

Contribution Of NGOs In Sustainable Agriculture And Indigenous Livelihood Systems For Socio-Economic Development In Rural Manipur

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Abstract:

Subsistence agriculture and traditional livelihood systems remain important towards the sustainability of the environment and community resilience in North-East India. Agriculture, indigenous form of cultivation, handloom and informal market which is solely led by women form the major sources of livelihood to the rural and marginalized communities in Manipur. Yet, these arrangements are confronting several challenges including climate vagaries, weak institutional support and stability in governance structures as well as market deficiencies. And as such, the present study investigates the intervention of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in sustainable agricultural development, and is based on the enhancement of indigenous livelihood systems in aiding socio-economic development especially in rural Manipur. It focuses on the way NGOs enable organic agriculture, water use and management, skill generation activities, women's Self Help Groups (SHGs), and conservation of traditional knowledge systems. Particular attention is paid to women's empowerment projects tied in with traditional market structures and eco-friendly. It also identifies some of the major operational challenges faced by NGOs, which include funding, governance, grassroots outreach, and political interference. However, it also establishes the potential of NGOs in bridging knowledge systems with modern development concepts thereby ensuring livelihood security and sustainability of the environment

Keywords: Sustainable Agriculture, Traditional Knowledge Systems, Livelihood Development, SHGs, Women Empowerment.

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I. Introduction:

The rural life of Manipur is based on agriculture, and in the state, a great part of the population lives on small farms, forest products, and subsistence agriculture. The rural families still practice indigenous ways of agriculture which are adjusted to the weak hill-valley ecology of the state. The practices have been very important in ensuring food security, income generating and balancing the environment. The framework of sustainable rural livelihoods provides an important framework for understanding these dynamics. According to Chambers and Conway, (1992) a sustainable livelihood is one that: pursues all these objectives in ways that are not detrimental to the longer-term prospects of livelihoods, particularly for future generations. In a like manner, sustainable agriculture is concerned with ecological balance, conservation of biodiversity and lower external inputs (Pretty, 2007). Many of these principles can be reflected in the traditional agricultural systems in North-East India (Jeengpah, 2023).

NGOs play a crucial role towards promotion of organic farming, SHGs empowerment and women economic participation (Swain and Wallentin 2009; Meena et al. 2013). As per the Economic Survey Manipur 2020–21, agriculture continues to remain very significant in the economy of Manipur. Thus, this study most particularly aims to highlight the role of NGOs in promoting sustainable agriculture and rural livelihood development in Manipur.

II. Objectives:

The present study aims at:

- i) To find out the alternative ways the NGOs enables to bring organic agriculture through conservation of traditional knowledge systems;
- ii) To make an in-depth study on the contributions of the NGOs to women's empowerment projects tied in with traditional market structures and eco-friendly.

iii) To identify some of the major operational challenges faced by NGOs in socio-economic development of the rural people.

III. Methodology:

The current research is based on secondary sources of data and assumes a descriptive and analytical research design. This study looks at the importance of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in ensuring sustainable agricultural practices and fortification of indigenous livelihood systems in Manipur using an advanced review of the existing literature and official reports.

The secondary information sources included books, peer-reviewed journal articles, research papers, government reports, policy papers, and published statistical reports in rural development, sustainable agriculture, women empowerment, and indigenous livelihood practices. Special focus was put on the research concerning North-East India and Manipur to make sure that it was contextually relevant.

Official information and statistical data were collected from government publications, such as annual administrative reports and economic surveys of Manipur. These documents were insightful in terms of agricultural performance, rural employment patterns, development schemes and various policy initiatives taken up in the state.

It involved a structured review of the available literature and materials; their classification and analysis with respect to the role of NGOs in socio-economic development, promotion of organic agriculture, women empowerment initiatives and livelihood diversification. Analysis began with the examination of current knowledge, posing comparisons between perspectives in both written literature and interviews whilst noting themes relevant to sustainability / rural transformation in Manipur. This methodological approach enables a comprehensive understanding of NGO interventions and rural livelihood dynamics based on documented evidence and established research.

IV. Discussion And Findings:

1. The Current Status of NGOs in Manipur

Non-Governmental Organizations in Manipur have taken up the role of key players in rural development especially in agriculture. Agriculture, which is still the main employment for rural population in the state and the base of livelihood security (**Directorate of Economics and Statistics 2021**) has seen NGOs play a large role. But also, we see that which is a result of geographical isolation, infrastructural deficiencies and limited extension services in out of the way districts which has left voids in the support structure. Into these voids have stepped private NGOs which have been working very closely with the farming communities.

The field of work for NGOs in Manipur is wide in terms of diversity and at the same time very constrained. Many of these organizations are into very basic level work which includes training programs for farmers, awareness campaigns and community-based mobilization. Also, they are to be found in support of what the government has put forth in their agricultural development reports (**Department of Agriculture 2021**). In addition, NGOs help develop access to schemes, promote better cultivation practices and assist farmers with institutional processes.

The structure of agriculture is characterized by diverse ecological systems such as valley-based wet rice and hill based shifting cultivation. Contextualised within these agro-ecological situations, NGOs adapt their approaches. In the valley areas, dominated by the Meitei community, interventions for paddy productivity improvement included use of organic inputs and water management. In many hill districts with predominantly Naga and Kuki populaces, NGOs work with people on shifting cultivation practices, soil conservation, and agro-forestry models.

NGOs are also involved in wider and constructive roles such as capacity building. They improve farmers' understanding of sustainable agricultural practices through workshops and field demonstrations. Such efforts contribute to the generation of human capital as well as adaptive capacity which constitute essential components of sustainable rural livelihood (**Chambers and Conway 1992**). NGOs facilitate trust among communities and facilitate collective action through participatory approaches. Though NGOs fill in those necessary services, they also have financial and logistical constraints. Limited continuity of funding and bureaucratic constraints sometimes dampen the scale-up of programmes. Yet, their grassroots orientation and contextual understanding make them potential key actors for promoting sustainable agricultural practices in Manipur.

Data that in the fact of this information, isn't updated after October 2023.

2. NGOs in Manipur and Organic Agriculture

The promotion of organic farming in Manipur has been driven by increasing recognition of soil degradation, climate variability and the long-term sustainability issues surrounding chemical-intensive agricultural systems. She acknowledges the need for savings by saying that systems should rely less on external

inputs and more on ecological processes (Pretty 2007). Manipur-based NGOs have passionately advocated the adoption of organic farming as a sustainable and eco-friendly model under this backdrop.

Historically, many areas of Manipur practiced low-input agriculture which gives us a good foundation for organic transition. This existing base is further built on by NGOs in terms of training programmes around compost preparation, vermiculture, botanical pesticides, crop rotation and mixed cropping. These strategies seek to improve soil fertility without disrupting the ecological equilibrium. In the valley areas, NGOs are working to promote better organic paddy-growing practices as well as diversification into crops with a high value such as king chilli, turmeric and ginger. Establishment of linkage to the market and group marketing mechanism are among important services rendered by NGOs providing synergies of income opportunities while protecting the environment. Using inputs sustainably, adapting and diversifying are household strategies which have been noted as strategic priorities in government agricultural reports (Department of Agriculture 2021).

In mountain areas which see extensive use of shifting cultivation (jhum) by the Naga and Kuki communities NGOs put forward to improve upon rather than do away with traditional systems. They introduce soil conservation methods, agroforestry practices, and multi-layer cropping which in turn reduce land degradation. By using indigenous knowledge with scientific soil management NGOs play a role in more sustainable land use. While issues of organic certification and market access are very much present NGOs play a role in getting farmer groups up to speed with certification processes and didn't get that far into details of what institutional support mechanisms are at the same time, we see that infrastructure and market link up is an issue (Hanglem et al. 2019). Also, what we see is a lack of farmer awareness regarding sustainable practices which in turn points out the need for continuous capacity building efforts (Thangjam and Jha 2025).

Through training, institutional support and market intervention NGOs are key to the growth of organic agriculture in Manipur. Also, it is through their actions we see that sustainable agriculture is possible which at the same time protects the environment and improves livelihoods.

3. The Contributions of NGOs to Indigenous Livelihood Systems

Indigenous livelihood in Manipur is in the root of agricultural practices, forest-based activities, and community resource management. As per the sustainable livelihood framework which Chambers and Conway put forth in 1992, we see the value in strengthening resilience and building up many forms of capital for long term well-being. NGOs play a role in this by supporting traditional systems at the same time they introduce what is needed to adapt. In the case of the Meitei community in the valley agriculture is very much a part of cultural practice and local food security. NGOs support in the form of seed conservation initiatives and the promotion of traditional rice varieties that do well in our eco systems. Also, through this they are protecting bio diversity and at the same time are putting an end to our dependence on external seed markets.

In mountain regions Indigenous groups like the Naga and Kuki practice shifting cultivation which they combine with the use of the forest. Instead of putting out these practices we see NGOs which are working to improve sustainability through agroforestry and soil stabilization techniques. We see that these interventions which also include the promotion of the use of natural resources which are renewable help to reduce soil erosion and at the same time maintain productivity which in turn respects cultural practices. Also, in the area of livelihood diversification, we see that NGOs play a great role. By promoting related activities which include piggery, poultry, fishery and horticulture they are reducing the vulnerability to crop failure and income instability. What we also see is that these diverse systems which the NGOs are into improving financial resilience and in the process reducing economic shocks. Collective institutions like farmer associations and cooperatives are put forward by NGOs. In such groups members see improved access to info, credit, and markets. Research reports that which participate in collective action see growth in economic security and decision making (Swain and Wallentin 2009). Though brought up in the context of women's empowerment, these group-based structures also improve larger household livelihoods. Indigenous well-being is tied to cultural continuity and social cohesion (Fleming and Manning 2019). NGOs play a role in this by seeing that development projects fit in with local cultures and institutions. By working within community governance structures, NGOs build trust and encourage adoptive practice of agricultural innovations. As a whole, NGO interventions support indigenous livelihood systems which in turn promote ecological sustainability, income diversity, and cultural preservation.

4. Major Challenges Faced by the NGOs

Despite the fact that NGOs in Manipur have very large roles in sustainable agriculture and indigenous livelihoods they also face many structural, financial, and institutional issues which in turn limit the scale and the long-term impact of what they do. These issues are related and also play out in the larger development picture within the state. Primary among these is what may be put down to limited and inconsistent funding. Many NGOs run on project-based grants which are by their nature of a set duration and which also are for very specific activities. What we see is that when the funding runs out the programs' continuity is put at risk. Also, in

the case of sustainable agriculture, we see that in particular with the issue of organic farming we are looking at a very long-term engagement from farmers as they go through initial stages of yield fluctuation as soil health improves (Pretty 2007). What we don't always see is that short term funding structures do not always support that which is required for ecological transformation.

Market issues also play a large role in NGO supported agricultural projects. Although there is value in organic and native products which command a higher price point, farmers see little of that profit due to poor transport infrastructure, little in the way of storage, and weak marketing connections. Also reported is that in Manipur (Hanglem et al. 2019; Thangjam and Jha 2025) we see that farmers still have issues with market access and technical information. Also, without strong market structures in place farmers are not as likely to go all in with sustainable practices. Also, we see that certification of organic products is a very big issue. While NGOs do what they can to guide farmers through the process it is very costly and very complex. Also, small and marginal farmers are at a great disadvantage in terms of having the required documentation and institutional know how for formal certification. Though group certification does help to bring down some of the cost, red tape is still an issue.

Geography and infrastructure play a large role in NGO operations. In remote areas which are home to Naga and Kuki communities' infrastructure is very limited as to what we see in other more developed areas poor road connectivity is a main issue. Issues of input transport, continuous training, and also market reach become what can be considered a logistics nightmare. The physical structures which we see as problems also raise up costs of operations and at the same also serve to lower the programs public health. Also, we do not see the clearest of lines between NGO's work and the governments' there is not always a clear policy around how they should be working together. Though the government does lay out their agricultural policies (as seen in the Department of Agriculture 2021 report) the actual carry out on that from the grassroots up is very different and at the end results in a lack of collaboration. Then also in the running out of funds before the scheduled time, in which roles of multiple agencies overlap, which in turn causes inefficiencies and in all these issues the program's effectiveness goes down. Social and environmental factors are also big determinants of NGO efforts. Weather variation, irregular rainfall, and soil quality issues all play at the drop of a hat into what is happening with the crops and the farmers' confidence.

Moreover, the search for employment opportunities drives migration among rural youth which leads to a reduced availability of agricultural labor impacting on the continuity of farming practices. The need for resilience in the face of such shocks is well established within sustainable livelihood theory (Chambers and Conway 1992), but that resilience takes sustained institutional investment to build.

Overall, Non-Governmental Organisations in Manipur work under a challenging environment marred by uncertainty of funds, market limitations, infrastructure status and institutional coordination issues. Tackling these structural obstacles is critical in striking sustainable agriculture initiatives that have lasting success.

5. Suggested Measures for Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture in Rural Manipur

Given the issues and parameters, we have put out there which also include challenges and available resources we put forth which measures will strengthen sustainable agriculture in rural Manipur. We put forth these recommendations which are in the areas of institutional growth, market development, capacity building and policy integration. First, we see that long term institutional support is a must. For sustainable agriculture to work it has to go beyond the short-term project horizons. Multi-year funding and stable partnerships between NGOs and government agencies is what we propose for better results. Also, we suggest to improve between NGO and agricultural department coordination which in turn will improve implementation (Department of Agriculture 2021).

Second, it is of great importance that we improve market linkages which in turn will encourage farmers to adopt organic practices. We may set up organized procurement centers, cold storage and better transport networks that also will include better handling of produce after harvest and in which farmers will get better prices for their products. Also, we can facilitate direct connection between farmers and urban markets which in turn will reduce the role of intermediaries. Research reports that improved access to markets greatly changes the farmer's decision to adopt sustainable practices (Hanglem et al. 2019).

Third, we see a need to simplify organic certification processes which also includes promotion of participatory guarantee systems which will in turn reduce the barriers small holders are facing. NGOs will play a supportive role here but we need policy level changes to make certification a more accessible and affordable process.

Fourth, we see a need to put in place post disaster capacity building at institutional and at organizational levels which past studies (Thangjam and Jha 2025) have identified as voids. We will see to it that we do frequent training on issues like soil management, climate resilient cropping and integrated pest management as also financial literacy which in turn will improve farmers' adaptive capacity. Human capital is a key element in the sustainable livelihood framework (Chambers and Conway 1992) which we must strengthen through capacity enhancement.

Also, we will push for the diversification of indigenous agricultural systems which does improve resilience. We will encourage intercropping, agroforestry integration and also associated activities like fishery and animal husbandry which in turn will mitigate risk and bring in income stability. As per Pretty (2007) mono culture expansion is out we must go in for ecological integration instead.

Fifth, we see that in remote hill districts infrastructure development is a must. We see that which improves road access and digital presence does that which increases market access for indigenous groups like the Meitei, Naga, and Kuki. Also, we note that strengthening local processing of spices, horticultural products, and traditional crops can bring about value addition in rural areas.

Finally, it is put forth that policy should recognize indigenous knowledge systems. Indigenous practices related to seed conservation, water management and community labor organization which in turn support ecological balance and cultural continuity. In development strategies we should build upon these practices instead of doing away with them. Policy which recognizes the indigenous well-being frameworks also strengthens social cohesion and sustainability (Fleming and Manning 2019).

Overall, we see that in the case of rural Manipur what is required for a push into sustainable agriculture is integration of institutions, strong market systems, which are made more accessible, and also continuous capacity building. NGOs play a key role as facilitators in this they do so through training, institutional support and market access but for lasting success we require supportive policy frameworks and infrastructure development.

V. Conclusion

This paper has discussed how Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) can bring about sustainable agriculture and reinforce the livelihood systems of the indigenous people in Manipur. According to the secondary sources and official reports, the findings suggest that NGOs have a considerable role of improving the socio-economic development in rural areas and also assist in ecological sustainability. NGOs can facilitate the hybridization of old knowledge with present sustainable practices by encouraging organic farming, crop diversification and training of farmers. Their projects lead to the enhancement of incomes, environmental protection, and resistance to economic and climatic instability. One of the most important products is women empowerment, especially with the creation of Self-Help Groups that increase financial independence and group involvement. Despite such limitations such as funding constraints, market and infrastructure setbacks, NGOs are however still significant organizations. Their work is generally significant in developing sustainable, community-based and resilient rural livelihoods in Manipur.

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