

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY NEPED AND ITS DRAWBACKS IN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME

¹Dr. Merensangla Longkumer, ²Prof. A. K. Makar

¹Guest faculty in Department of Rural Development & Planning, School of Agricultural sciences & Rural Development (SASRD), Nagaland University, Medziphema campus

²Faculty member in Department of Rural Development & Planning, School of Agricultural sciences & Rural Development (SASRD), Nagaland University, Medziphema campus

ABSTRACT

Nagaland is situated in the northeastern part of India with agriculture as its main source of livelihood. The Nagas practice shifting cultivation or slash and burn agriculture or jhum cultivation which involves cropping the land for a year or two and then keeping it fallow for some years to regain its fertility. Recognising the importance of shifting cultivation in Nagaland , NEPED was established in 1995 to encourage adoption of agroforestry by planting trees in farmer's jhum field. Since its inception, NEPED has taken up many activities in Nagaland to preserve jhum cultivation with suitable modifications to make it environmentally friendly as well as income generating activities to improve the economic status of the people. The series of activities aimed at improving people's economic stature while utilizing their resources in a sustainable manner. It addressed the problem of jhum with a view to make it more sustainable and productive. It addressed the need to organize credit management in the rural areas by financing development of cash crops and several other activities. The present study was conducted in three districts of Nagaland. The findings revealed the activities undertaken by NEPED and the most preferred activities among the respondents. Every project/programme has its advantages as well as disadvantages so the study revealed the drawbacks of NEPED as perceived by the respondents.

Keywords: NEPED, jhum, shifting cultivation, Nagas

INTRODUCTION

The people of Nagaland rely heavily on agriculture and natural resources to meet their livelihood needs. The numerous festivals of the sixteen tribes of Nagaland are centered around agriculture. All the tribes and villages in Nagaland practice slash and burn cultivation, locally known as jhum

(the vegetation is slashed, burned, tilled and sown in jhum cultivation) . The impact of modern scientific practices has not been appreciable as most high external input technologies are not suitable for high altitudes and rain-fed conditions. Traditionally jhum cultivation was productive and sustainable as after one or two years of use, people used to keep the field fallow for 15 to 20 years to build up the nutrients. However, increasing population has led to a shortened jhum cycle (the period from slash to slash) and land degradation thus inversely affecting the livelihood of the poor farmers. Realising that jhum cultivation cannot be uprooted and replaced as it is interwoven into the culture and tradition of the nagas and also the application of modern technologies has limitations in ecologically sensitive and hilly terrains like Nagaland and at the same time the jhum practice posed a threat to the environment because of carbon emission during burning and decrease in productivity because of short jhum cycle, NEPED project was established in 1995, partnering with the Government of Nagaland, International Development research centre and India-canada environment facility.

NEPED aimed to modify and improve the existing jhum cultivation by planting trees along with regular jhum crops and take up suitable measures for soil and water conservation and to increase the income of the people through various income generating activities.

NEPED implemented the project in three phases. The first phase known as Nagaland Environment protection and Economic Development (NEPED-I) was implemented in 1995 and successfully culminated in 2000. The second phase was formulated with the same acronym NEPED, begun in 2001 and culminated in 2006. The third phase was started in 2006 and was known as Nagaland empowerment of people through economic development (NEPED-III) and lasted till 2011.

As majority of the population in the state are forest-based farmers, NEPED primarily focused on issues like shifting cultivation, environment protection, economic development and empowerment of the people. The series of sustained programme interventions and action research aimed at improving people's economic stature while utilizing their resources in a sustainable manner.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There has not been any programme to address the issue of jhum as well as for economic upliftment of the people. Jhum not only occupies the greatest area of cultivation but also involves and sustains the greatest number of people in Nagaland. It is because of such factors that interventions to improve and intensify jhum were made central to NEPED activities. There was a growing felt need to introduce trees in jhum fields to address environmental issues and to introduce cover crops to replenish the soil fertility as well as introduce shade loving cash crops to

be grown under trees to increase economic return. Until the introduction of NEPED, people were not aware about the adverse effects of jhum cultivation to the soil fertility and environment and to take up activities such as tree plantation, cover crops and other income generating activities in the field.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Jhum cultivation is a way of life for the Nagas. Therefore, the need of the hour is to devise suitable measures that will make jhum cultivation more sustainable. This will enable the farmers to improve land use, help ensure food security, improve cash income and improve their environment as well. With this objective, NEPED was initiated in Nagaland for overall well being of the people in rural areas. NEPED being solely confined to the state of Nagaland and the researcher being a native of the state, the present research was carried out in the state of Nagaland. The study was conducted in three districts of Nagaland-Dimapur, Mokokchung and Phek.

Dimapur, being the gateway of the state has easy access to communication, transportation and infrastructures needed for any developmental activities. The state's only railway station and airport are located in the district. So based on its convenience and easy availability of resources for the research work, Dimapur was selected as one of the study area.

Mokokchung, one of the fast developing district of Nagaland and the cultural centre of the Aos. The Aos are considered the forward tribe of all the tribes among the Nagas. NEPED has been quiet successful in implementing its activities in Mokokchung.

Phek, one of the eleven district of Nagaland, lacking behind from other districts in many areas mainly because of poor transportation and communication, but yet the people are known for being hardworking, needs special focus and policy intervention to tap its vast unexplored resources. For the present study, Phek was selected as one of the study area to determine how much NEPED has succeeded in improving the economic status of the people in this backward area.

For the present study, two blocks randomly drawn from each sample districts were taken as sample blocks.

The investigator had a discussion with the NEPED officials for selecting the villages on which the programme has been implemented. List of villages under each of the selected blocks were prepared and 20 percent of the villages from each block were selected at random.

The basic criterion for the selection of the respondents is that one should be a beneficiary of NEPED. The respondents were selected randomly from the sample villages. From each selected villages, a total of 10 respondents were selected randomly. A total of 280 respondents were selected altogether.

The primary datas were collected directly from the selected respondents with the help of the structured schedule, by employing personal interview method. The secondary datas were collected from the records of NEPED office and the various publications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY NEPED

The respondents were interviewed on how they feel about the different activities undertaken by NEPED according to the phases.

Table 1: Activities undertaken by NEPED in different phases

SL. NO.	PHASES	ACTIVITIES	DISTRICTS			
			PHEK	DIMAPUR	MOKOKCHU NG	OVERALL
1	I	i. Tree plantation in Jhum field	60(100)	180(100)	40(100)	280(100) I
		ii. Soil conservation measures	38(63.33)	140(77.7)	0	202(72.2) III
2	II	i. Micro credit	58(96.66)	120(66.6)	40(100)	218(77.9) II
		ii. Market linkages	1(1.7)	0	0	1(4) IX
		iii. Plantation of shade loving cash crops	49(81.66)	110(61.1)	0	159(56.8) IV
		IV. Formation of SHGs		60(33.3)	40(100)	145(51.78) V

			40(66.7)			
3	III	i. Development of horticultural crops	20(33.3)	0	19(47)	39(13.9) VII
		ii. Carpentry & Blacksmithy	0	0	19(47)	19(6.8) VIII
		iii. Livestock production	20(33.3)	69(38.3)	19(47)	108(38.57) VI

*Figures in parentheses indicate percentage

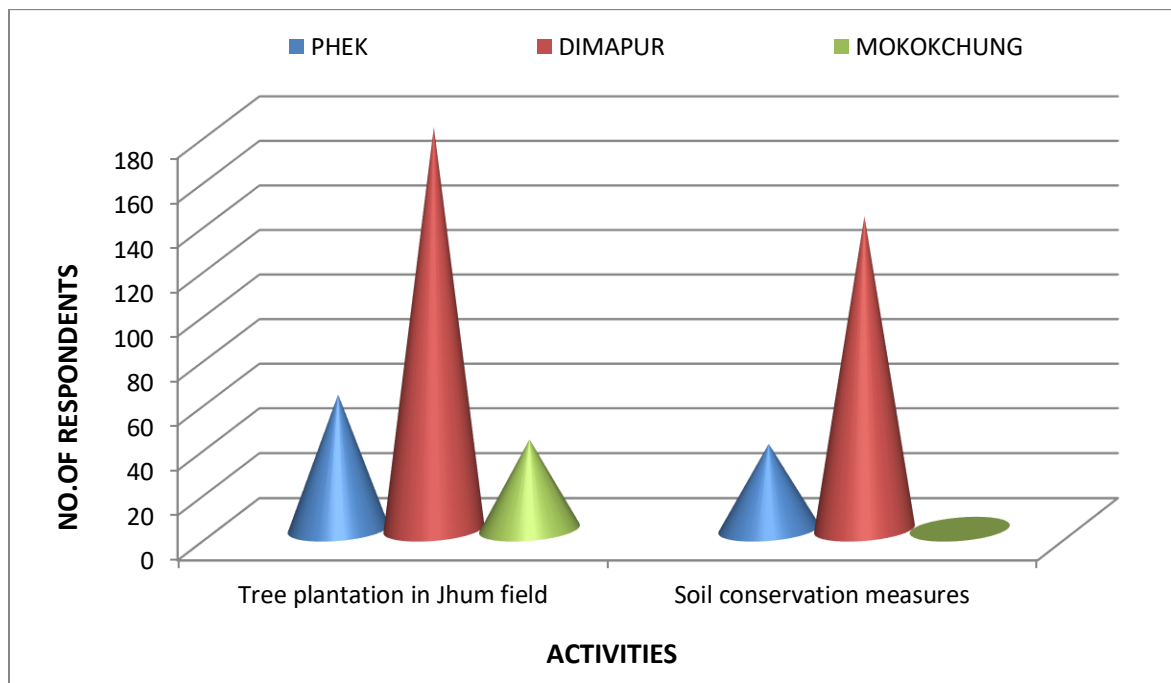


Figure 1(a): Activities undertaken by NEPED in first phase

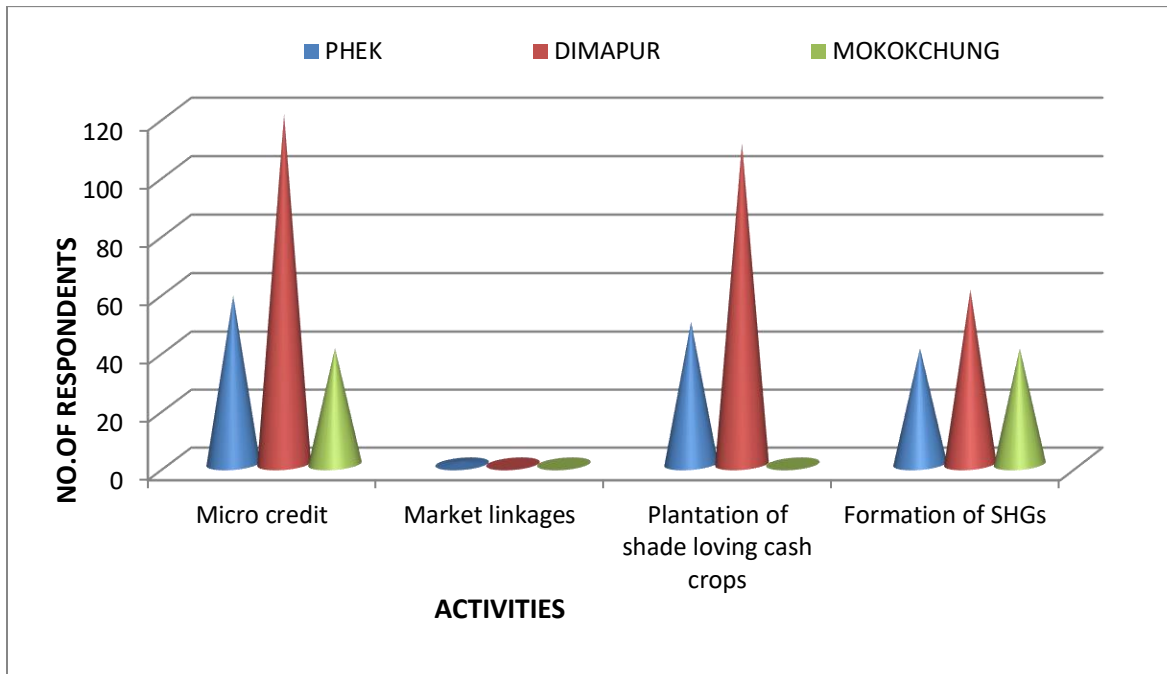


Figure 1(b): Activities undertaken by NEPED in second phase

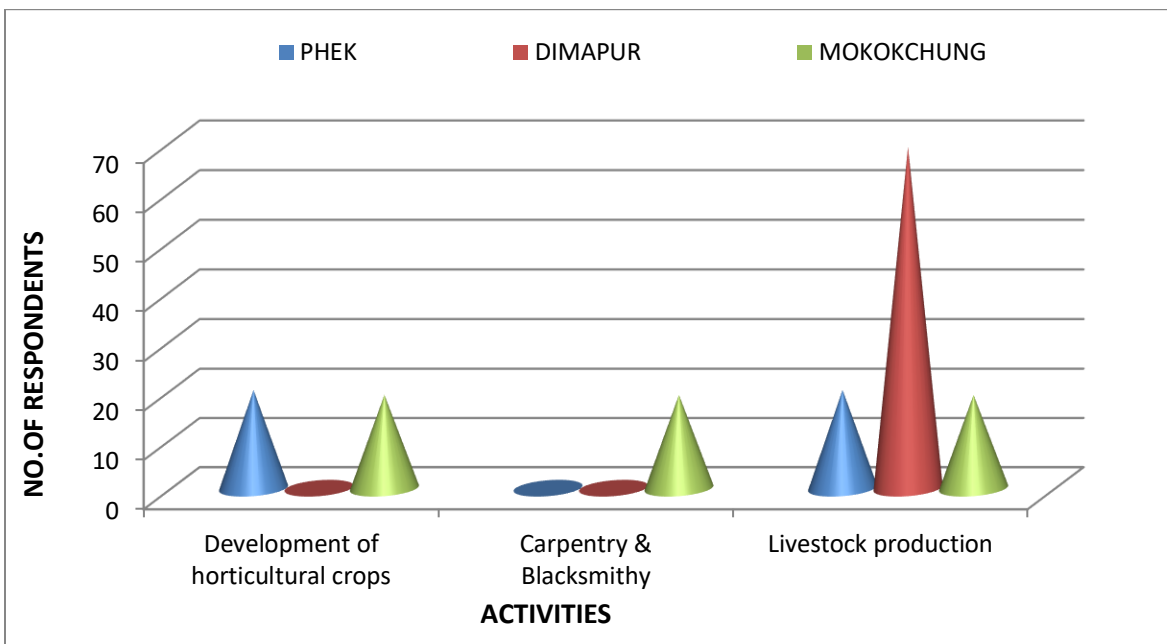


Figure 1(c): Activities undertaken by NEPED in third phase

Table 1 and Fig 1(a,b,c) revealed that in Phek, the most preferred activity in the first phase was tree plantation (100 %) followed by soil conservation measures (63.33%). In the second phase, the most preferred activity was the micro credit(96.66%), followed by plantation of shade loving cash crops (81.66%), formation of SHGs (66.7%) and lastly the market linkages (1.7%). In the third phase, development of horticultural crops (33.3%) and livestock production (33.3%) were most preferred , with no preference over carpentry and blacksmithy.

In case of Dimapur, the most preferred activity in the first phase was tree plantation in jhum field (100%) followed by soil conservation measures (77.7%). In the second phase, the most preferred activity was the micro credit (66.6%) followed by plantation of shade loving cash crops (61.1%) and formation of SHGs (33.3%). In the third phase, livestock production (38.3%) was the only preferred activity.

In case of Mokokchung, the most preferred activity in the first phase was tree plantation in jhum field (100%). In the second phase, the most preferred activity was the micro credit (100%) followed by formation of SHGs (100%). In the third phase, development of horticultural crops (47%), livestock production (47%) and carpentry and blacksmithy (47%) were all equally preferred.

Overall, the most preferred activity was tree plantation in jhum field (100%), micro-credit (77.9%), soil conservation measures (72.2%), plantation of shade loving cash crops (56.8%), formation of SHGs (51.78%), livestock production (38.57%), development of horticultural crops(13.9%), carpentry and blacksmithy (6.8%), market linkages (4%). This is in accordance with the findings of Faminow (1999).

The aim of this project was to make jhumming a more sustainable activity by adding value in the form of trees. There is a direct linkage between the project and environmental degradation. It is the poverty of the jhum farmers which forces them into causing environmental degradation and this continued environmental degradation re-enforces their poverty. According to the respondents, the project had successfully created effective awareness on tree plantation in jhum fields and created a source of income for the poor farmers, while addressing simultaneously the larger issues of environmental degradation and would like to continue the trend of planting more trees even in their own surroundings apart from their jhum fields. These findings were in agreement with the findings of Faminow (1999).

The concept of micro-credit system introduced in 105 villages was new to the villagers and required a lot of effort to familiarise them with these concept. The credit provided by the project i.e. Rs 5,000-20,000 per farmer, for all farmers of Nagaland. According to the respondents, the credit mechanism introduced by the project was different in approach. The rate of interest was

much lower on a per annum basis than the traditional lending system. The mode of repayment was loanee-friendly. The respondents were of the view that they are much more economically improved and people are aware about transactions and banking norms now. One particular man has purchased a taxi and its running successfully and there are many such instances where micro credit has brought changes in the lives of the people.

Jhum fields of Nagaland have upto 60 degrees slope, making them more prone to erosion than flat farm lands in the plain. The project attempted to conserve soil and moisture through the use and enhancement of traditional practices in different villages.

NEPED-I motivated farmers to adopt the culture of tree plantation in their jhum fields with the view that eventually these trees will generate cash income on harvest after they reach economically extractable size. However considering the long gestation period required by trees to attain economically viable stage, alternative option to provide to the farmers while waiting for the trees to get matured became an issue requiring immediate attention and intervention. The addition of fallow crops provided immediate returns to the farmers, and had been a significant input in the event of a second phase of the project.

Recognizing the difficulties women faced in accessing individual loans, the project organized women into self-help groups (SHGs) so that they could easily access credit and participate actively in the project. According to the respondents, there had been improvement in women's income, impacted on the quality of education of children as they could attend better schools. Introduction of SHGs has empowered women, they are more confident and vocal about issues knowing that they could achieve more when they could work in collective manner.

Domestication of livestock like piggery and poultry, most commonly piggery has been quite in demand in the villages. Realizing the role of livestock in economic upliftment of the villagers, the project started distributing piglets to all the interested households in the village. The respondents were of the opinion that the piggery initiated by NEPED had helped them in improving their economic status and wished the activity continues again in the future.

Cultivation of horticultural crops like banana, passion fruit, kiwi, pineapple, turmeric, was taken up by the project and there had been remarkable appreciation from the respondents.

Carpentry and blacksmithy were taken up in some villages where one person from the selected villages were given skill upgradation trainings and necessary resources to set up his own venture. The respondents wanted more of such activity for the unemployed youths and wished for continuing this activity in the near future.

Market linkages was the least preferred activity because this activity was not taken up in many villages selected for the present study. Market linkages are preferred by many respondents and wished the project takes up this activity on a serious note for more profitable farming and marketing.

2. DRAWBACKS/PROBLEMS PERCEIVED BY THE BENEFICIARIES IN ADOPTION OF THE PROGRAMME

The respondents were interviewed on the problems perceived by them in adoption of the programme

Table 2: Distribution of respondents based on the problems faced by them

SL.NO	NATURE OF PROBLEM	DISTRICTS			OVERALL
		PHEK	DIMAPUR	MKG	
1	MARKETING OF PRODUCE	10 (16.6)	10 (5.55)	25 (25)	45 (16.07)
2	LACK OF ADEQUATE TRAINING	20 (33.33)	10 (5.55)	15 (37.5)	45 (16.07)
3	LESS AMOUNT OF MICRO CREDIT	10 (16.6)	10 (5.55)	10 (25)	30 (10.71)
4	TREES TAKE LONG TIME TO MATURE	0	10 (5.55)	5 (12.5)	15 (5.35)
5	LANDLESS AND POOR PEOPLE WHO ARE GIVEN LOAN ARE UNABLE TO REPAY BACK	10 (16.6)	0	0	10 (3.57)
6	NO PROPER CO-ORDINATION BETWEEN NEPED OFFICIALS AND BENEFICIARIES	0	0	0	0

*Figures in parentheses indicate percentage

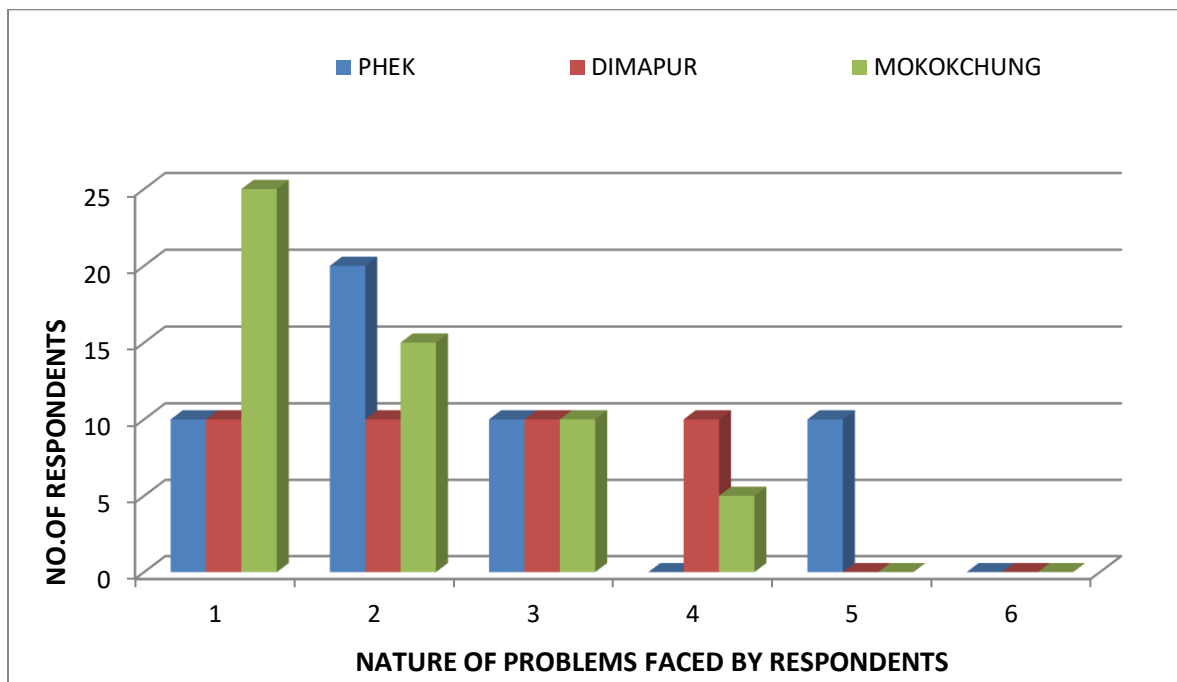


Figure 2: Distribution of respondents based on the problems faced by them

The problems perceived by the beneficiaries in adoption of the programme in Phek district were lack of adequate training (33.33%), marketing of produce (16.6%), less amount of micro credit (16.6%) and landless and poor people who are given loan are unable to repay back(16.6%).

In case of Dimapur, the problems perceived by the respondents were marketing of produce (5.55%), lack of adequate training (5.55%) and less amount of micro credit (5.55%).

In case of Mokokchung district, the problems perceived by the respondents were lack of adequate training(37.5%), marketing of produce (25%), less amount of micro credit (25%) and trees taking long time to mature (12.5%).

Overall, the problems perceived by the beneficiaries in adoption of the programme were marketing of produce (16.07%), lack of adequate training (16.07%), less amount of micro credit (10.71), trees taking longer time to mature (5.35%) and non repayment of loan by the landless and poor people (3.54%).

In many of the selected villages, the project failed to make market linkages. The respondents were of the opinion that failure to make market linkages as per the norms of the project has let them down and could have made a more better impact than the present. Lack of adequate

training is also another setback of the project. When asked, the respondents wished to go for more trainings often and pointed out that trainings can go a long way in making a long term and desired impact of the project on people.

Some respondents were of the opinion of less amount of micro credit and expressed their desire to avail higher amount from the revolving fund of the project. They wished for continuance of the micro credit in the coming years as it has played a tremendous role in their economic upliftment but with the desire for higher amount to take up other activities along with farming.

It is true that the trees take quite a long gestation period to attain economically viable stage. This was in agreement with some of the respondents but this has been dealt with by giving away fast growing cash crops in order to sustain the poor farmers during the gestation period.

Non repayment of loans by the landless and poor farmers was reported in a particular village though the problem was dealt strictly by the village council as per the norms laid out in the project. Other than that, this problem was not seen in any of the project villages as the village council have been empowered to deal with micro credit and its defaulters and they have done a commendable job on this.

CONCLUSION

Introducing trees as an additional crop in jhum fields was exceptional that the concept of tree raising in Nagaland has now spread much beyond what the project envisaged. With the plantation of tree crops, there was the longer-term vision of managing appropriate shade-tolerant cash crops to provide income to the farmers. Today Nagaland is producing cash crops like cardamom, ginger, passion fruit, black pepper and turmeric. Before the project, farmers accessed loans from banks at individual capacities and often used to default in payment. But the introduction of micro credit has facilitated profitable farming and empowerment of the villagers. Formation of SHGs and various livelihood activities and soil conservation measures using locally available resources were some commendable steps taken by NEPED. Market linkages is one area which needs special focus. Creation of good market linkages can change the agriculture scenario in Nagaland.

In spite of drawbacks like low training exposure, less amount of credit, the project had been one of its kind in economic empowerment. No other project in Nagaland had so far taken up multiple activities which NEPED had undertaken and people are so much in eager for the project to make its come back. The villagers in Nagaland are now convinced that planting trees in jhum field can generate income. The project achieved tremendous success in soil conservation measures, introduction of shade tolerant crops and pioneering micro credit system in Nagaland.