

India

Restoring Cloud Forests
May 2016



A total of 933,300 trees have been financed thanks to the support of donors and sponsors

The Project

In the Meghalaya state lies the “wettest place on earth”. Here, in the East Khasi Hills, WeForest works in collaboration with the Mawphlang Welfare Society to restore the native forest and empower communities. Local people are supported by their traditional governance institutions to protect and restore their forests and develop new livelihood initiatives. Through self-help groups, farmer’s clubs, home-based nurseries and more, the project fosters entrepreneurship, economic development and gender equality. The aim is to reconcile the area’s reforestation needs with those of the local communities in a holistic approach to ecological restoration.

Facts & Figures

- Location and GPS coordinates: Meghalaya, North East India (25°27'44.27"N 91°29'2.22"E)
- Project area: 1,500 hectares
- Restoration approach: Assisted natural regeneration¹ + enrichment planting
- Number of trees: 933,300 of 40 species
- Number of beneficiaries: 24,000 (3,500 families)

¹Protecting and nurturing wild tree saplings to promote the natural process of regeneration



Planting Update

October 2015 – March 2016

The team has completed the demarcation of an additional 500 hectares (ha), resulting in a total area of 1500 ha under restoration. A forest inventory of tree species was carried out in the last six months and has revealed promising results. A healthy 40 species were found to be present. Assisted natural regeneration continues and fire lines are being created about 30 km in length to protect the growing forest from disturbance. Communities agreed amongst each other to implement “social fencing”. This means that no animals are allowed to enter the restoration zone to allow saplings to grow.

Helping People Help Themselves

The project offers an opportunity for rural families to lift themselves out of the extreme poverty that characterizes the area. Through engagement in the project, villagers have the opportunity to get involved in a number of economic initiatives. They can join self-help groups, keep pigs and poultry, run nurseries, and even establish their own tea stalls, and are involved in the forest restoration activities (below right). There are a total of 68 self-help groups, 89 employees and 9 farmer's clubs. So far, 3,500 families have become involved in the project. That means that 24,000 people are benefiting from additional income generation, new skills and empowerment. Of the 68 self-help groups, 9 are male self-help groups and 29 are mixed genders and the rest are made up of women. Providing opportunities for local men and women, including young members of the communities, the project is helping to empower young men and women.



Changing Lifestyles for People and Nature

Villagers value their forests to such an extent that they are eager to change their lifestyles to protect them. The majority of local households use firewood which they use to fuel inefficient stoves. In light of this, 64 smokeless gas cookers (*chulas*) (above left) and 56 electric rice cookers were recently distributed to forest dependent families recently to make firewood use more efficient. Every household uses around 3 kg of firewood per day. By using the rice cooker, this amount is reduced by half.

Families are now being trained to use *chulas* and electric rice cookers and public awareness campaigns are underway to encourage and inspire locals to reduce their firewood use. Every time the project identifies a new plot and a new participating village, discussions with the village councils take place to explore how to reduce the need for firewood in the area. The energy transition programme is a vital component of the project and demonstrates the villagers' determination to look after their environment.

Meet the People Behind the Trees

"Forests are very important for receiving fresh air, a beautiful environment, reducing soil erosion and bringing back biodiversity"

Ms. Daplina Lynser (left) runs a nursery with another nine women. Here, she helps to care for 3,000 trees, 600 of which have been planted since she established her nursery this year. She is a member of a self-help group that works in piggery and poultry to improve their income and diversity their skills. At the nursery, she grows a variety of seedlings, including cherries. She has seen her income grow through planting trees, and has enabled her to help restore the environment.

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"If the forests disappear, we lose pride and honor as well"

We met with Mr. Pynshailang Lyngdoh (left), a local musician, to discuss what the forest means to him. He brought along his *divitara*, a guitar made out of pine wood, and a *ksing*, a drum made out of puma wood. During the meeting, he performed a song in the forest and talked of the importance of the forest to him. He is a famous Khasi folk singer and performs at monolith festivals and festivities around the sacred groves to raise awareness about forest protection. He believes that he can inspire young people to care about the forest through his music.

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