



Case Studies

Holistic Rural Development Programme **MEGHALAYA**

Preface

The first year of the Holistic Rural Development Programme (HRDP) in Meghalaya has given us a strong platform to scale up our activities and reach out to more people with addition of seven more villages taking the total number from 17 to 25.

This compendium of case stories seeks to delve into the impact of HDFC Bank Ltd's CSR initiative "Parivartan" in terms of improvement in peoples' lives through various interventions. The case studies chronicle these changes objectively since its inception to help us strategise future plans and actions.

We attempted to look at interventions in the backdrop of multiple benefits that people received from these activities and how they compliment each other. For example, the individual household water connections provided has not only solved their daily water needs, but also ensured personal hygiene and sanitation. With the availability of regular water supply many households set up kitchen gardens. Many children who would miss their classes as they used to help family fetch water from the sources are now attending the schools regularly. Similarly, development of waste lands in the villages has helped livestock beneficiaries get access to fodder. There are countless examples where beneficiaries set examples for other as to how to make the initiatives sustainable.

I extend my sincere gratitude to HDFC Bank Ltd for transforming the lives of people of these villages and guiding us at regular intervals. I also thank SACH team and our community resource persons (CRPs) who helped me compile these inspiring case studies.

Surendra Panwar
Communication Head, SACH



Content



01

Groundnut makes it to Ri_Bhoi, Meghalaya



03

A turnaround of sorts, not just fringe benefits



05

For the sake of education and self-employment



10

Art of rearing and reaping benefits



15

The wayahead



18

Emergence of 'black gold'



22

For the family nutrition and health

Groundnut makes it to Ri_Bhoi, Meghalaya

KVK scientists are upbeat over the farmers' success



“What these farmers did in Sohtad is remarkable and is really an encouraging sign not only for the other farmers but also for us too as the government is now focusing on introduction of new crops to supplement farmers' income.”

Dr. Mokidul Islam
Senior scientist & KVK head

On the Christmas Day the people of Sohtad village of Ri-Bhoi district in Meghalaya were surprised to see 50-year old Rukmani Pator sell groundnuts in Rs 5 and Rs 10 packs to the children. Some of them had not even seen the groundnuts before. Rukmani even baffled the KVK and ICAR scientists by harvesting 120 kg of groundnuts in mixed cropping (ginger and vegetables) on the land measuring 6 dang, something that could be put in high yield bracket. Another farmer Midalis Klein harvested 100 kg of groundnuts on 2 dangs of land (one dang is equal to approximately 21 sq meters).

People of the village say that groundnut used to be grown in the region till decades ago, but due to lack of awareness and the insects, the farmers refrained from cultivating it. If the version of Dr. Mokidul Islam, senior scientist and KVK head is anything to go by, the crop was introduced in the state way back in 2002, but the efforts could not yield the desired results.

Few months back farmers in 12 villages under HRDP were provided groundnuts seeds and insecticides to prevent the

“I am determined to grow groundnuts in the next season too, and this time on bigger area. My children have tasted them for the first time in raw form and they liked it. I also earned some profit for the family”

- Rukmani

crop from the potential damage. While many were skeptical to grow the crop given their past experiences, some like Rukmani and Midalis came forward to go for one more attempt. Both of them mixed the soil with the insecticides before sowing and removed weeds at the regular intervals.

When the crop was harvested in December, both of them had no idea that they would be in for a big surprise. They extracted 120 kg and 100 kg respectively from a land traditionally



A groundnut farmer in Umwang Nongbah

to be converted into a cash crop for the farmers in future.

But on being asked as to how they look at this in terms of a pure cash crop, both Rukmani and Midalis said that apart from more awareness about its scientific cultivation, they need some marketing channel.

Though all these farmers cultivated the groundnut for the first time, the success in their very first attempt has amazed many. Now all of them want to grow the crop again. And this time they are certainly looking beyond self-consumption and festive day sale.

known for ginger, paddy and turmeric with 'Megha' prefixed to them giving them the distinct identities.

Buoyed by the success both of them sold the major quantity to the locals and kept some for self-consumption and as seeds for the next crop. While Rukmani earned Rs 1500, Midalis got Rs 1000 from the sale. Both of them maintain that the crop has proved to be a big bonus for them as it has not only increased their family income but is also serving as a nutrient for their school going children.

Sriti Matong, another farmer in the village harvested 50 kg of groundnuts on a small patch of land close to her house. Apart from her, at least 10 farmers in Umwang Nongbah village harvested groundnuts in smaller quantities (10-15 kg) for the self-consumption.

According to KVK scientists, the region which is hugely dependent on meat for protein, groundnut if popularised systematically, could not only reduce their dependence on meat and fish consumption as it is full of protein and other nutrients, it also has the potency



Midalis Klein harvested 100 kg of groundnuts on 2 dangs of land

A turnaround of sorts, not just fringe benefits

The household water connections in four villages of Umling, Meghalaya, helped people improve their lives in many ways



“Apart from making life easy for these villagers, the initiative would provide a huge impetus to the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan as water is core to the cleanliness, be it school or home”

Chinmay P Gotmare
Deputy Commissioner
Ri-Bhoi

A revisit to the Khongwing post July 5, 2016, when it got individual household water connections, has a lot to reveal. The village which lies in Umling block of Meghalaya is approximately 35 km away from district headquarters Nongpoh.

“Can't you see our shiny faces and clean clothes”, said a villager jokingly on being asked as to how the household water connections impacted their lives. Though the remark was just a small take away from the huge initiative which provided household water connections in four villages in the district and improved the water management systems in another eight, the story goes far beyond that. Khongwing has 24 households. Earlier, only two households were getting the regular water supply.

The state's PHE department had constructed three water platforms in the village way back in 2004. The villagers used to fetch water from these platforms. But soon two platforms became dysfunctional due to poor maintenance and damage to the pipelines due to weather conditions.

Similarly, the 14 households in Markang, 39 in Umwang Nongbah and 117 households in Umpathaw also got household water connections. The rural areas in the state don't have individual household water connections. The water supply in eight other villages in Umling has also improved. These villages are- Pahamjiri, Marmain, Dondral, Belkuri, Sohtad, Umlakhar, Ronghilik and Mawlong.

A lot has changed since then. It is not only saving the villagers the precious time to devote it to other productive activities like agriculture, but is also infusing sense of dignity in them, especially the women who had to walk long distances to fetch water. There have many cases where families claim that because of household connections children don't have to miss their classes in the schools.

But the biggest impact was seen in the overall improvement of the hygiene and the cleanliness. With the availability of regular water supply direct to their houses, people are keen to clean their houses every day and take care of their personal hygiene. “Earlier, the family members used to take bath only once a



“Now the life of the family has changed as I can devote more time to other household chores and my Children whom I used to leave behind at the time of going to the source.”

- Monika

week, and that too at the water source. But now we take bath every day”, said Martina Maring, 34, a teacher in Khogwing village.

Monika Makri, 60, also from the Khogwing echoed the similar sentiments. She said that the cleanliness has improved a lot. Monika used to go to the source to fetch water at least two or three times. She also set up a kitchen garden near her house after the water connection. Her daughter Airintina Makri who lives nearby had no option earlier but to go to the source for taking bath or washing clothes. “Now the life of the family has changed as I can devote more time to other household chores and my Children whom I used to leave behind at the time of going to the source.”

These are not the just the fringe benefits that the household water connections have brought to these villages, but they are core to a dignified life wherein everything around it seems to be changing; be it more time for farms activities and attention to the families,

“The household water supply has also put a check on the diseases like dysentery and diarrhea to some extent”

- Martina

cleanliness, hygiene or reduction in the cases of water borne diseases.

One fact which has emerged from the interaction with the villagers after water connections is that the lives of the people have become easy. 59-year old Riam Marsing and her 73-year old husband consider themselves to be lucky that they no longer have to travel 2-3 kilometers to the source to fetch water facing the hardships at this age.

It has also helped children attend the classes regularly, especially in villages where the water problem was acute. Kolsing Baehahray, a farmer in Umwang Nongbah village admitted the fact that many children would miss their classes as they used to help the families fetch water from the source which was almost 3 km away.

If seen in the larger context, this could surely prove to be a watershed phase for these villages. “Apart from making life easy for these villagers, the initiative would provide a huge impetus to the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan as water is core to the cleanliness, be it school or home”, said Mr Chinmay P Gotmare, Deputy Commissioner, Ri-Bhoi. According to him, nearly all girls miss their classes at least thrice a year due to Urinary Tract Infection (UTI). It may be recalled that before these villages got the household water connections, 136 schools where the new toilets were constructed in five districts of Meghalaya, were connected to the water supply under Schools Sanitation Project (SSP). The project was implemented with support from HDFC Bank LTD under its CSR initiative called Parivartan.

Many people feel that for decades they faced water scarcity and other hardships despite the fact the state which receives the maximum rainfall in the country. But now they are witnessing a turnaround.

The headman of the village Khongwing is all praise for the initiative and termed it as sun shining after a long time. “I have witnessed the extensive efforts put in under this initiative. I remembered the days when during the construction work the hardships increased manifold due to rains in accident-prone slippery terrains”, he said.



Microenterprise

For the sake of education and self-employment

The financial support provided to the youth and women under the HDFC Bank's CSR initiative 'Praivartan' to set up small businesses or micro enterprises has been a key to creating self-employment opportunities for many beneficiaries. Some of them who were reeling under abject poverty are now showing the signs of upliftment. Their efforts are gradually translating into their empowerment in many ways. While some are trying to fight the acute poverty conditions, others are planning to invest into children's or their own education with money they are earning from these small businesses.





Baris Marak

Age 40 | Gunapati, Jirang Block

Driven by her determination to give her children best of education, something that her own childhood was deprived of, forty-year old Baris Marak's life is now going through an exciting phase. Sitting at her small merchandise shop, she reels out her plans as to how she is pinning her hopes on her children to change the course of destiny of the family.

The only way to achieve this goal was to ensure that the education of her children studying in class 7, 6 and 2 remain uninterrupted. But that was not possible with the small amount of money that her husband earns by selling vegetables in a Guwahati market. There was something urgently needed to take the income beyond Rs 5000 per month.

Desperate and dejected, both husband and wife ran from pillar to post to raise a small loan to start a

small business to supplement the family income. She along with her husband even approached the local money lenders, but the high interest rate dampened their spirit.

As luck would have it, her husband attended a meeting held by SACH in the village which aimed at orienting the villagers about livelihood opportunities being offered under HDFC Bank supported Holistic Rural Development Programme (HRDP). Following a few more interactive sessions with the SACH team, she finally attended a meeting held in collaboration with SIRD to orient the rural people, especially the women and the youth to set up their own businesses.

Finally, the time came when she got loan of Rs 15,000 to start a grocery shop in the village. Slowly but gradually, her shop started getting

regular buyers. In the first month she saved Rs 2,000 which increased to 3,000 in the second month.

Encouraged by this, she decided to set up a small tea stall with the money she saved. This new tea stall which caters to the local villagers and the labourers further boosted the income by Rs 1,000.

Her husband also helps her by supplying some fruits and vegetables to the shop. The monthly family income has now risen to Rs 9,000. "My biggest concern was the education and the proper upbringing of her children. My husband and I could not get the education, but we are determined that they help the family come out of the abject poverty after getting education". Baris said hoping that with more savings she could further expand the shop.



Cherry Marak

Age 23 | Gunapati, Jirang Block

She still looks like an unassuming teenager chasing her dreams but twenty three-year old Cherry belies this explicit impression once she starts revealing her life. A class nine drop out had to comprise with her education following an early marriage.

Cherry who always wanted to become a teacher still charms people her fluent English and could be mistaken for a well-educated woman by many. That could have been true, but the early marriage came with loads of hardships. Her husband who works as a guard in state's PHE department gets a salary of Rs 5000. But for the last many months he has not got a single many from the office.

"The last amount he got was Rs 20,000 which was an accumulated four-month salary. But for last five

months he did not get his salary, though he is going to the officer regularly", she lamented.

Dejected Cherry decided to start a small roadside paan shop to subsist her family, but the income was too small to make both ends meet. Her son who studies in lower KG was her biggest worry as she wants his education to go smoothly.

Cherry who is the member of village youth group created under HRDP was the part of youth exposure trip to RRTC and attended an orientation programme in SACH's Nongpoh office, learnt as to how the rural youth can change their destiny though micro enterprises.

Following this, she applied for financial support under the initiative and decided to extend her paan stall to a

grocery shop. She did that with the Rs 15,000. After a few months of hard work, she now earns Rs 4000-4500 per month and does not have to depend on her husband's salary.

"I can now wait for my husband's salary and can feed my family", she said.

Excited by this success which she describes her own, Cherry resumed her education and has written her class 10 exams. "Why not, I can still become a teacher" she replied with confidence when asked whether she would like to follow her dream.



Hubert Syngkli

Age 24 | Belkuri, Umling Block

Eldest of his 7 siblings, Hubert is class 12th pass but could not go for higher education because of the financial problems. The family which is engaged in agriculture grows paddy for self-consumption and broom cultivation which fetches it a meager Rs 20,000 annually. This was insufficient for a large family.

Desperate to enroll in a graduation course, Hubert did think of taking an educational loan but dropped the idea after realising that he won't be able to repay it. Further, he was bearing the burden of other siblings who were in schools and required money to complete their basic education.

Hubert says that when he was in class 10, he knew that he would have to discontinue his education to support his family. So, he was looking for opportunity to start a small business

to overcome financial crisis his parents were going through.

He too attended the training on micro enterprise organised by SACH and received support n of Rs 15,000 under HRDP initiative. He set up a grocery shop on the main road of the village so that he could attract the passersby. When he is not around or out to bring the materials for the shops, one of his siblings looks after the shop.

His monthly income of Rs 3000-4000 is crucial for the family, especially for the education of his younger ones.

"The opportunity for me came at the right time as I had given hope to achieve something in life. If I had not grabbed this opportunity, I would be whiling away my time like other unemployed youth in the village", he said with pride. Like Cherry he too

wants to give himself another chance as far as the higher education is concerned. He already has plans to enroll in Open University to do his graduation.



Ritisful Matong

Age 24 | Mawlong, Umling Block

Youngest of her 6 siblings, Ritisful was running a tea shop in the village before he got the financial support of Rs 15,000 to invest in her small outlet of yarns. The income from the tea shop was too meager to support herself and her aging parents.

Many women in the village are weavers who needed yarns which were not available locally and going to Assam markets meant a huge expenditure on transportation. Ritisful realised that if she expanded her yarn outlet, she can not only earn profit but also help these women.

The village CRP Bindas Syiem who herself is a professional weaver motivated her to attend an orientation programme in SACH's Cluster Resource Center in Nongpoh. Following this she decided to fill her

yarn shop with more varieties of silk, cotton and wool yarns.

After the financial support she got under HRDP she started buying more varieties of yarns in bulk from Sonapur, Assam. "Earlier my outlet did not have enough quantity of yarns to meet the demand in the village. But now the shop is full of yarns of different varieties".

"For example, if I buy a particular yarn from Sonapur at a price of Rs 350 per Kg, I sell it at Rs 450 per Kg. This covers my transport cost and gives me some profit", she said. But the sale depends on the season. The demand is high during the winters.

According to Bindas, Ritisful's efforts have also attracted weavers from other villages too. "It is her efforts that the weavers in Mawlong are

producing more", she said.

Today, Ritisful is not only self-dependent is also helping the village weavers expanding their businesses.

Livestock

Art of rearing and reaping benefits



Decades ago, the promotion of livestock was borne out of the perception that it will create a level playing field for the landless in the rural areas. But now it is no more purely an egalitarian agenda. The agrarian distress witnessed over a couple of decades and the dwindling farm incomes have compelled the policy makers to rope in all the sections of rural population for the livestock promotion. Now it is seen as a vital component of family nutrition and source of livelihoods in rural economy. The HRDP in Meghalaya is encouraging the people in the intervention villages to take to livestock on a bigger scale in order to improve their incomes. The case studies conducted after the completion of the first year of HRPD have revealed encouraging results. Though practiced traditionally in Meghalaya livestock promotion in HRDP villages got into different mode with major focus on its scientific management. For this, the livestock groups (Piggery, Goatery, Poultry, Fishries) were promoted according to choices of the people. They were taken to exposure trip (Goat Trust, Lucknow, RRTC, KVK and ICAR) and given handholding support.

With the financial support under the project, many livestock farmers have already started earning or are waiting for the right time to sell. Some are even planning for expansion. The following case studies have attempted to delve into the change in their lives following HRDP intervention.



Sriti Matong

Age 39 | Sohtad, Umling Block

The woman who along with her driver husband is bearing the burden of raising a large family is excited about the expansion plans of poultry unit she set up following the financial support under the HRDP. She has 8 children (6 school going), and the family required some extra income to meet the daily expenses.

She started with 20 chicks after going through the orientation and exposure trip facilitated under the initiative. Though 5 chicks died within a week of their purchase, she still managed to rear the rest with extra care.

According to her, the mortality rate of chicks was much higher in the village. After the orientation about the scientific management of the poultry units and the exposure trip, Sriti learnt as to what kind of feed is useful for the chicks and what kind of precaution

should be taken if they fall sick. After months of hard work and care, her 15 chicks (9 male, 6 female) are grown-up now and are ready to be sold. "I can easily sell them at Rs 1200-1300 for each, but am waiting for a better price." I will sell some of them when the emergency arrives. The health check-up of some of her children is her chief priority.

Apart from this, she has sold 100 eggs earning Rs 1200 and sent 80 for hatching to a local farm. But for her, the greatest satisfaction is that her poultry unit has grown bigger by 14 new chicks.

The life of Sriti is changing. She is now planning another poultry unit with newly borne chicks. "Earlier it was very difficult to support a large family. My husband's income was uncertain. The paddy that the family grows is just

sufficient for self-consumption. But she hopes this new venture will definitely make the life easier and her fulfill some of her dreams.



Mit Timung

Age 38 | Umwang Nongbah, Umling Block

Mit's family was struggling to repay a loan of Rs 30,000 to repay when he got the financial support under HRDP. He opted to buy two pregnant goats which gave birth to five male kids. Right now, he is concentrating on setting up one more goatery unit for stabilising his family's economic condition.

Mit, who also owns poultry and piggery units, has five school going children and grows paddy which is consumed by the family. He said that since all of newly born kids are male, they will fetch him good profit once they grow old. The goats that he bought have been covered by insurance under the initiative.

Like other beneficiaries he too attended orientation programme and went on exposure trips to RRTC and

KVK for scientific rearing of the goats with major focus on the feed. For any emergency, he can approach the village community resource person (CRP) who has the medicine kit for the livestock beneficiaries.

"Once a kid fell sick, but the timely intervention by the CRP saved the situation", he said.

He also plans to set up a small roadside shop to sell pineapples which the family has been growing for years with the good profit he is hoping to get from selling and multiplying of goats.



Petrus Manih

Age 30 | Sohtad, Umling Block

Thirty-year old Petrus Manih, who is a part of livestock group in Sohtad Village of Umling block in Meghalaya is a fine example of how enhancement of income through livestock could offer an opportunity to break class barriers.

Petrus lives his with two children and wife in a thatched house with little income from the small piece of land providing little help to support them. Goatery is quite popular in Meghalaya but most people are not aware about scientific methods of cattle rearing, good breed and the feed, and most importantly their medical care.

Under Holistic Rural Development Project, Petrus got a financial support of Rs 12,000, and bought 2 female and one male got few months ago. He also got the training in ICAR on how to take care of them and the insurance

for them under the project.

The female goats have given birth to two kids each. The multiplying of goats has given new hope to Petrus who is now calculating the profit he might earn after they grow up. He is also thinking of expanding his goatery units and reducing his dependence of farm produce.

This has not only changed his life but is an example for the fellow villagers who are looking to him for help in setting up goatery units.

“My life changed, after I joined the livestock group following the intervention of SACH. I put my heart and soul into rearing these goats. Now, I am satisfied and confident about expanding the units once I get the actual figure of the profit” he said.



Agnes Khymdeit

Age 48 | Sohtad, Umling Block

Despite the most tragic moment of her life when her husband passed away in last December, Agnes did not allow the adverse circumstances to dampen her spirit. Her husband Shikkim Ali was the HRDP beneficiary who had bought one male and two female goats.

But within two weeks after that he fell seriously ill leaving her and the three children fending for themselves. The family owns a small piece of land and after his death the burden of all agriculture activities fell on her shoulders. Besides, she has been taking the goats out for grazing as all her children are school going.

As her husband had been sick for a long time, he could not attend any livestock training or go on any exposure trip. But the courage of Agnes made it possible. She reared

the goats well and if she needed any help she would always approach the village CRP for advice. One goat gave birth to a male kid just one and half month ago, while the other is pregnant and may deliver any time in February.

She is planning to sell the kid as she immediately needs some money. As for future she plans to expand the goaterly unit through multiplication.

Her story is one of courage, spirit and hope. "At one point of time I had almost given up, but my love for these animals kept me going." Not only this she is ready to repay the money his husband got under the initiative.

Skilling

The way ahead



Imparting skill training which is integral to the HRDP is aimed at creating livelihood opportunities for the unemployed youth and women. For this, youth groups which were formed underwent the skill training as per their choices.

As revealed in the case studies, these youth and women wanted to do something in life, but the financial crisis

which impacted their education, lack of higher education facilities in the close vicinity and other hurdles put a road-block to their journey of life. HRDP approached and motivated them to adopt one skill or the other and create a space for themselves. They got financial support under the initiative and set up their own businesses or found jobs for themselves.





Ranis Lymphuid

Age 18 | Umpathaw, Umling Block

A class 6 dropout Ranis had lost hope that she could ever stand on her own feet and be independent in her life. All she was doing was slogging it out with the family on the fields.

She tried to resume her studies many times but family's poor financial condition proved to be a stumbling block.

Out of her five siblings, three go to school and the other two help the family in ginger and broom cultivation. The income is not sufficient for the family. In the past, the health problems and other emergencies compelled the family to beg for small loans.

"But the most humiliating for the family was frequent reminders for the repayment. The children are too small to be pushed into some labour

intensive business", said her mothers. She wanted the family to go into broom stick business but that required some money that could not be arranged.

But Ranis's life has started changing for the past few months. So is the family's. Ranis, who is a member of youth group formed in the village under HRDP, went for a training in tailoring. After the successful training she set up a tailoring shop with the financial support of Rs 15,000. She says that shop is part of the house and she does not have to pay the rent.

She earned Rs 2000 in the first month which grew to 2700 in the next month. She is hopeful to increase the business as hers is the first tailoring shop in the village. "Though some women in the village stitch their own family clothes, but are not as skilled as she is. So,

many of them have started coming to my shop for repairing and stitching of new clothes", she said with glee in her eyes.



Silvanus Ingti

Age 23 | Umwang Nongbah, Umling Block

It all took Silvanus Ingti a 23-year old daily wage labourer, only a 35 days training in Food & Beverages to turn his future around. A salary of Rs 8,000 plus free food and accommodation for someone who was born in a poor family and had to discontinue his studies after class 12, this by no means is a small achievement.

Silvanus hails from Umwang Nongbah village, 10 km away from Nongpoh which houses administrative headquarters of Umling block, and would migrate from one place to another in search of livelihoods. His large family had little resources to spend on his higher education. But this could not dampen his spirits. He said that he had to discontinue his studies to help other siblings to complete their education.

It all started on February 17, 2017, when SACH under HDFC Bank Ltd CSR initiative called Holistic Rural Development Project (HRDP) Meghalaya, conducted Youth Orientation Programme in Marmain cluster for 6 villages of Umling Block, in association with IL&FS. Silvanus and his friends were curious to know what it was all about. So, they decided to attend it. The programme was organized to make the youth aware of the livelihood opportunities through skill development. They were informed about various trades the rural youth can learn and increase their income.

Little did they know that this could prove to be a turning point for them. They were all impressed with knowledge imparted to them about the trades. SACH identified and selected the youth interested in various trades. Eventually, he was

selected after he gave his name and other details to SACH team. He chose the training in food and beverages.

On June 27 he left his village and family to undergo a 35-day skill development training in IL&FS, Shillong which helps in placement of successful candidates. He finally got a chance to prove his competence during the training. After, his successful completion of the training at IL&FS he had to undergo one more rounds to get placement. He got a placement in Kerala's Pepper Trail Heritage Plantation Retreat, where he would earn Rs 8,000 per month with free accommodation and food.

Today, not only her parents are proud of him but his fellow villagers and friends want to follow in his footsteps.

Organic farming

Emergence of 'black gold'



Organic farming is a major component of Promotion of sustainable agriculture. Under HRDP more than 120 vermicompost and trichoderma units were set up in the first year in all the intervention villages in Umling and Jirang blocks. For this, farmers and the CRPs were trained as to how and why this is important for soil nutrition and high yield.

Almost all the units are ready for harvesting. While some have sold this organic manure to the farmers growing vegetable through kitchen gardens, others are waiting for vegetable clusters which are coming up in these villages in the second year. Five cemented and permanent vermicompost units are to be set up in 25 villages of these two blocks.





Silbon Syiem

Age 57 | Mawlong, Umling Block

Silbon became the first beneficiary under the HRDP who started selling the vermicompost even before the initiative entered the second year. Not only this, she has also set up the second vermicompost unit and is playing a vital role in spreading awareness about the organic manure.

She set up the low cost vermicompost unit with the help of locally available bamboo and the plastic following the financial help under the project which envisages promotion of organic farming. Vermicompost is a vital component of sustainable agriculture as it enriches soil, increases plant growth and yields and suppresses diseases.

She set up her first vermicompost in July last year and started harvesting in the beginning of November. As the

project was also promoting kitchen gardens in the intervention villages, she began with the local sale to the farmers who opted for kitchen gardens at the rate of Rs 25 per kg. She has already earned Rs 2500 from the sale in the village and recently started selling to the families in Shillong where almost every household grows plants, mainly flowers.

But as the project enters the second year, she is planning to scale up the production by selling more. With focus on vegetable clusters this time, Silbon sees it as an opportunity to link her vermicompost units with the vegetable farmers. Many farmers who have sown vegetables this winter are already in touch with her.

“While I am still selling from my first unit, the second one will be ready for

harvesting very soon. I had bought 1000 worms. They have almost doubled and I have used in the second unit”, she said.



Bindas Syiem

Age 35 | Mawlong, Umling Block

The eloquent and confident Bindas Syiem was the natural and first choice for the residents of Mawlong village to offer her name as HRDP's Community Resource Person (CRP). In a short time, 35-year Bindas who lives with three children and husband, showed her mettle in convincing the farmers about the benefits of organic farming by setting up a vermicompost unit not only at her own house but twenty more in various HRDP intervention villages in Umling and Jirang blocks of Ri-Bhoi district.

Bindas owes her zeal to spread awareness about the benefits of vermicompost using locally available materials to the concern that productivity of many crops in the region is going down due to lack of knowledge about soil nutrition and the farmers opting for chemical fertilizers in the state known for organic farming.

Vermicompost contains water-soluble nutrients and is an excellent, nutrient-rich organic fertilizer and soil conditioner. It is used in farming and small scale sustainable, organic farming.

She was selected as a CRP for her ability to mobilize community and passion to engage in social activities. She attended many orientation programmes SACH facilitated in the region on sustainable agricultural practices with focus on organic farming. Bindas also attended special session in RRTC on benefits of vermicompost and how to set up them. She was also part of many CRP trainings.

Recently, she also held a demonstration to set up trichoderma unit to help farmers increase farm productivity. She says that she wants to turn this passion into a kin of revolution to save crops from harmful effects of chemical

fertilizers.



Kolin Ingtih

Age 40 | Marmain, Umling Block

Kolin Ingtih, 40, a farmer from Marmain Village of Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya never heard of vermi compost till he attended an orientation programme on sustainable agricultural practices held in his village few months ago. The programme was conducted by SACH in association with the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) scientists.

The programme was part of Holistic Rural development Project (HRDP) to improve the agri-livelihoods by promoting sustainable agricultural practices in the project intervention villages in the region.

One of reasons why he was keen to attend the programme was declining soil fertility of his farms. As a result of this, the yield was becoming less and less in the past few years. After consultation with Dr Popiha Bordoloi,

a KVK soil scientist, he realised that his farms soil need lack nutrients and this problem could be addressed by vermicompost. Soon it would ready to be used in farms.

But it was only after the project community resource person (CRP) from the village was taken on a two-day exposure trip to KVK in February this year where CRPs were oriented on the importance of organic farming with a special session on vermi compost, that he decided to build a vermi compost tank, the first in the village. He gained knowledge of constructing the vermi compost tank from village CRP and put it into practice. He used stick, grass, hay, sand, cow dung, sweet (Mithai) 2kg, biodegradable waste to make vermi compost. With health hazards related to use of chemical fertilizers in agricultural produce becoming so

pronounced in the recent years, the new buzz word is the organic food. This is not possible unless the farmers are motivated to take to sustainable agricultural practices with major focus on organic fertilizers.

Though most of crops in Meghalaya are organic by default, the region has seen the use of chemical fertilizers in the recent past. According to the soil scientists, the methods such as vermi compost, is vital not only for protecting the top soil but also for providing several times more nutrients to the soil than other methods can do.

Kolin is indeed an example for farming community in the region

Kitchen Garden

For the family nutrition and health



Almost every household in the villages have a small space which could be used for growing vegetables. A large number of households in the first year of HRDP were provided vegetable seeds to set up kitchen garden to ensure their need of inexpensive, regular and fresh vegetables.

Apart from this, the green vegetables contain nutrients which protect us against diseases. Lack of vegetables,

particularly the green leafy vegetables, leads to malnutrition which causes diseases like anemia and night-blindness.

Farmers were provided seeds such as beans, chilly, pumpkin, lady's finger, bottle gourd, bitter gourd, ridge gourd, brinjal, carrot, beat root and cauliflower. Many of them have grown vegetables successfully in the villages where household water connections were provided.





Indrajeet Das

Age 39 | Ronghilik village of Ribhoi district,

With increased interest in organic and sustainable living, many people are turning to vegetable gardening as a supplement to their family's diet. Food grown in the back yard consumes little space and it is not cost. Organic horticulture, or organic gardening, which so far is popular only in urban spaces needs to be encouraged in the villages to provide good nutritious food.

Keeping this in mind, HRDP seeks to motivate the people in the intervention villages to set up kitchen gardens by facilitating orientation programmes and providing seeds to the farmers. The idea is to help them get access to organic vegetables.

Thirty-nine old Indrajeet Das from Ronghilik village of Ribhoi district, who is only earning member in his family,

has become the first farmer to set up a kitchen garden to meet his daily needs of vegetables. Solely dependent on farming which is becoming increasingly cost intensive, Das feels that the initiative would save him some money which he can use for the education of his children. He is the member of village farmer group and attended several orientation programmes on sustainable agriculture, including the one on kitchen garden.

Helping the families set up kitchen gardens is part of HRDP to improve the agri-livelihoods by promoting sustainable agricultural practices in the project intervention villages in the region. The initiative supported Das and other families by providing seeds such as pumpkin, lady's finger, bottle gourd, bitter gourd, ridge gourd, brinjal, carrot, beat root. The

vegetable crops are now ready to be consumed.

"This will not only save me money but will also provide my family good nutritious food", he said.

