



Local Efforts and Environmental Sustainability in Mizoram

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Abstract: The terms 'environment' and 'sustainability' are two strong words that has been used the most in our world today. These two words when phrased together form a meaning undeniably relevant and important for societies, governments, corporations, and others before and since the 21st Century. Besides big governments, especially in the Western countries, striving and moving towards environmental sustainability as we see all over the media, it is also important to acknowledge the efforts given by local people especially tribal people that are closely linked with the natural surroundings of the environment. This has been quite significant in India, especially among the tribal people and their valuable traditional knowledge. This could also be true for the smaller states in the Northeastern part of India.

One of the smallest states in India, Mizoram is situated in the northeast. The state has a relatively high literacy rate when compared to many other Indian states, despite being behind in terms of infrastructure, economics, and other sectors. Tribal people make up the majority of the population of Mizoram, and they have strong ties to the environment. The people will be able to live affluent lives in their natural environments, preserve their identity and culture, and provide space for future generations to thrive if their knowledge of the flora and fauna is encouraged and promoted. Thus, in order to advance environmental sustainability, the larger governments need to make sure that their responsibilities and efforts are wisely prioritized. It has to study and comprehend how to grow its capabilities, cope with local issues, and make wise use of the resources at hand.

Keywords: environment, sustainable, local, traditional

I. INTRODUCTION:

The concept of environmental sustainability has been acknowledged and embraced by the world since times past and the concept has gained importance more than ever especially in the wake of the 21st Century all over the world. A series

of events such as the publication of Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" (1962), The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment at Stockholm (1972), Brundtland Report released by The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) (1980), the Earth Summit in Rio (1992), Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Paris Agreement (2015) woke the world up and paved way for the present efforts towards environmental protection and sustainability promotion. With a growing focus on conservation, renewable energy, and sustainable practices across a range of industries, sustainability has emerged as a fundamental idea in many laws, corporate strategies, and international debates.

Mizoram is home to diverse flora and fauna, including several endemic species. The state's forests play a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance and supporting livelihoods. Efforts are ongoing to protect these resources through the establishment of wildlife sanctuaries and protected areas. Local communities are increasingly involved in conservation efforts, leveraging traditional knowledge and practices. Community-based initiatives are essential for promoting sustainable resource management. The issue of environmental sustainability that is of serious concern is affecting every nook and corner of the world including a small state like Mizoram. Hence, it is important to study the efforts taken in such a state where social bondages and activities play a crucial role in local efforts towards any concerning issue that the state have gone through over the past years.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study will attempt to examine the efforts and initiatives taken up at the local level towards the promotion of environmental sustainability in Mizoram. It will cover the main environmental challenges faced by the state and the initiatives taken by the Government and civil societies towards the protection of environment and promotion of sustainable practices. The findings of this research may not applicable to others regions since the study is confined to Mizoram. Otherwise,



the findings may also be an important tool for policy recommendation to other parts of the Northeastern region or country. The secondary data has been collected from various sources such as newspapers, articles, journals, books and video clips. The reliability of information depends on the sources of information. Due to availability of limited time and resources, the present study cannot be guaranteed to be freed from all the possibilities of errors.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN MIZORAM

Owing to its geographical location, topography as well as other economic, political and social factors, the state of Mizoram faces concerning environmental issues. The major concerns are highlighted in brief as follows:

- **Deforestation:** Rapid deforestation continues to be a significant challenge in Mizoram, primarily driven by agricultural expansion, logging, and infrastructure development, leading to habitat loss. Vanlaltanpuia (et.al) in their paper 'Vulnerability level of forest degradation in Mizoram: A spatio-temporal density analysis' mentioned that according to the State of Forest Report 2009–2021, Mizoram has lost 1420.49 km² of forest cover overall, with declines observed in each of the current ten reporting years. A total of 562 km² of forest cover were lost between 2015 and 2017. According to the most recent State of Forest Report (2021), 186 km² of forest cover were lost compared to the 2019 assessment. Although initiatives are in place, illegal logging and land conversion for agriculture persist.
- **Soil Erosion:** The hilly terrain of Mizoram is highly susceptible to soil erosion, exacerbated by the traditional shifting cultivation (jhum) which is a common practice in agriculture. Efforts to promote sustainable agricultural practices and reforestation are crucial to mitigate these issues.
- **Climate Change:** Altered rainfall patterns and increased frequency of extreme weather events impact agriculture and water resources. Mizoram is experiencing the effects of climate change, including erratic rainfall patterns and increased flooding. This poses risks to agriculture, water supply, and overall ecosystem health.
- **Renewable Energy Initiatives:** The state is exploring renewable energy sources, particularly hydropower and solar energy, to reduce dependence on fossil fuels. However, the implementation of these projects can face regulatory and infrastructural challenges.

CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS INFLUENCING ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY IN MIZORAM

The Northeast Indian state of Mizoram's approach to environmental sustainability is influenced by a distinctive fusion of cultural and economic factors. By integrating these cultural and economic factors, Mizoram can work towards a balanced approach to environmental sustainability, preserving its unique heritage while fostering economic development. Here are a few crucial elements:

Cultural Factors

- **Indigenous Practices:** Traditional practices, such as shifting cultivation (jhum), have historically sustained communities but need adaptation for sustainability. This method of shifting cultivation (jhum) when it is done sustainably, can maintain biodiversity and soil health.
- **Community Governance:** Strong community ties and local governance structures (like Village Councils and Local Councils) empower residents to manage natural resources collectively, often leading to more sustainable practices.
- **Religious Beliefs:** Before Christianity set its roots in Mizoram, the indigenous people had spiritual practices involving nature such as worshipping nature-based spirits and other natural living objects. Even after majority of the people have become Christians, Mizo people continue to have spiritual beliefs that emphasize harmony with nature, influencing their attitudes towards conservation and environmental stewardship.
- **Traditional Knowledge:** Knowledge passed down through generations regarding local flora and fauna contributes to sustainable agricultural practices, resource management as well as medicinal remedies.

Economic Factors

Natural resources form an important means of livelihood to local communities. Local communities rely on forests for subsistence, making their involvement crucial in conservation efforts.

- **Agriculture:** Agriculture is the primary livelihood, with a focus on subsistence farming. Sustainable agricultural practices can enhance food security while protecting the environment.



- **Forestry and Biodiversity:** Mizoram's rich biodiversity presents opportunities for sustainable forestry and eco-tourism, providing economic incentives to conserve natural resources.
- **Government Initiatives:** Programs aimed at promoting sustainable development, such as the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)¹ focus on empowering rural communities while encouraging sustainable practices.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Economic growth and infrastructure projects can pose threats to sustainability; however, there is increasing awareness about integrating environmental considerations into development planning.
- **Alternative Livelihoods:** Promoting alternative livelihoods (like crafts and eco-tourism) can reduce pressure on natural resources and provide sustainable economic opportunities.

EFFORTS TOWARDS PROMOTION OF ENVIRONMENT SUSTAINABILITY IN MIZORAM

A combination of government policies and initiatives as well as civil societies and community based conservation activities play a crucial role towards environmental sustainability in Mizoram.

Government Policies and Initiatives

The Government of Mizoram has implemented several initiatives aimed at promoting environmental sustainability and conservation such as afforestation and conservation of biodiversity (e.g., Mizoram Forest Policy). Here are some key initiatives:

1. Mizoram State Action Plan on Climate Change (MSAPCC): This plan outlines strategies to address climate change impacts in the state, focusing on adaptation and mitigation measures in various sectors, including agriculture, water resources, and forestry.

2. Afforestation and Reforestation Programs: The state has undertaken large-scale afforestation projects to combat deforestation, enhance biodiversity, and restore degraded land. The Environment, Forest and Climate Change Department, Government of Mizoram plays a vital role in these efforts. Various schemes such as

Intensification of Forest Management (IFM) Scheme, National Afforestation Programme (NAP) and Green India Mission (GIM) are such central schemes that are taken up by the state government for the purpose of afforestation in Mizoram.

3. Bamboo Development Agency: Bamboo Development Agency, Mizoram is a society established by the Government of Mizoram under Commerce & Industries Department. The objectives of this society is to encourage, start, organize, carry on assist, lease, develop and regulate resources, plantation, utilization, research and development of bamboo and perform such functions as the Government may prescribe from time to time. Recognizing the ecological and economic importance of bamboo, this initiative promotes the sustainable harvesting and utilization of bamboo, supporting livelihoods while conserving forest resources.

4. Waste Management Initiatives: Efforts have been made to promote solid waste management and recycling practices in urban areas. The government of Mizoram has established Solid Waste Management Centres (SWMCs) at all district headquarters and notified towns. The first SWMC in Mizoram was inaugurated in 2019 by State Investment Programme Management Implementation Unit (SIPMIU) under North Eastern Region Capital Cities Development Investment Program (NERCCDIP). Awareness campaigns and infrastructure improvements are part of this initiative.

5. Renewable Energy Projects: The government promotes the use of renewable energy sources, particularly hydropower and solar energy, to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and lower greenhouse gas emissions. Mizoram has several renewable energy projects, including a solar park and hydroelectric power plants such as Vankal Solar Park which is Mizoram's first and largest solar power plant, with a capacity of 20 megawatts. It is located in Vankal, Khawzawl district. The park is expected to generate enough power for about 20,000 homes. Hydroelectric power plants are another project taken up by the Government of Mizoram. The Mizoram government has prepared Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for five hydroelectric power plants with a combined capacity of 800 megawatts.

6. Community-Based Conservation Programs: Engaging local communities in conservation efforts helps to ensure sustainable management of natural resources. Programs focus on training and empowering communities to protect their environments. The Mizos, living in Mizoram, have developed effective and well-organized community-

¹ The National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) is an initiative by the Government of India aimed at reducing poverty by promoting self-employment and organization of rural poor into self-help groups (SHGs).



based fire management practices that revolve around shifting cultivation.

7. Environmental Awareness Campaigns: The government conducts various awareness programs aimed at educating the public about the importance of environmental conservation and sustainable practices. Some environmental awareness campaigns in Mizoram include Fire Awareness Campaign which is a joint campaign between the Aizawl Forest Division, EF&CC Department, and Save Environment Association (SENA), House to House Environmental Awareness Campaign which is campaign by the Mizoram Pollution Control Board (MPCB) and Mizoram EIACP Hub, State Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change which is campaign that aims to generate knowledge on climate change by identifying knowledge gaps and bridging them and 100 Day Special Awareness Campaign Under Sankalp: HEW which is campaign undertaken by Directorate of Women and Child Development, Government of Mizoram.

8. Ecosystem Restoration Projects: Initiatives aimed at restoring ecosystems, such as wetlands and forests, are being implemented to improve biodiversity and ecosystem services. Some examples are Mizoram Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Enrichment Project, National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Eco-System², Green Mizoram Program, National Afforestation Program, Intensification of Forest Management and Green India Mission.

9. Sustainable Agricultural Practices: Programs promoting organic farming, agro-forestry, and sustainable agricultural techniques have gained importance in Mizoram that aim to enhance food security while minimizing environmental impact.

Community-Led Efforts

Civil societies, local NGOs and community groups engage in sustainable practices, reforestation, and awareness campaigns thereby giving best efforts to play their part in the preservation and promotion of environmental sustainability in Mizoram.

1. Awareness and Education Programs: Many civil society organisations conduct awareness campaigns to educate communities about environmental issues, sustainable practices, and the importance of biodiversity conservation. The central Young Mizo Association (YMA) is a key player in conservation and protection, and conducts

awareness campaigns. They also organize competitions to promote wildlife and river protection, and to raise awareness among the younger generation. Mizoram ENVIS Hub is another NGO working towards environmental protection. Hosted by the Mizoram Pollution Control Board, the ENVIS Hub helps implement the National Green Corps (NGC) program in the state. The ENVIS Hub coordinates and motivates eco-clubs, provides resource materials, and compiles and distributes reports on eco-club activities in schools and other institutions.

2. Community Forestry Initiatives: Local communities often take the lead in managing forest resources sustainably. They establish rules for resource use, ensuring that forest conservation practices are respected. NGOs work with local communities to promote community-managed forests, empowering villagers to sustainably manage and protect their natural resources. The Government of Mizoram also actively engages local communities in forest management through Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs).

3. Afforestation and Reforestation Projects: Communities often participate in tree-planting initiatives to combat deforestation and restore degraded lands, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for their environment. Organizations, schools, colleges and other private institutions also engage in tree-planting drives and reforestation efforts to combat deforestation and restore degraded lands. They often involve local communities in these activities.

4. Sustainable Agriculture Promotion: Farmers' groups promote organic farming, crop diversification, and sustainable pest management to reduce environmental impacts while improving food security. Besides these efforts, NGOs also promote agro-ecology through training programs, workshops, and the establishment of model farms to demonstrate sustainable agricultural practices.

5. Watershed Management: Local organizations focus on rainwater harvesting and watershed management projects to ensure sustainable water use and improve water availability for agriculture and domestic purposes. Several NGOs focus on watershed management, implementing projects that promote soil and water conservation practices to improve water quality and reduce soil erosion.

6. Biodiversity Conservation: Civil societies engage in activities aimed at conserving local flora and fauna, including the establishment of biodiversity conservation zones and initiatives to protect endangered species. Places that have historical values and sentiments are also well

² This centrally sponsored scheme is implemented in Tamdil wetland to restore and conserve the aquatic ecosystem.



preserved by the local people especially in rural areas. These places are often an attraction for tourists.

7. Waste Management Projects: Initiatives to promote solid waste management and recycling are common, with NGOs conducting clean-up drives and awareness campaigns to reduce plastic waste and littering. Community groups regularly organize clean-up campaigns to tackle littering and waste management issues in public spaces, promoting environmental awareness among residents. A recent initiative undertaken by Save the Riparian Project to clean rivers and gorges in Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram is noteworthy. The effort is now supported and assisted by Government departments like Urban Development & Poverty Alleviation (UD&PA), Aizawl Municipal Council and Public Health Engineering Department.

8. Advocacy and Policy Engagement: Civil societies often work to influence environmental policy by advocating for sustainable practices, engaging with government bodies, and participating in discussions on environmental legislation. The largest church organization in Mizoram i.e., Mizoram Presbyterian Church (Synod) have organized campaign programmes in local churches advocating for environmental conservation and animal protection. Other church denominations such as Baptist Church of Mizoram, Salvation Army, United Pentecostal Church have also rallied towards the cause as well. Newspapers and social media also play an important role in spreading awareness among the people. In Mizoram, one of the most popular environmentalists called by the name Ruatfela Nu writes articles on newspapers and spread awareness on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram thereby reaching the youth.

9. Renewable Energy Projects: Some NGOs promote the use of renewable energy, such as solar power, by providing training on installation and maintenance of solar panels in rural areas. Recently, start-ups such as Thlado Greentech have popped up that facilitate and promote the use of clean energy in homes. Many houses in Mizoram especially in Aizawl have installed solar panels in their residents.

10. Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation: Civil societies work on enhancing community resilience to climate change impacts by implementing disaster preparedness programs in educational institutions and promoting adaptive agricultural practices.

11. Jhum Cultivation Practices: Communities are working to adapt shifting cultivation (jhum) methods to be more sustainable, incorporating agro-

forestry techniques that enhance soil health and biodiversity. The practice of jhum cultivation has been of concern and the people as well as government are giving best efforts to tackle the harmful effects of this practice.

12. Traditional Knowledge Preservation: Efforts to document and preserve traditional ecological knowledge help communities maintain sustainable practices that have been passed down through generations. The Mizo people are closely connected to the flora and fauna and hence traditional knowledge on ecology is a forms and important daily tool for survival among the local habitats in the state. Traditional medicines are still a common remedy for the people during sickness.

13. Cultural Events and Festivals: Some communities integrate environmental themes into cultural events and festivals, celebrating local biodiversity and raising awareness about conservation efforts. One of the festivals is Anthurium Festival that celebrates the production of the anthurium flower in the state. Recently, Hnahsin Kut was celebrated for the first time in Champhai, celebrating and preserving the flower 'hnah sin' (cosmos flower).

14. Community-Based Eco-Tourism: Communities are developing eco-tourism initiatives that showcase their natural and cultural heritage while generating income and promoting conservation efforts. Tourism plays an important role in preserving nature as most of the tourists who come to Mizoram are attracted by its beauty, rich forest cover and clean air. Recreational hotspots such as Sakawrhmutuaitlang, Hmuifang tlang, Sialsuk tlang are among others that are taken care of by the people in the locality with the assistance of the government.

SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IN EFFORTS TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Besides the challenges of balancing economic development with conservation needs and addressing poverty and resource dependence among local communities, the following points highlights other major challenges towards sustainable practices in Mizoram:

- 1) Deforestation and Land Degradation:** Rapid deforestation due to agricultural expansion, illegal logging, and infrastructure development poses a significant threat to biodiversity and ecosystems.
- 2) Climate Change Vulnerability:** Mizoram is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, such as erratic rainfall, increased frequency of



natural disasters, and temperature fluctuations, which affect agriculture and livelihoods.

- 3) **Shifting Cultivation Practices:** While traditional shifting cultivation (jhum) can be sustainable, its expansion and intensification can lead to soil degradation and loss of forest cover if not managed properly.
- 4) **Population Pressure:** Increasing population density can lead to overexploitation of natural resources, putting additional pressure on forests, water bodies, and agricultural land.
- 5) **Economic Development Pressures:** The push for economic development often prioritizes short-term gains over long-term sustainability, leading to conflicts between development projects and environmental conservation.
- 6) **Lack of Awareness and Education:** Despite increasing awareness, many communities still lack knowledge about sustainable practices and the long-term benefits of environmental conservation.
- 7) **Weak Enforcement of Environmental Regulations:** Inadequate enforcement of laws and regulations related to environmental protection can lead to illegal activities, such as poaching and unregulated land use.
- 8) **Inadequate Infrastructure for Waste Management:** Urban areas often struggle with waste management, leading to pollution and health issues, compounded by insufficient recycling facilities and public awareness.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Addressing the challenges of environmental sustainability requires a collaborative approach involving government, NGOs, communities, and other stakeholders to promote sustainable practices and protect Mizoram's rich environmental heritage.

The way forward for environmental sustainability in Mizoram involves a multi-faceted approach that integrates community participation, government policy, and innovative practices. Here are some key strategies to consider:

1. Strengthening Community Involvement

- **Empower Local Communities:** Engage communities in decision-making processes regarding natural resource management to foster a sense of ownership.
- **Capacity Building:** Provide training and resources to enhance local knowledge about sustainable practices, agro-ecology, and conservation.

2. Promoting Sustainable Agriculture

- **Agro-forestry and Organic Farming:** Encourage the adoption of agro-forestry systems and organic farming practices that improve soil health and biodiversity while ensuring food security.
- **Crop Diversification:** Promote the cultivation of diverse crops to enhance resilience against climate change and market fluctuations.

3. Enhancing Policy Frameworks

- **Integrate Sustainability in Development Plans:** Ensure that environmental considerations are integrated into all levels of planning and policy-making.
- **Strengthen Environmental Regulations:** Improve the enforcement of existing environmental laws to prevent illegal activities that harm natural resources.

4. Investing in Renewable Energy

- **Harness Local Resources:** Promote the use of renewable energy sources like solar, wind, and hydropower to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.
- **Community Energy Projects:** Develop community-based renewable energy initiatives that empower local populations and create jobs.

5. Improving Waste Management Systems

- **Implement Comprehensive Waste Management:** Develop infrastructure for waste segregation, recycling, and composting to reduce pollution and improve public health.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Educate residents about responsible waste disposal and recycling practices to foster a culture of sustainability.

6. Biodiversity Conservation Initiatives

- **Protected Areas and Biodiversity Hotspots:** Establish and effectively manage protected areas to conserve critical habitats and biodiversity.
- **Community-Based Conservation:** Engage communities in conservation efforts through incentives and recognition of traditional knowledge.

7. Adapting to Climate Change

- **Climate Resilience Programs:** Develop and implement programs that enhance community resilience to climate impacts, including disaster preparedness and adaptive agriculture.



- **Research and Monitoring:** Invest in research to monitor environmental changes and assess the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives.

8. Public Awareness and Education

- **Environmental Education in Schools:** Incorporate environmental education into school curricula to instill a sense of responsibility for the environment in future generations.
- **Community Workshops and Events:** Organize workshops, seminars, and festivals that highlight environmental issues and sustainable practices.

9. Collaboration and Partnerships

- **Multi-Stakeholder Engagement:** Foster collaboration between government, NGOs, academia, and the private sector to create comprehensive and integrated approaches to sustainability.
- **Regional and National Networks:** Participate in broader networks to share knowledge, resources, and best practices for environmental sustainability.

By implementing these strategies, Mizoram can create a resilient and sustainable future that balances economic development with environmental conservation, ensuring the well-being of its communities and ecosystems for generations to come.

III. CONCLUSION

The initiatives taken by the government as well as civil societies reflect a strong commitment by civil societies and communities in Mizoram to protect their environment, promote sustainable practices, and engage in collaborative efforts to address environmental challenges. Their active participation is essential for achieving long-term sustainability goals.

In conclusion, Mizoram's environmental sustainability is greatly enhanced by local initiatives. Residents are empowered to actively participate in conservation and sustainable resource management because of the distinctive cultural traditions, traditional knowledge, and close community relationships. Adopting programs like waste management, sustainable agriculture, and community forestry helps local communities improve their standard of living while also protecting the environment.

A comprehensive approach to sustainability is produced by these grassroots initiatives, which support governmental regulations

and non-governmental organisation initiatives. But in order to make the most of them, stakeholders must work together more closely, make investments in capacity building, and raise awareness of sustainable practices.

In the end, Mizoram's sustainable future depends on the ongoing involvement and dedication of local people, who must make sure that their opinions and traditional knowledge remain at the forefront of environmental preservation initiatives. When combined, these locality projects have the power to significantly alter the situation and protect Mizoram's abundant natural resources and biodiversity for coming generations.

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