



Case Study on
Mawsynram Declaration

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Abstract

Mawsynram is a village located on the southern hillocks of East Khasi Hills district in the state of Meghalaya, North East of India. Located at a distance of 65 kilometers from state capital, Shillong, Mawsynram is famed to have the highest average rainfall on Earth. Perched atop a ridge, the village receives an average of 467 inches of rain per year (*as per Meteorological sources*). The heavy rainfall is attributed to air currents sweeping over the steaming floodplains of Bangladesh, gathering moisture as they move north. When the resulting clouds hit the steep hills of Meghalaya they are percolated or squeezed through the narrowed gap in the atmosphere and compressed to the stage they can no longer hold their moisture, causing the near constant rain the village is famous for.

The people in and around Mawsynram are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. In conjunction the Central Government's *MGNREGA* is also working and has greatly aided in creating durable assets and providing an employment avenue for the people in this region. In spite of the village's status as the wettest place on earth, it ironically suffers water shortages especially in the winter months. This can be attributed to a number of causes most notably the lack of infrastructures related to water conservation and retention as well as severe deforestation in some parts of the region. A conversation with some of the Village Employment Council (VEC) members of Langsymphut and Mawteibah villages ring a similar tone in that there is an absence of a proper mechanism to tap the tremendous potential of rain water within most of the villages under Mawsynram. Indeed, some of the interventions taken up by *MGNREGA* and subsequently by the Community Led Landscape Management Project (CLLMP) under Meghalaya Basin Management Agency (MBMA) has bolstered the conservation process to a fair degree but there still lacks a cohesive effort from all the villages to tackle this common problem.

The inception of this Case Study came about when the Commissioner Secretary of Community and Rural Development (C&RD) visited the villages falling under Mawsynram Block to inspect the sites implemented under *MGNREGA*. It was observed then how acute the issue of water scarcity was and feeling a need to mitigate this problem; he suggested that all the VECs of the villages come together to solve their common issue under one banner and call it —

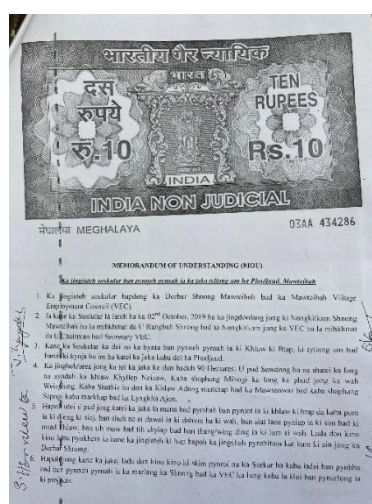
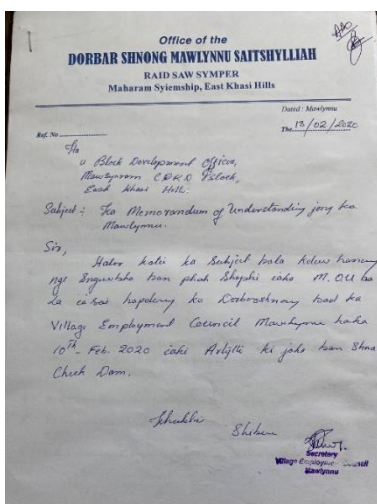
The Mawsynram Declaration.

The Mawsynram Declaration

On the 21st of August, 2019, the *Commissioner Secretary of Community and Rural Development (C&RD)*. Shri. Sampath Kumar along with members from the *State Rural Employment Society (SRES)*, made a field visit to some villages falling under Mawphlang and Mawsynram Block to inspect some of the sites implemented under MGNREGA. It was then noted that in Mawsynram, there are only a few numbers of interventions related to water harvesting and conservation. Furthermore, in villages such as Mawhiang which already has a water conservation infrastructure in place, it was found out that it was too small to meet the needs of the entire population of the village whilst some villages like Pongkung did not have any facility at all.

After taking stock of the situation and subsequently, at a meeting with the VECs at the Block Office along with the BDO; the Commissioner Secretary expressed his dismay at the current state of affairs relating to water resources and lamented that something should be done to uplift the condition and bring back the glory days of Mawsynram as the wettest place again. He then proposed the idea of VECs coming together to sign a declaration whereby each village should constitute a community land solely dedicated to the construction and maintaining of water harvesting structures. To accomplish this, VECs can sign a memorandum with their respective village institutions (dorbar) to allocate a certain community land for this purpose whilst in those villages that have no community lands, the VECs can purchase a plot of land from individuals for the same. With a show of hands, a number of VECs displayed their approval towards this Declaration.

Over the next few weeks and months, a number of villages turned up with the documents and the file work for the Declaration soon began. A majority of the villages signed memorandums with their respective village institutions since community lands are available whilst only a handful like Pongkung purchased lands from private parties. The Block officials from Mawsynram also played their part in disseminating the news about and getting more VECs to be a part of the Declaration. As part of the broadcasting process, the village institutions also held meetings to discuss on where and how the interventions can be taken up. Letters to the BDO etc. were also sent stating they wish to initiate the Declaration straight away with the constructions of ponds, checkdams, jalkunds etc.



Some of the documents signed by the VECs

Outcome

A total of twenty-four villages came forth and signed up to be a part of the Mawsynram Declaration. Of these, around ten villages have completed the construction of water harvesting structures and the remaining are still ongoing. The village of Langsymphut has taken great strides and the VEC members have spoken at length about how the construction of the check dam (in convergence with CLLMP) in their village has greatly benefitted the community. Whilst speaking to a village elder in the village, he noted how the water from the site was used during a church service congregation that was recently held at Langsymphut. He also spoke about how scarce water is during the winter months and now has a hope that the work undertaken with the help of the Declaration shall be fruitful.

Furthermore, the Secretary of the VEC also spoke about the location of the site — being in close proximity with the *Symper* Peak; it would make the place ideal for a recreational spot in the future. Given the size and splendour of the dam, he remarked that upon completion of fencing and beautification of the site, it would be a picturesque sight indeed. However, a concern was also noted about the safety and that the completion of fencing would be critical to prevent accidents from happening at the site.



Check Dam at Langsymphut Village

Another village that greatly benefitted from the Mawsynram Declaration is Mawteibah Village. The VECs of this village spoke about the history of the site. The former headman of the village was the owner of the land and upon seeing the potential of it, gave away a portion of the plot of to the village dorbar for public use. In conjunction with a water harvesting structure, the village of Mawteibah have also started afforestation and land development approach such as recharge pits and trenches (from CLLMP) in the vicinity of the site.



Sites at Mawteibah

Mawhiang village is another that paints a picturesque sight. According to the headman, it was here that the Commissioner Secretary first mulled about the idea of the all the villages coming together under the Mawsynram Declaration after he watched the view and listened to the plight of the community. Here as well, the check dam constructed has greatly aided the entire population of Mawhiang in terms of water supply.

However, one concern that the Secretary of the VEC noted was that they intend to expand the intervention site, however the portion that they mapped out belongs to a private individual who does not wish to sell the part of land to the VEC. Talks are still ongoing with the concerned parties regarding this and the VEC members hope that it would bear fruition in the days to come.



Panoramic view of the site at Mawhiang



VEC members of Mawhiang

Future

All the VECs aspire to further expand the sites in some form. Whilst some villages aim to expand the size of the structures, others wish to convert it to a tourist attraction while some plan to put forth land development interventions to further enhance the aesthetic as well as conserve the natural landscape of the place.

As exemplified by the Secretary of the VEC of Pongkung village, the *Mawsynram Declaration* has put in that cohesion that was missing amongst all the villages of Mawsynram. Since much of the work was initiated in the months of February-March of 2020, the VECs shall wait and see how much the interventions shall make a difference in the coming winter months.