INNOVATIVE INITIATIVES ON COVID-19: A CASE STUDY OF MOKOKCHUNG DISTRICT, NAGALAND, INDIA

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Introduction:

Mokokchung district is the abode of the Ao tribe of Nagaland state in India. Mokokchung district of Nagaland, India, is considered to be one of the most developed districts and is one of the major metropolitan towns of the state. The district has a population of 1,94,62 and population density of 120 per sq.km and has recorded the highest literacy rate in the state with 91.62%. Mokokchung town is the district headquarters and is situated at an altitude of 1325 m above sea level.

Mokokchung covers an area of 1,615 km². Mokokchung district is bounded by the state of Assam to its north, Wokha to its west, Tuensang to its east and Zunheboto to its south. It lies between 93.530 E and 94.530 E longitudes and 25.560 N latitude. The district comes under Eastern Himalayan Region – North East Hills (Zone 2) with sub-tropical and temperate climate. The administrative headquarter is located at Mokokchung town and the head of the administration is the Deputy Commissioner (Statistical Handbook of Nagaland). Mokokchung District has 108 villages in 2011 Census out of which 107 villages are inhabited and 1 uninhabited. It has three statutory towns, namely, Mokokchung Town, Tuli Town and Changtongya Town and one Census Town namely Tsudikong under Tuli administrative circle. Mokokchung town came into existence during the 1961 Census while Changtongya and Tuli Towns were notified after the Census 2001. Like other Naga villages the majority of the villages are located at the hill tops spread over six broad mountain ranges in the district. The six mountain ranges are Ongpangkong, Asetkong, Langpangkong, Japukong, Jangpetkong and Tzurangkong. Altitude ranges between 450 m to 1300m above sea level.

Mokokchung Town is the commercial hub of the Mokokchung district. Mokokchung town has eighteen wards under the Mokokchung Municipal Council. Each ward has a ward authority with the Chairman as the head.

Mokokchung COVID status at a glance

Mokokchung imposed a total lockdown of educational institutions from March 17, 2020 as directed by the State government which was followed by a total lockdown of the district from March 22, 2020 till date as directed by the Government of India. The Mokokchung district administration headed by the Deputy Commissioner is actively monitoring the COVID situation in the district. Mokokchung District Task Force on COVID-19 was constituted as a first step towards
handling the COVID-19 situation in the district. The district administration further created different committees to monitor the pandemic. The Core Committee on Essential Commodities, Sanitation Committee, Committee on Food Catering, Research and Communication Committee, Committee on Quarantine Centres are the major committees that have been formed. It is to be noted that all members of these committees consist of the District administrative officials and members from the community.

Mokokchung has one designated COVID hospital namely Imkongliba Memorial District Hospital and one COVID Care Centre (CCC) located at the TB Hospital in Mokokchung. The asymptomatic patients are taken care of in the CCC and if the patients become symptomatic, they are transferred to the COVID hospital. At present Mokokchung has a total of 377 health personnel in position in the public sector, 57 doctors and 320 nurses. Mokokchung has three Truenat machines where first line screening for COVID-19 is done. Due to the unavailability of Biosafety level laboratory (BSL Lab) in the district, the final tests for COVID-19 is sent either to Kohima, Nagaland or Dibrugarh, Assam.

Mokokchung so far has zero cases of COVID* and it is among the four districts in Nagaland were zero cases of COVID has been reported till date. More than 500 returnees to Mokokchung from different states and districts have been quarantined in 14 quarantine centers. According to the reports of the District Administration, a total of 1049 people have been put under home quarantine since the beginning of the lockdown and a total of 197 samples have been sent for testing while 470 samples were screened in the Truenat lab in the district.

(*At the time of filing this report, it was reported that a person under institutional quarantine in Mokokchung was tested positive in the Truenat test. The sample for the confirmatory test was sent to Kohima and the results are awaited)
Mokokchung's response to COVID19

Mokokchung district administration has been lauded by the people of Mokokchung for its innovative and quick responses to the COVID-19 situation in the district. The works of the district administration has also been in the news a few times for its innovative ideas. Some of the innovative ideas and initiatives taken by the district administration and the people of Mokokchung are briefly highlighted as under:

Core Team on Essential Commodities

The Mokokchung district constituted a Core team on essential commodities when the lockdown of the entire nation was announced on March 25. The core team on essential commodities comprises of eleven members headed by the ADC, Mokokchung, Mokokchung Municipal Council, Mokokchung Chamber of Commerce and Industries (MCCI) and various NGOs including Watsu Mungdnag (apex women organization of the Aos), Ao Students’ Conference and Mokokchung Town Lanur Telongjem.

The main purpose of setting up the core team on essential commodities was to focus on catering to the needs of the people of Mokokchung as well as the adjoining districts like Longleng, Zunheboto, Tuensang and Wokha, who depend on Mokokchung market for the supply of essential commodities. The core team also takes the responsibility of communicating and co-coordinating with the sourcing market located in the neighboring sate Assam namely, Jorhat.

The people can purchase or sell in bulks only after obtaining an approval list from the Core team. The core team monitors the price, co-ordinates with the buyers and sellers and also looks into ‘ambitious shopping list’ of the people. The committee sees that the people of Mokokchung are not hoarding the essential commodities mainly the needs of the neighbouring districts who buy commodities from Mokokchung also needs to be fulfilled. The Core team on Essential commodities also looks after the inter-state and inter-district movement of essential commodities vehicles. They also issued ID cards to the drivers and security personnel.

The biggest challenge of the core team is in maintaining a balance in the demand and supply of goods in market. With different churches, village councils and NGOs carrying out different social work and goodwill projects, many essential items were purchased in bulks and while some
people received aids in ten folds, some villages were finding it difficult to even procure the minimum needs of the village. The increase in demand of goods than the supply led to price escalation in the Jorhat market which led to an increase in the prices of the essential commodities in the Mokokchung market. Another challenge was convincing the truck drivers and truck owners as they were unwilling to risk their health and safety while transporting the goods and services from the neighbouring state. The drivers and owners were briefed on health, hygiene and maintaining cleanliness and social distance. They were provided with food and necessary precautionary items. Letting them know that they were the real heroes made things easier for the Core team. It was only the motivational talks and appreciations, they were ready to resume duties.

The Core team has so far closed seven shops for not adhering to the rules and regulations laid out by the Core team on essential Commodities. The core team has set up a temporary office in the middle of the town to help the community and assists the citizens on three market opening days Tuesdays, Thursday and Saturday.
**Mokokchung Cart: connecting farmers with buyers during lockdown**

Mokokchung Cart, an android app launched by the Mokokchung district administration, has been helping the citizens of Mokokchung to order essential commodities and medicines online. The Mokokchung Cart app is a zero budget and non-profit project designed and developed by TA& Co. and powered by Trail Hounds Cycling Club (THCC), Mokokchung.

A number of twenty delivery officers who are all volunteers from different churches and youth organizations deliver the orders on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays following strict COVID 19 medical protocols. The delivery officers were given a one day workshop on the dos and don’ts and the medical protocol in relation to COVID 19 before the delivery service began. Ever since its launch on March 30, the app has been successful in helping and providing essential commodities and medicines on order especially to those people who stay far from the main town. On an average the app receives a total of 103 orders per day.

Apart from the essential commodities and medicines, Mokokchung cart delivers fresh vegetables to the customers. With many farmers unable to sell their produce in the market due to the lockdown, Mokokchung Cart came to the rescue by contacting the farmers and fetching the vegetables directly from the villages.

Farmers from as many as twenty villages supplied their produce to Mokokchung cart. The Mokokchung cart officials collect the vegetables from the villages and stock them in the inventory. They start cataloguing the vegetables and upload them in the app after which they start selling. Once the orders are received, it is processed, packed and the items are delivered within five to six hours. Mokokchung Cart encourages customers to use pre-paid paying system like Google pay.

In extension of the goodwill service, the Mokokchung Cart Home delivery service also donates fresh vegetables and pulses to needy families in Mokokchung Town by delivering it to their doorsteps. So far more than a hundred families have been delivered free local vegetables. The needy people are identified by the Good Samaritan project.

Mokokchung cart also coordinates with the Core Team on essential commodities in supplying the essential commodities. The core team designates few grocery shops from where the Mokokchung Cart delivery service can collect the commodities ordered. Mokokchung cart is available for download for free from Google play store. Citizens can also order from a mobile number which has been issued in the Mokokchung Cart app.
The Good Samaritan Project

Christ Church Mokokchung, a non-denominational church in Mokokchung, along with some well wishers initiated ‘The Good Samaritan Project’ in Mokokchung town with a vision to help the people especially the daily wage earners, stranded students, the sick and the needy who are badly affected by the pandemic. With no or limited sources to earn for their livelihood, the daily wage earners have been hit the hardest in Mokokchung district.

The project started on April 6 and it is continuing till date. The project identifies the people who are in most need of assistance and provides them with financial assistance as well as with ration. Imliwapang and Limaonen Imchen spearhead the Good Samaritan project and along with other members, they have been delivering ration and assistance to the needy ever since the lockdown began. The project collects money from well wishers and donors and so far they have given financial assistance to more than seventy families.

The project collaborated with the CRPF, Mokokchung in providing free packed food to the needy people in town. More than 800 families have received the packed food provided by CRPF
and the Good Samaritan Project has been helping in home delivering as well as giving away the packed food at certain points around town.

The project also collaborated with the District Level Centre for Women (DLCW) during the mother’s day celebration by identifying widows and struggling mothers living in Mokokchung Town. The DLCW gifted the mothers with gifts containing nutrition and hygiene items on account of mother’s day which the project helped in delivering.

The Good Samaritan project has helped needy families, students from other districts who are staying in rent houses and also sick persons. The Good Samaritan Project is continuously locating people who are in need and have been selflessly investing their time in contributing and fighting against the virus through their noble cause. The Good Samaritan Project hopes that with their small cause, they will be able to help lighten the burden of the already burdened masses.

Volunteers from the Good Samaritan project distributing packaged food

_Washable cotton facemasks for all Campaign_

Mokokchung District Task Force COVID19 launched a Face Mask Campaign, a hundred percent citizen funded campaign, with an aim to stitch and distribute washable masks for all the citizens of Mokokchung district and PPEs for its frontline warriors as a long-term protective measure against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The campaign aims to produce two lakhs masks with an estimate cost of twenty five lakhs rupees. More than 1000 volunteers from Women department of various churches, Women and Youth organizations, Women Self Help Groups, mothers and professional tailors have volunteered to make two lakh masks a possibility.
The campaign has launched its own website where volunteers can sign up and place orders for materials that are required in making the masks and they can also notify through the website once the masks are ready for delivery. They have also created a group to build links of all groups who can stitch masks. The group is supported with coordinating material movement, collecting masks, and sharing tutorials on stitching from trained tailors to ensure same quality across all the groups.

Efforts were made to community spread the idea of the campaign which resulted in almost fifty villages volunteering in mask making and more than 1000 volunteers working towards the face mask campaign.

The finished face masks are collected and transported to Fazl Ali College (FAC), a government college in Mokokchung, for sterilization and then distributed. The college helps in sterilization of the masks by autoclaving or UV treatment. The masks are dried in a hot air oven after which it is sorted into packets of 50 and vacuum packaging is done. Tia Mollier, Asst. Prof. Dept. of Botany, FAC said that they are able to pack 5000-8000 masks in a day with four-five persons at work while maintaining social distancing.

One volunteer from the Women Department of a church said, “During a time when our normal women service were suspended and all our social concern activities remained cancelled or postponed, we were looking for ways and means where our services would be found useful during this pandemic. Then we heard about the Face Mask Campaign Mokokchung and we thought it was a great opportunity to serve the people of Mokokchung in our own small way. As such, we have joined the project and we hope to someday look back and say we did do something good during that pandemic”.

The Face Mask Campaign Mokokchung uses the hash tag #Iamwithmokokchung and the details of the project can be looked up at their google site website https://sites.google.com/view/iamwithmokokchung. The district administration has started distributing the masks in all villages and in all wards of Mokokchung town. The administration imposes a fine of one hundred rupees for people not wearing mask while in public places and also for spitting in public.
Local incinerator to tackle waste

Mokokchung District Administration developed innovative local incinerators to dispose wastes that are generated in the quarantine centers and COVID-19 hospitals in Mokokchung with the main purpose to separate regular waste from the waste that are produced in the quarantine centers and in the COVID-19 hospitals. ADC Mokokchung, Manpai Phom, said that “The wastes that are produced in the quarantine centre and hospital will pose as threat if it is mixed with regular waste especially while transporting the waste”, he said. “The local incinerators are made from
materials which are available in the market by local innovators. The incinerators are similar to the Bukhari heating systems that are used in the Himalayan regions, but instead of using wood, sand and kerosene is used to constantly generate the heat,” he added.

Imliakum Jamir, a 39 year old from Aliba village was entrusted by the district administration to make the local incinerators. So far he has made 8 incinerators and is in the process of making more so that each quarantine centre has an incinerator each. The incinerator has been created so that it will prove as a safety and will help prevent the contamination of the surrounding area. Imliakum is an active member of the Clean Mokokchung Campaign and he has helped in making plastic banks and waste bins for the campaign which is placed in and around Mokokchung town

The incinerator is made of iron and is designed in such a way that heat is generated constantly with the help of sand and kerosene. The kerosene is supplied to the chamber with the help of a control knob. The heat that is generated will instantly burn the bacteria and the ash is collected at the bottom in a tray. Imliakum Jamir said that it will usually takes five days to complete one incinerator but with the assistance of the administration, he is able to finish one incinerator in a day and a half. An incinerator cost about fifty thousand rupees.

The joint idea of the administration and the local innovators has made it possible for Mokokchung to bring out innovation that will further help in fighting against COVID-19 and also in taking safety measures to contain the spread of the virus. All together eight incinerators have been made and it is placed at different quarantine centres and also at the COVID-19 hospital.
**Sensitization programme and Radio series on COVID-19**

A massive sensitization programme on COVID-19 was undertaken by the District Task Force Mokokchung covering all the villages and towns under Mokokchung District where all the Village council members, church leaders, teachers and their stakeholders were sensitized on COVID-19 which went a long way in educating the masses about the COVID-19. The District Task Force Mokokchung has also launched a radio series on COVID-19 in collaboration with the All India Radio. So far 17 episodes have been aired where COVID related issues and understandings are discussed. Some of the series include Living with COVID-19, Pregnancy and other related issues during COVID-19 pandemic, Pet care during the pandemic, Market scenario, Job Opportunities & Self-reliance post COVID etc. The radio series can also be listened in the official you tube channel of All India Radio Mokokchung.

![A screenshot of the poster of COVID-19 radio series](image)

**Community effort towards fighting COVID-19 pandemic**

Mokokchung district in its effort to fight against the global pandemic has seen the cooperation and the contribution of the community at the highest level. As a closely knitted indigenous community, the various measures and plans adopted by the district administration were supported and initiated with the help of the community.

The core teams that were created by the administration to fight against the pandemic saw the inclusion of members from the various community and organizations present in the district. Various institutions, churches, NGOs and different communities came forward to lend a hand to the district.
administration. With scarce financial resources it was difficult for the administration to execute the plans to fight against the virus. In such difficult times, the community came forward to donate to the COVID-19 Relief fund. Various village councils, societies, sports associations, NGOs, churches, and families came forward to donate. The Ao Baptist Church Council, known as ABAM, has made its mission centre, Impur, as a quarantine centre. Four hostels in the mission centre and a school have turned into quarantine centres. The people residing in Impur are voluntarily cooking day and night for the quarantine people. Apart for the financial assistance fresh vegetables, food items, material requirements for quarantine centres, logistics and human resources are being donated by the citizens of Mokokchung. The ten Ao legislators representing Mokokchung district in the Nagaland state assembly also donated a Truenat machine for the district.

Some of the community groups that are actively involved in the war against COVID-19 can be highlighted as under:

- **Ao Senden and Watsu Mungdang**: The Ao Senden is the apex body of representing the Ao people. The Ao Senden acts as a strong pressure group involving in all major decision making of the district. The Ao Senden is also a member of the Mokokchung District Task Force on COVID-19. The Ao Senden in its first step to fight the pandemic visited all villages that are located in the bordering areas. Since the entire border gates were closed and movement was not allowed, the Ao Senden visited the bordering villages ensuring that there were no outside factors hindering the villages and with the village and border gates closed, availability of ration became difficult the Ao Senden distributed ration to the villagers. Similar to the Ao Senden, the Watsu Mungdang is the apex women organization of the Ao community. Their head office is located in Mokokchung town. Each Ao village and each ward in Mokokchung town has a Watsu unit under the Watsu Mungdang. Ever since the beginning of the pandemic, the Watsu Mungdang has also been very vocal about the problems faced by the people and has been letting the administration know about it along with their participation in the works of the District administration. With the coming of the returnees to Mokokchung, the Watsu mungdang volunteered to cook for all the inmates in all quarantine centres in Mokokchung. The Watsu units from different wards take turns in cooking lunch and dinner for the quarantine people.

- **Ao Kaketshir Mungdang**: The Ao Kaketshir Mungdang (AKM) is the apex student body of the Ao people. The AKM is actively involved in voicing out the problems faced by the
student community during the pandemic and is working in collaboration with the district administration. With the restriction of movements in public and private vehicles and also inter-state and inter district movement, the AKM timely visits the check gates that are located in the bordering areas. The AKM also takes the responsibility of delivering food made by the *Watsu Mungdang* to all the quarantine centres in Mokokchung which are located far from the residential area.

- **All Ward Union Mokokchung:** All wards in Mokokchung is looked after by a ward authority under the War Chairman. The All Ward Union Mokokchung comprises of all the ward chairman and is headed by a president. The All Ward Union is also actively involved in the war against the virus. Each ward constituted a Task force as directed by the district administration to look into matters relating to COVID-19. The members of the task force are members of the ward authority and youths from the ward. On market opening days, the Task force sees that everyone is wearing a mask and maintaining social distance. The Task force particularly implements strict rules in the market area requesting people to maintain social distance and to use sanitizers and masks. The All Ward union Mokokchung checks vehicles plying in the town, making sure those vehicles without permit for movement are not coming out unnecessarily to the market.

- **Mokokchung Town Lanur Telongjem:** The Mokokchung Town Lanur Telongjem (MTLT) is a non-profit NGO formed by like minded youths of Mokokchung town for the welfare and development of Mokokchung. MTLT started a donation drive in the first phase of the lockdown in Mokokchung town. With the amount collected from the donation, MTLT started a relief drive to different wards in Mokokchung Town. Relief was given to daily wage earners, widows and people living below poverty line. Relief materials were also given to patients and attendants at different hospitals during the lockdown. The relief consisted of food materials including rice, daal, flour and cooking oil. MTLT also went a step further by visiting the bordering villages of Mokokchung district and providing them with relief materials. In the fourth phase of the lockdown, MTLT started sensitization drive in and around the market place in Mokokchung town educating people about wearing masks, using hand sanitizers and maintaining social distance. MTLT also started a sensitization drive against stigma and discrimination of returnees and those in home quarantine and quarantine centres.
MTLT giving free face mask to a little girl during a sensitization drive

A son of a migrant worker receives free ration from Mokokchung Town Baptist Church

Longsa village council donating free vegetables to quarantine centres

A traffic personnel washing hands in one of the wash basins placed by Arkong Ward Youth Association

Relief distribution in one of the bordering village

Ao legislators of Nagaland State Assembly after a meeting with District Administration
Conclusion:

Mokokchung has so far been able to sustain the status of a COVID-19 free district and it is gearing up to control community spread of COVID-19 if at all the cases starts to increase in the district. According to the district administration, strict quarantine rules and SOP have been maintained so far and it plans to make better and safer rules. The co-operation from the community has been immense. Every village and every ward in Mokokchung town has their own Task force to look into matters relating to COVID-19. Many of the villages have constructed check gates to monitor the entry and exit of people from within and outside the village and they have also set up their own quarantine centres.

All possible measures are being taken for the safety of the people. Many innovative ideas that were executed were replicated by other districts too. For instance, Mon district also came up with a delivery service called the Green caravan to cater to the needs of the people. Mokokchung is the only district in Nagaland to have an official delivery app and also the only district where a mask campaign has been initiated by the district administration and fully funded by the people.

Community contribution and co-operation has so far been able to keep the virus at bay. The district administration hopes that this system of co-ordination and co-operation will continue as we fight against the invisible enemy.