

# Challenges Of Employment In The Agricultural Sector In Ukhrul District, Manipur

*Dr. Awungashi Samshokwo Varekan  
Post-Doctoral Scholar  
Manipur International University*

## Abstract

It is a study that endeavors to study the important agricultural sector of the Tangkhul Naga people of Manipur. They have been known to be fairly skilful and hardworking farmers for centuries. They are earth movers carving out beautiful terrace rice fields, clearing forest for Jhum cultivation, etc. The methods of cultivation and various traditional food crops cultivated produced sufficient to meet the needs of the village. Agriculture among the Tangkhul has not only been the main source of livelihood but it was the activity to which the social and economic life of the tribe revolves around. Agricultural practices have always been community based and when this foundation was shaken due to transition and transformation brought about by factors such as education, money, and lifestyle, leading to drastic changes in the needs and wants of the population. This shift has posed a huge practical narrative of the prospects and challenges to the labor supply in the agricultural sector in Ukhrul district.

**Terms** animism, migration, monsoon, agripreneurs, self-sufficiency, cultural identity

## Introduction

For centuries agriculture has been the most important sector in Ukhrul district, Manipur. People in the district have always been engaged in agricultural activities especially in the cultivation of their staple food, Rice. The Tangkhuls are known for the skill and work in practicing terrace farming and Jhum cultivation. Besides rice cultivation, they also engage in other agriculture and allied activities such as horticulture, cattle rearing, fishing, and weaving, etc.

The socio-economic life of the Tangkhul revolves around the agricultural activities and seasons. Every festival is agriculture centric. The new year sets in with the most important and significant festival called as “Luirā” to begin agricultural activities. It is the seed sowing festival and invocation of the spirit to bless the year with bountiful harvest. The year closes with the ingathering festival of the women called as “Chumphā”. The seasons in between is filled with festival at every stage of rice cultivation.

The method of cultivation is still largely traditional. The tools and implements, the setting aside of seeds for the next season, and the irrigational facilities, etc. are all the same as was adopted by their ancestors yet it had produced and supplied enough to meet the needs of the economy. The produce of agriculture sector in Ukhrul has always been sufficient since everybody engages in agriculture to produce enough to meet their basic needs. It had always been a self-sufficient economy until the introduction of money and market system.

It had always been an agrarian economy depending on the mercy of the elements of nature. The people practice animism and thus their agriculture activities are dependent and controlled by the elements and phenomena of the environment. The success of the agriculture sector is dependent on the timely and sufficient rainfall. Whatever is done by the community is to please the spirits of nature, to enjoy bountiful harvest. The Tangkhuls have mastered the art of observing the nature that indicates the outcome which is skilfully used in the social, economic and political practices to thrive and survive. The bio-indicators and nature indicators help the community in preparation and prevention.

With the introduction of money, education, exposure to foreign culture and practices, introduction of modern technology, and most importantly adapting to lifestyle different from that of the ancestors, the demand and dynamics of the society has drastically changed. These socio-economic, religion, and political changes has been a boon as well as a bane in the society. There have been irreparable and irreversible loss and changes in practices, beliefs, and lifestyles which has caused much stress and faultlines.

Agriculture has been the greatest victim in the dynamics of changes. One of the changes to agriculture sector in Ukhrul district is the lack of knowledge and skills, and the desire to be a farmer. Agriculture is still the most important sector but not the most preferred sector of employment.

### **Factors responsible for opting other sectors over agriculture for employment:**

The challenges of employment in the agricultural sector in Ukhrul district and its villages are generic and it stems from the following factors as shared by the respondents in the questionnaire and interview.

1. Agriculture sector is not an attractive option of employment because of the practice of small scale farming due to lack of market, entrepreneurship, and farmland. Selling of farm produce is relatively new to the Tangkhul community and therefore the production of farms has always been to produce sufficient to meet the family needs and not surplus.
2. Agriculture among the Tangkhuls community is highly dependent on normal monsoon. The agricultural activities are seasonal and mostly single cropping. The agricultural activities commence in March and ends by November, and the rest of the season they are unemployed. This factor of dependence on monsoon and unemployment in off season makes the sector very unattractive.
3. Educated youth does not find agriculture to be an attractive option of employment because of the obvious poverty among the farmers. Many of them experience the struggle have-nots as farmers. Therefore, it is the goal in life to look for other employment opportunities to earn higher income and raise the standard of life.
4. It is not only the unwillingness to be employed in agriculture sector but more of the inability to do it due to lack of knowledge and skills. In the ancient days, it was the most important sector and every child was taught the skills and imparted the knowledge. The educated youth does not have the knowledge nor the skills as it is not part of the curriculum of the formal education.
5. One of the biggest challenges of agriculture sector is the lack of labor in the market due to migration of labor to the cities in search of alternative employment opportunities. This migration of labor is due to the lack of employment opportunities due to lack of development in the industrial and service sector. This lack of labor is also the outcome of the change in the cultural and traditional practices and beliefs.

### **Challenges of Employment**

#### **1. Migration of Labor**

One of the greatest challenges in agriculture is retaining the farmers or labor force. Labor has been migrating to other sectors of the economy in search of higher income and standard of life. Migration has not only reduced the supply of labor in agriculture but it has also created unemployment amongst the non-migrating labourers. The transfers of funds from those who have migrated have discouraged the others to give up agriculture.

#### **2. Perspective towards agriculture**

Traditionally, members of the family is main source of labor in the agricultural activities but with change in lifestyle, needs and wants, there has been a tectonic shift in the perspective towards agriculture as the main source of livelihood and employment. Every parent wants their children to be in some other profession over agriculture. They are being taught and

indoctrinated that all other profession is preferable and better than being a farmer. Agriculture sector is never perceived and promoted or proposed as a good option of employment.

### 3. Education and exposure

The decimation of traditional dormitory system in the wake of formal education and exposure to other culture was disastrous to the traditional practices. With the loss of dormitory system, the traditional training of the knowledge of arts and skills of agriculture began to decline. One of the important sources of labor supply called as “Yarnao” or the age-set group began to lose its traditional purpose and meaning. Education presented them the opportunities to be employed in different sectors. Migration, employment, and education presented to them the different employment possibilities other than agriculture that would earn them higher income and higher standard of life.

### 4. Private sector

The growth of various private sectors in industries and services has offered end number of opportunities for employment. Today, migration of rural Tangkhul labor force is find employment in sectors such as hospitality like hotels and cruise, beauty salon and spa, BPOs, Management, shops, academics, entrepreneurs, etc. Today, many youths are migrating to the cities and towns in search of employment in such sectors which otherwise would be source of labor in the agricultural sector.

### 5. Public sector

This is the most sought-after sector of employment among the Tangkhuls. Every parent and youth dream of finding employment in the public sector or government. Much is invested in education, public service exams, and efforts to get a government job. And in such endeavours, the available labor for agricultural sector is adversely affected. Once the government Job is secured, it further reduces the supply of labor as the parents are likely to discontinue farming and the other younger siblings are supported for further studies or employment.

### 6. NRGES

The National Rural Guarantee Employment scheme (NRGES) launched by the Government of India with the intention of providing employment to the rural labor during the lean season has turn out to be a deterrent in agriculture labor supply. The policy is excellent in terms of intent and objectives but the outcome has been unexpected. The policy that was to provide employment and income during the lean season has turn out to be one of the major reasons for the farmers to discontinue cultivation. They have become dependent of the meagre income from NRGES to meet the basic needs and wants and in so doing have lost interest in farming.

### 7. Lack of skills and willingness

Education and higher education, change of lifestyle, loss of the traditional dormitory system, and increasing employment opportunities in other sectors have adversely impacted the necessary training, skills, and willingness to engage in traditional agricultural practices. The present education curriculum and system does not include and encourage agriculture nor do they provide the practical skills. They provide only information but not contextualize knowledge and skills, the contents are only foreign culture and practices while the local ethnic culture and practices are ignored. Thus, years of being in school, college, and university creates longing and desire for different lifestyle and livelihood.

### 8. Climate changes

Tangkhul kingdom is not an exception to the adverse impact of global climatic changes. The untimely rainfall has made terrace farming very uncertain and unpredictable. Traditional terrace rice cultivation is at the mercy of the timely and sufficient rainfall but when this fails, the whole cycle of cultivation is affected resulting in leaving many rice fields uncultivated. Rice cultivation is such that it needs constant supply of water all through the season but when monsoon fails, it is bound to fails miserably. This uncertainty and unpredictability have left many farmers considering leaving farming and looking for alternative options of employment.

Failure of crops also has left families under poverty and underemployed and pushing them to venture into other source of employment to provide means of livelihood.

9. Low income and inflation

Agriculture among the Tangkhuls has always been at the subsistence level. They produce just for meeting their basic needs of food and not for commercialization. This traditional practice is due to lack of market facilities and money as a medium of exchange. But when money was introduced and the needs and wants expanded beyond the traditional means, agriculture produce was not meeting the expectation. The production was insufficient to commercialize and earn money. Therefore, agriculture was not an option of employment but attention was given to other sectors that could earn them enough money to demand for goods and services. It was considered that supplying labor to other sectors was more preferable as it could earn them sufficient funds to meet their needs including food.

### Suggested Remedies

Some practical remedies or solutions through the research findings may be suggested below:

1. Focus on the possibilities and opportunities rather than the challenges.  
There is no doubt that migration of labor force in search of more monetary lucrative sector elsewhere is a challenge but that opens an opportunity in the economy for those who wish to innovate and continue in the sector because the demand for food will only sustain or increase.
2. Efficient and effective forward and backward linking.  
There is a need for agripreneurs who need to tap the possibilities of forward and backward linkages in the market to increase employment, production, productivity, marketing, and income.
3. Establish and expand market.  
Labor migration to other sectors or outside of Ukhul can be arrested if the prospects of market for agriculture produce is created and expanded. The entrepreneurs, the Civil societies and the government can play a vital role in the market creation and expansion. Facilities such as weekly market, processed foods, agro-based industries, etc. will create employment opportunities.
4. Production and self-sufficiency should be emphasised rather than import and dependency.  
The historical fact Ukhul economy can produce enough to meet the need should be re-emphasised so that the dependence on imported food grains and other essentials can be reduced. This will not only bolster the economy but also ensure the circulation of money within the economy to bring about economic growth and development.
5. Labor dignity needs to be restored.  
The attitude towards agriculture as a low-profile job and considering it to be the least preferred source of employment needs a huge paradigm shift. Stake holders need to be educated the importance and the prospects of agriculture.
6. Emphasized it as part of cultural identity.  
Agriculture is not only an economic sector producing food, providing employment, and generating revenue but it is a sector that has great cultural significance. The foundation of cultural identity of the Tangkhuls is built on agricultural practices and seasons, and thereby the existential issue of agricultural sector in Ukhul district is an existential issue of the Cultural identity of the Tangkhuls.

### Conclusion

The challenges of employment among the Tangkhuls are not due to lack of employment opportunities in agricultural sector and its allied activities but due to the lack of willingness and ability. These have led to the migration of labor to other sectors and outside of the district and state, and the decrease in supply of labor to the agricultural sector. It needs to be kept in mind that with the climatic conditions, the soil, ancestral knowledge, modern technology, information, and better



infrastructural facilities there is no dirt to the possibilities and opportunities in agriculture and allied activities in Ukhrul district but this can only be realised if the general population is willing to invest time and effort through paradigm shift in their perspectives towards this sector. The challenges can be turned into opportunities through innovation, creation of utilities and generating lucrative employment opportunities competitive enough with other sectors. Application of modern method and technology to the existing traditional method and skills is the key to the generation of employment opportunities and the growth and development of agriculture sector.

## References

- Gonmei G.Hiamguanglung (2013). Hills economy of Manipur: A structural change. *Journal of North East India studies*. Vol. 3, No. 1, Jan-June. Pp. 61 – 73
- Nshoga, A. (2009). *Traditional Naga Village system and its transformation*. Anshah publishing house. Delhi.
- Singha, komol. (2011). *Economy of a primitive tribal village in Manipur*. Concept publishing company pvt. Ltd. New Delhi.
- Adesugba Margaret & George mavrota (2016). Youth employment, agricultural transformation, and rural labor dynamics in Nigeria. *International food policy research institute*.
- Anjani Kumar (2009). Rural employment diversification in eastern india: trends and determinants. *Agricultural economics research review*. Volume 22, Pp. 47 -60. c. Vol. 83(7). Pp. 765 – 72.
- Athungo, Ovung. (2012). *Social stratification in Naga society*. Mittal Publications, New- Delhi.
- B.D. Parmar (1987). Rural labour market: an empirical study of farm wages in Saurashtra region, *Indian journal of industrial relations*, Volume 23, No. 2, Pp. 229 – 239.
- Bedamatta Rajshree (2021). Employment of the rural labour force in India – the current trends and future prospects. *Indian journal of agricultural economics*. Vol. 76, No. 1. Pp. 92 – 108.
- E. Kharaisvili, M Chavleishvili, M Lobzhanidze, N. Damenia, N Sagareishvili (2017). Problems of youth employment in agricultural sector of Georgia and causes of migration. *International journal of social, behavioural, educational, economic, business and industrial engineering*. Vol. 11, No. 10. Pp. 2116 – 2121.
- Haokip Paominthang (2018). An empirical analysis on pattern of employment diversification among the rural households in Churachandpur district, Manipur. *Pratidhwani the Echo*. Volume VI, Issue IV. Pp 289 – 298.
- Sukumaran Nair, M.K. (1993). Rural laobur market in Kerala: small holder agriculture and labour mark<sup>1</sup>Mohanti (1995) et dynamics. *Economic and political weekly*. Vol. 32. No. 35. L45 – L52.
- Vankatesh P, Nithyashree M.L., V Saneetha, Suresh Pal (2015). Trends in agriculture, non-farm sector and rural employment in India: An insight from state level analysis. *Indian journal of Agricultural sciences* Vol. 85 (5). Pp. 671-7.