



Ngainga village, Ukhrul

Background

This village is located in the western part of Ukhrul district which is approximately 17km from the district headquarters. The total area of the village is 2348.17ha. Presently 170 households reside in this village. People of this village mostly depend on agriculture including shifting cultivation (*jhum*) and settled cultivation (terrace), forest produce and weaving. The village is occupied by the tangkhul (naga) tribe.

The village is about 400 years old. Conservation of a green belt at the vicinity of the village or surrounding the village is a common practice in most of the tangkhul villages since time immemorial. The forests around the village were protected basically for the security and safety of the village, either from fire and/or enemies during the days of head-hunting. But with increasing population and land pressure, the practice has been gradually eroding. In the recent times such safety forests have been converted to agro-horticulture plots or used for extraction of timbers for income generation. Ngainga has been no exception to this. This village is also known for notorious charcoal business. Due to proximity to the Ukhrul town, forest products like fuelwood, bamboo, bamboo shoot, timber, among others were over extracted. This was also due to weakening of traditional governance systems. All these activities contributed to destruction of forest and the village forests were left severely degraded by the late nineties. People of Ngainga began to experience acute shortage of water and the good quality firewood was not enough to meet the demands throughout the year.

Under these circumstances, the IFAD-funded North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas (NERCORMP-IFAD)¹ came to this village in the year 2000. As part of the project NERCORMP-IFAD constituted a natural resource management group (NaRMG) from within the community. This group was given capacity building training and also awareness was raised about the importance of protecting biodiversity and natural resources. Under the project water supply was taken up in 2001-2002. Even with this development, the villagers could not get water throughout the year as the water sources would dry up in dry season. With the awareness packages provided to the community, they started linking non-availability of water with rampant deforestation. It was in this scenario that the villagers decided to conserve the catchment area of the water resources along with their traditional reserved forest. As a result the village is now protecting a patch of 142.92ha.

Towards community conservation

Mobilization and capacity building started with the entry of the NERCORMP-IFAD project in this village. The Ukhrul District Community Resource Management Society (UDCRMS) implemented the project. The process started with training on participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools for community-led planning. The community-based institution called the natural resource management group (NaRMG) was set up in the village where husband and wife from each household were the primary members. The village has three primary NaRMGs under one common village NaRMG and five self help groups (SHGs) under a village federation. The NaRMGs meet at least once in a month. All meeting proceedings and resolutions adopted in the process are recorded. According to the NaRMG guidelines, a resolution can be adopted only when at least 70% or more members are present in the meeting. Thus, the process for conservation of forest and biodiversity were initiated by the NaRMGs, which were then nurtured and supported by NERCORMP-IFAD along with UDCRMS. The NaRMG also took into confidence the village council (VC), the traditional village decision making body, while taking the resolution about protection of the reserved forest.

Under the programme, awareness workshops and seminars have been conducted at the district level in order to re-enforce and strengthen such processes in the villages. The benefits of such practices are deliberately and purposefully discussed and taken up by the project at all level of community meetings and discussions. Saplings for plantations are taken from the state forest department (FD).

Like Ngainga, in many other villages both the NaRMG and the VC have decided to strengthen the process of community forest management and the governance systems. They have also constituted



a forest committee to manage the reserved forests. The village forest committee members take turns to inspect the forest. Customary rules and regulations have been revisited and re-written in most villages based on new learning and awareness through the NERCORMP-IFAD. All the rules and regulations, which are usually preventive, prohibitive and punitive in nature, are discussed in the NaRMG meetings for wider understanding and appreciation. Village youth are also informed about these rules and regulations through customary channels and procedures.

Impacts of community effort

The villagers in Ngainga are witnessing ecological benefits but they also anticipate some economic benefits. They are planning to keep their reserved forest as a wildlife sanctuary, which they feel will benefit them ecologically and economically as well. One of the major benefits of conservation has been the availability of water throughout the year to all the households in all the localities of the village. The households also extract edible plants for vegetables from the protected forests. Collection for sale or export outside the village is prohibited. The rules are more relaxed for the poorer in the community, who can harvest non-timber forest products (NTFP) and small timber for construction and repairs of their houses, without paying anything to the village authority.

Opportunities and constraints

The conservation efforts are yielding very quick results. The forest is regenerating very quickly, enhancing the ecological and economic benefits from these forests. There are a few mature trees that can be harvested now if the village prepares a working scheme (management plan) for the area.

Since the village is close to Ukhrul town, they can also benefit from sustainably harvesting and selling edible plants and vegetables. Socially too, the communities are now well motivated towards conservation of their forests.

The constraints are primarily elements of poverty and need for increased cash income for education of children and other human development requirements. Sale of forest products is one of the few means of income for many of the poor households, thus increasing the pressures on the forests. The other constraint is non-availability of planting materials, even if the communities would like to undertake plantations within and outside the protected forests.

Conclusion

The efforts of the villagers towards managing and protecting their reserved forests will be much more fruitful if small incentives could be provided to the NaRMG members. The forest committee is safeguarding the village forest in every possible way without any honorarium or additional incentives for such commendable voluntary activities. The youth and young children need to be explained the meaning and benefits of such conservation efforts by the elders within the village.

This case study has been contributed by Vincent Darlong, Thingreiphi, Selim Keishing and Tutumoni Lyngdoh from the North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project of the International Fund for Agricultural Development in June 2007.

For more details contact:

Vincent Darlong

North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas [NERCORMP-IFAD],

"Sympli Building",

Dhankheti,

Shillong 793 001,

Meghalaya

Ph: 0364-2503531, 2500495

Email: drvtdarlong2002@yahoo.co.in

Tutumoni Lyngdoh

(As above)

Thingreiphi
Ukhrul District Community Resource Management Society [NERCORMP-IFAD],
P.O. Ukhrul,
Ukhrul District,
Manipur.
Ph: 03870-22183

Selim Keishing
(As above)

Endnotes

¹ North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas (NERCORMP) is a Joint Project of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Government of India, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, North East Council, Shillong, Meghalaya. For more details on the programme, see www.necorps.org.

