

# Rural-Urban Migration and its Impact on the Urban Environment and Life in Nagaland

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## Abstract

*The phenomenon of population movement has been a part of human history since time immemorial, and man is restlessly migrating from one place to another as part of a process of adaptation to his social, economic, cultural and ecological environment. In the most primitive society migration is the first mode of existence of the man. He used to migrate from one place to another in search of food, livelihood and security. And since then he has been able to have a stationary and stable life which is much more secured and developed when compared to the life in the primitive society. In modern times, migration from the rural to urban areas is accelerating, making internal and international migration potentially one of the most important development and policy issues of the 21st century. Nestled among the gorgeous ranges of the Northeast India, the State of Nagaland with a total population of about 19,80,602 persons (Census, 2011) covers a geographical area of 16, 527 sq.km (approx). Migration is an important factor in changing the size and structure of the population. As elsewhere, even in Nagaland, the phenomenon of migration from the rural areas has contributed largely to the rapid growth of urban population. However, now the explosive character of population growth in the urban centers has become a matter of grave concern. In 1981, the urban population of the state was 1.2 lakhs, which increased to 3.5 lakhs in 2001. Besides all other factors, migration from rural areas to the urban centres has been the driving force behind the explosive population growth rate which has created serious impact on the environment in these urban centers besides causing strain on the limited urban services and infrastructure and increase in urban poverty and unemployment levels. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to evaluate the ongoing process of rural-urban migration and its impact on the urban environment and quality of life in the urban centres of Nagaland.*

**Keywords:** Migration, Nagaland, Rural to Urban migration, Urban environment

The term migration has been understood in various ways by different scholars. Literally, it means the settlement or shifting of individual or a group of people from one place to another, more or less permanently. Defined as a permanent

and semi-permanent shift of residence across boundaries of administrative and settlements units, migration is one of the most important correlates of modernization. It is an instrument of cultural diffusion and social interaction, and is a necessary

element of population redistribution. The study of migration is of special interest to geographers as it is closely related to the spatial distribution of population. A large number of studies have been conducted by various social scientists regarding migration in India. However, geographers have not made their due in this connection to the part of the country which is under study.

### **The Reasons for this Phenomenon**

Migration processes have been existent throughout all times and in all regions of the world. The original triggering of migration in former times had been primarily the search for more favorable conditions. Patterns of migration over the years have undergone many changes particularly since the age of industrialization. Towns and cities attract the 'surplus labour' from nearby or far-off villages; thereby they become the pivotal centres of attraction. In rural areas the burgeoning poverty, meager employment opportunities, low and uncertain/irregular wages, lack of education and health facilities act as push factors and induce people to migrate to the urban places.

The migration process affects the areas to which migrants have moved in and areas from which they have moved out. The fact that the decadal growth rate of population in Nagaland during 2001-2011 is 0.47% indicates that the growth is largely due to migrant population. This trend of continuous out-migration is related to conditions in the rural areas where the life is not that comfortable. In Nagaland, since its statehood in 1963, the small administrative blocks and headquarters have been steadily

growing in population as more and more people migrate from the surrounding villages in search of jobs, education, health care and various other lifestyles that are not available in the villages. Subsequently, the small townships and hamlets have been expanding and growing in complexity, congenial to the growth of population. Judging by the number of people living in rural areas constituting 71.03% of Nagaland's population in 2011, as against 82% in 2001, it can be inferred that it is an indication of rural to urban migration in the state. The decadal rural to urban migration has been steadily increasing over the decades. Among the four urban areas from where the sample was drawn, Kohima as the State capital and Dimapur as the commercial hub of the State appear to have the highest and most sustained pull over the rural population to migrate.

### **Impact on Urban Areas**

In Nagaland, except for Dimapur, all urban areas are located in the hill districts. Whereas, the topography and the geology of the hilly nature of the state present a limitation to the expansion and development of the urban areas, the influx of migrants particularly from the rural areas is seen to have been contributing to the growing urban population. This heavily takes toll on the existing infrastructural facilities and the amenities as well. The majority of the migrant population in Nagaland is drawn from the rural areas, and the phenomenon of continued out-migration essentially tells upon the conditions in the rural areas, making the life increasingly

difficult. More than 80 per cent of the rural population is dependent on agriculture. But the low rate of investment in agriculture, inequalities in the distribution of land and other productive assets, institutional mechanisms which discriminate in favour of the owners of wealth (e.g. In provision of credit and government schemes), coupled with natural calamities lead to increasing unemployment and poverty of the rural population. In fact, the unemployment and poverty of the rural population are the main causes of out migration to the urban centres of the state and to other states as well. Unemployment pushes migrants towards areas with greater employment opportunities where they engage themselves in petty business activities such as vegetable vendors, grocery stores, petty shops like pan shops, hotels and tea stalls etc.

### **Consequences**

Though agriculture still remains the main occupational activity in rural Nagaland, agricultural production is mostly for domestic consumption. Due to lack of infrastructural facilities such as connectivity, market linkages, facilities for storing and value addition for the agro products, the creation of opportunity for sustained employment and income generation is insufficient. Problems are also cropping up as a result of out-migration in the place of origin, and in the place of destination. Some of the emerging problems are closely related to environment, apart from others such as infrastructural strain and poverty.

### ***Environmental Implications***

No doubt, the growth of population has a number of positive impacts on the environment and human well-being, i.e. higher population densities mean lower per capita costs of providing energy, health care, infrastructure and services. Also, urbanization has historically been associated with declining birth rates, which reduces population pressure on land and natural resources. Despite all these positive impacts, almost all major towns of the region are increasingly plagued by environmental problems. Some major aspects are as follows:

- a) As a direct result of urbanization, great threat to health and safety in the towns comes from water and air pollution, especially at the households and community levels. Waterborne diseases are found most commonly in low-income neighborhoods as a result of inadequate sanitation, drainage and solid waste collection services. Health risks, especially to the poor, are also posed by pesticides and industrial effluents.
- b) The productivity of many cities is adversely affected by traffic congestion and air pollution. The loss in productivity includes the total productive time wasted in traffic and the associated increase in the costs of operating and maintaining vehicles such as wear and tear as a result of idling in traffic and frequent acceleration and braking. For example, delays, which may result in late arrival for employment, meetings, and education,

result in lost business. Furthermore, Fuel wastage owing to increased idling, acceleration and braking increases air pollution and carbon dioxide emissions.

- c) Uncollected and improperly handled solid waste can have serious health consequences. They block drainage systems and contaminate groundwater at landfill sites. Most urban centres in the state are also unable to manage the increasing amounts of hazardous wastes generated by hospitals and the rapid growth of industries. Besides this, Most towns do not have underground piped or sewerage system and even if they do exist; the total length of proper drains is short of crude drains, which therefore means that there is no proper cement (RCC) coverage for most drainage systems. Further none of the towns in Nagaland has a functional sewerage treatment system.
- d) Conversion of agricultural land and forest, as well as reclaiming of wetlands, for urban uses and infrastructure, is associated with widespread removal of vegetation to support urban ecosystem and put additional pressure on nearby areas that may be even more ecologically sensitive. Major urban centres such as Dimapur, Kohima and Mokokchung are the most affected and environmentally fragile areas which are triggered by rapid expansion of human settlement and infrastructural development.

Urbanization does not have only local environmental impacts but also large so-called 'ecological footprints' beyond

their immediate vicinity. Intensive and extensive exploitation of natural resources to support urban economy includes excessive extraction of energy resources (including fuel wood), quarrying and excavation of sand, gravel and building materials at large scales, and over-extraction of water. Other effects can be felt further such as pollution of waterways, long-range air pollution that impact on human health as well as on vegetation and soils at a considerable distance.

### ***Infrastructural Strain and Poverty***

The growth of large cities, particularly in developing countries, has been accompanied by an increase in urban strains resulting from unemployment and infrastructural inadequacies leading to increase in urban poverty in general. In many cities and towns, urban services are commonly inadequate to meet even the basic needs of the inhabitants. A thematic report on rural-urban migration in Nagaland has been brought out recently which draws attention to issues pertaining to facilities, opportunities and livelihood options. "The report indicates that it is vital to concentrate on urban regeneration in Nagaland especially as most of the towns are in the hills which naturally have very limited carrying capacity," penned lead author and coordinator of thematic studies Prof. Manoj Pant.

Infrastructure is about delivering the essential services that people need to maintain basic standard of living. The essential services include water supply, sanitation, electricity, roads, transport and telecommunications, health care, education,

market and financial institutions. These in turn lead to improvements in health, access to education, economic opportunities and more. The water supply requirement of most towns in Nagaland is met through natural sources such as rivers, streams, springs and ground water reserves. While there is some supply by the Public Health Engineering Department in some pockets of some of the towns, the remaining urban population either resorts to getting their water requirements met through the above mentioned sources or end up digging up wells and using community springs. In the field of sanitation, the urban centres have not been able to do much either. The towns have their respective municipal councils to look after the sanitation and public amenities of the urban residents; however, these councils are mostly inefficient as well as inadequate to take prompt actions in meeting the requirements of the ever-increasing urban population.

The transport sector, too, has seen a substantial growth in the last decade, particularly with an increase in personal transport. The average growth rate of the vehicle population of Nagaland has been in the region of 5-7% in the last decade. In terms of district and town wise vehicle population, the districts and towns of Dimapur and Kohima have the highest vehicle population. This phenomenon has made traffic congestion and snarls a common feature in the urban centres of Nagaland. The pressure of urban population on public amenities and infrastructure is no doubt an important reason for underdevelopment and poverty. However, given the fact that urban

settlements in Nagaland, except for Dimapur are situated either on hill slopes or rugged terrain the prospect of all round development becomes practically unfeasible.

### **Measures to Remedy**

Since the statehood of Nagaland in 1963, the small administrative blocks and headquarters have steadily grown in population as people migrated to these places for education, health care and livelihood prospects. Accommodation of population from the rural areas in the ever complex expansion of the townships is going on unabated. Whereas growth and development are positive movement, in regard to urban living such growth almost always is accompanied by multiple problems and issues associated with the movement of people and materials in a larger scale than the land can hold. The need to address the growing infrastructural and social needs of the increasing urban population on one hand and the problems of land acquisition, issues of public safety and environmental protection on the other are the crucial areas requiring judicious urban planning and development.

To achieve an enduring solution to the problems of migration and urbanization measures should be adopted to do away with the conditions which generate such problems. The Gandhian approach seems to be relevant in this regard. Urban development is desirable but it should not be at the cost of the rural people. And since about 71% of Nagaland's population dwells in the rural areas so a rural solution is the only solution to rural and urban problems. Providence of

social amenities and the development of the rural areas in all spheres of life will definitely be an answer to the overwhelming outflow of rural population to the urban centres. However, Scholars differ in their opinions on the rationale of urban growth as an essential element of the process of development. Some argue that the rapid growth of urban centers has been the result of migration of ill-equipped and unskilled poor peasants from the villages causing over-population in cities and towns, rise of unhealthy slums and choking of civic amenities. There are others who consider urbanization as ‘an opportunity and a challenge’. They argue that ‘for most part, urban migrants are energetic and ambitious and that the urban poor make significant contributions to urban economics’. A balanced view may be taken in this regard as asserted by Gopal Krishan: “While rural development is the most desirable objective in itself, it is doubtful if it will make a dent on rural-urban migration. . . One may possibly arrive at a conclusion that the basic question is not of containing of the growth of dynamic cities but of managing them better”.

In conclusion, the present scenario of migration from the rural areas to the urban centres is taking place at a rapid pace in Nagaland. Whereas such phenomenon of growth and development are positive movement for the urban centres, in regard to urban living such growth almost is always accompanied by multiple problems and issues associated with the movement of people and materials in a larger scale than the land can hold. As such, there is an urgent need to address the growing infrastructural

and social needs of the increasing urban population, problems relating to land acquisition, issues of public safety and environmental protection. These are crucial areas requiring judicious urban planning and development. Besides, an important measure would be to provide urban amenities in the rural areas so that rural based activities would take place in the urban areas and the urban oriented activities would also take place in the rural settlements. The recognition of such rural-urban interface should be taken into perspective for the all round development of the State.

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