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# **ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY, CHURCHES, AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOs) IN COMBATING CONSUMPTION OF NARCOTICS (DRUGS) IN THE NORTH-EAST PART OF INDIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the North-Eastern part of India, the consumption of Narcotics has been a major issue. Due to the illicit trading of drugs, many people in the North-East face social and economic challenges. These issues pose a major concern towards public health, menacing the well-being of individuals and families. Since international borders surround all the north-east states of India, the illegal trading of drug substances is far easier than in other states in India. These International borders are the major illicit drug-producing areas with significant drug trafficking transit. Even though law enforcement and legal Aid have played a huge role in fighting drug abuse, sufficiency is still lacking to control and aid the addiction. This article will focus on how society plays a role in combating drug abuse, and how churches and NGOs are dealing with the drug problem effectively all around the north-east states in India. This article will analyse how these churches, NGOs, and Civil Society are contributing to prevention and awareness and emphasises the distinct advantages of society and church-based engagement in communities, diminishing stigma, and offering culturally sensitive support systems.

**Keywords:** NDPS, Narcotics, Drug abuse, Addiction, North-East India, civil society, churches, NGOs, rehabilitation.

## 1. Introduction

For over a decade, the North-Eastern states of India, particularly known as the Seven Sisters, which are- Mizoram, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Tripura and a brother Sikkim, have been facing issues among the communities, families, and individuals because of the emergence of Substance abuse. Consumption of Narcotics leads to vital illness in communities, and has been the most serious socio-economic and public health challenge. Under this category of Narcotics, we can have, as a first category, Natural Opiates, which are Morphine and Codeine, secondly, Semi-Synthetic Opioids, which are Heroin, Oxycodone, Hydrocodone, and finally, we have Fully Synthetic Opioids that are Fentanyl, Methadone, and Tramadol. Among these categories, this article will focus only on Heroin that comes under the third category since it is the most consumed substance in the north-east states of India. Drug Abuse is most common among the youth, which also leads to unemployment, robbery, nuisance, etc. Due to its unique geographical regions, which feature most of the state's international borders, this plays a critical and vital role in the state.

And not to be missed out, the Golden Triangle- one of the world's largest illicit drug-producing regions, which comprises Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand. From this Golden Triangle,<sup>1</sup> Illicit drugs are easier to trade and exchange across borders. Most of the Illegal Substances trafficking in these regions are Heroin, Methamphetamine and more of others Synthetic drugs. This easy access enables people to distribute even in remote areas. But it cannot be said that, just because of its easy access from the external, borders are the main reason that north east India has more of illicit drug consumption and trafficking, but also the internal, which is deeply rooted in socio-economic issues such as poverty/unemployment, lack of law enforcement, peer pressure, lack of education, and lack of awareness.

Though the government gives its best to control and fight against drugs, even enforcing the NDPS Act (Narcotics and Drugs and Psychotropic Substances) in 1985, which turned out to be insufficient. The world still needs the support of society, churches, and non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) to fight against Drugs. The working pattern of each community has played an important and crucial role in combating Drug Abuse.

The contributions made by these institutions offer ethical guidance, moral support,

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2021). World Drug Report.

awareness, education and community engagement. The working pattern aids in raising awareness, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, reintegration, and advocacy. It contends that their participation is essential for establishing a comprehensive and lasting approach to the drug crisis.

## 2. Origin And Consequences of Drug Abuse in North-East India

There can be a lot of problems why the North-East India region has issues regarding drug abuse among the people living within the states. First, it could be its specific regional context, as all states share international borders with Bangladesh, Myanmar, China and Bhutan. Simultaneously, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland share an international border with Myanmar, which is one of the world's top opium producers in Southeast Asia and illicitly traffics into India at a high price, making it a lucrative cash crop. Meghalaya, Tripura, Assam and Mizoram also share an international border with Bangladesh. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Sikkim share an international border with Bhutan. Lastly, China's border is connected to Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>2</sup>

The combination of these borders, challenging landscapes and inadequate infrastructure creates significant obstacles for efficient monitoring and law enforcement. Consequently, North-East India has turned into both a channel for drug trafficking and a market for narcotics.

Particularly in States like Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur, heroin, synthetic Opioids (Morphine and Codeine), and some Psychotropic Substances like Anti-depressant and Anti-Psychotic drugs are broadly circulated across these States. According to India HIV Estimates, 2020, Technical Brief, people from the north-east states of India are using injectable drugs the most as compared to other Indian States, which leads to public health issues like high rates of HIV/AIDs and hepatitis victims among people.<sup>3</sup> The main reasons and causes of drug abuse among the youths are most likely to be high unemployment rates, a feeling of purposelessness, peer pressure, lack of reassurance, and the efficacy Gap. At the same time, rapid change in society and community has become one of the main reasons and a significant factor that leads to drug use among the youth and adults. Experimentation and the desire for acceptance by society lead them to depend on drugs. In some communities amongst north east states, there is

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<sup>2</sup> Manikya Kishore Varshney. (2025). States of India Sharing International Borders — Complete Guide.

<sup>3</sup>National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO). (2021). HIV estimations 2020: Technical brief, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India. P-45

a stereotype that addiction to drugs is a moral failure, which gives such nuisance to society and family, instead of a health condition. Because of this stereotype, people who are addicted to drugs cannot reach out for help as much as they want. The feeling of embarrassment and being humiliated has built inside them, not just to them, but to their own family as well, which leads to isolation.

### **3. How Society Plays a Role in Combating Drug Abuse.**

Any group or association that falls under the umbrella of civil society may be referred to as Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), which refers to non-state, non-profit entities that unite people voluntarily to work collectively toward shared social, cultural, or ethical goals.<sup>4</sup> In India, we have four stages of evolution in Civil Society Organisations (CDOs)- Ancient Medieval roots come first, and then the pre-Independence Era followed, and thirdly, post-Independence, and lastly, but not least, the Contemporary era. This era is what we are living in today's world.<sup>5</sup>

Since north-east India has a significant international border with the Golden triangle- Myanmar, Laos and Thailand, it appears to have a crucial socio-economic and public health crisis because of easy access to illicit substances. Many challenges have been faced by the people living in it, among which the most concerning is the excessive consumption of drugs among young people and adults. Because of this easy access, the north-east region's vulnerability rate has increased, particularly in drug trafficking.

Civil society participation in combating drug abuse has been referred to as a voluntary act under a non-governmental organisation. Since these states are rooted in their own traditions and social structures, humility and kindness live within them; their strength lies in the deep connection with the local communities. It plays a huge role in addressing drug abuse in different ways. Women's associations, rehabilitation, a home for drug addicts, awareness campaigns, Student Unions in different Institutions and Universities, youth clubs, etc., can be brought together as a community-based organisation that helps fight and control drugs.

Awareness campaign is one of the primary contributions in this category. The Organisation not only focus on the drug users but also on parents, relatives, friends and any parts of the

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<sup>4</sup>Dristiiias. (2025) Civil Society Organisations in India, <https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/civil-society-organizations-in-india>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

families. It initiates seminars and workshops for them that give them a huge amount of knowledge and more benefits in their lives. For students, the organisation organises school-based programmes that help students and teachers understand what drug abuse or excessive drug consumption could lead their lives into a dark pit where they will not be able to get out of it and mostly get them into lifetime addiction. That way, students can have the knowledge and ideas of how drugs can have a harmful effect on their lives.

Since there are different dialects and different languages used in the northeastern regions of India, using their own mother tongue or dialect helps a lot in communication, while doing public speeches. Respecting elders' opinions, taking advice from village leaders, and handling the community in a good way of manner help a lot in spreading a message on the harmful effects of abusing drugs.

Apart from all these, the leaders of the villages, women's association, like Mizoram Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP)<sup>6</sup> become one of the largest women's organisations that promote moral reform and help in combating drug abuse in Mizoram. All Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti<sup>7</sup> is one of the oldest women's organisations in Assam that promotes social reform and provides a range of assistance in anti-trafficking of narcotics-related activities. Subsequently, all the other North-East states, Meghalaya, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Sikkim, also have their powerful and famous Women's Org. Khasi Mothers Association<sup>8</sup>, Tripura Mahila Samakhya<sup>9</sup>, Arunachal Pradesh Women's Welfare Society<sup>10</sup>, Naga Mothers Association,<sup>11</sup> and the Sikkim State Commission for Women.<sup>12</sup> There's a famous women's org. in Manipur called Meira Paibi,<sup>13</sup> also known as Women's Torch Bearer, who conducts night patrols to combat drug abuse. They all act as informal regulators of society and as community watchdogs.

#### **4. Role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).**

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) hold a vital role in providing services related to

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<sup>6</sup> Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl," *Government of Mizoram*, accessed 2026,

<sup>7</sup> Overview of Women's Movements Across Northeast India. BANotes. 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Aruna Chanu Oinam and Purnima Thoidingjam, "A Brief Review of Meira Paibi," *Asian Review of Social Sciences* (2020).

drug exploitation. In many parts of North-East India, NGOs compensate for the limited reach of the government institutions, mostly in rehabilitation and home care. Their work emphasises treatment, harm reduction and social restoration.

Every state in the north east india have their own NGO that plays a crucial role in fighting drug misuse by the people as follows:

- a. Manipur- Manipur has an Institute for Social Disease (ISD) that works exclusively on drug abuse prevention and treatment, as well as an HIV/AIDS program. It also operates rehabilitation centres and an outreach program for drug users.<sup>14</sup> It also has the Born Again Rehabilitation Centre (BARC), which offers a rehabilitation centre and gives counselling as well as outreach services.<sup>15</sup>
- b. Mizoram: Mizoram has a strong NGOs that play a crucial and vital role in combating drugs, which is known as: 1) Young Mizo Association (YMA), it plays a major role in anti-drug campaigns and awareness programs. This YMA works with the government agencies to combat drug addiction.<sup>16</sup> 2) The others that play an important role are Rehabilitation Centres and homes for the Addicts and Children who do not have parents or relatives to raise them, which is known as the TNT (Thutak Nunpuitu Team), which was founded by a person named Sangthankima, who got the Padma Shri Award in 2024.<sup>17</sup> He has worked for over 30 years helping people who don't have a place to stay, people with a substance use disorder (SUD), orphans and whoever needs help.<sup>18</sup>
- c. Nagaland: Nagaland has more homes and centres than associations for people with a substance use disorder (SUD). It has Youth Mission, which is one of the leading NGOs that offers and provides treatment to drug abusers who are stuck in addiction since 1989.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, Eastern Drug and HIV Training Centre (NEDHIV).<sup>20</sup> Thirdly, Prodigals Home, which operates a counselling program and runs a Rehabilitation

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<sup>14</sup> Institute for Social Disease, "About ISD." Accessed 2026.

<sup>15</sup> Born Again Rehabilitation Centre, "About BARC", accessed 2026.

<sup>16</sup> "YMA, MSACS to combat HIV & Drug Addiction," Times of India, 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Government of India, Padma Awards 2024 List, Ministry of Home Affairs.

<sup>18</sup> "Mizoram's Thutak Nunpuitu Team and its role in Rehabilitation," India Today NE, January 26, 2024.

<sup>19</sup> Youth Mission, "About Us," accessed 2026.

<sup>20</sup> Eastern Drug/HIV Training Centre, "NGO Profile," accessed 2026.

Centre for drug abusers for a very long term.<sup>21</sup> Lastly, Bethesda Welfare Youth Centre.<sup>22</sup>

- d. Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh: These three states have a strong society that works all over north-east India for the youth development as well as a social issue, particularly on drug and substance misuse awareness. This society is known as the Pro Rural Society.<sup>23</sup>
- e. Tripura and Sikkim: Tripura and Sikkim do not have many NGOs that fight against drug abuse, even though there are NGOs, there are not many documents to find in academic sources. But what we can find is that they operate under government-supported - Integrated Rehabilitation Centre for Addicts (IRCA) Schemes.

In Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland, the prevention of drugs and organising programs and outreach for HIV awareness are mostly conducted by the NGOs, which are mentioned above. These NGOs play an important role in three crucial points, i.e., Awareness Campaigns, Harm Reduction, and Rehabilitation.

## **5. Role of Churches in Fighting Against Drug Abuse.**

In the North-Eastern regions, the Church plays an important role in community and society. Based on the latest Census in India, 2011, Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur have the most Christians in their states, where Nagaland leads at 87.93%, and Mizoram comes second 87.16%, then third Meghalaya 74.59%.<sup>24</sup> Churches not only function as a place of worship and a holy place, but they also function as a centre of social organisations, moral guidance, and community support.

The moral authority of Church leaders allows them to form public perceptions regarding drug misuse. Through preachings, pastoral guidance and counselling, or any kind of meeting that the church holds, they consistently highlight the risk of substance abuse and promote values of discipline, responsibility, and compassion. Significantly, churches often frame

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<sup>21</sup> Prodigals' Home, "Integrated Rehabilitation Centre for Addicts," accessed 2026.

<sup>22</sup> Bethesda Welfare Youth Centre, "NGO Profile," accessed 2026.

<sup>23</sup> Pro Rural Society, "About," accessed 2026.

<sup>24</sup> Religion Data of Census 2011: XXVIII Northeast. (The Christianisation of the Northeast: It all began in the eve of Independence). Centre for Polity Studies. (2016).

addiction as a condition that necessitates care and compassion instead of judgment, which helps in diminishing stigma and promoting treatment.

Churches play a unique, dominant, and significant role in community and social life in the North-East states of India, particularly, we can say, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Nagaland, since these states have the highest percentage of Christianity among the Eight States. Numerous religious institutions and faith-oriented organisations run rehabilitation and recovery centres. These facilities combine medical care and psychological support with spiritual guidance, creating a structured and nurturing atmosphere. Faith-based rehabilitation deeply connects with local communities, as it reflects cultural values and offers emotional and spiritual encouragement for recovery. The focus on forgiveness, hope, and personal growth frequently enhances the dedication to change.

Christian youths are playing a vital role in combating drug abuse. For instance, in Mizoram, most of the churches have a Youth and Children faith-based community separately, like Children with Christ and Youth with Christ. These Youth and Children group leaders would organise gospel camping, sports activities, adventure, mentoring programmes, etc., and lead them in the right way. These kinds of activities help prevent the youth and children from being tempted to try bad things. Churches offer young people a positive way to say no to drugs and a variety of constructive activities that serve as positive alternatives to drug use. By engaging in such church programmes, young people find a sense of belonging and purpose, which fosters a strong moral foundation. This supportive environment helps to diminish their susceptibility to peer pressure and the temptation to experiment with drugs, ultimately guiding them toward healthier lifestyles and stronger values.

In the State of Nagaland, there is one popular Rehabilitation Centre which was established in 1993 by a Catholic Church, which is meant to offer a shelter, counselling, as well as treatment for drug abusers. The Church named this Centre the Shalom Rehabilitation Centre.<sup>25</sup> This centre focuses on spiritual healing, detoxification etc., for the recovery of the Addicts. The Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) has been actively conducting sermons, Bible study groups and youth fellowships to avoid and promote disciplined lifestyles.<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, in Mizoram, the Salvation Army and Pentecostal Youth groups are engaging

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<sup>25</sup> "About Us," Shalom Rehabilitation Centre, accessed May 7, 2026.

<sup>26</sup> "Faith in Action: How Nagaland Churches are Battling Drug Abuse," EastMojo, March 25, 2025.

in humanitarian outreach among vulnerable populations. They provide food, shelter, emotional support, and counselling for their addiction recovery and take care of the ones who need to be treated medically and mentally.<sup>27</sup>

## **6. Challenges and Limitations.**

Civil society organisations, NGOs, and Churches play essential roles in our community, and while they face certain challenges and limitations, there are opportunities for collaboration and growth. Funding and Infrastructure constraints can impact the breadth and sustainability of their initiatives, and many organisations are actively working to attract skilled professionals in mental health and addiction counselling.

Additionally, social stigma remains a barrier, but by fostering open conversations, one can encourage families to seek the support they need. Strengthening collaboration among stakeholders can enhance service provision and create a more cohesive approach to addressing these critical issues. Together, everyone can work toward overcoming these challenges for the benefit of the community.

## **7. Conclusion**

Substance misuse in NE India is a multifaceted and longstanding issue that cannot be effectively tackled solely through punitive actions. Organisations in Civil Society, Churches, and NGOs are crucial in addressing this issue by fostering awareness, prevention, rehabilitation, and reintegration efforts. Their presence at the grassroots level, moral authority, and established trust within the community allow them to tackle the personal aspects of addictions more successfully than enforcement-driven methods alone. A coordinated, inclusive and compassionate strategy that combines government action with community-based initiatives is essential for long-term success. Strengthening partnerships, expanding resources, and empowering local institutions will be crucial for building a drug-free, resilient, and socially cohesive NE India.

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<sup>27</sup> “How a Rehab Centre Highlighted Mizoram’s Never-ending Fight Against Drugs,” EastMojo, July 2, 2025.

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