



KHASI HILLS COMMUNITY REDD+ PROJECT

2nd QUARTER REPORT

APR-JUN 2022

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 85 participating communities guided by their village councils (Durbar).

<https://synjukmawphlangociety.com>



PROJECT SUMMARY

The Khasi Hills Community REDD+ Project has completed 10 years of successful operation. The project has mobilized over 7,250 families to protect and restore 2,847 hectares of old-growth, montane cloud forests in the Uiam River Watershed. In addition, project communities are working to regenerate over 9,000 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 project is reaching its goal of increasing household income as new village surveys show that 70 percent of the families are below India's poverty line, compared to early project numbers of 90 percent. The project also seeks to improve public health through the provision of clean drinking water systems and smokeless cooking technologies, such as LPG cooktops and rice cookers, to reduce household air pollution.

Response to COVID-19 Global Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has decreased in Meghalaya and throughout India. During June 2022, Covid cases began to rise once again, however there are significantly fewer hospitalizations and deaths caused by the virus now than during the previous outbreaks. Community facilitators and youth volunteers have continued with forest patrols, monitoring, fire monitoring, and planting programmes. The team has also been busy conducting awareness programmes, training programmes, site visits, nursery visits, and starting the planting season. There are currently no restrictions in place and travel to the state is open to tourists. The team continues to take precautions and stays up to date on best practices.

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 and tourist destination. The project's tourism team is working to add activities along this trail, including horse riding and mountain biking, which is also nearby the Mawphlang Sacred

Grove, a tourist destination and wonderful example of indigenously led conservation. Forest preservation 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, fish, and orchids, some of which are found only in this area. The project has started to monitor biodiversity in the project area using camera traps in conjunction with the Wildlife Department of Meghalaya which has assisted in training of setting and monitoring the systems. During this quarter, several species of birds were sighted in the project area including an injured tern species which was handed over to the Meghalaya Wildlife Department for treatment and released back into its habitat.



Awareness programmes continue to be held in villages on a regular basis. During these programmes, the socio-economic team, forestry team and project director speak on the project activities and the benefits provided toward communities for conservation of forests and habitats. The village Headman and the Community Facilitators often lead the discussion and provide a platform for the project to communicate with community members.

An important project strategy to reduce deforestation and forest degradation is community-based forest fire control. The project has continued to train local Community Facilitators in monitoring the production, transport, and use of charcoal within the project area. This second quarter is characterized by thunderstorms and the beginning of the monsoon. Continuing awareness programmes are being implemented to raise awareness on fire safety throughout the communities and reduce the spread of forest fire.

Degraded Forest Restoration

With nearly 9,000 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. During this second quarter, villages receive support from the project to compliment the silviculture activities by planting trees. Gaps are filled with seedlings and saplings starting in June when the monsoon rains begin. Currently there are approximately 1,640 hectares of land being actively restored with Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR) treatment.

The project is also partnering with several schools to plant trees within the communities and involve school children in the process of environmental conservation. Many of the tree species come from locally collected seed which is distributed among the home-based nurseries (HBN) within the project area. The tree species planted in these nurseries are: *Alnus nepalensis*, *Prunus cerasoides*, *Exbucklandia populnea*, *Pinus kesiya*, *Pinus petula*, *Quercus* sp., *Quercus griffithii*, *Schima khasiana*, *Betula alnoides*, *Castanopsis indica*, *Myrica esculenta*, *Rhododendron arboretum*, *Symplocos* sp., *Citrus* sp., and *Prunus nepalensis*. During the monitoring of HBN in May there were a total 11014 trees growing and available.



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 is working to supply all project families with LPG cooktops, LPG cylinders, or electric rice cookers. Previous surveys by the team found that adoption of gas cooktops has reduced firewood consumption an average of 2.5 kgs of fuelwood per day for each household.

To get a better understanding of how families use fuel currently, including fuelwood and charcoal, the project is conducting ongoing surveys based on fuel needs and current arrangements. Through the surveys, the team found that those who had used the LPG or rice cookers found them to be beneficial in cooking time and ease. However, one of the challenges is the distance and cost of refilling the LPG cylinder. The surveys will also provide information on which families are already implementing LPG or rice cookers and which would like to do so in the future. The CFs play an important role in monitoring and following up on alternative energy practices.

Sustainable Agriculture

With most families 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, polyhouse and shade-net vegetable growing, and organic farming. This year one SHG is developing their own design for a polyhouse using locally available bamboo.

The socio-economic team has continued to monitor the structure for improvements or to implement similar designs elsewhere in the project area. They have begun cultivating vegetables within the polyhouse. Besides vegetables, other beneficiaries are using their polyhouses for floriculture production.



The project has also started training interested farmers in buckwheat cultivation. This is a high value and fast-growing crop which has many health benefits known to the local people already since there is a wild variety which has been used for food and medicine over the years. The crop can also be planted among fruit



trees and is beneficial to soil health as well. During this quarter, three staff from Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) visited the buckwheat cultivated in the project area and gave their feedback to

the local farmers. In May, the SET, along with a beneficiary from Hima Nonglwai attended the meeting of Meghalaya Farmer's (Empowerment) Commission held by the KVK and they had a discussion on the challenges and issues faced by the farmers during the buckwheat plantation. They also explained that the purpose of buckwheat plantation is to promote it at the international marketing level. A training on beekeeping will be conducted in order to promote the marketing for the farmers. Further, they added that they will be holding a buckwheat festival and encourage the farmers to participate in the festival so that they will be able to showcase their hidden talents through traditional food.

SHGs are also involved with vermicomposting to increase value-added products to their marketable goods and for use in their own agricultural practices. During this quarter, beneficiaries have sold chickens at a rate of Rs. 200-280/kg.



Eco-Tourism and Cultural Conservation

The Tourism Development Team has been busy as they continue to conduct a number of capacity building programmes. This quarter the trainings included a workshop on hospitality which was conducted by the Indian Institute of Hotel Management in Shillong, and a training on tour guiding and basic life support (first aid) which was conducted by the staff of the Community Health Centre of Mawphlang. The team has procured two horses to be part of the eco-tourism initiative and the owner has spent time with the local caretaker to train them on proper management practices. Besides mapping and taking surveys of potential tourist destinations, the team has been meeting with LWCs to form tourism committees.

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 such as peach, plum, pear, apple, kiwi, and pomegranates 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, pickles, or dried fruit. The fruit trees are found to have a high survival rate when protected from grazing animals and winter frost. During this quarter, fruit trees continued to be monitored by the Community Facilitators and socio-economic team. This is the season for some of the fruit trees, especially peaches, to bear fruit and be harvested. The fruit is sold at Rs. 30- /kg.



Mushroom Cultivation

The project continues to oversee a mushroom cultivation programme and has been expanding this high value production system given the conducive moist, high elevation environment. Oyster mushrooms bring in a good return for local families once the mushroom house has been constructed. One of the SHGs had sold 11 kg of mushroom at a rate of Rs. 400/kg.

During this quarter, the socio-economic team along with three beneficiaries attended a training on button mushroom cultivation. The programme



was in collaboration with the Mushroom Production Centre and was conducted for 18 days.

SHG Federation

The project is currently in the process of forming an SHG Federation to improve and overcome the inherent limitations of small and informal groups, like limited resources, capacity, negotiation and bargaining powers and an inability to deal with the outside world such as Government, mainstream institutions, and markets. The project team has been organizing several awareness programmes about the Federation of SHGs. Lady Community Facilitators are also spreading awareness about the SHG Federation while meeting with SHGs in their respective Hima.

Herbal Practitioners

As a niche tourism product, “Wellness Tourism” has seen a recent pick-up in different parts of the world as an alternate product in the tourism industry. Being located at a rich bio-diverse region, there is a strong presence of Khasi-traditional healers who serve the community with the age-old practice on herbal medicine. As a potential product for Wellness Tourism, Herbal Healers play a vital role as service providers and cultural exhibition of this traditional healthcare practice. A series of surveys were conducted for a thorough documentation on this regard.

A confluence of Herbal Healers was held at the Community Knowledge and Resource Centre, Nongrum-Mawphlang, on the 26th of May 2022, where 32 Herbal Healers attended. An introduction to the tourism industry and awareness about Wellness Tourism was addressed during the event, with a one-on-one interview session conducted by the tourism team along with the Forestry team to gather knowledge on the various plants and herbs used, cures and treatment, apprehensions and problems faced and most importantly a confluence between the herbal practitioners and the tourism initiative. There was a positive response with the new initiative.



Community Development Funds

Each year the project provides the participating communities with community development funds to finance projects that benefit many village families. The villages prepare proposals for priority projects. The villages are defining their proposals and planning to carry out the projects in the year ahead. The CFs met with the LWC members to discuss these projects and ensure that they are moving forward once funds are released. The socio-economic team monitored the progress on these projects during the month of May. Most communities use the funds for sanitation, community water resources, and utilities for community gatherings.

PROJECT UPDATES

1 and 9 April 2022

The Forestry Team met with herbal practioners of Hima Mawphlang, Lyngiong, Nonspung, and Pamsanngut. The team assisted in the research work of a student in NEHU.



5 April 2022

The Forestry team was at Seng Khasi Secondary School at Tyrsad. The project gave a photocopy machine as a gesture for participation and availing the ground for the SHG Meet and Fest.



7 April 2022

The Synjuk distributed chairs and rice cookers to the beneficiaries of Hima Laitkroh, Hima Mawbeh, Hima Sohra and Hima Nongkhlaw. Also, there was a farewell for Myntri Nongrum of Hima Sohra.



8 April 2022

The Socio-economic Team (SET) and Forestry Team attended the first Lower Working Committee (LWC) of Mawponghong-Nongthymmai Rum Cluster held at the Mawponghong Community Hall. The CF and Asst. CF of Hima Lyngiong were also present.



13 April 2022

The Forestry team organized an awareness programme on the conservation of biodiversity. Two resource persons from the Biodiversity Board of Meghalaya were present on the day. 131 participants were present. Seven awards were given for voluntary participation in animal rescue.



19 April 2022

The Forestry Team organized a training programme on camera trap installation and use. All the CFs of the 10 Hima attended the programme. Two resource persons from the wildlife department gave the training on the use and installation of the camera trap.



20 April 2022

The SET, in collaboration with 3 staff from Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) monitored buckwheat in Hima Mawphlang (Nongrum locality), Hima Nonglwai (Nonglwai village) and Hima Lyngiong (Umsawmat and Thainthynroh).



21 April 2022

The SET attended the LWC of Lyngdohphanblang Cluster held at Perkseh Community Hall. There were 46 participants who attended the meeting out of which 14 of them are the SHGs.



23,27, and 28 April 2022

The Forestry Team installed rain stations in 4 new sites of the project area at village Mawkyrdep, Urur, Laitkynsew, and Mawkma.



29 April 2022

The Forestry team was at Pyndenumbri village for an awareness programme on wildlife conservation, specifically river and pond fish. The resource person from the wildlife department and village members were present at the programme.



4 May 2022

The Socio-Economic Team (SET) monitored the vermi-compost of Banteilang Shabong in Synrangsohnoh and found that the straw is ready and the earthworms can be introduced. The team also monitored the shade net of Kummeria Shabong and Lamjingshai SHG in Synrangshohnoh and was informed that they do not plant vegetables here all year round due to the heavy fog.



10 May 2022

The project distributed commercial LPG and rice cookers at the Community Resource and Knowledge Centre, in Nongrum Mawphlang. There were 35 beneficiaries who received Commercial LPG connection and 150 beneficiaries who received rice cookers residing at Hima Mawphlang, Hima Nonglwai, Hima Lyngiong, Hima Pamsanngut, Hima Nongspung and Hima Myllem.



12 May 2022

The team distributed one vermi-compost bed and 150 earthworms each to four beneficiaries of four Hima.



18 May 2022

The SET distributed the Mushroom spawn to the beneficiaries of Hima Laitkroh, Hima Mawphlang, Hima Nonglwai, Hima Lyngiong, Hima Pamsanngut, Hima Nongspung, and Hima Myllem who have been benefited from the preceding cultivation and they have the desire to keep cultivating mushrooms via the assistance of the Project. Mushroom cultivation has now become one of their sources of livelihood.



23 May 2022

The SET met with the herbal healers from Hima Pamsanngut, Myllem, and Nongspung for gathering information based on their experiences.



24 and 25 May 2022

The SET conducted an evaluation on the SHGs that fall under Hima Lyngiong and Pamsanngut, they also took note of any grievances the SHGs presented so that the project team could address them.



28 May 2022

In collaboration with the Agriculture Department, the SET distributed 300 saplings of Jalbera to Iahunlang SHG of Nongmadan village, Hima Pamsanngut. Jalbera saplings were given to the polyhouse owners from the agriculture department.



31 May 2022

The SET distributed layer chicks to Hima Laitkroh, Hima Mawbeh, Hima Sohra. Each Hima had 5 beneficiaries and each beneficiary received 20 chicks. A total of 300-layer chicks were distributed to 15 beneficiaries.



1 and 25 June 2022

The Forestry Team monitored the rainfall station for data collection at Mawkma and Urur village respectively. This is part of the follow up after the installation of the rain station.



4 June 2022

The Forestry team took part in tree plantation organised by Perkseh village as a mark of celebrating 'World Environment Day 2022'. A total of 100 tree saplings were planted.



8 June 2022

The Socio-Economic Team (SET) Distributed 10kg of fish seed to the 8 beneficiaries



8 June 2022

Distribution of commercial LPGs at the Community Hall Mawjriong Laitkroh. On this day the distribution of Commercial LPG was conducted with the Hima located near Sohra, including Hima Laitkroh, Hima Mawbeh and Hima Sohra. There were 35 beneficiaries who received Commercial LPG connection on this day.



10 June 2022

A School Tree Adoption Program was held at Mawsadang Govt. LP School, Hima Nongsung whereby four schools from Mawsadang area took part in the program. 200 tree saplings were planted by the students.



11 June 2022

The Forestry Team along with the SHG from Kyrphei organised a tree plantation of 100 saplings at Lum Kyrphei, Hima Myllem in the presence of the CF of Hima Myllem and the group members.



16 and 28 June 2022

The Socio-Economic team distributed temperate fruit trees: peach- 135, plums- 135. The trees were distributed to 27 beneficiaries from all the 10 Hima's under the Project area. The team distributed 50 packets of mushroom spawn to the beneficiaries of Hima Lyngiong. The team distributed 220 kiwi saplings to 22 beneficiaries from the 10 Hima.



21 June 2022

The Forestry Team installed camera traps at Lum Jong U Mong, Laitkynsew village.



22 June 2022

The Forestry Team monitored the ANR area of Phanniwlahrum Lumniewkor.



28 June 2022

The Socio-Economic team monitored the new constructed polyhouse of Mrs. Antimersha Blah from Mission, Mawphlang in convergence with Horticulture.



29 June 2022

The team attended the LPG distribution programme at Tyrsad Umkseh village. 44 beneficiaries received the LPG units on that day.



30 June 2022

A School Tree Adoption Programme was held at Umket Government LP School where 41 students from Umket Government LP School and Umket SSA Upper Primary School took part to plant 100 tree saplings.



Biodiversity Monitoring

In May 2022, the Forestry Team recorded a siting of an injured Tern species at Mawlum Tyrsad, Hima Myllem and handed it over to the Meghalaya Wildlife Department for treatment before it was released back into its habitat. The team also released a slaty legged crane, a hooded pitta, and a hare back into their habitats. The Forestry Team visited the site at Umsawmat village where *Nepenthes khasiana* (pitcher plant) is found. The team plans to include this site as a biodiversity spot for conservation of the endemic species. The Forestry Team Leader along with the Project Associate attended the awareness programme on biodiversity at Lady Hydari Park Shillong. The programme was organized by the Forest Department Wildlife Division Shillong. On the day many local NGOs were present discussing the enhancement initiatives that can be undertaken to improve the biodiversity of the state.

