



Everyday Lives of Naga Women

SHOLU MOVI,¹ LANUAKUM AIER,¹ RUCHIRA BOSS²

In their everyday lives, Naga women have many responsibilities and perform many tasks and duties, not just for themselves but for their families and communities. On most occasions, these go unnoticed, as though the women are invisible as they perform them. Our fieldwork was carried out in an attempt to understand and measure the time Naga women spend on different activities. The pictures below depict the wide range of work done by Naga women from different parts of Nagaland, including Phek, Kohima, Dimapur, and Wokha districts.

Keywords: family, food providers, food processing, parenting, women's work, fuel

1. The Highland Institute
2. University of Göttingen



Photos 1–3: Women as food processors

Women in Elumyo village in Wokha district engaged in peeling, cutting, and drying yam (*taro*). This activity is performed by the women of the village, either in groups or alone. A few baskets of *taro* can take a whole day to peel and cut. The cut pieces take four to five days to dry and are then packed and sold in Wokha town. Many Elumyo women frequently travel in a truck to town to sell the dried *taro*, which can take the whole day. This activity is performed on top of all the other household chores the women do on a daily basis.



Photos 4-7: Invisible women

These pictures do not have any people in them, but if we were to associate them with anyone, then we would think of women. Collecting fuel, foraging in fields and forests, cooking and processing food, and taking care of livestock are overwhelmingly the tasks that Naga women undertake, along with other jobs like cleaning, washing, and caring for children and the elderly. All these tasks are seen as women's work, which remains invisible.



Photos 8–11: Women and leisure. These words rarely go together. In three months of interviewing about 1000 women in urban and rural Nagaland across different tribes, the women’s time-use survey reflected that very rarely did women spend time relaxing or doing something solely for their own pleasure — the family and its needs always came first. These pictures capture a few of those rare moments when women took a short break from their chores for a chat, a laugh, and some tea. The generosity of these Naga women was reflected when they took time from their work to welcome our survey team, providing us with accommodation, food, and warmth in their own homes.



Photos 12–14: Women as food providers



These pictures are from urban areas: Golaghat, Assam (top left), Bamboo Market, Kohima (top right), Sunday bazaar, and Bhandari town (bottom).

In urban areas, most vegetable and fruit street vendors were women. In many cases, these women are farmers who travel from their villages very early in the morning to sell their produce. Unfortunately, many sell their produce at low prices as it is perishable, and they, unlike big traders, cannot afford storage facilities. Their daily grind of travelling, sitting in uncomfortable positions for long hours, sometimes without a complete meal, says a lot about their resilience. The labour and effort of these food providers cannot be taken for granted.



Photos 15–18: Women as nurturers

Although parenting responsibility is shared in Naga households, women play a pivotal role in providing shelter, food, and warmth to their children. Even after working for hours in the field, mothers in many households take time to prepare special snacks for their young ones or help them with their homework. The woman in the top right photo was engaged in constructing her new home before we started the interview. In the picture, she can be seen keeping watch over her child, whom she feared might hurt himself around the construction site while playing.



Photos 19–21: Things women hold

The two pictures at the top of this set are from Khonoma Village in Kohima district. This is India's first green village and is known for the fierce battles fought by brave Naga warriors in the past. Women stand in queues to receive their refilled LPG gas cylinders (top left). One of them (top right) can be seen carrying a cylinder back home in a basket placed on her head. The weight of one cylinder is 14–15 kg. This activity is performed every few months. The last photo was taken in Zhavame village in Phek district. Here, older women from the village can be seen holding opinions and happily sharing them with our survey team during a focus group discussion.

Photo credits: Saktum Wonti (Photo 7), Esther Swu (Photo 17), and Ruchira Boss (all other photos).

Understanding the Changes in Food Environments in Nagaland, led by Doctoral Researcher Ruchira Boss

India's food environment has shifted due to liberalization and globalization, with increased consumption of processed and ultra-processed food and increased consumption of edible oil. The North East Region, primarily tribal and autarkic, has been impacted by urbanization and modernization. A cross-sectional household survey was conducted in four districts of Nagaland, examining women's food consumption, cooking methods, preferences, and cultural practices. The study also included a food market survey. Women's time use was measured in detail using a novel method relying on participatory research approaches and a visual toolkit.

