

Success Story of the Lakhpati Didi



1. BASIC DETAILS

Name of Lakhpati Didi	Huirongbam Shanti Devi		
Name of Self Help Group	Panthoibi Self Help Group		
State	Manipur	District	Imphal East
Block	Kshetrigao	Village	Thongju Nameirakpam Laishram Selungba Waikhom Ning, Porompat

2. CURRENT LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES

Huirongbam Shanti Devi owns and operates Kangleisil Muga gi Nachom, which serves as her primary source of income. (In the figure: Shanti with sacks of mulberry silkworm cocoons)

3. A SHORT NOTE ON LAKHPATI DIDI'S TRANSFORMATION JOURNEY

Introduction

Huirongbam Shanti Devi hails from Thongju Pheijaleitong in Imphal East district, Manipur. She is the daughter of the late H Shyamkeshore and Okram Ningol H Ongbi Tamu. As the eldest daughter in her family, she has two elder brothers, two younger sisters, and one younger brother. Despite discontinuing her education after completing 12th grade in 2001 to support her family, she tirelessly assists her mother in caring for her siblings. Shanti also manages a business named Kangleisil Muga gi Nachom, where she provides employment opportunities to women. With her selflessness and commitment to her family and community, Shanti sets a remarkable example of resilience and compassion.

Early Struggles before joining SHG

In 2006, Huirongbam Shanti Devi began learning the art of reeling silkworm cocoons for the first time, utilizing the threads to make Muga Phanek until 2008. In 2009, Shanti Devi showcased her products at a fair in Nagaland, marking a significant step in expanding her business reach. During this period, as microfinance options began to emerge in Manipur, she joined a self-help group unaffiliated with MSRLM. Amidst turbulent times in Manipur, characterized by inadequate law enforcement and an economic blockade, she delved into microfinance in 2011. That same year, she capitalized on an

opportunity to exhibit her products at the Manipur Sangai festival. Yet, the scarcity of raw materials was a prevailing challenge at that time. The unwavering support from the women in the SHG proved invaluable, making the experience profoundly rewarding. Moreover, she creatively utilized cocoons unsuitable for reeling by dyeing them and started crafting "Muga Nachoms," hair adornments for women, using mulberry silkworm cocoons. This innovative approach aimed to maximize the value of cocoons that might not otherwise yield significant profits. Her involvement with microfinance spanned until 2017, further solidifying her entrepreneurial journey. Encouraged by positive feedback from family and friends, she gradually transitioned this endeavor into a small-scale enterprise. However, expansion efforts were hindered by her family's financial constraints. Nevertheless, acquiring financial assistance proved difficult because of the absence of collateral, causing banks to be hesitant in granting loan approvals.

In 2017, Shanti Devi embarked on plans to construct a work shed, with the site generously donated by someone keen on ensuring its optimal use and protection. Moreover, during the 2017 Sangai festival, her "Nachom" sales surpassed three lakhs, demonstrating the growing demand for her creations. Despite her efforts to enhance working capital, securing support proved challenging. Banks hesitated to invest, citing concerns about the market demand for her product, particularly with the prevalence of plastic alternatives. Despite these obstacles, each hurdle reinforced her determination to envision a future where her Muga "Nachom" would replace plastic counterparts, driving her entrepreneurial spirit forward.

Before becoming a part of the Self-Help Group (SHG) under MSRLM in 2018, Shanti had applied for the Startup Manipur program. In 2019-2020, she received funding of 1.5 lakhs, followed by an additional ₹1.5 lakhs in the 2021 grant round. However, this funding was insufficient to fully support her business, and she was eagerly awaiting an opportunity to expand it further.



Fig: Shanti holding Leihao Muga Sambullei

Discovery of MSRLM, a turning point

Learning about the advantages of becoming part of a Self-Help Group (SHG) associated with MSRLM, Shanti was intrigued by stories of members obtaining substantial loans, worth lakhs. Nonetheless, SHGs linked with MSRLM had not reached her locality until mid-2021. Furthermore, in 2021, Shanti experienced a crucial moment when she participated in an event hosted by the Manipur State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MSRLM) in Thongju Part 1 Gram Panchayat. The gathering aimed to impart financial literacy to SHG members, where the supportive atmosphere not only enriched her understanding but also supported her small business. Following a prolonged anticipation, she and fellow women established the Panthoibi SHG, comprising 15 members. Supported by the SHG

members, Shanti's business flourished as they endorsed her products, and she actively encouraged young women in their families to join her enterprise. Upon joining SHG, she mentioned gaining more knowledge about financial literacy.

Amidst challenges and resilience, Shanti's life unfolded with transformative empowerment enhanced by the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and the Manipur State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MSRLM). As Self-Help Groups (SHGs) formed in neighboring areas, a Village Level Federation (VLF) called Ebudhou Thonglen Lakpa emerged, deepening Shanti's dedication to community development. Eventually, her VLF merged into the Cluster Level Federation (CLF), known as Thongju Apunba Women Multipurpose Cooperative Society Limited, as she continued to pursue her aspirations with support from MSRLM in making a meaningful impact on the Manipur market.



Fig: Workshed of Kangleisil Muga gi Nachom, Thongju part 1 – Pheijaleitong

About Kangleisil Muga gi Nachom

Shanti crafts “Muga Nachom”, hair adornments for women, using mulberry silkworm cocoons. She focuses on indigenous flowers unique to our region, drawing wisdom from conversations with elders. These flowers embody our cultural heritage, reflecting our deep-rooted traditions. Elders pass down the essence and allure of Nachom, leading us on a meaningful journey to reconnect with our roots. Thereby guiding us on a transformative journey to rediscover our identity and purpose.

Kangleisil Muga gi Nachom is an enterprise which crafts a range of Nachom flowers, such as Takhellei, Chingonglei, Leihao, Leiren, Kundo, Leibaklei, Khusum lei, Kombirei, Shirui Lily, Nageshor, Bokul, Uthlao, Madhabi, Urirei, Thambal, and roses. Additionally, they create Samjirei (worn near the ears) and Sambullei (used in hair buns) for adorning hairstyles, as well as various other items such as bouquets, decorative items, gift items, garlands, badges and more.

She mentioned that since the flowers she focuses on are native to the region, they play a role in educating the younger generation, particularly teenagers. Additionally, she noted that people of her age

group are often unaware of many indigenous flowers in Manipur. Her initiative is also aiding in their learning process. Moreover, Nachom serves as a symbolic portrayal of femininity, much like a delicate flower. Unmarried women typically wear it on the left side of their ears, while married women opt for the right side. Unmarried women often adorn themselves with nachom when they are celebrating life's romance or attending special events.



Fig: Presentation of State Flower of Manipur "Shirui Lily" made from mulberry silkworm cocoons

The older generation recounted tales from ancient civilizations, portraying a deep conviction in the existence of gods or divine entities engaging with humans. These convictions were reflected in diverse myths, legends, and religious customs, depicting gods as actively involved in human affairs, sometimes even living alongside them. Every term related to one's culture holds deep significance. Occasionally, she became so engrossed in the tales that she would unconsciously smoke Bidi, which the elders would offer her during storytelling.



Fig: (left) A woman adorned with Nageshor flower Muga Nachom and (right) Kundo flower presentation made from mulberry silkworm cocoons

In the beginning, despite its attractiveness, there were few purchases, but as time passed, it gained popularity, and the market expanded accordingly. These hair accessories also aid in environmental conservation by substituting plastic-made Nachom products. She solely focuses on her Nachom making enterprise and doesn't engage in any other business. Occasionally, when there is an abundance of silk cocoons, she invests in weavers to produce silk enaphee.



Fig: (left) Rose flower Muga Nachom and (right) Takhellei, Chingonglei, Leihao and Kusumlei flowers Muga Nachom



Fig: (left) Rose flower Muga bouquet, (center) Takhellei Muga Samjirei and (right) a bunch of Leihao Muga Nachom



Fig: Badges made from mulberry silkworm cocoons

Financial Empowerment and Community Enrichment

Shanti genuinely expressed her gratitude for the visit of Madam Director of MSRLM to her workplace during a program in Ebudhou Thonglen Lakpa VLF in 2022. During their conversation, Madam inquired about the amount of loan she had received, to which she mentioned just ₹15000. Following their discussion, Madam introduced her to the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) scheme. Through the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), she acquired loans in four stages. Initially, in April 2023, she received ₹220,000, which was used for constructing store rack furniture. Following that, in July 2023, an additional ₹200,000 was obtained and invested in purchasing reeling machinery. In September 2023, another installment of ₹200,000 was received and utilized for procuring raw materials. Finally, in February 2024, she received another installment of ₹220,000, which was utilized for purchasing mulberry silkworm cocoons.

The enterprise now employs thirty-two (32) staff members, a significant increase from the initial four (4) employees. Initially, there was no work shed, but now there is one conveniently located near her house. She also provides training for individuals interested in learning. The first group of trainees was in 2021-2022, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the outcomes did not meet expectations. Typically, each training session enrolls around 20 participants. Throughout this training



Fig: First participation in a Mela after joining SHG under MSRLM



Fig: Saras Mela 2022

period, trainees are observed and assigned suitable flowers to work with.

Staff salaries are structured to include a three-month training period, during which trainees receive ₹1500 per month. Furthermore, several of the trainees have already launched their own businesses and have opened their stores. Her participation in Saras Mela 2022 also gave her an opportunity, and since then, SHG members have been promoting Nachoms more. Moreover, in 2022, her product was officially launched by the Chief Minister, Shri N Biren Singh.

After expansion, she now operates a store with a sufficient workforce to sustain her business and provide employment opportunities for young individuals. Typically, she generates a monthly profit ranging from ₹15,000 to ₹20,000, which can increase to ₹30,000 during festive and wedding seasons. During peak periods, staff salaries may also rise to ₹15,000. Additionally, a college student who dedicates her free time to learning Nachom crafting earns between ₹3500 to ₹4000 per month based on her productivity. Moreover, several trainees have already launched their own businesses and opened their stores. Currently, her sole plan is to enhance the packaging. Hence, based on her journey, it's evident that she has made substantial contributions both economically and within her community, showcasing remarkable achievements. As a result, Shanti's story serves as an inspiring example of perseverance and impactful entrepreneurship, inspiring others to pursue their goals despite challenges.



Fig: Inauguration of Kangleisil Muga gi Nachom store

Conclusion

Shanti's impressive entrepreneurial journey, characterized by the growth of her business and the establishment of her store, serves as an evidence of resilience and community upliftment amidst the assistance provided not only to self-help group members but also to their family members. Her ongoing commitment to empowering women in Manipur, particularly in the aftermath of recent conflicts, reflects her determination to expand her impact for the betterment of society. Shanti's narrative of achievement epitomizes empowerment, resilience, and community development enhanced by MSRLM through NRLM.