

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38027/iccaua2023en0269>

Community Based Tourism for Economic Growth: A Case of Mawlyngot the Urlong Tea Village in Meghalaya, India

¹ Ph.D. Candidate **Nishith Srivastava**, ² Professor Dr **Prafulla Parlewar**
School of Planning and Architecture, 4-B, IP Estate, New Delhi, 110 002, India ^{1&2}
E-mail ¹: nishithsri@yahoo.com , E-mail ²: prafulla.parlewar@spa.ac.in;

Abstract

The significance of Tourism and more specifically the Community Based Tourism was realized in the wake of global pandemic situation. The growing trends towards the popularity of niche tourism such as the Community Based Tourism was a notable change. Tourism is today recognized as one of the fastest growing industries in the world. The question however remains, should the benefits of the industry be limited to select few. Is the industry benefiting local communities who deserve their fair share?

The research paper attempts to answer this, citing the example of Mawlyngot village which was a sleepy village full of social evils. The village has seen transformation after promotion of local tea through community-based efforts and promoting Tourism. Based on the structured interactions with the key stakeholders and the local community the paper examines the key factors leading to such transformation.

Introduction

The Community Based Tourism essentially involves the local community as an owner, partner, beneficiary or even custodian of tourism. The Community Based Tourism is generally small scale and involves interactions between visitor and host community, particularly suited to rural and regional areas (CBT Manual 2010)¹. Therefore, it involves community participation leading to economic and social benefits to the members of the community. The tourists on the other hand gain by an enriching experience of closely interacting with the communities, experiencing their food, culture, art and crafts and knowing about their customs and traditions and thereby establishing a personal connect with a new world. There is, however, a major gap between the academic definition of the concept and the way it is used by practitioners (Goodwyn and Santili, 2009; Amen, 2021; Aziz Amen, 2022; Amen et al., 2023; Amen & Nia, 2020)²

The Community Based Tourism has its own set of issues and there can be multiple factors that contribute towards its success. Sustainability of a Community Based Tourism initiative, therefore, is the key and an integrated approach is required towards sustainable community-based tourism. The issues of justice, equity and fairness must be better addressed in a sustainable community-based tourism approach (Dangi & Jamaal, 2016)³. The present study attempts to examine the various factors that may lead to a successful community-based tourism with an example Mawlyngot village which has seen transformation due to community-based initiatives including tourism.

Materials and Method

The study was conducted in Mawlyngot village of Meghalaya state in North-East India. The paper is based on physical observation and interactions carried out with the local community and key stakeholders. The previous studies and information available through multiple sources such as government documents, news reports and research papers. The background information on the region such as the demography, nature, ecology, social, culture, economy and livelihood were derived from government sources such as the published reports and verified information posted on government websites. The village level analysis was carried out through physical observation, key informant interview, interactions with community and stakeholders and from the information available through other studies. Some of the news reports about Mawlyngot Village and Urlong Tea were also taken into consideration which were further verified during the village level interactions.

Meghalaya State

The Meghalaya is a predominantly tribal state in the north-eastern part of India as the state was carved out from the tribal hill regions of Assam state. The state shares its borders with Assam in the north and has international border with Bangladesh towards south. On January 21, 1972, Meghalaya was created by combining the hill areas inhabited by Garo, Khasi, and Jaintia tribes to form a separate state (HDR, Meghalaya, 2008)⁴ and enacted through a legislative act providing autonomy to the state (NEAR Act 1971)⁵. The three tribes are geographically distributed

in different regions within the state as reflected the names of the administrative divisions such as the East Khasi Hills, West Garo Hills and so on. The Meghalaya state thus created comprises of seven such districts inhabited by one or the other dominant tribe. There are limited historical records available about these tribes and the written records of the history of Meghalayan tribes came about only post British colonisation, i.e. after 1947. A limited accounts Khasi kingdoms, which is one dominant tribe in region, can be found in the chronicles of the neighbouring Ahoms and Kacharis which are tribes from the neighbouring states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The entire region is a plateau with terrain varying from gentle to steep slopes with an altitude ranging from 150 to 1965 m above the mean sea level. The state has abundant natural beauty and nature-based attractions such as water falls, rivers, hills, green rolling terrain and so on. Also, the state is rich in cultural heritage with its unique tribal culture dominated by three main tribes. This is reflected in the rituals, traditions festivals and local craftwork.

Forests as a Source of Livelihood

Meghalaya is rich in forest resources. Nearly 76 % of the total geographical area of the state is covered by forest as compared to national average 25 % forest cover in India (ISFR 2021)⁶. The forests of Meghalaya can broadly be grouped under two types- tropical and temperate. The tropical forests are present in areas up to an elevation of 1200 m and with an average rainfall of about 100 – 250 cm. Temperate forests can be found at about 1000 m above mean sea level, mostly along the southern slope of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and in the areas of high rainfall (200 – 500 cm). About 14 % of Meghalaya is covered by bamboo forests, and the state is one of the leading bamboo producers in India.

As per the traditional systems, the Khasi customary law identifies forests into various categories some of which are Sacred forests locally known as *Law Kyntang*, the Village Forests or *Law Shnong*, the Village Restricted Forests or *Law Adong*, the Private Forests or *Law Ri-Kynti*, Clan Forests or *Law Kur*, Cemetery or *Law Lum* and so on. Presently, there are two broad types of forest systems - the state-controlled forests, and the community forests controlled by the autonomous district councils.

Majority of the forest is community owned and the state-owned forests accounting for only 12 % of the total forested area. The livelihood of tribal people in Meghalaya is heavily dependent on forest resources and therefore these forests play a vital role in the subsistence of the local populace. The forests in Meghalaya can be further classified into the six categories:

1. The reserved forests, which include government forests, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. These forests are owned and managed by the state forest department.
2. The protected forests are used by local communities for personal consumption.
3. Unclassified forests are under control of local communities, where the communities enjoy full rights, and are used mostly for shifting cultivation.
4. Private forests belong to individuals for personal consumption.
5. Village forests are used for subsistence purposes by the villages
6. Community (*Raij*) forests are managed by the *Raij* or community head under local administration.

The Reserved and Protected Forests have little contribution to community needs as these forests are under state control with limited rights of people. Unclassified forests are the most utilized form of forests where communities have full rights, and they use it according to their needs. People carry out slash and burn cultivation or the Jhum cultivation, extraction of fuelwood, timber, and the non-timber products from these forests. Timber trade is an important economic activity, and the forests of Meghalaya are a rich source of timber. The bulk of timber for trade originates from private forests. Some of the important tree species, which yield valuable timber for trade, are Khasi pine, sal, teak, and bamboos. Non timber forest products are cane, bamboos, broom, mushrooms, orchids, commercially important grass species and the oil yielding trees.

Agriculture as Livelihood

Meghalaya is primarily an agricultural state, with more than 70 % of its total population depending entirely on Agriculture for livelihood (MHDI Ch IX)⁷. Agriculture contributes 22 % of the State's Gross Domestic Product. The net cropped area, however, is only about 9.8 % of the total geographical area of the State. The per capita crop production has been declining and the state is depending on external supplies to meet the food demand (MHDI Ch IX). The major agricultural systems and crops in Meghalaya are:

1. *Jhum cultivation*: Slash and burn cultivation system involves clearing for forest and cultivating. It is a mixed cropping system with high crop diversity. It is done mostly for subsistence with excess produce traded in

local markets. The most common crops sown during the first season after clearing the forest is potato, while cabbage, cauliflower, pea and radish are preferred during the second season. Across Meghalaya, variety of crops are planted in the jhum fallow lands, such as bay leaf, jackfruit and black pepper by Khasi community, banana and broom grass are planted by Karbi farmers, and arecanut and citrus plants by Garo people.

2. *Settled paddy cultivation*: Permanent wet rice cultivation and cultivation of cereals including maize and millet.
3. *Horticulture*: A range of tropical, sub-tropical and temperate fruits such as mandarin orange, pineapple, banana, lemon, guava, pear, plum etc., and a large variety of indigenous and exotic vegetables.
4. *Cash crops*: There are three important plantation crops in the state viz., arecanut, cashewnut and tea. In recent years coconut has been introduced. The other important cash crops include potato, ginger, turmeric, black pepper, areca nut, bay leaf, betel vine, short-staple cotton, jute, mustard and rapeseed.
5. *Floriculture*: The climatic condition in the state is suitable for floriculture and a vast varieties of flowers grow in state. These also include some of the off-season flowers such as orchids, bulbous plants, birds of paradise, chrysanthemum, gerbera, gladiolus, marigold, carnations and so on. The commercial floriculture, however, is not much developed due to the lack of market potential in the state. The market however is growing and efforts are made by the Government to support floriculture in the state.
6. *Other crops*: Pulses (cowpea, pea, lentils, arhar, gram, black gram, and rajma) and fiber crops (cotton, jute and mesta) are mainly cultivated in Garo Hills. Except cotton, the production of other fiber crop has been stagnant and declining in some cases.

The dependence on small scale farming using traditional methods means that the production is for own consumption rather than producing surplus for the market. The production is not sufficient and there is high dependence on supplies from the nearby states such as Assam and Bengal and even from relatively distant states such as Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. The state does presents a huge potential for agri-tourism on account of the fact that agriculture remains central to the economy of the state and the agricultural products of the state are known for their good quality (Peinlang, 2019) ⁸

Economic Status

Historically the North-Eastern region remained rather secluded from the mainstream India and so was Meghalaya. The state therefore remained a relatively less developed in terms of infrastructure and technology as compared to some other parts of the country. As per the UNDP, the Human Development Index (HDI) of India report for the year 2018⁹, Meghalaya was ranked 26th with a Medium HDI value. In terms of per capita income, Meghalaya ranked 28th out of 29 states and 7 union territories in 2018-19. Despite the low per capita income, the state has a better positioning in terms of its Gender-related Development Index (GDI) as compared to most of the states in India. The main reason of which is its society structure wherein a matrilineal in nature (MHDI Chapter II).¹⁰

Matrilineal Society

The three major tribes of Meghalaya, the Khasis, the Garos and the Jaintias follow a matrilineal structure of the society. Matrilineal societies generally provide more autonomy to women as compared to patrilineal societies. Matrilineal society follows a system of inheritance and succession of the parents to the children through daughters. The matrilineal system of Khasis and Jaintias is also characterized by the succession of property to the youngest daughter called 'Ka Khadduh'. The social events and religious rites are generally conducted by males but in the house of female clan member (HDR Meghalaya, 2008, Chapter 8)

The family lineage is traced through the mother and the right to inheritance goes to the daughters. The residence is uxorilocal where married couple resides with wife's family. Among the War Khasis, however, property passes to all the children, male and female, in equal shares. The Nokmaship or the leadership of the clan, is also inherited mostly to the youngest daughter of Nokma.

Tribal Structure - The Khasi Tribe

There are three main indigenous communities in the state namely Khasis, Garos and Jaintias. The other major indigenous communities include Karbis, Mikirs and minor ones like the Hajongs, Kochs and Rabhas (Maghalaya State Development Report, Chapter II, A Historical Perspective). The Khasi society is divided into clan or '*Kurs*' and the Garo society is divided into three major clan or '*Katchis*' viz. *Marak*, *Sangma* and *Momin*. Each of the '*Katchis*' is further subdivided into numbers of lineages called '*Machongs*'. Traditionally the Jaintias, the Khasis and the Garos

were ruled by their Clan Chiefs / Village Heads, with the assistance of the village councils (*Durbars*), variously named as the *Dolois* among the Jaintias, the *Syiems*, *Lyngdohs*, *Wahadadars* etc. among the Khasis and the *Nokmas* among the Garos. Altogether there are sixteen *Syiemships* whose *Syiems* are sanctioned by clans. The *Syiems* are only titular heads however, and the *Durbar* plays the most important role in the running of the village administration. (HDR, Meghalaya 2008)

The indigenous communities of Khasis, Jaintias and the Garos are of Paleo-Mongoloid descent, who were one of the earliest East Asian settlers in Meghalaya. The Garos, belongs to the Bodo group of the Tibeto-Burman family, while the Khasis and the Jaintias belong to the Mon-Khmer family of Austric affiliation. Among the Khasi-Jaintia groups, the Jaintias or Synteng, also known as the Pnars, are the older branch of the indigenous community. They have a long traditional historical account of the kingdom and dynasties.

The study area and surrounding region is dominated by Khasi Tribe. The Khasis have their own legend about how they came to settle in these beautiful hills. They believe they had descended from heaven by a ladder set on the peak of "U Lum Sohpetbneng" located by the side of the present "Umiam Dam". They say they consisted "Khadriew Trep" "Sixteen Huts" or sixteen households all of which lived in heaven, but they used to come down to earth through that ladder. However suddenly that ladder snapped, and nine huts or households remained in heaven and seven on earth. Till today the Khasis believe that their present abode was a heavenly gift handed over to them by God.

Land ownership

Among the Khasis, broadly two types of land are predominantly found:

1. Ri-Kynti, where the land is owned by clans. This is further subdivided into multiple titles depending on the clans, acquisition rights, and inheritance.
2. Ri Raid, where the land belongs to the village and no one has absolute right of ownership. The land is therefore community land. Usually, any land that remains uncultivated for more than 3 years reverts to the village.

The Ri Raid or the community owned land can be allotted for with rights to use and occupancy. The person can build permanent structures, cultivate permanent crops, fruit trees or use it for wet paddy cultivation or fish pond and sell the produce from the land.

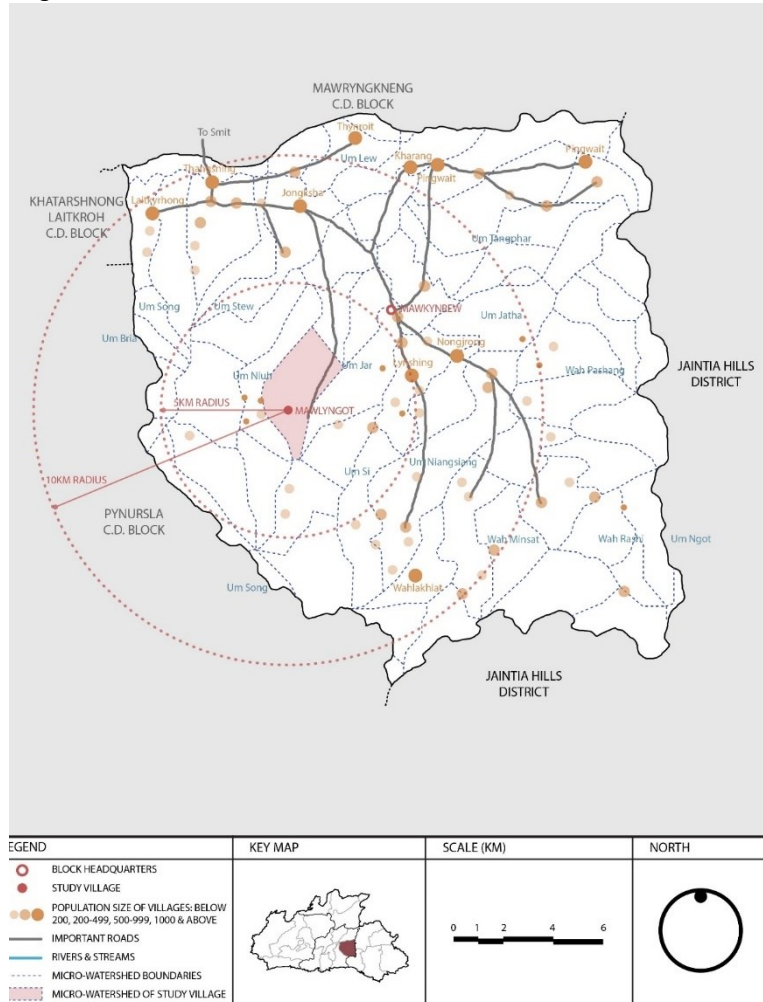
Livelihood and Economy

During early 1700, the Khasis used to trade in silk, cotton goods, iron, wax, honey and ivory in exchange for rice, salt and dry fish to Pandua border of Sylhet. The Khasis depended on trade center in Pandua for their entire supplies of grains. The smelting of Iron was chief industry in Khasi hills, and considerable amount of Iron was exported to Bengal via Pandua in Sylhet. Limestone from the Khasi Hills was another major trade material to Bengal. Later British officials of the East India Company began the trade of highly profitable trade of limestones.

Mawlyngot Village

The Mawlyngot village is located in Mawkyntew block of the East Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya. Mawlyngot is about 45 km from Shillong which is the state capital and the largest city in the state. The nearest market place is located in Smit Village which is around 30 km from the village. The nearest town is Mawkyntew which is block level headquarters and located at a distance of 8 km from village.

The nearby villages have social linkages through community level interactions. These include the Umtong, Jatah Nonglyer and Mawsna villages. The linkages of Mawlyngot Village with state capital, market, nearest town and villages is shown in the Figure 1 below.



Source: Infrastructure Development Corporation of Karnataka, Bangalore¹¹

Figure 1: Location and Connectivity Mawlyngot Village

The Mawlyngot village was a sleepy hamlet two decades ago, infamous for alcoholism. The locals believe that the people from the Indo-Bangladesh border towards south had migrated down the Umsong river and settled down here. The village was full of poverty and deprivation due to lack of income generating opportunities. The children were deprived of education and there was no health facilities. The women produced a brand of rice and millet liquor known as "Pyrsi" in the local Khasi language. The only jobs were at a brewery or to grow seasonal crops. Majority of the people in Mawlyngot village earned their livelihood on small scale cultivation of horticultural and agricultural crops like potato, millet, beans, chillies, banana, sesame, etc. However, with the passage of time, the villagers encountered low productivity of their agricultural produce. This resulted in dwindling economic growth of the village, thereby aggravating their living conditions.



Photo 1: Tea Gardens in Mawlyngot

Village Profile- Demography and Infrastructure

Mawlyngot is one of the smaller villages, having a total population of 201 persons, with 41 households, as per the District Census Handbook, 2011¹². 48% of the recorded population is female. The literacy rate in village is 70% with females reporting higher literacy than their male counterparts as illustrated in Figure 2.

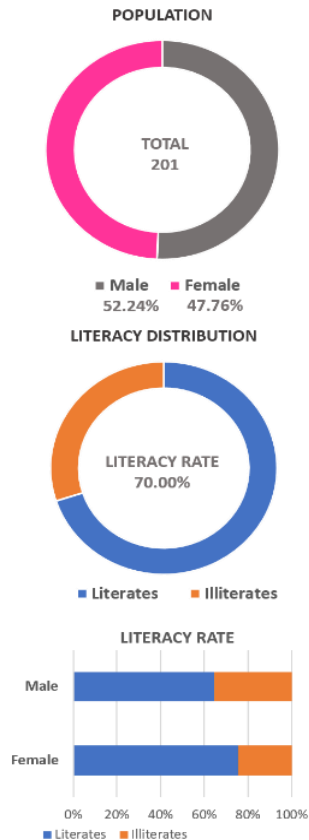


Figure 2: Population and Literacy

Social Infrastructure is progressed in the village over last decade with basic education, health and recreation facilities now available. The Figure 3 illustrates village level infrastructure in Mawlyngot.

1. Educational and Medical Facilities – Mawlyngot has educational facilities up to primary school within the village. A middle school and primary health sub-centre is found within 5 km, and a secondary school and primary health centre is found within 10 km of the village.
2. Trade, Commerce – Apart from a public distribution shop in the village, the closest market is 30 km away, in Smit, in the Mawryngkeng block.
3. Community Facilities – The village has its own Self Help Group (SHG), Anganwadi, nutrition centre as well as an appointed an Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA), the primary healthcare worker. Mawlyngot also has its own sports field within the village.
4. Transport and Infrastructure – Private taxi facility and bus service is available in Mawlyngot. The village is not connected to any district roads. Power supply has been made available to the village, but no tap water is available, and villagers rely on natural springs for water.

Table 1: Village Level Infrastructure, Mawlyngot Village

	Within Village	< 5 Km from Village	5-10 km from Village	>10 km from Village
Education and Health	Pre-Primary School Primary School	Middle School	Secondary and Senior Secondary School	Vocational Training Institute Degree College Non-Formal Training Centre
	Nutrition Centre Rural Sanitary Mart	Primary Health Sub- Centre Maternity and Child Welfare Centre Family Welfare Centre	Primary Health Centre	Community Health Centre
Trade Commerce and Community	Public Distribution System		Commerce and Community Banks	ATM Agricultural Marketing Society Weekly Rural Market Agricultural Credit Society Mandi (Bulk market)
	Self Help Group Accredited Social Health Activist Sports Field Child care centers			Community Centre Recreation Centre
Transport and Infrastructure	Bus Service Taxi and Vans			Connected to District Road, State Highway and National Highway Railway Station (Guwahati) Airport (Guwahati)
	Spring Power Supply			

Source: District Census Handbook, 2011

The Urlong Tea: Mawlyngot Village

The agro climatic conditions in Meghalaya are considered suitable for tea plantation (Meghalaya State Development Report, 2008-2009). Initially some experimental tea stations were established in the West Garo Hills, West Khasi Hills and Ri Bhoi districts. These stations received a good response and based on this success the government decided to encourage tea plantation across the state.

In 2001, after being elected headman, felt a desperate need for improving livelihood of villagers through a sustainable approach. He put forward the idea of tea cultivation in the village, after ascertaining the suitability of the soil and climatic condition for its cultivation. The tea saplings were originally brought from the famous tea gardens of Darjeeling. In 2003, the Mawlyngot Tea Grower's Cooperative Society, a collective of 20 farmers, sowed its first plantation. They called this tea *Urlong*, a Khasi word for 'dreams come true'. The Urlong Tea Integrated Village Cooperative Society was formed in 2011, a society that currently comprises 41 farmers who own individual gardens. They sell the teas plucked in their gardens to the society owned tea processing unit for the betterment of the lives of all.

Therefore the Urlong Tea Integrated Village Cooperative Society Ltd emerged as a cooperative of farmers who got together to collectively improve their lot, and those of other farmers through cultivation of tea, with a focus on the economic sustainability. Since its inception, their cultivation practices have been exclusively organic whereby no chemical application like pesticides and fertilizers have been used for soil and weed management or for pest control.

Participation of stakeholders at all levels of project ensures a successful and sustainable rural tourism venture (Priyanka, Devarani, 2022)¹³. The society was registered under the Meghalaya Cooperative Societies Act and its area of operation covers the whole village of Mawlyngot. The society initially started tea plantation with the help and support of the Border Area Development Department and Horticulture Department, Government of Meghalaya. This was done along with World Vision India, an NGO which has been working to bring about growth and development in the area.

The NGO helped to build a tea processing center and acquire equipment and organic certification¹⁴. According to World Vision India, a significant impact that has been seen with the shifting of occupation from liquor to tea plantation is that alcoholism, conflict, broken family and other social evils prevailing in this village have reduced tremendously over past few years. The trend is followed in neighboring villages and the tea saplings have been distributed in those villages.



Photo 2: Tea Processing Centre.

The Urlong Tea Village Cooperative Society Limited is also taking up marketing and promotion of the Urlong Tea. They have participated in many exhibitions and trade fairs held within the state as well as in different parts of the country. The society started the tea processing unit as a pilot project with a small capacity rolling table, and indigenous equipment like the withering trough and a drying machine. This tea processing unit is currently the only asset that operates for the collective benefit of all the farmers in the area. Every family owns a tea estate and runs their individual gardens with an implied agreement of interdependence¹⁵ - that they sell the leaves plucked from these gardens to the society's owned processing plant.

This unit produces black tea, green tea and white tea under the brand name 'Urlong Tea'. Men and women package over 1,000 kg of organic tea every year. However, the demand for this brand in the market is significant and many times the society is unable to meet the required demand of the consumers. The tea processing plant not only processes the tea leaves produced in Mawlyngot but also those from the neighboring villages of Jatah Nonglyer and Mawsna.

Tourism in Mawlyngot

The Mawlyngot village has beautiful landscapes with hills, forests, waterbodies and tea gardens. Despite abundant natural attractions there was meagre tourism activity in the village. The Urlong Tea Village Cooperative Society had built a tourist guest house at Mawlyngot known as the Travelers' Nest and is engaging in promotion of tourism in the village with the support from the



Photo 3: Travelers Nest Tourist Accommodation.

Apart from a serene peaceful setting, the village offers multiple activities for the visiting tourists. There are multiple trek options such as trek in the hills forest or riverside. The visit to tea gardens, tea processing unit and tea tasting itself gives an immersive experience. They can visit scenic waterfall, of rock caves or just experience the landscape. The Meghalaya state has over 500 caves and a large variety of bats (Vijay 2014)¹⁶. The tourist activities in the village and level of community involvement is show in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Tourist Activity and Community Involvement

Existing Tourist Activity	Direct Community Engagement	Indirect Community Involvement
Shum Shum Water Fall	Local youth as Guide	None
Mawkyndup Sawa Rock Cave		
Bat Cave (Cave full of bats at 1 hour trek from village)		
Blue Worms (along forest stream)		
Trek to River Valley downhill (2 hour forest trek)		
Forest Trek	Experienced villager as Guide	Tea Processing
Tea Processing Unit Tour		Tea Farming
Trek in Tea Gardens		
Sale of Urlong Tea	Tea Farmers	
Potential tourism related activity for future	Direct Community Engagement	Indirect Community Involvement
Homestay accommodations	Village households	Local farming for farm to table, training of host community
Restaurants and Dhabas (informal eating place for local cuisine)	Business for village member	Benefit to local farmers in village or nearby villages
Shops for local produce such as Ginger extract, Honey, Pepper etc	Village Farmers	Farmers and other villagers involved in producing the agro based products
Shops for handicrafts including bamboo craft work	Village craftsmen	More people engaging in sraft works
Trip to nearby villages that tea for Mawlyngot Tea Processing Unit	Local Guide from village or nearby village	Income generation opportunity for nearby villages

The Community Based Tourism in Mawlyngot presents further opportunities for villagers not only in Mawlyngot but also nearby villages. With increase in the number of tourists and day visitors, it is anticipated the other income generating activities will be taken up. These include restaurants or dhabas, which are informal eating place service local food, convenience stores, trained tourist guides, shops for local produce such different varieties of tea, ginger extract honey and shops selling local handicrafts particularly the baboo craft items. Further, the homestay arrangements may be developed to meet increasing demand for tourist accommodation.

Community Involvement Impact

The Mawlyngot generates enough revenue from tourism to meet the nutritional needs of every child in the village. The involvement of community in the village level tourism has been through involvement of the local people in management of Travelers Nest accommodation, serving food from the local produce, locals guiding the tourists through various treks and places of tourist interest as listed above.

There is an induced effect of the village cooperative society that has resulted in the overall development and wellbeing. As discussed earlier, there is village level infrastructure available now which is clearly an induced effect of the community based tea farming and tourism. Visible change is noted in the village and further training and capacity building carried out by the cooperative society as below:

1. Training children of the village to distribute dustbins in every locality of the village, inculcating a civic sense importance of a clean and healthy environment.
2. Training the Self Help Groups (SHGs) of the village on book-keeping, maintenance of voucher for process and receipts, to obtain transparency and accuracy in their different financial activity.
3. Employment generation and training programmes, distribution of seeds and saplings.
4. Training in other agricultural cultivation.
5. Development of Vermi-compost unit.
6. Training tea growers who want to set up their own Tea Processing Unit, not solely dependent on large tea factories for processing their product.
7. Acting as the sole central purchasing, producing, and selling institute for different agricultural products.
8. Professional handling of marketing and packaging.

Village Potential and Emerging Linkages:

The tea cultivation has emerged as income generating activity not only in Mawlyngot but also in neighbouring villages of Jatah Nonglyer, Mawsna and Umtong, among others. There is increasing demand and the tea produced is processed at the processing unit in Mawlyngot. This presents an opportunity to Ulong Tea Integrated Village Cooperative Society Ltd. to further promote the community based tourism in the cluster. Mawlyngot, the block headquarters, becomes the main connector for these villages and Smit village is the nearest market for trade. This opens up the possibility for a tea village circuit, positioning Smit at the base and connecting the villages of Mawlyngot, Umtong, Jatah Nonglyer and Mawsna. The linkages are shown in the Figure 3 below:

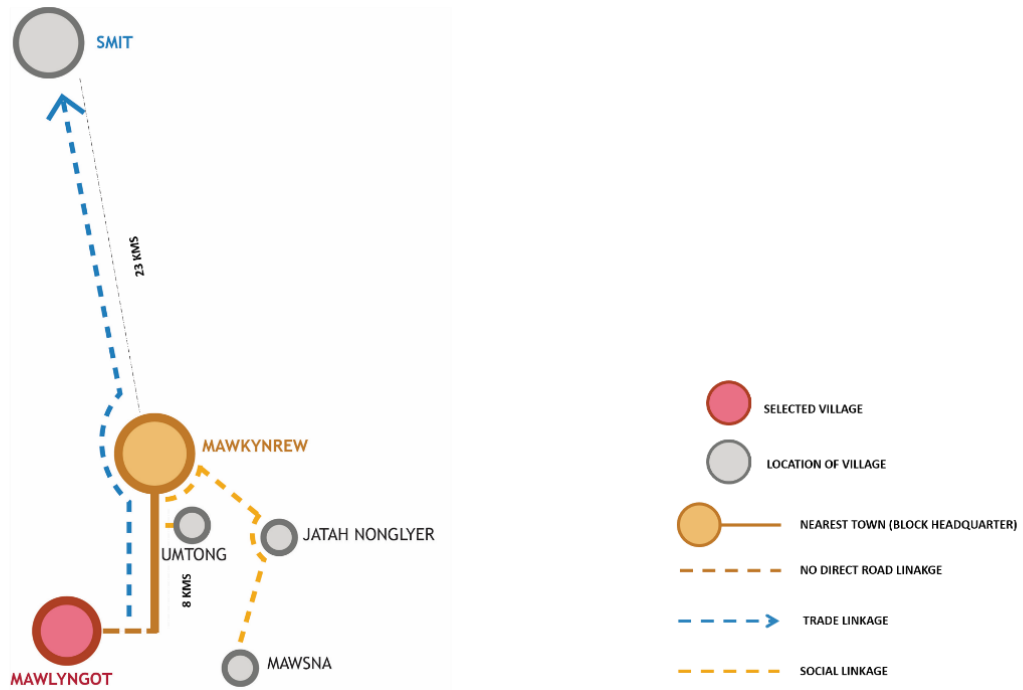


Figure 3: Potential Emerging Linkages to Mawlyngot Village

Source: Infrastructure Development Corporation of Karnataka, Bangalore, India

Conclusion

The Mawlyngot village is a good example of how the community based tourism can help in not only economic growth but also social upliftment of the local community. The village has undergone a complete transformation from a deprived community two decades back to a prospering one and looking ahead towards a plethora of opportunities. The Meghalaya state has agro climatic conditions suitable for cultivation of tea. A high quality tea is being produced and traded in other districts of the state. When the village headman decided to promote tea cultivation, the purpose was to provide an alternative livelihood to villagers who were otherwise dependent on petty farming for minimal subsistence. There were meagre education and health facilities in the village and the overall condition of the villagers was poor. The villagers were engaged in production and consumption of local liquor which only added to the problems.

The tea farming work initiated with the efforts of the village headman and supported by government and NGO. A separate village cooperative society was set up as Urlong Tea Integrated Village Cooperative Society Ltd. A tea processing unit built by the society with the funding support from government and further support from the Village Cooperative Society of Meghalaya and NGO. Therefore, the Institutional support proved to be one of the key factors in successful initiation. The funding for tea processing unit, the capacity building and technology transfer, the initiation of tourism activities including accommodation facilities were made possible through institutional support. The matrilineal society in the village has also been another factor indirectly contributing to the successful community based initiatives. The women are equal partners in society if not higher. This means higher participation of women in decision making and income generating activities including the tea farming and community based tourism.

The existing land ownership system in the state, helped in the process, wherein most of the land is owned by village community. The community land was allotted to villagers which was available to develop tea gardens with an agreement that all the tea produced in these farms will be processed in the tea processing unit set up in the village. Therefore the existing fabric of the village society with a community based land ownership system was another major factor particularly as community land was available for the tea farming.

The cultivation of tea as a source of livelihood has not only brought prosperity but also led to more awareness about the tourist potential. The village despite being a beautiful and serene setting with interesting landscape and potentially many places of tourist interest was secluded place. The places of tourist interest that surround the village include waterfalls, unique blue worms in rainy season, scenic treks in forest, trek in the riverside towards downhill and trek in the tea gardens. The Urlong Tea cooperative society has been instrumental in promoting tourism in the village. They set up Travelers Nest tourist accommodation at a scenic place in the village which allowed the tourists to stay overnight and experience the serene natural beauty of the place. The shift from petty farming to tea gardens have helped reduce adverse environmental impact through a lesser dependence on slash and burn cultivation.

The villagers in Mawlyngot are welcoming in nature and they are happy to interact freely and discuss about their culture and traditions with the visiting tourists. The degree of community involvement helps in success of any community based initiative. The visitors get an immersive experience interacting closely with the local people; by experiencing their local cuisine and they go back knowing more about the Khasi culture and traditions.

Table 3: Key Factors for Community Based Tourism in Mawlyngot

Type	Key Factors Identified
Physical	Climatic conditions with high rain and humidity helped in production of high quality tea
	Suitable soil quality
	Rolling and hilly terrain
Institutional	Support from Government Departments
	Meghalaya Village Cooperative Society
	Non-Government Organization
Socio-Cultural	Support from Tourism Department Government of Meghalaya
	Rich Culture and Traditions
	People friendly in nature
	People willing to discuss and share information
Local Production and Crafts	Women as equal partners in society
	Urlong Tea as USP of village
	Ginger, Spices, Honey
	Bamboo Products and Craftwork

The increasing demand of the Uurlong Tea, the increasing Community Based Tourism and the combination of the two has clearly has an induced effect leading to the development of village community and potentially further development of nearby village communities. The village is a good example of a growing community based tourism and it will be a good case to observe how the benefits or adversaries pan out in the future.

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