

**North Eastern Regional Community Resource Management
Programme for Upland Areas (NERCORMP)**

assisted by

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

Phase I: completed

Phase II: under implementation

Phase III: under consideration

1. Introduction

North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas (NERCORMP) is a jointly funded project of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and North Eastern Council, Ministry of DoNER, Government of India. Till recently UNOPS was the cooperating Institution to supervise on behalf of GOI and IFAD. DEA as the nodal Authority for all externally aided projects in the country maintained concern over the project.

NERCORMP is a livelihood and rural development project aimed to transform the intervened lives of the poor and marginalized Tribal families in North East (NE) India, and thereby become a Developmental Model in the region.

OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of NERCORMP is *“To improve the livelihoods of vulnerable groups in a sustainable manner through improved management of their resource base in a way that contributes to preservation and restoration of the environment.”*

AREA OF OPERATION

NERCORMP is operating in Assam, Manipur and Meghalaya.

- Assam - Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills
- Manipur - Senapati and Ukhrul
- Meghalaya - West Khasi Hills and West Garo Hills

The project is working in 860 villages, covering 39161 households, 1012 Natural Resource Management Groups (NaRM-Gs), 3168 Self Help Groups (SHGs), 103 NaRM-G Associations and 103 SHG Federations in Phase-I.

APPROVALS FOR PHASE-I

The project was approved by the IFAD Board in April 1997 and was declared effective in February 1999. The project start up workshop was held on May 1999 and the completed in September 2008.

NERCORMP aims to synergize the best strengths of Government, IFAD (an International organization with rich and long global experience), Partner NGOs, a dedicated Project Team and the inherent remarkable strengths possessed by Communities. Fortunately and gladly, this has happened. Most of the proven and well known modern community and rural Developmental tools were employed. Further, innovative and creative solutions kept emerging along the way in NERCORMP.

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION & IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

NERCORMP was put in place as a Central Government sector project with NEC under Ministry of Home Affairs, and subsequently under Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region. The milestones of the project were as follows:

- ◆ Approved by IFAD Board in April, 1997.
- ◆ Declared effective by IFAD in February, 1999. Start up workshop in May, 1999.
- ◆ Mid Term Review in May 2002
- ◆ Interim Evaluation conducted in April-May 2005
- ◆ Project closed in September 2008.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

1. *Project Fund:* Project Management and administrative cost of NERCORMP as per appraisal is 10.9 % of the Project cost. This is to meet all the overhead and non-programmatic cost of the Project, which included Staff salary, audit fees, office automation equipment cost, office management, Vehicle maintenance and etc.

2. *Project Coordination:* As agreed at Loan Negotiations, the Project was implemented at the regional and district levels through registered societies established specifically for the Project (LA page 20 schedule 4.A para 2). This helped in promoting the identity of the Project, given full autonomy, a certain distance from government and allowed for greater operational flexibility and efficiency. The autonomy has enabled the Project in accomplishing the desired objectives in a much faster way.

Regional society located at Shillong and 6-District societies at all the Project Districts were formed to oversee and provide guidance to the Project Management team .

Key features of the Societies:

Regional Society:

(i) Regional Society based in Shillong has a **General Body** composed of representatives of the stake holders in the Project (namely participating communities and NGOs active in the Project Area, the Borrower (Govt of India), the North Eastern Council (NEC) and participating State Governments. Secretary of the NEC is the President/Chairperson of the General Body. Participating States are represented by the Chief Secretaries and the Nodal Officers, Representative of Ministry of DoNER (earlier MHA representative), besides some key officials , DCs/PSs, representatives of communities and NGOs.

(ii) RS has a governing body named the **Executive Board**. Secretary, NEC is its Chairman. The Executive Board has representation of participating communities, NGOs, the NEC, Representative of Ministry of DoNER (earlier MHA representative) besides some key officials , DCs/PSs, representatives of communities and NGOs.

District Societies:

(i) A District Society, established in each Project district, has structure similar to that of Regional Society. Its **General Body** comprises representatives of State Governments, the members of the Executive Board, representatives of local research institutes, prominent people's representatives, prominent rural development specialists, line departments representatives and community and NGOs representatives. Chairman/ President of the General Body is the Principal Secretary of the Autonomous Council in Assam and the Deputy Commissioner in the other States.

(ii) **The Executive Board** comprises official representatives (the PCDS or his nominee, representatives of District Agriculture, Horticulture, Soil Conservation, Veterinary Dept, Fishery, Forest, Medical, PWD, Electricity, PHE, Irrigation, DRDA, etc.), community representatives, NGO representatives and representative of Lead Bank. . The Chairman of the Executive Board is the Principal Secretary of the Autonomous Council in Assam or the Deputy Commissioner in the other States. The Project Manager is the Member Secretary. **Recently the Project has inducted more**

community members in District Board, in order to shift more ownership to the community.

B. Organization and Implementation Process

Project has been implemented at the regional and district levels through registered societies (as mentioned above) established specifically for the Project. At the regional level a Programme Support Unit has been established, to provide direction and support to the Development Support Teams (DST), which is established in every District. Establishment of autonomous district level society helped in promoting the identity of the Project, and provided needed operational flexibility and efficiency.

Project implementation and all related interventions are carried out through the communities and partner NGOs responsible for community mobilization and community institution building. Development Support Team (DST) at the District level with constant support and guidance from the Programme Support Unit (PSU) facilitated the Process. In all its implementation efforts, Project maintained operational flexibility and emphasized (provided for) participatory decision making process at all levels. At the Communities level, the two key Institutions, which formed the pillars and channels for institutions building are the NaRMGs and SHGs. Higher level of institutions had also been developed and promoted, such as: Federations and Cluster Associations, etc.

Right at the inception of Project itself, an MOU was signed between the Regional Society (RS) and NEC outlining roles, responsibilities and expectations. Similarly, each District Society signed an MOU with RS (PSU).

Overall executive responsibility for the Project is vested in the Programme Coordinator & Development Strategist (PCDS) who is the head (full time) of Programme Support Unit (PSU) within Regional Society. PCDS coordinates the entire project implementation process that includes 6 (six) DSTs. He is supported by a team of specialists/ Sector heads located at Shillong. Staff members of both DSTs and PSU are hired on contract or deputation through open competition.

As for Development Support Team (DST), executive responsibility of overall implementation process at the district level is vested in the Project Manager (PM) who is the head the DST. DST is the key unit for day-to-day coordination of Project activities and is responsible for liaising with communities, NGOs and technical service providers and with PSU. District Societies also review and approve Village AWPBs and following approval by District Societies (DS) the same is submitted to the RS for its review and approval in accordance with the Provision of the Loan agreement.

PROJECT STARATEGY & APPROACHES

Strategies adopted

A number of strategies were adopted to achieve the goals and objectives as per Project Appraisal, and as part of creative solutions that appeared during implementation:-

- i. Consistently promoted an Inclusive development approach wherein women, weakest and the poorest participate on equal footing and platform and in the process realising true participatory approach in letter and spirit.
- ii. Formation and establishment of viable and robust CBOs namely SHGs and NaRMGs.
- iii. Project adopted a deliberate and conscious approach to trust communities and entrust them with corresponding responsibilities.
- iv. Promote thrift and saving among SHGs (in limited scale at NarMG level); provide revolving fund to SHGs to provide easy access to credit for communities, who initially had mixed purpose of loaning both for consumption and IGA, but later moved on predominantly towards IGA.
- v. Ensure transparency and accountability at all levels; introduced and encouraged social auditing at all levels.

- vi. All village development fund managed by the communities themselves through bank accounts and in transparent manner.
- vii. Upscaling and enhancing many Income Generating Activities (IGA), carried out with sensitivity.
- viii. Providing market linkages for produces to find easy market access for members and to ensure remunerative return.
- ix. Introduce Business- prioritization for Food Security of the communities.
- x. Adopting proven Modern developmental tools like PRA tools to meet local requirement and needs.
- xi. Enabling communities both at villages and household levels to visualize a vision for the future and evolve perspective plans to achieve it.
- xii. Involving Traditional Institutions (TIs) and Social Institutions (SIs) in existence to achieve set goals and objectives through a formal agreement.
- xiii. Capacity Building and training conducted on regular basis, approximating 15,000 trainings till date covering diverse areas.
- xiv. We consciously provided space for people (both Communities and Team members) to grow and also encouraged creativity and involvement.

4. CBOs / Institutions NERCORMP so far built:

- i. NaRM-Gs – NaRM-G is a village level institution which comprises of one male and one women member from each household which addresses issues on village level development planning, implementation, monitoring & evaluation. The NaRM-G have been rated 6 out of 6 as they have gainfully addressed issues of village development planning and implementation, and successfully brought into their fold the participation of women in decision making at the village level, besides bringing

about new orientation and sensitisation to the traditional village institutions/authorities towards community development.

ii. NaRMGs/Cluster Association – NaRM-G Cluster Associations comprises of a cluster of villages within a given geographical area to address issues on collective bargaining and marketing, to serve as a pressure group for availing developmental funds from different line Acommitted financial support from the line departments, lack of capacity building in certain areas, besides being a developing institutions from which communities are yet to experience direct relevance and benefits.

iii. SHGs – SHG, predominantly promoted by women, comprised of 20-30 individuals in a group, formed based on certain affinities, bond or interest. Aimed at women empowerment, each group and individuals within the groups were oriented towards the habit of savings and thrift through micro credit for income generating activities. Over and above these, Revolving Fund was provided by project, (and also interests earned accruing) making their corpus size reasonably strong to carried out many needed activities The SHGs were rated 6 out of 6 as they experienced this as a process of empowerment of women to take up economic development, improved household income, improved financial assets and freedom, besides more respected voices in the decision making at both village and household levels.

iv. SHG Federations – SHG Federation comprises of about 10 to 15 SHGs within a given geographical area to take up enterprises at the cluster level, provide need based credit to individual SHG through credit support from financial institutions, etc. The SHG Federations have been rated as Highly Relevant. Much needed support has been established to assist the individual SHGs in capacity building, providing need based credit to individual SHGs, taking up matters of common interest including education, business and setting up of successful cluster enterprises. They are also beginning to take up activities which are relevant at cluster level beyond capacity of individual units/ villages.

v. Apex Association-Federation – Individual Apex Associations and Federations comprise of all the NaRM-G Associations and SHG Federations as two separate lobby groups at the district level. The role of the Apex Association is similar to that of the Cluster Associations and the same is for the Apex Federations with higher level of scope in reach. The Apex Associations and Federations have been rated 4 out of 6 and also lowest under this domain as these are the recently initiated CBOs in their early formative stages from which communities are yet to benefit directly. Nurturing and capacity building processes of the Apex bodies would take a while, but these are necessary bodies as felt by the communities particularly for market networking, advocacy and lobbying with government bodies/ agencies, access to fund, and to provide overall supervision and guidance to the lower level of CBOs.

5. Some of the key interventions

a. Gender Mainstreaming - With formation of the NaRM-Gs, SHGs and Cluster level institutions, Gender Mainstreaming has been achieved

As a result, men are acknowledging and respecting the participation and views of the women towards village level planning and decision making. Also active participation of women in developmental efforts among themselves and with men side by side has unleashed their potential and genius resulting in very encouraging achievements on many counts. Bottom-line is , without good gender mainstreaming , NERCORMP would never have reached this level.

b. NGO Coordination - The NGOs role in project implementation has been crucial and highly Relevant. The grounding and implementation of project activities has widely been achieved due to the active involvement and commitment of the Partner NGOs. They continue to be relevant in their respective geographical areas of functioning even well beyond the contract period and thus form strong social capitals today.

- c. Economic livelihoods / IGA – The system of guided bottom up approach of planning has empowered the communities to plan for relevant livelihood activities which had brought about increase in household income, food security, reduction in shifting cultivation, increased biodiversity conservation, improved local environment, etc. Highly encouraging results gained in this sector is substantiated by various studies and surveys , some independent external studies, (also clearly visible on the ground) demonstrating that significant economic gains have taken place and is in fact accelerating, whereby most families have been lifted up above poverty line. Economic and livelihood options and opportunities are increasingly getting widened and deepened.
- d. Social Sector - The social sector activities have brought about drastic changes like improved availability of water supply to the villages which has reduced drudgery of women, the low cost latrines has address issues of health and hygiene where women have expressed that their dignity within the society has been uplifted, etc.
- e. Village infrastructure - Under this sector need based infrastructural development, in the forms of roads, bridges, culverts, water tanks, school buildings, multipurpose community halls, processing units, etc had been undertaken and were seen as the most visible signs and indicators of successful project interventions. Infrastructure developed by the project has greatly impacted on the lives of the rural communities. Though the project had limited funds under infrastructure development, however much has been achieved in this sector, which addressed the critical and basic requirements of the communities. Convergence with line departments in many cases have proved to be excellent, raising benchmarks both for them and us. IRR Internal rate of return measured by an external independent study has confirmed very high returns with multiplier effect under this sector.

f. NRM- Biodiversity & Forest Conservation - The communities have realised the relevance of biodiversity conservation and forest conservation by framing community based rules and regulations for better forest management which has led to improved quality and quantity of water, increase of NTFPs, firewood, household construction materials, wild edible plants, wild animals, fish, etc. This is one area of Project's outstanding achievement happened with minimally investment.

g. Micro finance / micro credits / revolving funds - Due to limited access to credit facilities in and around the villages from formal financial institutions, access to credit through SHGs and SHG Federations has helped the communities to have easy access to credit for IGAs. This sector today, can be taken as the GROWTH ENGINE for most IGAs. The MFI established in Ukhrul and West Garo Hills have to proper shape.

8. Project Output

A. The project has covering 860 villages against the target of 1000 villages as fixed in the MTR. The project has formed 1012 NaRM-Gs, 3168 SHGs, 103 Narm-g Cluster Associations and 103 SHG Federations. The following table shows the project achievement.

Major Components	Physical Achievement
1.Capacity Building	15,158.00 Nos
2.Agriculture/horticulture	11,138.54 Hectors
3.Spices	2,173.78 Hectors
4.Plantation	2,716.37 Hectors
5. Medicinal & Aromatic plants	1,641.34 Hectors
6. NTFPs	742.91 Hectors

7. Livestock, Fishery, Sericulture & Vermi composting	860 villages covering 39161 households
8. Biodiversity & Forest conservation	1,835.89 Sq Kms
9. Social Sector & Infrastructure	
a. Low cost Latrine	29,459 Nos
b. Gravity pipe water supply	368 Nos
c. Water tank	613 Nos
d. Spring tapped chamber	385 Nos
e. School building	75 Nos
f. Road construction	1,236.10 Kms
g. Bridges/culverts	277 Nos
h. Electrification	50 villages
i. Terrace Development (Wet & Dry terrace)	1,557.39 Hectors
10. Non-farm Enterprises	6184 Nos

9. NERCORMP in the Post 30.9.08

NERCORMP has become a full fledged Project of NEC since 1.10.08. NERCORMP had achieved its stated mandates and it was acknowledged by IFAD by saying that it is a notably successful Project.

Having achieved its original mandates, NERCORMP will now focus on the following activities

Marketing intervention and Value Addition: The products of the SHGs and the NaRMGs in the project areas are very good, but we are not being able to market it outside the region and nor even within the region properly. In many of the remote project villages, we are still in the bartering kind of system. So, that is one important area where we

must concentrate our activities and we must see that the SHGs and the individual farmers are not doing any distress sale. So, that is why, as per the direction of Chairman NERCRMS, we are thinking of introducing kind of a programme with some minimum market support price for our SHGs so that if they are not getting the market price and if any unscrupulous cartel is taking away their products, then, we should be able to give some minimum support. In this direction, i.e. that of marketing initiatives, we have organized the first NEAT FEST in Shillong. NEAT is the brand name of the NERCORMP products from the SHGs and the NaRMGs. We have named it NEAT FEST since it was a fair of SHGs products. This was a very successful event, because SHGs and the NaRMGs got enough exposure to the kind of consumer choice and demand in cities and metro areas and cosmopolitan area like Shillong. It was funded with help from Ministry of DONER and NERIWALM another NEC Institution which is in Tezpur.

Capacity Building: As regards training and other activities, our project has always played a very important role in the project areas. Even now we are tying up with various institutions like e.g. with the NERIWALM, for organizing free of cost training programme for our SHGs and NaRMGs members in watershed management. With this initiatives we visualise our cluster associations to take role of local NGOs.

Linkages and convergence: In the project districts, the Government services delivery may well be through our project. In fact, we would like to request the Government representatives in the BOM from those districts to look into the issue in even more detail, so that our project SHGs and NaRMGs and the District Societies can be utilized more and more, for service delivery to the project areas. This interfacing will be of two ways kind of thing and it will probably help the community and the government for the purpose of implementation of not only the State Government but the Central Government projects also, if they are implemented through our project supporting units and SHGs and NaRMGs. Linkages with CBTC will help us to develop cane and

bamboo products in our areas, with more finish and marketable products. **Rural Business HUBs** : The project has communicated to the Ministry of Panchayati Raj for setting up of twelve Rural Business Hubs in the six districts of NERCORMP, but we are yet to reach any concrete conclusion.

Micro Finance Institution (MFi) : As regards Micro credit initiatives, we have already done a lot, but still funds are required and there is a need to access the fund requirements, the repayment capability of SHGs and NaRMGs. We are already in the process; SIDBI is expressing interest in funding and giving loans, soft loans to our SHGs. Our goal is to establish MFIs in all the six Districts of NERCORMP in line with the ones established in Ukhrol and West Garo Hills.

Value Addition: NERCORMP is now going towards Value addition in a more serious manner. Our Aloe Vera Processing units will be fully functional in 2-3 months time. As regards cashew nut in West Garo Hills district, we are trying to have an arrangement with some private factories that will source their raw materials from us at the market price plus some profit markup so that our farmers do not get below market price or so that no cartel takes away our products. They will also provide infrastructure for first level of value addition.

Re intervention: Re-intervention in 20% bottom family. NERCORMP achieved enough success, however in the 20% bottom families we have not been able to impact. One of the reasons is perhaps, because they do not possess the absorptive capacity. Our Districts have already been activated/ alerted to find out the best means to do some re-intervention in their cases and districts have also been asked for a cluster wise productions and economic activities census, so that we can plan our next step on the basis of that economic census for the project villages and project districts.