

OPERATIONS OF NERCORMP IN NORTH EAST INDIA: A REVIEW

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Cooperative Management, Kalyani, West Bengal***VS. Khathing***Asst. Prof. Pettigrew Collage, Ukhrul***ABSTRACT**DOI URL: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra2991>

The development project, North East Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCOMP) was launched in February 1998 in six districts selected from three states – Assam, Manipur and Meghalaya in North Eastern India. The project venture started with adoption of two approaches – (1) Social infrastructural development and (2) Socio –economic development, both with the participation of community based organisations (SHGs and NaRMGs).

Needy social infrastructural development activities have been executed under the project which give a breakthrough in development of remote tribal areas in NER.

Socio-Economic development through institutional capacity building and participation of CBOs has brought a drastic change in the life style of tribal people in the region.

By and large, the NERCOMP has given a great contribution to the socio-economic development of tribal community in the upland areas of North Eastern India.

Such project deserves replication in other demanding places.

KEY WORDS: NERCORMP, IFAD, SHGs and NaRMGs**INTRODUCTION**

Under the project sponsorship of an UN development agency, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Government of India through the North Eastern Council, Ministry of DONER launched the North East Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCORMP) in 3 (three) States of the North East India-Assam, Manipur and Meghalaya in February 1998. Two districts were selected from each chosen state. Karbi Anglong and North Cachar districts were selected from Assam; Senapati and Ukhrul districts from Manipur; and West Garo Hills and West Khasi Hills from Meghalaya.

The goal of the project is to improve the living standard of vulnerable groups of people who live in the upland areas of North Eastern Region (NER) in a sustainable manner through effective management of their resources with the fulfillment of specific objectives to : (a) promote a more sensitive approach to the design and implementation of development intervention, (b) enhance the capabilities of local people to manage new

technologies and institutions at the village level, (c) increase income through more sustainable farming system and the establishment of non-farm enterprises, (d) make people more aware of the need to conserve and regenerate natural resources, particularly forests and biodiversity, (e) establish effective and appropriate delivery system for inputs and for the maintenance of assets and resources, (f) increase participation of women in local institutions and decision-making processes within the community, (g) increase saving capacity and develop the habit of thrift mobilisation and (h) increase access to basic services and infrastructure facilities.

METHODOLOGY

The academic exercise has been carried out through descriptive research process. It attempted to find out the real contribution of the North East Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCOMP) in social infrastructural development and socio-economic development in six project districts – West Garo Hills, West Khasi Hills, Karbi Anglong, NC Hills, Senapati and Ukhrul districts.

DATA BASE

The academic work is based on secondary data (internal records of NERCOMP) taking reference period from 2007-08 to 2017-18. In addition to this field visit for appraisal of work executed has been carried out.

OBSERVATIONS

The total cost of project was USD 33.2 million, of which IFAD loan was USD 22.9 million, while Government of India's contribution was about USD 5.6 million and beneficiaries' contribution was about USD 3.5 million in the form of labour and contribution to the credit needs of SHGs and the non-

farm enterprise development. The loan delivery became effective on 23rd February 1999 and expected to be completed by 31 March 2006. The delivery of IFAD loan extended for two more years and completed on 31 March 2008.

At the end of December 2006, 81.45% of the IFAD loan had been disbursed, and the remaining balance amounting SDR 3.69 million were disbursed upto 31st March 2008. The total cumulative project expenditure as on 31st March 2007 was Rs. 1.04 billion and the annual expenditure for 2006- 07 was Rs. 1.98 million. Details of the total cumulative expenditure incurred was as follows:

(1) Community Institution Building	Rs.	130,112,021.00
(2) Village Development Fund	Rs.	501,914.00
(3) Village Development Fund - Social	Rs.	82,983,713.00
(4) Village Development Fund - Infrastructure	Rs.	118,996,429.00
(5) Natural Resources Management Plan	Rs.	30,387,158.00
(6) Project Management-Regional Society	Rs.	93,723,536.00
(7) Project Management-District Society	Rs.	134,412,860.00

Total : Rs. 1,040,087,631.00

ROLES PLAYED

The NERCORMP has played various roles for community development for six selected districts of Assam, Meghalaya and Manipur in North Eastern Region of India. Setting up new community based institutions and strengthening existing community based institutions are the principle foundation for taking up community based socio-economic activities. As such, Rs. 130112021.00 were utilized for the purpose of community institution building.

Infrastructure development for villages for better connectivity like road construction (549 Km), improvement of existing roads (240 Km.), construction of culverts (206 units) and suspension bridges (12 units) were carried out during the project implementation period.

Infrastructure development for agriculture was also undertaken. 2823 acres of agricultural land have been converted from jhum land to terrace land.

As part of community infrastructure development five common facility centers, 60 school buildings and 15 community halls were constructed. Under health and sanitation programme as many as 27,903 low cost latrines were constructed. For providing safe drinking water supply to the villagers plastic pipe lines were connected from the reservoirs. The total length of pipe line connection was 103 Km. In addition to this 81 water ponds were modified and made necessary improvement. For these activities Rs. 118,996,429.00 were spent under the head: Village Infrastructure Development Fund.

With the accessibility of such social infrastructure a breakthrough in socio-economic development in the project areas has been ensured.

The road connectivity has increased the momentum of growth of agricultural and horticultural production. As a result, earnings from farming have also increased substantially. Community facility centers and community halls have facilitated social interaction and social cohesiveness among the people in different tribal villages.

Sanitary latrines (low cost latrines) have changed the life style of tribal villagers. Gravitational water supply system has given new living styles to tribal villagers. Combination of sanitary latrine facility and safe water supply system has given a substantial impact on improvement of health status of innocent poor tribal masses. They get safety net from many communicable diseases.

Micro enterprise initiative was one component of the project mission. Up to 31st March 2008 a good number of micro enterprises were set up as listed below:

Petty business:	829 units
Cluster business:	137 units
Handicraft:	8 units
Grocery:	707 units
Weaving:	1895 units
Tailoring:	50 units
Cold Storage:	6 units
Rice Mill:	64 units

Community based organizations (CBOs) in the project districts have been organised and participated actively in the development process. Two categories of CBOs were created viz (1) Self Help Groups (SHGs) absolutely for women with focus on building capacity for savings and credit activities, and (2) Natural Resource Management Groups (NaRMGs) village wise for managing social activities and village infrastructure. These primary level groups have graduated to secondary level by forming Federation of SHGs and Association of NaRMGs initially in two districts (Ukhrul district in Manipur and West Garo Hills district in Meghalaya). Now such secondary level CBOs are set up in all districts under the project. These community based organizations have been set up for effective social mobilisation and building the capacity to self-manage social and economic affairs of needy masses.

According to project appraisal report 460 villages were to be covered. Later during the mid-term appraisal it was decided to cover 1000 villages and 860 villages were covered

at the end of March 2007. A total of 39,161 households were found participated in 6 (six) project districts in three States of Assam, Meghalaya and Manipur. As many as, 3168 SHGs

and 1012 NaRMGs were formed. At the secondary level of institutional building 103 SHG - Federations and 103 NaRMG-Associations were organised. Details are shown in Table - 1.

Table - 1
District wise Achievement of SHG and NaRMG Formation

District	No. of SHG	No. of NaRMGs	SHG Federations	NaRMG Associations
West Garo Hills	852	257	25	29
West Khasi Hills	454	162	18	16
KarbiAnglong	417	166	16	16
North Cachar Hills	347	131	15	11
Senapati	417	150	24	21
Uhrul	681	146	5	10
Total	3168	1012	103	103

Source : Progress Report of NERCORMP 2017-18

Among 6 (six) districts under IFAD project, Ukhul district stands second rank in terms of number of SHG set up, 5th in number of NaRMGsorganised, 6th in SHG Federation and NaRMG Association set up.

Clusters have been formed comprising 10-15 beneficiary villages in each cluster.

Coordinators of Federations of SHGs, NaRMG-Associations and Clusters have played important roles in mobilisation of corpus fund and collective business development as detailed below:

- Associations of NaRMGs are to focus on the developmental activities and strengthen their capacity to liaise and coordinate with outside bodies to access resources. Federations of SHGs are to continue to strengthen their micro-finance activities which would gradually culminate at the apex level.
- To facilitate the cluster and federation level institutions building to ensure batter pace of community development..
- To facilitate the formation of apex institutions for associations and federations under appropriate legal entity and to provide training on operation areas.
- To facilitate in the establishment of systems for assessing business viability, its control, monitoring and risks management.
- To enhance knowledge and skill of officials of CBOs in organizational management to fit in the changing environment.

Federations of SHGs have been recently formed and they need to build up their capacity to do lending activities. As such one-time payment of Rs. 100,000 (Rupees one lakh) to each Federation has been made out of project fund. The margin earned could be used to meet operational costs of the Federation.

Convergence with Government Programmes and Bank Linkage

- (i) As the end of September 2007, convergence with government programmes had been made in all 6 (six) project districts. Among the project districts, Senapati, KarbiAnglong and Garo hills have been identified as more active than the rest in terms of covering a wider range of programmes [Forest Department, Veterinary, DRDA, Agriculture, Fishery, PHED, Soil Conservation (tea and coffee), solar lamps]. Such convergent programmes are supplementary among various project activities in the concerned villages.
- (ii) SHG - Bank linkages have been made with State Bank of India, Meghalaya Cooperative Apex Bank, Bank Nongkyndong and LongpiDehangi Bank according to service availability in the project districts. The total number of such SHGs which got bank linkage facility was 980 which linked directly and indirectly under the SGSY scheme(now National Rural Livelihood Mission). Under the SHG- Bank linkage programme SHGs started income generating activities for which banks dispursed Rs. 30.2 million as microcredit. A total of 19 Associations of NaRMGs were linked with private finance companies (North Eastern Development and Finance Corporation Ltd. and TATA Motors Finance Company Ltd.). Lack of bank branches was the main hurdle in the development of SHG – bank linkage programme. Raising demands of micro credit could not be made available from banks.

STATUS OF CBOs

As part of institutional building substantial number of SHGs, NaRMGs, SHG-Federations and NaRMG – Associations have been formed in all six districts under the IFAD aided project, West Garo Hills district has taken lead in terms of formation of community based organisations (COBs). It is followed by Ukhul district –as shown in Table – 2

Table - 2 :

District wise Distribution of CBOs

Sl. No.	Districts	No. of SHG	No. of NaRMGs	No. of SHG Federations	No. of NaRMG Associations
1.	West Garo Hills	852	852	852	852
2.	West Khasi Hills	454	454	454	454
3.	KarbiAnglong	417	417	417	417
4.	NC Hills	347	347	347	347
5.	Senapati	417	417	417	417
6.	Ukhrul	681	681	681	681
7.	Total	3168	3168	3168	3168

Source : NERCORMP's Internal Record(20017-018)

Based on performance indicators CBOs are categorized under Grade A, B and C. Every year such CBOs are upgraded based on their performances. Ukhrul is first rank in terms of Grade A and second in Grade B in CBOs ranking.

West Garo Hills stands second rank in Grade A category and first in Grade B. Highest upgradation of COBs was recorded in West Garo Hills district, followed by Ukhrul district. Details are shown in Table -3

Table - 3

Grade wise Distribution of CBOs

District	Grade A CBOs	Grade B CBOs	Grade C CBOs	No. of Upgrade CBOs	Total
West Garo Hills	317	265	85	185	852
West Khasi Hills	271	160	17	6	454
KarbiAnglong	204	204	9	10	427
NC Hills	117	118	67	45	347
Senapati	255	137	21	4	417
Ukhrul	348	208	45	80	681
Total	1512	1092	244	330	3178

Source - Ibid

TRANSFORMATION OF JHUM

Under NERCORMP project a great extent of crop intensification, crop diversification and crop commodification were introduced. Transformation of Jhum(shifting cultivation) areas into perennial horticulture crop plantation areas was done. A total area of 10979 acres in 476 villages were brought under crop intensification which benefited 24621 households

upto 30th June 2007. A total area of 5696 acres of Jhum land became under crop diversification covering 445 villages and 19415 households. Another landmark achievement of Jhum transformation is that 16278.17 acres of land are converted land on crop commodification for seven crops as depicted in Table – 4

Table-4
Achievement under Jhum Modification

Activities	Area Covered (acres)	No. of Villages	No. of HHs
Crop Intensification*	10979	476	24621
Crop Diversification**	5696	445	19415
Crop commodification***/Conversion of Jhum into perennial horticulture crop plantation			
Banana	2123.51	592	10911
Pineapple	2338.5	471	10804
Passion fruits	808	279	8591
MAPs	4734	954	23718
Orange	2708.46	578	12155
Areca nut	3205.5	582	12973
Lemon	117.2	89	1255
Mixed horticulture crops	243	213	1622
Biodiversity Conservation/ Community Forest/ NTFP Reserves	1835.81 sq. km	642	26865
Terrace fields	2832.5	687	12446
Plantation of cash crops (tea, cashew, etc.)	5587.39	1267	28201
* Crop Intensification : From traditional one year cropping to 2 or more years			
** Crop Diversification : Jhum areas used for non-traditional Jhum crops like potato, peas, cabbage etc.			
*** Crop Commodification : Introduction of horticulture and/or cash crops in Jhum areas; crops are usually perennial.			

Source : Ibid

In addition to this biodiversity conservation/ community forest/ NTFP (Non Timber Forest Produce) Reserves have been developed covering 1835.81 Sq. Km. in 642 villages by

benefitting 26865 households. Table – 5 sets out district wise achievement of biodiversity conservation in the project areas.

Table -5
District wise Achievements of Biodiversity Conservation

District	Biodiversity/ Community Forest Reserves (sq. km.)	No. of Villages covered	No. of Villages where community forest reserves declared
West Garo Hills	600	192	180
West Khasi Hills	253	162	11
Karbi Anglong	330	108	104
NC Hills	436	103	74
Senapati	140	166	142
Ukhrul	76	131	131
Total	1835	862	642

Source : Ibid

CONCLUSION

The North East Community Resource Management Project has executed both infrastructure development and socio-economic development activities in six districts of three states of North Eastern India. This has given a perceptible change in social and economic dimensions in upland communities.

Through institutional building microfinance penetrated for ensuring better agricultural farming in the six selected districts which led better income earnings of all households through SHGs & NaRMGs. Consumption pattern and life style changes of target people have been observed in the project area.

A substantial transformation from Jhum cultivation practice to Non-Jhum Cultivation Practice – Perennial Horticultural Crop Plantation has been carried out and farmers are found practicing alternative of Jhum cultivation successfully. Biodiversity reserves have been created. These become community assets.

It is obvious to reveal that NERCORMP Project has given a commendable contribution to the North Eastern Region in terms of economic development and social asset creation. Such project needs replication in other demanding places in the same region or other regions.

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