



# **KHASI HILLS COMMUNITY REDD+ PROJECT**

**4th QUARTER REPORT**

**NOV-DEC 2023**

(October was included in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter report)

*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 86 participating communities guided by their village councils (Durbar).*

<https://synjukmawphlangociety.com>



## PROJECT SUMMARY

The Khasi Hills Community REDD+ Project has completed over 10 years of successful operation. The project has mobilized over 7,660 families to protect and restore 2,847 hectares of old-growth, montane cloud forests in the Umiam River Watershed. In addition, project communities are working to regenerate over 9,000 hectares of open 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. This year the project team has conducted a number of free health camps providing check-ups to community members within the project area. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2023, 270 participants turned up for the health camp. Basic screening like blood sugar, blood pressure, weight and height were done for all depending on the age. Doctors from four institutions and one staff nurse were present for the medical checkup.



## Forest Habitat and Wildlife Conservation

Conserving the montane cloud forests along the steep banks of the Umiam 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. 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 endemic to this area.

The project has started to monitor biodiversity in the project area using camera traps. The forestry team, Community Facilitators (CFs), and Youth Volunteers have installed several camera traps throughout the project area in order to better understand the fauna living and moving through the project. Camera traps are once again set during this quarter as the monsoon rains have ended. Community members and CFs continue to rescue injured wildlife during this time and take notes of their location. See the biodiversity monitoring section at the end of the report for more details.

An important project strategy to reduce deforestation and forest degradation is community-based forest fire control. This fourth quarter is characterized by the end of the monsoons and the beginning of the dry season. Although the region is home to the wettest place on Earth, the winter months are extremely dry and drought is common, providing favourable conditions for fire to spread quickly. Communities are made aware of the potential hazards of the fire season and begin to prepare by building and maintaining fire lines to prevent fires from spreading into forested area. CFs, during this quarter, have been selecting fire fighters from each of the village areas.

### **Degraded Forest Restoration**

With nearly 9,000 hectares of open 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 through Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR) and agrees to close the land to firewood collection, grazing, and agriculture. During this quarter, the project team prepares for silviculture activities which help to increase growth of the trees and remove unwanted species for native plants to prosper. CFs continue to meet with those involved in charcoal and quarrying to discuss alternative methods of income and possibilities of regeneration of forest areas. For many, the reason for participating in these activities is due to unemployment, and some are interested in transitioning to the activities promoted by the project team.

Many of the tree species that are planted in ANR areas come from locally collected seed which is distributed among the home-based nurseries (HBN) within the project area. During this quarter the forestry team distributed polybags to the HBN owners. 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*.

### **Clean Energy Transition**

Firewood consumption for cooking, heating, and drying is one of the drivers of deforestation in the project area as well as contributing to indoor smoke pollution that causes respiratory illness. In addition, fuelwood burning is a source of carbon emissions. To address this, the project is working to supply all project families with LPG cooktops with 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. Last year, the team has also started providing commercial LPG cylinders to Integrated Child Development Services and other agencies involved in preparing mid-day and school meals for children. This has reduced the use of fuelwood by 35 kgs per day for some.

The CFs play an important role in monitoring and following up on alternative energy practices and most report that the beneficiaries are using the alternatives for cooking and that it has reduced time spent gathering fuel and cooking. During this quarter, the CFs and youth volunteers conducted surveys in all of the project villages to ascertain how many families are benefiting from LPG and those who are still in need of alternative cooking sources.

### **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 and Self-help Groups

(SHGs) from a heavy dependence on low value potato cultivation to diversify into horticulture, polyhouse and shade-net vegetable growing, and organic farming. Besides vegetables like mustard leaves, radishes, various chillies, and herbs other beneficiaries are using their polyhouses for floriculture production, including orchids, chrysanthemum, alstroemeria, etc.

Throughout this quarter the socio-economic team monitored many of these small enterprises to assist with guidance and to assess overall benefits to the community members. A majority of beneficiaries are doing well and have put the advice of the project team into practice in order to succeed in their various livelihoods.

Beneficiaries are also involved with vermi-composting to which fetches a good price in the market and can be used in their own agricultural practices. In this quarter one SHG sold 103 kg of vermicompost for Rs. 3090. Others are involved in poultry rearing for both egg and meat production and several are starting to take up pig breeding. The socio-economic team distributed 250 layer-chicks to 6 beneficiaries.



### **SHG Meet and Fest**

During the month of December, the socio-economic team organised 8<sup>th</sup> annual SHG (Self-help Group) Meet and Fest. There were 552 participants in attendance at the programme, including dignitaries, Synjuk members, SHGs, Community Facilitators and youth volunteers.



The major attraction of the festival was the products that the SHGs had on display for sale. The festival also featured speeches, songs, traditional dance, and lively competitions for the SHGs to contend in. Currently within the project area there are 273 Self Help Groups who are engaged in different activities like piggery, livestock, poultry farming, mushroom cultivation, vermi-compost production agricultural activities and other non-farming activities. Awards were distributed to the best performing SHGs and LWCs.



### **Community Horticulture**

As part of the project's sustainable agriculture program which includes organic farming techniques, the project team is also providing high value fruit trees such as peach, plum, and kiwi to project families. This helps diversify farm produce in case of failure due to weather, disease, or pests. Fruit trees also provide produce that can be converted to value-added jams, pickles, or dried fruit. Many of the participants who took part in the food processing training earlier in the year have continued producing pickles, jams, and juices. During the winter, beneficiaries are pruning their trees as directed in the previous training that was conducted by the Department of Horticulture from Shillong in order to achieve a higher yield.

### **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 simple and affordable mushroom house has been constructed. More and more beneficiaries are becoming interested in this activity and many are continuing to purchase their own spawn in

order to increase production. The oyster mushrooms sell for around Rs. 300-400/kg. During this quarter, the production slows down due to the dry climate.

### **Eco-Tourism and Cultural Conservation**

The Tourism Development Team has been busy as they continue to conduct a number of programmes. This quarter is a great time for festivals and trekking as the weather is more pleasant. The team employs locals to guide the tours and prepare lunch for the participants. The tourism team held an educational hike for the Department of Tourism and Travel Management of Lady Keane College.



During this quarter, the team had four fellows from Green Hub taking part in a “Responsible Tourism Programme.” They stayed in the project area to develop a specific outline for eco-tourism in selected villages. They, along with the CFs, engaged with community members to carry out surveys and plans. In December they presented their findings to the Hima, villages, and the project team.



As part of the method to preserve cultural heritage, the tourism team took part in an annual prayer for one of the sacred groves within the project area. The social fencing of sacred groves in the Khasi Hills has preserved old growth forests as well as traditional customs of the Khasi people.





### **Capacity Building**

Ongoing training for CFs, Assistant CFs, and Youth Volunteers is provided by the project in order to create familiarity and acquaint new field staff with the activities related to forestry, socio-economic projects, and tourism. This year, the orientation program was held in October with all staff from the 10 Hima present. The CFs also provide training to the youth volunteers on how to conduct surveys within the communities. This quarter the surveys were conducted on LPG.

### **Hydrology**

The project is interested in learning more about how forest cover and conservation are affecting the water sources in the project area. The team will continue to monitor the physiography of the watershed in terms of land use, soil characteristics, tree species surrounding the area, and the number of households that benefit from the ponds. During this quarter, the CF met with the headman regarding the construction of a water well for drinking water and inspected the construction of a washing place as part of the Community Development Funds. The CFs are continuing to document the sources of the drinking water throughout the project area for better monitoring.

### **Biodiversity Monitoring**

During the fourth quarter, the CFs recorded information of a local tree species known as “Soh Jalamat.” Parts of the tree are used as medicine and as a food source. Three herons were rescued and handed over to the wildlife department for further rehabilitation.

## PROJECT UPDATES

### 7 November 2023

The Socio-economic Team (SET) accompanied by the Lady Community Facilitator (CF) and Mr. Amlan had conducted a site inspection on various activities such as piggery, polyhouse and vermi-compost at Hima Laitkroh and Hima Sohra.



### 8 November 2023

The Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU) visited the Khasi Hills Community REDD+ Project for an organisational visit of the BSW 1<sup>st</sup> semester students. The programme was hosted by the Socio-economic Team in the presence of Mr Tambor Lyngdoh (Project Director).



### 10 November 2023

The Project conducted a health camp at Pyrda village on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2023. 270 participants turned up for the health camp. Basic screening like blood sugar, blood pressure, weight and height were done for all depending on the age. Doctors from four institutions and one staff nurse were present for the medical checkup.



### 14 November 2023

The team, along with the CFs of Hima Nonglwai, Hima Nongspung and Hima Myllem, went for an eco-tourism initiative survey to:

- Nongneng Cave (Hima Nonglwai)- Footpath construction
- Lawbasa, Umlangmar (N), Hima Nopngspung- Viewpoint & picnic area
- Phod Lawkhla Park (Hima Myllem)- Fencing and kids' playground



The team found out that the tourism grant 2020-2021 provided to these areas has been implemented, whereby proper footpaths are being constructed to reach Nongneng Cave. Also from the tourism grant, the viewpoint at Umlangmar (N) as well as Phod Lawkhla kids' play structures such as swings, slides, and seesaws were being constructed for the eco-tourism initiative.



### 14 November 2023

The SET along with the Lady CF monitored poultry rearing at Mawkohmon, Hima Mawphlang and Pamsanngut, Hima Pamsanngut. The team also visited the vermi-compost unit at Mawlum Tyrsad in order to assess the overall progress of the compost.



### 21-22 November 2023

The tourism team, along with the project director and the forestry team, attended the inaugural session of the 11<sup>th</sup> International Tourism Mart organized by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. This event was inaugurated by Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma and Union Minister of State for Tourism Shripad Yesso Naik at the Lariti International Centre for Performing Arts and Culture, Shillong. This event showcases the rich culture and tourism potential of the NE region. The 11<sup>th</sup> ITM focuses on sustainable and responsible tourism, aiming to be a carbon-neutral event. It's a platform for sharing ideas, connecting people, and promoting the diverse beauty of the NE states of India.



### 28 November 2023

The Forestry Team attended the annual festival of sanctification of Law jong u Mong, a community protected forest at Laitkynsew village. The team gave a speech on the importance of forest and forest cover.



### 30 November 2023

The SET monitored the vermi-composting unit to assess the overall progress of the compost at Nongwah, Hima Pamsanngut. Thereafter the team visited the verm-icomposting unit of Pynroilang SHG at Mawlum Khongsit, Hima Myllem to examine the harvesting of the compost.



### November 2023

Throughout the month of November, the SET assessed the SHGs, LWCs, and beneficiaries for their performance in maintaining bookkeeping, records, and conducting their activities. They finalized their results in order to facilitate awards at the SHG Meet and Fest.





### 5 December 2023

The 'Faith Foundation', an NGO based in Mawphlang, organised an Awareness Programme on Tourism Development at Khrawsing College, Mawngap. The tourism team from Synjuk went as resource persons and provided a thorough presentation on Tourism Development along with a career guidance about the tourism industry to the 50 students who participated in the program. The program was addressed by Bah Tambor Lyngdoh and the members of the Faith Foundation. In the morning the students were given a theory session and in the evening the students had an interaction with the local guides at Mawphlang Sacred Grove.



### 8 December 2023

The Lower Working Committee meeting was organised at the Dorbar Hall, Laitkynsew, Hima Laitkroh. There were 13 members who attended this meeting and the meeting was facilitated by the President of LWC. Agendas for this meeting were about the village collective effort for the following:

- Fencing at Law Adong (Sacred Grove)
- Cleaning Drive from Wahtwa to Wahniangleng (Tourist spot)
- Cleaning Drive at Sacred Grove, trails that reach the waterfalls
- To sustain and promote Lum Maw-Shyieng present at Law Adong (Sacred Grove)



### 13 December 2023

The team had a meeting with the tourism Committee of Hima Mawbeh at Dorbar hall, Mawbeh. A total of 12 members attended this meeting. Agenda discussed on this day was about:

- Installation of Tourist Kiosk at Mawbeh as part of the Eco-Tourism initiative
- Camping sites and facilities required
- Fee structure for rock climbing, rappelling and other adventure activities at Mawbeh
- 21<sup>st</sup> January 2024 – NIFT, Shillong to participate camping at Mawbeh
- Parking, entry fee & installation of signboards at NH-Mawjrong towards Mawbeh



### 14 December 2023

The tourism team had a meeting with the Tourism Committee of Hima Lyngiong at the Dorbar hall, Khongsit, Mawlum Tyrsad. A total of 13 members attended this meeting. Agenda discussed on this day was about:

- Financial Report of the Bam-Niang phlang festival 2023
- Impacts and feedback from the Bam-Niang phlang Festival 2023
- To initiate camping sites at Hima Lyngiong
- How to make use of the presented tourist kiosk
- Sustainable practices needed to be considered to protect and preserve the various heritage sites in Hima Lyngiong.



**15 December 2023**

The Forestry team attended a LWC meeting of Dympep cluster at Umdiengpoh village. Various issues related to Forestry and Socio-economic activities were discussed during this meeting such as Silviculture, Fuelwood, Fireline, Carbon plot, Home based Nursery, and biodiversity.

**27 December 2023**

The tourism team along with the Project Director and the Accountant of KHCRP went to Mawbeh to have an urgent meeting with the Sirdar of Hima Mawbeh as well as surveying of the community land proposed for tourism activities at Hima Mawbeh.

Mawbeh Village where tourism activities have been initiated by the Synjuk (adventure sport, trainings, etc) is under a conflict between the village council and the private landowners. Hence, a resolution is to be made and a tripartite sign is to be initiated between all stakeholders for tourism initiatives.



**The 2023 Annual Report will produce all the monitoring information required and provide details and updates in relation to the project implementation.**