

Green Entrepreneurship in Manipur

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Abstract: *Manipur is a small hilly state in the North-East region of India. Manipur may well be historically characterized by economic backwardness and unstable law and order conditions but in the face of such reality, there has been remarkable growth in the market and production in recent years. The native of the state have always had an inherent respect and love for nature and in time people's consciousness for the environment have been culturally and traditionally woven into their lives. In recent years natives of the states have taken up many ideas and visions to help conserve nature and turned them into profit making business. Such a drive has drawn a significant picture of green entrepreneurship in Manipur.*

"Green entrepreneurship" is the activity of consciously addressing an environmental/social problem/need through the realization of entrepreneurial ideas which has a net positive effect on the natural environment and at the same time is financially sustainable and a "Green entrepreneur" is someone who starts and runs an entrepreneurial venture that is designed to be green in its principle, products and processes.

The genuine awareness of environmental health and its implications on human life is significantly reflected in emergence of green entrepreneurship in Manipur. So far there have been some successes but they face many challenges in the form of raising capital, customers, awareness, market for products, employees, unexpected occurrences, political instability, lack of complementing infrastructures, etc.

Some of the pioneers of entrepreneurial culture of Manipur includes Mr. Ragesh Keisham of SuiGeneris Inc., Mr. Rungsung Wengmanso (convenor) and Mr. Vashum Lung Dang Raising (secretary) of Chiko., Mr. Premjit Ngairanof SALAI POWER, Miss Ngangom Monalisa Chanu of 'Envi', Mr. Thangjam Joykumar of Thangjam Agro industries, Madam Geetashori Yunnam (managing director) and Dr. Asem Sundari (Managing Director) of Green Biotech Eco-Solutions, etc. Moreover North-East India is revered with unspoiled nature and the region is home to many picture-like perfect unexplored destinations and potential tourist spots. Such tourist spots provide for development and flourishing of eco-tourism.

This paper is a humble attempt to throw some light into the challenges faced by the green business community and the entrepreneurs in general in Manipur and supportive measures that can boost and promote such growing industry with immense potential.

Key words: *North East India, Green entrepreneurship, Manipur, supportive measures.*

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I. Introduction

Green Entrepreneurship can be explained as an entrepreneurial journey to optimize the returns on Economic, Social and Environmental Capital Invested. It is a process of wealth creation through optimal use of natural or man-made resources by ensuring minimization of greenhouse gas emissions and waste generation to reduce air, water and solid waste pollution thereby increasing profitability while enhancing an overall positive impact on humanity

In recent years the general awareness of global warming, climate change, detritions of natural environment as well rising deaths of flora and fauna and the increasing pollution levels have brought about a new wave of innovations towards the betterment and protection of the environment.

North East India is revered with unspoiled nature and the region is home to many picture perfect natural destination and potential tourist spots. The landscape of Manipur is well endowed with natural habitats which are home to many species of flora and fauna. The local natives of the state have always had an inherent love and respect for the nature. Recent years have shown a rise of many pioneers in the field of "Green Entrepreneurship" which not only are environment friendly but are reaching financial heights. Moreover there has been a significant rise in the development of ecotourism.

The genuine awareness of environmental health and its implications on the human life and its surroundings is significantly reflected in its emergence of Green Entrepreneurship in Manipur. They take the

form of Agro-based products, recycling of products water conservation, eco-tourism, etc. Significant lack of industries and capitalism has also played a role in driving the entrepreneurs towards environment friendly ventures on small and medium scale.

II. Objective Of The Study

The objective of this paper is to study the possibilities for income and employment generation without affecting natural habitat and environment through green entrepreneurship in Manipur.

III. Methodology

The study is based on explanatory method of research and primary sources of data. A comprehensive personal survey and interview was conducted on the renowned pioneers of the entrepreneurial culture of Manipur like Mr. Ragesh Kaidam of SuiGenesis, Mr. Premjit Ngairangbam of SALAI Holdings Pvt. Ltd., Mr. Rungsung Wengmanso (convenor) and Mr. Vashum Lung Dang Raising (secretary) of Chiko, Miss Ngangom Monalisa Chanu of 'Envi', Mr. Thangjam Joykumar of Thangjam Agro industries, Madam Geetashori Yumnam (managing director) and Dr. Asem Sundari (Managing Director) of Green Biotech Eco-Solutions, etc

IV. Review Survey

The story of "Chiko" began in the year 2016 when a group of 9 well educated youngsters from the district of Ukhrul in the state of Manipur formed an expedition team to explore the potential of ecotourism in the state. The maiden venture began in July 2016 when they ventured to the forest of "Talloi" and Sengcha village in Ukhrul District. A survey and interview was conducted on "Chiko" conducted in the month of October 2017 at Ukhrul district with the help of Mr. Rungsung Wengmanso (convenor) and Mr. Vashum Lung Dang Raising (secretary) of Chiko.

Their team have been through adventure activities like trekking, mountaineering, cycling, rafting and camping, etc. They have worked vigorously to provide tour guide, camping materials, hotels, home-stay, lending equipment and providing training, etc. To the adventure tourist which have significantly changed the tourism industry of the district and the state. During the survey they have successfully organised a tour to "Hoyang Mount Sengcha Village" to the tourists from the USA and Poland along with a cycling team from Nagaland.

The Chiko team has already established official association with the Wilderness Adventure of Manipur (WAM), Manipur Mountaineering and Trekking Association (MMTA) and The Tourism Department of Government of Manipur. The next step is to start organising tours for the school and college students.

The Chiko team have faced many obstacles in their journey such as exploring uncharted territory, assurance of security, communal instability amongst the locals, lack of funding and investment, absence of proper forum to initiate exposure of the company, etc. Despite the numerous problems the Chiko team has had a promising beginning towards a bright future being the pioneers of eco-tourism in Manipur.

Another pioneer of green entrepreneurship is Mr. Ragesh Keisham an UNCTAD – Empretech Graduate and a first generation entrepreneur. He has dedicated his life to nurture the wealth of Manipur's rich soil and channelize it towards bringing prosperity and development to the region. His journey included many ventures prior to the foundation of "The SuiGeneris Inc". During his quest he was very impressed with the numerous therapeutic benefits of Cymbopogon Citratus. As lemongrass grows wild in the land of Manipur, a very high yield was predicted for Cymbopogon Citratus. Due diligence revealed that Ragesh's quest had finally found a direction and he launched The SuiGeneris Inc., a privately owned sustainable development enterprise that imported 10,000 saplings of superior quality Cymbopogon Citratus from Indonesia in 2007. On 21st August 2011, The SuiGeneris Inc. launched CC Tea, a naturally caffeine-free instant lemongrass tea. Prepared exclusively from the leaves of Cymbopogon Citratus aka fever grass; the zesty, clean and tangy flavours of this pure tisane are soothing yet refreshing. By mid-2012, the company had developed the first prototype for automating its tough manual works. Today, the company uses a much more advanced proprietary model, specially designed and tweaked for the purpose.

The survey conducted on the SuiGeneris Inc shows that the SuiGeneris Inc. has grown from 2 to 2000 workers and is actively empowering thousands of families across Manipur. It is generating gainful employment in one of the least economically developed states of the Indian subcontinent and uses all available resources for manufacturing a world-class product.

The company adheres to organic farming policies and the produce is grown and packaged without any pesticides, fertilizers, colouring agents, flavours or other additives. The SuiGeneris Inc. is primed for bringing a revolutionary transformation in global consumption of the lemongrass plant. The company's first product line CC Tea is approved by FICCI and is garnering curiosity from global traders across Europe, US and UAE.

A pioneer in the field of green revolution, The SuiGeneris Inc. currently owns and manages a pristine 250-acre plantation of Cymbopogon Citratus in Imphal. It has acquired an additional 500 acres for cultivation

and is expanding production to meet the ever growing demand for CC Tea. The SuiGeneris Inc. has leased and acquired more than 1000 hectares of land for tree plantation in different areas of Manipur and plants high value species that are given aftercare till maturity. The SuiGeneris Inc. has also undertaken an ambitious 'Plant a Million Trees' campaign and realizes that these must be sown in reserves and managed woodlands so that their full maturity and biodiversity targets are achieved.

The SuiGeneris Inc. is triggering a much-needed wave of development in this struggling region and has opened the doors for an era of economic bloom and prosperity for all sections of the society. The firm is managed by a team of professionals having sound business backgrounds and is backed by a team of advisers comprised of experienced professionals in legal, financial and technical fields.

Another name on the top of green entrepreneurs list is Miss Ngangom Monalisa Chanu of 'Envi'. Her company 'Chanu Associates' has brought about a new era of eco friendly products in the form of environment friendly pens and pencils. Using the brand name 'Envi', she produces handmade eco-friendly ball pens, pencils, disposable pen barrel and paper bags with different categories such as baker bags, grocery bags, confectionary bags, non-woven bags and so on. During our interview she revealed that she always had a soft corner to save the environment and to keep it natural and organic from the midst of global warming and climate change and that She wants to contribute as much as possible in saving the environment which is not only meant her locality but the whole world. She had trained herself to be a medical practitioner, following the footsteps of her elder brother and sister in medical profession. However, observing the world decaying away with no much effort from people to preserve the environment, medical profession never satisfied her.

The uniqueness of the pens and pencils she manufactures is that the bottom part of the pen is filled with seeds of different vegetables, fruits, flowers and medicinal plants. The size of the seeds range from watermelon seeds to as small as mustard seeds. The varieties of plant seeds used are beneficial to the environment, human beings and animals, she added. Some of the seeds she implants are of beetroot, lettuce, brinjal, marigold, leipungkhang, chingglei etc.,

According to Monalisa, "Once the ink of the pen gets over or the pencil is used up, it can be planted in 30 degree angle with sands. The capsule covered ultimately gets off and a new plant is planted,"

Monalisa now produces 200-300 units and gets a profit of Rs. 50,000 per month. So far she has produced around 50,000 units.

Recently, she was also given loan by state government under Startup Conclave and if materialized, she plans to upgrade her machineries. Informing that demand is always higher than supply, the entrepreneur said that if mechanized she sets a target of producing 3000-5000 units per day.

The next pioneer to make name in the environment friendly business in Manipur is Mr. Thangjam Joykumar of Thangjam Agro industries Pvt. Ltd. The journey to establish Thangjam Agro as a small scale industry began in 1991, when Thangjam Joykumar realized the potential of the humble pineapple, a fruit widely available all across Manipur. He took the decision to start an agro-based industry that gives employment to locals on his journey back home after completing his Master's in Economics from Bhopal University in 1983. He wanted to start his business even earlier, after his graduation in Business Management from Mysore University, but, he listened to his elder brothers and pursued a master's degree.

Manipur happens to be the second largest producer of pineapple in the country. The visionary entrepreneur started his venture at Chingmeirong in Imphal, where he and his four employees started retrieving and packaging juice from pineapples. Initially Mr. Joykumar used to sell pineapple juice from his courtyard, just informally by himself. He then decided to it into a formal business. He received Rs 5 lakh from Manipur Industrial Development Corporation (MANIDCO) and Rs 1.5 lakh from Imphal Urban Co-operative bank as loans to start up. With a total investment of nearly Rs 10 lakh, Joykumar started the business which then had an annual turnover of around Rs 4 lakh. In the beginning the business faced many rough times and was unable to get the momentum for the initial 4-5 years. Eventually he introduced 'Likla' (dew drop), his brand that offered packaged drinking water and bakery items, apart from fruit juice and other beverages. Joykumar now produces more than 1,000 tonne processed food and drink products annually, including bottled pineapple juice with which Joykumar began his venture. Recently they have established a manufacturing plant at Nilakuthi Food Park complex, located 7 km from Imphal.

Today, Likla claims to hold the largest market share in Manipur in the business of packaged water and fruit juices, and Thangjam Agro Industries also exports 10 tonnes of pineapple juice to Kerala annually. At Thangjam Agro Industries, 98 per cent employees are locals, including technicians and machine operators, and 70 per cent of the staff is female, which Joykumar thinks is a reflection of how spirited and empowered Manipuri women are. The industry runs for at least 300 days a year, the staff working 12 hours a day in three shifts. A workaholic himself, Joykumar works nonstop, through weekends. He steered the company through a massive expansion project, financed by Bank of Baroda, Imphal with venture capital assistance from Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium, New Delhi.

Speaking about difficulties and hurdles at the beginning, the soft spoken entrepreneur said he had faced severe marketing and logistical problems during the initial stages, in the 1990's.

"Frequent economic blockade along the NH-27, which passes through Nagaland and is the major lifeline of Manipur, along with periodic general strikes in the state by various organizations, made it difficult to work. Irregular power supply used to be another main disturbance, as 90% of power requirement was harnessed from generators," explains Joykumar.

For his outstanding contribution to India's economy through the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector, in 2010, the Chamber of Small Industry Association (COSIA) honoured Joykumar with the Entrepreneurship Appreciation Award. Joykumar is also the recipient of Best Production Award by the All Manipur Art and Culture Sports Development Society and the Governor's Trophy for Best Entrepreneur, 2012.

The entrepreneur now plans to establish a child care centre within the plant's premises so that married women employees can bring their children, who will be taken care of by trained nurses. In his early 50s, Joykumar is glad to see the growing industrial sector in Manipur, which can today substitute various imported products with locally manufactured products.

According to Mr. Joykumar, the net investment for 2016 was nearly Rs 10 crore, with financial assistance received from North East Industrial Development Finance Corporation and State Bank of India. The company was able to achieve a turnover of Rs 15 crore.

The next pioneer of green entrepreneurship is Madam Geetashori Yumnam (Managing director) and Dr. Asem Sundari (Managing Director) of Green Biotech Eco-Solutions.

Green Biotech is a research based farming input biotech manufactures and marketing enterprise based in Manipur. The enterprise is focussed on bio solutions for Crops, Soils, Animal husbandry, Aquaculture and Environment Management Inputs. The company has also received ISO 9001:2008 certification. The company was established in 2014. It has opened a unit in Guwahati, besides the main office and a branch in Imphal. The objective of Green Biotech is to help the farmers minimise their investment by using their organic products and increase their annual output by 10-15 per cent.

The journey wasn't easy for both Geetashori and Sundari as they found it difficult to mobilize capital for their idea. They did not have mentorship support who could give them the necessary push. Transportation cost and the regular bandhs were posing a big threat to their work, both financially and logistically. Despite all the hurdles, both of them launched 'Prakriti', a product which turns waste into bio-fertilizer. The product was a hit among locals selling nearly 5000 packets within 6 month and gave their idea the necessary boost to take their work on the next level.

Green Biotech produces a variety of agricultural products and provides unique services that are first of its kind in Manipur and have turned their attention towards a better an environment friendly agricultural practises in the state. The first of its products is 'Micro Magic' which is a multi-purpose organic cleaning solution which can be applied on the floor, on kitchen cabinets and tops, on glassware, in bathrooms and toilets, laundry rooms, drainage and for septic tank treatment, among others. It can also be used in homes, hotels, hospitals, office and learning institutes. According to Asem Sundari, managing director of the company, the product contains no chemicals, toxic substances or allergens. It can eliminate different kinds of odour within a very short time.

The company also manufactures bio-pesticides, biofertilizers, bio-agricultural inputs, medicines and feed for poultry, animal husbandry and for aquaculture. It also produces varieties of nursery plants.

According to Sundari, "Gaining farmers trust is very important for us. We also do training and capacity building for farmers and households to switch to organic products. Earlier, to buy an input for poultry a farmer was spending INR 4500 now they are just spending INR 1500 with our probiotic products. Until now, they were able to reach out to 10,000 farmers, while earlier it was only 3500 farmers.

In year 2016, they became a part of Green Business Challenge. The initiative helped them collaborate with Assam Agricultural University for technology transfer for making bio-inputs to manufacture and sell the concentrate in the market. Now, Green Biotech Eco-Solutions manufacture and distribute their own products. In 2017, Truvalu provided them with funding of 67,000 EUR for setting up state of art infrastructure which tripled their production. Earlier the production capacity was only 1.5 MT and now it is 4 MT.

In 2016 the company has hit sales of Rs 69 lakh and are currently employing 22 members who are dependent on the company for their livelihood. They have a strong pool of 80 plus retailers who help them in selling their product and ensuring last mile delivery.

The company is currently pushing for an MOU to be signed for transferring five unique food processing technologies developed by ICAR, Manipur to Green Biotech Eco-solutions Pvt. Ltd. with the objective to start up entrepreneurship using underutilised natural exotic products of the state.

The Final survey was conducted on selected companies of the SALAI Holdings Pvt. Ltd. which are under the umbrella of environment friendly and green companies. The selected companies include SALAI Land

Development & Agricultural and Allied Activities Cooperative Credit Society Ltd., SALAI Agro Products Pvt. Ltd., SALAI Energy Solutions Pvt. Ltd., SALAI Bio Diversity Park Pvt. Ltd.

SALAI envisions an exploitation free society without poverty, inequality and social injustice having to discriminate one against the other, a future in which poor and marginal farmers, prospective entrepreneurs; educated unemployed and socially excluded people participate in the making of an equitable and sustainable nation. The objective of establishing such companies by the India based parent company SALAI Holdings Pvt. Ltd. is to realise its vision of a society wherein people do not have to depend on other states and nations for their basic necessities.

During the early phases, SALAI Holdings Pvt. Ltd. came to the realization that agriculture and its allied activities pertaining to the North Eastern region of India lack not resources but policies, policies to ensure that sufficient and quality maintained foods are produced and generated for the inhabitants of the region.

Taking advantage of the arable and fertile land that have been bestowed upon us by nature, we have emerged at the forefront holding firmly onto our primary weapons i.e., agriculture, its varied methods and related technology and utilizing their efficiency to the utmost extent. The objective of establishing such a company by the India based parent company SALAI Holdings Pvt. Ltd. is to realise its vision of a society wherein people do not have to depend on other states and nations for their basic necessities.

V. Conclusion

This paper is a humble attempt to throw some light into the challenges faced by the green entrepreneurship community and the entrepreneurs in general in Manipur. The ever growing industry which is advancing in the direction of sustainable development and environment protection is in dire need of significant support through investments, government policies, inclusive growth participation, supportive measures, promotional activities, infrastructural developments, etc. This industry has immense potential and is much needed for sustainable development and must be supported to achieve its potential.

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