

A leader in her own right

STORY OF A DYNAMIC WOMAN - MRS. LHAINGAH SENGYUNG

As the age old saying goes “man must work and women must weep” but here is a woman who had to shoulder manifold tasks and what is striking is that she singlehandedly, though painstakingly, did it.



Fig: Mrs. LHAINGAH SENGYUNG

Mrs. Lhaingah Sengyung, born in 1955 at Tumjang village, in Dima Hasao district of Assam, to a poor household whose main source of income was jhum cultivation. She did her formal education at St. Agnes Convent High School, Haflong, a co-educational institution run by Catholic nuns. However, she could not complete her schooling due to financial constrains. Most of her teachings in life and nature were from her father as she recollects and says “*I owe everything to my father for helping me stand on my feet by teaching me the secret of hard work.*”

Mrs. Sengyung was widowed after 15 years of marriage and had the big responsibility to bring up six children and without any financial support. She had to face poverty and difficulty in every way. She remembers those years and adds on “*my burden was heavy and I have no choice but to work as hard as I can to keep my family alive.*” Her only source of income was by selling agricultural products.

When Tumjang village was taken over as a project village by the North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCORMP), and Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Natural Resource Management Groups (NaRMGs) were formed, Mrs Sengyung joined these groups and became an active member. The Project team in the initial years trained and spread the awareness of preservation of natural resources and taught them techniques of utilizing them. Mrs Sengjung says “*I belonged to the Kuki tribe where women have very little or no voice. With the onset of NERCORMP in my village, I became more interested as the Project ensured equal opportunity for women.*”

Through the revolving fund provided to her SHG, Mrs. Sengyung took a loan of Rs. 4000/- for taking up weaving and made good profit through this activity. In the following year, after repaying her previous loan, she took an education loan from the NaRM-G for sending her eldest son for higher studies. She could also avail different grants provided by the project to take up activities like Kitchen Garden, poultry farming; plantation of horticulture crops, and also constructed a low cost toilet. She started selling vegetables and fruits as well as handloom products which enhanced her income as well as her savings. She could give good education to her children and also improve on the standard of living of her family.

Mrs Sengyung, besides enhancing her financial status also took keen interest in attending different trainings and workshops organized by the project as well as by other departments for capacity building of the communities. Impressed by her hard work, dedication and capability, she was elected as the General Secretary of the NaRMG Association of her block, called the Association of NaRM-Gs for Social and Economic Development (ANSED), which worked with better ideas and forward vision towards sustainable development of the communities. Under this capacity, she

attended several workshops, trainings and exposure visits. The interactions and meetings with different people within and outside the district greatly increased her potentiality. As the General Secretary, she realised the importance and stressed for registration of ANSED under the Society Registration Act (SRA) and eventually ANSED became a registered society. She took initiative to bring about a sustainable source of income for the society. At that point, the cluster received financial assistance from the Project as corpus fund and they constructed a multipurpose building at Mahur Bazaar. ANSED housed its cluster office in the building and rented out the other rooms, which is now a sustainable source of income for ANSED.

An unwanted ethnic clash erupted between the Dimasa and the Zeme Naga tribes in the district. Many villages were burnt down to ashes and many innocent people were made homeless. Mrs. Sengyung took the initiative to visit the nearby villages and relief camps and it is pertinent to mention that ANSED distributed relief materials to the homeless.

Till today, through her selfless and democratic approach, she leads the NARMG Cluster Association which is a mosaic of different communities comprising of the Hmar, Kuki, Dimasa & Jeme Naga tribes and also coordinates with the NaRM-Gs and the project team. ANSED still functions smoothly under her strong leadership. Today, she stands proud to achieve what she has by overcoming all challenges through sheer hard work and dedication.

Submitted by NERCORMP- Dima Hasao, Assam.