



EXPOSURE VISIT TO MAWLONGBNA

FOR PARTNERS FROM MOOSAKHIA AND NONGKHNUM VILLAGE TO UNDERSTAND
VARIOUS ECO-TOURISM INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN BY MAWLONGBNA



Prepared by Knowledge Services Division

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BACKGROUND

During a Community Dialogue that was held on add 14th May 2016 at Moosakhia, organised by the Knowledge Management Team of MBDA which focused on promotion of eco-tourism in the twin villages of Moosakhia and Samanong, one of the key issues raised by community members is the lack of clarity on the concept of eco-tourism. Interactions with community members during and after the event indicated that there was some confusion around the concept of eco-tourism, its key components, how it was different from conventional tourism. Further, the community wanted to learn how eco-tourism could help conserve local natural resources while also generating revenue for the people.

It was decided that MBDA would arrange a few exposure visits for the community members who wish to venture into eco-tourism, to a few model sites within or outside the state.

Therefore on the 09th of September 2016, an exposure visits to Mawlongbna was organised by the Knowledge Management Team for the community members of Moosakhia and Nongkhnum village.



OBJECTIVE

The objective of the visit is to showcase to visiting community partners the various eco-tourism initiatives undertaken by Mawlongbna. This is to inspire and inform them on the various eco-tourism opportunities available, key requirements and considerations for initiating eco-tourism, operational aspects related to the initiatives, and key lessons learnt from implementing eco-tourism.

The aim is to highlight the potential for eco-tourism to be an alternate source of livelihood for the livelihoods of the people. Eco-tourism has helped raised the incomes of the people of Mawlongbna, which has improved their quality of life.

The emphasis of the visits was to see each and every tourist attractions in the village and interact with the guides and owners for a deeper understanding of the initiative, the benefits and how it is done.

PARTICIPANTS FROM MOOSAKHIA VILLAGE, WEST JAINTIA HILLS

1. Shri. Sngapjar Suting
2. Shri. Toli Kyndiap
3. Shri. Enowel Khongiong
4. Shri. Melkin Kyndiap
5. Shri. Danny Khongiong
6. Shri. Riwell Suting
7. Shri. Bok Pohkhsang
8. Shri. Rimiki Mukhsor
9. Shri. Hamki Suting
10. Shri. Realsing Mukhsor
11. Shri. Sumer Pakhsang
12. Shri. Eclat Khyriem
13. Smt. Pena Mukhsor
14. Smt. Amy Suting
15. Smt. Wanri Synnah
16. Smt. Rani Suting
17. Smt. Rubi Pakhsang
18. Smt. Belin Pakhsang

PARTICIPANTS FROM NONGKHNUM VILLAGE, WEST KHASI HILLS

1. Shri. Lamphrang Nongsiej
2. Shri. Nicholas lawren
3. Shri. Tarling Rynton
4. Shri. Fabian Khar bani
5. Shri. Ioanis lawlar
6. Shri. Nestor lawlar
7. Smt. Kyntiewlin lawren

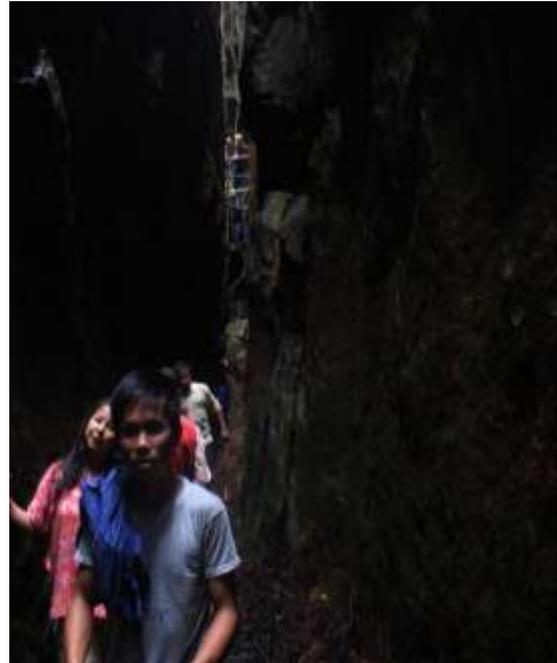
RESOURCE PERSONS FROM MAWLONGBNA

1. Shri. Michael Pdahkasiej
2. Shri. Peter Tohtih

SITES VISITED

1.Split Rock

The Split rock derives its name from the large crack of not less than 50-60 feet and more than a 100 metres in length, formed on one of the rocky surfaces in the area. The community members have created wooden stairways for people to walk down to the bottom of the crack



2.Umkhakoi Lake

The Umkhakoi Lake is a water reservoir created by the community. The lake is formed behind a small dam that was constructed to provide irrigation water to the otherwise drought prone area. The water is stored between massive boulders on each side that run for about half a kilometer. A variety of fish species are found here and it is a perfect place for fishing and kayaking.



3. Umdiengkai Waterfall

The Umdiengkain waterfall is a scenic tourist site ending at a pool that is also a fertile breeding ground for different fishes.



4. Traveller's Nest (tourist lodging)

Mawlongbna Traveller's Nest comprises a number of cottages for lodging, that sits atop a hill overlooking the plains of Bangladesh. This site is nestled away in a community protected forest and provides a quiet and peaceful environment for travelers to stay.



KEY DISCUSSIONS AND LEARNINGS FROM THE EXPOSURE VISIT



Discussions covered several aspects of eco-tourism as implemented by Mawlongbna including the approach and steps taken by the village to operationalize the various initiatives and supporting services. A summary of the discussions is given as follows:

1. INSTITUTIONS FOR MANAGEMENT OF COMMUNITY TOURISM RESOURCES : MAWLONGBNA MULTIPURPOSE COOPERATIVE SOCIETY

Participant Questions:

- How is the village able to manage and develop its eco-tourism sites and resources?
- How does the community deal with the inflow of tourists and the services they require?
- Who owns the eco-tourism resources within the community and makes decisions?

Response by Bah Micheal - The village regularly engages in developmental activities with funds coming in from various development agencies including the government. The village realised that because of the tremendous scope of work these activities bring, it is difficult for individuals alone to take on all responsibilities and accountability. Hence, the community decided to form a Multi-purpose Society that would function as a nodal body to all the initiatives implemented in the village, providing key strategic inputs that would benefit the entire village. The **Mawlongbna Multi-purpose Cooperative Society Limited**, was registered in 2003 and this same Society now also looks after all eco-tourism initiatives engaged by the community. The Society determines all strategic and operational aspects of eco-tourism initiatives including selection of sites for eco-tourism in the village. Sites are selected based on the scenery, cultural and historical significance, accessibility, safety and potential for typical tourist activities like exploration, picnic etc. The Society also appoints

community members as tourist Guides and Cooks, from amongst the youths in the village. Initially training for the members were taken care by the Campfire Trails. They either trained them by themselves or connect them to others. They received various training ranging from hospitality, first aid, tourist guide, cooking, trekking, communications, soft skills and so on. Currently there are 185 members under this society.

2. REVENUE SHARING & MANAGEMENT REGULATIONS

Participant Questions:

How is the revenue from eco-tourism activities shared across community members?

Response by Bah Micheal -

The entire revenue earned is divided into four parts. 25 % is given to the village, 25% is kept as a reserve fund for further development and maintenance of village tourism resources , 30 % is kept in the society's account and acts a fund for various activities undertaken by the society and 20% is distributed among the members.

3. MANAGEMENT OF TOURIST LODGINGS (“THE TRAVELER’S NEST”)

Participant Questions:

How are tourist lodgings managed? What are the facilities available and the requirements for maintaining these facilities?

What are the arrangements for providing food to the lodgers?

Response by Bah Micheal : The cottages were constructed by the society itself using funds received from the Registrar of Cooperative Societies. These cottages are known as “*Traveller’s Nest*”, a name befitting the purpose of these accommodations. There are three well designed cottages with all basic amenities including running water and clean toilets. There is also a gazebo overlooking the plains of Bangladesh, which is used for dining and relaxation. The Society charges ₹1500 per day for each cottage. The Society has also appointed trained housekeepers from amongst the members of the society. These housekeepers are paid ₹150 per day.

Bah Peter explained that few members of the cooperative society are assigned by the Society to prepare and serve food to tourists whenever they come. Members are tasked on a rotation basis to ensure every member is able to earn from this activity. Similar to housekeepers, these members are paid on a daily basis ranging from ₹200 per day to ₹300 per meal depending on their experience and the amount of food prepared.

4. ARRANGEMENT FOR TOURIST GUIDES

Participant Questions:

Who guides the tourists to local attractions?

What do tourist guides do and how much do they charge for their services?

There are 10 qualified guides in the cooperative society. These guides are fully trained in swimming, trekking, first aid and so on. They are also trained in soft-skills including hospitality and communications. Each guide can cater to one group of tourists at a time. In case large groups of tourists visit the village then several guides can be engaged at a time. Each guide charges ₹300 per day for standard tours of places of interest in the village and ₹500 per day for adventure tours that also involves activities such as swimming, river walks, water sliding etc. This entire amount is retained by the guide who, similar to cooks, take up the work on a rotation basis.

5. CAMPING: AN ALTERNATE OPTION FOR LODGING

Participant Questions:

What if there are more tourists than rooms available?

What about people who want to go camping?

Bah Peter explained that a lot of young travelers who come to stay, prefer to camp that to stay in the Traveler's nest. The Society has identified several sites in and around the village that are ideal for camping, especially in terms of safety. Visitors who wish to camp can **rent camping tents** from the Society and return them when done. The Society charges ₹ 1,000 for double camper and ₹ 500 for single camper. Visitors are however not allowed to bring tents from outside.

6. ADVENTURE TOURISM

Participant Questions:

What kind of trends in tourism are growing now?

Which private sector organisations do you partner with to attract tourists?

The resource persons explained that the presence of water streams, ponds, natural trails etc. has opened opportunities for adventure tourism which is becoming an increasingly popular type of tourism. The society has leveraged on the natural resources available in the area for development of several adventure activities including swimming, trekking, canoeing, mountain biking, caving etc. The society with the support of external travel agencies, is currently exploring possibilities of starting Zip lining across the water rapids just in front of the Umkhakoi dam.

Tie up with travel and adventure agencies

The Cooperative Society has tied up with Campfire trails, a leading adventure tourism company in Shillong, for support with capacity building and in implementation of adventure tourism in Mawlongbna. The Society has a formal agreement with Campfire trails. As per the agreement, Campfire Trails will bring tourists to Mawlongbna. All services rendered by the Society to the tourists will be paid by Campfire Trails who will in turn charge the tourists at their own rates. Campfire Trail also provides on the job handholding support to members of the society to build their capacity.

7. PRESERVATION OF INDIGENOUS FISH

Participant Questions:

How do you prevent local natural resources from being over-exploited?

How do you motivate community members or tourists to protect local resources?

On reaching Umkhakoi lake, the participants were particularly interested to learn about the preservation of Khakoi (indigenous fish) at the reservoir as they believe that they can replicate the same in their villages. They wanted to learn how the community at Mawlongbna were able to prevent from catching these preserved fishes.

Respond by Bah Micheal: Initially the village resorted to strict policing of the lake to ensure people did not rampantly fish out the indigenous species. Over time, the community was slowly educated on the value of preserving such rare and indigenous species and how this can lead to preservation of biodiversity and natural heritage. Today, the Khakoi at the Umkhakoi lake is one of the key attractions of the village. The village allows fishing at the lake, but only on Saturdays. This way, the lake is allowed to recuperate and the fishes do not get depleted.

8. ENHANCING TOURIST EXPERIENCE THROUGH AGROFORESTRY

Participant Questions:

What other kinds of travel experiences do you offer tourists?

How do you manage your forests and farms along with your tourism activities?

Another key attraction for travelers to Mawlongbna is farm experience. The village is noted for its beautiful farms that provide not only scenic views but also a unique experience for traveler who choose to explore and learn more about them.

Forest produce is one of the key sources of livelihood of the village. As the population of Mawlongbna grew, the community soon realised that extraction of forest produce from forests is unsustainable and cannot go on forever. Bah Peter informed the participants that in order to reduce dependence on, and to conserve forest resources, the village has adopted agro forestry practices. Using multi-cropping technique, the village has been to produce a variety of crops including broom

grass, wild peppers, areca nuts and seasonal fruits. A typical farm at Mawlongbna would consist of a bit of broom grass cultivation, bay leaf trees, areca nut trees and some fruit trees, all in one cultivation site. Apart from conserving natural forests, this practice of multi-cropping also ensures that resource hungry crops like broom grass, do not suck in all the nutrients from the soil, thus protecting the soil. This practice also ensures that farmers can earn an income throughout the entire year rather than only during a particular crop's cropping seasons.

9. PROTECTION OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY FOREST

Participant Questions:

What are some of the ways in which you have taken up the challenge of natural resource management in your village? How do you manage your forest and water resources?

The Umkhakoi lake gets its waters from a community forest located upstream at the edge of the village. Ten years ago, heavy felling of trees led to a serious depletion of forest cover in the area which in turn led to a reduction in water retention capacity of the soil. As the soil in most of region is rocky with the exception of few patches of forests such as the one at Mawlongbna, this had resulted in severe water scarcity in the village.

Realising that this shortage was mostly due to unsustainable forest practices, the community members decided to take action and preserve the forest to reverse the negative effects of depleting forest cover. The village passed and enforced stringent laws to prevent people from cutting down trees and also educated community members on the importance of forest conservation. Today, the forest protected by the community has become a thriving eco-system of its own with a variety of local birds and small forest animals living in it. Because of increased water retention, the village no longer suffers from drought and the Umkhakoi Lake once again has its source of water back.

This was a very important learning for the people of Moosakhia who are themselves facing the same kind of depletion of forest cover in their village.

10. CONNECTIVITY

Participant Questions:

What about small-scale investments in infrastructure such as footpaths, local roads etc?
How do you get funds to build and maintain such infrastructure?

One of the participants saw that there were proper footpaths and trails to all the key tourist sites in the village and wanted to know who supported the construction and where the Society got funds to construct them.

Respond by Bah Micheal - Most of the footpaths are constructed through the MNREGA scheme and the remaining are constructed through community contributions.

OUTCOME OF THE EXPOSURE VISIT & ACTION FORWARD

1. A key learning for the people of Moosakhia and Nongkhnum is that for any developmental work to succeed, there must be equitable participation and willingness of the community. This is particularly true for eco-tourism where resources are diverse and resource ownership is not evenly distributed. Having a well represented and active Society can ensure effective implementation of not just eco-tourism initiatives but also of other developmental activities.
2. Participants realised that there is a good market for eco-tourism and that their villages are equally gifted with various natural resources that they could tap to promote eco tourism
3. The participants realised that just like the people of Mawlongbna, help in the form of grants and fund from the government will only start to flow if there is strong commitment and sincerity of work in the community. Taking a cue from the people of Mawlongbna, the participants, especially those from Nongkhnum, expressed their desire to immediately start developing their village into an eco-tourism destination on their own and not wait for government intervention to start.

MOOSAKHIA

During a meeting in the village (dorbar) which was held on the 16th of September 2016, the participants who went on the exposure visit shared their experiences with other members of the Dorbar. The dorbar including the headman were impressed by the way Mawlongbna has been able to successfully bring people together for the common good. The Dorbar took a decision to replicate some of the initiatives and approach taken by Mawlongbna immediately, including - preservation of fishes, and steps to protect their forests and natural heritage. The Dorbar aims to start initiatives for conservation of indigenous varieties of fishes before the end of the year, for which they will invite the SDO of Amlarem and other key Government officials to inaugurate.

NONGKHNUM

Nongkhnum has less than 30 residents and they have decided to form a society like Mawlongbna to take care of eco-tourism in their village. The village has chosen Nongkhnum Area Tourist development Society as the name for their society which will comprise 14 to 15 members. Registration of the society is under process and all eco-tourism developmental works will be taken up under the banner of the society.



