctors, nurses, medicine or the hospital itself, but because of the fear of people's judgment and rejection.

Everyone in our family panicked. In that hour of darkness, we were confused about what to do, and how to handle and tackle the situation. However, in those hours of hopelessness and helplessness we held on to God. There was only us, we had to look after each other as people were scared to visit us and we also feared going out.

We started to take the situation more seriously. We took care of each other, followed all the precautionary measures and the most important lesson we learned from this experience is being there for each other when there is no one. It was hard but we continued to hold on to God, continued to pray, maintained regular bible study, took medicines and other health supplements.

Through all this we learnt to value each other's lives more and our bond became stronger as a family. We experienced God's miracle of healing. Love and faith overcame this challenge for us.

Ridila Sangtam*

* A student at Oriental Theological Seminary, Dimapur-Nagaland.

Memory

Memory, a realm between the past and present.
It says the six-hundred rode straight into the Valley of Death,
Till the jaws of death remained the soldiers' oath.
But covid received no oath nor let them bid goodbye.

Where are the tombstones?
Alas! There lay none.
We could dig no six feet.
Rather we kept six feet from them.

Who conveys these unspoken goodbyes?
Who inscribed their epitaph?
For there lay no stone to carry the weight,
Nor a hand to pen the heavy heart's sigh.

There is one but not a mortal being.
The rest will fade and die too but –
It is you, memory, the trace of all kind.
It is you, memory, who holds the story of all gone.

Bitsa Mongzar Sangtam*

* A student at Oriental Theological Seminary, Dimapur-Nagaland.

The Covid-19 Through the Eyes of Frontliners

*The Networking**

The mass return of Naga migrant workers, escaping the COVID-19 pandemic and the unprecedented preventive measures adopted as a result, had the Nagaland state government buckling under pressure back in mid-2020. COVID-19 not only exposed a known frailty of government healthcare infrastructure, it also uncovered the vulnerability of a place, wrecked by electoral demigods and a compliant electorate content with putting a monetary price tag on adult suffrage.

Derelict hospitals short of bed, equipment and the requisite medical workforce hogged the limelight, as an impending health crisis became inevitable with the government clearly racing against time to set up quarantine housing for migrant workers returning to Nagaland. The situation called for extra hands and volunteers from civil society organizations did just that, filling gaps and helping government personnel organize things at the grassroots.

Here is an account of one such volunteer, from Peren district's Jalukie town, who was involved in the thick of things in 2020, helping connect Naga migrant workers with the government and family and also providing much needed counselling to the stranded.

The volunteer, a 31 year-old social activist of a prominent student organization in Peren, described his task included assisting government

* This story is transcribed and narrated by Imkonglemba Ao.

officials collect data of migrant workers from the district and serving as the bridge to help address issues and complaints raised by returnees in quarantine.

A common theme in Nagaland, he said, is the lack of employment opportunities that's driving the youths, irrespective of educational qualification to search for jobs elsewhere. According to him, the Nagas may be a small group in the broader landscape of India but this has not served as dampener to go outside the state. "Of course, being Nagas and a minority, people (in the mainland) may consider them as different but still then, their confidence in their identity is not down."

These youths, who left home with dreams of providing for themselves and family were however faced with an unprecedented global crisis that further exposed their status as different looking or in his words as "other identity" in the eyes of most people in the mainland, while stating that not allowed to enter homes, being called Chinese or corona were a clear instance of discrimination faced by Naga migrant workers in the initial part of the pandemic, he said.

Further, he said that migrant Naga workers were unable to organize themselves, not helped by the fact that they scattered in small groups during a pandemic, in different cities, where "we are not considered as an immediate friend, or immediate neighbour or fellow Indian. Our appearance, our way of life and lifestyle is very different from them. But still then, we are under the Indian subcontinent, the Indian constitution and under the Indian nation."

With jobs lost and without salary, the mental toll only mounted as the reality of feeding family back home sank in. "Some of them had families back home who they have been supporting, they have children, families, wives."

As a volunteer service provider, who witnessed the government effort from close quarters, he spelled out the repatriation undertaken by the government. As per his observation, the government did well

enough but pointed out gaps that included the lack of testing kits and mismanagement of quarantine centers, especially in Peren district. According to him, the fund management should have been transparent as to enable provision for comfortable lodging and healthy nutrition for the people in quarantine. He also hinted at overworked government personnel, which affected response to address grievances at quarantine centers.

A lack of infrastructure to set up quarantine facilities for thousands of returnees was clearly evident, the state government had offered cash incentives for those who wished to stay back. On this, he commented that those who applied/registered must have received the incentive.



As to the question of coordination or lack thereof between the different levels of India's government structure, he viewed that each unit with its own responsibilities supplemented each other. Nevertheless, as per his observation, he said that there were deficiencies at the district level, while stating that support has to come from the higher levels of the government first for any undertaking.

While the government did its part, but at a personal level, he regarded the grassroots authority or the village councils as more effective and responsive to the needs of migrant returnees in quarantine.

On the role of non-governmental organizations, he said that many different organizations, including the churches and student bodies, rose to the occasion rendering assistance to not only the returnees but also migrant workers from other states in Nagaland and also students stuck in the towns unable to go back to the villages because of the lockdown. He mentioned with appreciation the services rendered by women, serving as counsellors and volunteering to prepare meals for the quarantine centers.

The student organization that he is part of, crowd-sourced fund, to deliver food items to remote villages and even officially “unrecognized villages where no one was going” with the help of the Assam Rifles, he recalled.

Despite all the effort, there were instances of trouble in the quarantine centers mainly over food quality, water and accommodation, which remained a recurring theme throughout. At the quarantine set up at Peren's new district headquarters, he said, “So many returnees complained about the food, the place, the water and said that place was not suitable for them to stay for long.” In addition, disputes rose between the returnees and officials and even within the returnees themselves, he said.

He recalled one incident in particular, a controversial one which made the news, causing a group of returnees to undergo re-test and

quarantine a second time. It was reportedly a confusion over two similar sounding names.

With regard to preparing for similar crises in future, he underscored the need for a robust healthcare infrastructure.

Leaving home in search of work is inevitable, and in this regard, he recommended maintaining a dedicated database of migrant workers from Nagaland, besides stronger coordination between the various Naga organisations beyond the state.

Further, he said that the role of the state government representatives, officially known as Resident Commissioners (RC), should be expanded to also cater to civilians from Nagaland. He suggested, “In my opinion, the RC and staff should look after all the Nagas who are in those states, irrespective of their affiliation to the government or their status or their role in the government.”



Phek Quarantine Center

*Beyond the Call of Duty**

I am currently working under the Ao-Milen (Local Print Media) as a journalist. I have been working in the field of media for over 7 years. With Ao-Milen, it has only been a year and a half. My role in the department is directly associated with communications—any medium of mass-media, disseminating information, and spreading awareness to the masses.

However, with the Covid-19 crisis, seeing that there are shortage of frontline workers/volunteers, I have been involved in contact tracing of the returnees, assisting the helpline number for registering individuals who are unable to register themselves to the Covid-19 Nagaland Visitor's App, health updates on individuals in quarantine facility, assisting the common citizens on Covid-19 vaccine registration and propagating Covid-19 related news and information to the public within Mokokchung.

On a personal front, there is so much stress related to work especially during the pandemic, as the responsibilities continue increasing and becomes more hectic; but on the brighter side, people rely on you for certain things and it becomes an opportunity to be of help to others. Attending calls on the helpline number during the wee hours, long working hours and working even on off days has become a routine which affects our physical and mental health.

* This story is transcribed by Imkongwati.

Workers who earn by means of daily wage laborers or runs small businesses in Nagaland experienced immense hardship during the total lockdown in the State because they are dependent on their daily wages. Some did not have any alternative for livelihood and so shortage of money became a major concern due to no work during these hard times. For the Nagas working outside, many were neither able to return to their hometown nor had any source of income to feed themselves and their family. As a result, many ended up with major dilemma for survival. The lightening lockdown all over the country left many Naga migrant workers with no room for access to livelihood and thus many were unable to pay their rent or manage themselves.

While some were kicked out from their homes for different reasons, many slept on the railway station and streets unable to return home or have proper meals. The physical and mental trauma of the Naga migrants were affected to a large extent. During this pandemic, the minorities were pushed away more and the real color of hatred and 'ism' came out to the surface reaching its highest level. It feels like the migrant workers had nowhere to go, some were searching for food, some for LPG cylinders for their kitchen, some for tickets to return to their hometown, and every step they took, they were always far behind because they were neglected like stray dogs by the other mainland Indians. I have heard stories about how they were asked not to come out of their houses unless they wished to be chased out! Some were locked by their house owners from outside and treated like prisoners.

I am sure the migrant workers not only lost their jobs but were affected even physically and mentally due to the trauma they faced during the pandemic. Some were so shocked at the ill-treatment received from their fellow; all they could do was to keep silent with tears, knowing that they were totally helpless. Many of the returnees shared how desperate they were to leave the big cities and just come back home. The issue of identity crisis came up to the forefront for many as they experienced rejection, ostracism and discrimination by the mainland Indians.

During the pandemic, the government agencies provided a homestay for the migrant workers and returnees who were hauled or stranded because of the complete lockdown. They were provided food and other basic necessities with the support of various organization and agencies on rotation basis. Even though the government had many responsibilities to shoulder during the pandemic, the discomfort of the people could not be avoided. The government could not cover every aspect of managing the quarantine centers and thus failed when it had to feed large amount of food to inmates residing in many quarantine centers. In Mokokchung, the common complaint was mostly related to food. As far as individual issues are concerned, e.g., human treating another human indecently – it is a personal character problem, not a collective choice. We cannot deny the fact that discrimination happens all around the world.

The self-volunteers, NGOs and faith-based organizations provided food and basic necessities to quarantine centers and homestays while some were distributed among the migrant workers living in localities. Some volunteered and gave out of love around their vicinity while some put in a pick-up point for whoever needs it could take it. Many government and institutional quarantine centers were set up in the entire district however despite government efforts, many problems did arise in terms of food and discomfort as some needs could not be fulfilled by the authority. I think the main factor that contributed to certain failures was due to lack of clear communication between the public and the government in curbing the virus.

Only videos shared by NGOs and other voluntary organizations were hugely circulated among the public. No digital media documented the event as the State does not have any independent media house. But I hope all these stories will turn into a book/documentary after well-furnished data collection.

The Nagas should appeal to the Government of India to engage with us with greater respect, sincerity and honesty. Also recognize the need

to address institutional corruption and all other forms of structural malpractices by rigorously ensuring that the principles of transparency and accountability are applied in all matters of governance. Encourage the various social movements for positive change taking place in the Naga context and particularly impress upon the younger generations to take proactive initiatives and shoulder responsibilities in creating a cohesive vision.



*Left to Serve and Survive**

What the COVID-19 pandemic exposed was sheer unpreparedness against a health crisis the world was not alien to. India was no exception! The pandemic exposed an underbelly of the Indian economic machine— a huge and vulnerable migrant labour population, amassed in the big cities, from the less prosperous corners of an expansive country.

Jobs lost and stranded as a result of a nationwide lockdown, returning home was inevitable and state governments were faced with the gargantuan task of not only preventing an infectious virus from entering its borders but also bringing domiciles back home.

Here is an account of the government response through the experience of a pandemic frontline-worker serving in Nagaland.

Rose,** a female and a medical doctor by profession with 14 years of experience under the government health services, she was posted in Dimapur, which served as the main entry point for Naga migrant workers returning to Nagaland, since the pandemic alarm was sounded in February. Her primary work involved screening of travelers/returnees and monitoring the health of returnees in quarantine, besides keeping a tab on positive cases on home isolation.

According to her, the reason why Naga youths from Nagaland go to

* This story is transcribed and narrated by Imkonglemba Ao.

** Pseudo name.

other states in search of work is two pronged— lack of job opportunities and a misplaced notion of pride and status associated with government jobs. She said that the latter has given rise to an environment where the youths without higher educational qualification find it socially awkward to take up menial jobs in the state, while taking up similar jobs in other states.

“They usually work as security guards, as beauticians in parlours, as salespersons. They were the ones, who were sacked the first when the pandemic hit.”

The lack of employment opportunities here, she said, “has to be a failure of our society as a Naga community and the government.” State sponsored skill development programmes for the unemployed exists, but she felt that not many are availing largely for a lack of awareness.

Health-wise, she said that people have become more health conscious and noted a decline in reports of general respiratory ailments. On the flipside, mental health was a concern as fear and misconception with regard to COVID prevails. She recalled people struggling to cope in isolation during quarantine.

For the migrant Naga workers, she said that mental stress was more elevated, adding, “We feel we are Indian citizens but then because of the political turmoil when we go outside, we feel like we don’t belong in other parts of India like the way we feel in our own state.”

On the question of treatment based on ethnicity, either discriminatory or preferential, by government agencies, she was of the opinion that Nagas are relatively tolerant. While stating that outside of Nagaland, Nagas get “treated differently,” in contrast, she denied there was any discrimination in relation to race “when it came to quarantine facilities” in Nagaland.

In terms of work and livelihood, she observed a newfound resolve for self-reliance among the youths finding a foothold in a booming online business sector.



As far as government response was concerned, she was rather critical. Cohesive initially, she said, then it lost steam as the months went on. According to her, much of the work fell on medical personnel, while the district administration and other departments like Social Welfare and Rural Departments, which were tasked to closely coordinate with the Health Department, loosened responsibility.

Free transportation, quarantine and food was what the government provided and it expected everything to go smoothly. However, as a frontline worker, who was in the thick of things, she admitted there were lapses in organizational set-up and workers on the ground were left in the lurch. “We were left just to fend for ourselves without any facilities, without any insurance, without any guarantee for our health or any financial support. Most of the time, we were left like that.”

The inferred lack of coordination, according to her, was not confined to the local level alone, rather it was also apparent in the governmental chain of command. She said, “From the Government of India, we expect financial support. And we expect them to monitor how the finances are run. The state level (government) should see that this money is

disbursed properly. But most of the time, we do not get what we are supposed to get.”

At the grassroots, she said that it got quite difficult to deal with the village councils. Nevertheless, she still rated the village councils higher in terms of receptiveness.

As for the non-governmental organizations, she said that none of the bigger Naga civil society organizations, including but not limited to the traditional councils, were responsive enough to the plight of Naga migrant workers stranded outside. “I remember we had to ask them for help.”

Except the state chapters of the Rotary International, Lions Club and other lesser-known local clubs donating PPEs and other essentials, she said that much of the Naga NGO realm hardly contributed towards the pandemic effort.

It was the religious bodies that filled gaps, she said, making mention of the Sikh community in Dimapur running a community kitchen for the stranded and the Dimapur Ao Baptist Church volunteering to bear the expenses for feeding returnees housed in the biggest government-run quarantine and student organizations chipping in with food and other essentials.



“If more had come forward, things would have been better.”

On the condition of the quarantine centers in general, she recalled that there were many disputes, mainly, over the amenities and food provided by the government. Another issue was congestion and it was summer, and with hundreds crammed into dormitories without adequate cooling amenity, proper lighting and water supply, tensions rose, she said.

In the face of similar crises in future, she called for the government laying down mechanisms in place that would avoid kneejerk reactions. It could be in the form of establishing liaisons or offices in various cities or states, which can serve as contact points in crisis situations and also enabling proper coordination between states and the Central government.

“Last time what happened was that there was no streamlining. They were all stuffed (into trains) and they were brought back home. And that’s why it became worse,” she said, adding that there should have been better coordination between states and the transportation services.

Furthermore, the COVID pandemic exposed the absence of and therefore a necessity to establish an infectious disease control center. She said that such a body should be independent of the state governments in the north-eastern region.

*Comprehending God in the OTS Quarantine Center**

The phenomenon of comprehending God in an institutionalized quarantine center was a whole new experience during the daunting initial outbreak of Covid-19 in Nagaland. Perhaps I would recall it as a provocation to most of us who were rarely familiar to the idea and running of quarantine centers. While quarantine centers were set up to prevent transmission of the virus in the larger community, it was discomfiting for the quarantined inmates who were isolated, separated, restricted in movements and activities for being Covid-19 suspects. Besides, the toil and sacrifice of the frontline workers in quarantine centers, their unexpressed fear, rejection and stigma from the rest of the society went unheard. In such a given scenario, quarantine centers became the most uninviting place. Indeed, an infected place to dispose and contain the virus.

In the context of the returnees from other metropolitan cities to Nagaland, Oriental Theological Seminary (OTS) as a church seminary offered herself (both with space and human resources) to the Government of Nagaland to become one of the institutionalised quarantine centers in Dimapur, Nagaland. Consequently, a batch of 83 returnees were taken in for quarantine at OTS. On joining the

* This reflective piece on the experience of running a quarantine facility during the Covid-19 (First wave) is written by Zavi-i Nisa, an Assistant Professor at Oriental Theological Seminary, Dimapur-Nagaland.

OTS quarantine center, I conjectured the safety of those people (my colleagues, students, staff workers and their children) both at the managing control room as well as those performing tasks directly dealing with the inmates and their inhabited areas which were already contaminated. In a moment, I realized that all people at the quarantine center apart from the quarantined inmates were put at risk. Therefore, the irony was SOPs strictly maintained for the safety and wellbeing of the inmates simultaneously were endangering the lives of the workers at the quarantine center. In such a predicament, I was stimulated to comprehend the God of love. Traditionally, the God of love is perceived as the ever-loving God who protects, guides, blesses, gives peace and security to humans. But at the quarantine center, the God of love became the motivator in perseverance, courage, wisdom, trust and hope. It was not necessarily the unseen care, well-defined happiness, confidence, certainty as we often think it to be.



Furthermore, in undertaking the quarantine center, the command given by Jesus “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39) became a reforming foundational praxis. Loving one’s own neighbor as oneself comes from our love for God. This is apparent and operative

in a circular mechanism where our love for God becomes proactive, responsive and sacrificial for others, and even Jesus established this maxim throughout his 'renewal activity'. Therefore, in the quarantine center, the radical act of loving, helping and serving was translated in prioritizing and pursuing the inmates to help and heal them (physically, emotionally and spiritually). The command also helped in redefining values such as overcoming the orientation of self-centeredness, enduring solidarity with others, struggling and building their vulnerabilities and limitations, empowering them in thoughts, words and acts with our limited capacities. Truly, we were challenged to do everything in our power to perpetuate this command and for the welfare of the inmates as much as we desire others to manifest likewise.

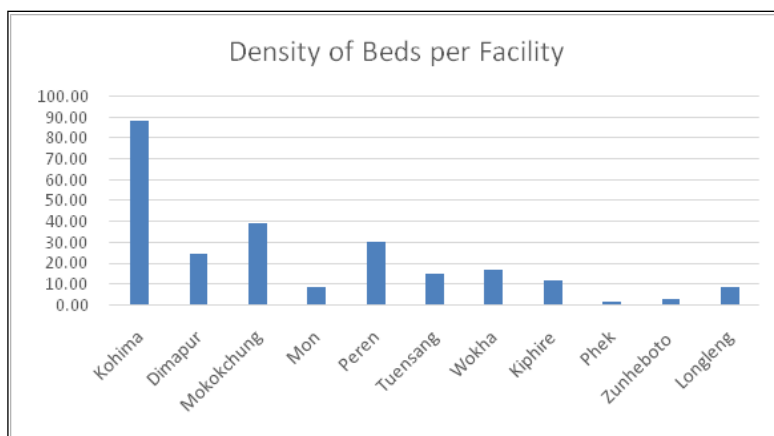
In my personal experience, working with anxiety and fear of being infected was difficult, however, the non pareil was choosing to completely love, care, embrace and serve the inmates who were complete strangers. In little time, along with the others, I realised 'love' in utmost commitment in listening to the inmates, bearing with their pleas and serving them at all possibilities for their wholistic wellbeing. Gratitude for being safe and healthy became our daily norm despite our finite understanding about this dreadful pandemic. In truth, the entire experience reaffirmed my values of ministering in Christ and gave away a testimony to claim and proclaim – to contrive our experiences in the chronicle of God's love, secured us with the fervency to love and care for those lives even amidst chaos and perplexities, and beyond our reach.

Like many others, our quarantine center for a time was sealed as a contaminated place; nevertheless, a metamorphosed 'contaminated place' where hand gloves and masks became the indicator of care giving, protective gears became the embodiment of faith, prayers and courage, cooking and delivering food became the essence of kindness and sharing, the asserted filthy works such as sanitation, garbage disposal and fumigation became the greatest acts of nobility and humility. It was in this quarantine center, we experienced God in entirety and in the purest devotion of love.

*Data of Covid-19 First Wave Returnees**

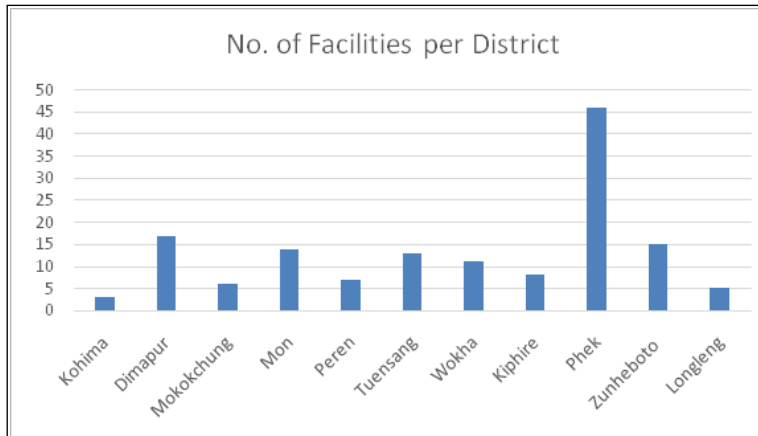
<i>District</i>	<i>Total Beds</i>	<i>No. of facilities</i>	<i>Density</i>
Kohima	266	3	88.67
Dimapur	426	17	25.06
Mokokchung	236	6	39.33
Mon	126	14	9.00
Peren	213	7	30.43
Tuensang	201	13	15.46
Wokha	189	11	17.18
Kiphire	98	8	12.25
Phek	95	46	2.07
Zunheboto	51	15	3.40
Longleng	43	5	8.60
	1944	145	13.41

Table 1: Designated Quarantine Facilities in Nagaland**



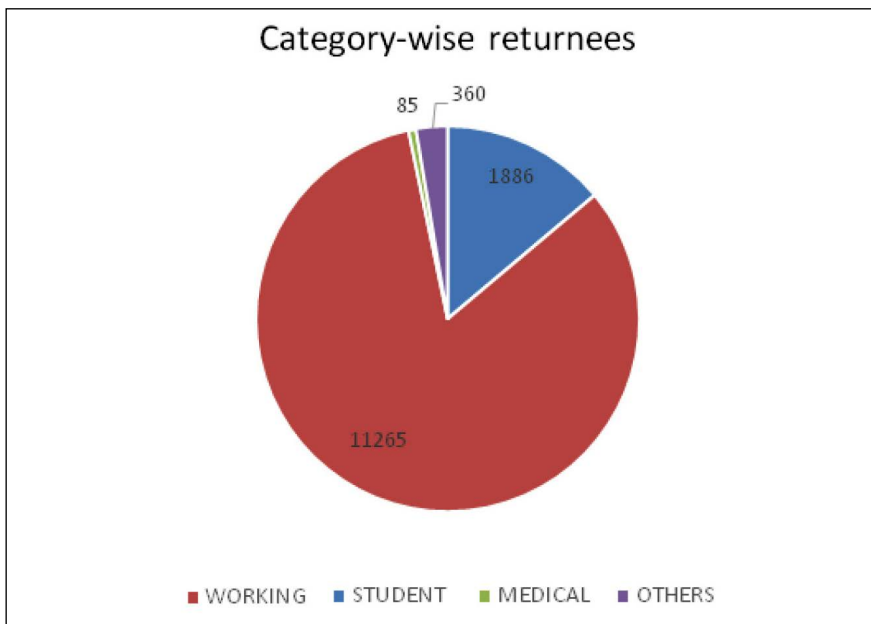
* The data of migrant returnees and State government run quarantine facilities have been provided by and granted permission for use by the State War Room, Government of Nagaland.

** This list does not include many quarantine centers that were run by private institutions, tribal bodies, societies, churches, villages and colonies.



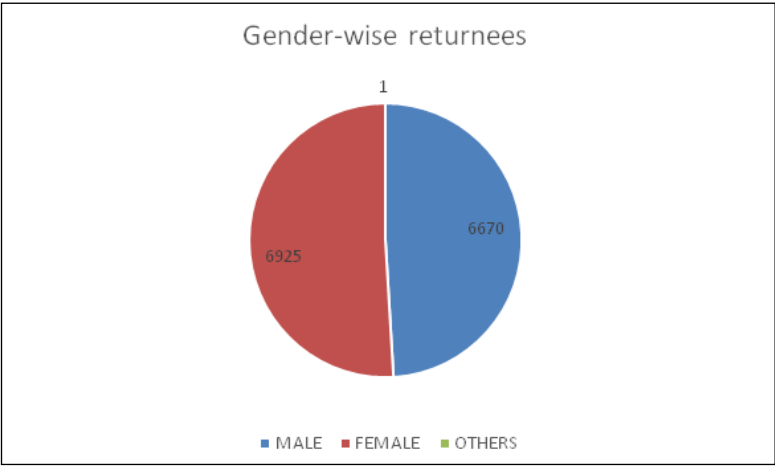
Returnees Analysis

Figure 1



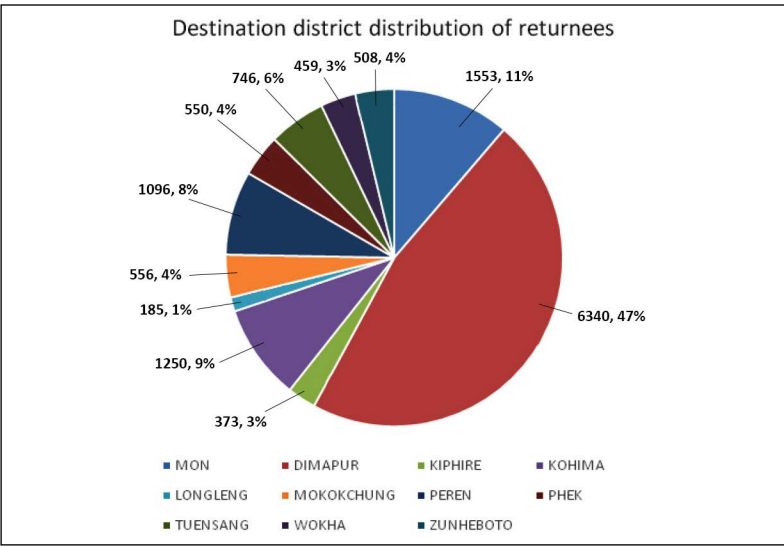
Working: 83%, Student: 14%, Medical: 0.5%, Others: 2.5%

Figure 2



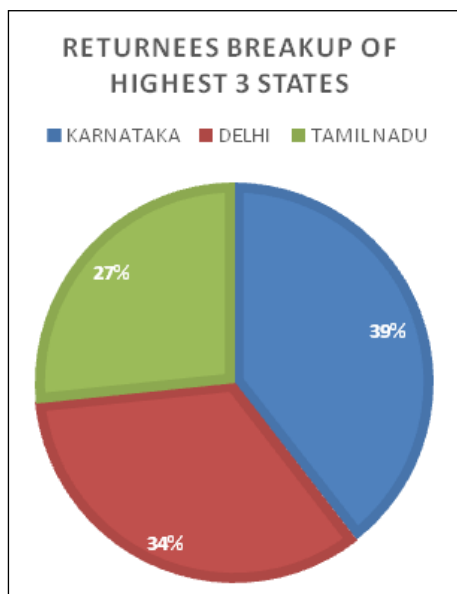
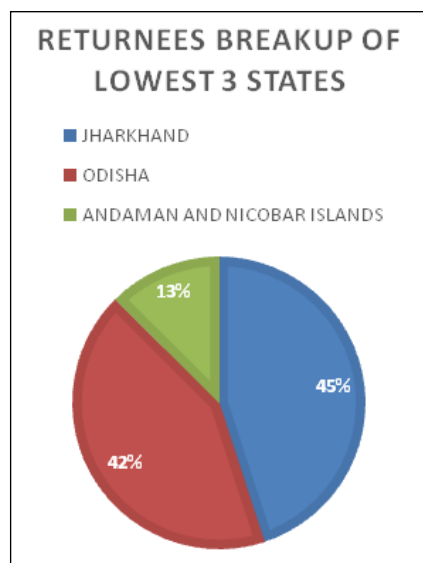
Male: 49%, Female: 51%

Figure 3



MON	11%	LONGLENG	1%	TUENSANG	5%
*DIMAPUR	47%	MOKOKCHUNG	4%	WOKHA	3%
KIPHIRE	3%	PEREN	8%	ZUNHEBOTO	4%
KOHIMA	9%	PHEK	4%		

* An exploded percentage of returnees is observed in Dimapur, since most returnees were first received in Dimapur.

Figure 4**Figure 5**

STATE	Nos.
KARNATAKA	2506
DELHI	2153
TAMIL NADU	1691
JHARKHAND	18
ODISHA	17
ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS	5

Name of State/UT	CATEGORY				GENDER			DESTINATION DISTRICTS										
	Student	Working	Medical	Others	Male	Female	Others	Mon	Dmp	Kph	Kma	Lng	Mkg	Prn	Phek	Tsg	Wka	Zbt
ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS	0	5	0	0	0	5	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
ANDHRA PRADESH	29	82	0	0	53	58	0	8	29	3	12	2	6	13	5	23	2	8
BIHAR	6	17	0	3	14	12	0	8	12	0	3	0	2	0	0	1	0	0
CHANDIGARH	5	106	0	2	64	49	0	5	71	3	4	0	0	2	11	2	4	11
CHHATTISGARH	1	33	0	0	4	30	0	5	15	0	8	0	0	1	1	2	2	0
DAMAN AND DIU	0	22	0	0	0	22	0	1	0	2	2	0	12	0	0	0	5	0
DELHI	323	1647	35	148	1034	1119	0	98	1176	48	226	6	90	210	81	85	66	67
GOA	0	478	0	2	170	310	0	37	254	12	38	3	31	9	38	28	10	20
GUJARAT	15	925	0	5	311	634	0	41	505	49	52	4	36	51	40	71	26	70
HARYANA	30	382	1	17	192	238	0	17	220	7	25	3	8	110	4	18	14	4
HIMACHAL PRADESH	32	22	0	1	31	24	0	10	29	0	9	0	1	1	2	2	1	0
JAMMU AND KASHMIR	2	21	0	1	10	14	0	0	8	0	2	0	2	0	4	0	7	1
JHARKHAND	0	17	0	1	9	9	0	2	10	0	1	0	3	0	1	1	0	0
KARNATAKA	195	2289	2	20	1507	999	0	248	1261	84	185	82	82	114	76	137	66	171
KERALA	61	622	3	3	407	281	1	413	148	2	27	8	7	53	11	7	4	9
MADHYA PRADESH	24	82	0	3	31	78	0	10	45	6	10	0	4	5	5	16	7	1
MAHARASHTRA	146	755	3	9	395	518	0	68	397	32	119	10	59	43	56	77	24	28
ODISHA	2	14	0	1	6	11	0	2	3	0	3	0	3	1	1	0	0	4
PUDUCHERRY	2	17	0	0	11	8	0	1	3	1	2	0	0	7	3	1	0	1
PUNJAB	73	130	0	0	108	95	0	30	89	2	34	7	4	12	9	5	7	4
RAJASTHAN	45	550	3	6	162	442	0	42	306	6	57	8	27	42	19	31	50	16
TAMIL NADU	196	1466	16	13	996	695	0	198	676	88	96	14	35	323	54	140	36	31
TELANGANA	50	358	4	7	194	225	0	49	214	8	45	2	12	18	15	8	27	21
UTTAR PRADESH	181	235	2	8	203	223	0	36	233	4	49	7	13	26	18	11	21	8
UTTARAKHAND	99	59	0	6	74	90	0	18	55	2	32	4	11	6	12	4	17	3
WEST BENGAL	61	379	4	32	259	217	0	23	269	3	46	4	29	9	17	30	29	17
NE STATES	308	552	12	72	425	519	0	163	310	11	163	21	79	40	67	46	34	10
	1886	11265	85	360	6670	6925	1	1533	6340	373	1250	185	556	1096	550	746	459	508

Lessons Learnt: The Way Forward

Anne Décobert, Matthew Mabefam,
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This section presents a summary of “findings” and “recommendations” from the experiences of COVID-19 first wave. The lessons are based on documentation provided by nine field researchers who participated in this Handbook project, analysis of that interview documentation by Dr Anne Décobert and Dr Matthew Mabefam from the UoM, and from September 11, 2021 symposium on “sharing and listening on Covid-19 experiences” in which seven primary care-giver groups from Dimapur city shared their first-hand experiences of running quarantine centers.

SOME FINDINGS

Migrant Workers from Nagaland in Mainland India: Their Conditions Prior to COVID-19

- Except for state sectors where most Naga people still hope to find a job, and in a negligible portion of rental and hospitality sector (hotels, lodges), almost all the business and infrastructure development area have been captured by the non-Naga community. This disproportionate monopoly of the market along with increasing cheap labour provided by migrants from mainland India and Bangladesh, serves as a major economic impediment for the local people.
- A failing state-machinery, wide social and economic gap, lack of economic and livelihood avenues, poverty, corruption, social evils,

conflict and militarization caused by the Indo-Naga political struggle, migration of village folks to urban areas, divisions and competition between tribal communities, to name some key examples, are factors that push many people to leave the state. The basic education that most young people have, along with their aspirations and easy mobility, make them the biggest group of migrants.

- Systemic inequalities and marginalization of Nagaland and Naga people contribute to lack of economic and educational opportunities, leading to both push and pull factors of out-migration to different parts of India. Although some choose to look for jobs outside the state based on pure personal reasons, most of the Nagas are compelled to look for opportunities and become economic diasporas.
- Out-migration is driven by types of opportunities available in non-state sectors of Nagaland, which are typically low-pay and low status jobs, leading to young people wanting to leave for cities in search of better paid and higher status jobs.
- Specific jobs (such as security guards, janitorial work in hotel/kitchen, care-takers) are not taken up by most Nagas within the state due to inferior socio-economic status attached to them. However, many migrants are comfortable and happy performing these roles outside of the state.
- Many Naga families, especially the Naga youth, live beyond their income. Most of them are not interested in works that involve disciplined dignity of labour and in doing customer-friendly everyday activities (such as running of errands and trouble-shooting jobs). For this reason, steady income generating sectors such as agro-based farming/products, construction (masonry, plumbing, electrification) and small-scale seasonal businesses are dominated and run predominantly by the non-Nagas.
- Although migrant workers seek better work and lives outside of Nagaland, they commonly end up in precarious (often exploitative)

work situations, with no social welfare and legal systems to fall back on. This makes them more vulnerable in times of crisis.

- Migrant workers were therefore already vulnerable prior to pandemic and during the pandemic faced major impacts on livelihoods, mental health, and sense of identity.

The Experience of Migrant Returnees During the Pandemic

- The pandemic had disproportionate impacts on Naga migrant workers, whose marginalization and vulnerability were shaped and heightened by pre-existing systemic inequalities in India that are organised along geographical location, socio-economic status, language, caste/ethnicity and religious lines.
- Pandemic also raised complex issues around socio-political identity, race and ethnicity, citizenship and belonging for Naga people – and showed how vulnerability is exacerbated within identity-based citizenship regimes like India's.
- Most migrant returnees typically saw themselves as abandoned by the central and state governments in areas where they were working. This happened as each state/union territories were tasked to identify and take back only their respective citizens (migrants) to their local/home states.

Over-all Preparedness of Disaster Management System

- **Inefficient State Machinery and Delivery System:** Because of the history of structural violence, conflict-militarization of the region and marginalization within the Indian Union, Nagaland lacks the infrastructure and resources to cope with a crisis of the scale of the pandemic. This meant that Naga people were particularly vulnerable and exposed to negative impacts of the pandemic and measures to curb spread of COVID-19. There was also a lack of preparedness for facing (by both State and Naga society in general) a crisis of this level.

- **High Risk of Economic Dependence:** The vulnerability of Nagaland during the pandemic was greatly shaped by the uncomfortable dependence of Nagaland on Delhi (central government) for funding and on other parts of India for essential supplies, work opportunities and so on. The pandemic drew attention to this dependence and provoked greater desires for more self-sufficiency of Nagaland in relation to the rest of India, and for fostering greater resilience.
- **Lack of a Unified and Strong Public Voice:** The protracted Indo-Naga political conflict, factionalism/divisions among Naga national political groups and tribal communities, and the multiple effects of transition to modern life result in a weak social fabric and lack of common aspiration and a shared narrative. Consequently, the communities in the state found themselves responding to the pandemic mostly in highly localised piece-meal terms. This deprived the Naga public from having a collective people-based power for influencing key decisions and policies that would have strengthened the over-all capacity and health delivery system of the state.

State-level Responses to COVID-19

- As mentioned earlier, at the nation-wide level, government responses to COVID-19 reinforced and crystallized identity-based aspects of citizenship. The fact that different states effectively became responsible only for inhabitants of their state meant that many categories of migrant workers were systematically excluded and reinforced vulnerabilities.
- Nagaland state government and Naga community/civil society groups were seen as more responsive. However, government responses were often criticized for poor coordination and insufficient execution. Government responses also reinforced the existing unequal bargaining power between urban-rural areas, tribal communities, and minority groups. This led to the exclusion of people from more remote areas and those without identity documents or lacking the endorsement of local leaders and bodies. But there was nevertheless a sense that the

state government should care for its citizens and this led to greater desire for accountability and responsibility on behalf of the state.

- Owing to inexperience and lack of an efficient coordinating mechanism between the COVID task forces, administration, health and other government departments, the first wave of COVID-19, in particular, encountered major lapses and caused serious challenges to primary caregivers on the ground.
- Due to lack of adequate medical facility, personnel and testing facilities, timely medical care and COVID-19 tests could not be delivered to some migrant returnees. Likewise, the transportation of some returnees to their native places from the towns were delayed even when they had finished the required quarantine periods.

Community-level Responses to the Pandemic

- In general, people saw more local governance systems as most responsive and effective in supporting Naga migrant workers and people.
- Community-level responses to COVID-19 were led by local tribal governance systems: tribes, villages, churches, societies, groups (students, youth, women), institutions (schools, colleges) and other civil society organizations. These were the first-level responses that sought to fill the gaps left by the government.
- These responses showed strong systems of care and solidarity at the community level. They were most effective in the running of quarantine centers, especially in providing proper food and accommodation facility.
- Community responses to COVID-19 fostered a strong humanitarian and collective solidarity, with different tribal and socio-religious groups coming together and responding in unison to the pandemic and its impacts. There were some stories of exclusion and marginalization along tribal and village lines; but mostly, the pandemic demonstrated that people can transcend even deep cultural and social divisions for

addressing a common humanitarian cause. Participants did however mention that this often came at the cost of lesser attention to non-Naga people in Nagaland, particularly migrant workers and daily wage labourers from other parts of India.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

Building a Robust State-economic System

- The experience of COVID-19 in Nagaland has shown that the state should develop a strong economy and become more resilient and self-sufficient.
- Covid-19 pandemic has shown that the State government of Nagaland needs to recalibrate its system – a system free from corruption. It is apparent that this pandemic surmounted the institutional, cognitive, and human-financial resources of the government. It should take the COVID-19 as an opportunity and a timely call to critically analyse its system, vision, and values; and objectively realize the core reasons for its very existence.

Creation of Jobs and Employable Skill-training Opportunities

- Given the fact that lack of jobs and opportunities in Nagaland is a systemic issue driving the vulnerability of Naga migrants in times of crisis, many felt that key to reducing the vulnerability of Naga communities would be the creation of jobs and opportunities in Nagaland, so that people did not then need to leave in search of work elsewhere.
- In order to do this, migrant workers and others mentioned the need to provide training in trades and entrepreneurship, as well as support and encouragement for the setting up of small initiatives such as businesses, organic farming and eco-tourism. In particular, by directly linking Government programs and skill-trainings to work opportunities and also by increasing awareness about practically accessible central/state schemes, more people could benefit and

remain in Nagaland instead of seeking work elsewhere.

- Besides offering formal training, grooming of character and people skills in the trainees should be a paramount task in the state and this can be fully achieved only through transparent partnership with several non-state sectors, including the church. With so many youngsters, and unemployed migrating to mainland India leaving the state depending on non-local workers, it is imperative for the government to seriously look into this matter.
- There has been lots of emphasis on skill development at least in the local papers post first wave of Covid-19, however the question of whether the emphasis could be translated into reality remains to be seen. Indeed, there are many central and state schemes relating to skill development project. However, pragmatic steps (devoid of unnecessary red tapes) should be ensured so that these schemes go to the right people or groups. The state machinery should actively facilitate and monitor the implementation of such schemes for the goal of transforming the lives of the unemployed and the economy of the state.
- There is need for additional support for people who lost their jobs or have been re-located back in the community without any support base during the pandemic. Many felt that they had been left on their own after returning to Nagaland.
- Alongside building of economic capabilities, corruption and 'backdoor' employment should be totally checked so that more people could access government opportunities.
- It is imperative that the government in the state should actively work towards creating support-systems for employment by networking with non-state sectors: Since the present state has exhausted its carrying capacity due to over-employment, young people should be encouraged to work toward creating self-employment through initiation of entrepreneurial activities. Tribal communities, local groups, societies, churches and Self-Help Groups are the most

capable agents in making this critical intervention and thus lead the change that Naga people so desire.

Better Preparedness for Future Disaster Management

- **Census and tracking system:** The experience of chaos early in the pandemic in identifying and supporting Naga migrants who had left their homeland in search of work elsewhere show that it is essential for the state to establish a census and tracking system for migrant workers. This would allow better repatriation systems for migrants in times of crisis. One person also mentioned the need for a specific organisation/body or representative to deal with migrants from Nagaland.
- **Building inclusive support systems:** There is need for better and more inclusive financial and other support systems in times of crisis. For instance, support systems could be place-based rather than identity-based (e.g. migrant worker in Delhi can access support from Delhi authorities, rather than only support from Nagaland State Government). More important, crisis support systems should be adapted to people who lack certain identity/citizenship documents, access to internet, etc. Some felt that having a Nagaland house in each state would help to reduce the discrimination experienced by Naga people in different parts of the country.
- **Networking and empowering:** The state government should look seriously into its disaster management strategy. The government would reap rich dividends should it empower the NGOs, churches and community organizers to work during crises time. These groups have shown their effectiveness in reaching out to the people whether in terms of disseminating information, or giving care. Networking should be one of the goals of state machinery. It is better to empower the wheel than to reinvent a wheel, which already exists.
- **Improved health facilities:** Some interviewees found that the response to current COVID-19 pandemic had already helped to

enhance and improve infrastructure and preparedness in Nagaland. But there is an urgent need for more improved health facilities and disaster preparedness in Nagaland.

- **Trust-building, coordination and management of information:** Proper coordination and a transparent delivery system at the state-district-local level is essential for building an effective response in times of crisis and especially for winning the confidence of the public. Moreover, the appointment/designation of proper state, legal, administrative and community leaders as point persons (spokespersons) would not only create trusted channels for guiding the public but also help in developing effective coordinating mechanisms for censoring fake news and misinformation that often confuse the public in times of crisis.
- Several migrant returnees – particularly those who had less positive experiences in government quarantine centers – mentioned the need for government actors to set up better quarantine centers and administration of quarantine centers.
- Many interviewees expressed that a robust statewide capacity building is required for frontline workers and greater preparedness of first responders in times of crisis.

Addressing Socio-Cultural Impediments and Attitudinal Issues

- Many migrant returnees described the need to remove stigma that is deeply associated with ‘low grade’ work in Naga society. Creating jobs and opportunities should go along with change in mind-sets and focusing on skills and occupations that are possible and relevant in the Nagaland context.
- Returnees who had themselves faced discrimination upon their return to Nagaland often described a need for increased education, with the stigmatisation they faced being – in their eyes – the result of fear and lack of understanding about COVID-19 and the situation of migrant workers.

- Social problems such as domestic violence, drug addiction, alcoholism as well as prostitution should be checked. Right policies and implementation should be in order otherwise crisis such as this pandemic has the edge to exacerbate these social problems.
- Some also felt that solving the Naga political issue was key to resolving issues of discrimination and fostering greater self-sufficiency and resilience of Nagaland and Naga people.

Leveraging and Empowering Local Support Mechanisms

- There is serious need for recognizing and building upon traditional governance and community systems (villages, tribes, councils, churches, colonies, community elders), which are important systems of care and support. Integrating these systems into more formal crisis management and response would greatly augment the capacity of the state.
- Tribal communities should work toward transcending “isms” and come together for advancing common goals. It is there for all to see how the politics of tribalism get into our sanity. Nagaland would be a better place if all the tribes come together and work for common cause instead of letting jealousy or tribal competition override and derail development and progress.
- The church needs to have sound and right theological aspirations. It should be palpably vivacious in what is good. It should drive in unity and act as ‘check and balance’ for the government whose workers are its members.

Promoting Dialogue Across Cultures and Races

- Addressing lack of understanding and discrimination against Naga people was also felt to be central to reducing the vulnerability and enhancing the resilience of Naga communities in the face of current and future crises. In particular, some migrant returnees felt that it would be important for Indians throughout the country to learn more about the Northeast and its peoples and cultures.



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