

**ANNUAL ACTIVITIES REPORT OF
MAHILA SHAKTI KENDRA (M A S K)**



FOR THE PERIOD

01 APRIL 2021 TO 31 MARCH 2022

*Prepared by Secretary
Mahila Shakti Kendra*

**MOLAN PUKHURI, BALIPARA,
DISTRICT SONITPUR, 784 101
ASSAM – INDIA**

Contents

Introduction	3
1. Partners.....	4
2. Education	5
A. Attempting replication –	6
B. Development of Model ICDS Center –	6
3. Women Empowerment.....	7
A. Renovation of kitchen environment for women’s health.....	8
B. Introducing Solar Lights in the Kitchen-	9
4. March 8th - International Women’s Day Celebration	10
5. Building competence through staff training	11
6. Investigating the Causes of Human-Elephant Conflict and Identifying Potential Solutions	12
7. Livelihood-.....	13
A. Animal husbandry and fishery	13
B. Organic farming	13
C. Paddy cultivation.....	14
D. Mushroom production.....	14
E. Marketing links.....	15
The following are the steps taken throughout the year for this marketing linkages program:	15
F. Horticulture and spice cultivation.....	15
G. Social safety net PMFBY (Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana)	16
H. Custom hiring center.....	16
I. Lyard Model –	16
J. Art and design of bamboo products	17
8. Natural Resource Management & Climate Change mitigation	17
9. COVID-19 second wave crisis responses.....	18
10. The Forest Rights Act of 2006	19
11. Meetings/Seminars and Visitors	20
A. Visitors	20
MAHILA SHAKTI KENDRA GOVERNING BODY MEMBERS	21

Introduction

Mahila Shakti Kendra is a Federation of over 100 Self Help Groups, popularly known as MASK. It was established by the SHG members on 01 April 2002 and on 08 February 2006, it got registered under the Societies Registration Act XII of 1860. Today MASK has emerged as an indispensable platform for several tribal women in the district of Sonitpur in Assam.

It applies SHGs as a tool to encourage savings, introduce income generation programs, and build linkages between women and banks. And thereby, it helps to provide financial empowerment to women.

MASK's vision is to empower the poor and marginalized, especially women, to bring about social change in their status and transformation in society.

MASK's mission is to promote and form Self Help communities of love, concern, thrift, and solidarity among the poor. Especially among marginalized women irrespective of their caste, creed, or color, whereby they become conscious of their collective strength (unity) as members of the Federation, to help themselves individually and as a group and to empower themselves economically and socially to live with dignity in the mainstream of society.



1. Partners

Our partners

Sl. No.	Funding Agency	Project	Donation
1	AJIM PREMJI PHILANTHROPIC INITIATIVES, KARNATAKA, INDIA	Livelihood of people living near forest	30,23,000.00
2	NORTHERN AROMATICS LIMITED (NAL), UTTAR PRADESH- 201010	Windows for Kitchen	27,00,900.00
3	PAUL HAMLYN FOUNDATION (PHF), UNITED KINGDOM	Natural Resource Management to Enhance livelihood of Forest Dependent People	17,20,635.00
4	BALIPARA TRACT AND FRONTIER FOUNDATION (BTFF), Guwahati	Balipara Reserve Forest Habitat Restoration	16,73,025.00
5	PAUL HAMLYN FOUNDATION (PHF), UNITED KINGDOM	Post Covid Relief Fund (PCRF)	9,70,000.00
6	BREAD FOR THE WORLD, GERMANY	Strengthening Community Action for Development in North East India	8,62,172.00

 <p>AJIM PREMJI PHILANTHROPIC INITIATIVES.</p>	 <p>PAUL HAMLYN FOUNDATION (PHF), UNITED KINGDOM</p>
 <p>BALIPARA TRACT AND FRONTIER FOUNDATION (BTFF), GUWAHATI</p>	 <p>Bread for the world, Germany</p>
 <p>NORTHERN AROMATICS LIMITED (NAL),</p>	 <p>JIVANTI WELFARE AND CHARITABLE TRUST, DELHI</p>

2. Education



Figure 1 Outdoor activities at Baligaon L.P. School

MASK works in areas where no government schools exist. This year, the organization has worked with six community-run schools. These schools are in remote areas of the Sonitpur District, near the Assam-Arunachal border, primarily inhabited by tribal communities. Before the pandemic, these community schools lacked basic infrastructures, such as good school buildings or toilets. AIAS and NAL have supported the organization in creating these basic facilities for two such schools.

However, during the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 and 2021, these schools failed to adapt to an online mode of education because almost all of the villages lack electricity, making it difficult to use digital devices for education.

At the beginning of 2021, Mahila Shakti Kendra aimed to establish eight learning hubs to help fill in the learning gaps of school students across 42 villages in this area. MASK has conducted teacher training programs for regular school teachers and volunteer learning hub teachers to introduce them to effective strategies for making classroom learning joyous and interactive. Through the training, they learned to use new modes of teaching such as outdoor games, science, and numerical awareness for rural children. This year, the organization assisted 611 students in the area in filling learning gaps by providing coaching classes through these learning hubs, in which volunteer teachers played an important role.

Under this education initiative, MASK, in collaboration with AIAS, established a mushroom production unit, a fishery, a school garden, a nursery, and an animal husbandry unit within the school campus of Baligaon M.E. School to support the school's financial needs.

As an outcome of these in-house revenue-generating activities under the project, the community contribution as school fees decreased to roughly 55,000 rupees, which was 94,400 rupees per year, saving the villagers 35,200 rupees on school fees. By leveraging the school's resources, the initiative raised around 2,93,282.00 rupees in 2021; that year, the school committee saved 1,98,482.00 rupees.

The school has been able to build new toilets, classrooms, and a new school building under the project. The initiative also assisted the schools in acquiring solar panels for the water pump and LED lights.

Apart from funding these two institutions, the program has also helped students from 10 nearby schools to continue their studies during the COVID lockdown.

A. Attempting replication –

MASK has been attempting to replicate its Baligaon Forest School model at Phulguri Garogaon, Garogaon, Morisuti, and Noghoria since November 2021. The initial activities assisted the school Management Committee (SMC) in running mid-day meals, in order to improve child nutrition, and it also successfully increased basic skills and knowledge of the students regarding kitchen gardens.



Figure 2 replicating the “Bhalukpung” model

B. Development of Model ICDS Center –

Integrated Child Development Services involves providing support to mother and child development in India. It includes supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-up, referral services, nutrition and health education and pre-school education. Keeping these services in mind, one ICDS centre has been constructed in Harchura Adivasi Pam. The centre is still under construction but roof renovation, wall renovation and constructions; and wall paintings with nutrition messages have been finished so far.



3. Women Empowerment

Working in approximately 150 villages in the Balipara development block of the Sonitpur District in Assam, MASK has been promoting and nurturing of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) from the beginning of its establishment. It has founded hundreds of SHGs, many CBOs, and a few FPOs under the leadership of village women from the area. The initiatives, which have the backing of APPI and PHF, have yielded some fascinating insights.



Figure 3- Self-Help Group are setting up nurseries.

Initially, most of the women leaders assigned to manage such village-level organizations felt they did not have the skills or knowledge to successfully participate in meetings or decision-making processes to run such institutions. Many women also felt they needed the support of their husbands because it was the first time they were outside of the domestic environment. When they did attend meetings, they often lacked the confidence to speak up about their priorities and opinions.

The staff of Mahila Shakti Kendra (MASK) and the government agencies collaborating with MASK widely acknowledged the women leaders as change agents. The organization gave the women a lead accountability role in a few of its programs, including community health, water user committees, and school management committees. On their way to becoming leaders, these women encountered obstacles such as a lack of awareness about their roles, a lack of capabilities, and social restrictions that made things even more difficult. Mahila Shakti Kendra (MASK) realized that one-time inputs and the bare provision of capacity-building through sporadic training are insufficient given the numerous barriers and exclusions that the women leaders have to negotiate.

The organization, therefore, devised a plan to mentor the SHG, CBO, and FPO leaders. The organization also designed a three-day training course to walk women leaders through their roles and responsibilities. In addition, this course gave the women leaders the knowledge and skills they needed to manage the finances of their organizations. It also helped them improve their communication skills and understanding of gender-based discrimination.

The organization's staff continued their mentoring program throughout the year, planned orientation sessions, and assisted the leaders in meeting with government representatives to widen their influence. This year, the organization's staff helped all the female leaders to understand how their institutions operate, helped them identify problems within their group, and guided them to find solutions while upholding organizational accountability by transparently managing their associations.

It is needless to say that rigorous monitoring and intensive capacity building are critical to promoting women's leadership in village-level institutions.

The Mahila Shakti Kendra (MASK) pioneered the process of elevating women so they could voice their opinions on a range of social issues that affect them daily; this process was made possible through the promotion of SHGs in the villages. The organization has gradually promoted these SHG leaders to the roles of CBO and FPO leaders during the latter stages. The organization has noticed that these women leaders are now acting as catalysts for development in their villages.

Most of the SHG leaders were receiving mentoring from the organization to improve their SHG management. However, it appeared that they also used their leadership and a method akin to that used to manage SHGs to address problems with resource management, water use, and other livelihood-related issues. Additionally, these women have improved village infrastructure, participated in COVID and other disaster relief efforts, and taken steps to ensure their rights and entitlements. The respect they earned from their families and communities served as the primary motivator for the majority of them.

A. Renovation of kitchen environment for women's health

This year, women from Harchura Adivasi Pam were made aware that an unhealthy kitchen environment could lead to health hazards for them. This made them willingly adapt to the

healthy practices of kitchen management. They realized that a good kitchen simply needs adequate space, light, ventilation, but no smoke. We have made some simple but good village kitchens in collaboration with the women of the villages. For most of the women creating their own simple but unique kitchens from locally available materials was fun, and their family members helped them to set up the kitchen area. Some of the very poor households of these villages did not even have any designated covered



spaces for a kitchen and were cooking in open space. This initiative has encouraged them to make some sort of an enclosure dedicated only for cooking. Almost every household of the

villages made an innovative utensil rack to keep their washed utensils, this helped the water to drain out and keep the cleaned utensils dry and off the ground. Ventilation was provided for every kitchen by leaving a gap of at least 12 inches above the wall and the roof. The villagers used bamboo grills or small holes/ window near the stove for air and light.

These are simple and inexpensive kitchens, but efficient as it helped the women to have an improved work environment and can take out some of the drudgeries that women have to undergo daily. Recently, the villagers were provided with support for kitchen utensils such as a big and small bucket, a steel basket for keeping the utensils and other essentials. A total of 75 households received this facility. One of the beneficiaries, named Anita Janti, shared her view that, due to a poor kitchen facility, they had faced problems in preparing food and as mud stoves emit huge amounts of smoke, it created a problem in preparing food. So, after the renovation, the kitchen had windows which helped them in getting rid of the smoke very easily and the construction of racks and shelves also helped them in draining the water from the utensils.

B. Introducing Solar Lights in the Kitchen-

Every family in one of the project villages, Harchura Adivasi Pam, received a solar home lighting system from MASK. So far, 75 households have received solar lights. The new lighting facility immediately extended working hours in the evening and has several types of benefits. It has helped each family in the kitchen with food preparation and their children's studies.

So far, MASK has provided 75 households with solar lights. Kukurmoni, one of the beneficiaries who received the solar light, expressed that beforehand they had to light candles to make food, which was difficult while cooking at night. But providing solar lights to them has helped each household in the kitchen to prepare food and also helped the children in their studies as they were able to read and write effectively with the help of the solar lights.

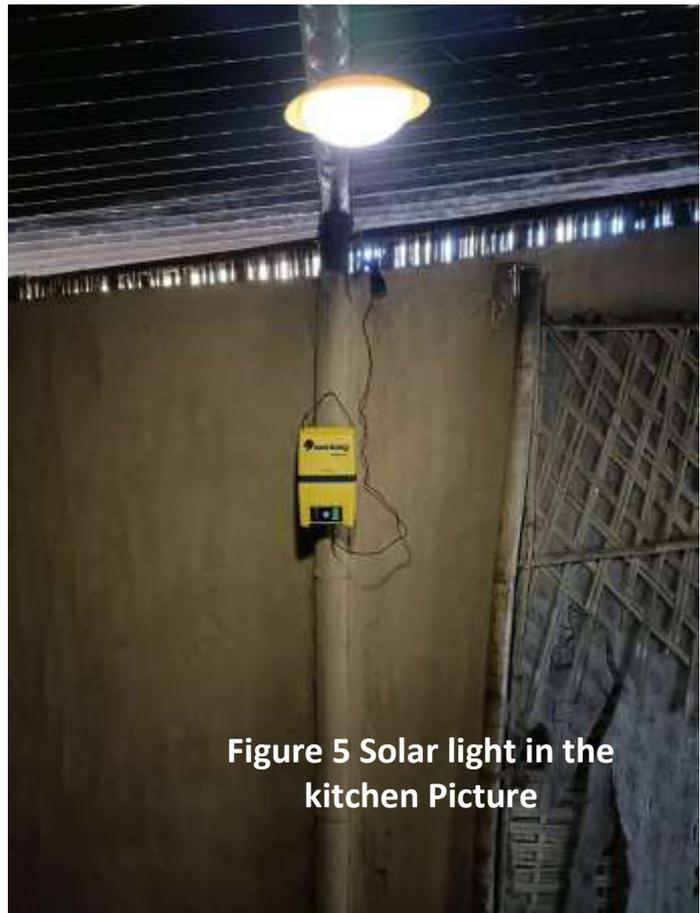


Figure 5 Solar light in the kitchen Picture

C. Constructing Water Source-

The villagers of Harchura were facing problems because of a lack of regular and dependable water supply in the area. They didn't have clean drinking water and the women had to walk 3-4km up and down the hill to fetch water, which was becoming very difficult for them. Taking that issue

into account, MASK planned to help resolve their water problem by constructing a tube well in that area so that they



can easily get access to clean drinking water. A total of 20 tube wells have been constructed in the village since then. One of the beneficiaries of this effort, named Sumitra Rajuwar, expressed her view that the construction of tube wells helped in getting access to water and that she was grateful she didn't have to travel so far to get drinking water anymore.

4. March 8th - International Women's Day Celebration

The North East Network (NEN), organized a program at Dharikathi Village on 27th February 2022 to celebrate an early international women's day. Eliza Boro, Khusbu Rana, and Priska Sangma of MASK attended this

program. Eliza Boro, the Secretary of Mahila Shakti Kendra (MASK), whose was invited as a guest for the program by NEN. During this program, she made an



Figure 7 On 8th. March, the delegates inaugurated the program by lighting lamps.

inspiring speech about international women's day being a day to celebrate achievements of women from all over the world and it also being a day to reflect on the challenges and progress toward gender

equality. She also promised that NEN and MASK are committed to creating a safe and inclusive environment for women and girls in the area.

On 8th March 2022, MASK's staff and the local community celebrated international women's day separately once more. Dr. Bubha Keot (Sub-Divisional Medical Officer, Chariduar CHC) and Dr. Kakali Basumatary (Veterinary Officer, State Veterinary Dispensary, Chariduar) delivered relevant speeches to the staff and local community on the occasion. The program paid tribute to 3 female street vendors and 12 SHG members in the area, praising their bravery in facing challenges through their small businesses. The facilitation and space to express themselves made the women emotional and tear up during the event but they still delivered their best in their speeches and encouraged other women to face the world with confidence and strength.

5. Building competence through staff training

Staff and institutional capacity building is important for every organization as it helps identify gaps and improve the efficiency of the organization. The objective of such a training is to help staff members grow and learn to meet individual and organizational goals. This part of the report discusses some of the activities conducted for MASK's staff/institutional capacity building.

- On 10th and 11th March 2021, CASA organized a program for Project Implementing Organizations (PIO). Khusbu Rana attended the program on behalf of MASK. On the first day, they discussed and reviewed the project achievements of the entire year, from January 2021 till December 2021. During the second day, PIOs participated in a workshop on 'Enhancing Project Management.' In this program, the trainer discussed project management principles and how to apply them in the project context. Both days were fruitful for PIOs as they were equipped with new skills and learnt how to better understand project achievements, and develop a good teamwork atmosphere.
- On 11th March 2022, MASK organized a workshop on understanding government schemes like IBS under MGNREGS. Ranjan Saikia was the resource person who facilitated this workshop. Ranjan Saikia works with an organization named SeSTA at Bongaigaon (Assam). SeSTA has been guiding MASK in strengthening our fund-leveraging capacity through MGNREGS, for livelihood-focused natural resource development plans, and implementing the same. The workshop was attended by Khusbu Rana, Apurba Basumatary, Manjeet Medhi, Sujeet Koch, Kapila Marak and Rashmi Basumatary, of MASK.
- On 6th May 2021, the MASK team attended an online open forum discussion among the Assam PIO's, organized by CASA's Guwahati office as a part of the 2nd phase orientation of the BfdW sponsored project. The state coordinator revised the project objectives, indicators, and goals. In addition, the state coordinator also outlined the different thematic components of the project. The PIOs agreed on the need to develop a system for tracking and documenting issues that arise during project execution.
- The PIOs of CASA discussed the need for a state-level platform for Assam in another zoom meeting on 28th July 2021. The purpose of the meeting was to create a platform for Assam that is in line with the BfdW-sponsored project mandates. The participants at the meeting also chose an interim chairperson and a core committee to draft the constitution.

- Oscar Pereira conducted an internal audit consisting of the entire book of accounts. He and the accounting team checked every bill and voucher of every ongoing project of the organization to check for any evidence of irregularities. The purpose of the internal audit was to identify and document risks inherent in the accounting process and to make recommendations for mitigating those risks. This internal audit process helps identify areas for improvement within the accounting and administrative process, and it assists senior management in increasing efficiency, improving employee morale, and reducing risk. The internal audit was a process by which Oscar assessed the organization to ensure it was compliant with the law and was operating ethically.

6. Investigating the Causes of Human-Elephant Conflict and Identifying Potential Solutions

Elephants are one of the most iconic animals on the planet. Their population is declining rapidly due to habitat destruction caused by human activities, and as a result, they often



Figure 8 Damage caused by Wild Elephants, to 78 homes in our area

conflict with humans. Assam is one of the last strongholds of endangered Asian elephants, but as the number of clashes has increased in recent years, people have become hostile towards wild elephants and vice versa. These clashes and the resulting hostility endanger the lives of both animals and humans. This year, wild elephants have damaged 78 residences, two fair-price shops, twelve private grocery stores, three school buildings, three tea garden godowns, one ICDS center, one motor vehicle, and five bicycles, as well as 12 homesteads and more than 200 bighas of paddy field. However, three elephants, one male, and two females died in the area. Elephants have killed ten people in the area, eight men and two women. Ten more people were injured this year by wild elephants.

In response to this conflict, the organization has started a community-based elephant monitoring and compensation program in the Sonitpur district. The project monitors the movement and behavior of elephants and has created a system of compensation for damage caused by elephants. The project also aims to raise public awareness of the importance of elephants to the environment and to prevent unnecessary harassment of elephants. We work closely with locals affected by these elephant raids to develop solutions such as watch towers, electric fences, and other non-lethal elephant deterrents that

help keep their families safe. This campaign seeks support from the public to construct barriers around their fields so that wild elephant will stay away from their farms in the future.

7. Livelihood-

A. Animal husbandry and fishery

Poor animal productivity is a primary challenge for animal husbandry and fishery activities in the ---area. Farmers must improve their skills and use modern technology to increase productivity to earn more money and provide better provisions for their families. MASK is developing the necessary infrastructure for animal and fish breeding, including a pig and goat breeding unit and an animal feed manufacturing facility. Additionally, MASK is promoting sustainable land management practices that support grazing in the region.



This year, the organization distributed 600 ducklings to nine local villagers. MASK's capacity-building programs educated 189 participants on diverse topics, including cattle vaccination, disease management, and feed supplements. Thirty-six households received goats and pigs as input support under various projects. Mahila Shakti Kendra also worked with Charduar State Veterinary to provide pig farmers in the area with swine fever vaccines.

B. Organic farming

Mahila Shakti Kendra (MASK) promotes organic farming and agribusiness for farmers and agricultural workers in the area. Its objective is to expand the area under organic crops while maintaining soil fertility and preserving the region's agricultural diversity. Mahila Shakti



Figure 9 –Potato & Ginger farming at Bhalukpong.

Kendra works with government agencies to promote organic farming through government programs such as: the "National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture" (NMSA), the "Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana" (PKVY), the "Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana" (RKVY), the "Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture" (MIDH), and others. This year, the organization trained 394 farmers on organic pesticides and manure and provided seed assistance to them.

C. Paddy cultivation

Paddy cultivation in Assam is laborious, and farmers lack adequate agricultural inputs; as a result, farmers must improve the soil, which farmers have used for centuries to grow paddy. MASK helps farmers to follow an adequate package of practices to increase production. This year, MASK has established a rice cafeteria to promote the diffusion of the ten most prevalent, traditionally grown rice varieties. The organization has also worked with the agriculture department to bring more paddy fields under irrigation. MASK has encouraged the paddy growers of the area to form a farmer's producer group so that their products can be sold to government agencies in bulk at a Minimum Support Price (MSP).



Figure 10 Paddy transplantation in the rice cafeteria with community involvement

D. Mushroom production

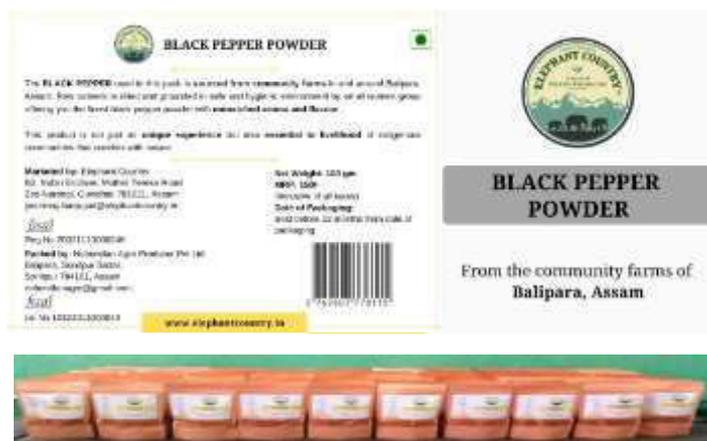
Mahila Shakti Kendra (MASK) is concentrating its efforts on producing high-quality fresh mushrooms and processed products free of pesticide residues at a reasonable price. The organization promotes mushroom cultivation through three projects funded by APPI, PHF, and AIAS. These projects have introduced mushroom cultivation in ten villages with 100 beneficiaries. So far, the initiative has developed three mushroom demonstration units, and 46 individual processing units are in progress.



Figure 11- Mushroom production unit Bogijuli village.

E. Marketing links

In the northeastern states, the issue of marketing agricultural products is very pressing. Lack of infrastructure, such as storage and transportation, contributes to the low cost of these agricultural commodities. The organization is trying to create a novel business model to connect farmers with consumers. It has the potential to bring local farm producers online and provide them with the opportunity to market their products to a national, if not global, consumer base.



The following are the steps taken throughout the year for this marketing linkages program:

- On July 21, 2021, farmers from the area exported pineapple, lemon, and jackfruits to Delhi and Hyderabad.
- On October 25, 2021, the organization also assisted the farmer's production company (promoted by the PHF project) in registering with an e-trading platform called NeML.
- On December 20th, 2021, staff organized an FGD among the identified farmers in Morisuti to discuss their requirements for running small agricultural businesses.
- On January 29th, 2022, our organization helped a farmer producer company promoted by the PHF project to apply for its FSSAI license.
- On March 25, 2022, local farmers sold 2000 kilograms of vermin compost and 5 kilograms of vermin to the tomato and cabbage growers of Rupa, Arunachal Pradesh.

F. Horticulture and spice cultivation

Mahila Shakti Kendra (MASK) is supporting farmers to expand the area of high-value commercial fruits, vegetables, spices, and floral crops. This region grows a wide range of horticultural crops such as pineapple, litchi, and Assam lemon, as well as spices such as ginger, turmeric, and black pepper, and ornamental plants such as orchids.



Figure 12- Litchi sapling distribution, and Ginger cultivation at Bogijuli

G. Social safety net PMFBY (Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana)

The organization assisted the state agriculture department in implementing the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) in the area. The organization wanted to connect farmers to the scheme because the government promised to compensate farmers who suffered crop loss/damage due to unforeseen events, particularly floods and wild animal raids. The organization staff helped the Agriculture Department with the collection of proposals and premiums from farmers. The team assisted the farmers in filling out the declaration forms, which required them to provide information about the insurance, the premium, the total area insured, the category of farmers (small/marginal/other), caste (SC/ST/others), gender (male/female), and bank account information. The team helped 1038 farmers in the area to apply for PMFBY (Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna) crop insurance on July 22nd, 23rd, and 24th, 2021.

H. Custom hiring center

On December 25th, 2021, the organization received support from APART to set up a custom hiring center (CHC) for 518 farmers in the area. The organization received seven different types of farm machinery, including a paddy reaper for harvesting paddy, mustard, and other crops. The CHC will reduce farmers' drudgery while saving them a lot of time and money.



Figure 13 *Machineries at CHC*

I. Lyard Model –

In August of 2021, the farmers of Harchura village were provided training for a particular method of multicrop farming called the 7-layered model of farming. The farmers of this area are poor and were in need of some more income. They had a patch of uncultivated land but did not know what crops would be best to cultivate there. MASK stepped in and suggested multi cropping, and provided them with three training sessions on homestead plantation and 7-layered model of cultivation. This was adopted in the village and support was provided to them by MASK, to acquire seeds and saplings so that they could use the



Figure 14 *Layered models for the area*

field effectively to earn more for their living. The plant species that were distributed to the villagers were Moringa(Drumstick), Litchi, Lemon, Papaya, King Chilli, Ginger and Guava. This 7-layered model was implemented in a total of 75 households.

J. Art and design of bamboo products

In collaboration with AIAS and GMS, MASK organized a five-day exposure tour to Bangalore and Mumbai in 2022 for two office staff and two community members. The purpose of the exposure was to educate participants on the emerging art and design of bamboo products in these cities. The tour has helped the office staff understand the potential of bamboo-based products. It has the potential to transform the local economy if the organization can properly harness the potential of locally available bamboo and use it to transform rural businesses.



Figure 14 : MASK Staff with other participants of Art & Bamboo Exposree trip to Bangalore & Mumbai

8. Natural Resource Management & Climate Change mitigation

Mahila Shakti Kendra (MASK) has been working for more than four years to mitigate the adverse consequences of climate change. The program has already restored more than 700 ha of critical ecosystems and engaged more than a thousand households. It has identified 6,000 ha for restoration

by 2030, of which 2000 ha will be under agroforestry. The organization has supported and promoted three community nurseries this year. The organization worked with 350 local families to plant 4,750,000 native trees across two plantation zones in Assam. This program is working to restore three degraded



Figure 15 Women are planting trees.

forests in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland to preserve ecosystems that provide carbon sequestration and provide living environments for the fauna and flora to thrive.

9. COVID-19 second wave crisis responses



When the second wave of the pandemic struck, the organization realized that the pandemic had the potential to devastate the local health system. The health establishments in the Balipara Block lacked adequate facilities, and with a population of 279465 people to cater to, they were under intense pressure. The Balipara PHC had only four oxygen cylinders. In terms of equipment, supplies, and medical and paramedical personnel, PHCs are understaffed and underequipped. Sub-centers, such as Community Health Centres (CHC), were also unprepared to deal with Covid-19 cases. The second wave would almost certainly have destroyed the health systems in the area, just as it had destroyed Delhi, Mumbai, Lucknow, and Pune.

Considering the situation, MASK had prepared plans to arrange oxygen cylinders, concentrators, oximeters, nebulizers, and thermometers and to establish isolation centers and vaccination centers in collaboration with hospitals. It has also prepared its plan to assist the poorest people to survive during this critical time through relief programs. Managing so many activities appeared to be too much at that time. The situation was complicated, necessitating the preparation and implementation of a complex plan to combat the pandemic's second wave.

Activities undertaken towards COVID19 management during the year -

- MASK distributed dry rations to 10 households from July 23rd to July 24th, 2021, during the second wave of COVID-19.
- On September 1st, 2nd, 6th, and 17th, 2021, Mahila Shakti Kendra held COVID-19 vaccination camps in four villages.

- On the 8th, 22nd, and 27th of October 2021, Mahila Shakti Kendra distributed uniforms, gloves, shoes, and gumboots to four sanitation workers working in PHCs and CHCs of the area.
- On the third, sixth, thirteenth, and seventeenth of September 2021, MASK organized a series of COVID-19 awareness campaigns. One hundred and fifty people participated in the campaigns.
- The organization assisted six women-headed households on October 18 and 23, 2021. These households were struggling to make ends meet because of the COVID-induced situation. The families received financial and material support to run their small businesses.
- From February 15 to February 20, 2022, a professional videographer from green hub documented ICRRF-funded COVID-19 relief work.

10. The Forest Rights Act of 2006

The Forest Rights Act, 2006 is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted on December 23, 2006. It is a significant piece of legislation to protect the forest rights of indigenous people all across India. It allows tribal communities to claim traditional forest lands as their community forest resources and maintain their customary way of life. Ironically however, the tribals and other traditional forest-dwellers neither have a basic understanding of this act, nor do they know how to take advantage of it from a legal point of view.

In 2021, MASK held a massive awareness drive about the FRA, 2006 in which there were 500 participants from 46 villages. Earlier, each household had to pay Rs 1500/- to legal agents to have their rights documented, but on August 6, 2021, MASK conducted a day-long training cum workshop to teach the villagers how to fill out Forest Rights application forms and learn GIS mapping on their own, and avoid the unnecessary cost of legal agents. The participants were eager to learn the legal technicalities of claiming their FRA entitlements. There have been 25 participants from 11 villages so far, who were directly benefited from this hands-on training intervention.

This training was highly interactive and a valuable learning for all participants. All of them took active part in every process, which included identifying the geographical coordinates of the village, digitizing maps, entering data into excel sheets, producing final products in pdf, sharing knowledge about the use of GPS, identifying adequate persons for data entry work, and more.

Learning these skills has helped villagers to follow the application process and to prepare the accurate map required for the claim submission. This year the organization has helped 1285 households in the area to apply for their Forest Rights, which has saved a lot of money and energy for the villagers.

So far, they have prepared all the necessary maps and application forms containing information about their forest area. Many SHGs and CBOs are also working with communities and facilitating the process. The organization keeps them up to date on the latest FRA developments.

11. Meetings/Seminars and Visitors

Throughout the year, the MASK's office staff, including the secretary, attended several conferences and discussions. The meetings and seminars that the staff and secretary attended are listed below.

- On 15 December 2021, Secretary Eliza Boro, one office staff Priska Sangma, and two other community members participated in an Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics Forum organized by Balipara Foundation in Guwahati.
- On 5 November 2021, Eliza Boro went to Guwahati to attend a meeting of NERCRC. NERCRC is a forum of the different non-government organizations working in the development sector across 12 states of India. After the meeting on 13 November 2021, Mahila Shakti Kendra became a formal member of NERCRC.
- On 23rd February 2022, Dhruva J Das and Nirola Basumatary (a member of the FPC promoted by the organization) attended a buyer-seller meet at Tezpur. APART Sonitpur organized the event at the Office of the Joint Director of Agriculture. The purpose of the meeting was to find an opportunity to collectively market the producers of the farmers of the area, particularly paddy, maize, and mustards.
- On 17th March 2022, Priska Sangma and Nirola Basumatary (community member) attended a local stock holder meeting. The District Industries and Commerce, Sonitpur, organized the meeting at Dhekidol, Goramari. The factory management of the Dabar Group and Patanjali Udyog attended the meeting; they discussed the possibilities of local procurement of agricultural products, especially spices and medicinal plants.
- Mr. Chandan Saikia, the organization's accountant, traveled to the CASA office in Guwahati on March 9th, 2022, to attend a one-day workshop, organized by Brot, on financial management.

A. Visitors

These are the names of the people who came to the Balipara office of Mahila Shakti Kendra between April 1, 2021, and March 31, 2022.

Sl. No.	Date	Name	From	Purpose
1	31-05-2021	Roshan Chetry	ICCOA	FPC promotion
2	31-05-2021	Himangsu Pathak	ICCOA	FPC promotion
3	08-11-2021	Kishor Kr. Baruah	ICCOA	FPC promotion
4	08-11-2021	Sandeep Jaishi	ICCOA	FPC promotion
5	08-11-2021	Himangsu Pathak	ICCOA	FPC promotion
6	10-12-2021	Pranjal Hazarika	ICCOA	FPC promotion
8	17-02-2021	Dr. Umesh, Dr. Nidhin, Sejal, Prosik	Metta Foundation, Mumbai	Education and awareness

MAHILA SHAKTI KENDRA GOVERNING BODY MEMBERS



*Mrs. Akhai Marak,
President*



*Mrs. Sushila Sangma,
Vice-President*



*Mrs. Pherpin Momin,
Treasurer*



*Mrs. Indu Basumatary,
Trustee*



*Mrs. Mainu Marak,
Trustee*



*Mrs. Anita Devi
Jt. Secretary*



*Mrs. Eliza Boro
Secretary*

Date : 25th. April 2022

Place : Balipara



FOR Mahila shakti Kendra

Eliza Boro
Secretary