



THE LIVING BRIDGE

INSPIRING STORIES OF SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS FROM RURAL MEGHALAYA

DEAR READER,

Welcome to the first issue of our new publication series "The Living Bridge"

The Integrated Basin Development and Livelihoods Promotion (IBDLP) Programme is an award-winning state wide initiative that was launched in 2012 by the Government of Meghalaya and is implemented by the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority. Its aims to facilitate ecologically sustainable and economically inclusive development in Meghalaya through citizen-centric governance, community-led interventions, and public administration reforms focused on convergence across government departments.

At the core of the IBDLP Programme lies the strong belief that citizens are not "*Beneficiaries*" of the development process, they are "*Partners*". Every project under IBDLP tries to empower its "*Community Partners*" such that they themselves can initiate action on ground, whether for natural resource management or sustainable livelihoods. Thus the spirit of social, economic, and environmental entrepreneurship is what drives this programme forward.

As the IBDLP Programme has moved forward with the help of community members, NGOs, volunteers, government officials and so many other partners on the field, we have come across an increasing number of inspirational stories from the field. We decided to launch this publication titled "*The Living Bridge*" to capture these stories and spread the word about these wonderful entrepreneurs that come from every corner of Meghalaya.

This first issue focuses on individuals or communities who have partnered with IBDLP to become successful entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs have broken through significant socioeconomic barriers and set an example of how enterprises can be economically viable and environmentally sustainable. We hope you are as inspired by these stories as we are!

Thank you,

Knowledge Management Unit
Meghalaya Basin Development Authority

From our next publication all issues will be translated to Khasi and Garo.

SHA KI PARALOK NONGPULE BAIEID,

Ngi pdiang sngewbha ia phi sha ka sien pynmih jong ka thup ba nyngkong jong ka kot jong ngi “The Living Bridge”

Ka Integrated Basin Development and Livelihoods Promotion (IBDLP) Programme kadei kawei na ki programme ba la pyntreikam da ka sorkar Meghalaya ha ka snem 2012 kaba la ioh ruh ia ka khusnam na ka bynta ka jinglah ban pyntreikam bha ia ka ha kyleng ki bynta jong ka jylla. Ia kane ka programme la pyntreikam da ka tnat Meghalaya Basin Development Authority. Ka jingthmu jong kane ka programme ka long ban iarap ha kaban pynneh pynsah ia ka mariang sawdong sawkun bad ha kajuha ka por ban kyn-tiew ruh ia ka ioh ka kot kabanlong salonsar, da kaba wanrah ia ka jingiashim bynta lang jong ki paid nongshong shnong ha ka synshar khaddar, ka jingthaw ia ki kynhun ha ki shong ki thaw kiban lam khmat ha ki kam ki jingtrei bad kumjuh ha kaban wanrah ia ka jingkylla ha ka jingpyniaid ia ki kam ki jam da kaba buh ha khmat ia ka jingiatreilang bad ki tnat sorkar bapher bapher.

Ka mat pdeng jong ka IBDLP Programme ka long ba ngi don ka jingngeit skhem ba ki nongshong shnong kim dei tang ki nongioh bynta ha ka jingpyniaid ia ki kam ban kyntiew ia ka ioh ka kot, hynrei ki dei ki paralok kiban pyniaid lang ia ka kam. Man la ka project hapoh ka IBDLP ka pyrshang ban pynkupbor ia ki kynhun ha ki shnong ki thaw kiba long ruh ki paralok khnang ba ma ki, kin sdang ia ki kam la ka long ha ka jingpynneh ia ki spah mariang lane ban wanrah ia ki kam kiba lah ban iaineh bad ban kyntiew ia ka ioh ka kot. Kumta ka mynsiem ban sdang ia ki kam na ka bynta ban wanrah ia ka jingjop ha shnong ha thaw, ha ka ioh ka kot bad ha ka jingpynneh ia ka mariang sawdong sawkun kidei kiei kiei kiba la ai mynsiem ia ngi ban pyniaid ia kane ka programme shakhmat.

Katba kane ka programme jong ka IBDLP ka la nang jam shaphrang da ka jingiarap lang jong ki khynhun bapher bapher ba kynthup ia ki nongshong shnong, ki seng treimon sngewbha, ki nongiarap, ki nongtrei jong ki tnat sorkar bad kiwei kiwei ki paralok kiba iadon bynta ha ki kam bapher bapher, ngi lah iohi ba la mih bun ki khana jingjop na ky-lleng ka ri, kiba lah ban ai mynsiem shi katdei eh ia kiwei pat ki paralok kiba thrang ban ieng ha la ki kjat. Kumta ngi la rai ban pyllait ia kane ka thup jingthoh ha kaba ngi la ioh ban lum bad sain dur ia kita ki khana jingjop kum shibynta ban pynsaphrang ia ki sha kylleng ki bynta jong ka jylla.

Kane ka thup ba nyngkong jong kane ka jingiatuh khana ka phai khmat sha ki riwshimet bad ki kynhun na ki shnong ki thaw kiba la iateh lok bad ka IBDLP ban long ki nongseng kam lajong kiba jop. Kine ki nongseng kam ki la trei shitom ban jop iaki jingeh kiba har rukom ba kynthup ia ki jingeh ha ka liang ka pisa tyngka bad ban long pat ka nuksa ba ka jingseng ia ki kam lajong kan wanrah ia ka ioh ka kot kaba iaineh. Ngi ngeit skhem ba phi ruh phin ioh ia ka jingai mynsiem na ki khana jong kine ki paralok jong ngi, kumba long lem ma ngi.

Khublei Shibun,

Knowledge Management Unit
Meghalaya Basin Development Authority

Ia ki jingthoh kiban wan, ngi khmih lynti ba ngin sa pynmih ha ka ktien Khasi bad Garo.

KA.SARA PORAIISOENGGIPA,,

Chingni gital chap.a ka.enggipa "The Living Bridge" ni skanggipa bak-ona rimchaksoa

IBDLP ba Integrated Basin Development aro Livelihood Promotion Programme-ara award man.pilgipa a.dok-o a.bachengatgipa ong.a jekon Meghalaya sorkari 2012 bilsio a.bachengataha aro iako Meghalaya Basin Development Authority nirok sandienga. Iani miksonge kamko ka.aniara Meghalaya a.dokko pilakni gitan chu.ong je ong.telaigipa gamrangchi aro tangka paisarangchi chu.ong an.tangarin choliaigipa ong.china gita gimik sorkari department rang baksa bakrime kamko ka.ani aro manderangna mong-songbate simsakani, jinma apsan bakrime kamko ka.ani aro manderang baksa nangrime kamko ka.aniko namdapatanian ong.a.

IBDLP Programme-ni ning.ora songdongenggipa manderangko "namgniko ba man.dapanirangko man.aigipa" ine chanaigija "apsan dake bakko ra.giparang" inesa chanskaa. IBDLP ni ning.o donggipa mingprakprak project-an IBDLP baksa bakrime kamko ka.giparangko gimik cholrangchin skie on.aniko daka jedakode uamang an.tangtangan baikamgipa janggi tangani cholrangko ba a.gilsako ong.telaigipa gamrangko name ripinganiko a.bachengaonin ka.dilna man.gen. Ia indakgipa saksa sakgipin baksa bakrimani cholko on.gipa, tangka paisa man.ani cholko on.gipa aro an.chingni samtangtango donggipa ong.telaigipa gamrangko name ripingna on.gipa bading chiwale cha.ani ba dake rike cha.anian ia programme-ko mikkangchina ja.ku dena dakchakenga.

Community-ni manderang, NGO-rang, volunteer-rang, sorkarini officer-rang aro bang.a bakko ra.pagiparangni dakchakanichi IBDLP Programme-ni mikkangchina ja.ku de.na man.on, chinga bang.a didianiko on.a man.gipa golporangko chagrongaha. Ia golporangko segate ra.na gita aro Meghalaya a.dokni pilak kona-noksikoni re.bagipa bading-chiwalaniko dakgiparangni gimin kattarangko gipatna gita chinga ia "The Living Bridge" ki.tap ko chapa ka.na tik ka.aha.

Ia skanggipa bak-ara je sakprakprak manderangan ba jinma apsan bakrime kam ko ka.giparang jemangan IBDLP ming bakrime chu.sokgipa bading chiwalaniko dakgiparang ong.aha uamangni gimin segipa ki.tap ong.a. Ia bading-chiwalaniko dakgiparangara mongsonggipa songsarni aro tangka paisani gita champenganirangko chagronge matchotbagiminrang ong.a aro maidake daka-rikanirangko ba bading-chiwalanirangko dakaniara tangka paisani gita chu.ongani aro jringjotna baikamgipa janggi tangani chol ong.a uko gipinrangna mesoknaba man.aha. Ia golporangchi na.aban chinggitan didianiko man.gen ine chinga ka.dongsoa.

Mittela,
Knowledge Management Unit
Meghalaya Basin Development Authority

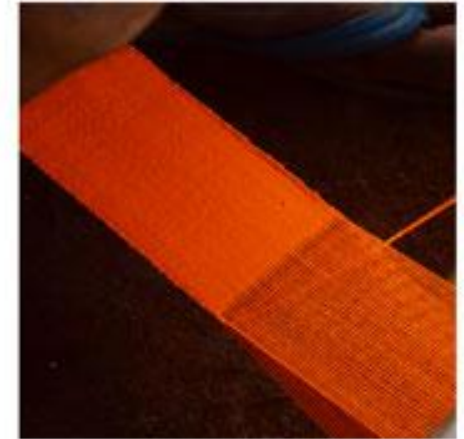
Mikkangchi pilak koborranko (publications) a'chikku aro Khasi ku'sikchi on'angskagen.

CONTENTS

1. WEAVING ONE'S SUCCESS	1
2. AGAINST ALL ODDS	7
3. A FATHER'S DREAM	13
4. THE CATTLE BUSINESS	19
5. CONSERVING FLOWERS - CONSERVING LIVELIHOODS	25
6. JOURNEY OF AN INTEGRATED FARMER	31
7. TAKING THE INITIATIVE	37
8. A BEEKEEPER'S STORY	43
9. THE POWER OF WORKING TOGETHER	49
10. SUCCESS AS SWEET AS HONEY	55

Bindass with the members of her Nangkiew Shaphrang Cooperative Society which she started to create a better livelihood, for the members as well as for the community





WEAVING ONE'S SUCCESS

Bindass Syiem is a resident of Mawlong Nongtluh Village, which is in Ri Bhoi District of Meghalaya. For generations, her family has been rearing lac insects and producing lac dye (locally referred to as Laha) as a means of livelihood. Bindass decided to follow in their footsteps and also take up laha as a source of income. However, the low production of Laha made it difficult to make ends meet in a large family, and take care of the needs of her three children. She knew that she needed another way of earning an income but that was too difficult a prospect for her as she did not know any other traditional activities, and had never taken up any other livelihood work. That was when she heard of the newly started Enterprise Facilitation Centres (EFC) under IBDLP and decided to register herself at one.

At the EFC, Bindass naturally chose sericulture as a livelihood option since she did not want to abandon her traditional livelihood but rather to upgrade it. So in 2013, shortly after her registration, she was sent to Bangalore for training on Post Cocoon Technology of Muga and Eri Silk, conducted and funded by the IBDLP Basin Development Unit (BDU). Soon after the training, she applied for a Kisan Credit Card (KCC) loan of Rs 50,000 to start Laha cultivation in her own homestead garden. With her husband's help, she also started weaving and dyeing.



Laha



Bindass preparing Laha before dyeing



Dyed yarn being weaved



Dyeing of Eri Yarn

Three generations of women weaving together (Bindass, her mother and her daughters)



Today, Bindass produces 30 to 40 kg of Laha annually. She uses this for dyeing traditional woven cloth which she then sells at the market in Nongpoh. Her annual income has now risen to Rs 1,00,000 and she is now able to send all her three children to good schools at Nongpoh.

In the year 2015, Mrs. Bindass was helped by the EFC at Umling to go for yet another exposure visit, this time to Jharkhand. The goal of this exposure visit was to learn more about Micro Enterprise Promotion. Upon returning, she rallied her friends, neighbours and fellow weavers from Mawlong Nongtluh village and in June 2015 launched a Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society - **'NangkiewShaphrang Multi-Purpose Co-Operative Society'**. The goal of this Cooperative Society was to promote Laha Cropping, and traditional styles of dyeing and weaving.

The phrase 'NangkiewShaphrang' means "climb ever higher". It aptly represents the spirit of this cooperative society and its desire to create better livelihoods for themselves and their community members. Bindass is the currently elected President of the organisation.

Bindass hopes that one day, with the support of her fellow weavers in the co-operative society, she can not only better promote this age old method of using natural colouring for dyeing cloths, but she can reach these traditional products to larger regional markets, and indeed to markets all over the country.



Dyed Eri Yarn

Jesinta Lyngdoh in front of her newly constructed house





AGAINST ALL ODDS

They say a successful Entrepreneur is always a self-made person, this adage could not hold more truth than in the case of Jesinta Lyngdoh, a pig breeder with an annual turnover not less than ₹4,00,000 and a story to match.

Life was not always easy for Jesinta. Abject poverty forced her to discontinue schooling at the age of twelve so she could help her parents cultivate ginger and support and school her five younger siblings. Over time, she started rearing just one single pig. She put away the money that she made from rearing this pig as savings and to cover her own limited financial expenses.

Jesinta continued leading these two family activities till the year 2008. By this time, things were slowly starting to turn around for this family. Their ginger was selling well and generating a little more money. The savings that they were able to put away would allow them to construct a new house possibly soon. They badly needed a new house too as their house was worn out and in need of major repairs that would be expensive. But it wasn't going to be so easy for Jesinta and her family. Perhaps out of envy, a few miscreants burnt her ginger seeds just before the sowing was supposed to begin, destroying the entire stock. No one in the family had sufficient money to buy new seeds for sowing. Jesinta's dream of constructing a proper house for her family was shattered. As she recalls, what troubled her most was that some people around her could have wanted to hurt her so much. But despite such discouragement, Jesinta knew that she had to go on for the sake of her family and her own dreams. So she continued looking for opportunities to pull herself and her family out of this ordeal.





Hygienic concrete Pig sty helps Jesinta keep her pigs healthy



One evening while feeding her pig, a thought dawned on her - "If just this one pig could support me well for so many years, why not rear more pigs to support my family?" Looking back, she realizes that this decision changed her life. Having wondered about pig breeding as her primary source of livelihood, she first approached the Veterinary Department. Through them she received initial training in the piggery sector and additional handholding that allowed her to procure piglets and start off on her new livelihood activity.

Today, Jesinta has not only become successful as a pig breeder, but has also become a master trainer in the piggery sector. Government programmes that provide training to other farmers interested in rearing pigs work with her as a trainer and resource person to support these aspiring entrepreneurs. As she always dreamt, Jesinta was finally able to build a house for her family. She is now building another one for herself while also taking full care of her nephews and nieces after her younger sister passed away.





Jesinta is a registered partner of IBDLP at the Umling EFC. Through IBDLP, she has received various kinds of support including bank linkage for enterprise loans and linkages to government departments for resources and advanced training under various schemes and programmes.

In 2015, Jesinta received training in candle making and she hopes to start this second enterprise next year as a source of supplementary income. In fact, she has also ventured into Mushroom cultivation after receiving training from RRTC at Umran, which was conducted by the Ri Bhoi Basin Development Unit under IBDLP. Jesinta invested ₹12,000 of her personal funds in the mushroom cultivation venture and has already made a profit of ₹80,000. Jesinta stands as a proud example of a successful, serial entrepreneur who is especially a role model for the many aspiring women entrepreneurs with whom IBDLP works.



Jesinta showcasing her Oyster Mushroom cultivation which is her newer venture

Jubor and his family





A FATHER'S DREAM

Every day, people queue up in front of Jubor's shop in Ngunraw village to purchase cement. Why? Because he is the only cement dealer in his village as well as other neighbouring villages. But before starting his cement venture, Jubor depended solely on agriculture. His wife is a home maker. At the time, farming could easily support him because his family comprised of only him and his wife. But the family of two gradually expanded to nine, and farming alone was no longer sufficient to cover their growing financial needs. While the circumstances were difficult and putting food on the table was a daily challenge, it remained important to Juborlang that his children should have the opportunity to access better education. Thus he did not keep his children back in the fields to help him run his farm. Instead he sent them to a government school in the neighbouring village and encouraged them to study hard in their free time. His constant reminder to them was, "A person who is educated will always survive".

At the back of his mind, Jubor always wanted to start a business. But he did not know where to begin. One day, while he was selling his farm produce at Mawkyrwat market as usual, he overheard one of his customers discussing how entrepreneurs could get assistance by registering at an Enterprise Facilitation Centre (EFC) at the Block headquarters. Eager to know more, Mr. Jubor spoke to this customer and enquired about the EFC. The very next day he set off with one of his friends to register himself at the Mawkyrwat EFC.

A panoramic view of Ngunraw village





Jubor is the only cement dealer in Ngunraw as well as other neighbouring villages

In 2014, MIE was planning an exposure trip to Gujarat where partners would be given intensive training on starting a successful enterprise.


On the basis of his commitment and interest, Jubor was selected for the programme. When he returned to his village, Jubor first conducted a survey in his own village and all the neighbouring villages to understand the demand and supply of cement. He had realised that there was a good opportunity to start a cement business in this region but he wanted to do local market research first. The survey results confirmed his hunch about the market potential and so he approached Star Cement for becoming a dealer. Star Cement gave their approval and soon he opened a shop at Ngunraw.

Today, his cement business has grown tremendously and he is the sole cement dealer in Ngunraw. But that is not all Jubor undertook. Once his cement business started flourishing, he started expanding his agricultural activities.



Turmeric Produce from Jubor's garden



A close-up photograph of broom grass plants with long, thin, feathery seed heads and broad green leaves. The plants are growing in a garden setting with a blue sky and clouds in the background.

Jubor's Broom grass Garden

Today Jubor has also ventured into cultivation of high demand crops such as Areca Nut, Turmeric, Betel Vine, Oranges and Broom grass. A true entrepreneur at heart, he also supports fellow farmers who are finding it difficult to sell their agricultural produce, by aggregating and buying their produce and taking it to the market.

But Jubor himself says that his biggest success has been the education he has been able to give all his children. Today, three of his children are pursuing higher studies in Shillong city while the six younger ones are all studying at schools in Mawkyrwat.





Karmel Lyngdoh Marshillong



THE CATTLE BUSINESS

Karmel Lyngdoh was born and brought up in a small village of Meghalaya called Photjaud. His father reared cattle for a living and his mother grew maize, potatoes and vegetables for consumption. He was hardly interested in his school studies during his childhood, and he soon dropped out of school. He recalls now how much more he enjoyed taking his cattle to the field compared to attending school. Soon he assumed full responsibility of his father's cattle. He would take the cattle to the field in the morning and return only at sundown. As he grew up, this became his primary source of livelihood. But right from the beginning he took the long view and ensured that his livelihood activity, though small, was sustainable. Thus even when he first started out, he ensured that whenever he sold any of his cattle, he invested the proceeds into buying a few calves so that his livelihood would be sustained.

Rearing cattle was not easy for Karmel. Many a time his cattle would fall ill and he would not be able to sell them. At other times the cattle would not grow as expected, and hence would not fetch a good price in the market. There were times when he wasn't even able to sell enough cattle to buy food for his family. And still Karmel did not give up. It was cattle rearing that he had grown up with and which he cherished. Instead, Karmel became even more determined to make his chosen livelihood activity work, and work better.

Using the manure from his cows, Karmel has been able to fertilize the fallow land behind his cowshed where he grows organic vegetables



There is nothing that pleases Karmel more than spending time with his cattle







Since he had dropped out of school so early, Karmel found it difficult to keep track of his sales, purchases, profit or loss. One day, a friend of his from the village informed him that the Enterprise Facilitation Centre (EFC) at Mawkyrwat was conducting training on book keeping. Karmel immediately went to the EFC and got himself registered. Soon after, he was given training on bookkeeping and basic business principles to incorporate into his existing activities.

Today, Karmel is able to make more effective day to day business decisions. He now meticulously tracks all information related to sales and purchases, keeps detailed records of every cow right from the day of purchase to the day of sales and is able to plan ahead and budget properly for the case of loss of cattle due to sickness etc. He currently has more than 60 cattle on his farm and he hopes to rear even more in the future.

Members of Nonglwai Orchid Conservation Society along with Dr. Ram Dev, a senior plant breeding scientist ICAR Sikkim





CONSERVING FLOWERS - CONSERVING LIVELIHOODS

On 5th June, 2015, the occasion of World Environment Day, 'Nonglwai Orchid Conservation Society' was conferred with a prestigious state award for their tremendous environmental services through the conservation of indigenous orchids. The driving force behind this society is Charles Tympuin.

It all began when Charles, who is a school teacher in Jaidoh, decided that he wanted to make the most out of the time he has outside of teaching. He felt that he had the potential to do more for himself and his society but he just could not find an avenue to start something. One day as he was taking a walk to his friend's house he decided to take a short cut through the forest. As he was walking, he realized that the forest had an abundant number of wild orchids growing all over. He took a few of the flowers to the market just to see what they would fetch. He was surprised by the response of the people. There was a huge demand for indigenous orchids yet there were hardly any sellers there.

So began his search for indigenous orchids in the forest to sell in the market. A number of people in his village also started collecting wild orchids, following in the footsteps of Charles. It became a source of livelihood for many and an additional source of income for Charles. He would make anywhere between Rs. 1,000 - 1,500 per day by selling orchids. It was a very good source of revenue for him. In fact he was finally even able to make long due repairs to his house using the money he earned from selling wild orchids.





Charles Tympuin

This activity continued for many years until one day when Charles realized that the orchids are beginning to disappear. He realized that simply harvesting wild orchids to sell in the markets was unsustainable, both for the local environment and for the sellers. He had to do something to preserve this source of livelihood. This was when he decided to grow and preserve these indigenous orchids in his own garden. He also encouraged his friends to do the same. In 2011, he mobilized these friends to form 'The Nonglwai Orchid Conservation Society' and took on his present role of general secretary.

As demand increased, the members decided they required formal training to better manage their orchid production. They approached the IBDLP Basin Development Unit (BDU) at West Khasi Hills for assistance. Soon after registration, the BDU provided them with training on pest management and In situ cultivation. The BDU also facilitated an exposure visit for society members to the National Research Centre for Orchids in Sikkim. There they received training and capacity building for identification and further propagation of the species.





Today, the society that Charles started has conserved more than 3,000 plantlets of indigenous orchids. Experts from the Bio-Resources Development Centre (BRDC) in Shillong, a research and development institution under IBDLP, have already identified 70 species conserved by this society. Additionally, the society also grows hybrid species in large numbers which are sold as cut flowers.



Charles and his friends hope that their efforts create awareness about the importance of preserving the indigenous species of Meghalaya and also provide a strong example for how the rich biodiversity resources of Meghalaya can be sustainably leveraged to create profitable livelihoods for people as well.





JOURNEY OF AN INTEGRATED FARMER

Ploit Sunar is a busy man nowadays, engaged in farming and many other activities on his land in Laskein. His is a unique story of innovative thinking in which he took his Jalkund and turned it into an integrated farming system. Piggery, duckery, goater, fish breeding and rice cultivation are some of the activities that he has started just with the help of a single resource – the Jalkund. All these activities earn him an income of not less than ₹2,00,000 annually.

However, ten years ago his life was a different story. Ploit Sunar lost both his parents at a very young age, when he was still in school. Grief stricken, he dropped out of school and soon took comfort in drinking. His life started to spiral out of control but he could not help himself. He abandoned the paddy field left behind by his parents. The field stood barren for years. He started a family but didn't change his ways, making life hard for both himself and his family.

But all this was about to change. He didn't know yet that the paddy field he had inherited from his parents, the field which he had so carelessly abandoned, was a blessing in disguise. As it turns out, the paddy field was a source of perennial water and officers from the Government of Meghalaya's Water Resources Department had identified this site as a viable place for the construction of a Type 2 Jalkund. A Jalkund is a water harvesting structure; a Type 2 Jalkund is one that gets its water from surface or ground water through small, localized engineering structures. Soon a construction project was proposed, with funds coming from the IBDLP Programme under convergence with the Water Resources Department.



Ploit Sunar's Jalkund has turned out to be a blessing in disguise allowing him to build several livelihood activities around it.

Ploit agreed to the construction thinking it was just another government scheme and if nothing else, he would get some money out of it. But once the Jalkund was constructed and his old paddy field began to get flooded, he suddenly realised that maybe he could actually do something with the Jalkund and earn money out of it. He thought for some time and decided to go with a fishery. He started with a handful of fingerlings and saw that fishes grew quick and fast in his reservoir. This gave him good income. Once people started inquiring about fishing in his pond he got another idea. He could rent out his pond for fishing and make even more money without having to go to the market to sell the fish himself.

The size of the fishes caught from his pond was so big that word about his pond soon spread far and wide across Laskein. People started to flock to his pond, paying good money for a good catch. With the money he earned, Ploit was now able to provide for his family. The success of his endeavour made him a changed man. He felt a new sense of self respect and started enjoying his ability to take care of his family and his business. For the first time in many years, his family was happy and came out to fully support him. Seeing his family happy encouraged him to devote more time to his Jalkund, exploring innovative ways to make his enterprise flourish.

Ploit Sunar's Jalkund, which doubles as a fishery, attracts a number of fishermen looking for a good catch







Large fishes found in Ploit Sunar's Jalkund are a major attraction for aspiring fishermen

Over time, he started rearing goats and he found that his land was very well suited for that. Today he proudly claims that his goats are the fattest and the best fed in the area.

He then introduced ducks into his Jalkund, earning even more income by selling their eggs. He also started rearing pigs which he now sells for meat. Most recently Ploit converted half of his jalkund into a paddy field where he now cultivates rice.

Thus his integrated farm is both a source of income and a direct source of food for him and his family.

Today Ploit is a respected member of his clan and community, and is able to support 5-6 members of his clan in addition to his family members. Ploit is honest about his failures in the past and hopes that his story inspires others to keep trying no matter how difficult things get, because if they do then life will turn around.





TAKING THE INITIATIVE

Allagre is a village in the Rongram C&RD block of West Garo Hills District in Meghalaya, and is located about 17 km from Tura. Recently, the members of this village community have come together to form a Self Help Group called “Bakrime” with the aim of participating in bringing about socio economic development of the community and enhancing the socio economic welfare of community members.

Before the SHG came about, the people of Allagre often talked about the problem of buying chickens for consumption in the village's households. People would have to travel all the way to Rongram market which takes about half an hour to reach on foot just to buy chickens because the volume of locally grown chickens was inadequate, particularly during high demand seasons such as Christmas. The people often discussed how wonderful it would be if someone could just start a hatchery in the village itself.

Around the time that the SHG was formed, a few of the community members suggested that since poultry rearing presented a seemingly viable local business opportunity, why not use the SHG platform to apply for financial assistance and start a poultry farm together? Thus the agenda was set and 10 community members came together to set up Bakrime.

Following up on their initial idea of starting a poultry farm, the SHG members collectively went to nearby banks multiple times to discuss about and apply for business loans. Unfortunately, their proposal kept getting rejected over and over again.



The road to the market





It was at this discouraging time that the SHG members came across the Integrated Basin Development & Livelihoods Promotion (IBDLP) Programme. Under this Programme, an Enterprise Facilitation Centre (EFC) has been set up at Block Headquarters, in each of the 39 Blocks in Meghalaya. The Enterprise Resource Persons (ERPs) stationed at these EFCs work with aspiring entrepreneurs to identify and facilitate access to opportunities for skill training and capacity building, linkage to basic equipment, physical resources and technologies, and access to financial assistance wherever possible whether through government schemes or bank loans. The SHG members came across the ERPs in their Block during one of their local market days, during which the ERPs were conducting an awareness programme. Realizing that this was an opportunity to get support for their poultry farm idea, the SHG members then visited their nearest EFC (in Rongram Block Headquarters) and with the EFC for poultry sector related support. Soon after, in April 2015, a few of the SHG members were sponsored under IBDLP for a one week beginners' training in poultry farming at the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) in Guwahati.

Now armed with basic knowledge of poultry farming, the SHG was helped by their local ERPs to get a bank linkage for financial assistance to start their enterprise. This time, the Meghalaya Cooperative Apex Bank (MCAB) was willing to give the SHG a loan of Rs 3 lakh for construction of a poultry farm. Land for this venture was leased to the group for about 15 – 20 years by one of the SHG members who is himself a land owner.

At present, the construction of the poultry farm at Allagre is ongoing. The plan is for the SHG to getting their initial chickens from NIRD Guwahati; a capacity of 750 - 1400 chickens is expected for this farm in the beginning. A key problem that SHG members are apprehensive about is the overall financial cost beyond those of construction costs once the enterprise operations start.

Despite this, optimism is high and the group expects to start poultry sales in January 2016 or soon after.



The question of how the costs and responsibilities of logistics and operations will be distributed across SHG members, is yet to be finalized by the group. Similarly, the group has not decided how revenues will be shared basis distribution of duties on the farm. A discussion with the group brought up two options. One would be to share profits equally across all members. The other would be to have a fixed salary system, with the remainder of profits going into a common fund. Although these financial issues are yet to be sorted out, the SHG insists that its key challenge will be access to further financial assistance, not issues related to management of their SHG and group enterprise activities.

The Bakrime group has developed an entrepreneurial mindset in that they are already thinking of working hard to scale their new enterprise. For example, while their initial poultry sales are expected to be directly done at Rongram Market, the SHG members are already thinking about exploring other market linkages. Additionally, the members are excited about getting into the livestock and food sectors and often discuss among themselves ideas for diversifying their business once the poultry farm venture takes off. The organic foods sector is one that they are keen to explore although they admit that a lot of effort will be required in this first phase of their enterprise, before they can think of taking up expansion ideas.

While the Bakrime group has a long way to go, their transformation has been significant. From wanting someone else to start a poultry business in their village, to coming together as a collective and themselves taking advantage of this business opportunity, this group has set out strong on the path of entrepreneurship.



A Honey bee comb



A BEEKEEPER'S STORY

In Stevenson's village of Nongthymmai, located in Bhoi Rymbong, beekeeping is an activity that has been practiced for generations. The people of Nongthymmai believe that a house with bees is an active and healthy household. Earlier people would take up beekeeping as a hobby, but now it has become a key income generating activity for many households in the area.

Mr. Stevenson started beekeeping out of passion but soon realised its economic potential. He registered himself at the Umsning EFC to get accurate technical knowledge on beekeeping and was given training at RRTC in Umran. Upon completion, Stevenson expanded his bee colonies and started extracting more honey than before. He also began packaging his honey and selling them at markets in Nongpoh and in Shillong.

Today Mr. Stevenson earns at least ₹1,00,000 and up to ₹2,00,000 annually through the sale of honey. In fact Mr. Stevenson states that the demand for good quality honey is so high that he is not even able to meet his own local market demands. This year he plans to increase his number of bee colonies by 10 or 20 boxes.







Traditional beehive in cut log



The community at Nongthymmai is trying to strengthen its beekeeping activities as a collective. The community has established a beekeepers' society through which it aims to scale up honey production, improve packaging and marketing of honey, and even start producing honey-based value added products.

Mr. Stevenson himself is hopeful that with the launch of the Apiculture Mission in the State, he and his community members will be able to access a wider platform on which to market and sell their honey, and profitably carry on this livelihood activity that has been passed down across generations.

Bah Pis (1st row center) along with the members of the Umlyngka Milk Producers Society





THE POWER OF WORKING TOGETHER

Piston R. Kharbteng (or Bah Pis as he is lovingly known) is a happy man who is at peace with his cattle around and never tires of spending time with his animals. His first experience with keeping cattle came about when a friend of his ran into some financial trouble and needed help in selling off a few of his animals to raise money, Bah Pis was a construction worker at the time. The animals his friend offered included two dairy cows and two calves. Bah Pis felt sorry for his friend and decided to buy the cattle to help him out.

Initially, Bah Pis faced countless difficulties trying to look after the four cows as he was completely new to cattle. Persevering, he managed to keep the cattle for a year before selling them. While he did not make any profit through the sale he realised instead that he had become attached to working with cattle. So he decided that he would pursue this activity further but that this time, he would make it a financially lucrative activity as well.

Bah Pis completely shifted his focus from construction work to cattle rearing. In 1990, his farmer friends and he together decided to form a co-operative society so they could work together at milk production and marketing. They named the society Umlyngka Milk Producers Society after their village. There were only a few members when the society started but today the Society has 68 members, both men and women. The members also include educated youth who are interested in starting their own dairy business.

Milk Producers Society's members transporting milk to The Meghalaya Dairy





Milk Testing Equipment





In the beginning, the society faced several challenges due to lack of technical knowledge and could produce only about 20 litres of milk per day. They sold this to Meghalaya Dairy. However their dedication to improving their dairy business ensured that milk production volumes gradually went up and kept increasing over time.

Seeing the economic livelihood potential of this activity, the Government of Meghalaya created an initiative for skill training of cattle and dairy farmers. Under this, farmers were also provided hands-on training on improved cattle rearing using current scientific methods but as adapted to the local context. The Meghalaya Institute of Entrepreneurship (MIE) under IBDLP assisted the Society by sending its members for an exposure trip to ANAND, the site of the biggest dairy producer and dairy federation in the country, and one of the largest in the world. Here they learnt about modern technologies and methods that could be used to improve production quality and quantity. Further, MIE assisted the society by linking them to suppliers of modern, low cost milking machines that would help ease the labour required for the milking process while also improving hygiene.



A Milk producer on his way to the Market from Umlyngka

Today, the society produces around 3,800 litres per day. Some of this continues to be sold to the Meghalaya Dairy while the rest is retailed to consumers in and around Shillong. The Society runs entirely on financial investments by the members themselves, and is fully sustainable today rather than being dependant on government grants or subsidies.

Today the Umlyngka Society is recognized as one of the best performing milk producers in the NE region. Its members hope to continue their hard work to uplift not only their village but the state as a whole.

Mlansing Nongrum and Rngup Nongrum





SUCCESS AS SWEET AS HONEY

Miansing Nongrum and Rnguo Nongrum are sibblings who grew up in the small village of Mawkma, located in the Khatar shnong block of the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya. Being a farming family, the brothers engage in the farming of potatoes and maize as a primary source of livelihood. However, they also keep bees, an activity that started as a hobby almost 40 years ago. Over time the brothers have realised that beekeeping is a livelihood activity that can provide significant additional income for their families. In fact, the income they earn from the sales of honey has helped pay school fees of their children, hospital bills and miscellaneous medical expenditures as have come up suddenly, quite often other small but important household expenditures.

The brothers' production of honey shows moderate annual variation that in turn depends on variations in climate. A bad year means that the brothers produce about 150 kilos of honey. A good year means that production is 200 kilos or more. The brothers sell the honey along with the honeycombs at the nearby Sohra market at a wholesale price of Rs 250/- per kilo. This means that even a bad year gives them a revenue of Rs. 37,500 from honey, and that too without any further packaging, marketing, or investment into value addition.



Rngup displaying the modern bee boxes received after his training at RRTC

Having never had formal training in beekeeping, the brothers were excited when they were selected for training at the Rural Resource and Training Centre (RRTC), Umran. There they learnt several new skills including annual and seasonal colony management, parasite management, uniting and dividing of bee colonies, transferring bees from traditional hives to modern movable frame hive, queen production methods, and honey value chain and marketing management. On completion of the training, they also received modern bee boxes which they felt was much needed since their traditional boxes does not allow preservation of the bee combs which is traditionally given away along with the honey sold.

Today, the brothers are looking to expand their honey rearing business. With the new knowledge they gained from the training, the brothers are working hard to turn their activity into a thriving business. In fact they feel that since beekeeping is able to generate significant income without being very labour or capital intensive, it can and should be taken up by a wide range of farm-based entrepreneurs.

As the IBDLP Programme focuses on strengthening and scaling the honey sector in Meghalaya, it is hoped that more success stories like that of Mlan-sing Nongrum and Rngup Nongrum emerge from all corners of the state.





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