

Indo German Environment Partnership Program in Rural Areas (IGEPPRA): Climate Change Adaptation North Eastern Region of India (CCA NER)

Country	GIZ INDIA
Full Name of the program	IGEPPRA CCA NER (Climate Change Adaptation – North Eastern Region)
PN (complete 12 digits)	14.2296.300.3.00
AV / Program Director	Dr Uwe. Scholz
Name of Team Members	Mr. Kenneth Pala, Ms. Sharon Kharshiing, Ms. Ruth Marbaniang
Project Reach (states / region)	Meghalaya, Nagaland and Sikkim
Duration of program	1st April 2015 – 30th September 2017

MEGHALAYA: IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Tucked in the Eastern Himalayas, North Eastern region of India comprises of eight states of the Union of India: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Northeast India is the eastern-most region of the country connected to mainland India by a narrow strip of land. The North Eastern states share more than 4500 km of border with Bhutan to the northwest, Myanmar in the east, South Tibet in the north and Bangladesh in the southwest. North-east India is characterised by considerable biodiversity, ethnic diversity, and political instability.

Meghalaya is a hilly state of North East India, surrounded by Assam in the north and Bangladesh to the south and covers an area of approximately 300 kilometers in length and about 100 kilometers in breadth. The state has a population of 2,964,007, the majority following a matrilineal system where lineage and inheritance are traced through the women. Also called “the abode of clouds”, the State has a sub-tropical climate, which varies with altitude, offering a large variety of species and crops, and makes it suitable for silk activities. Agriculture is predominant in Meghalaya and is the main activity involving the major part of the state’s population. However, production yield is low and rural people remain poor. Furthermore, agriculture is the first sector to be affected and is rendered fragile by climate changes. At first glance, Meghalaya seem blessed by nature, but, mountains are among the most fragile environments on Earth. In these regions, small changes in temperature and extreme slopes lead to rapid changes in climatic zones over small distances, showing marked impacts in terms of biodiversity, water availability, agriculture, and hazards, and this has an impact on general well-being of its inhabitants.



Empowering women and adapting to Climate Change – Women Eri Silk Workers in Meghalaya

Initiative: Adaptation to climate change and promotion of inclusive economic growth

With the objective that “Rural people in the North Eastern Region (NER) enhance their livelihood resilience and adaptive capacities to the impacts of climate variability and change”, GIZ initiated a programme in partnership with the Ministry of Development of the North Eastern Region (DoNER).

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Under the project “Indo German Environment program in Rural Areas Climate Change Adaptation program North East Region”, GIZ is working with target groups and its nodal implementation partners in the three States of the North- East Region: Department for Planning and Economic Development (Govt. of Meghalaya), Agriculture Production Commissioner (Govt of Nagaland), Department of Science, Technology, and Climate Change (Govt. of Sikkim).

Sericulture and Weaving are important cottage based industries in rural areas of Meghalaya involving more than 30,000 families. These twin industries portray the cultural ethos and rich heritage of the people of the State. Till date around 15,900 families are involved in handloom activities and a further 16,000 families in sericulture farming. These two sectors were identified as providing consequent positive impact for Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) in line with GIZ India IGEPPA Programme objectives to create climate resilience in rural areas, protect natural resources and support inclusive social economic growth:

- ❖ Generating subsidiary income to farmers' families
- ❖ Offering a greater role to women in socio-economic development as rearing and weaving silk is mainly done by women
- ❖ Checking migration from rural to urban areas
- ❖ Maintaining the rich heritage of the local tribes' culture and way of life
- ❖ Sericulture and weaving – dyeing, encouraging plantation and safeguard of trees, with consequently a positive impact on the environment and hindering soil erosion.

Silk activity in Meghalaya is mainly based on traditional practices and is eco-friendly. It also provides job opportunities in the rural areas, thus containing migration from rural to urban areas, and keeps farming activities alive, preserving a balance between farmers and their eco-system.

Beyond these climatic issues, it maintains the rich heritage of the local tribes' culture and way of life. Thanks to its hilly relief and climate conditions, the State is suited to production of three kinds of silk: Eri is the main crop, followed by Muga and Mulberry. In the absence of appropriate reeling facilities, most cocoons reared here are sent to neighboring states.

ERI SILK: Eri is produced extensively in almost all the areas of the state. It is reared not merely for silk production but also for its food value. Eri silk worm is fully domesticated and reared indoor, hence women play a more significant role in rearing and post rearing activities, which is synchronized well with the other day – to day household activities. The yarn is not only spun and sold to buyers but it is also used for weaving of traditional fabrics using a traditional floor loom. Dyeing techniques of Eri silk is also traditionally practiced using indigenous vegetable dyes found within the state. The entire process of producing eri silk (rearing to finish products) is an activity fully undertaken within the State. Besides, it provides self-employment to the rural women through which they can supplement their family income.

WEAVING IS AN AGE-OLD ACTIVITY, REPRESENTATIVE OF MEGHALAYA TRADITION AND CULTURE

Unlike other parts of India, where much of the spinning and weaving is in the hands of men, spinning and weaving in Meghalaya is the exclusivity of women. Similarly to rearing cocoons, weaving is a subsidiary activity to farming, practiced during their spare time –around three hours a day. The traditional loom is rudimentary but easy to handle for rural women inside their small living space; it is



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made of a bamboo reed with wooden sticks to maintain the warp. It only allows the production of one to three silk scarves, depending on the length of the weaving place. Weavers use these traditional looms to weave their hand spun yarn.



IGEP CCA NER aimed to develop a holistic approach to Eri silk value chain with a very specific focus on hand spun Eri silk yarn, evolving and developing on what exists and practised in the region, rather than bringing readymade solutions.

The project in collaboration with the Government of Meghalaya Department of Sericulture & Weaving conducted a **practical-oriented research** for the development of Eri silk. Enhancing the method of production at all the processing steps, by organizing it in a systematic and specialized way, ensuring value addition to products. As a result substantial improvement in the quality of hand spun yarn and subsequent quality of woven fabric is demonstrated. The project further initiated an experience learning program, where in other states within North east were invited to Meghalaya for up scaling and developing cross learnings within the states.

Although women participation and contribution in family income are increasing especially in relation to Eri silk, in most of the cases they do not have control over what they produce because of poor education and technical skills. Lack of education further aggravates the situation, the poor education results in poor innovativeness, which is again having a link to inadequate training facilities. The artisans are mostly self-trained and work as unskilled workers.

Way forward

In cooperation with Government stakeholders in charge of Sericulture and Weaving in the state, trainings have been conducted to the women Eri silk artisans with the aim of increasing the capacity and skills of these women and help increase production. These trainings are presently being undertaken by the Government stakeholders to other Eri silk cluster within the state.

- ❖ **Training support to women weavers in Meghalaya:** Manual released on how to produce superior silk yarn in *THE Shillong Times newspaper* :

News Link: <http://www.theshillongtimes.com/2014/10/07/training-held-for-eri-silk-producers-in-ri-bhoi/>

- ❖ **Release of Training manuals and guidelines, Eri silk**

News Link: <http://www.theshillongtimes.com/2015/07/01/chief-secy-releases-training-manual-guidelines-on-eri-silk/>

Gender Sensitive Training modules developed: Specific training module was designed and developed which reflected the roles of men and women in livelihood, given the existing culture of the NER.

Discussions on '**Leadership development**', '**Women in leadership positions**' were also organized and specific trainings for team members along with state partners/stakeholders were conducted. The responses from the stakeholders was one of "removal of gender blindness" which made them more open to discussing specific issues related to Climate Change in the context of gender-role (both men and women), specific to the region and the state.

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Mainstreaming gender within the CCA NER Program

IGEPPA CCA NER project undertook an in-depth gender analysis to identify gender issues in the natural resource management/ climate change which are related to inequalities in the status and condition of women and men in different resource areas.

The gender analysis which was specific to the 3 project states (Meghalaya/Nagaland & Sikkim) highlighted the need to put people at the center of climate change responses, paying particular attention to the challenges and opportunities that climate change presents in the struggle for gender equality. It did so in collaboration with both internal and external stakeholders. The analysis advocates for an approach in which women and men have an equal voice in decision-making, participation and representation on climate change and broader governance processes and are given equal access to the resources necessary to respond to the negative effects of climate change.



Further the following gender mainstreaming approaches are encouraged within the project

- Appointment of a steering structure for gender mainstreaming approaches (appointment of a Regional Gender coordinator).
- Gender based discussions during Operational Planning Workshops, Review Team Meetings etc.
- Review Missions to have at least one review member who would wear the 'gender hat' and to ensure this is part of their TOR
- Gender disaggregated data (sex disaggregated data) to be collected for different activities/ trainings
- Monitoring of the different indicators / as per RbM Requirements
- Sharing experiences across states
- Ensuring 'gender proofing' of Baseline and Needs Assessments along with developing specific tools which would guide the design and development of TORs, assessments and studies

The GIZ IGEPPA CCA NER project has had strong focus discussions with stakeholders and it was always expressed that the project interventions were very relevant, which indicates acceptance of the technology promoted. India is a diverse country and the state of Meghalaya being a matriarchy state has a few challenges wherein gender roles are something which must be understood in the context of the region. Further the government of Meghalaya has taken many programmes and activities for a much level or overall awareness and gender issues. A commission 'the Meghalaya State Commission for Women acts as core advocacy committee for women. The Meghalaya government initiated different schemes and programme for women empowerment and gender equality as the centre of a strategy for poverty alleviation through different government departments. These programmes of the government include poverty eradication schemes, micro credit programmes, and various forms of support for women workers and vocational trainings.

Meghalaya a matrilineal society wherein women are respected, honored and are encouraged to have a high position in society. This allows women to be free from many social restrains. There is no caste system, untouchability or social inequality present

IGEPPA CCA NER is applying for the Gender Award 2015. We believe that our programme and our activity have made remarkable efforts in strengthening the traditional practices, by ensuring value addition to eri silk thereby creating opportunities and encouraging artisans (mostly women) to enhance their entrepreneurial skills. Should the IGEPPA CCA NER win the GIZ Gender Award, the prize money will be utilised to further strengthen capacity building and gender mainstreaming into other project activities.