



Sericulture and weaving are important cottage-based industries in rural areas of Meghalaya, involving more than 30,000 families. These two sectors were identified as providing consequent positive impact for Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) in line with GIZ programme objectives to create climate resilience in rural areas, protect natural resources and support inclusive social economic growth:

- Generating subsidiary income to farmers' families
- Checking migration from rural to urban areas
- Maintaining the rich heritage of the local tribes' culture and way of life
- Sericulture and weaving – dyeing, encouraging plantation and safeguard of trees, with consequently a positive impact on the environment and hindering soil erosion
- Offering a greater role to women in socio-economic development as rearing and weaving silk is mainly done by women



Adaptation to climate change and promotion of inclusive economic growth – project of the GIZ in cooperation with The Republic of India

With the objective that “Rural people in the North Eastern Region (NER) enhance their livelihood resilience and adaptive capacities to the impacts of climate variability and change”, GIZ initiated a programme in partnership with the Ministry of Development of the North Eastern Region (DoNER).



MEGHALAYA IN FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Meghalaya is a hilly state of North East India, surrounded by Assam in the north and Bangladesh to the south and covers an area of approximately 300 kilometres in length and about 100 kilometres in breadth.

The state has a population of 2,964,007, the majority following a matrilineal system where lineage and inheritance are traced through the women.

Also called “the abode of clouds”, the State has a sub-tropical climate, which varies with altitude, offering a large variety of species and crops, and makes it suitable for silk activities.

Agriculture is predominant in Meghalaya and is the main activity involving the major part of the state's population. However, production yield is low and rural people remain poor. Furthermore, agriculture is the first sector to be affected and is rendered fragile by climate changes. At first glance, Meghalaya seem blessed by nature, but, mountains are among the most fragile environments on Earth. In these regions, small changes in temperature and extreme slopes lead to rapid changes in climatic zones over small distances, showing marked impacts in terms of biodiversity, water availability, agriculture, and hazards, and this has an impact on general well-being of its inhabitants.



SILK IN MEGHALAYA

Silk activity in Meghalaya is mainly based on traditional practises and is eco-friendly. It also provides job opportunities in the rural areas, thus, containing migration from rural to urban areas, and keeps farming activities alive, preserving a balance between farmers and their eco-system. Beyond these climatic issues, it maintains the rich heritage of the local tribes' culture and way of life.

Thanks to its hilly relief and climate conditions, the State is suited to production of three kinds of silk: Eri is the main crop, followed by Muga and Mulberry.

In the absence of appropriate reeling facilities, most cocoons reared here are sent to neighbouring states.



ERI SILK

Apart for some very small portions of muga, eri silk is the only silk fully processed within the State, from rearing to the finish product.



Growing eri silk is a household activity conducted exclusively by women within the State



Eri silk is spun from open-ended cocoons. For this reason, it is often named “peace silk” or “poor man's silk” due to its cotton aspect.

Because Eri silk has an open-ended cocoon leading to a non continuous thread, it is traditionally hand spun directly from the cocoon using the conventional spinning device “Takli” – a Drop Spindle.

WEAVING IS AN AGE-OLD ACTIVITY, REPRESENTATIVE OF MEGHALAYA TRADITION AND CULTURE

Unlike other parts of India, where much of the spinning and weaving is in the hands of men, spinning and weaving in Meghalaya is the exclusivity of women. Similarly to rearing cocoons, weaving is a subsidiary activity to farming, practiced during their spare time – around three hours a day.

The traditional loom is rudimentary but easy to handle for rural women inside their small living space; it is made of a bamboo reed with wooden sticks to maintain the warp. It only allows the production of one to three silk scarves, depending on the length of the weaving place. Weavers use these traditional looms to weave their hand spun yarn.





MEGHALAYA WEAVING TRADITION

Today, most weavers are grouped under a village cluster. Each cluster has a weaving centre with improved weaving equipments, such as fly shuttle looms with jacquard devices and twisting equipments. These centres and equipments have been introduced by the government in order to increase weavers' productivity and create more weaving textures.

Few weavers are weaving in these centres, as most of the clusters' members are still working at home, using their traditional weaving techniques.

DYES FROM NATURE



In villages, most weavers are using natural, mainly vegetal ingredients for dyeing their silk, such as flowers, leaves and bark that they collect in their back yards and nearby forests. Insects and metal is also used as well as natural leaves to fix colours.

Unfortunately, lack of transmission and recording of ingredients has led to a loss of knowledge of proper use and colour variety. They now have only six varieties, out of which, only few trained dyers can make others shades. Considering Meghalaya's plant variety and its particular climate, it seems very limited.

GIZ SILK PROJECT

The objective of the giz silk project is to work along with government bodies of Meghalaya as key partners to enhance their strategies and plans towards climate change adaptation along the silk value chain.

More specifically:

- Improve the supply of good quality raw silk, fully processed within the State
- Give Eri and Muga silk their inherent aspect so that the fabric has a pleasant silky shine, a soft and comfortable touch and a nice fall
- Increase the products' worth, adding value through quality and designs, as well as reducing product weight and price
- Develop existing natural dyes methods and increase the range of colours
- Improve the design of the products, proposing new textures, attractive motives and appropriate sizes for shawls



To be in line with «slow fashion» way of thinking, the project will focus on the following aspects:

- Use of Eri and Muga silk as they are fully eco-friendly
- Natural dyes and ingredients
- Eco-friendly practises and methods
- Products that last long: Simple and timeless designs
- High-end products with related quality
- "100% made in Meghalaya": Design weaved only with yarn that has been reared and processed in Meghalaya
- In harmony with people's lifestyle and traditions:
- Use both traditional and improved methods, thus, preserving old techniques while encouraging use of the improved equipment
- Spread production to most weavers rather than focusing on one professional group.

The project will follow bellow steps:



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Silk in Meghalaya Slow Fashion

