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NEWSLETTER FROM

Project for Community Based Forest Management & Livelihoods Improvement in Meghalaya

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Project Director's Desk-

The Community-based Forest Management and Livelihood Improvement in Meghalaya is a JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) assisted Project being implemented in the State of Meghalaya. The objective of the Project is to restore and conserve natural resources within the villages by sustainable forest management, livelihood improvement, and institutional strengthening, thereby contributing to the conservation of the environment, biodiversity, and uplifting of socio-economic conditions of people in the State of Meghalaya. The Project is being executed by the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA). The Project has commenced from 27th March, 2020 and it will continue for next 10 years. The entire cost of the Project is estimated as 13,076 million Japanese Yen of which 10,397 million Japanese Yen is to be covered by the loan for the Project. JICA has signed an agreement with the Government of India on 27th March, 2020.

The Project is in line with "Meghalaya Vision 2030" issued by the State Government and aims at sustainable community forest management through participatory planning and inclusive growth development along with capacity development for people and institutions concerned.

The project will also contribute in achieving the objectives of North Eastern Region Vision 2020 which aims to alleviate poverty and emphasized inclusive sustainable development through sustainable community forest management, grassroots planning by adopting participatory development approach. The Project will also contribute in achieving the objective of "Green India Mission" under the National Action Plan on Climate Change.

The interventions include rejuvenation of springs/water streams, forest fire management, restoration of the degraded community forests through restoring 22,500 ha of degraded forest areas; promotion of livelihood oriented forestry including medicinal plants, bamboo cultivation, reclaiming of shifting cultivation area, REDD⁺/Carbon finance pilots, supporting 1,000 Self Help Groups and community gender sensitization activities; and value chain development and economic amelioration for the targeted rural communities.

Now the Project has completed the 'Preparatory Phase' and entered into 'Implementation Phase'. The Project has so far achieved establishing Project Management Units at state level, District level and Block level. Project Management Consultants were employed and mobilized. Non-Government Organizations for community mobilization were selected and deployed. All 500 villages were identified, in which 435 Village Project Implementation Committees (VPIC) were formed and made functional.

- Dr. Vijay Kumar D, IAS

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PROJECT UPDATES

1. Orientation training for Project and NGO Staff

An Orientation Training for District Project Managers (DPM) and Block Project Managers (BPM) of the Project was held from 28th February 2022 to 4th March 2022 at SPMU Conference Hall, Shalom Building, Lower Lachumiere, Shillong. Topics discussed included Project's introduction, Participatory Land Use Planning (PLUP) and microplanning; community mobilization, entry point activities (EPA), gender mainstreaming, soil and water conservation.

Orientation training for the staff of the Non-Government Organizations (NGO) was held from 28th February to 2nd March 2022 (3 days) in Conference Hall of the Forest and Environment Department, Sylvan House, Lower Lachumiere, Shillong. Topics taught were, community mobilization, conflict resolution, gender mainstreaming and sexual harassment at the work place, introduction to the Project, microplanning, PLUP, community engagement methods, VPIC formation, soil and water conservation, Non-timber Forest Produces (NTFP), Self Help Groups (SHG) activities, market linkages and mobilization of resources etc.

2. Demarcation and Mapping of Group-1 Project Villages

As per the Minutes of Discussion (MoD) of the Project, 450 Group-I villages and 50 Group-II villages are to be identified and the Project should intervene and implement the Project components in those villages for sustainable forest management including soil & water conservation; community development and livelihood improvement; and institutional strengthening. The Group-I villages are those where forests were badly degraded, soils were critically eroded and socio-economic deprivation is high. The Group-II villages are those where the forests are being managed well (registered either with State Government or with ADC) and there is less vulnerability to soil erosion and have fairly connected through road network for better access. 435 VPICs were formed so far under Group-I villages.

The Project had undertaken demarcation and mapping of Project Villages and so far, completed 418 villages out of 450. This exercise has been carried out by GIS personnel of SPMU and staff of DPMUs using handheld GPS and with the help of Google Earth Images.

3. Mobilization of Project Management Consultancy (PMC)

As per the Loan Agreement, Project Management Consultancy (PMC) with key and non-key experts are to be employed in the Project who are expected to offer technical advice to the Project Implementing Agency. The Project through an elaborate international bidding process (ICB) has successfully employed 'Consortium of NIPPON KOEI' as consultants, who have already commenced their services w.e.f 1st April, 2022. With the deployment of PMC, the implementation process of the project in the implementation phase is expected to get the due boost.



PROJECT UPDATES

4. Training of selected Farmers from Project Villages on Sloping Agriculture Land Technology (SALT)

SALT approach has the potential to offer the hill tribes with an alternative method of agriculture, which while being climate smart, will also provide the farmers with means of sustainable livelihoods. A training was conducted by World Bank assisted Project, Community-led Landscape Management Project (CLLMP), in which 54 farmers and 18 staff of the MegLIFE were also trained along with the farmers of CLLMP Project in convergence mode in 11 districts in April, 2022 by an Expert Mr. David Gandhi, Technical Advisor and Manager for Sustainable Rural Livelihood Development Programme, Sauramandala Foundation, Karnataka. At end of the training 90 acres of model SALT farms were set up.

5. Selection of Entry Point Activities for Project Villages

Entry Point Activities (EPAs), are those activities, the Project undertakes before the commencement of the activities of the main 'Project Components', in order that the Project could enhance the interest as well the community participation in implementation of the Project. The Project is currently planning the EPAs during the current financial year and towards that, conducted the needs analysis in Group-I Project villages. Some of the crucial needs are community halls; Anganwadi; repairing of school buildings; developing /repairing sports facilities; construction/repair of roads/bridges; check-dams; irrigation canals; water sources for drinking water and water for other purposes; grey water management, waste management; public toilets; village electrification; smoke-less chullahs etc.

6. Review Meetings with District Project Management Units

A Detailed Review Meeting of the 11 DPMUs was held from 9th to 13th May, 22 in which all the concerned DPMs and BPMs have attended at SPMU Conference Hall, Shillong. The agenda included, shortlisting of Entry Point Activities (EPA); Annual Plan Operations (APO) status and issues concerning staff of Non-Government Organizations (NGO) deployed by the Project in all the 22 project blocks; progress in DPM accounts; status of VPIC formation and all the related issues; selection of sites for establishment of Community Nurseries (CN); and miscellaneous issues the Project is currently concerned with. It transpired at the end of the 5days Review Meeting that the progress of implementation of the Project is very satisfactory and as per the time schedule, prescribed for various activities.

7. Training of Finance Section Employees of DPMUs

The accounts training to the staff working in the finance section of the DPMUs was organized from 9th to 11th May 2022 at the meeting hall of the Forest and Environment Department, SYLVAN House, Shillong. 11 Programme Associates (Finance) and 11 BPMs posted in DPMU Head Quarters were successfully trained. The topics covered inter alia included, book keeping, preparing vouchers, budget heads, proper booking of expenditure, using TALLY software, procurement methods and other accounts related matters.



EVENTS/WORKSHOPS

8. Field Visits by Project Officials

Shri Gunanka DB, IFS, Additional Project Director has visited 14 Project villages of 3 blocks from 29th May to 30th May, 2022 and on 22nd June, 2022. The villages visited are Wakoinanggre, Galwanggre B, Rongare Adinggre, Dadokgre and Dana Bollonggre of Gambegre Block of West Garo Hills District; Baladinggre, Sasatgre, Sakal Aduma, Chandigre, Marakpara and Daljagre villages of Rongram Block under West Garo Hills District; Kut, Mawkhanu, KsehPyndeng Villages of Mawryngngeng block under East Khasi Hills District.

These visits were made to review the progress of activities implemented in the field and also to have interaction with communities for ensuring their active participation in Project implementation. Moreover, quick survey was also conducted involving community for finding out availability of land for afforestation activities to be undertaken in the villages by the Project. As the lands belong to Private/ Clan/Community, focus was also given to collect choice of species for plantation and availability of land for raising community nurseries.

9. Workshops on Soil and Water Conservation Measures and Agro-Forestry

A workshop on 'A Critical Assessment on the Soil and Water Conservation Measures adopted in the State of Meghalaya' on 23rd May, 2022 by Meghalaya Basin Management Agency (MBMA) at Moreau Institute of Integral Training (MIIT), Shillong. The workshop was inaugurated by Dr. Vijay Kumar D, IAS, Commissioner and Secretary, Planning Department. DPMs of all the 11 districts, Field Engineers posted in DPMUs, staff of Meghalaya Institute of Natural Resources (MINR), staff of MBMA, staff of SPMU and BPMs of MegLIFE Project, and the Project Management Consultants had attended the workshop. The resource persons attended included Advanced Centre for Water Resources Development and Management (ACWADAM), Pune, Maharashtra; NEHU, Meghalaya; People's Science Institute, Dehradun; Soil and Water conservation Department, Govt of Meghalaya, PRASARI, WB; MINR; and Mr. David Gandhi.

A workshop on 'Exploring the potential of Scaling-up of Agro-Forestry in Meghalaya' was also conducted on 24th May, 2022 at MIIT, Shillong. The resource persons for this workshop were Silviculture Division of the Forest and Environment Department (FED); Central Himalayan Rural Action Group (CHIRAG), Uttarakhand; Centre for Sustainable Development Studies, MLCU, Shillong; ICRI-CTRI, Karnataka; R S Hansal, Karnataka, NAANDI Foundation, Telangana; Nagaland Environment Protection and Economic Development (NEPED).

10. Celebration of Meghalaya Environment Week from 1st to 7th June, 2022

Meghalaya Environment Week was celebrated by Government of Meghalaya from 1st June to 7th June 2022. This event was organized by MBMA, Centre for Excellence for NRM and Sustainable Livelihood, Forest and Environment Department, Soil and Conservation Department, Community and Rural Development Department, Department of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare. 1st June was celebrated as Environment Technology Day. 2nd June was celebrated as Water Conservation Day. 3rd June was celebrated as Plantation Day. 4th June was celebrated as Restoration Day. 5th June was celebrated as Community Action Day. 6th June was celebrated as Walk for Nature Day. 7th June was celebrated as World Environment Celebration Day.

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