

MEGHALAYA

MILESTONES



Aajeevika
National Rural Livelihoods Mission
Government of India



Kudumbashree
Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission
Government of Kerala

Kudumbashree-National Resource Organisation

Publisher

This edition is first published in 2023
By Kudumbashree NRO, III Floor, Carmel Towers,
Cotton Hill, Vazuthacaud,
Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala - 695014

Copyright

Kudumbashree National Resource Organization (KS-NRO)

Written by

Shveta Pandhare, Sathi M., Subha Kawatra

Edited by Kudumbashree NRO

Priya Paul (Programme Manager - Convergence), Benazir Nazeem Nawaz, Padmini Ramesh, Ayana Prasad, Arindom Bora

This book wouldn't have been possible without the special support from Sajith Sukumaran (COO, KS-NRO), Memorial Kharmalki (SMM - SISD), Priya Paul (Programme Manager - Convergence), Manu Sankar (Former Programme Manager - Convergence), Michel Momin (DMM-WGH), Eson Khongrymmmai (DMM-SWKH), Riewehkumar Kharsyntiew (DMM-EWKH), Local Resource Group Members under PRI-CBO Convergence Project and Kudumbashree NRO Mentors - Roopa Anchan, Mini Suresh, Swapna Shaju, Jayashree Bhat, Maya Sasidharan

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all who have contributed to this compilation and express our deep appreciation for the MSRLS, Kudumbashree NRO and the countless individuals who have dedicated themselves to the cause of poverty eradication and women's empowerment. Through your unwavering commitment, we witness the dawn of a brighter future for all.

FOREWORD

This book unveils the inspiring tale of how the Kudumbashree National Resource Organization (NRO) with the Meghalaya State Rural Livelihood Society has successfully harnessed the synergies between Traditional village heads, Village employment councils and Community-Based Organisations in Meghalaya, nestled in the northeastern regions of India. It explores the principles, frameworks, and strategies that have shaped this unique collaboration, showcasing how VC, VEC, and CBOs' collective action has merged to ignite unprecedented change.

The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) issued a guideline in the year of 2013 to establish an effective functional relationship between PRI (Panchayati Raj Institutions) and CBOs (Community-Based Organisations), recognising the need for convergence between both. NRO has been piloting the PRI CBO convergence project since 2013 in the western, central, and northeastern parts of India. The project has been successfully piloted in Meghalaya in the year 2021-22. The project effectively strengthened local democracy by empowering communities to actively participate in decision-making processes, promoting inclusive growth, and nurturing a sense of ownership over their village's development

The book is about real-time convergence experiences among the local community and the state's local governance system. It reflects on the community's transformation into agents of change, breaking barriers and creating a new tale of community-led development.



H. DINESHAN IAS
Executive Director
State Poverty Eradication Mission
Government of Kerala
Thiruvananthapuram - 11

C O N T E N T

List of Abbreviations

Introduction

1. LOCAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

15-23

Autonomous District Councils

Traditional local governance

Khasi Governance

Garo Governance

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme

Village Employment Council

Area Employment Council

Block Employment Council

2. MEGHALAYA STATE RURAL LIVELIHOOD SOCIETY (MSRLS)

24-28

Objectives

Coverage of MSRLS

Interventions of MSRLS

3. COMMUNITY BASED ORGANISATIONS

29-31

4. VC-VEC-CBO CONVERGENCE PROJECT

32-37

Kudumbashree Mentor Resource Person

Project Activities

5. PROJECT ORIENTATIONS

38-41

CBO orientation

Orientation to Local Government Institution Representatives

6. LOCAL RESOURCE GROUPS

43-47

Capacity Building of LRGs

Details of trainings

“Breaking Barriers : Devi’s inspiring Path to Empowerment”

7. VILLAGE POVERTY REDUCTION PLAN

49-72

Introduction

Public Goods, Services & Resource Development (PGSRD) as MGNREGA Plan

Objectives

Process Adopted in Meghalaya

Key Learnings

Gram Sabhas

“Turning Stones to build Mountains”

MGNREGA follow up for Incorporation

Entitlement and Livelihood Plan Preparation

Objectives

Process Adopted

VPRP-VLDP Integration

8. LEARNING VISIT TO KERALA

73-77

“The challenges of working with Traditional System of Governance - The case of Dalu Block”

9. DEPARTMENTAL CONVERGENCE

80-81

10. STORIES OF CONVERGENCE FROM FIELD

82-106

Convergence Camps - Entitlement and Livelihood

“Convergence Camp - By the People, of the People, for the People”

Livelihood Interventions and Outcomes

“Farm Livelihood Convergence Camp”

Jackfruit Processing Training

Mushroom Cultivation Training

UDYAM Registration Mela

Cooking Skill Development Initiative

FSSAI License Registration

Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department

Health Department

11. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

107-130

Community Led Plantation Initiative

Nutritional Security Awareness Program & Nutrigarden

Anganwadi Intervention : Anganwadi Level Monitoring & Support Committee

Adolescent Awareness program

Children’s Group Formation

Promoting Adult Literacy

Rally & Awareness Program on Alcoholism & Drug Abuse

12. VO STRENGTHENING

131-132

13. EXIT WORKSHOP

133-135

14. MAJOR LEARNINGS AND REFLECTIONS

136-137

15. MOVING TOWARDS UNIVERSALISATION OF THE PROGRAMME

138-140

CONCLUSION

141

ABBREVIATIONS

ADC	Autonomous District Council
APO	Assistant Program Officer
AWC	Anganwadi Centre
ALMSC	Anganwadi Level Monitoring and Support Committee
BDO	Block Development Officer
BMMU	Block Mission Management Unit
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CLF	Cluster level federation
CSS	Centrally Sponsored Schemes
DMMU	District Mission Management Unit
KCC	Kisan Credit card
LRG	Local Resource Group
LSGI	Local Self-Government Institutions
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MSRLS	Meghalaya state Rural Livelihood Society
MSME	Micro Small Medium Enterprises
NRO	National resource Organisation
NSAP	National Social Assistance Pension
OB	Office Bearers
PAP	Panchayat Apprenticeship Program
PGSRD	Public Goods, Services and Resource Development
PMJJBY	Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana
PMSBY	Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana
PO	Project Officer
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions
SDP	Social development Plan
SHG	Self Help Group
SRLM	State Rural Livelihood Mission
SSS	State Sponsored Schemes
VC	Village council
VEC	Village Employment Council
VLDP	Village Level Development Plan
VO	Village Organization
VPRP	Village Poverty Reduction Plan
TA	Technical Assistant



INTRODUCTION

Meghalaya State Rural Livelihoods Society (MSRLS) and Kudumbashree - National Resource Organisation, with joint effort and collaboration, implemented the (Panchayati Raj Institutions - Community Based Organisation) PRI- CBO Convergence Project in a pilot phase from 2021-2022. Meghalaya has a unique governance structure under Schedule VI of the Constitution of India; the project was renamed the VC-VEC-CBO convergence (Village Council - Village Employment Council - Community Based Organisation) project to best suit the context of the state. It was envisioned that through the project, a strong correlation between the community institutions and local governance structures would be established to make local development inclusive and participatory. The project's significant stakeholders include wide-ranging stakeholders such as the women's federations, traditional governance institutions such as the Village Councils and Nokma, the Village Employment Councils (VECs), and the line departments. The project's core was to strengthen democracy and enhance women's participation in governance.

This book entails an overarching understanding of the VC-VEC-CBO Convergence Project rolled out in Meghalaya and its significant impact on the community, which is making substantial improvements in their lives and local development. An attempt is made to briefly describe the functioning and structure of Meghalaya State Rural Livelihood Society (MSRLS) and Kudumbashree - National Resource Organisation (NRO), the two partnering agencies for the project, and the unique local

governance structure in Meghalaya, especially in the Garo and Khasi regions, which have been the significant intervention areas in the project. The strengthening of the community, especially the women's federations, to become the catalysts for change, benefiting the families and community and creating decisive models for participatory local governance is illustrated here.

The book also narrates the strategy and process the VC-VEC-CBO Convergence Project has followed to achieve its objectives:

- ◆ Developing a dedicated resource pool, known as the Local Resource Groups (LRGs), to implement the programme at the grassroots level
- ◆ The capacity Building of the Community-Based Organisations
- ◆ Capacity Building of the Local Government Institutions
- ◆ Participatory and democratic planning processes for the identification of issues and demands of the community
- ◆ Nurturing collaborative efforts between the LSGI and CBO to meet the community needs and effective democracy
- ◆ Engaging with line departments as efficient service delivery agents for the rural communities and targeted beneficiaries.

The booklet also details the activities, strategies, policies, and tools adopted to achieve the objectives mentioned earlier. The entry-level point on convergence with MGNREGA as the most promoted livelihood programme of



the Government and has direct convergence with PRIs and departments is one of the key strategies in the project that is illustrated for better understanding and for replication when it comes to the project's second phase. The MGNREGA Plan preparation has seen a major change in the rural communities of Meghalaya. For the very first time, these federations have collected for village-level planning and exercised their agency to identify community needs. This was done with the collaboration of the village heads and the VECs. This was the first instance where the community witnessed collaborative action and participatory planning.

The Village Poverty Reduction Plan, a tool to identify community demand through planning exercises, is another significant intervention in the project. This was conducted in all the intervention SHGs as an awareness generation tool on various entitlement schemes and livelihood support for which a citizen is eligible. Through the interactive and participatory process, demands were collected, and the right-holders were identified to address the multidimensional aspects of poverty. This exercise also involved the line departments to achieve the demands through different initiatives such as Convergence Camps and Awareness Camps. The book also covers other initiatives such as Gram Sabha Mobilisation,

VO Strengthening Activity, Panchayat Apprenticeship Program (PAP), etc., that have also played a vital role in shaping the rollout and strengthening the CBOs and local government Institutions.

It narrates the project's visible outcome with case studies, testimonials, and best practices. Several community-led initiatives that the SHG members have undertaken to address social issues such as Drug Abuse and alcoholism, lack of proper infrastructure such as the Anganwadi, adult literacy campaigns, etc. that highlight the community as agents of social change and to practise collaboration and convergence within their own village is narrated in the last part of the booklet.

The path to achieving the objectives was not smooth. Understanding the challenges, too, is crucial, and they are mentioned in the last part, along with how we have addressed them. This will help when the state decides to universalise the project on its own.

The project's outcome points out the change in the functioning of the governance structures in the intervention areas, primarily that the governance institutions and the women federations have started interacting and collaborating more frequently for local needs. It was a journey of empowerment for women and the community as a whole.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

The Constitution of India recognised the need to protect the interests and promote the cultural identity of the diverse communities and tribal groups residing in the region by making special provisions. In 1950, Garo Hills, United Khasi and Jaintia Hills were brought under the purview of the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution. The creation of Meghalaya in 1972 resulted in the formation of three Autonomous District Councils (ADC) to develop the hills. The three councils are

The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council

The Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council

The Garo Hills Autonomous District Council

These ADCs serve as local self-government bodies responsible for the administration and development of their respective regions. The creation of Autonomous District Councils in Meghalaya has played a crucial role in preserving the distinct identities, customs, and traditions of the tribal communities.

Autonomous District Council

The key responsibilities of Hills Autonomous District Councils include appointing or succeeding chiefs and headmen, managing land and forests, regulating money lending and trading by non-tribals, overseeing matters of marriage, divorce, and property inheritance, managing ponds, ferries, road transport, and waterways, regulating markets, preserving social customs, and levying and collecting taxes.

However, in 1972, an amendment was made to the Indian constitution. This amendment, known as Paragraph 12A, established that in case of any conflict, the state government's decision would prevail. As a result, the legislative autonomy of the district councils was reduced, and they were required to closely coordinate with and seek clearance from the District Council Affairs Department of the Government of Meghalaya before the Governor approved of any bills passed by the Autonomous District Councils.

<p>Legislative Powers</p>	<p>Power to make laws related to allotment and use of land, management of forests, establishment and management of villages and towns, regulation of shifting cultivation, inheritance of property, and social customs, with the Governor's assent</p>
<p>Judicial Powers</p>	<p>Powers to constitute village courts, with appellate powers with the Council</p> <p>Subordinate/additional district courts – EC appoints, with Governor's approval</p> <p>In Garo Hills, village courts consist of the Lasker of the village and two members elected by the village council. Nokma is the chairman of Village courts</p>
<p>Executive Powers</p>	<p>Appointment and succession of chiefs/headmen</p> <p>Establish and manage primary schools, dispensaries, markets, cattle pounds, fisheries, roads, waterways and road transport, and forests (excluding reserve forests)</p>
<p>Financial Powers</p>	<p>Prepare and pass budgets, assess and collect revenue, impose taxes on trades and markets, collect tolls, manage licences, and lease/share in royalties collected by the state government</p>



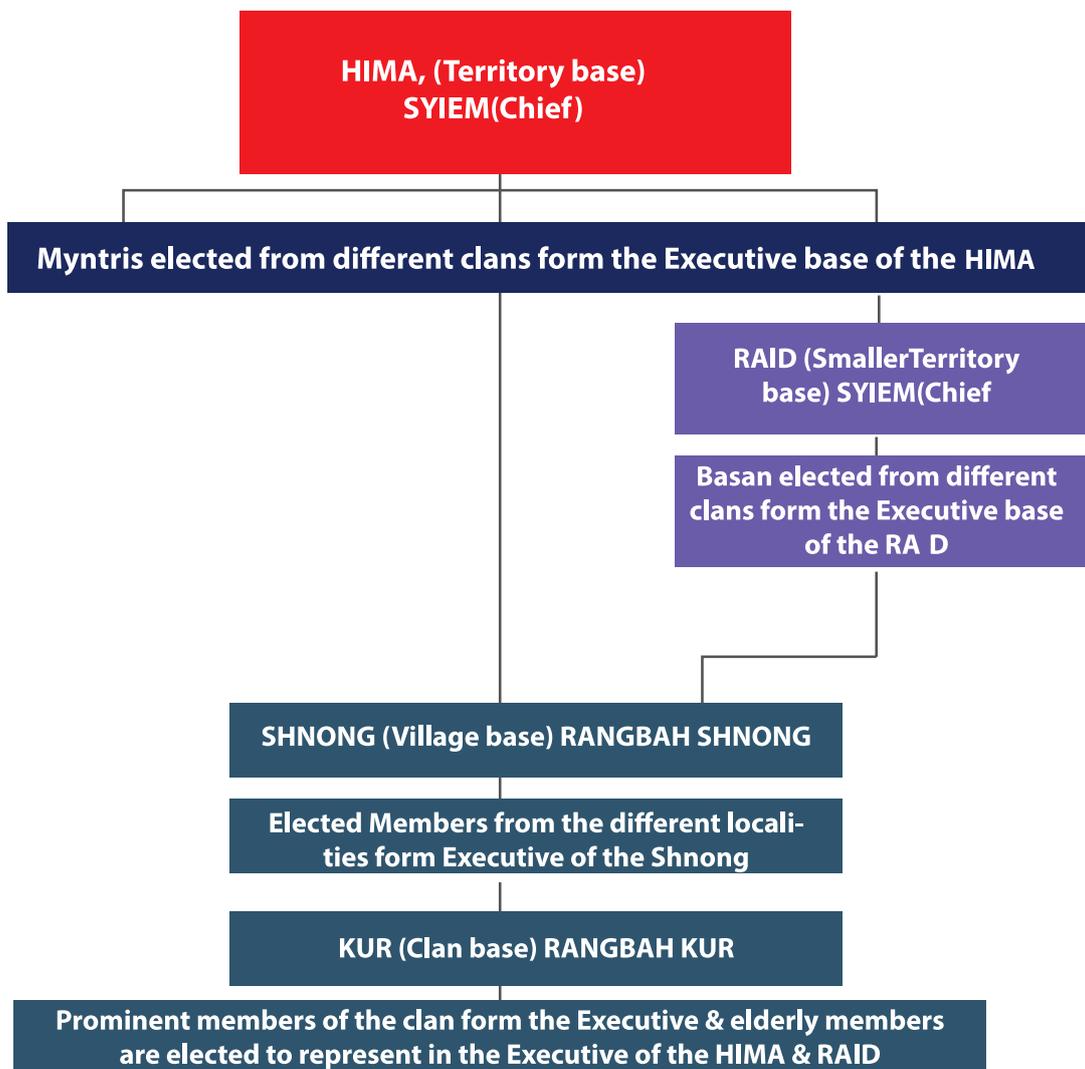
Traditional Local Governance

The traditional governance systems in Meghalaya have a rich history deeply rooted in the cultural network of the indigenous communities. The tribal communities have their own unique systems of governance that play a vital role in maintaining order, resolving disputes, and preserving their cultural heritage. The state of Meghalaya is home to four major tribes. However, the implementation of the VC-VEC-CBO Convergence project was limited to the Khasi and Garo hills. Consequently, it is essential to understand the local self-governance institutions specific to the Khasi and Garo tribes. The traditional governance institutions have major cultural significance and authority related to land affairs, but there are limited funds available with the village level institutions for development purposes.

01 Khasi Local Self Governance

In the Khasi region, the traditional governance system revolved around the institution of the Syiemship. The Syiem, who was the paramount chief, held significant authority and acted as the custodian of the people’s welfare. The Syiem’s position was hereditary, passed down through the matrilineal line, and governed a specific territory known as the Hima. Under the Syiem, the hierarchy extended to the Dorbar Hima (State Council), Dorbar Raid (Regional Council), and Dorbar Shnong (Village Council). These councils, comprising local elders and representatives, played important roles in decision-making, dispute resolution, and community welfare at their respective levels.

DETAILS ON HIERARCHY OF KHASI TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS

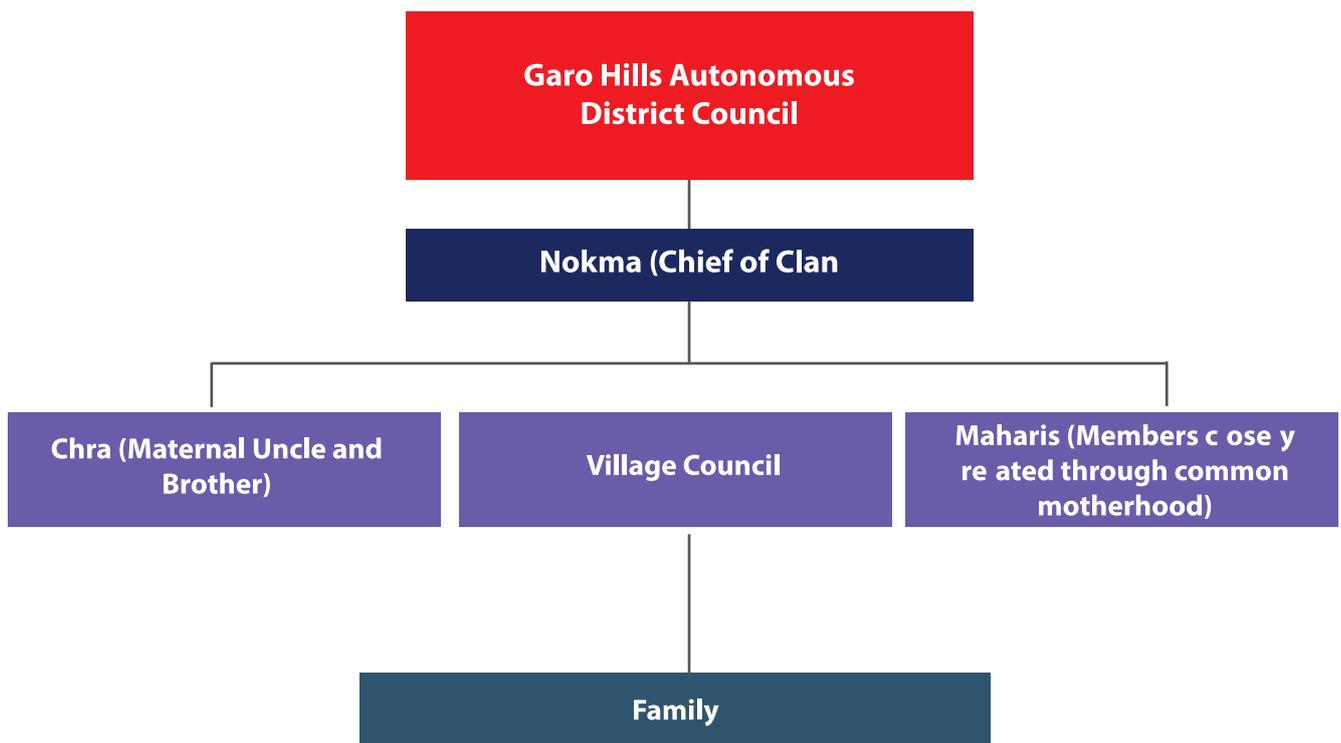


Source: Khasi traditional institutional structure (Dasgupta and Symlieh 2006)

02

Garro Local Self-Governance

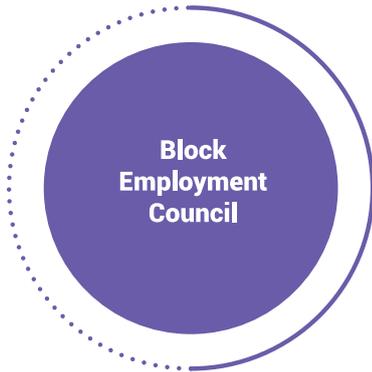
In the Garo region, the traditional governance structure is hereditary in nature and is of single tier. The Nokma, selected from the matrilineal clan, served as the village head and held significant authority in local matters. The Nokma is responsible for maintaining harmony, settling disputes, and overseeing the welfare of the community. This position is hereditary and symbolised the power vested in the lineage of the youngest daughter in the family.



In the Garo region, the traditional governance structure is hereditary in nature and is of single tier. The Nokma, selected from the matrilineal clan, served as the village head and held significant authority in local matters. The Nokma is responsible for maintaining harmony, settling disputes, and overseeing the welfare of the community. This position is hereditary and symbolised the power vested in the lineage of the youngest daughter in the family.

Source: Garo traditional institutional structure (Dasgupta and Symlich 2006)

These traditional governance systems in Meghalaya have provided a framework for self-governance, community participation, and the preservation of cultural norms and practices. While modern administrative structures have been introduced, the traditional systems continue to hold significance and influence decisions in various aspects of community life, including land management, dispute resolution, and cultural celebrations. Efforts are being made to strike a balance between the traditional systems and the requirements of modern governance in Meghalaya.



Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act & Village Employment Council

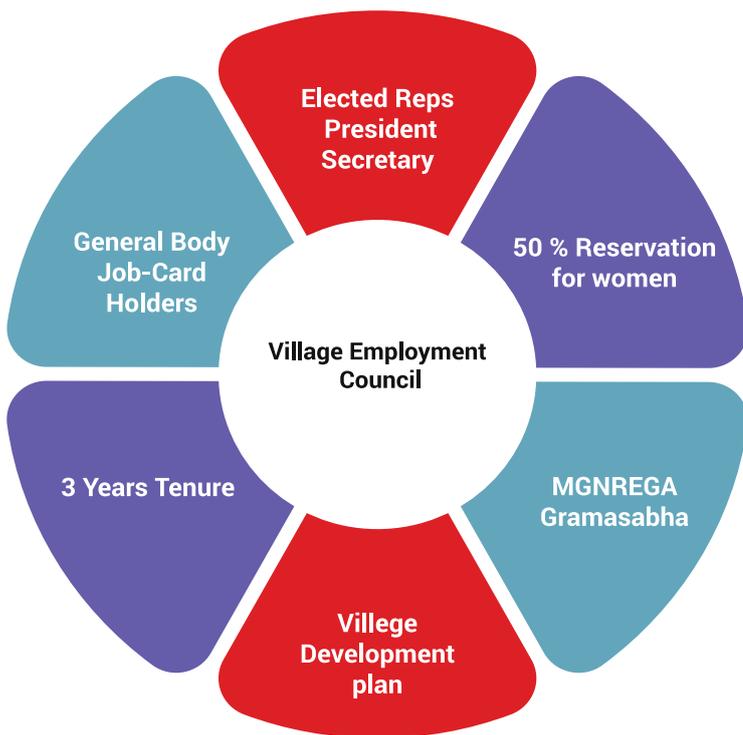
Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act Scheme is a right-based demand driven wage employment programme for people in rural areas irrespective of their status of BPL or APL. Although the programme was launched in the country on February 2, 2006, the actual implementation of the programme in Meghalaya did not commence immediately with the rest of the country. This was due to the fact that the State of Meghalaya is not within the purview of Part IX of the Constitution. Neither Panchayati Raj Institutions nor local councils/authorities were in existence in the State at the time when MGNREGA was launched. In absence of these Institutions, the State had to explore its own institutional arrangement resembling a Panchayati Raj Institution and constitute them right from the scratch for the implementation of MGNREGA. Hence the state formed Village Employment Councils (VECs) to operate at the village level, the Area Employment Councils (AECs) function at the cluster of villages level, the Block Employment Councils (BECs) operate at the block level, and the District Employment Councils (DECs) operate at the district level. These empowered councils are responsible for implementing MGNREGA programs at their respective levels. The composition, powers, functions and responsibilities of Village Employment Councils (VECs) are briefly explained below.

01 Village Employment Council

The Village Employment Council (VEC) is established at the village level in accordance with paragraph 7A of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. Each village forms a VEC, consisting of male and female heads of households. Previously, it was customary for the headman of the traditional local governance structure to automatically assume the role of the president in the Village Employment Council (VEC). However, in recent times, the state authorities have introduced a new directive stating that the post of VEC president should be filled through elections. The Village Employment Council (VEC) in Meghalaya comprises three elected members holding key positions within the council: The President, Secretary, and the Treasurer. The office bearers of the VEC, including the secretary, serve on a voluntary basis. The general body of the VEC consists of the job card holders from the village, ensuring broad representation and active participation from the local community.

The VEC is empowered with the responsibilities and functions of a Gram Sabha as prescribed by the MGNREGS. It has been observed that the participation

of women in the village gatherings (Dorbar Shnong) in the Khasi area is relatively low. Similarly, in the Garo areas, the functions of the Nokma are typically handled by the husband, even though both communities follow matrilineal systems. To encourage women's participation in the schemes and village activities, a reservation policy was implemented by the state, reserving 50% of the seats for women. Additionally, the VEC has been designated as the nodal agency responsible for implementing the Village Level Development Plan (VLDP), known as Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) in the other parts of the country.



02

Area Employment Councils (AEC)

The Area Employment Councils are constituted at the Cluster level comprising villages within a 2.5km radius. There are more than three VECs within the jurisdiction area of an AEC. All the areas should be within the existing Gram Sevak Circle of the Block as far as practicable. Any dispute of settling the jurisdiction of the AEC is referred to the Deputy Commissioner for final decision.

This council consists of 3 elected representatives from each VEC falling under the jurisdiction area of one AEC. The election process may be in the presence of at-least 70% attendance of the VEC members and the Project Officer (PO) or representative from the MGNREGA Department. The total members of the AEC should not exceed 20 and 30% thirty percent of the members of AEC must be women.

The office bearers of the AEC comprise of an elected Chairperson, Secretary and members, who will be elected in the presence of PO or representatives. Chairperson and Secretary will be empowered by the Council to operate a joint bank account in a Nationalised Bank under the jurisdictional area of the Council or its vicinity in the name of the Council and maintain proper accounts/records of all receipts and disbursements/transactions. The members of the AEC will work on a voluntary basis.

The jurisdiction area of AECs shall be identified by the Block Development Officer in consultation and concurrence with the VECs. The AECs function in close coordination with the involvement of the members of the VEC while implementing, monitoring and supervising the works of each village. All the works must be clearly approved and sanctioned for each village separately.

Each AEC is vested with powers, functions, roles and responsibilities of a Gram Panchayat by the District Programme Officer/Programme Officer.

03 **Block Employment Councils (BEC)**

The existing Block Selection Committee has been notified as Block Employment Councils (BECs) for every block. Each Block Employment Council is vested with the responsibilities of the Block Panchayat. It finalises and approves block level plan which consists of a consolidated shelf of projects to be taken up under the scheme, supervises and monitors the projects taken up in the block and performs such other functions as may be assigned by the District Employment Council (DEC) and the State Council. Each BEC is vested with the powers, functions, roles and responsibilities of a Block Panchayat. The BEC will identify the works to the tune of 25% of the total entitled allocation. These works shall be preferably those works involving two or more villages. However, the works shall be implemented by involving the concerned VECs.

The BEC shall be guided by the PO/BDO. The BDOs and the line departments shall execute the works identified and approved by the BEC as per the provisions of NREGS by actively involving VECs. The BDOs and the line departments are identified as implementing agencies based on the technical expertise available to them for the 8 different permissible categories of works under schedule I of NREG Act, 2005.

Meghalaya State Rural Livelihoods Society (MSRLS)

To implement NRLM in the state, an autonomous society named Meghalaya State Rural Livelihood Society (MSRLS) was created in 2011. Meghalaya State Rural Livelihoods Society (MSRLS) is registered under the Society Act, 1983. The Government of Meghalaya promoted MSRLS under the Community and Rural Development Department. MSRLS is the nodal agency that implements NRLM within the state.

MSRLS serves as a vision to

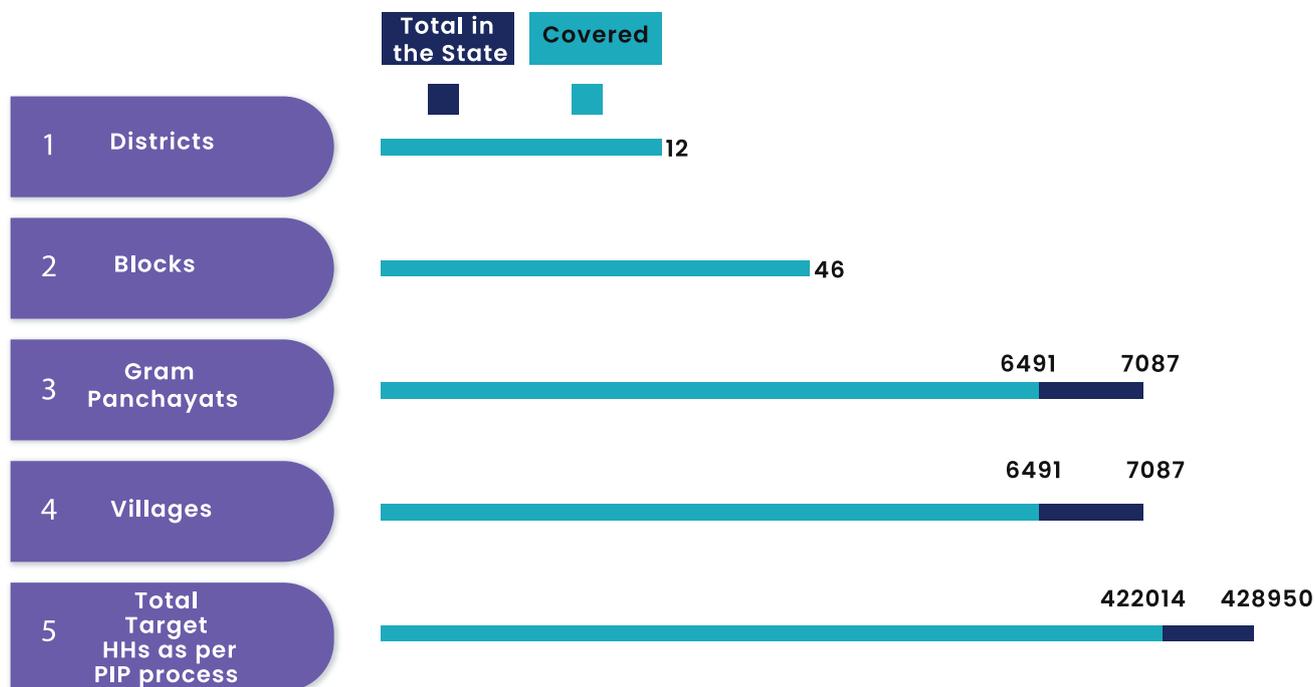
“ Redressing poverty in the rural areas by identifying the poor and vulnerable, empowering them through SHGs and their federations and providing them livelihoods opportunity. ”

Objectives of MSRLS:

- ◆ Facilitate and empower active and affinity-based groups of the rural poor.
- ◆ Enhance their capability, understanding and provide opportunities for the rural poor, to work for their development.
- ◆ Strengthen the institutions of the poor (SHGs, VOs, CLFs, etc.) to become a responsive, inclusive, accountable, social and sustainable body representing and assisting the poor.
- ◆ Facilitate and open new avenues for taking up various livelihood activities

The Chief Secretary of the state is appointed as the Chairperson of the Governing Council of the MSRLS. Other members of the General Body include Secretaries of other relevant departments/ government and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chief Operating Officer of the MSRLS. An Executive Committee consisting of the Principal Secretary C & RD Department, members of other relevant departments/government and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chief Operating Officer of the MSRLS. The Executive Committee is entrusted with the responsibility of taking decisions on all important matters in the MSRLS. The Organogram of the MSRLS is as given below:

Coverage of MSRLS:



Interventions of MSRLS:

MSRLS as per the NRLM Guidelines, have a wide range of thematics and programmes that aims to attain the objectives of the society. It has a dedicated pool of teams for each thematic that tirelessly supports the effective implementation of the programmes. The VC-VEC-CBO Convergence Project falls under the Social Inclusion & Social Development thematic of MSRLS. Few other themes and programmes of MSRLS are mentioned below:

SECTORS**ROLE/SUBJECT**

INSTITUTION BUILDING &
CAPACITY BUILDING (ICB)

- ◆ Institution Building
- ◆ Capacity Building
- ◆ Strengthening of CBOs

FINANCIAL INCLUSION (FI)

- ◆ Facilitate & ensuring the releases of Community Funds (SF, RF, CIF & VRF)
- ◆ Bank Linkages (Opening of Bank Account & Credit Linkages)
- ◆ Financial Literacy
- ◆ Facilitate Block Coordinator – Agents
- ◆ Saksham Centre
- ◆ Enrollment of Social Security Scheme

LIVELIHOODS

(A) Farm Livelihoods

- ◆ Agri related intervention
- ◆ Livestock related intervention
- ◆ Other Convergence Project

(B) Non-Farm Livelihoods

- ◆ Micro-Enterprises Development
- ◆ Skill Building Training
- ◆ Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Program(SVEP)
- ◆ Other Convergence Project

SOCIAL INCLUSION &
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
(SISD)

- ◆ Social Inclusion (promotion of Special Groups), Implementation of Vulnerability Reduction Fund (VRF)
- ◆ Food Nutrition Health and Wash (FNHW)
- ◆ Gender Intervention
- ◆ PRI-CBO Convergence
- ◆ VPRP - Village Poverty Reduction Plan
- ◆ Special Project - "Ultra Poor Graduation Approach"
- ◆ State Convergence Project through SHG network

MONITORING & EVALUATION

- ◆ Monitoring Programme performance
- ◆ Field Assessment
- ◆ Conducting Studies etc
- ◆ Driving LoKOS implementation

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION (KMC)

- ◆ Documentation of Case study and Success Stories
- ◆ Developing short clips and videos on various success stories
- ◆ Managing media and coverage of various activities of MSRLS
- ◆ Developing weekly newsletters etc

MIS & IT

- ◆ Monthly Progress Report of MSRLS in NRLM Portal
- ◆ Providing technical support (IT related) to all Mission team
- ◆ Data uploading in the NRLM MIS portal

FINANCE

- ◆ Financial Management of MSRLS
- ◆ Implementation of eFMAS





COMMUNITY BASED ORGANISATIONS

01 Self Help Group

The Self Help Group structure under the Meghalaya State Rural Livelihoods Society operates through a three-tier federated structure, encompassing SHGs at the neighbourhood level, Village Organizations (VOs) at the village level, and Cluster Level Federations (CLFs) at the cluster level. SHGs typically consist of 10-15 members, with key positions such as President, Secretary, and Bookkeeper. In the intervention clusters, most SHGs adhere to the *Panchasutra* (the five principles of SHG functioning) and conduct regular weekly meetings. While many SHGs maintain well-documented records, others demonstrate comparatively lower levels of performance. A core practice among SHGs is promoting regular savings as a fundamental aspect of financial management. The amount saved per member varies across SHGs, reflecting the group's specific objectives and the financial capacities of its members. On average, each member saves Rs. 15 per week. Although initial savings were modest when SHGs were first formed in these regions, over time, members have significantly increased their contributions. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, SHGs displayed strong loan repayment performance. However, the pandemic severely disrupted livelihoods, impacting repayment rates across many SHGs. Despite these challenges, SHGs continue to focus on increasing their savings, though only a limited number of SHGs and VOs have transitioned into collective income-generating and convergence activities.

02 Village Organizations (VOs)

Village Organizations serve as the second level of federation in the community-based structure. These organisations are formed when 10-20 SHGs from nearby villages come together, with two representatives from each SHG participating in the VO. Due to the sparse population distribution in Meghalaya, VOs often span two to three villages, with SHGs from multiple areas joining forces to form a single VO. This pattern is particularly noticeable in the blocks of Mawkyrwat, Rongram, and Dalu. Conversely, in Mairang, VOs are formed irrespective of the number of SHGs, often involving SHGs from the same hamlet.

The convergence project has prioritised these VOs as essential units of engagement, given their critical role in fostering collaboration, coordination, and collective action among SHGs at a broader level. In the *VC-VEC-CBO* Convergence Project, VOs have taken ownership of various activities and actively engage with village-level authorities, such as Village Heads and Village Employment Councils (VECs). VO members have been instrumental in identifying Local Resource Groups, supporting them, and mobilising entire villages for project activities and decision-making processes.

03 Cluster Level Federations (CLFs)

The formation of Cluster Level Federations is still ongoing in Meghalaya, with many CLFs being relatively new. Each CLF is governed by six office bearers: President, Vice President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer, and Bookkeeper. The Block Mission Management Unit (BMMU) has provided training to CLF members on their roles, responsibilities, and long-term vision.

The vision-building exercises at the CLF are effectively facilitated by the Cluster Coordinators, resulting in CLFs undertaking various activities focused on social development. These activities include raising awareness about issues such as child marriage and alcoholism. The members of the CLFs demonstrate a high level of responsibility and seriousness in addressing these matters. Many CLFs are led by strong and capable leaders who are dedicated to their roles.

In addition to their social initiatives, CLFs receive extensive training from various line departments, such as agriculture-related programs, mushroom cultivation, and food processing etc. CLF members actively follow up on these training sessions, applying the skills and knowledge gained to benefit their communities.

A key event in the CLF calendar is the Annual Gathering Meeting (AGM), which takes place in every CLF. During this event, members organise a large program where they present their

vision and showcase the work they have accomplished so far. The AGM brings together the entire general body of SHGs under the CLF, providing a platform for reflection, planning, and celebration of their unity and collective achievements.

Given the relatively early stage of development for many Cluster Level Federations (CLFs), the VC-VEC-CBO Convergence Project has prioritised comprehensive capacity-building efforts to ensure that these federations can effectively fulfil their roles. The primary goal of these efforts is to empower CLFs to provide strong, consistent support to VO, which are essential in coordinating activities and facilitating collaboration among SHGs

To achieve this, the project has implemented a series of targeted interventions designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of CLF members. These capacity-building initiatives focus on developing the leadership, organisational, and financial management abilities necessary for CLFs to function as strong, independent institutions. Additionally, significant emphasis has been placed on building relationships between CLFs and key line departments at the block level, such as agriculture, animal husbandry, rural development, and social welfare etc. This convergence with government departments is essential for ensuring that CLFs can access resources, technical support, and training to better serve the communities they represent.

By strengthening both their internal capacities and external connections, the CLFs are being positioned to take on a more prominent role in promoting convergence and driving community development and ensuring that SHGs and VOs receive the guidance and support needed to thrive.

VC-VEC-CBO CONVERGENCE PROJECT

In 2012, Kudumbashree was designated as a National Resource Organization (NRO) by NRLM in two domains viz., PRI-CBO Convergence and Enterprises development. Since then, Kudumbashree NRO has become an implementing partner in PRI-CBO Convergence Project in multiple states across the country, ranging from Karnataka to Uttar Pradesh and even reaching Arunachal Pradesh. As of 2022, the Kudumbashree NRO has collaborated with 15 states, each with its unique governance strategies. In Meghalaya, the project commenced in the year 2021.

The PRI-CBO (Panchayati Raj Institutions-Community Based Organization) Convergence project of Kudumbashree NRO aims to promote collaboration and synergy between Local Self-Government Institutions and women's self-help group networks (CBOs). Its primary objective is to enhance access to entitlements and promote active community participation in local governance. Inspired by the successful development model in Kerala, this project has established a framework where these two key stakeholders, namely the Local Self-Government Institutions and the Self-Help Group network, join together to drive village development.

The governance systems varied across states where Kudumbashree NRO operated. While some states followed a three-tier Panchayati Raj system, others adopted a two-tier system based on factors such as population and geography. Meghalaya, falling under the 6th schedule of the Indian Constitution, did not have the institutional framework of Panchayati Raj Institutions. The NRO team customised strategies to align with the specific needs and governance frameworks of each state, resulting in successful collaborations and positive outcomes. In preparation for the project in Meghalaya, a two-day Recce visit was conducted by the Kudumbashree NRO team to gain firsthand insights from the field. Subsequently, in-depth discussions were held with the Meghalaya State Rural Livelihood Society to develop a customised strategy for the state. Taking into account the unique local context of the Khasi and Garo areas, the project was renamed to VC-VEC-CBO Convergence.

The project in Meghalaya aims to bring local self-governments (Rangbah Shnong/ Nokma and VEC) and Community Based Organisations on the same platform to achieve holistic development of the village. It strives to improve the quality of life of rural communities and to provide social security schemes to the poor and marginalised sections. To implement the project at the selected districts and blocks KS-NRO positioned State Project Coordinators (SPCs), Field Coordinators (FCs) and Mentor Resource Persons. There was 1 SPC at the state level, 2 FCs at the district level and 4 Mentors at the block level.

01

Kudumbashree NRO Mentor Resource Person

The Kudumbashree Mentors are from the Kudumbashree Community network and have extensive experience and knowledge gained through their involvement in the Kudumbashree program and working with Local Self Governments and different stakeholders as Community Development Society (CDS) Chairperson or other relevant positions. They are selected as mentors due to their expertise and understanding of the Kudumbashree approach and its principles. They have hands-on experience in implementing various Kudumbashree initiatives, working with the SHG network and PRIs, and supporting the empowerment of women and marginalised communities.

In partner states, the Mentors act as facilitators who bring together the Local Self-Government Institutions and CBOs to foster collaboration and effective convergence efforts. They help establish communication channels and facilitate interactions regarding convergence between the two entities. Their role as mentors is to share their knowledge, offer guidance, provide technical assistance, and build the capacity of stakeholders involved in the convergence process.

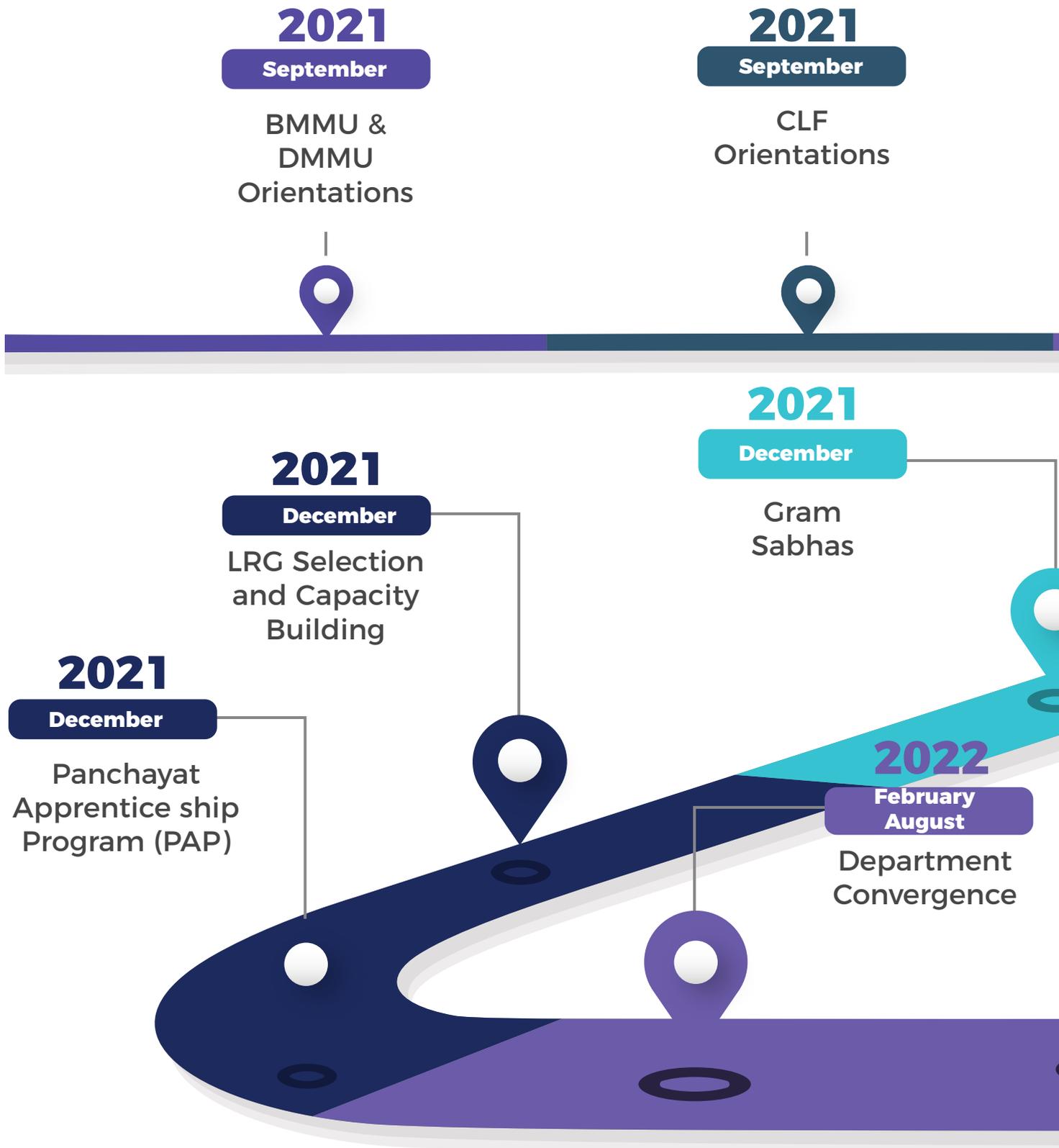
In the state of Meghalaya, 4 Mentor Resource Persons were engaged at the block level to provide handholding support to the locally selected cadres, develop capacity of the CBOs, and in planning of activities.

S. NO	District Name	Block Name	Total Villages	Total Village Organizations	NRO Mentor allocation
1.	Eastern West Khasi Hills	Mairang	16	16	1
2.	South West Khasi Hills	Mawkyrwat	18	15	1
3.	West Garo Hills	Dalu	32	29	1
4.	West Garo Hills	Rongram	14	9	1

02

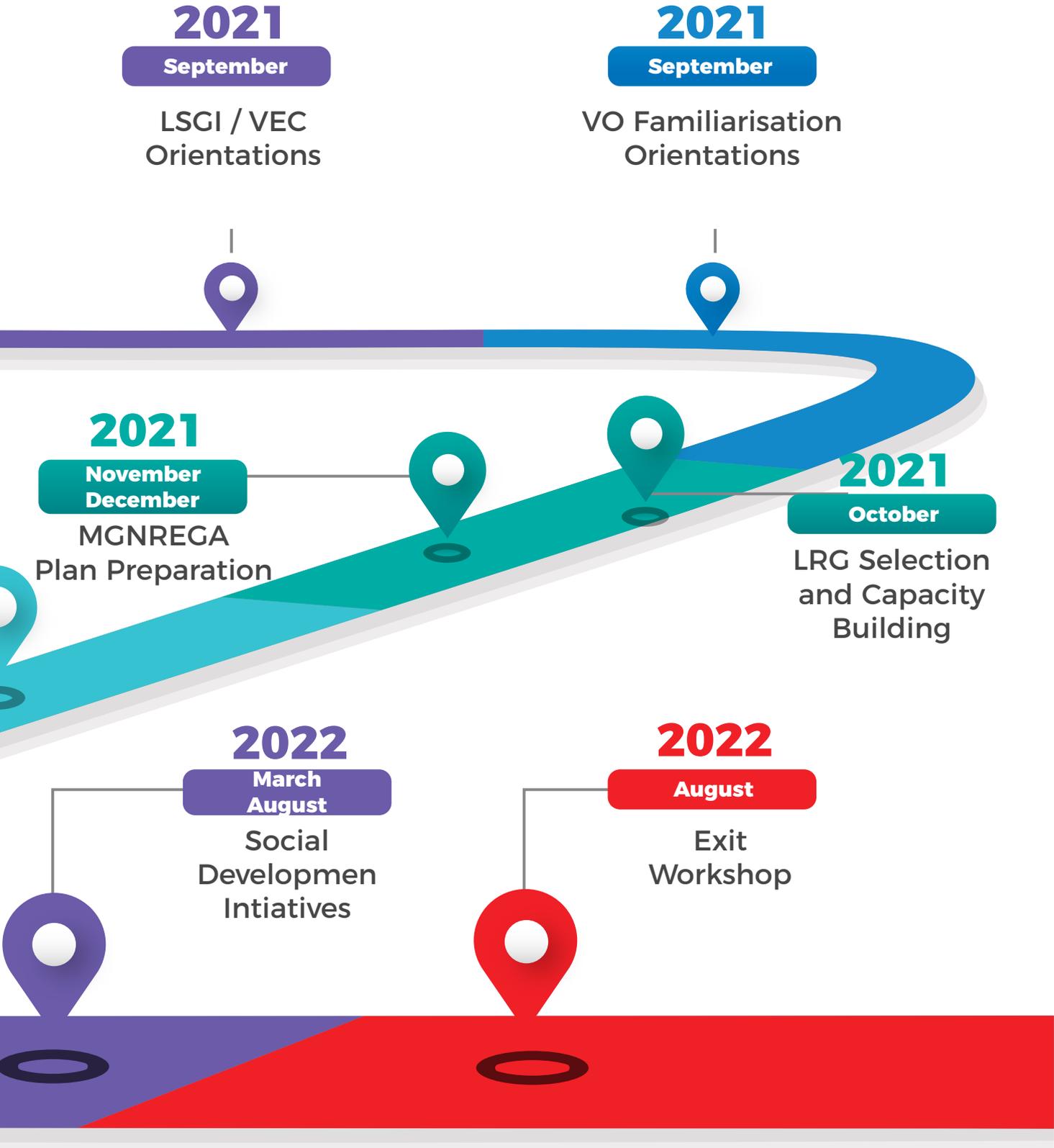
Project Activities undertaken

The VC-VEC-CBO Convergence Project was started in the month of September 2021 and ended in August 2022 in 4 blocks (Rongram, Dalu, Mairang and Mawkyrwat) of 3 districts (West Garo Hills, Eastern West Khasi Hills and South West Khasi Hills). All the major stakeholders, such as the community-based Organisation, local government institutions, and line departments, were engaged at all levels to ensure the effective delivery of



services. The primary focus was to attain synergy and coordination between the stakeholders to meet the demands and needs of the community and pave the way for development. The project activities and the timeline are described in detail below:

The following sections of the book gives a detailed description of the project activities and the processes adopted to execute them.



Timeline	Project Activities	Objectives
September 2021	Project Orientation to DMMU & BMMU staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ To orient the DMMU and BMMU officials on the VC-VEC-CBO Convergence Project ◆ To plan the upcoming activities
September 2021	Project Orientation to the CLFs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ To orient the CLF members on the VC-VEC-CBO Convergence Project ◆ To familiarise the CLFs on their role in the Project
September 2021	Project Orientation to the LSGIs/VECs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ To orient VC/VEC members on the VC-VEC-CBO Convergence Project and the significance of convergence activities ◆ To build a rapport between the VC/VECs and VO leaders
September 2021	VO familiarisation orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ To orient the VO members on the VC-VEC-CBO Convergence Project ◆ To identify potential LRGs and build rapport with the VO members
October 2021	Selection and Capacity Building of LRGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ To select a dedicated resource pool-LRGs, from each VO to drive the VC-VEC-CBO Convergence Project Activities ◆ Capacity Building of LRGs to to develop them into active agents of the project
November-December 2021	MGNREGA Plan Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ To make the MGNREGS planning process participatory, transparent and inclusive of SHG members ◆ To motivate the VOs to actively engage in identifying community needs

December 2021	Orientation on Gram Sabhas and Mobilisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ To enhance women participation in Gram Sabhas ◆ To present and submit the MGNREGS Plans by the VO members to the VECs
December 2021	VPRP preparation and submission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ To familiarise the Community on entitlement schemes and benefits made available from the government ◆ To prepare a demand plan and identify the poorest of the poor in a fair, transparent and participatory manner
December 2021	Kerala Exposure Visit: Panchayat Apprenticeship Programme (PAP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ To gain insights on the convergence model between local governance, line departments and CBO network ◆ To understand the collaborative efforts in implementing low-cost or no-cost initiatives
February-August 2022	Departmental Convergence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ To meet the VPRP demands through collaborative action with the Line Departments ◆ To ensure effective service delivery to the beneficiaries
March-August 2022	Social Development Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ To address social issues affecting the communities through joint efforts ◆ To enhance VO and CLF leadership in community development activities
August 2022	Exit Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ To present the outcomes of the project to all the stakeholders and share the experiences and learnings from the pilot phase ◆ To strategize the sustainability of the project activities and way forward without the support of Kudumbashree NRO mentors

PROJECT ORIENTATION

01 Orientation of CBOs

The orientations regarding the project were conducted at the CLF and VO level aiming to familiarise the members with the project objectives and processes and also to initiate the Local Resource Group member identification process in each village. The orientation sessions consist of ice-breaking activities, creating a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, allowing the CBO members to become familiarised with the team and to build rapport among themselves.

During the orientation, Mentors shared their experiences and journey so far, inspiring the participants with their valuable insights. A small activity was organised to introduce the concept of the convergence project. Volunteers were selected to represent key institutions such as Nokma, VC, VEC, VO, CLF, and line departments. Participants were presented with a scenario, such as a





water problem in their village, and were asked to identify the approach and relevant stakeholders for addressing the issue. In response, participants voluntarily stood up and shared their proposed plan of action, highlighting the importance of discussing the problem in the VO meeting, seeking support from the CLF, engaging with the VEC and VC members, and collectively contacting the concerned line departments to address their request. This activity effectively probed participants about the process of problem-solving through collaborative efforts. Furthermore, information about the various line departments present at the block and district levels was shared with the participants, enhancing their understanding of the institutional landscape involved in the convergence project. At the end of the orientation, a list was prepared among women candidates who expressed interest to join as LRGs in the PRI-CBO convergence project.



Table: Details of CBO Orientation across blocks

Block	CLF Orientations		VO Orientations	
	Timeline	Participants	Timeline	Participants
Mairang	3rd September 2021	10	4th September to 2nd November	Representatives from 15 VOs
Rongram	4 September 2021	13	5th September to 30th September	Representatives from 9 VOs
Mawkyrwat	7th September, 2021	12	8th September to 1st October	Representatives from 13 VOs
Dalu	9th September 2021	34	11th September to 3rd October 2021	Representatives from 19 VOs

The concept of convergence received a warm response from the CBO members, who expressed their belief that this platform, which brings together CBOs and line departments, would serve as a catalyst for realising their aspirations for their village and for establishing it as a model community. Many participants expressed keen interest in further exploring the concept of convergence and eagerly expressed their intention to attend upcoming meetings to deepen their understanding and actively engage in the process.





02 Orientation to Local Government Institution representatives

Project orientations were organised for representatives of VECs and traditional government institutions with the objective of familiarising them with the project and its goals. The orientations provided a platform to introduce the key activities of the project, including its objectives and implementation strategies.

During the orientation sessions, presentations were delivered to the representatives, highlighting the importance of their roles and responsibilities in contributing to the project activities for inclusive development. The sessions also emphasised the significance of effective collaboration between the VECs, traditional government institutions, and other stakeholders involved in the project.

Table: Details of Project orientation to representatives of VECs and traditional governance

Block	Timeline	Total Participants
Mairang	6th September 2021	41
Rongram	20th September 2021	25
Mawkyrwat	10th September, 2021	34
Dalu	10 September 2021	50

Discussions were held to address any queries or concerns raised by the participants, ensuring a clear understanding of their roles and the expected outcomes. Additionally, the orientations provided an opportunity for the participants to share their insights, experiences, and suggestions, fostering a collaborative and inclusive approach towards project implementation.

Reflections

This orientation served as a crucial platform for building mutual trust and understanding between the project team and the representatives of VECs and traditional governance bodies. Through these interactions, the participants gained a comprehensive understanding of the project objectives, the strategies employed, and the expected outcomes.

Overall, the project orientations aimed to establish a strong foundation for effective collaboration and engagement between the project team, VEC representatives and traditional governance bodies. By aligning their efforts and working together, the goal of achieving holistic and sustainable development in the community is realised.

LOCAL RESOURCE GROUPS (LRGs)

In order to empower the local community and ensure their access to entitlements and the ability to voice their grievances, active participation and organisation of the local people is essential. This led to the creation of Local Resource Groups (LRGs) as part of the VC-VEC-CBO convergence project. The primary aim of creating a pool of LRGs was to facilitate demand-driven actions and promote the socio-economic well-being of the local population. To ensure active participation of local community members in governance, the LRG members are carefully selected from the SHG network within each village. The number of LRG members selected depends on the number of SHGs and the population of the village, typically ranging from two to three individuals. These LRG members are active SHG participants who have a strong interest in working for the betterment of the community and the development of villages.

The Local Resource Groups (LRGs) are the cadres of the project and hold a plethora of responsibilities that are listed below:

- I LRGs to work closely with the VOs and strengthens its sub-committees
- II Act as a bridge between VO and VEC/ VC and line departments
- III Work with VO, VC/VEC to create awareness about rights and entitlements of the people
- IV Supporting the VOs to raise their demand and participate in Gram Sabha



- V Support SHG federations in planning and demand generation for Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP)/Village Level Development Plan (VLDP)
- VI Follow up on the demands with the VEC/VC and line departments along with the VOs
- VII Training and awareness sessions on various Governmental and departmental schemes & programs to the VO (OB) members.
- VIII Working closely with VC/VEC members towards decision making in support of the CBO
- IX Liasoning with village stakeholders i.e. VC/VEC members, Church Leaders, Youth Clubs and department officials on a regular basis
- X Conducting innovative activities in convergence with various line departments
- XI Assisting VOs in identifying social issues and work for social development
- XII Other activities as when required by MSRLS in coordination with NRO Team

The selection process for LRG members was a one-day workshop conducted at the block level. During this workshop, members that were nominated by the Village Organizations underwent a selection process in which the Cluster Level Federation (CLF) president and Block officials were



involved in the selection panel. The nominees were selected from their respective villages based on their dedication, commitment and potential to contribute effectively to the socio-economic well-being of the local people. The selection process involved an extempore and a written exam to assess their basic understanding on the CBO network as well as their communication skills.

It was imperative for the selected candidates to possess a certain level of confidence and knowledge about their village, ability to work with village heads and become the torch bearers for the entire community. The VOs played a major role in the entire process from nominating the interested candidates to logistically supporting the selection process of LRGs.

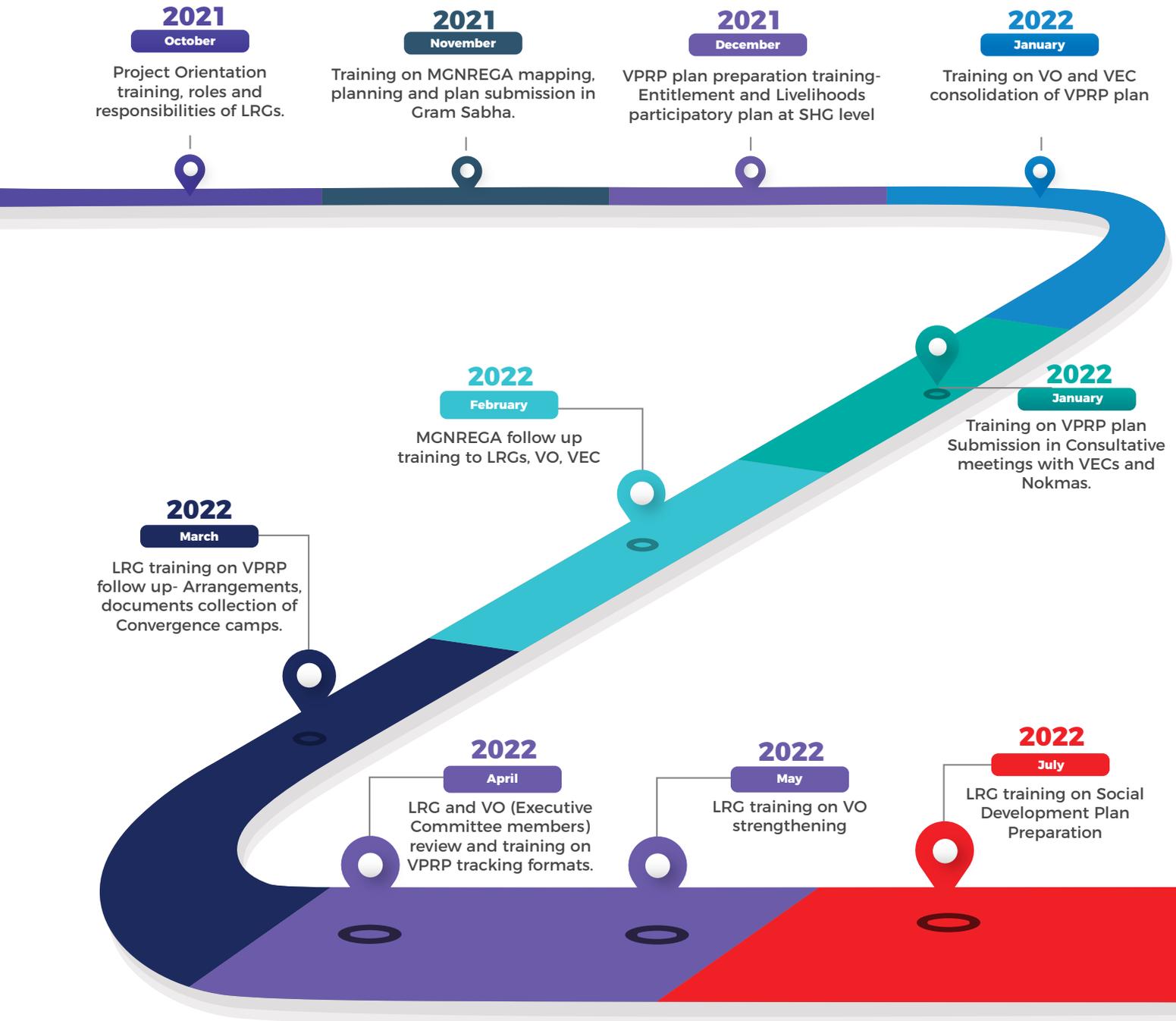




Capacity Building of LRGs

The LRGs are the project's foot soldiers, and developing their capability is essential for a successful rollout. Capacity Building of the LRGs has been a continuous activity across the project timeline. The Mentors have provided handholding support to the LRGs to conduct the project activities efficiently and to evolve as good leaders for the community. The capacity building process has been both through a series of interactive training as well as through conducting activities. The newly selected LRGs underwent their first round of training primarily to learn about the Kudumbashree National Resource Organisation and the significance and goal of the VC/VEC CBO Convergence initiative. A brief introduction was given on the working of SRLM's SHG network, Village Council, Village Employment Council and Line department. To be able to work with several stakeholders, it was imperative for the LRGs to understand the functioning and responsibilities of each of them. Further the roles and responsibilities of Local Resource Groups in VC-VEC-CBO convergence project was explained. The training sessions emphasised on the concepts of harmony, collectivism, and unity among the cadres as well as bringing VO and VC-VEC together to collaborate on village development. The first phase of the training was also aimed to familiarise the LRGs on the objective and process of the Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP) and Village Level Development Plan (VLDP).

Throughout a one-year period, a comprehensive range of training sessions are provided to the Local Resource Groups (LRGs) as listed below.



"Breaking Barriers: Devi's Inspiring Path to Empowerment"

A story of a dedicated Local Resource Group Member

The VEC-CBO Convergence Project of Kudumbashree NRO started in Dalu block of Meghalaya in September 2021. The project has been implemented in Bilcham Cluster level federation that covers 32 villages under Dalu block. This story came from a village called Dusinggre where Mrs. Devi D Sagma was selected as an LRG cadre by the project team. Devi lives in Dusinggre village with her husband and a daughter. She joined SHG four years back. She always aspired to work outside the comfort zone and helped herself to keep the aspirations alive.

In the monthly VO meeting, the Kudumbashree NRO mentor oriented the VO members about the project. This brought the attention of Devi's thoughts. She decided to work as a cadre under the project. She went through the selection process and got selected as a Local Resource Group member. After attending the Personality and Skill Development training conducted by the team, Devi underwent many personality changes and became a very active cadre.

At first her husband wasn't supportive, and felt it would be overburdening for her. But soon he realised that this work can give her a sense of satisfaction and can also contribute financially to the family. Devi started working in the village under the project. She was actively engaged in the MGNREGA Plan Preparation. A woman who never talked in front of more than 10 people has facilitated the whole village mapping exercise consisting of more than 100 people. In spite of her pregnancy, she worked hard and tried to overcome the difficulties of the field, so that the difficulties of pregnancy would not hinder the work area.

She was unable to attend the training after delivery, so she sent her husband for the VPRP training and also ensured to contact her colleagues to clarify doubts regarding the VPRP plan preparation. On the 14th day of delivery, she carried her new born baby and went to the VPRP plan preparation, climbed up the hills with a 14 days old baby, and went to 6 SHGs to conduct VPRP. She tried to collect the data from outside SHG as well in a very short time as her determination of working for the vulnerable was very strong. In addition, Devi participated in the Mushroom cultivation training conducted in the village by the Horticulture Department and inspired women to join and adapt the new skills. Devi is still busy in the developmental activities in the village, even though she has not yet received the payment. But helping others in distress is her primary motivation. Confident and self-sufficient Devi is a role model for her elder daughter.



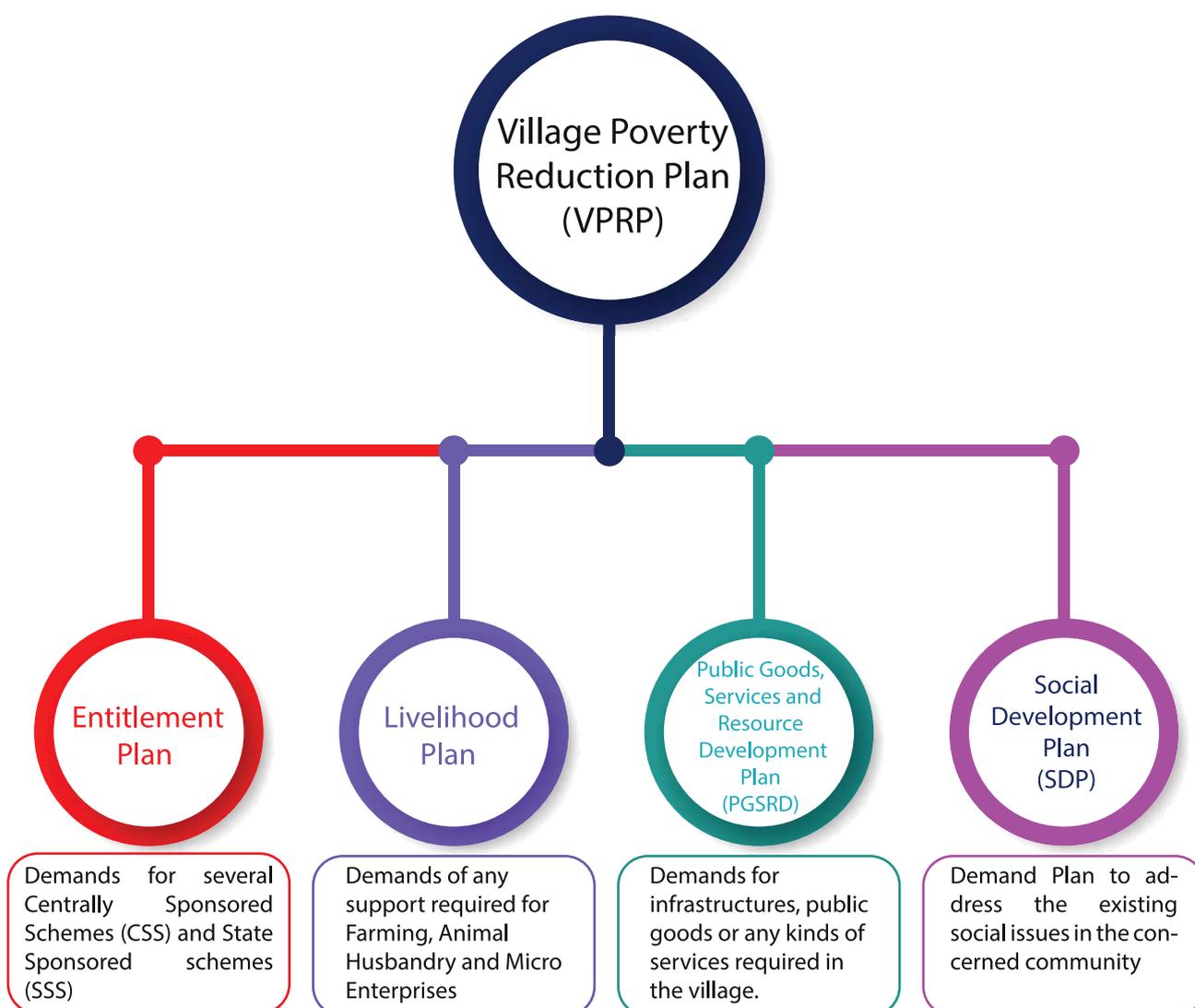
“

Devi : It is a very challenging job. Villagers were not only rude to me, they also misunderstood me and this often landed me in trouble. But despite all the negative feelings I always worked hard and managed to sleep everyday with the feeling of satisfaction.

VILLAGE POVERTY REDUCTION PLAN (VPRP)

Introduction

The Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP) holds significant importance as a major component of the project. It was conducted to generate demand from the community in a very engaging and participatory manner through the SHGs and the VOs. The VPRP is a community-driven demand plan facilitated by SHG and VO members. It serves as a platform to collect community demands and is structured around four key components, which are illustrated in image below:



The first two plans, namely the Entitlement and Livelihoods plans, are designed to cater to the individual and group needs and are prepared at the SHG level. On the other hand, the other two plans are formulated at the VO level to address the demands at the community or village level. The entire VPRP process educated the community about various Central and State sponsored Schemes as well as the types of assistance that the Line Departments might provide for the promotion and improvement of their livelihoods.

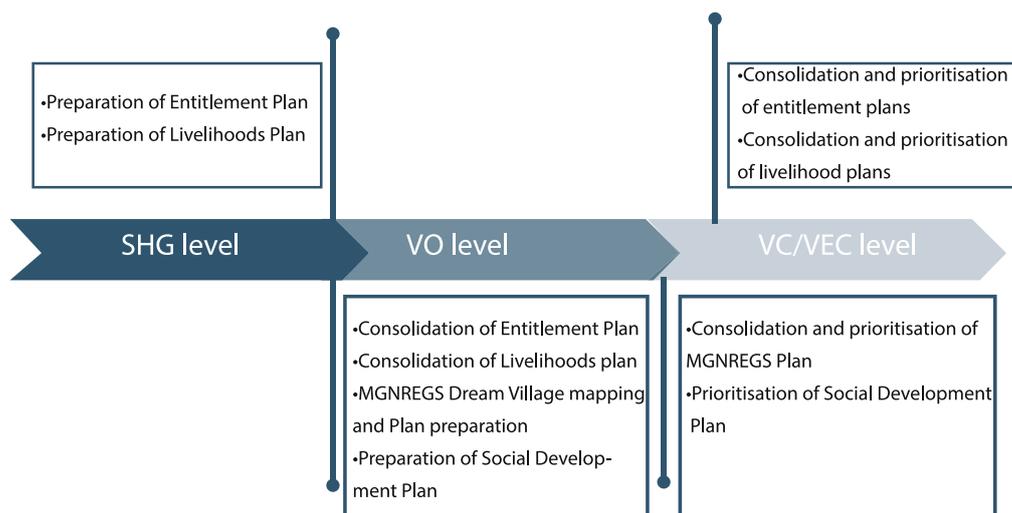
The VPRP process in Meghalaya was initiated and carried out throughout the year, with the preparation of customised VPRP sub-plans modified to the specific need and condition of the state. Once prepared, the plans were submitted to the district/block level line departments, the village head and the VEC. The strategy was to fulfil the VPRP requirements through the line departments, as Meghalaya operates as a sixth schedule state where local authorities do not receive any funds under VLDP (Village Level Development Plan).

The process of VPRP is very extensive as it aims to not leave even a single household behind in the planning process. It is an inclusive and transparent demand generation activity which not only provides awareness to the community on benefits of several government schemes but also gives a scope to the people to identify their needs and voice out their demands. It also equips the CBO network to systematically collect and collate the demands and present it to the concerned stakeholder for its proper addressal in order to materialise the needs of the community. Therefore, the process establishes the CBO network as a well-equipped stakeholder to address community issues and needs. The VPRP process is conducted at both the SHG level as well as at the VO level depending on the type of demand. Individual and group demands are raised at the SHG level whereas the Community demands are raised at the VO level. Therefore, all the SHGs prepare the Entitlement Plan and the Livelihood Plan to generate demands on several entitlement schemes and livelihood demands (such Farming, Animal Husbandry, Micro Enterprises demands).

In Meghalaya, a total of 11 entitlement schemes were covered such as - MGNREGA Job card, National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) - Widow Pension, Disability Pension and Old Age Pension, Ration Card, Ujjwala Gas, Saubhagya, Health Card, Aadhar Card, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) and Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY). Each SHG, through a discussion, ranked the beneficiaries based on their vulnerabilities to ensure that the neediest person gets the benefit first.

After the SHGs have prepared the plan, at VO level the demand of beneficiaries outside the SHG Level after which the demands were consolidated and re-ranked. Along with this, the MGNREGA plan through a resource mapping exercise and the Social Development plan is also prepared to list down the communities' needs for Public Goods, Services and Resource Development and the Social issues that needs to be addressed.

The VO level plans are then consolidated at the Village level and submitted to the village heads, VEC and respective line departments. Throughout the process of VPRP, the LRGs have been the facilitators for the CBO and they have supported the SHG members to prepare the plans.



Public Goods, Services and Resource Development Plan (PGSRD) as MGNREGA Plan

In September 2021, the Village Employment Councils (VECs) in Meghalaya were in the process of preparing their Annual Action Plans (AAP). After carefully understanding the structure and the nuances of the VIth schedule, the NRO team customised the nationally followed VPRP to suit the social and structural realities of Meghalaya. As the VECs were primarily involved in implementing MGNREGA-related activities and in order to integrate community demands and foster participatory planning, the Public Goods Services and Resource Development Plan (PGSRD) of VPRP was reframed to act as a sub plan for preparation of MGNREGA Plan. MGNREGA Plan was carried out by the VO Members using a mapping exercise to identify the public goods and resources that are required in the village.

The objective of the process was:

- ◆ To systematically and comprehensively gather the demands of Public Goods, Services, and Resource Development from the communities, in accordance with the state guidelines for MGNREGA implementation.
- ◆ To gain a deep understanding of the social and structural dynamics in Meghalaya and adapt the preparation and submission process of VPRP accordingly.
- ◆ To devise a strategic approach that ensures the delivery of maximum impact and benefits to the community.

Process adopted in Meghalaya

- ◆ The process began with a block-level meeting with the Assistant Program Officer (APO) of the MGNREGA Department to understand the timeline and methodology of MGNREGA plan preparation, along with the permissible list of works and the types of demands considered based on local factors.
- ◆ A comprehensive plan format was created to systematically capture the demands of the communities, adhering to the MGNREGA Permissible list of works.
- ◆ Beyond the infrastructure demands, a different section was incorporated into the plan to accommodate the service-related demands identified by the communities.
- ◆ Letters from APO-MGNREGA Department were issued to all VECs to provide support to the VOs and LRGs while they prepare the plan for the first time. The letter also directed to incorporate the VPRP - MGNREGA demands into the final MGNREGA Annual Action Plan prepared by the VECs.
- ◆ Two Days Training was imparted to the LRGs on the concept, process, and methodology of conducting the entire process of MGNREGA Plan Preparation.





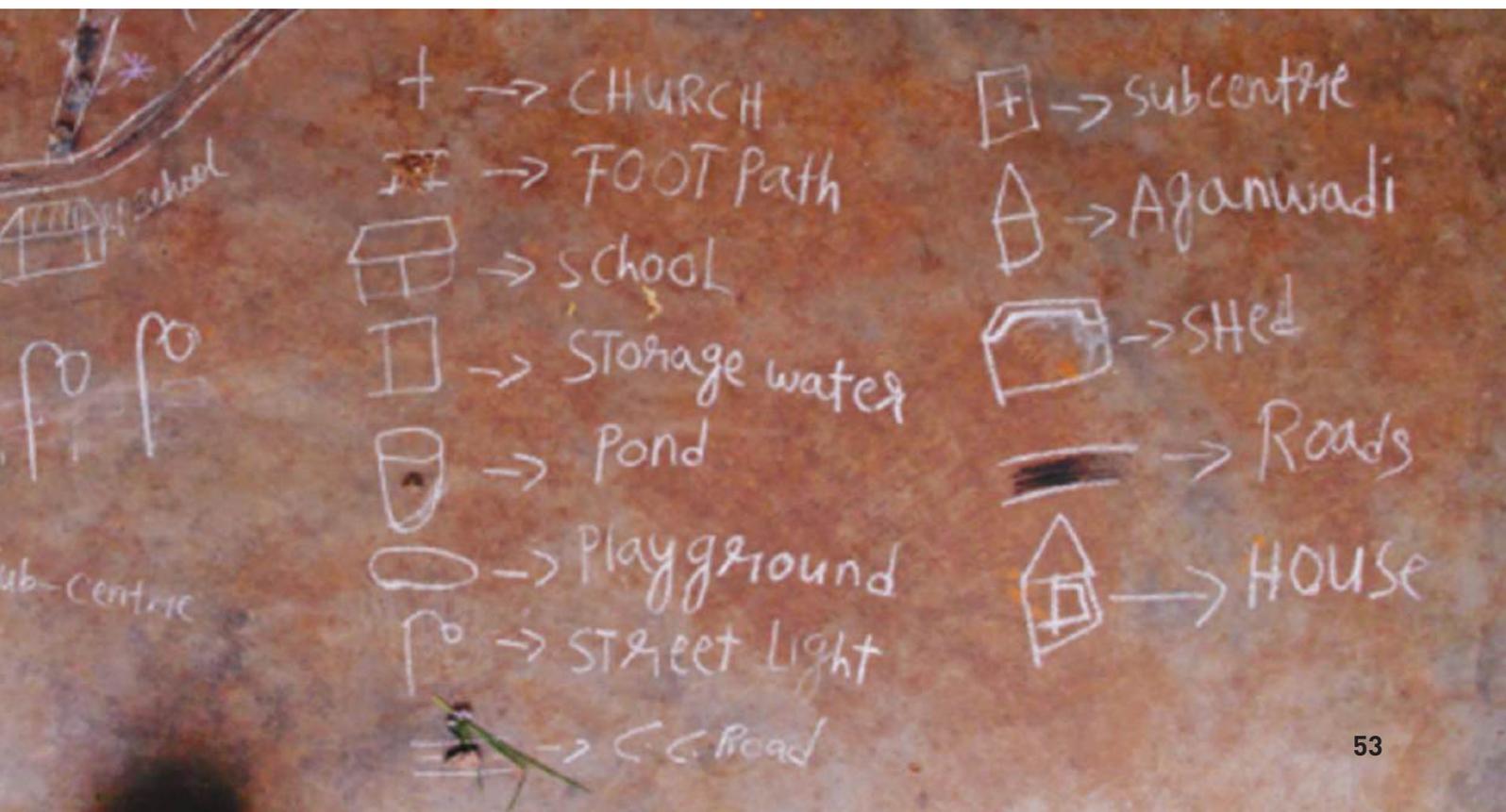
In a few blocks like Mawkyrwat and Dalu, the MGNREGA Plan Preparation Process was inaugurated by the Block Development Officer (BDO), in the presence of Line Departments officials, APO-MGNREGA, DMMU, BMMU officials, VEC and VO functionaries. Discussion regarding the planning process was done and BDO addressed the queries came up by the VEC secretaries. The activities undertaken in a nutshell are given below:



- ◆ LRGs along with the VO representatives approached the VEC and VC members/Nokma to invite them for the MGNREGA Plan Preparation Process and finalise a date and venue for the same.
- ◆ The information regarding date and venue have been disseminated by the VC/Nokma and mobilisation was done.
- ◆ The plan preparation was done through the Dream Village Activity where the VO members, LRGs with the help of VEC and VC members / Nokma made a map of their village and marked their demands for Public Goods and Resource Development according to the need. They also listed down the kind of services they would want.
- ◆ The map helped them to figure out and discuss what they needed in their village. The village map was prepared in an innovative way across all the villages.



- ◆ After mapping exercises, the demands were then written down by the LRGs in the MGNREGA plan format.
- ◆ Followed by the plan preparation, the LRGs along with VO members discussed for the Gram Sabha dates with VEC functionaries.
- ◆ Mobilisation for the Gram Sabha was done in a full-fledged manner where the LRGs and the VOs took out rallies, made posters and announced the Gram Sabha dates in VO meetings. In some villages, they announced the dates in the village, online campaigning through videos and poster making, door to door mobilisation etc.
- ◆ On the Gram Sabha Day, the plan was presented by the VO members and was submitted to the VEC members. A thorough discussion on the demands took place in the presence of the entire community where suggestions were taken and changes were made.
- ◆ The VEC members were requested to integrate the demands into their final MGNREGA plan.
- ◆ In March 2022, A consultative meeting was carried with the VECs to ensure the incorporation of demands.





The MGNREGA mapping exercise proved to be highly valuable as it generated a lot of demands from various villages. People actively expressed their needs and priorities through these demands, providing us with a clear understanding of the prevailing situation. The MGNREGA plan was divided into three key components, namely:

I **Infrastructural Demands:**

This included the construction and improvement of roads, dorbar halls (community hall), footpaths, street lights, and other related infrastructure demands.



II Resource Development Demands:

This includes demands such as the creation of ponds, wells, afforestation efforts, and other measures aimed at enhancing and preserving natural resources.



III Services Demands

This category focused on addressing the community's needs for essential services, such as additional school teachers, Anganwadi teachers, police officers, and other personnel necessary for the welfare and development of the village.

While the MGNREGA funds can address the infrastructure and resource development demands, fulfilling the services demands requires collaboration and convergence with other departments. The MGNREGA plan played a crucial role in capturing the community's demands, which aimed to benefit the entire community rather than just individual needs. Based on the demands received from the four intervention blocks, several observations can be highlighted.

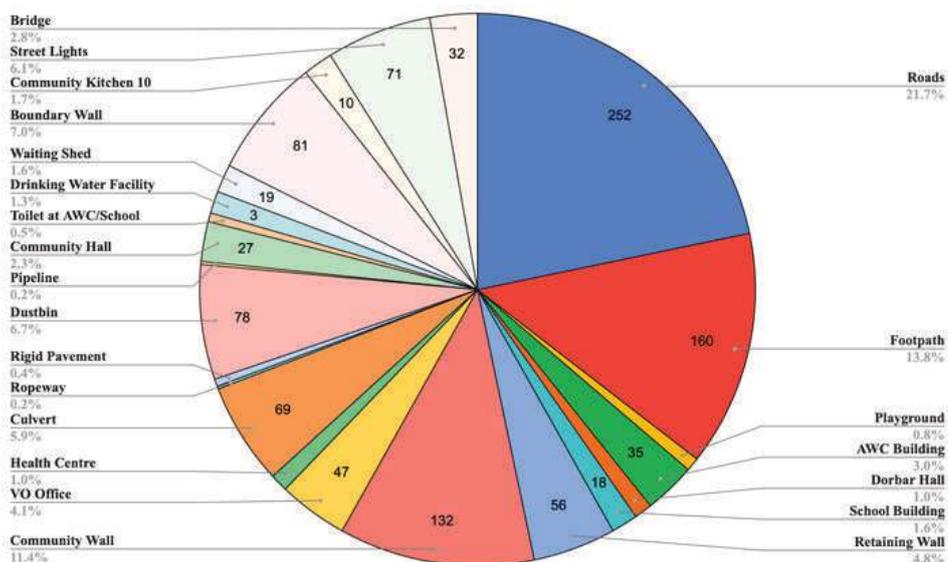


01 In terms of Infrastructural Demands

the primary demands from the community were focused on roads, which constituted approximately 21.7% of the total demand, and Footpaths, accounting for around 13.8%. These demands indicate lack of basic infrastructure, particularly in terms of accessibility, within the intervention areas. This issue is particularly prominent in sparsely populated villages, where the number of job card holders is relatively low, resulting in limited funds available for the MGNREGA plan of those specific villages. Consequently, constructing complete roads or footpaths with the available funds becomes challenging. Furthermore, the geographical characteristics of these villages, characterised by significant size and hilly terrain, further complicate the construction of roads and footpaths.

Another common demand observed across the four blocks is the need for Dorbar Halls/ Community Halls. It serves as an essential community space for conducting gram sabhas, hosting social events/celebrations, or simply providing a gathering place for community members. Many VC/VEC/Nokma and VO Members involved in the planning process have expressed the necessity of having a Dorbar Hall that would benefit the entire community. Notably, the demand for an office space exclusively for the VOs emerged as a significant achievement in the planning process. This achievement holds particular importance as it signifies women recognizing their collective power as a federation and understanding the value of organising themselves more effectively. In some instances, requests were made to utilise existing structures available in the village as VO offices.

Additional demands that arose during the planning process include the establishment of Anganwadi Centres (AWCs), development of playgrounds, and the provision of community toilets, etc. These demands highlight the community's aspirations for improved social infrastructure and facilities that contribute to the overall well-being of the villagers. The demands of the community have been depicted herewith :



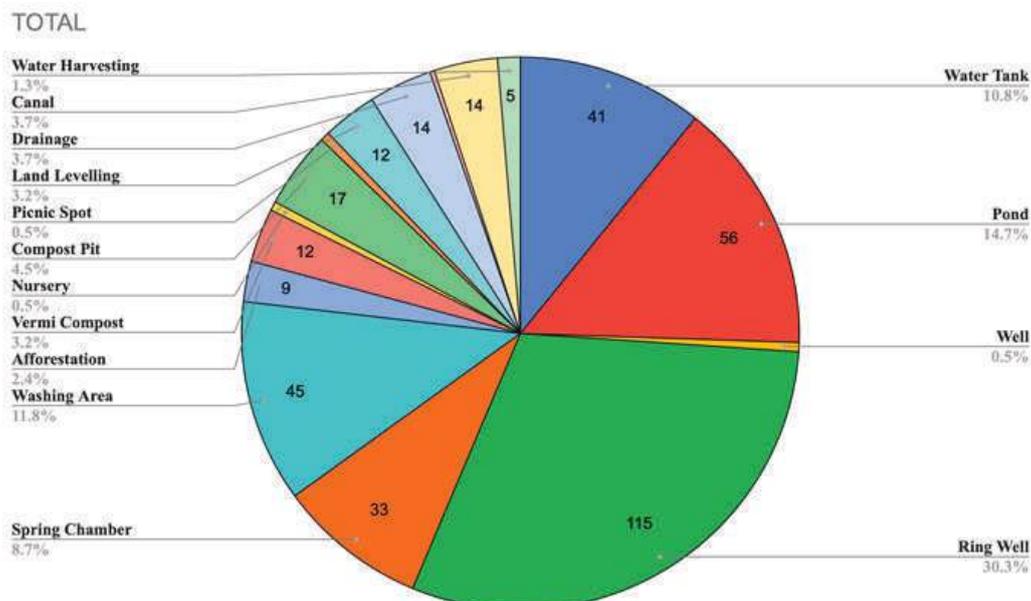
02 The Resource Development Plan

highlights the pressing need for various resources, particularly Ring Wells, Ponds, and Washing Areas, in the region, with a significant focus on addressing water scarcity, especially in the Khasi region. In these areas, access to water supply for households is severely limited, forcing people to rely heavily on springs and running water sources. Obtaining clean drinking water and washing clothes often requires walking distances of 1-2 kilometres due to the absence of pipelines, mainly due to the challenging hilly terrain.

To alleviate the water shortage issue, there was a significant demand for wells to tap into groundwater reserves. Additionally, women in the community have expressed the need for Washing Areas within their own villages, eliminating the need to travel long distances to rivers or lakes for laundry purposes. The scarcity of water affects the entire community, but it disproportionately impacts women who bear the additional responsibilities of household chores, such as washing clothes and water fetching, alongside their agricultural activities. The absence of an adequate water supply near their home's places them in even more challenging situations as they must carry water from distant sources.

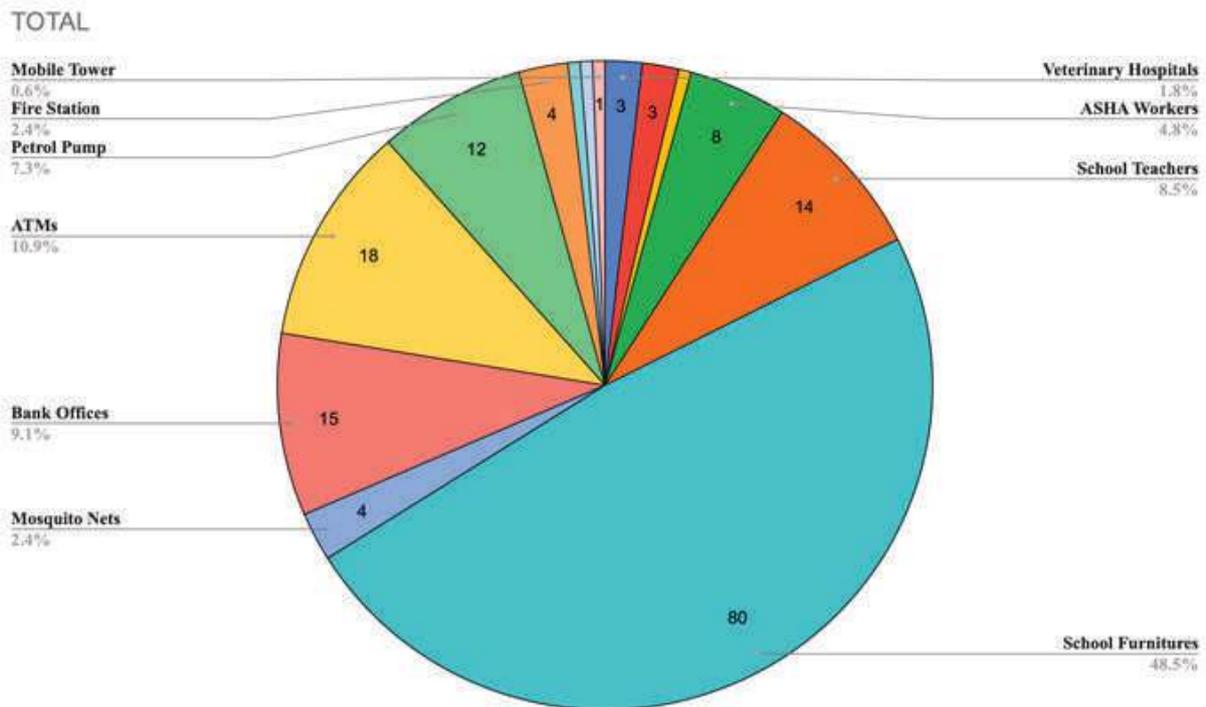
Moreover, while travelling for water, people often come into contact with leeches, small segmented worms that attach themselves to the skin and feed on blood. These leech encounters pose health risks and, in some cases, transmit skin diseases that create additional problems for the affected individuals. It is essential to address the issue of water scarcity to improve the overall well-being and quality of life for the community, particularly for women who face multiple burdens due to water shortage and the associated challenges of encountering leeches and health risks.

The community demands for resource development are depicted herewith:



03 The Services plan

includes the various services required by the community. Analysis shows that the predominant demand includes School Uniforms, ATMs, and Petrol Pumps, among others. It is noteworthy that the villages suffer from inadequate access to functional ATMs. Given the considerable distances between villages and the absence of ATMs, this poses a significant challenge. Consequently, people are less inclined to save money in banks due to the lack of easily available withdrawal mechanisms. The need for School Dresses for children emerges as a prominent demand, representing 46.1% of the overall demands. While fulfilling all of these demands may be challenging at the village level, advocating for them at the block level becomes crucial. Such advocacy for facilities and services acts as a capacity-building exercise in itself, empowering the community to articulate their needs and strive for improvements.



Key Learnings from MGNREGA Plan Process

- ◆ The successful implementation of participatory planning within a short period was made possible by the strong CBO structure, which has been effectively supported and capacitated by the Meghalaya State Rural Livelihood Society.
- ◆ High levels of participation were observed during the planning process and Gram Sabhas, reflecting the community's enthusiasm and the hope they had for the project.
- ◆ Gram Sabhas served as valuable platforms for learning experiences for the LRGs, contributing to the long-term sustainability of the project.
- ◆ In West Garo hills, resistance from traditional village heads (Nokmas) towards holding Gram Sabhas was seen. They were concerned about potential changes to power structures and the introduction of a Panchayat system. Convincing the traditional heads about the project's vision and the importance of Gram Sabhas as inclusive participatory planning platforms posed a challenge for the team and the Block staff.

Gram Sabhas

Gram Sabhas play a significant role in grassroots democracy, serving as a platform for the last mile delivery of services. It holds immense importance as to facilitate the submission of VPRP and MGNREGA plans, while also providing a space for deliberations and discussions. These gatherings ensure transparency in the decision-making process and allow every community member to voice their perspectives and suggestions. Gram Sabhas actively engage the community in the development of their village, promoting a sense of ownership and empowerment. It enables the people to determine the most suitable and necessary initiatives for their village's progress.





Gram Sabhas, known as Dorbar meetings, in Meghalaya take place usually just for the job card holders. The citizens of the village who hold a job card attend the Gram Sabha to identify MGNREGA works and to allot work. Though women, as a job card holder, attend such meetings, there has been a lack of representation of women as

a federation. The VO has a limited role to play when it comes to decision making in the Gram Sabhas. The SHG women usually do not have Gram Sabhas as an agenda of their SHG Meetings. Therefore, to ensure that women too have a say in local decision making, it was taken as a strategy to present the MGNREGA Plans prepared by the VO members in the Gram Sabhas to execute their potential as a major stakeholder as well as to make the MGNREGA Plan preparation inclusive and transparent. It was for the first time that the women federations were able to exercise their power of collectivism in local democracy.

To organise Gram Sabhas, the LRGs and VO members collaborated to confirm a suitable date and venue with the VEC members. Extensive mobilisation efforts were carried out by the LRGs, with the support of VO members, across all blocks. Announcements were made in VO and SHG meetings, as well as throughout the village. Rallies were organised,



posters were created and circulated within the community. In certain villages, online campaigns were conducted through videos and digital posters. Invitations were extended to officials from the block and district offices, line departments, and APO-MGNREGA to attend the Gram Sabhas. During the Gram Sabha, VO members presented the community work demands of MGNREGA and the village map to the gathered audience. A comprehensive discussion took place, allowing everyone to provide their suggestions in addition to the demands. Following the discussion, the plan was submitted to the VEC members with a request to incorporate the demands into the final MGNREGA Plan.

This collaborative approach ensured that the community's input was integrated into the planning process, fostering a sense of ownership and inclusivity.

THE EXPERIENCES of LRGs in Gram Sabha

The Gram Sabha marked a significant milestone for the LRG members, as it was their first time stepping onto such a prominent platform to present and speak in front of their fellow villagers. Overwhelmed with anxiety, they dedicated their entire night to practising their speeches and preparations. However, their efforts proved fruitful as they expressed a deep sense of satisfaction and accomplishment after the Gram Sabha. They felt incredibly satisfied and proud, gaining a new confidence and renewed motivation to continue the social work



THE EXPERIENCES of VO members in Gram Sabha

The VO members joyfully shared their sense of fulfilment and pride in actively engaging in the preparation and presentation of the VPRP plan. They expressed their delight in representing themselves as a united federation during the gram sabha, recognizing the immense power they possess in shaping the decisions of the local government body. Echoing their sentiments, they stated,

"Our strength lies in our unity. If we continue to work together, wonderful things can be achieved."



THE EXPERIENCES of village members in Gram Sabha

The Villagers also expressed their satisfaction and fulfilment after participating in the Gram Sabha meetings. They shared their experiences of voicing opinions and concerns in front of the entire community. Many individuals highlighted the significance of this opportunity, mentioning that it was their first time participating in a Gram Sabha gathering.



THE EXPERIENCES of Local Governance Representatives

The representatives of VEC and traditional bodies acknowledged the crucial role played by women in local governance and were surprised to witness their active participation in the Gram Sabha. They recognized this inclusion of women in decision-making processes is not only a matter of gender equality but also essential for the overall development and progress of the households.



Turning stones to build mountains Community Mobilisation for Gram Sabha Mawkyrwat, SWKH

One major activity that Kudumbashree NRO started its intervention with in the state of Meghalaya for the first time is the MGNREGA and Services plan preparation as a part of Village Poverty Reduction Plan. Though Meghalaya is a state known for its unique matrilineal system and where women are a step ahead in terms of authority and ownership compared to the other states, in reality women are often excluded from public spaces and decision-making processes. The exclusion is prevalent to an extent where women have never participated in public gatherings or in Gram Sabhas (locally called, Dorbar Meetings). Women, in very few villages are seen to hold decision-making roles in VCs or VECs, despite the 50% reservation in VECs.

LRGs were engaged in MGNREGS plan preparation. The VOs with the help of the LRGs and the VC/VEC Members conducted the dream village activity where they made the map of their village and marked their demands. The mapping was done after a thorough discussion of what the community needed for the betterment of their village. It was for the first time that the VO Members came together to discuss and prepare a demand list for their community. There was more to it than just demand generation. It was an activity that made the women come forward and decide for the community, which has never happened before. Earlier, women in the SHG Network restricted their involvement only to thrift and credit. They never got the opportunity to realise the power they have as a federation and how they can be the change makers for their community. This MGNREGA plan preparation was one such activity for the SHG and VO Members to realise they can do more than what they think they are capable of.



It seemed nearly impossible to mobilise or motivate the VOs in the Mawkyrwat Block of South West Khasi Hills District to conduct the activity, majorly because, most of the VOs are newly formed and the people in the community are not used to women being part of the planning process. A lot of hesitancy came on the way of the LRGs from the VECs who clearly didn't want the women to make the plan as they have been the ones doing it every year. Harvest season and unavailability of the VO members added up to the challenge. At this juncture, VO Members took the mapping process as an opportunity to demand a space for themselves – A VO Office. Until now, in Mawkyrwat, the VOs used to meet in the Dorbar hall or at somebody's house. Only very few VOs had a space of their own. Now, it was not only the fight to be a decision maker but also a fight for space. A room that they can call as their own and meet independent of anybody's permission. Women realising how much a room of their own would help them grow stronger. It took some time to convince the VEC members about the need for a VO Office. The VO Members made sure they convinced the VEC Members not only to integrate their demand for a VO office but also to prioritise it for the current year's Annual Action Plan.

The hardest part was yet to come -The Gram Sabhas. People in Mawkyrwat have never heard of a Gram Sabha. They only know of Dorbar Meetings which were organised by the VECs and were a space only for men. There was no involvement of the women from the community. MGNREGA Work and other important decisions are usually taken in such meetings. This was the first time that the LRGs and the VO members heard of a Gram Sabha where women were also supposed to be present and participate. The VO members decided to present their MGNREGA Plan and submit it to the VEC to be incorporated in the final MGNREGA Plan. Mobilisation for the Gram Sabhas was the challenge as people are not used to it. The LRGs tried everything they could to mobilise and convince the community to attend the Gram Sabha. Digital mobilisation through videos of LRGs, posters, door-to-door invitations, mobilisation in SHG and VO meetings was tried and tested.

The turnout in most of the villages weren't too much from the community but it was definitely a success as it was something that made the women come out and sit in a meeting where decisions were being taken. The table has finally started turning. Finally, amidst all the struggle and hustle, something remarkable happened in one of the villages. After most of the gram sabhas in other villages with low participation of people, the LRGs and VO members were settling down for the bare minimum. We knew even if half of the SHG Women turned up for the gram sabha and shared the same platform as men, it would be an achievement for all of us. Little did we know that the silver lining wasn't too far. Jakrem, is the largest village among all the other 18 project intervention villages and consists of more than 700 households and 45 SHGs. Hence it was even more difficult to mobilise people and expect them to attend the Gram Sabha. No stone was left unturned by the LRGs to mobilise people. They planned along with the VO Members to conduct a rally for the same. Again, where women never explicitly took part in activities like these, where women have never come out as a collective for any issue related to their village, it was a challenge to conduct a rally and ask women to participate. The LRGs prepared chart papers, slogans were

the voice of the LRGs who refused to give up and carry on with the rally. One of them said, “If nobody comes, we will fight for our village”. They started the rally at sunset, turned on their mobile phone torches and shouted the slogans as loud as they could. The rally that started with not more than six people ended up with more than 400 people joining the rally. The voices of the six people echoed in the empty streets and it wasn’t long when they were joined by others. It was the determination of the LRGs and the strength that their voices had that attracted people. They proved something greater that day – It is very important to have that first voice, no matter how lonely and disappointing it is. There were women who came out of their houses and joined the rally, men walked along and reached the gram sabha venue.

Hurdles will be in numerous but turning that one possibility into an opportunity will eventually decide the success of the project. And in Mawkyrwat, these LRGs have set an example and are an inspiration for the project. They have shown that Change cannot happen with one person but can definitely start with one.

Details:

Village Name: Jakrem

Total number of Households: 745

Gram Sabha Date: 19th November, 2021

Total Participation in Gram Sabha: 450

“We have never had Gram Sabhas in our village before and we women were never invited to one. This time we organised the Gram Sabha and invited the VEC and VC members. This makes us feel equal to the men we got to decide what our village needs. We can now negotiate and discuss the demands with the VECs.”

- Shaidaris

VO President

Baniengskhem VO



MGNREGA FOLLOW UP FOR INCORPORATION

A follow-up consultative meeting was organised at the Block level with the VECs, VO, LRGs, Block Technical Assistants and Junior Engineers of the MGNREGA department, in the presence of the District Program Manager of the DRDA and the Block Program Manager of the NRLM. The objective of the meeting was to ensure the incorporation of the MGNREGA community demands prepared by the VOs into the final MGNREGA Annual Action Plan.

During the meeting, a group activity was conducted where the participants were divided GP wise and the VEC and VO members discussed the MGNREGA plan of respective villages, tentative timeline and prioritisation of the demands to be included in the AAP. The participants actively participated in this exercise, providing valuable insights and feedback. The session emphasised the importance of aligning the community demands with the available resources and capacity, ensuring effective implementation and timely completion of the work.

Following the meeting, the VOs were tasked with the responsibility of monitoring and following up on the implementation of the work based on the agreed timeline and priority set during the activity. This approach aimed to enhance community ownership and participation in the MGNREGA projects, promoting transparency and accountability.

The successful organisation of this meeting was made possible with the support and assistance of BDOs who played a vital role in ensuring its smooth process. The cooperation and active involvement of the VECs, VOs, LRGs, and TAs were greatly appreciated. Overall, this consultative meeting served as an important platform



for integrating community demands into the MGNREGA AAP, fostering community participation and ownership in the planning and implementation processes, and ultimately contributing to the sustainable development of the region.

Entitlement and Livelihood Plan Preparation

The Entitlement and Livelihood Plan, unlike the MGNREGA plan, was prepared at the SHG level targeting individual needs and demands for various entitlement schemes and livelihood enhancement support required from the departments. A total number of 11 entitlement schemes were covered in the Entitlement Plan whereas, the Livelihoods Plan was divided into three categories - Farming, Animal husbandry and Micro Enterprises to list down the support that a household requires to enhance their present livelihood activities or to explore new ventures.

Objectives of Entitlement and Livelihood plan preparation were:

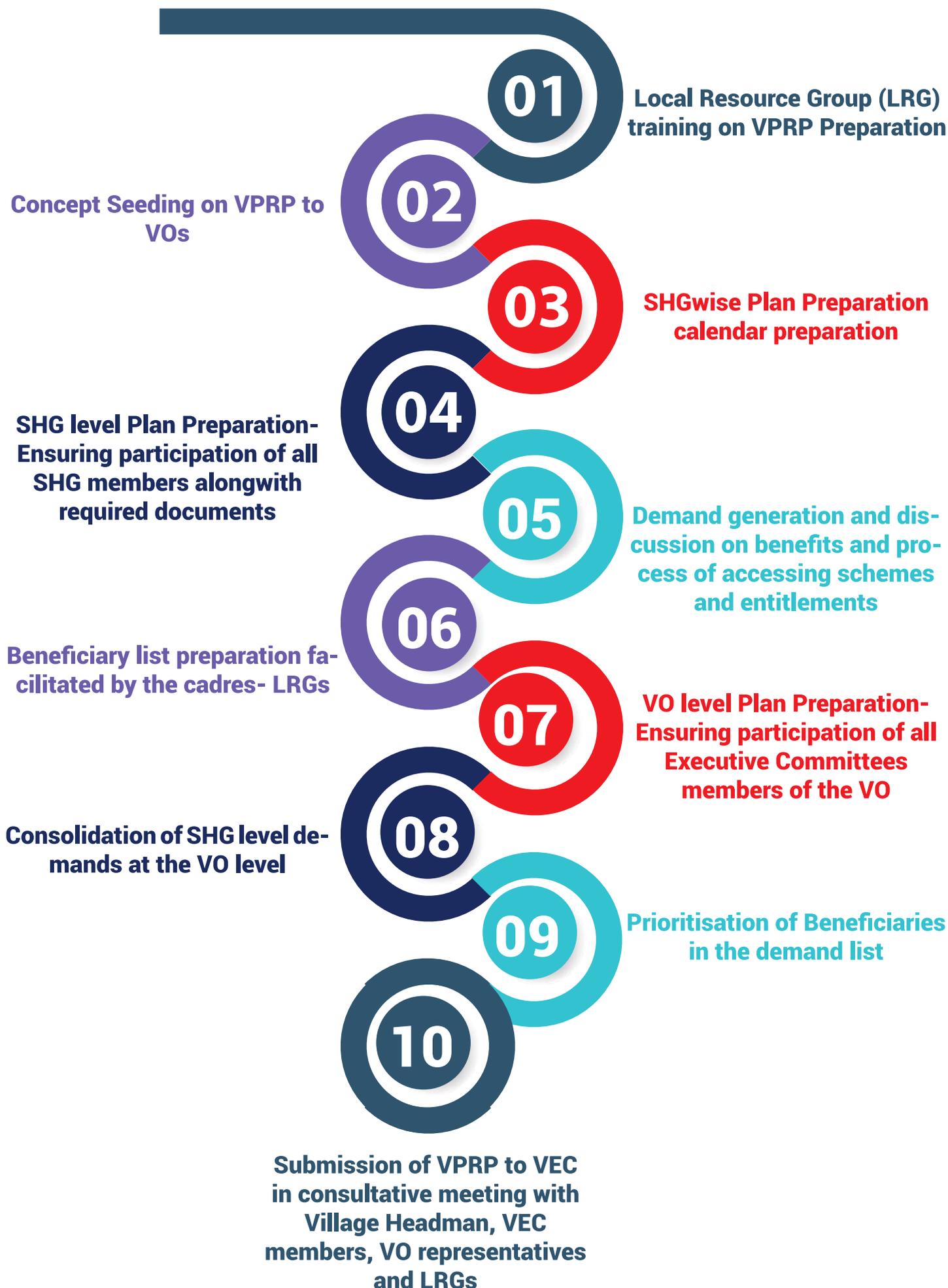
- ◆ To assess and address the individual demands related to entitlements, ensuring that community members have access to their rightful benefits and resources.
- ◆ To identify and support livelihood enhancement initiatives that promote sustainable economic growth
- ◆ To facilitate the active participation of community members in the planning process, ensuring their voices are heard and their demands are considered
- ◆ To promote transparency, accountability, and equitable distribution of resources by prioritising the right beneficiaries for entitlements and livelihood opportunities available within the community.
- ◆ To foster collaboration and convergence among different stakeholders to maximise the achievements and outcomes of the plans.



Process Adopted in Meghalaya:

- ◆ Discussions to incorporate state-specific and centrally specific schemes into the entitlement plan and livelihoods plan, taking into account the prevailing circumstances. As the Aadhaar coverage was relatively low, it was emphasised to include the demands related to Aadhaar cards within the plan.
- ◆ The LRGs underwent training on VO concept seeding and the VPRP process, provided with the essential documents and skills set required to effectively carry out the VPRP process on the field.
- ◆ The cadres initiated the VO Concept Seeding process as an initial step of Plan preparation by helping the VOs understand the significance of VPRP and its procedure.
- ◆ In order to perform the SHG Level Plan preparation at all SHGs, the VO members and LRGs prepared the SHG wise calendar on the day of VO Concept Seeding.
- ◆ The SHGs were informed in advance and all SHG members were required to be present on the day of the plan preparation, as per the calendar created. The SHG members were instructed to bring their Voter ID, Aadhar cards, Job Cards, and other vital documents for informational purposes.
- ◆ The plan preparation process began with a detailed discussion of each scheme and livelihood support that the women need once they are all present in the meeting. Each scheme was discussed one by one and the members who have access to the particular scheme, explained its advantages, requirements, and application process to the other members. This promoted peer learning and made the process participatory.







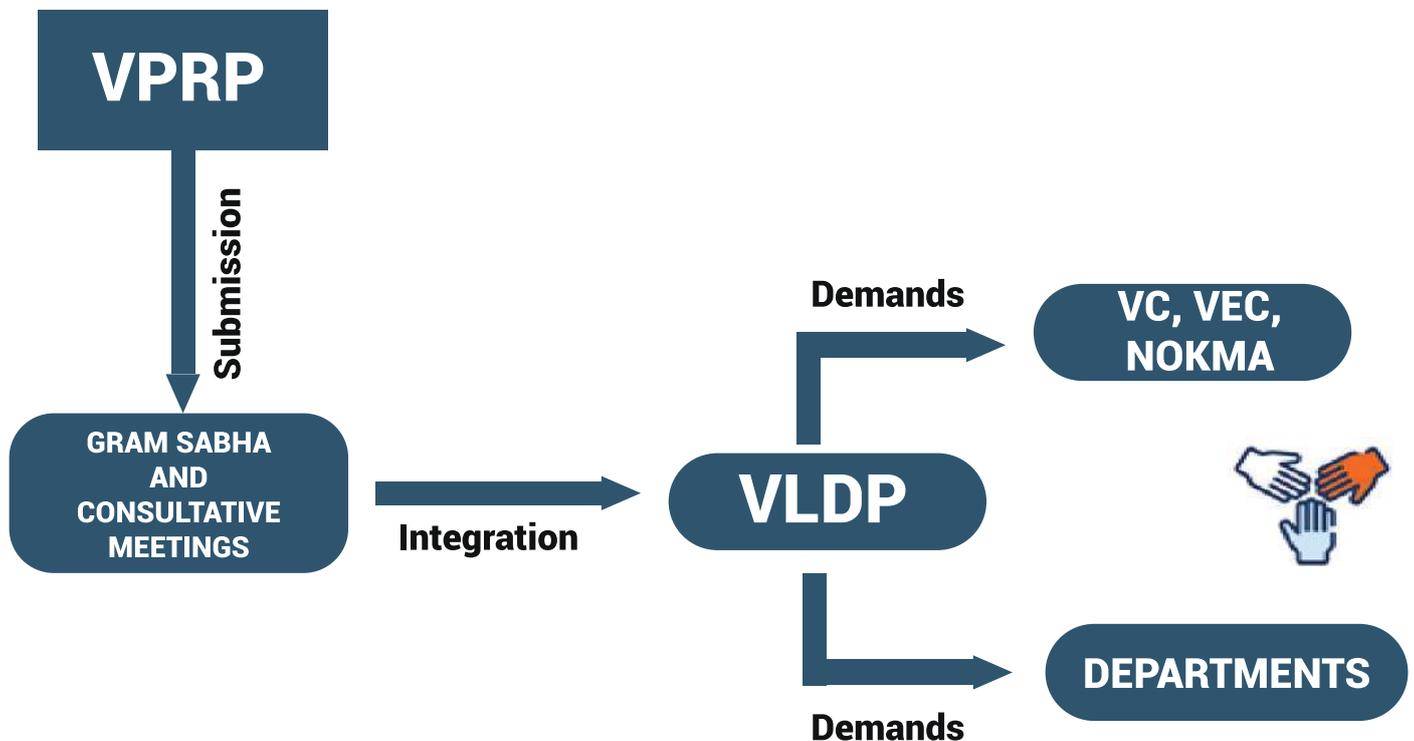
- ◆ As the discussion proceeds further, the LRG/ Community cadre lists down the names of the beneficiaries and fills up the format for Entitlement and Livelihood Plan.
- ◆ Following the completion of the SHG Level Plan Preparation, a day is decided for the VO Level Plan Preparation. On that day, demands from individuals outside of the SHG network are also recorded, and the SHG level plans are consolidated and beneficiaries are prioritised at the VO level.
- ◆ In areas (especially in Mawkyrwat Block, SWKH) where the SHGs are not federated in any VO, the SHG representatives were called together for plan preparation and consolidation.
- ◆ In locations where there are multiple VOs in a village (such as in Rongram, Dalu, and Mawkyrwat), the VEC level consolidation was carried out after the VO level plans were prepared. Representatives of each SHG were requested to come together and make the Village level Plan by consolidating and prioritising the VO level plans.
- ◆ There are villages in the intervention areas of Meghalaya, where one VO is spread across more than one village. In such cases, in place of VO Level consolidation and prioritisation, the representatives from SHGs of one village were engaged in the Village level plan preparation process.
- ◆ Finally, the village level plans or the VO Level plans were submitted to the VEC Representatives, VC members/Nokma and to the VOs in a consultative meeting for further follow up on the fulfilment of the demands.
- ◆ Due to the prevailing COVID-19 protocols, the Gram Sabhas could not be conducted at that time. Therefore, consultative meetings were conducted with the concerned stakeholders instead.





VPRP-VLDP Integration

The primary objective behind conducting the complete VPRP Process was to raise awareness among the communities regarding the various schemes and support available to address poverty through enhanced community participation and public action. Achieving holistic community development through the VPRP Process involves not only generating new demands but also fulfilling existing demands thereby ensuring comprehensive progress. Hence, sourcing the demands to the concerned stakeholders and departments stands out to be another step in the whole process. Incorporating the VPRP demands raised and prepared by the women of the federations into the Action Plan of the concerned departments is a primary indicator of the success of the demand achievement. Therefore, significant efforts were taken to submit the plans to various stakeholders.



Learning Visit in Kerala



The Panchayat Apprenticeship Programme (PAP) of Kudumbashree NRO is a comprehensive learning initiative designed for functionaries of local governing institutions, Community-Based Organization representatives, local resource group cadres and field personnel from NRO partner states. The primary objective of the program is to deepen their understanding of the role of local government institutions in poverty reduction and development, as well as the collaboration between various line departments and community based organisations in supporting their functions. The PAP spanned over a period of five days and included additional sessions for reflection and discussion.

In the context of Meghalaya, where the PRI System is not in place unlike Kerala, the objective of the visit was to gain insights into the convergence between local governance, line departments, and the CBO network. The visit aimed to understand the collaborative efforts undertaken by the Panchayat and CBOs in implementing low-cost or no-cost initiatives. The focus was on identifying feasible strategies and practices that can be adapted and implemented in Meghalaya. To enhance the learning experience of representatives of Meghalaya, the program included visits to Gram Panchayat offices, Line departments, and CBO structure of Kudumabshree, where participants engaged in detailed interactions with relevant representatives and officials.

Real-life case studies and examples were shared, drawing from their own experiences. Furthermore, in the field visits they witnessed the implementation of various projects and programs by the Panchayat and Kudumbashree.

Table: Details of learning visits to Kerala

Sr. no.	Category of Participants	Total Participants	Timeline	Districts and Panchayats visited
1	Representatives of Local Government institution (VEC president/ secretary, VC representatives, Nokma)	44	13- 17 December 2021	Choorikkara and Karumalloor GPs of Ernakulam District
2.	Representatives of Community Based Organisation			
3.	Officials form BMMU			
4.	Local Resource Group Members	58	23- 27 September 2022	Kottukal and Mangalapuram GPs of Trivandrum District





Post-Visit Impact and Strategy: Kerala Exposure Visit Experience Sharing Workshop

After the exposure visit to Kerala, experience sharing workshops were organised at each block, inviting representatives from all the VECs and Village Organizations, along with LRGs. The participants who went on the visit shared their experiences and learnings about the various institutions they visited, such as BUDS Schools, Balasabhas, Anganwadis, Mother's Committees, and School Management Committees (SMCs). The workshop was highly participatory, with everyone showing a keen interest in understanding how these institutions function systematically and efficiently in Kerala. This exercise helped them identify the existing problems in their own village institutions and possible areas of involvement with the local institutions.



During the workshop, participants were asked to identify two issues or institutions they wanted to start working on immediately and to develop a proper action plan outlining what needs to be done, why, how, the stakeholders involved and the expected benefits. It was inspiring to witness all of them coming up with innovative and thoughtful plans, such as establishing Balasabhas and BUDS schools at the CLF level, proper monitoring of Anganwadis, and involving SHG women in SMCs.

Villages that did not have Anganwadis expressed their desire to establish them for the benefit of their children. The process of action plan preparation instilled determination among the participants and provided them with a clear roadmap to address their problems and work towards their solutions. The LRGs were also highly motivated after the workshop, knowing that they had the support of their VECs and VOs to overcome challenges and engage the community in social action. The workshop was a significant event, and its success lay in the follow-up of the action plans developed by the teams. The focus was on working towards these plans in the coming days, translating the visions into tangible actions for the betterment of the communities in Meghalaya.



The challenges of working with Traditional Systems of Governance

The case of Dalu Block, West Garo Hills, Meghalaya - VIth Schedule Area

The sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution under Article 244(2) and Article 275(1) provides for special status to some areas with tribal populations in the North East. It protects tribal populations and provides autonomy to the communities through the creation of autonomous district councils that can frame laws on customary traditions, land, public health, agriculture and other domains pertaining to self governance. These councils are empowered to make laws in respect of areas under their jurisdiction, which cover the land, forest, cultivation, inheritance, indigenous customs and traditions of tribals, etc. and also to collect land revenues and certain other taxes.

Needless to say, the local self-governance structures in VI schedule areas are vastly different from those in Panchayati Raj areas and the concept of tribal self-governance and autonomy is highly prevalent in these areas. Several tribes do not want any interference in their affairs and look at the Panchayati Raj System as an imposition and extension of the bureaucratic set-up, something which they outrightly reject. A challenge for the PRI-CBO (Panchayati Raj Institutions-Community Based Organizations) project in this case becomes the issue of contextualising the project interventions such that they meet tribal needs and get tribal acceptance as well taking the traditional tribal chieftains and heads of village councils into confidence for the smooth roll-out of activities. This is not easy. In fact, the kind of mobilisation and repeated persuasion that goes into convincing the tribal chieftains about the benefits of working with the CBO (Self Help Group Network) is quite extensive and requires interaction with several stakeholders- both inside and outside of the local administrative structure.

A case in point to illustrate this is the example of Dalu Block in the West Garo Hills of Meghalaya. Garos are a tibeto-burman ethnic tribe based out of the Garo Hills in Meghalaya. Since Meghalaya falls under VIth Schedule Administration, the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) is the nodal self-governing authority and all the funds go to it. At the village level, 2 major governance viz. The Village Employment Council-VEC (Nodal Implementing agency for MGNREGA- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) and the Nokma (with the traditional Garo Chieftain) exist. The Village Employment Councils have been created specifically for the purpose of implementing MGNREGA because the traditional structure doesn't have funds or authority to implement the scheme.

The villages in Dalu block follow a traditional system of governance, which is headed by an Akhing

Nokma. Akhing Nokma heads a cluster of 10-15 villages and is the custodian of traditional practices of that cluster. Furthermore, each village is headed by village heads, known as Nokmas.

One of the most significant challenges for the PRI- CBO convergence Project in its initial stage was to mobilise people and garner the support of these traditional heads. With the onset of the Village Poverty Reduction Plan as a major activity, these mobilisation challenges began coming to the fore. The Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP) is a demand plan made by community members (Self Help Group network and others) which is to be integrated with the Village Level Development Plan (VLDP). In areas with no Gram Panchayats, the question of integration assumes all the more significance- because nothing can go ahead without the buy-in of the Nokma.



In Belabor village of Dalu block, the Nokma and the VEC members resisted to accept and integrate the VPRP, as they were of the opinion that the project would change the power structure- abolish the traditional governance system and bring in Gram Panchayats for the governance of the village. The name of the project, of course, didn't help a lot. It was a major challenge for the team to convince the village representatives about VPRP. Despite onerous efforts by the Village Organization members, Local Resource Group, Kudumbashree NRO Mentor and Field coordinator, the Block Development Officer (BDO), the Block Mission Management Unit (BMMU) Staff, the Nokma just wouldn't accept

the VPRP or anything to do with the project. The BDO, after repeated persuasion, told the NRO Team that no one can be forced to accept the plan and that integration in such a scenario would be very difficult. The fact that the Nokma was actually a Self Help Group member herself, didn't help. However, after a lot of struggle and getting the VEC Members (who had attended the exposure visit to Kerala) to talk to the Nokma and explain the benefits of the project, the Nokma finally gave way. The VEC Members who had the Kerala exposure visit fresh in their minds explained to them the details of the project and the benefits of VPRP. They talked about what they saw in Kerala and how the project would induce the development of the village and would definitely not bring in the Panchayati Raj Institution Structure. This whole endeavour also brought to light the importance of Convergence as a mechanism through which the four stakeholders- CBO, VEC, Nokma and the departments come together and could bring themselves to look at the benefits of the project, shedding their doubts and cynicism away.

The whole experience was a great lesson to the NRO team and also served as a crucial reminder of the sheer diversity in local self governing structures in India and how each LSGI brings with it its own opportunities and challenges. It was also a humbling experience because it brought home the point that constant persuasion can achieve a lot and also that mind-set change is a slow and gradual process. Most significantly, it helped us reiterate our end goal- to work for the community, with the community's acceptance and that tribal interests and demands need to be given attention and importance. Nothing about them, without them.

DEPARTMENTAL CONVERGENCE

In Meghalaya, departmental convergence is crucial for promoting overall development, making the best use of resources, improving service delivery, addressing interconnected challenges and empowering local communities. By bringing different departments together, the complex issues can be tackled more effectively, leading to the well-being of the people.



The entitlement and livelihoods component of the VPRP received numerous demands, which can be due to various factors. One factor is the geographical challenges because communities live in remote locations, making it challenging for them to travel to the block department offices.

Another reason is the lack of awareness about the various schemes and programs available. There was a lack of knowledge about the support

and benefits the citizens are entitled to, leading to a higher demand. The convergence project recognizes the significance of bridging the gap between Line departments located at the block or district level and the communities. By increasing their presence and accessibility, the line departments can create a stronger connection with the community and ensure that their resources and assistance reach those who need it the most. The Line departments at the Block level, along with their allocated funds, play a crucial role in supporting the VPRP and VLDP related initiatives. A key aspect of the project involves encouraging SHGs network to establish convergence with the line departments.

Process Followed for convergence with departments:

- ◆ District/Block level line department orientations were conducted to orient the project and the activities, such as the VPRP, to the departments. The objective was to familiarise them with various programs, schemes, and support available through different departments.
- ◆ As part of the follow-up to the orientations., the team initiated meetings with the departments to gain insights into the services and assistance offered by each department, The purpose was to understand the departments' supply side and to stay updated on any newly introduced programs.
- ◆ Furthermore, the Village Poverty Reduction Plan was finalised, and the demands were categorised according to the relevant departments.

- ◆ After consulting with the Village Organization, the demands for support required from each department were presented to them. This involved submitting a letter from the village organisation along with a list of beneficiaries. In some instances, a cover letter from the Block Development Officer was also included.
- ◆ A stakeholder workshop on the Village Poverty Reduction Plan was organised at the state level in collaboration with the Meghalaya State Rural Livelihood Society. The workshop was attended by the CEO, COO, principal secretary, and representatives from all line departments.
- ◆ Following the workshop, necessary follow-up actions were taken with the departments based on the actionable points identified during the event. These actions included sending letters from concerned departments and nominating a point of contact from each department for communication with MSRLS and other relevant stakeholders.



**STORIES OF CONVERGENCE
FROM FIELD**

Convergence Camps - Entitlement and Livelihood

The strategy to conduct Convergence Camp was devised as a means to fulfil the VPRP demands while prioritising the convenience of the community. Given the challenging terrain of the intervention areas in Meghalaya, it was impractical to expect all beneficiaries to travel to the district or block headquarters to apply for the schemes necessary to fulfil their demands. Instead, the primary objective was to bring all essential services together under one roof and deliver them directly to the community, thereby overcoming geographical barriers.

Doorstep service delivery stood as the fundamental rationale behind the establishment of convergence camps, aiming to bridge the gap between the community and various line departments. The community possessed the rightful authority to request services to be delivered within their own villages, and it was the responsibility of the departments to fulfil these demands. The convergence camps served as a platform for integrating the supply and demand sides of numerous projects, while also facilitating awareness sessions.

During the process of preparing the VPRP, it became evident that the community had limited awareness regarding most of the Centrally and State Sponsored Scheme. Consequently, the convergence camps evolved into a forum for knowledge exchange, where officials from line departments engaged in detailed discussions pertaining to the specific plans and resources within their respective departments. The concept of Convergence Camp was first piloted in one village - Domjyrti VC, out of the 18 intervention villages of Mawkyrwat Block.

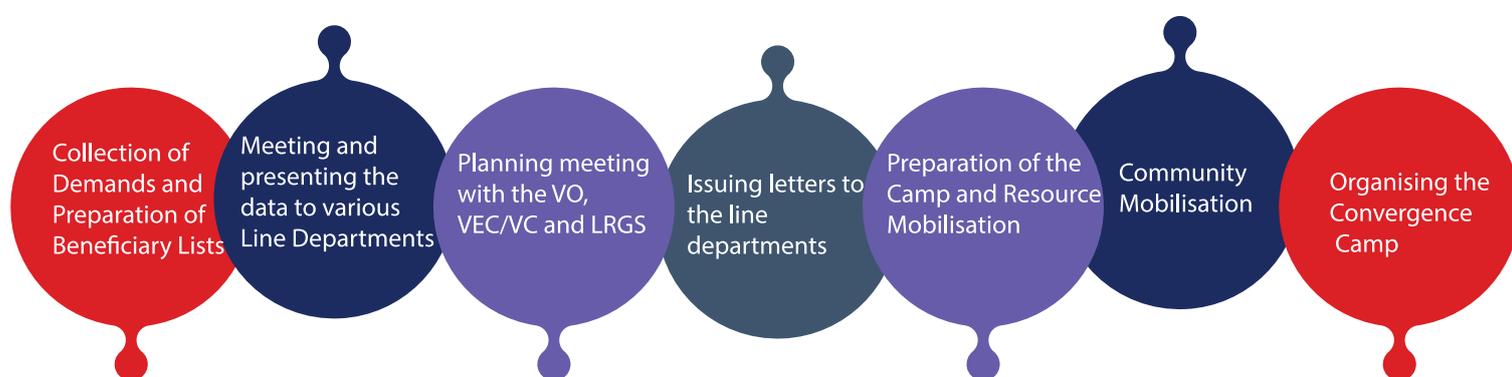


The identification of community needs to bring the departments at the doorstep involved constant efforts, which are details herewith.

- ◆ To conduct the camp, the LRGs of the PRI-CBO Convergence Project prepared beneficiary lists for each scheme from the entitlement plan. To start off, only a few schemes like Aadhar Card, NSAP, E-Shram Card, PMJJBY, PMSBY, Health card, KCC were selected.
- ◆ After the beneficiary list was prepared, there were separate meetings held with each concerned department official and the demand list was presented. Separate meetings were held with officials from each concerned department, where the demand list was presented and the idea of a convergence camp was proposed.
- ◆ The next step was to introduce the idea to the Village Heads and Village organisation members. It was necessary for them to take the ownership of VPRP Demand fulfilment and arrange the camp for the overall benefit of their own village. Community ownership and involvement was the only principle on which the convergence camps were held.
- ◆ Letters were then issued to several line departments from the BDO office to actively engage and provide their support to successfully organise the event.
- ◆ The most crucial part of the entire process was to mobilise people and resources for the camp. Various mobilisation strategies were adopted to ensure participation of the people. The cadres went door to door to invite people, announcements were made by the Village Head, VOs took the responsibility to mobilise all the members of the SHG etc. Along with mobilising people, resource mobilisation was also a challenge. As most of the scheme enrolment would require proper electricity connection, adequate space, printing machines etc. all kinds of arrangements were to be made beforehand.
- ◆ On the day of the convergence camp, the event started with the awareness sessions on various schemes by Line Department officials, followed by the enrollment session. The BDO and PD-DRDA were invited as the chief guests for the camp.
- ◆ The following departments were invited at the Convergence Camp as the service providers of the schemes demanded in VPRP.



Department	Schemes/Benefit
Planning Department	Aadhar Enrolment
Health Department	Health Card, Health Checkup
Agriculture Department	Kisan Credit Card, Awareness on benefits
SBI, MRB	PMJJBY, PMSBY
Social Welfare Department	Awareness on Benefits
Labour Department	E-Shram Card



Outcomes and Benefits:

- ♦ The convergence camp initiative was one of its kind and brought major success. The footfall in the first camp was beyond all expectations because of the strong mobilisation strategies that were adopted. The local cadres, VO members, and Myntri did everything they could to ensure maximum participation of the people. The camp put on a festive mode in the community where everybody came together and enrolled for various schemes. Achievements from the camp toppled the VPRP Demands because the festive environment, Line department officials delivering awareness on the benefits of the schemes and seeing other people taking access to them acted as a motivation factor. The camp broke through all the hesitancy amongst people regarding certain schemes and people enrolled in huge numbers.
- ♦ The success of the first Convergence Camp motivated the cadres and VO members of other villages to take it up further. The line department officials were all appreciative of the initiative as the footfall was beyond all expectations and they could enrol too many people together

enhancing their achievement rates as well. The strategy was also adopted in other intervention as well as non-intervention blocks and districts.

- ♦ The camps provided a significant advantage by offering the community convenient access to a wide range of services directly in their own village. The Convergence Camps, in particular, showcased exemplary collaboration between different departments and the local communities, highlighting the effectiveness of such convergence efforts.

Table: Convergence camp total achievements across blocks.

Entitlements	Achievements
Job cards issued under MGNREGA	427
Aadhaar Cards	1258
Health Cards (Ayushman Bharat)	734
Old-age pension	175
Widow pension	21
Disability pension	18
Ujjwala Gas Connection	154 (Applications Submitted)
PMSBY	426
PMJJBY	262
SBM (IHHL)	391 (Applications Submitted)



"Convergence Camp: By the people, of the people, for the people" A story of Waram Songma Village of Rongram Block.

In the tribal-dominated Rongram Block of the West Garo Hills District, the majority of the population is engaged in farming, making it challenging to meet people after 9 a.m. as they are busy working on their farms. Additionally, the tribal communities tend to be hesitant in accepting outsiders and take time to understand the benefits of government programs and schemes. This hesitation leads them to prioritise their farming activities over tasks like visiting block offices for getting an Aadhaar card or insurance. So, building trust and engagement among the community proved to be a difficult task. The team realised the importance of establishing connections, creating a sense of belief, and fostering a spirit of collaboration.



To gain support and promote ownership, the team prepared a plan for a Convergence Camp in one of the villages named Waram Songma, a platform where various schemes and initiatives would converge to empower the beneficiaries. Given the challenges, the strategy adopted for the convergence camp was to meet with the Nokma, the traditional village headman who holds great influence among the villagers. The team explained the concept and benefits of the camp to Nokma, who

turned out to be intelligent and kind-hearted. He agreed to call for a Songma Meeting (Gram Sabha) and convince the villagers about the importance and advantages of the camp for their well-being. Additionally, he offered to provide logistical arrangements for the camp, emphasising that it was for their people, and the arrangements would be made by the community for the benefit

of the community. On the second day, the Nokma conducted the Songma meeting and successfully convinced the villagers. They also informed the team of a convenient date for the camp. Accordingly, a letter was obtained from the Block Development Officer, and invitations were sent to various line departments. The VO members and the LRGs joined hands and set out on a mission to engage every household in the community. They went from door to door, tirelessly reaching out to villagers, sharing valuable information about the convergence camp, and encouraging active participation.



The day of the camp was nothing short of magical. The villagers worked together to set up stalls in the camp, the line department officials were greeted by the traditional food prepared by the community. The unity displayed by the villagers was highly praised by all the people present there. This brought tears of joy to the team's eyes. They witnessed the beauty of collective effort, and



the transformation that unfolded before them. At that moment, they realised the convergence camp was more than just a camp. It was like a beautiful song, with everyone's hearts beating together.

A strong bond formed. It went beyond time and traditions. It was a bond of trust, hopes, and a collective commitment to embrace transitional development. A powerful message that trust building among community matters, and their acceptance is utmost important. The

story of Waram Songma Village of Rongram Block continues, leaving its mark on the journey of Kudumbashree NRO in Meghalaya. The day of the camp was nothing short of magical. The villagers worked together to set up stalls in the camp, the line department officials were greeted by the traditional food prepared by the community. The unity displayed by the villagers was highly praised by all the people present there. This brought tears of joy to the team's eyes. They witnessed the

beauty of collective effort, and the transformation that unfolded before them. At that moment, they realised the convergence camp was more than just a camp. It was like a beautiful song, with everyone's hearts beating together. A strong bond formed. It went beyond time and traditions. It was a bond of trust, hopes, and a collective commitment to embrace transitional development. A powerful message that trust building among community matters, and their acceptance is utmost important. The story of Waram Songma Village of Rongram Block continues, leaving its mark on the journey of Kudumbashree NRO in Meghalaya.



Livelihood Intervention and Outcome

Meghalaya, with its unique geographical location, topography, and climatic conditions has a rich agricultural background. Agriculture plays a vital role in the state's economy, with a significant portion of the population engaged in farming. Traditional farming practices, such as shifting cultivation or jhum cultivation, have been prevalent in Meghalaya for a long time. The state's hilly landscapes, plateaus, and valleys, coupled with heavy rainfall, contribute to the formation of deep gorges, fast-flowing rivers, and picturesque waterfalls.



In terms of major crops, Meghalaya's agriculture is predominantly focused on food crops. Rice, the staple crop, is cultivated in the valleys while maize and millets are grown in the uplands. Additionally, the state has favourable conditions for horticultural crops resulting in abundant cultivation of fruits like oranges, pineapples, plums, bananas, passion fruits, and jackfruits. The Khasi Mandarin variety of oranges, renowned for its exceptional quality, enjoys popularity both domestically and internationally.



Furthermore, the state's agro-climatic conditions make it suitable for organic farming, and many farmers have adopted organic methods to preserve soil fertility and promote sustainable agriculture. Meghalaya's organic produce has gained recognition in the market. However, the agricultural sector in Meghalaya faces certain challenges. Limited access to modern farming techniques, inadequate irrigation facilities, fragmented landholdings, and a lack of market



infrastructure are some of the key obstacles. Additionally, there is a need to raise awareness among farmers regarding available schemes and support systems to enhance their productivity and overall agricultural development in the state.

Interventions around Agriculture: Considering that the department was providing support for seeds, soil testing,

equipment and training; though certain support varied in some blocks. The department was approached with the list of VPRP demands for the concerned support. The Local Resource Group (LRGs) and the Village Organizations (VO) approached the department and submitted their demands. The department has provided training, equipment, seeds, manure, and polyhouses to the community.



Following the preparations of the



Village Poverty Reduction Plan, A substantial number of demands were received in three key components, namely Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, and Micro Enterprises. Keeping in mind the needs of the community and the availability of valuable institutions and resources, the team

diligently worked towards fulfilling these demands. To effectively address the demands received for agricultural support under the livelihoods component, the concerned departments were approached by the Local Resource Group and the Village Organizations with the support of MSRLS and Kudumbashree NRO team. These community-based groups actively engaged with the department and submitted their



specific demand list and beneficiary list for the required support.

The Agriculture department has been actively engaged in extending support to the communities of Meghalaya. This support encompasses a wide range of assistance including distribution of seeds, manure, soil testing, equipment, and comprehensive training programs, support in establishment of poly houses to facilitate controlled-environment cultivation. However, it should be noted that the level of support may vary across different blocks within the region.



In the intervention block of Rongram, it has come to attention that there is presently an absence of an established block-level agriculture office. Instead, the agricultural activities in the area are coordinated through the District Headquarters in Tura. Due to the geographical characteristics of the area, which consists of hilly terrain, the predominant cultivation in Rongram is tea and areca nut plantation. Farmers in this region do not heavily rely on farm machinery for their agricultural operations. Households in Rongram block maintain their traditional seed banks, relying primarily on these seeds for their agricultural practices. As a result, there is relatively low demand for seeds and farm machinery in the block, leading to limited achievements in this regard.



FARM LIVELIHOOD CONVERGENCE CAMP

Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP) prepared by the SHG Women in all the 18 intervention villages provided a striking database of demands from the communities on livelihood practices. Animal husbandry and farming are the major livelihood activities practised by the communities in Mawkyrwat hence there was a lot of demand for supports required for livelihood promotion. It was also realised that there was a huge gap between the line departments and the communities in terms of information dissemination about schemes and support that can be derived from the departments. The community wasn't aware of the schemes and the process of availing the schemes from the departments.



Hence, it was important to address this gap before moving ahead with materialising the demands. Therefore, a Farm Livelihood Convergence Camp was organised on 29th of August, 2022 in Umoid VC for beneficiaries from five villages - Umoid, Shadshaid, Mawpon Myrkew, Pyndendiwah and Diwah Shadmoit. The convergence camp was planned in order to bring all the line departments on farm livelihood together to the community in order to inform them about the support as well as provide them with the same. Line Departments like

the Fisheries, Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Department and Meghalaya Rural Bank participated in the convergence camp as active service delivery agents and gave awareness on the schemes that each of these departments have. The camp was followed by the registration of animals after the awareness sessions. A total number of 58 Pigs, 37 Goats and 38 cattle were registered with the Veterinary Department for further support from the department. Medicines for the animals were also distributed to the beneficiaries by the Veterinary department. People were also informed about the benefits, documents required and the process of availing KCC cards and loans. Various other schemes were discussed and information was given to the community people to enhance their livelihood practices.

The Farm Livelihood Convergence Camp turned out to be a success as a lot of beneficiaries were benefitted with enrolment as well as they were informed about the services they could get from the departments. Similar camps will be held in other villages as well in order to fulfil the VPRP demands in the coming days and to benefit the communities for their betterment.



Livelihood Promotion through Jackfruit Processing Training and Its Impact on VPRP Beneficiaries in Tura

A three-day Jackfruit Processing Training was organised by the Department of Food and Nutrition, College of Community Science, Tura, as part of the VPRP livelihood demands. A total of 20 VPRP beneficiaries from Rongram and Dalu blocks were enrolled in this training program, which aimed to equip them with the necessary skills for processing jackfruit, leveraging its wide seasonal availability in the region and market demand for processed products. Upon the completion of the training, the Department of Food and Nutrition issued certificates of completion to the trainees and organised a felicitation event. The distinguished guest at the event was the Assistant Commissioner, accompanied by Smt. Jyoti Madam and the District Mission Manager, who graced the occasion with their presence.

The impact of the training was immediately evident as the 20 SHG women who received jackfruit processing training started making various products at home and selling them in the weekly markets. The entrepreneurs shared their experience, expressing their satisfaction at the positive response they received from customers. They mentioned “All the packets of jackfruit products that we prepared were sold within two hours.” instilling hope and enthusiasm in them to further utilise this skill to generate more income for their households.

Witnessing the SHG women actively utilising their newly acquired livelihood skills and contributing to their households was a heartening experience for all involved. It represents a small yet significant step towards economic empowerment and self-reliance. This achievement highlights the potential for further growth and development in the community. The Jackfruit Processing Training for VPRP beneficiaries has laid the foundation for the utilisation of local resources and the creation of livelihood opportunities. The participants' enthusiasm and success in selling their jackfruit products showed the effectiveness of such skill-building initiatives. This endeavour not only enhances the economic prospects of the beneficiaries but also promotes self-reliance and empowerment among the community members.





Mushroom Cultivation Trainings in convergence with Agriculture Department and Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) in Dalu Block

The Village Poverty Reduction Plan prepared by the VO in Dalu Block had several demands related to Mushroom cultivation due to the region's favourable climatic conditions for the crop and the high market value of mushrooms. The strong interest shown by the SHG members in mushroom cultivation further validated its suitability as a livelihood opportunity. The Kudumbashree NRO team along with the Block Project Manager proactively contacted Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) to initiate the collaboration for the Mushroom Cultivation Training program. The CLF members took the lead in organising and arranging the entire program, utilising their funds. The 1st batch training program for Mushroom Cultivation initiated on 8th February 2022 in Dalu Block, West Garo Hills District. The program was organised by the Bilcham CLF with the aim of promoting livelihood opportunities through mushroom cultivation. It focused on providing training and support to beneficiaries, empowering them to start their own mushroom cultivation. The program commenced with a formal inauguration ceremony, graced by the presence of the Block Development Officer, District Mission Manager, and Horticulture officials. This event showcased the active participation and keen interest of the community members in learning effective mushroom farming techniques. A training cum demonstration session on mushroom cultivation was conducted during the program. Livelihood experts collaborated with the Horticulture department and Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) to provide comprehensive training to the beneficiaries. The training covered various aspects of mushroom cultivation, including preparation, cultivation techniques, and maintenance.



Following the training, mushroom seeds (spawns) were distributed to the beneficiaries, enabling them to initiate their own mushroom cultivation enterprises. This step aimed to provide them with a sustainable source of income and economic independence.

As a result of the program, 139 beneficiaries in five batches from different villages in Dalu Block received training on mushroom cultivation. This training equipped them with the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully cultivate mushrooms. Furthermore, 23 beneficiaries from Agalgre, Dusinggre, Balihata, and Babelapara etc have started cultivating mushrooms in their respective areas, demonstrating their commitment to implementing the learned techniques. The community members also sold the products in the local market at fair rates, thus enhancing their economic prospects.

The VPRP Achievement program in Dalu Block, organised by the Bilcham CLF, has successfully promoted livelihood opportunities through mushroom cultivation. Also there was successful thematic integration at the block level between Livelihoods and IBCB (Institution Building and Capacity Building) themes of MSRLS. The Project Executive and the Cluster coordinator of IBCB collaborated closely along with the Kudumbashree NRO team for the development of various initiatives and activities. This collaboration aimed to ensure a comprehensive approach to community development by addressing both livelihood enhancement and institutional strengthening.



Livelihoods: UDYAM Registration Mela by MSME Department in Dalu Block

In order to enhance the eligibility of SHG enterprise for government benefits, incentives, support programs, and to create market opportunities, the Bilcham CLF organised the UDYAM Registration Mela in Purakhasia. This initiative, conducted under the Department of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME), aimed to facilitate the registration of SHG enterprise shops under the UDYAM scheme. The initiative aimed at facilitating enterprise registration and providing official recognition to entrepreneurs in Dalu Block. The mobilisation for the event was undertaken by the members of the VOs. They actively went from shop to shop, spreading awareness and informing the local entrepreneurs about the details of the camp. Their dedicated efforts in mobilisation played a crucial role in ensuring maximum participation and engagement.

The Mela commenced with an informative guidance session conducted by the Assistant Director of MSME, who enlightened the participants about the various schemes and opportunities offered by the MSME department to support and promote micro, small, and medium enterprises. The session was helpful in raising awareness among the entrepreneurs and guiding them through the registration process. The event witnessed a great turnout of SHG women entrepreneurs, Over 50 women actively participated in the camp, showcasing their enthusiasm and determination to establish and grow their enterprises.

During the UDYAM Registration Mela, around 30 entrepreneurs successfully completed their business registrations, receiving the acknowledgment for their ventures. The presence of the concerned Cluster Coordinator, Mentor, Livelihood Coordinator, and LRG members further



enhanced the effectiveness of the event. Their guidance and support were invaluable in assisting the entrepreneurs and ensuring a smooth registration process.

After the successful registration process, the entrepreneurs were issued certificates via mail, which they printed and displayed in their shops. These certificates served as official recognition and identity cards for their businesses, instilling a sense of trust and credibility among customers and stakeholders. Moreover, the registered enterprises will gain advantages to avail loans at minimum interest rates offered by the department, which will provide them with much-needed financial support to expand and enhance their businesses. Additionally, being registered with the MSME Department opened up opportunities for the entrepreneurs to participate in exposure visits to various locations within India.

The UDYAM Registration Mela served as a platform for SHG entrepreneurs in Dalu Block to formalise their businesses and benefit from the various support programs provided by the MSME department.



Cooking Skill Development Initiative: Promotion of food enterprises

The Kudumbashree NRO team along with Block officials commenced culinary training for the SHG women of Dalu block, with the aim of empowering them to establish their own food enterprises and earn a livelihood. In response to the changing food preferences of the community, we recognized the growing demand for items such as Maida-made Paratha, Samosa, noodles, and sandwiches which are not really healthy for the body.



The SHG women had cooking skills; however, they lacked expertise in preparing a wide variety of rice-based dishes that could tempt the taste buds of people, particularly children and youngsters. This is where our intervention became crucial. Led by the experienced Kudumbashree NRO Mentor, Smt. Swapna Shaju, who is a South Indian home-based cook, initiated the training sessions. Around 12 SHG members were trained in the South Indian Dishes, while another 6 SHG members

received training in the preparation of crispy Papads.

Throughout the training, the women entrepreneurs not only acquired the necessary cooking skills but also became acquainted with modern cooking gadgets commonly used in the kitchens. The training sessions encompassed the preparation of Dosa, Idli, Uttapam, Pickles, Puttu, Papad, and more. During their first practical session, the SHG members who were trained for Dosa making tried their hand at making the dish typically served with Coconut Chutney and Vegetable Sambar. The process of fermentation involved in Dosa preparation enhances digestibility, enriches B

vitamins, and boosts the immune system. Simultaneously, the other group of SHG members trained in Papad, demonstrated their skills in creating delicious and crispy papads.

Guided by the Officials from MSME (Micro Small Medium Enterprises) department, the SHG members launched their food stalls in the Purakhasia weekly market after their training was completed.





At present, the women entrepreneurs had successfully set up a Dosa stall, also selling the packets of Papad, in the weekly market, receiving an encouraging response from the local community.

This initiative in Dalu Block not only encourages entrepreneurship but also the consumption of healthy foods, giving our SHG women the opportunity to familiarise with the usage of modern gadgets, marketing and improve the welfare of their families and gain economic empowerment.



Guided by the Officials from MSME (Micro Small Medium Enterprises) department, the SHG members launched their food stalls in the Purakhasia weekly market after their training was completed. At present, the women entrepreneurs had successfully set up a Dosa stall, also selling the packets of Papad, in the weekly market, receiving an encouraging response from the local community.

This initiative in Dalu Block not only encourages entrepreneurship but also the consumption of healthy foods, giving our SHG women the opportunity to familiarise with the usage of modern gadgets, marketing and improve the welfare of their families and gain economic empowerment.



FSSAI License registrations for food enterprises.

The Kudumbashree NRO team along with Livelihoods Executive of MSRLS have been actively involved in supporting the entrepreneurs. Providing assistance in packaging and labelling the Papads to enhance their marketability. The members were given essential information and sensitised about the significance of obtaining the FSSAI License. They were also encouraged to maintain high standards of hygiene and cleanliness during the process. Furthermore, the participants were directed to responsibly dispose of any damaged or rotten food items at designated locations.

Through these initiatives, the community is taking significant strides towards establishing successful food enterprises while ensuring adherence to safety standards and regulations. The campaign not only promotes self-reliance but also fosters an environment of entrepreneurship and economic growth within the region.



Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department

Animal husbandry and livestock rearing play a significant role in the agricultural economy and rural livelihoods of Meghalaya. The region's favourable climatic conditions, abundant grazing lands, and rich biodiversity support the rearing of various livestock species. Pig rearing is a prominent practice, where cattle, buffalo, pigs, goats, and poultry are commonly raised as well. Indigenous cattle breeds such as the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia are well-adapted to the local conditions and are valued for their milk, meat, and draft purposes. Given below is the background of farm livelihoods in the state.

- 1. Dairy Farming:** Dairy farming is an important aspect of animal husbandry in Meghalaya. The state's favourable climate and availability of green pastures contribute to the production of high-quality milk. Many farmers, especially in the plains and valley areas, engage in dairy farming and rear dairy breeds like Jersey, Holstein-Friesian, and their crosses. Dairy cooperatives and private dairy companies provide necessary support and infrastructure for milk collection, processing, and marketing.
- 2. Poultry Farming:** Poultry farming is widely practised in Meghalaya, catering to the demand for eggs and meat. Backyard poultry rearing is prevalent in rural households, where native chicken breeds are raised for their meat and eggs. Commercial poultry farms, including broiler and layer units, have also gained prominence, supplying poultry products to both local and regional markets.
- 3. Pig Farming:** Pig rearing is an integral part of the livestock sector in Meghalaya. The state has a long tradition of pig farming, with indigenous pig breeds being raised for meat consumption and cultural rituals. Pig farming is primarily practised by tribal communities, and efforts have been made to improve the productivity and breed quality through scientific breeding programs.
- 4. Goat Rearing:** Goats are well-suited to the hilly terrain of Meghalaya and are reared for meat, milk, and fibre. Various goat breeds, including local breeds like the Garo and Jamunapari, are raised by farmers. Goat farming provides an important source of income and livelihood diversification for rural communities.
- 5. Veterinary Services:** The state government, along with various institutions and organisations, focuses on providing veterinary services and healthcare facilities to ensure the well-being of livestock. Veterinary hospitals, dispensaries, and mobile veterinary units are established to deliver healthcare services, vaccinations, disease control programs, and breeding support.
- 6. Government Initiatives:** The Government of Meghalaya has implemented several schemes and initiatives to promote livestock rearing and enhance the productivity of the sector. These initiatives include breed improvement programs, provision of subsidised inputs, skill development training, creation of market linkages, and financial assistance for setting up livestock-based enterprises.

Animal husbandry and livestock rearing in Meghalaya not only contribute to the agricultural economy but also play a vital role in supporting the socio-economic fabric of rural communities. The sector provides livelihood opportunities, nutritional security, and additional income sources for farmers, while also contributing to the overall food security and economic growth of the state. While animal husbandry and livestock rearing have significant importance in Meghalaya, there are several challenges that affect the sector:



1.Limited Infrastructure: One of the primary challenges is the lack of adequate infrastructure for animal husbandry. Insufficient veterinary hospitals, dispensaries, and diagnostic laboratories hinder timely healthcare services for livestock. The absence of proper livestock markets and processing facilities also affects marketing and value addition.

2.Lack of Modern Practices: Many livestock farmers in Meghalaya still rely on traditional methods and have limited access to modern practices and technologies. The lack of knowledge about improved breeding techniques, scientific feeding practices, and efficient management systems hampers productivity and limits the potential for increased income.

3.Disease Control: Disease outbreaks pose a significant challenge to livestock rearing. Lack

of proper vaccination programs, limited availability of veterinary professionals, and inadequate disease surveillance systems contribute to the spread of diseases among animals. Diseases like foot-and-mouth disease, parasitic infestations, and respiratory ailments can cause substantial economic losses.

4.Feed and Fodder Availability: Availability and access to quality feed and fodder are crucial for the well-being and productivity of livestock. Meghalaya faces challenges in terms of insufficient availability of green fodder, particularly during the dry season. This leads to increased dependence on purchased feed, which can be expensive and affect profitability.

5.Land Constraints: The hilly terrain of Meghalaya poses challenges in terms of limited grazing lands and suitable space for expansion of livestock farms. Fragmented landholdings and encroachment on grazing lands further restrict the scope for scaling up livestock production.

6.Climate Change: Climate change impacts, such as erratic rainfall patterns and changes in temperature, can affect livestock health and productivity. Extreme weather events like floods and droughts can result in the loss of fodder and grazing lands, leading to a scarcity of resources for livestock.

7.Lack of Financial Support: Limited access to credit facilities and financial support is a common challenge faced by livestock farmers. Insufficient capital for investing in improved infrastructure, quality breeding stock, and mechanisation inhibits the growth and development of the sector.

During the preparation of the VPRP, various demands emerged in the livelihood plan, most of which were met with the support of the respective line departments. As part of joint efforts, awareness camps were organised to educate beneficiaries on appropriate practices.



Additionally, vaccination drives have been conducted, ensuring the health and well-being of the livestock. Furthermore, insurance coverage was provided to the concerned beneficiaries (Cow, Pig etc). To address the issue of parasitic infestations, deworming medicines were also distributed.



Health Department

The state government of Meghalaya has established a network of healthcare facilities, including Primary Health Centres (PHC), Community Health Centres (CHC), and District hospitals, to cater to the healthcare needs of the population. In addition, there are a few private hospitals and clinics in urban areas. Like other regions in India, Meghalaya faces various health concerns. Some of the common health issues in the state include:

- 1. Communicable diseases:** Infectious diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, dengue fever, and waterborne diseases pose a challenge in certain areas of the state. Efforts are made to control and prevent the spread of these diseases through vaccination campaigns, disease surveillance, and public health initiatives.
- 2. Maternal and child health:** Maternal and child health indicators, such as maternal mortality rate, infant mortality rate, and child malnutrition, are areas of concern in Meghalaya. The state government has implemented various programs and initiatives to improve these indicators, including maternal and child health services, immunisation drives, and nutrition supplementation programs.
- 3. Non-communicable diseases:** Non-communicable diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases are on the rise in Meghalaya, primarily due to changing lifestyles, urbanisation, and an ageing population. Efforts are being made to raise awareness about these diseases and provide screening and treatment facilities.

In order to address the importance of public health and respond to the impact of the pandemic, the social development plan of the VPRP has incorporated health-related components. Collaborative efforts between the health department and other stakeholders have led to the organisation of multiple camps, which focused on promoting well-being and enhancing access to healthcare services. These camps included activities such as medical checkups, fitness sessions, vaccination drives, and enrollment for the MHIS health card, which is associated with the Meghalaya Health Insurance Scheme.

Despite facing challenges such as limited funds and human resources, both the community and the team are actively navigating their way to mutually benefit from each other. The local resource group is receiving guidance and support from mentor resource persons from Kerala. Their role is to facilitate communication and coordination with the line departments, enabling the VOs to effectively collaborate with the departments.

As the community's demands continue to emerge, the line departments are actively engaging and collaborating with the community. An example of this collaboration can be seen in the regular participation of line department officials in convergence camps, where they interact with the community directly. Furthermore, line departments have shown their commitment by

submitting applications to state authorities on behalf of the community for specific demands. A notable instance occurred in Mairang blocks, where the Sub Divisional Agricultural Officer forwarded a demand from the Village Organization (VO) for sprayers/pumps to the state level. As a result, the community received the requested equipment. This mutually beneficial relationship between the community and line departments was only possible due to the combined efforts and innovative strategies employed by both parties. The community actively put in efforts to establish effective communication channels and find new ways to collaborate with the departments, fostering a positive and productive working relationship.



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

During the month of June 2022, the process of concept seeding on social development plans was initiated in VO meetings. A brief orientation was provided to the VO members regarding the identification of social issues and the significance of this identification. The aim was to initiate a discussion around the various social issues prevalent in the village. Based on these discussions, the SDP, or the strategic plan to address the social issue, will be developed. The concept seeding process began with a discussion on the question of what constitutes a social issue. A story was narrated to the VO members to help them understand how to identify social issues, and the story included instances of social issues like domestic violence, child marriage, and drug abuse etc. VO members then discussed issues that can be addressed through community intervention. The LRGs emphasised the importance of recognizing that certain situations, conditions, or practices within the community can become normalised and accepted. They highlighted the need to critically examine and question such norms in order to bring about a shift in mindset and thinking.

Table: Details of Social Issues identified across 4 blocks

- Drug and alcohol addiction
- Adult illiteracy
- Child marriage
- Domestic violence and abuse
- Mobile phone addiction among children
- Unawareness among adolescents

These issues can be addressed through the 'No cost, Low cost' component of VPRP. VO members were actively encouraged to adopt a conscious approach of transitioning from the tendency to normalise certain aspects to actively problematizing them.

The concept seeding process served as the initial stage in identifying social issues, wherein VO members were tasked with compiling a list of pertinent social issues. These identified issues were discussed in subsequent meetings, allowing for in-depth exploration and analysis. Through this iterative process, comprehensive Social Development Plans were formulated at the VO level, including a range of activities and a well-defined timeline, ensuring a systematic and time-bound approach towards implementing the proposed initiatives.

After plan preparation, the implementation of activities commenced to achieve the goals for social development. The identified social issues were addressed through a range of initiatives and interventions. The VO members and other stakeholders actively participated in executing the planned activities, following the established timeline. Efforts were focused on fostering

collaboration and bringing together all stakeholders, including concerned line departments, VEC and VC members.



Recognizing the importance of collective action and shared responsibility, all stakeholders actively participated in the implementation of social development activities. Their expertise, resources, and local knowledge were leveraged to maximise the impact of the initiatives. The efforts were focused on creating awareness, empowering individuals and communities, fostering behavioural changes, and promoting inclusivity and equality. Regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms were put in place to track the progress of each activity and ensure their effective implementation. The collective efforts of the VO members and the community played a crucial role in achieving positive outcomes and making significant strides towards social development in the respective blocks.

Table: Activities Initiated under Social Development Plan

SDP Broad Areas	Activities undertaken
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health awareness sessions • Health Camps • Awareness Rallies against alcohol addiction and drug abuse • Distribution of medicines • Fitness Class
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation of Children’s Groups • Anganwadi Level Monitoring and Support Committee formation and strengthening • Adolescent awareness programs • Adult Literacy Classes
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plantation and Afforestation • Nutri Garden • Cleaning Drives
Social Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-Shram card enrollment camps
Women and Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women’s day Celebrations • Formation of Mothers committee in AWC • Menstrual Hygiene Awareness sessions • Sukanya Samriddhi Enrollment

COMMUNITY LED PLANTATION INITIATIVES

The activities related to the environment have been carried out by different Village Organizations in various locations within the state. These initiatives showcase the community's commitment to promote environmental conservation, and fostering sustainable practices.

Moringa Plantation Drive by Rikname VO in Hatimara Village of Dalu Block: Rikname VO organised an awareness session to educate community members about the Miracle tree (Moringa) and its nutritional value. Following the session, a plantation drive was conducted primarily in front of the Anganwadi and School premises in Hatimara village; a total of 30 Moringa trees have been planted. The VO members, along with the LRGs, took responsibility for the maintenance of the planted Drumstick trees. The KS-NRO mentor provided guidance and monitoring support. This successful initiative has inspired other VOs to replicate the plantation drive in their respective villages.



Tree Planting Ceremony for the inauguration of Convergence Camp in Rongram Block: During the inauguration of the first convergence camp, a tree planting ceremony was conducted by the CLF members. The ceremony was graced by esteemed Chief guests, including the Block Development Officer (BDO) and the Assistant Program Officer (MGNREGS). The Chief guests actively participated by planting trees around CLF office symbolising the collective commitment of the community towards environmental preservation. The members of the CLF pledged to nurture and care for the planted trees, promoting a sustainable approach towards nature conservation.

"Plantation Day" Celebration by Pyrkhatalang VO in an Mawkyrwat Block: Pyrkhatalang VO celebrated "Plantation Day" as part of their VPRP Demands for Afforestation. They procured over 500 saplings from the Forest Department and organised a special event to mark the occasion. The celebration involved the community members and esteemed guests, including the BDO sir and BPM-NRLM. The event took place in Domjyrti Village, where the plantation movement was officially inaugurated. The VO members expressed their commitment to beautify the village and preserve the environment. These community-led plantation and afforestation initiatives have led to outcomes and impacts, including awareness, community engagement and ownership and environmental conservation.



Nutritional Security Awareness Program and Nutri Garden

The awareness programs were conducted by the Horticulture department and Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Rongram and Dalu block, to promote nutritional security among community members. The officials educated community members about the importance of a balanced diet and access to nutritious food. The program aimed to enhance understanding of the nutritional needs of different groups, including children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers. Through this initiative, the VO aimed to empower community members to make informed decisions for improved health and well-being. A total of 117 members from various villages of both the blocks attended the training, equipping them with the knowledge and resources to establish their own nutri gardens.

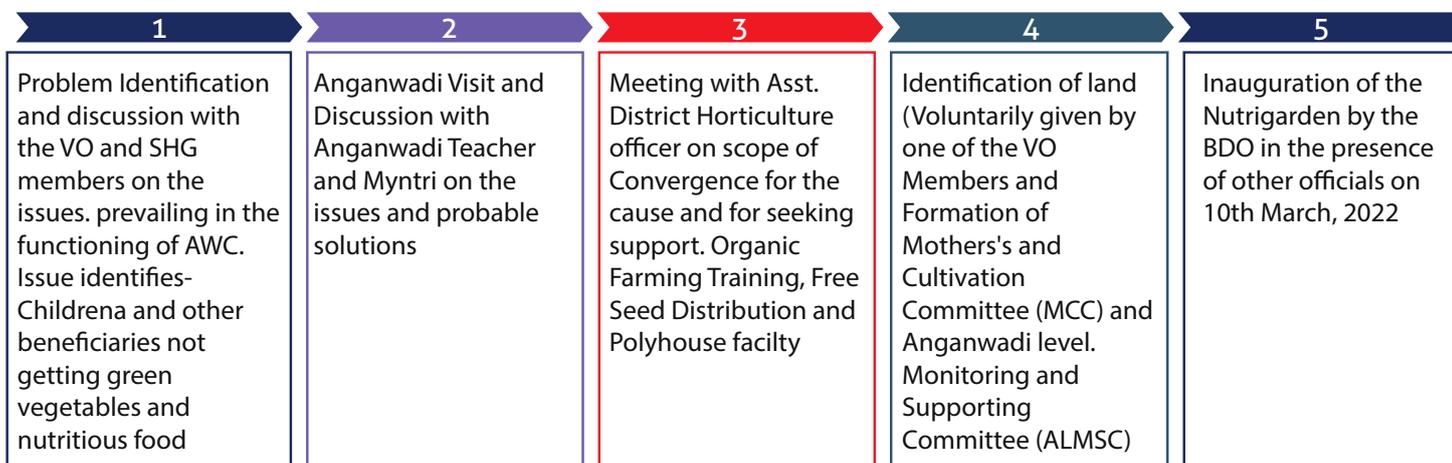


As part of their efforts to promote nutritional security, the Sanda Adu VO in Dalu block has set up a Nutri Garden near the mini Anganwadi. The garden aimed to provide fresh and locally available nutritious food to the VO members and community. It was inaugurated in a ceremony where the Horticulture Officer conducted a one-day training session on Nutri Garden management and distributed seeds to the participants.

Unfortunately, a flash flood in Purakhasia severely damaged the nutri garden set up by the Sanda Adu VO. Only the corn plants remained in an edible condition. In response, the VO members made a collective decision to distribute the corn to the children of the Anganwadi, pregnant women, and lactating mothers in the community. They embarked on a door-to-door distribution initiative to ensure that everyone in the village was safe and had access to food.



Anganwadi Intervention: Anganwadi Level Monitoring & Support Committee and Mothers & Cultivation Committee



In Mawkyrwat, the project is being implemented in 18 Villages out of which one village – Pyndendiwah, the project has been closely working around the proper functioning of the Anganwadi Centre to ensure better implementation of the ICDS services.



Learnings from Kerala

The need to work with the Anganwadis in Mawkyrwat Block of South West Khasi Hills District rooted from the constant engagement with the communities and interaction with the women, which revealed that their understanding of the services provided by the Anganwadi Centres was limited and that the current Anganwadi Centres were not operating effectively. The Exposure Visit to Kerala of the VEC and VO members acted as a catalyst. The Anganwadi visit in Kerala was an eye opener for the community members of Meghalaya with respect to the importance and functioning of the Anganwadis. Starting off from regular fun filled classes in Anganwadis for the children to the clean hygienic kitchen and kitchenware used, everything seemed surprising to the community representatives of Meghalaya. The learnings from the Exposure Visit seeded the idea of making the Anganwadis in Mawkyrwat function better in the minds of the Village Representatives and thus the interventions were taken up solely through community participation and ownership.

The exposure visit participants realised that the AWCs in Kerala are immensely efficient in their working unlike the AWCs in the villages of Mawkyrwat. There the AWCs are properly equipped with functional growth monitoring instruments, kitchen gardens with biogas equipments, walls painted with children friendly posters and paintings, details of the students and beneficiaries recorded digitally in the computer, clean hygienic kitchens with well maintained utensils and food storage facilities, books, toys, chair and desks for the children etc. They were astonished to see AWCs that were so organised and child-friendly.. It made them realise that Anganwadis are supposed to provide their children with proper care and nutrition. AWCs should provide children a safe place to learn while having fun and provided with the needed nutrition. Anganwadis are supposed to inspire Children to come and spend time in the AWCs and not just treat them as units of collection of ration. Fostering an environment of learning for the children along with ensuring primary care to the

children is what the Anganwadis in Mawkyrwat have been lagging behind with.

Along with this, what excited the participants was the support and services the AWCs provide to the adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating mothers. This was an eye opener for everybody as they have never seen the AWCs functioning so actively as service delivery agents in their own villages. Another aspect that came to their notice throughout



monitoring and ensuring that the children are taken care of and are getting good nutritious food. They discuss and address issues that exist in these centres for its better functioning. The participants realised how important community ownership and community participation is for the progress of the communities. Representatives from the villages who do not have an AWC demanded that they want to take this issue up with the ICDS for having one such AWC in their village. The idea of having a Mother's Committee for the existing AWCs seemed to be quite appealing to the participants.

Problem Identification

Pyndendiwah, one of the intervention villages in Mawkyrwat, took up the initiative to support their Anganwadi Centre in their village. NRO representatives in the block were consulted for handholding support and to discuss the strategy to address the problems that exist in their Anganwadi Centre. To get a better understanding about the problems and reasons behind the gaps of effective implementation of the ICDS Services, a VO Meeting was arranged where all the SHG members participated to voice out their opinion and raise the issues regarding the Anganwadi Services. The meeting was also attended by the mothers of the Anganwadi going children, Lactating and Pregnant mothers and other community members. The Myntri (Village headman) who was also a part of the Kerala Exposure Visit talked about the Anganwadis in Kerala and how different they are from the one they have in their village. The experience shared by the Myntri posed a lot of questions in the minds of the women and they started questioning the functioning of their AWC. The members present in the meeting were also explained the services that are supposed to be provided under the umbrella of ICDS schemes through the Anganwadi Schemes.

A prolonged discussion took place, during which a lot of gaps and loopholes in the functioning of the Pyndendiwah AWC were exposed. The problems that were identified in the discussion are as follows:

- ◆ Irregular pre-school classes.
- ◆ Inadequate chairs and tables for the children in the classroom.
- ◆ Improper infrastructure: Leaking roofs, Washroom with no water supply, unpainted walls, broken window
- ◆ Insufficient number of books and toys for children
- ◆ No fresh vegetables and nutritious food included in the meal provided to the children
- ◆ Irregular supply of Take Home Ration to the beneficiaries of the AWC
- ◆ Unclean and unhygienic kitchenware and storage containers
- ◆ No regular height and weight measurement of children and pregnant mothers: non-functional medical instruments

Initiatives undertaken

After the issues were raised in the VO Meeting and the community showed interest in taking the ownership of improving the services of the AWC for the betterment of the children, it was necessary to plan out a strategy to address the problems.

First and foremost, multiple visits were made by VO members to the Anganwadi Centre to interact with the Anganwadi Teacher and the Helper regarding the issues that were flagged. It was noticed that the attendance of the children was considerably low compared to the total enrolment according to the registers. Children did not want to attend the Anganwadi centres for classes and pre-school learning. There were several causes for this, one of which was that the classroom was too small to accommodate 32 kids at once. The classrooms weren't visually appealing enough to catch the kids' interest, nor did they have enough books and toys for them to engage in learning or fun activities. Rice and pulses were the only foods offered to the children at the centre. Eggs, vegetables, and other sources of protein are not a part of the meal. Hence, the children find no interest in having the food.

Mawkyrwat is topographically a hilly area with high amounts of precipitation and rains. The poor infrastructure of AWC caused leaking roofs during the rainy seasons which made it difficult for the children to sit inside the classroom during the rains and it spoiled the stored food as well. Such issues were discussed in detail with the Myntri (Village headman) and the Anganwadi Teacher to find probable solutions to improve the condition of the AWC. Myntri voluntarily funded the repairing and painting to resolve the inadequacies found in the infrastructure of AWC. He was of the opinion that the children should be benefitted and the community should take the responsibility of providing a better future for them. The Anganwadi teacher and the helper agreed to help in painting the walls along with the VO Members.

It was informed by the Anganwadi teacher that due to irregular and limited funds they are unable to provide vegetables to the children. Hence, having a nutri garden solely for the Anganwadi centre would serve the purpose. Therefore, it was decided that a nutrigarden would be established and maintained by the VO members, mothers of the children and the Anganwadi Teacher and Helper.

To establish a nutrigarden wasn't an easy task as there were several things to be taken care of. Most importantly, availability of land was the first concern that needed to be addressed. There was no community land available around the Anganwadi Centre that could be used for the purpose. This concern was raised in one of the Community meetings where the VO Members, Anganwadi Beneficiaries, Village Head and Anganwadi Representatives were present. Considering the seriousness of the issue that the children are not receiving proper nutritious food as per their right in the Anganwadi Center, a VO Member agreed to voluntarily give a piece of her land to establish the Nutrigarden. It was also decided that the Mothers of the children who are enrolled in the Anganwadi will take the responsibility of cultivating and supplying the vegetables produced to

the AWC for the children.

To ensure the effective functioning of the Anganwadi centre and proper cultivation of the nutrigarden, an Anganwadi Level Monitoring and Support Committee was also important. Therefore, on 5th March, 2022 the Anganwadi Level Monitoring and Support Committee (ALMSC) and the Mothers & Cultivation Committee (MCC) was formed.

Structure of ALMSC:

1. Village Headman (Myntri): ALMSC President
2. VO Secretary – ALMSC Secretary
3. VO President – ALMSC Member
4. Anganwadi Teacher – ALMSC Convener
5. MCC Secretary - ALMSC Member

Arranging inputs such as seeds, fence, manure has been one of the challenges while initiating the cultivation in the land. . District horticulture department has extended support by providing seeds and training MCC members on organic cultivation.

On the occasion of International Women’s Day – 8th March, 2022, the MCC and ALMSC Members undertook the activities such as fencing the land for the Nutri Garden and painting the Anganwadi Building.

On 10th March, 2022 the Nutrigarden was inaugurated by the Block Development Officer, Mawkyrwat C&RD Block and seeds were distributed to by the Assistant District Horticulture Officer to the MCC Members for the Nutrigarden. The women received training on organic farming and cultivation on the same day so they could begin cultivating the land solely with organic manure.

On 2nd April, 2022 a one day training was given to the ALMSC and MCC members on their roles and responsibilities and functioning of the committees.



Way Forward

The first step in resolving the problems with the AWC in Pyndendiwah was the establishment of the Mothers & Cultivation Committee and the Anganwadi Level Monitoring and Support Committee Only because of community ownership the Nutrigarden could be established. One major change that took place throughout the process is that the community realised that they were being deprived of the basic rights and entitlements that they are supposed to be benefited with. It was a sheer manifestation of what the community can do together for the development of their own village. To ensure the effective service delivery of village level institutions, it is necessary that the community is aware of their rights and are actively engaged in monitoring and supporting the institutions. Thus, the committees formed in Pyndendiwah will be responsible to do the same while engaging the community in its decision making processes.



Adolescent Awareness Programs

The Adolescent Awareness Programs initially commenced in Rongram Block as part of the Social Development Plan, addressing the issue of adolescent unawareness about mental health, substance abuse, personal hygiene, nutrition, career guidance, and life skills. The Programs were organised in various villages in convergence with the Health Department, Social welfare department, Schools and local organisation etc. The programs aimed to empower school-going students with essential knowledge and skills related to adolescence. The resource persons from the departments conducted interactive sessions and activities on topics such as family values, nutrition, personal hygiene, and the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Sensitive issues such as sex abuse and early marriage were also discussed, equipping the students with awareness and resilience. The resource persons highlighted the growing prevalence of smoking, drinking, and tobacco use among their age group, urging the students to reject these harmful behaviours.

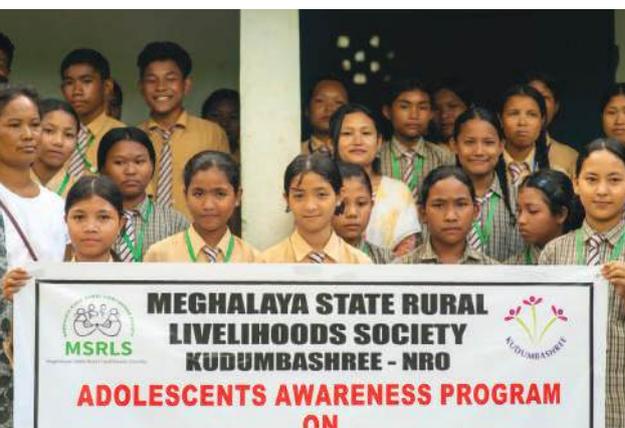
In order to address the shyness and encourage active participation among the adolescents, the officials from the department implemented an effective strategy during the awareness program. They organised fun activities and games, incorporating an element of competition and excitement. These engaging activities served as ice-breakers, creating a relaxed and interactive environment for the students to express themselves. An



essay writing competition was also organised as part of the program, providing an opportunity for the students to express their thoughts and ideas. The topic of the competition was “What would be the things you would implement if you were the VEC President/Nokma for a week?” This engaging topic aimed to stimulate the students’ creativity and critical thinking skills while encouraging them to envision themselves as leaders and change-makers. The students wholeheartedly embraced the competition and enthusiastically participated in the program.



To further motivate the participants, the organisers rewarded the winners of these activities with attractive prizes such as notebooks, sketch pens, and chocolate boxes. These incentives not only added a sense of achievement and recognition but also fostered a spirit of healthy competition among the students. By utilising this strategy, the officials successfully encouraged the adolescents to come out of their shells, boosting their confidence and enthusiasm to actively participate in the program. Sanitary pads were distributed as part of an initiative to promote menstrual hygiene during the Adolescent Awareness Program for girls.



Recognizing the importance of community ownership and participation, the VO members and LRGs actively took charge of coordinating the logistics, mobilising the adolescents, and ensuring their active involvement in the awareness programs. Through their efforts, the VO members and LRGs played a crucial role in creating a supportive and inclusive environment for the adolescents, allowing them to freely engage in the awareness programs and benefit from the valuable information shared.

The program witnessed the active involvement of various stakeholders, including CLF leaders, frontline workers like Asha and Anganwadi workers, healthcare professionals, and educators. The success and impact of these programs prompted their expansion to other blocks as well. By equipping young individuals with knowledge, fostering critical thinking, and providing a nurturing environment, these programs were aimed to unlock the full potential of the teenage years, ensuring that it truly becomes a golden era in their lives.



Table: Details of the Adolescent awareness program organised across blocks

Block	Timeline	Village	Organised by	Total Participation
Rongram	21st May 2022	Appanggre	Sangsang VO	44
	4th June 2022	Galwanggre	Galwanggre VO	17
	11th June 2022	Waramsongma	Waramsongma VO	36
	12th June 2022	Daljaggre	Mongalgre and Daljaggre VO	16
	18th June 2022	Tebronggre	Chockchimsa VO	37
	18th June 2022	Waram Asimggre	Domdime VO	27
	Dalu	6th August 2022	Marakkapara	Marakkapara VO
21st August 2022		Waram Dipogre	Navaldagre VO	47
6th August 2022		Halchatu	Birangona VO	50
16th August 2022		Khasipara	Janseva VO	35
18th August 2022		Balijora	Chutna VO	32
22nd August 2022		Chongnapara	Niwate VO	55
26th August 2022		Nekdalgre	Gitidang VO	110
Mairang	15th July 2022	Rikhen	Laweibaphyrnai VO	49
	16th July 2022	Mawkhomit	Lamingshai VO	39
	6th August 2022	Mawlytriang	Mawshanamramhal VO	88
	29th August 2022	Maroid	Persara VO	133

CHILDREN'S GROUP FORMATION

Jyngkyrmen & Syntiewbarit Group



Mawkyrwat C&RD Block South West Khasi Hills District

The exposure visit to Kerala has motivated the community in Meghalaya to try new things in their own villages and formation of Children's Groups is one such thing. Baalsabhas in Kerala won a special place in the hearts of the Meghalaya representatives. They were fascinated seeing how children in Kerala were also involved in community action and were playing an active role in developmental activities of their entire village. Returning from the Exposure visit, Pyrkhlatlang VO of Domjyrti village discussed and started mobilising children to form groups. The VO members also wanted the children to inculcate the habit of savings amongst the children and hence, weekly savings was also a reason behind forming the children's groups. The women of Domjyrti were particularly concerned about the children getting involved in drug abuse and ill practices. Children

tend to misuse their money in wrong doings and there is a high prevalence of school dropout amongst them. Hence, the VOs want their children to invest time in something that will avoid them to get into such ill-practices and become responsible citizens by involving in social activities for the betterment of their village. The Children's groups are also a forum for the children to meet and discuss the problems that they are facing in their surroundings. It helps the children to explore and express their talents and interest in singing, dancing, poetry, story telling etc. These group meetings will consist of discussions on child rights, gender empowerment, environmental issues etc.

There are two groups formed in Pyrkhatlang VO - Jyngkyrmen & Syntiewbarit Group, with 10 children each from the age group of 8-10 years. The groups meet once every week following the normal protocols of a meeting. They start with Prayer, introduction and agenda setting. The members of the group also save Rs. 5 per person per week for their upcoming activities. One VO member each are responsible for each Children's group and will monitor their regular meetings and ensure the children are meeting every week and engaging in activities. The children were also given registers to the groups by the VO and the president and secretary of the Children's groups were trained on how to maintain the registers and keep the minutes of the meeting regularly. The children in their meetings have discussed the problems that they feel exist in their villages, like increased use of plastics, school dropout, deforestation etc. and they have presented it in front of the VO Members. They have also discussed their course of action that they will undertake to solve these issues with the support of the VO Members and



the LRGs.

The children's groups are a great scope to engage with children and empower them. These groups will later be the medium to address other children from the village and the community as a whole to spread awareness on Child Rights and Gender equality.

Paintings by Children from Mawkyrwat Block



Promoting Adult Literacy: Emphasising a Fundamental Element of Development

“Literacy plays a crucial role in societal development. Kerala has shown us that a literate community actively benefits from developmental programs aimed at their welfare.”

- Bilcham CLF Member

Members of the community from Dalu block in West Garo Hills, Meghalaya, came to this revelation after spending 10 days in Kerala. An exposure visit was organised for chosen community leaders as part of the Panchayat Apprenticeship Programme (PAP) under the VEC-CBO Convergence Project of Kudumbashree NRO to give them the chance to learn firsthand about the development of rural communities in Kerala and to analyse various factors involved in carrying out development of the community as a whole. The exposure visit is further followed by multiple experience sharing and discussion sessions allowing the community to share their opinion and present their views about their visit experiences. In these sessions, many community members mentioned the importance of basic literacy and its role in empowering communities as it ensures efficient participation of the community in schemes and programs of development. Community members gave specific examples from their visit to the state of Kerala to support their strong opinion that rural communities in Kerala benefit from all developmental programs and schemes and take part in the planning of projects for their welfare because they have developed the fundamental and basic set of skills as a result of having better access to literacy.

Considering the importance of literacy, a village community of Dalu block had submitted the demand to organise an adult literacy Program for SHG members under VPRP. Moreover, in a series of meetings and discussions with SHG members, it has been analysed that many community members face challenges in reading basic information and writing their individual details. Many women find difficulty in inking their signature; they feel a sense of embarrassment as being unable to ink their basic details and signature. Additionally, they discussed their shared experiences with the circumstances that they typically encounter during meetings and when visiting any public institution. If an ink pad is not accessible, they always ask someone else to sign their attendance records, and when they visit public institutions, they often have trouble reading simple sign boards and information.

These persisting challenges gave an opportunity to the team of Kudumbashree NRO and Block unit of MSRLS to chalk out an innovative solution to assist the community members in upgrading their basic skill sets. It led to the development of the idea for starting a literacy campaign for the community. The Campaign has been organised in a phased manner and intervention carried out by focusing on the main one aspect:

01 Organizing Adult Literacy Classes.

During the CLF meeting, an organisation of Adult Literacy Classes proposal was put forth by the CLF members, Recognizing the importance of education and skill development, the representatives of Balihata VO stepped forward to take the initiative of conducting classes in the Balihata Village. To spread awareness, the VO president called for a general body meeting where the concept of the classes was introduced, and some of the VO members expressed their interest in participating. As a result of these collaborative efforts, the initial phase of the intervention was successfully launched in Balihata Village. It has been planned to involve 20 identified community members of the village. The classes spanned a period of five weeks, during which participants actively engaged in daily interaction sessions alongside the regular lessons. This approach aimed to create a dynamic learning environment that fostered effective communication and to enhance their educational capabilities.

Objectives of Literacy Campaign:

Literacy campaign aims for enhancing the basic skill sets of community members through short duration classes. The broader objectives of the campaign are mentioned below:

1. To give basic reading and writing classes to identified beneficiaries.
2. To ensure active participation of community members in different programs and activities.
3. Sensitization of community members about literacy and its importance.

Financial Management of the Campaign:

For the initial phase, the financial expenses for organising literacy classes in Balihata village on a pilot basis have been borne out from the amount collected through Crowd/community funding in Convergence Camp.

Implementation Strategy

In the first phase of implementation, the intervention area is Balihata village of Dalu block comprising 20 identified beneficiaries who are being trained under this campaign. For conducting the training program under the literacy Campaign, a primary school teacher has been identified with support of the village Organisation. The teacher is taking multiple sessions designed for a duration

of 5 weeks on a voluntary basis without charging any fees as she considers that contributing to this noble cause is her social responsibility. The monitoring of these sessions are being done by the Local Resource Group Cadres of the same village.

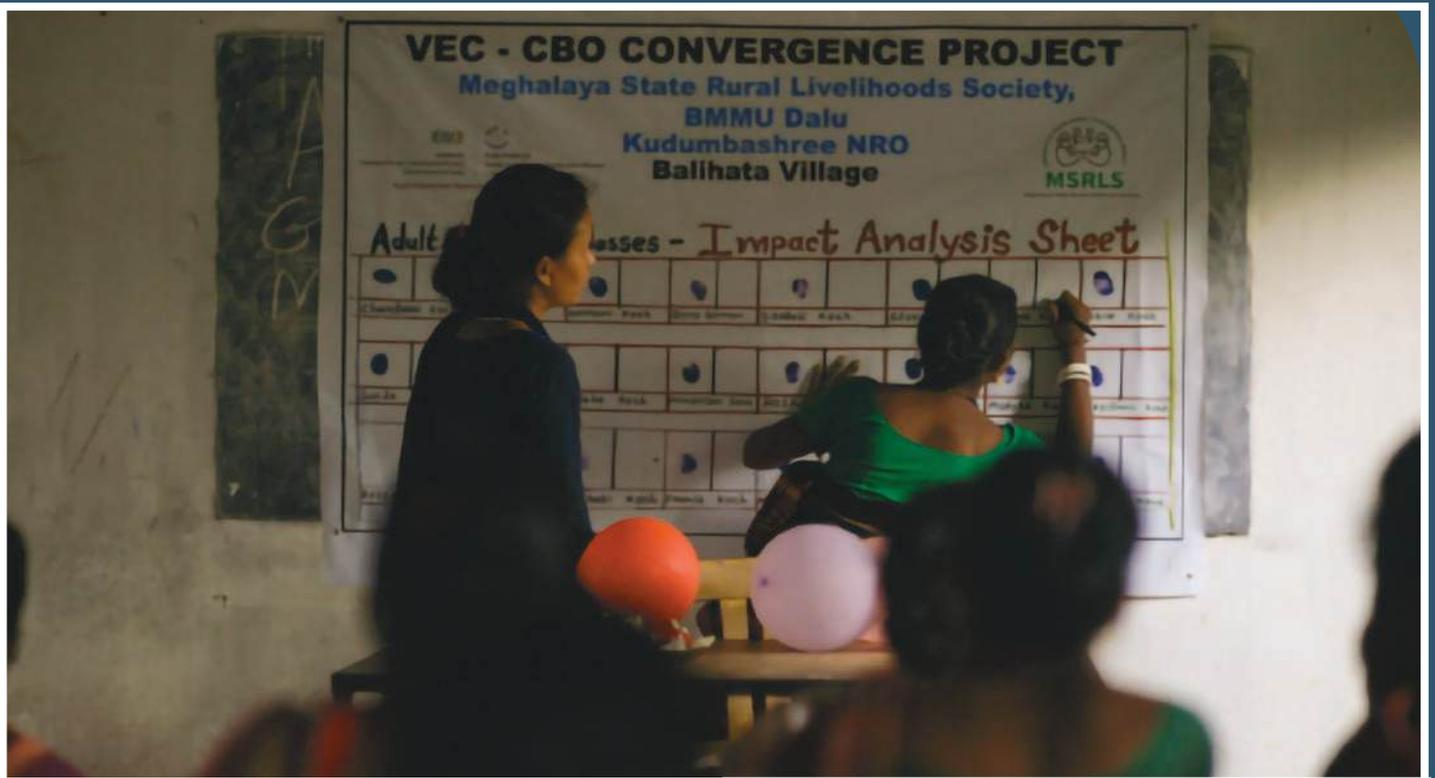
Literacy classes began with the inaugural event on 14th March 2022. The VEC Secretary, VO President and Nokma motivated the beneficiaries to learn and also appreciated their efforts of showing interest and will to learn by beating their age factor. The Teacher was also congratulated by all for undertaking the task of teaching on a voluntary basis. With initial gratitude, the beneficiaries were felicitated by the village representatives. Writing materials including slate and chalk- pencils were distributed to the beneficiaries.

Further discussion about literacy class and its schedule of 5 weeks was carried out. Training primarily consisted of practising and drawing shapes of alphabets and numeric. A few beneficiaries who had never held any writing pencil and finding difficulties in getting a grip were helped to initiate drawing on sand by using wooden sticks. In the inaugural event, the VEC secretary of Balihata village also assisted the beneficiaries in basic writings.



An impact analysis sheet was prepared to measure change, where all the beneficiaries marked their status on DAY-1 and, upon completion of the 5-week session, filled the blank space, which was expected to be filled with signs instead of thumb impressions.

After successfully completing the duration of these classes, the beneficiaries were felicitated and received completion certificates from the Block Mission Management Unit of Dalu block.



Adult Literacy Classes - Impact Analysis Sheet

Chandani Kach	Mina Kach	Sampat Kach	Sono Suman	Sambal Kach	Ujara Kach	Sukam Kach	Sudip Kach
Saba Kach	Dabi Kach	Saba Kach	Manab Kach	Roshni Kach	Dyabon Kach	Mohita Kach	Sardani Kach
Prasanna Kach	Saba Kach	Prasab Kach					
Saba Kach	Saba Kach	Saba Kach	Saba Kach	Saba Kach	Saba Kach	Saba Kach	Saba Kach



Future Scope and Expected Outcome:

The initiation of the literacy campaign aimed to bring significant progressive changes for the community members by enhancing their basic skill sets and creating awareness about the importance of literacy in development. Although the first phase intervention was limited to 20 beneficiaries only, in addition to Balihata village, the adult literacy program was extended to two more villages: one in Dalu block and another in Rongram Block. The communities in these villages eagerly took on the responsibility of organising the entire program, from the inauguration to the facilitation of beneficiaries. They understood the value of literacy and were determined to empower their members through this initiative.

It was expected that the success of this initial effort would lead to the expansion of the campaign and the inclusion of additional elements in the future. Thus, this beginning aimed to empower the communities on a greater scale by contributing to the fundamental cause of literacy.



RALLY & AWARENESS PROGRAM ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE And Initiative by Tehsonglang CLF

Social Development Plan is the fourth component of Village Poverty Reduction Plan in which the Village Organisations are required to identify a social issue and make a plan to address it with the support of the line departments. As the VOs in the intervention villages started preparing SDP for their own villages, a major issue that came up in almost all the VOs was the problem of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse amongst men and adolescents followed by continuous raids at the brewing and selling shops. The issue was widely discussed in all the VOs as well as in the intervention CLF (Tehsonglang CLF). The CLF members decided to take out a rally and conduct an awareness program at the block level before taking such initiatives in the respective villages. The plan was discussed with the Block Development Officer as well as with the District Commissioner with whose support a two days rally was organised on 22nd and 23rd August, 2022 at Umjarain

Village and at Mawkyrwat Market Area respectively.

On 22nd of August, Tehsonglang CLF organised a rally at Umjarain village (in the market area) where more than 300 women joined the rally from all the SHGs from intervention VOs. For the awareness program, officials from Social Welfare, Health Department, Police Department and Mental Health Department were invited. The VO members presented a skit on alcoholism and drug abuse which was very vibrant and heart touching.

On 23rd of August (today) the Intervention CLF was joined by Mawkyrwat CLF and Mawlangwir CLF and a similar rally and awareness program was organised at the Block Level



where more than 500 women joined from all SHGs and VOs from all the three CLFs. The children's groups (Jyngkermen and Syntiewbarit) formed as an initiative of the PRI-CBO Convergence project presented a dance while the LRGs (Local Resource Groups) did a skit performance on the related topic. The program was joined by officials from Health Department, Social Welfare, Mental Health Officer, Police Department (SI and DCP).

Both the days the rallies were guided by the Traffic police personnels and an ambulance was provided by the Health Department as the rallies were quite long. Additional Deputy Commissioner and Extra Additional Commissioner was the chief guest on 23rd and 22nd respectively.



VO STRENGTHENING

The objective of conducting the VO strengthening activity was to ensure the sustainability of the project as the project timeline was nearing its end. The specific objectives of the activity were as follows:

- ◆ Strengthening VO and Subcommittees: The activity aimed to strengthen their subcommittees, empowering them to take over the project's responsibilities. By enhancing their capacity and skills.
- ◆ Connecting CBO Members with the project's objective: The Web of Poverty and Haq ka Dabba activities were designed to connect CBO members with the project's basic objective of poverty eradication. The "Haq ka Dabba" (Box of Rights), symbolising the VPRP. They were instructed to disentangle the rope while referring to relevant cues from the Haq ka Dabba. As participants selected appropriate cues, they released the rope from their hands, symbolising their commitment to addressing poverty collectively. The emphasis was on the importance of following up with the VPRP and encouraged participants to approach Panchayats and relevant departments. By visualising the interconnectedness of poverty issues and understanding the significance of the VPRP, participants were encouraged to actively contribute to addressing poverty collectively.



VPRP Demands Monitoring and Evaluation: The activity focused on teaching VO members the importance of monitoring and evaluating the VPRP demands. By updating the VO Monitoring Sheet with the latest information, participants learned how to track the progress of VPRP achievements and identify areas that required attention. This emphasis on monitoring and evaluation aimed to ensure effective utilisation of resources and accountability.

By achieving these objectives, the activity aimed to create a strong foundation for the VOs and subcommittees to continue their efforts in eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development even after the project's timeline ended. It fostered collaboration, collective understanding, and a sense of ownership among the participants, ensuring the long-term success of the project.



EXIT WORKSHOP

VC-VEC-CBO CONVERGENCE WORKSHOP

KUDUMBASHREE NRO

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Meghalaya State Rural Livelihoods Society (MSRLS) and Kudumbashree NRO for implementing the PRI-CBO Convergence Project was signed for one year starting from September, 2021 till August, 2022. As the project tenure was coming to an end, the exit workshops were held at the block level at the end of August, 2022.

The project has been initiated with the primary objective of enhancing the convergence relationships at all levels between the traditional heads (Myntri, Sordars, Nokma), VECs, CBOs and with Line Departments for the holistic development of the intervention villages. Along with the convergence activities, the project also aims at strengthening the women federations at the village level and the local self-government structures to promote community ownership and community participation in developmental activities. A major part of fulfilling this aim goes into spreading awareness on the rights and entitlements of the people, role of women in public action and generating demands from the community through Village Poverty Reduction Plan. The project has been able to fulfil these objectives to a large extent through its intervention activities like Village Organisation orientations and strengthening activities, Village Poverty Reduction Plan Preparation, VOs making the Village map and preparing MGNREGA Community Demand Plan, Gram Sabhas, Line



Department Orientations both at district as well as state levels, Convergence Camps, Health camps etc. organised by the Women federations with the support of the village heads and VECs, and other activities with collective efforts of the CBOs, Village heads, NRLM- Block & District Officials as well as of the Line Departments.

Objectives of the Exit Workshop:

As we approach the end of the existing project cycle in the intervention clusters, a Block Level Exit Workshop was organised to have a glance at the success of the project so far as well as to plan a way forward as Kudumbashree NRO withdraws its direct support.

1. The data generated on VPRP Demands and Achievements from the intervention villages was presented and a plan was made to achieve the unmet data.
2. The workshop includes sessions on experience sharing of being a part of the project by the VECs, the traditional heads as well as by the VO members.
3. Plan for the upcoming quarter was prepared along with the BMMU-NRLM & DMMU-NRLM team for the intervention villages.

The exit workshop was attended by all the concerned stakeholders in the intervention Blocks. Additional Programme Officer-MGNREGA, BMMU & DMMU officials with SPM Smt. Memorial as the chief guest of the event. The Local Resource Groups presented the work undertaken in the last one year through chart papers and explained the activities in detail. They also presented the VPRP Demands and Achievement statistics and the activities that they have done to accomplish the demands. They also took the participants through a beautiful photo gallery of activities done under the project. The VO and the VEC members presented in the event shared their experience of working in the project and with the SHG members in their respective villages. They mentioned how beneficial the project was to them in order to bring some positive changes and take their community towards the path of development.



At the end of the workshop, a session was organised with the LRGs, CLF President and BMMU Officials to discuss the plan for the upcoming quarter and the activities that should be taken up by the LRGs. With the workshop, Kudumbashree NRO officially hands over the project to the Block Mission Management team and hopes the project continues to flare up even more from now on. The Block level exit workshop was the last event of VC-VEC-CBO Convergence project in and with this event we hope the objective of bridging the gap between the line departments and the community is minimised through the project and the convergence exists in the coming days as well.

MAJOR LEARNINGS AND REFLECTIONS

The VC-VEC-CBO Convergence Project in Meghalaya has been a remarkable journey, offering numerous valuable insights into the transformative power of community-driven development and convergence. Reflecting on the project's implementation and its outcomes, several key learnings emerge:

1. Empowerment Through Convergence: One of the most significant learnings from this project is how convergence between Village Councils, Village Employment Councils, and Community-Based Organizations can empower communities. By bringing together traditional governance institutions and women-led federations, the project has promoted a collaborative environment where local voices are heard, and decisions are made collectively. This convergence has enabled greater inclusivity in local governance, particularly for women, who have historically been underrepresented.

2. Strengthening Local Democracy: The project has demonstrated that true democracy is participatory. Through community-led processes such as the Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP), it became clear that engaging the local population in planning and decision-making can lead to more relevant and responsive governance. Communities actively identifying and addressing their own needs represent a powerful shift towards self-reliance and ownership over development processes.

3. Capacity Building as a Cornerstone: Capacity-building efforts for both CBOs and local governance institutions have proven to be significant. The establishment of LRGs and the training provided to women federations and traditional governance bodies have equipped them with the skills and knowledge to function effectively. This has also led to a better understanding of government schemes, enabling communities to access entitlements they were previously unaware of.

4. Challenges of Adapting to Local Contexts: A key reflection is the importance of contextualising development projects to align with local governance structures and customs. In Meghalaya, where the Panchayati Raj system does not exist, renaming and adapting the project to VC-VEC-CBO Convergence was crucial. This approach ensured that there would be no misconceptions and the project was respected and worked within the unique governance frameworks of the Khasi and Garo regions, which was essential for its success.

5. Women's Participation in Governance: The project's focus on enhancing women's participation in local governance has been particularly impactful. By empowering women through SHGs and federations, the project has facilitated their active involvement in governance processes. This shift has not only improved the visibility of women in public forums but also allowed them to exercise their agency in identifying and addressing village-level development needs.

6. Participatory Planning and Implementation: The participatory planning processes adopted, such as the preparation of MGNREGA plans, highlighted the power of collaborative action. For the first time, women federations, VCs, and VECs worked together to develop village-level demand plans,

a practice that has now become a stepping stone for participatory governance. This approach has proved the importance of involving diverse stakeholders in the planning and execution of development projects.

7. Overcoming Challenges Through Collaboration: The project faced several challenges, including initial resistance from traditional governance institutions and difficulties in ensuring the active participation of all stakeholders. However, these challenges were overcome through persistent efforts at collaboration and capacity building. The project highlighted that long-standing barriers can be broken down through patience, trust-building, and continuous engagement with all stakeholders.

8. Sustained Impact and Future Opportunities: While the project has been successful in creating a foundation for convergence and participatory governance, there is still room for further development. Future efforts should focus on sustaining and scaling up the initiatives, ensuring that the collaboration between VCs, VECs, and CBOs continues to thrive. Additionally, more attention could be given to addressing social issues such as drug abuse, alcoholism, and infrastructure deficiencies, as highlighted by the SHG-led community initiatives.

9. Community as Agents of Change: Perhaps the most profound reflection from this project is the realisation that communities, when empowered and given the right tools, can be the most effective agents of change. The active participation of community members, particularly women, in governance processes has led to visible changes in how local institutions function, how decisions are made, and how development is pursued. This shift toward community-led development is a model that can be replicated in other regions facing similar challenges

MOVING TOWARDS UNIVERSALISATION OF THE PROGRAMME

The activities and best practices established during the pilot phase of the VC-VEC-CBO Convergence Project in Meghalaya provide a solid foundation for a universal rollout of the programme. The transition from the pilot phase of the VC-VEC-CBO Convergence Project to a universal rollout will mark a significant step in expanding the program's reach and impact across the State. The pilot, conducted in three districts and four blocks, demonstrated effective strategies and best practices that will be adapted for broader implementation across 12 districts and 40 blocks in the initial timeline of the Phasing out plan of Universalisation.

These practices not only demonstrated effectiveness in the pilot but also offer valuable insights that can enhance implementation on a larger scale. Here's how these best practices will be adapted for universalization:

1. Training and Capacity Building: The pilot successfully trained 131 Local Resource Groups (LRGs) to act as intermediaries between Village Organizations (VOs) and local self-governments, fostering better communication and collaboration within communities. For the universal rollout, these existing cadres will be further developed and upgraded to serve as Block-level Trainers leveraging on their existing know-how and experience of the project activities. Additionally, new cadres will be placed in both immersion and non-immersion areas to be extended during the universal coverage, ensuring ongoing capacity building throughout the project's timeline. This structured approach will capitalise the sustained cadre pool development strategy of the state.

2. Community Engagement: Active community participation was a hallmark of the pilot, where focus efforts to work together with Village Heads were taken to improve governance and ensure representation of Self-Help Group (SHG) members in functional committees to encourage greater community participation in local development planning. This participatory model will be replicated in the universal rollout, with an emphasis on civic literacy and joint capacity-building initiatives among Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), Village Education Committees (VECs), and frontline workers which will be vital to install a sense of value towards ownership on decentralised planning and democratic practices. Strengthening women representatives in VECs will further enhance leadership skills and participatory planning, leading to more effective community governance.

3. Convergence with Government Programs: The pilot established strong connections with MGNREGA and other government initiatives, improving access to essential entitlements like job cards, Social welfare schemes and health services. The insights gained from these efforts will inform focused capacity-building initiatives with relevant departments such as SIRD and SRES, aimed at developing effective training modules and guidelines for devising focused community led convergence activities. By showcasing successful service delivery mechanisms through convergence camps, the program will streamline resource access for communities during the

universal rollout.

4. Exposure Visits for Learning: Organising exposure visits to successful models like Kudumbashree in Kerala allowed participants to learn about effective PRI-CBO convergence practices. This strategy will be expanded in the universal rollout by including key stakeholders—such as departmental representatives and administrative heads—in future visits. This collaborative learning approach will facilitate the adoption of successful strategies across various contexts within Meghalaya.

5. Institutional Strengthening: Strengthening the Social Action Sub-committees of the Village Organisations (VOs) during the pilot phase helped members to operate independently and effectively monitor their activities. This successful approach will be expanded in the universal rollout by establishing Village/Cluster Level Convergence Forums, which will serve as collaborative platforms for various committees existing at the village level. These forums will facilitate tracking of demands collected under the Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP) and drive community-led convergence activities forward.

Additionally, existing departmental service delivery platforms, such as Village Health Councils, Anganwadi committees, and School Management Committees, will be enhanced to foster greater community participation. This will involve joint orientations for Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and Village Heads to clarify the roles and responsibilities of these committees. By promoting collaboration between these committees and the Village Level Convergence Forums, the initiative aims to create a more integrated approach to service delivery and community engagement.

6. Community-Led Initiatives: The pilot phase fostered various community-led initiatives that addressed local needs, such as training programs on livelihoods, campaigns against drug abuse, adult literacy camps, and child welfare activities through Children's Groups. These successful initiatives demonstrated the importance of integrating community efforts with departmental support. The universal rollout will build upon these experiences by encouraging similar initiatives that leverage local resources and address specific community challenges.

The transition to a universal rollout of the project involves implementing several strategic initiatives that will ensure effective deployment and sustainability. Below are the key strategies and proposed way forward :

1. Experience and role of KS NRO: The experience of KS NRO piloting the PRI-CBO intervention in 15 states consisting of developing interventions in PRI, PESA and Non-PRI areas (5th and 6th Schedule areas), NRO will be delivering a role as a knowledge and technical partner to the states and states will be the implementation agency for the universalisation of the Programme. Herewith a robust implementation architecture with defined roles and driving mechanisms will be placed in the States who will be working in coordination with Professionals and Mentors placed from Kudumbashree NRO.

2. Proposed Stages and Activities under Universalisation:

Sl No	Stages	Activities
1	Pre-rollout Preparations	Scoping Study for contextual understanding of the State, Development of State Operational Framework for the programme and Drafting of cadre Policies
2	Rollout of Activities	Project Orientations, Exposure Visits to Kudumbashree, Concept Seedings on the Project and Civic Literacy to the Community stakeholders, Strengthening of Social Action Sub-committees of the CBO, Working together with Local Government Institutions, VPRP Plan preparations and Gram Sabha Mobilisations, Strengthening Women Elected Representatives in Local Government Institutions, Formation of Institutional Platforms of Convergence- VLCC and CLCC; Workshops with Line Departments to establish coordination and joint action in VPRP-VLDP/MGNREGA demand integration and establish coordination committees alongwith strengthening of Citizens Committees through enhancing role of the SHG federation in these committees, Social development and community led initiatives driven through convergence, Capacity building on MGNREGA and community participation in MGNREGA works, and; Community level workshop on VPRP and Project achievements.
3	Post-rollout Activities	Exit Plan and Compilation of Best Practices, Strategies, and Training Modules in IECs.

3. Phased Expansion The plan for a phased expansion will be aimed to extend coverage to 3,567 villages across 12 districts, allowing for effective change management through gradual adaptation. This approach facilitates the incorporation of lessons learned during the initial phases into subsequent expansions, ensuring that both immersion and non-immersion blocks are addressed over an 18-month period. Following this initial rollout, the project will scale up to include an additional 2,929 villages across 15 blocks, necessitating careful planning to sustain engagement with local stakeholders and ensure that the necessary infrastructure is in place to support ongoing operations.

In summary, the best practices from the pilot phase are not only effective but also adaptable for broader implementation. By incorporating these strategies into the universal rollout of the VC-VEC-CBO Convergence Project, Meghalaya aims to enhance community participation, strengthen governance structures, and improve access to essential services across a larger coverage area. This approach ensures that local needs are met while fostering sustainable development through active community engagement.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the VC-VEC-CBO Convergence project in Meghalaya has been successful in making communities aware of various schemes and support available to address poverty through improved community participation and public action. The project aimed to approach the state of holistic development of the community through the VPRP process, demand generation and materialising demands. Sourcing demands to the concerned stakeholders and departments was critical, and efforts were taken to submit the plans to various stakeholders. The interventions of the project played a crucial role in changing the perspective of the local government institutions about women participation in public forums, strengthening of existing committees, formation of new ones etc. While the project has achieved its objectives to a great extent, there is still scope for more development. Throughout the implementation, the community realised that they were being deprived of their basic rights and entitlements, leading to a manifestation of what the community can do together for the development of their own village. The success of the project lies in the empowerment of communities to take charge of their own development and participate actively in decision-making processes. The VECs, VCs and VOs will be responsible for engaging the community in its decision-making processes, while also ensuring their participation in monitoring and supporting institutions. The Community achievements are commendable, and efforts must continue to build on this success and achieve more milestones in the future. The VC-VEC-CBO Convergence Project has been a testament to the power of collective action and grassroots governance. It has provided a framework for how traditional governance institutions, community organisations, and government agencies can work together to drive development that is both inclusive and sustainable. The project has illuminated the path toward a future where local communities are at the forefront of their own development, ensuring that no voice is left unheard.

Quotes

Gram Sabhas, a democratic platform of public action that ensures community ownership in the local development process.

Empowering communities through participatory planning not only ensures their active involvement in decision-making processes but also fosters a sense of ownership, collaboration, and accountability.

To facilitate the active participation of community members in the planning process, ensuring their voices are heard and their demands are considered



Ajeevika
National Rural Livelihoods Mission
Government of India



Kudumbashree
Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission
Government of Kerala

Kudumbashree-National Resource Organisation