



KHASI HILLS COMMUNITY PROJECT

QUARTERLY UPDATE JAN-MAR 2020

The Khasi Hills Community Project is implemented by the Ka Synjuk Ki Hima Arliang Wah Umiam Welfare Society, a Federation of 10 indigenous Khasi governments (Hima) representing 62 participating communities guided by their village councils (Durbar).

<https://synjukmawphlangociety.com>



PROJECT SUMMARY

The Khasi Hills Community Project is nearing 10 years of successful operation. The Project has mobilized over 5,000 families to protect and restore 9,250 hectares of old-growth, montane cloud forests in the Umiam River Watershed. In addition, project communities are working to regenerate over 5,000 hectares of degraded forest. In return for their efforts to save their community forests from logging, forest fires, mining, and conversion to agriculture, the project provides communities with a diverse set of social and economic activities. The goal is to increase household income in the 62 participating villages, where 90 percent of the families are below India's poverty line, while also improving public health through the provision of clean drinking water systems and smokeless cooking technologies to reduce household air pollution.

Response to COVID-19 Global Pandemic

Since the COVID-19 outbreak began impacting India in March 2020 the nation has mobilized following Prime Minister Modi's shelter in place order. The 62 villages in the project area have been careful following social distancing and wearing masks, many of them manufactured by women in project supported Self Help Groups. At the time of writing, only 14 persons in the State of Meghalaya have tested positive with one death with no cases reported in project villages. Community facilitators and youth volunteers have continued with forest patrols and monitoring including fighting forest fire outbreaks during the dry season. In order to increase the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) the project supported local self-help groups to produce over 20,000 masks for distribution to poor families, as well as donating 2,000 to the Community Health Center in Mawphlang.



Protective Masks



Socio-economic team member donates 2000 masks to the local health clinic

Forest Habitat and Wildlife Conservation

Conserving the montane cloud forests along the steep banks of the Uiam River is a major goal of the project. The dense forests drop over 500 meters to the rushing waters of the River which subsequently flows into Bangladesh. The historic David Scott Trail constructed in the early 19th century, winds its way up the river gorge and has become a popular hiking route. A portion of the trail is on project land and the community constructed rest stops and provides maps and guides. It continues to be an important eco-tourism community project. Forest conservation is complemented by community efforts to restore forest fragments on the hill tops above the river, creating a wildlife corridor that extends from the 2,000-meter plateau down to the Bangladesh plains. This habitat supports a broad range of birdlife, reptiles, and

mammals, as well as amphibians and fish, some of which are found only in this area. An important project strategy to reduce deforestation and forest degradation is community-based forest fire control. Rapid response has reduced the extensive annual dry season fires that plagued the watershed prior to the project to small events that are quickly controlled.

Degraded Forest Restoration

With over 5,700 hectares of degraded forest land, the project seeks to restore these areas to improve wildlife habitat, increase the hydrological function of the watershed, and sequester atmospheric carbon. Each participating village identifies the degraded community forests that they want to restore and agrees to close the land to firewood collection, grazing, and agriculture. The village receives support from the project to clear fire lines, remove weeds and scrub, and open space for emerging saplings. Gaps are filled with seedlings and saplings. Nearly 2,000 hectares of land have been restored in this way over the past eight years. Villages are finding that restoring the watershed is resulting in better stream flow levels, as well as water availability in the dry season.

Clean Energy Transition

Household firewood consumption for cooking and heating is a major driver of deforestation in the project area as well as contributing to indoor smoke pollution that causes respiratory illness. In addition, fuelwood burning also is a major source of carbon emissions. To address these problems, the project wants to supply all project families with LPG cooktops, tanks, and electric rice cookers. Adoption of gas cooktops has reduced firewood consumption an average of 2.75 kgs of fuelwood per day for each household.

Sustainable Agriculture

With most families are dependent on farming for their income, improving agricultural practices has been a project priority. The project team seeks to assist families from a heavy dependence on low value potato cultivation to diversify into horticulture, green house vegetable growing, and organic farming. After the project distributed green houses village families have been able to start cultivating cauliflower, broccoli, mustard leaf, chillies and turnups generating \$100 in income.



Eco-Tourism and Cultural Conservation

The Hima Mawphlang have requested the project for help in the extension of the cobbled footpath in Mawphlang Sacred Forest. The Mawphlang indigenous government or Hima asked if the project could construct a stone walkway to the altar for the Crowning Ceremony of the local Khasi Chief. The tribal federation that directs the project passed the resolution to help with this activity. The trail in the sacred grove has been damaged by the mass of tourist and visitors causing soil erosion and damage to the roots of forest trees. The completion of the pathway is expected on May 2020.



Community Horticulture

As part of the project's sustainable agriculture program which includes organic farming techniques, vermiculture, and composting the project team is also providing high value fruit trees to project families. This helps diversify farm produce, especially

low value potato farming on which many families depend. Fruit trees also provide produce that can be converted to value added jams and jellies.

Mushroom Cultivation

The project has initiated a new mushroom cultivation programme. The project hopes this new high value production system can be expanded due to the conducive moist, high elevation environment. Oyster mushrooms sell for \$ 1.50 per kg, representing a good return for local families.



Community Development Grant

Each year the project provides the 62 participating communities with community development grants to fund projects that benefit the majority of village families. The villages prepare proposals for priority projects. Over the past five years, most villages have asked for support for clean drinking water systems.



Kyrphei Villagers receive Development grant

PROJECT UPDATES

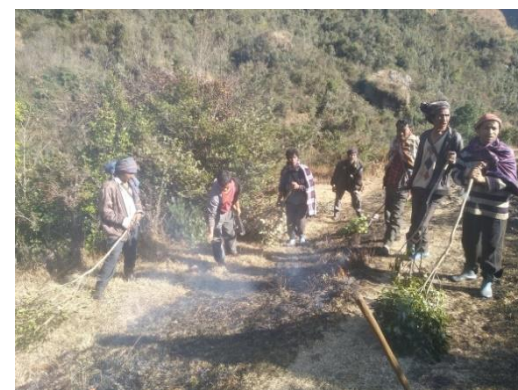
13 January 2020

the Forestry Team extinguished a forest fire at Mawkhan, Hima Mawphlang that had burned 0.57 hectares of area caused by an electrical transformer short circuit.



23 January 2020

The Forestry Team along with the CF and Asst CF on participation with the villagers of Mawkalang in making of firelines at Lumhati, Mawkalang, Hima Mawbeh.



12 February 2020

In order to assess the impact of activities each year the project's forest team conducts an inventory of over 60 plots. The Forestry Team along with the CF of Hima Laitkroh and Asst. CF of Hima Mawbeh took the GPS coordinate of carbon plots at Laitumiong, Hima Mawbeh and Laitkynsew, Hima Laitkroh before taking biomass measurements. The team found that community-based forest protection was increasing the rate of carbon sequestration in the old growth forests contributing to more climate resilience.



13 March 2020

The Forestry Team along with the Asst. CF of Hima Sohra monitored the area affected by forest fire (4 ha) at Mawkma, Hima Sohra.



5 March 2020

A Youth Volunteer from the Forestry Team went to Mawmyrsiang, Hima Mawphlang to check on the community constructed fire lines totalling 2kms.



11 March 2020

The Forestry Team inspected the area affected by forest fire (0.7 ha) at Steplakrai, Hima Mawbeh along with the CF, Asst. CF and local YV of Hima Mawbeh.



18 March 2020:

The Forestry Team monitored the area affected by forest fire (8.14) at Lum Maria, Laitmawpen along with the Asst. CF of Hima Lyngiong. The project area experienced an exceptionally dry period from January through April, with no rain falling in March. In response, the project mobilized all Community Facilitators and Youth Volunteers to be alert and quick to extinguish forest fires as well as poaching by hunters from outside the project area. Due to village hunting bans and patrolling by the



project staff, the project forests have become a refugia for wildlife from neighbouring areas.

The CCF have been so keen to initiate by alerting all CFs and Youth Volunteers to protect forest fires but also actively monitored illegal poaching by people from outside the project area. We are glad to see that all hunted animals escape to the area under the project. Villagers and community leaders have also rescued a number of orphaned and injured wildlife for rehabilitation and return to the forest. In 2019-2020 this include a young Marbled Cat and an injured Bengal Slow Loris (see below).



Above: Bengal Slow Loris (*Nycticebus bengalensis*)

Left: Young Marbled Cat (*Pardofelis marmorata*)

13 February 2020

The Forestry Team monitored reforestation activities at Lumdiengsai Village along with the Community Facilitator, Youth Volunteers and village members.



15 February 2020

The Forestry Team travelled to Hima Laitkroh to oversee the silvicultural treatment of a regenerating Khasi pine forest and the creation of firelines. All the villagers of Laitkynsew participated in the activity.



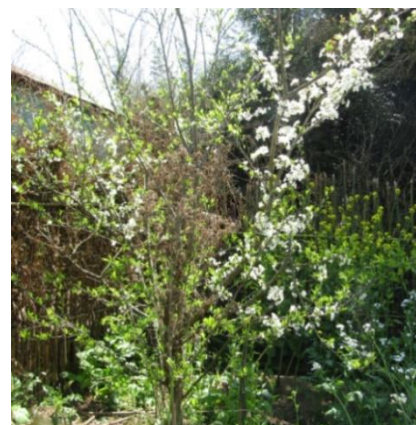
24 January 2020

The Socio-Economic Team distributed LPGs to the beneficiaries of Hima Mawphlang, Nonglwai, Pamsangut, Lyngiong, Myllem, and Nongspung. The project has distributed over 290 LPG cooktops and hopes to reach an additional 2500 cooktops over the next five years.



4-7 February 2020

The Socio-Economic Team distributed temperate fruit tree saplings including pears, plums, peaches, and chestnut) to the beneficiaries of Hima Mawbeh, Laitkroh, Sohra, Mawphlang, Nonglwai, Lyngiong, Pamsangut, Myllem and Nongspung. A total of 1220 temperate fruit tree saplings were distributed to 69 farm families.



6 March 2020

The SET distributed mushroom spawns to the SHG of various Hima. Sixteen women received oyster mushroom starts and have successfully grown them on their farms.



13 March 2020

The Socio-economic Team went to monitor temperate fruits of Mrs. Bonsi Khongsit of Mawlum Tyrsad village of Hima Mylliem who received 20 peach saplings and the survival rate is 19. Mrs. Jhit Sawkmie received 25 plums and 25 peaches and the survival rate is 20 plums and 21 peaches. These trees were distributed by the Project in the year 2018.



16 March 2020

The project team visited Kyrphei village to provide them with a grant of Rs. 3,50,000 for the construction of a water storage tank that will be the primary source of drinking water for the people in the village. In the past, the villagers had to carry water from a spring below the community. The new tank and pump system will both reduce labor in transporting the water, while keeping it safe from pollution and surface run-off. The meeting show below was held in the Community Hall of the village in the presence of the Headman, Executive Members, and the people of the village.

