

CENTRAL SECTOR SCHEME ON HELICOPTER SERVICES IN NORTH EAST
An Evaluation Report

by

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Executive Summary

The Helicopter Services in North East was introduced during the financial year 1992-93 under the aegis of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. It is a subsidy based scheme which is meant to provide connectivity to remote areas and border terrains, and also for providing air connectivity to North Eastern Region with other States.

For a prolonged period, NE region was inaccessible due to inadequate road/rail transport infrastructure facilities. The NE region was mostly inaccessible through road, rail and air connectivity. In this context, the “Helicopter Services in North East” was approved by Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in 1992 with the following objectives: (i) to provide connectivity to common passengers to remote areas in the region and with the rest of India at affordable cost; (ii) to evacuate people during natural calamities and medical emergencies. Thus, the Helicopter Services in North East based on these objectives has helped ease transportation and boosted interventions for the welfare among the people of North East region.

Presently, the helicopter services are operational in seven NE States, namely (1) Arunachal Pradesh (1995), (2) Sikkim (1998), (3) Meghalaya (1999), (4) Tripura (2002), (5) Nagaland (2007), (6) Mizoram (2012), and (7) Manipur (2018), with subsidy from Ministry of Home Affairs. Also, one additional helicopter each was sanctioned for the States of Nagaland and Mizoram in 2018. The helicopter services are hired on wet lease basis by the respective State Governments directly through open tender processes. The operations of helicopter services in NE states are reviewed in every three years. The scheme was last reviewed by SFC on 20-09-2017, wherein it was agreed to continue services in NE states w.e.f. 01-04-2017 to 31-03-2020.

Against the backdrop, the objectives for the evaluation of the helicopter services in NE region are as under:

1. To examine the efficiency and usefulness of the Helicopter scheme in the North East region,
2. To find out the extent to which the scheme has facilitated connectivity for different layers of end users,

3. To analyze the set target for flying hours across the NE region,
4. To assess the efficacy of maintenance plan for Helicopter scheme in North East Region
5. To identify the key bottlenecks and challenges faced during the Helicopter Scheme Implementation in the North East Region,
6. Shortcomings identified in the design of the existing Helicopter Scheme, if any
7. Key-findings based on the data collected from the field on the objectives of the study, and
8. Recommendations/suggestions for necessary restructuring to be carried in the scheme to achieve desired results and need for continuation.

With positivist frame of evaluation, both quantitative and qualitative research methods have been used for data collection. The study has been conducted in seven states where scheme of the helicopter services in NE is implemented. The scheme of helicopter services in NE has impacted the beneficiaries of North East to a great extent. The multiple indicators pertaining to the scheme evaluation have been taken into account as to gauge the obvious impact of the scheme on the beneficiaries. The sample size of target group has been drawn in such a way that it represented the population. By taking up a 95% of confidence level and 5% error margin, a total of 384 respondents were sampled.

During the period 2016-17 to 2018-19 the budget sanctioned by the MHA for the scheme is Rs. 86 cr., Rs. 86 cr. and Rs. 90 cr., respectively which have been fully utilized by the State Governments. During 2019-20, Rs.100 crores has been sanctioned; the entire amount has been fully utilized till 31.03.2020.

In the input-use efficiency, passengers are taken as the output and the flying hours as input. Now, from 2016-17 to 2019-20, the overall efficiency in North Eastern Region has seen a positive trend, although, it declined in 2018-19 due to a significant decline in the number of passengers in Nagaland and Sikkim despite a marginal decline in the input variable, i.e. number of flying hours.

Among the sampled beneficiaries, women participate 22 percent, SC represent 24.22 percent and ST and OBC represent 30.99 and 11.72 percent respectively. This shows that the

scheme is inclusive. In addition, the flying hours are optimally utilized and scheme caters the designated objectives.

Hence, **the study team of IIPA recommends the continuation of the Scheme on Helicopter Services in North East after taking total financial implications for the period 2021-22 to 2025-26 into account.** In order to strengthen this further, the following recommendations are given below:

1. The scheme needs to be continued with additional allocation of financial resources coupled with increased number of flying hours. The number of helicopters used under the scheme across the NE States need to be increased so that the bandwidth of the scheme may reasonably be expanded.
2. The MHA may consider having the flexibility to increase the number of helicopter and flying hours for the NE-States as per request, which are dynamic in nature.
3. There should be continuation of helicopter services in the State of Manipur under the scheme with ceiling limit of 744 flying hours per annum.
4. There should be continuation of existing annual ceiling limit of flying hours for the State of Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Tripura.
5. Additional helicopter request by the Government of Arunachal Pradesh is not justified as they have already three operational helicopters and their utilisation of sanctioned flying hours are below optimum level. Moreover there is a proposal for new airports to be in operation by August 2022. In addition, rail and road connectivity, in the state, has improved significantly.
6. An additional helicopter is already sanctioned in the State of Nagaland with in principle approval of the MHA. This is recommended to be continued with enhanced ceiling limit that could of 1200 flying hours per annum for both the helicopters.
7. An additional helicopter is already sanctioned for the State of Mizoram with in principle approval of the MHA. This is recommended to be continued with enhanced ceiling limit that could of 1200 flying hours per annum for both the helicopters.
8. Annual ceiling limit of flying hours for existing helicopter recommended to be increased in the State of Meghalaya keeping in view the flying hours utilised by them during the previous years that far exceed the annual ceiling limit.
9. Additional helicopter request by Government of Meghalaya does not seem to be justified as

they have already one operational helicopter and rail and road connectivity in the state has improved significantly. Increasing the annual ceiling limit of flying hours for existing helicopter may cater to the expressed demand.

10. The monitoring mechanism of the scheme needs to be strengthened more effectively so that any mid-course measures, if required, may be taken by various implementing agencies.
11. Helicopter stationed at Guwahati for Union Government Ministers/ Senior officers and dignitaries should be continued to facilitate their visit to remote areas of NE States.
12. State Government should follow the competitive bidding process based on quality and cost based selection (QCBS) through e-tender for hiring of helicopter operator or it can be done through Central Public Procurement portal of the Government of India.