



A total of 833,000 trees have been financed thanks to the support of donors and sponsors

THE PROJECT

In the East Khasi Hills in the Meghalaya state, North East India, WeForest continues its work in collaboration with the Mawphlang Welfare Society (Synjuk) to reverse the loss of forest cover. Joining forces with a federation of local governments and villages, the project employs a community based approach to carry out enrichment planting, coppicing and assisted natural regeneration (ANR) to protect and nurture volunteer saplings¹. By engaging local communities and developing varied livelihood initiatives, the project seeks to empower local communities and promote gender equality. Locals are involved in the boundary demarcation and monitoring of reforestation plots and women's self-help groups manage the project nurseries. The project aims to reconcile the area's reforestation needs with the needs of local communities in a sustainable, long-term approach.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- Location and GPS coordinates: **Meghalaya, North East India (25°27'44.27"N 91°29'2.22"E)**
- Project area: **1,000 hectares**
- Number of trees: **833,000 of 46 species**
- Number of recipients since 2011: **2,293**
- Number of women's self help groups: **68**
- Number of farmers clubs: **10**
- Number of home based nurseries: **77**

PLANTING UPDATE

April – September 2015

During the last six months the team has completed its demarcation of the 500 hectares of land for restoration. The team selected open forest areas for natural regeneration and enrichment planting to increase the diversity of tree species. An inventory of tree species revealed the presence of 46 species. Growth and diversity in the area is promising and growth and seedling survival in the nurseries is high. Numerous tree adoption and awareness events took place at local schools in the area. A further 500 hectares is being selected to scale up the project.



¹Volunteer saplings are those that are grown naturally rather than being deliberately planted

FORESTRY MONITORING

The boundary of the entire assisted natural regeneration (ANR) area was mapped using GPS points and Google Earth images to produce maps for the ANR areas that demonstrate the division of management responsibilities by the different himas². The diversity and growth of the plots was monitored. The area is home to 46 different species. The stem height of all tagged individuals within the plots was measured and shows positive growth. The team has reported that carbon sequestration has tripled in the ANR areas. This equates to a reduction of 30,17 ton CO₂ per hectare³. The 77 home based nurseries are flourishing. The mortality rate of the planted saplings is very low and, in the event that a sapling is unsuccessful, voluntary replacement takes place.



SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

The team has decided that the project will focus on existing and well-functioning self-help groups (SHGs) with the intention of establishing independence among the most progressive and therefore no new SHGs will be formed. 14 SHGs and four Farmer's Clubs were monitored during the last six months to measure the progress. The review showed that members are engaged and working hard, they possess good record keeping abilities and attend meetings. SHGs are taking part in a variety of different livelihood activities for socio-economic development. In addition to the restoration activities, the project supports local initiatives in economic development through agriculture. Some members have taken loans from the group to purchase piglets and vegetable seedlings while others use them to pay school fees for children. In addition to the SHG and Farmer's Clubs, the project integrates school activities with local forest restoration. By engaging children in planting, growing and caring for trees, the project seeks to educate and train future generations in forest restoration. During the last six months several school adoption and awareness programs took place to increase awareness among children.

DIRECTOR OF RESTORATION AT WEFORREST VISITS

The Director of Restoration Projects, Dr. Victoria Gutierrez, visited the Synjuk Office from 20th – 27th September 2015. During the visit the Synjuk organized three meetings. Together it was decided to scale up the project with an additional 500ha. Among the various topics discussed were the objectives for 2016, the distribution of funds and the protocol for field monitoring. The director visited the ANR plots and nurseries and interviewed individuals, members of SHG's and Farmers Club. The visit proved extremely successful as members of the project showed great enthusiasm and excitement.



²The annual forest inventory took place at the end of 2014, and carbon measurements are based on the principle of additionality

³Local governments

INTERVIEWS

To explore villagers' perceptions of the project the team interviewed villagers and asked them questions relating the project benefits. The interviewees gave very positive feedback. They expressed gratitude and excitement towards the work of the Synjuk and WeForest and are optimistic that it will help them restore their native forests. Below are excerpts from two interviews.



INTERVIEWING THUASILA NONGKYNRIH (43 YRS)

"I am very grateful for the work carried out by WeForest and the Synjuk. I am a member of the Bankiew Shaphrang SHG. Our village has been experiencing great problems in conserving our forests because of the frequently occurring forest fires and illegal activities. With the intervention of the Synjuk, I am happy to see that some of our forests has come back and the trees have started growing again. I am also happy that the Synjuk has been supporting our SHG in various activities of the SHG and hope that it will continue to do so. As a concerned citizen, I am trying my best to make people aware of the activities of the Synjuk and the need to conserve our forests as they are the backbone of our livelihood. I also try to encourage them to take part in this activity to conserve our forests."

INTERVIEWING MEDALIN KHONGSIT (31 YRS)

Do you find the project beneficial? If yes, in what way?

"Yes it is a beneficial because it helps us in many ways. Using the loan from the group we get to utilize the money in buying pigs and in paying the school fees. It is important that there is collective responsibility towards a green and clean environment and in finding ways to a better financial approach while sustaining our forests at the same time. I have learned a lot in the forest conservation and in tree nursery work. We also learnt about savings, book keeping, micro enterprise and team work. Our mind set is broadening a lot."

Has the project brought about any changes to the forest or the mindset of the community members?

"Yes it has. The forests have regenerated and water bodies are improving. Now people are very much environmentally concerned and also equipped to be able to take up small projects through SHGs and Farmers' club."