

MegLIFE Annual Report

FY 2023-24



PROJECT FOR COMMUNITY BASED FOREST MANAGEMENT & LIVELIHOODS IMPROVEMENT IN MEGHALAYA



Components

- Sustainable Forest Management
- Community Development & Livelihoods Improvement
- Institutional Strengthening

1 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Meghalaya, a North Eastern state of India covers a geographical area 22,429 km² with elevation ranging from 60 to 1,950 m. The state is broadly divided into three hill regions namely Garo Hills, Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills. Meghalaya is rich in forest resources with a forest cover of 75.6% out of which around 90% of the forests belong to communities, clans or individuals.

Forest areas and forest cover in Meghalaya are decreasing and forest quality is degrading due to various factors described elsewhere. Forest degradation has negatively impacted rural livelihoods, resulted in increased shortage of water for domestic and agricultural use and further deteriorated the soil erosion on farm lands thereby increasing the vulnerability of poor villagers to social and environmental changes. Forest degradation also adversely affected biodiversity and further contributed to man-animal conflicts. In order to address these issues, Government of Meghalaya with the aid of Japan International Cooperation Agency is implementing a Project for “Community-Based Forest Management and Livelihood Improvement in Meghalaya” (MegLIFE). Meghalaya Basin Development Authority is the Project Executing Agency (PEA) for MegLIFE and a State Project Management Unit (SPMU) has been created as Project Implementing Agency (PIA) to manage and implement the project.

1.1 Project Scope & Objectives

The "Project for Community-Based Forest Management and Livelihood Improvement in Meghalaya" (MegLIFE) is being implemented in 22 Blocks spread over 11 districts i.e. West Garo Hills, South West Garo Hills, North Garo Hills, East Garo Hills, South Garo Hills, West Khasi Hills, South West Khasi Hills, Ri-Bhoi, East Khasi Hills, West Jaintia Hills and East Jaintia Hills. Project activities will be carried out in a participatory mode in 500 villages. The project duration is for 10 years from 2019-20 to 2029-30, which is divided into three phases – Preparatory Phase (2 years, April 2020 to March 2022); Implementation Phase (6 years, April 2022 to March 2028), and Consolidation Phase (2 years, April 2028 to March 2030). The total Project budget is Indian Rs. 660 crores

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 conservation of environment, biodiversity, and uplifting of socio-economic conditions of people in the State of Meghalaya.

1.2 MegLIFE Goal, Purpose and Outputs

Project Goal: To contribute to conservation of environment, biodiversity, and uplifting of socio-economic conditions of people in Meghalaya State.

Project Purpose: To restore and conserve natural resources within the target villages in Meghalaya State.

Project Outputs:

1. Restoration of degraded forest areas and forest conservation is implemented through sustainable community forest management.
2. Inclusive community development is promoted by facilitating women and youths' active participation and livelihoods of community people is improved by providing alternative livelihood means.
3. Capability and capacity of community and governmental institutions is strengthened.

1.3 Project Strategies

Participatory Land use planning

The village land and areas in Meghalaya have not been surveyed. This makes the process of land-based planning and land-based interventions challenging and difficult, especially given the diversity of land tenure arrangements at the village level. It also leads to unsystematic changes in the land use. Significant amount of area that supported forest cover have been converted into agriculture/ horticulture crops. Village-level land use planning will efficiently contribute to the requirements of restoration and conservation of forests, by reducing pressure on forest lands and by preventing land conversions. Simultaneously project strategizes to effectively control land use changes especially on private lands. Thus participatory land use planning is a key strategy to ensure all rural stakeholders agree on checking uncontrolled changes of land-use from forest to other.

Strengthening Community based management

The uniqueness of the state is that around 90% of the entire forest area belongs to communities, clans or individuals. The land, forests and other natural resources are managed mostly according to customary laws. The policies, rules and regulations of the State Government and ADCs provide some scope for formalizing these without disturbing the ownership regime.

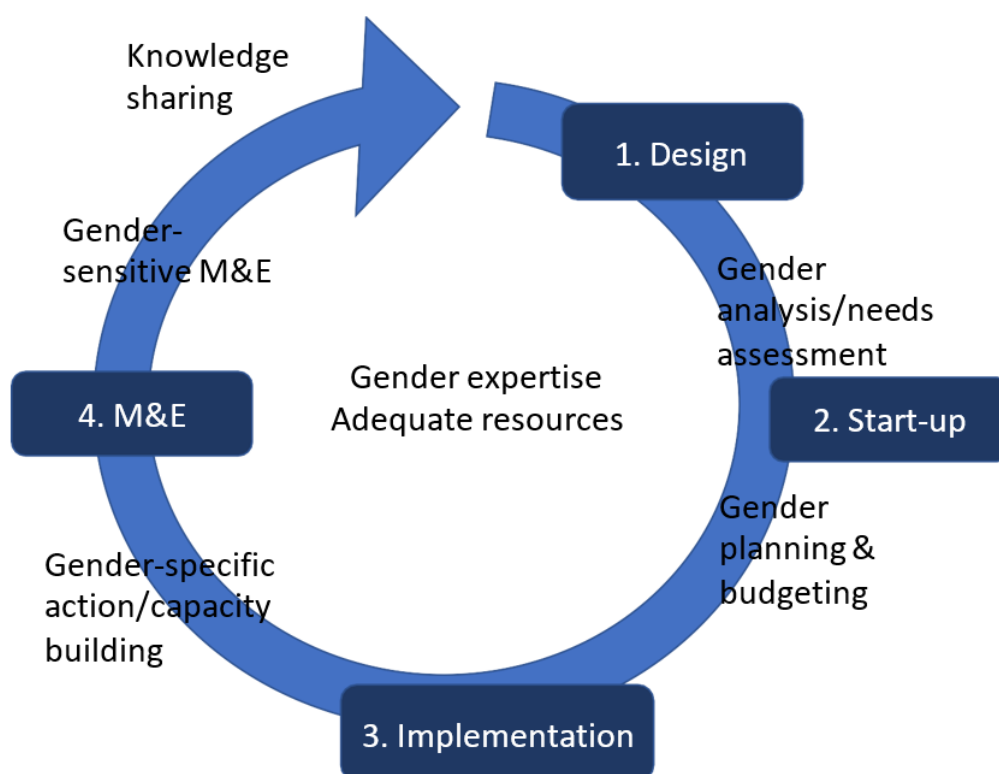
As pressure on forest lands and forest resources increase, ADCs and FED take more active role in formation of Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs), Village Reserve Committees (VRCs), Community Forest Management Committees (CFMCs), Community Reserves (CRs) for protection of forests and for ensuring effective forest management in the larger context of community led traditional forest management practices. To ensure that these efforts yield best results, the focus should be on increasing efficiency of both the communities and institutions and ensuring the sustainability of forest management through capacity development of the communities and concerned institutions and introduction of new advanced scientific techniques for better management of both community and private forests.

Livelihood Enhancement

Livelihood enhancement interventions are designed in such a way so as to reduce pressure on forest lands and sustainable harvest and marketing of forest resources especially NTFPs. Project envisages to introduce alternative income generating sources to people in selected villages and providing them with skill development, institutional platform for aggregation and collective processing and marketing, and financial support. SHGs, farmer producer groups and cooperatives are envisaged as platforms for livelihood enhancement interventions.

Focus on Women, youth and most vulnerable stakeholders

To ensure project benefits reach most needy group and to establish gender mainstreaming and social inclusion firmly in project interventions, the project is focusing on integration of



Gender mainstreaming in Project Cycle

women including single mothers, and youth as well as vulnerable people at community level (single women, elderly, physically challenged people) in the project activities. The project implementation body of this project at community level i.e. Village Project Implementation Committee (VPIC) will have minimum representation of 50% of women members and women in decision making positions. In Income generation activities women would be prioritized and SHGs would be integrated. All the above mentioned stakeholders' contribution in participatory land use planning and participatory micro planning would be emphasized.

Institutional Capacity Building

This is another key strategy with three sub approaches: a) Facilitation to implement existing schemes, b) Capacity development of community institutions and c) Introduction of advanced scientific techniques for data collection and monitoring. A robust MIS – M&E, use of GIS and RS, focus on visibility (Publication and promotion of best practices) are part of key project strategies.

Convergence with the line departments and ongoing schemes

As the project has envisaged a multipronged strategy to ensure sustainable forest management and livelihood enhancement, it has proposed to work closely with the line departments as part of unique implementation strategy. These departments include: Autonomous District Councils, Forest and Environment Department, Soil and Water Conservation Department and Agriculture-Horticulture Department. Convergence with ongoing schemes for community development, natural resource management and livelihoods by various agencies will also add to project investments in these areas.

Alignment with overarching development goals of the governments

The state Government has issued Meghalaya Vision 2030 with a set of seven strategic initiatives which intends for the empowerment of people through participatory planning, sustainable development, and capacity development of people and institutions. The “Project for Community Based Forest Management and Livelihood Improvement in Meghalaya” is contextualized in this larger backdrop. The project will align with relevant state, regional, national policies and development goals.

2 CURRENT PROJECT STATUS & FOCAL ACTIVITIES FOR FY 2023-24

2.1 Project Implementation Status

During the period under report, the Project has accomplished the following:

1. Sustained the established Project Governance Structures & PMU, District Advisory Committees and implementation bodies namely District Project Management Units (DPMUs), Block Project Management Units (BPMUs), Village Project Implementation Committees (VPICs) and Integrated Village Cooperative Societies (IVCSs) for strengthened implementation project activities.
2. Project management systems such as planning and review, monitoring, GIS, accounts, procurement, knowledge management have been made more robust and systematic to a large extent. This was possible due to the constant and periodical review and monitoring meetings conducted at Head Quarters and field offices.
3. Recruitment and staffing of PMU (SPMU, DPMU, BPMU) has been completed. The Director level positions which remain to be filled up is compensated through the recruitment of Technical Specialists at SPMU and field level recruitment of Project Associates. The Project is also constantly supported by MBDA personnel who are working on other projects.
4. Selection of Group 1 Villages and Ground Truthing – 450 villages was completed; including additional appraisal which was needed in some villages regarding feasibility of certain project interventions, and action is being taken through discussions with Clan Heads and Nokmas in a few villages on continuation of project activities given the volatile situation.
5. Microplans have been completed in Batch 1 villages. The digitization of microplans is an innovative approach which has enabled the community and the staff of MegLIFE to revisit the microplans in order to implement the activities agreed to and owned by the community. At the same the hard copies of maps and other data produced by the community under the guidance of BPMs is a great contribution as a baseline data or tool for any future development work even by other development agency or Department. There were some minor issues related to App used in uploading digitized microplans particularly maps. These were sorted out by constant monitoring and discussions with the service provider which was a learning experience.
6. **Guidelines and Manuals** – Guidelines on Community Nursery, Plantations, SWC structures, Seed Calendar, Agroforestry Models were prepared for use and to support field level activities. Nevertheless, these need to be revised as different elements of the Project strategy and actual project implementation arrangements are keep changing and get revised. Most of the management and

technical manuals have been completed as planned. The VPICs were strengthened through periodical meetings and VCFs were motivated and their work periodically monitored for increased community mobilization and community ownership of the project.

7. Contracts with NGOs namely Grameen Sahara, Nongstoin Social Service Society, Jaintia Hills Service Society and BAKDIL which were ended and based on the performance of the personnel worked in the NGOs, MegLIFE directly recruited them obtaining NOC from JICA.
8. Experienced BPMs were promoted as DPMs based rigorous selection process has brought in experienced hands into the project which has helped in implementing the project activities
9. Plantation work was undertaken initially by securing sites from the villages and through a series of activities namely jungle clearance, boundary marking before plantation and after plantation, fencing, fire line marking, pit making, planting and post plantation care. As the Community Nurseries were established during the year, seedlings were lifted from the Nurseries established by Soil and Water Conservation Department as per the agreement with the Project. All the precautionary guidelines were followed in order to avoid damage to seedlings during transportation from the Nurseries to the plantation sites. In addition to this, seedlings were procured from private nurseries for meeting the requirement of plantation target for the year 2023-2024.
10. The Project has also started production of seedlings in Community Nurseries to cater the seedling requirement for plantation season 2024 & 2025. This included selection of ideal site based on water availability, collection of seeds and maintaining community nursery through periodical monitoring and supervision. Survival rate of seedlings in these nurseries are encouraging.
11. Periodical orientation program for the project staff both at SPMU level and block level were organized which were needed among field staff for increased understanding of project needs, strategies and actions.
12. Identification and prioritization and implementation of EPAs has started in all the 500 villages. This strategy has been carefully reviewed. Based on the review those villages which have allotted plantation area for the project has been allotted Community Halls and also the SWC structures.
13. Demarcation of Project village boundaries and preparation of LULC base maps were completed which served as the base map for PLUP and helped in starting and completing the microplans.

2.2 Focal Activities for Year 2023-24

The main activities that the Project was involved in the year 2023-24 include:

1. Finalization and review of Project policies and technical guidelines/ manuals
1. Finalization of Group 2 villages
2. Finalization VPIC formation in Group 1 and Group 2 villages
3. Implementation of EPA activities in Group 1 villages
4. Periodical capacity building and training of Project field staff and VPIC

5. PLUP and Microplanning was completed in Batch 1 villages
6. All the Microplans were digitized and available online with control over accessibility
7. Creation of infrastructure of 426 Community Nurseries
8. Production of Quality Planting Materials for plantation through permanent and community nurseries
9. Establishing and strengthening the Project Management systems including Project Web and Mobile AAP based MIS and M&E systems.



MegLIFE



KEY EVENTS

- ✓ JICA Mission visit -Apr & Nov,23
- ✓ 3rd EC & GB Meeting held on 25th July,23
- ✓ Annual Review Meeting held on 25th Nov,23
- ✓ Project Adopted IVCS Approach for Income Generation Activity
- ✓ 23 VPIC Members sent WB & Tripura JICA Projects for exposure

Physical Achievements

01

- 500 VPICs formed
- 222 PLUP completed

02

- 2787.16 Ha of Plantations
- 426 Community Nurseries
- 116 SWC structures

03

- 222 Microplans Completed
- Onboarding of SHGs and IVCS Started
- Feasibility Study for Enterprise Developemnt initiated

04

- 9682 Persons trained
- LULC Mapping completed for 500 Villages
- Drone Mapping done for 247 villages
- MIS based monitoring established
- Baseline survey completed

05

- 165.21 MMs of PMC utilized

FINANCIAL ACHIEVEMENT

Total Budget INR 838 Cr.

2021-22 INR 7.95 cr.

2022-23 INR 48.76 cr.

2023-24 INR 149.50 cr.

APO 23-24 INR 86.55 cr.

Achievement INR 92.79 cr.

For Further Details Please Contact:-
O/o The Project Director, MegLIFE Project
Shalom Buidling, 2nd Floor, Lower Lachumiere,
Block-3, Shillong-793001, Meghalaya

Ph: 0364-3510190, Email: meglifembda@gmail.com