

Khasi Hills India: Restoring Khasi Hills forest

Treesisters has been funding the restoration of tropical and subtropical, mixed broad-leaved forests, including montane cloud forests in the Khasi Hills since October 2017. The project is led by WeForest, one of our valued reforestation partners. Khasi Hills forms part of central Meghalaya, a land-locked state situated northeastern India and bounded to the south by the Bangladesh. Meghalaya is a region of scenic hills, like Scotland, but with cultivated terraces.

The restoration sites are located in the East Khasi Hills and the North Khasi Hills (Ri Bhoi) districts. 75% of the Khasi Hills is covered with luxuriant dense tropical forests of altitudes and degraded forests with more open tree canopy, which cover approximately 5,500 square kilometers (1), approximately the size of the built urban area of Greater Sydney, Australia.



Why are we planting there?

WeForest supports the Khasi tribes through the partnership with the Ka Synjuk Ki Hima Arliang Mawphlang Welfare Society. Simply named the "Federation", it gathers forest dwellers spreading across 11 indigenous governments and 75 Khasi villages. The Federation seeks to release pressures off their remaining forests with forest restoration, community engagement, forest monitoring and research data collection. The project holds the possibility to regenerate over 4 million trees spanning across 5,000 Hectares - about the size of Washington's Dulles Airport, USA. It represents 1% of the Khasi Hills landmass and provides a vital protection for knowledge, wildlife and water sources. This project is highly important to TreeSisters and WeForest, because of the Khasi's deep cultural and traditional attachment and respect for forests.

What are the expected socio-economic outcomes?

The Khasi directly benefit through: restored landscapes, employment and additional livelihoods, increased soil fertility under agroforestry systems, and indirectly in the long run, through replenishing water tables and drinking water.

It is interesting to note that WeForest has been working with other partners to strengthen the communities' capacity to monitor the forest-water interactions. Indeed, tackling water scarcity in the dry months and pollution has been stated the top priority by many community members.

What are the goals?

The project seeks to restore 5,000 more hectares of degraded forest lands towards reaching 833 trees per Hectare, which is the tree density of the nearby natural forests, in order to tackle poverty and reduce pressure off the Khasi forests. The project also contributes to protect watersheds, improve water availability and water quality. The project creates forest-based livelihood opportunities, through raising awareness and capacity building events, as well as tree nursery development and other activities such as poultry, piggery, tailoring, to limit grazing.

Through the restoration of 22 sites, TreeSisters directly restored 94,173 trees over 127 ha in May 2018. In 20 years time this will lead to 21,596 tons of CO2 stored.

The Khasi will continue to long-term manage their forest resources - with trees and forest continuing to drive their culture and livelihoods. This is possible because the project encourages forest-based entrepreneurship. Self-Help Groups, farmers clubs and micro enterprises are trained on how to set up, manage and operate tree nurseries, and small horticulture businesses (including the cultivation of plums, peaches & others, under agroforestry systems).





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People

In the Khasi society, faith and culture are highly connected with Nature. To them, the natural world is indeed a sacred web of life. There are many Khasi traditional dances and rituals that demonstrate their intrinsic ecological connection.

Under this project, the forest restoration involved is called "assisting natural regeneration" which is protection of wild regenerating tree saplings of over 40 species of trees.

Among the 40 species of trees involved are: *Alnus nepalensis*, a pioneer (tree often colonizing clearings), nitrogen fixing tree, which is native to the subtropical highlands of the Himalayas. Project is also planting endangered tree species such as critically endangered *Ilex Khasiana* which is endemic to India.

The Khasi are rural. They are nearly self-sufficient as Nature fulfills their essential needs.

TreeSisters Partnership since October 2017

Trees



Sites are selected when assisted natural regeneration is possible through a technical feasibility developed by WeForest.

Expected Outcomes

Khasi communities are restoring degraded mixed broadleaved forests and some forests plots where there are currently mostly pines growing. The starting density at the restoration sites varies between 300 and 600 trees per Hectare (degraded forestlands).

Project Approach

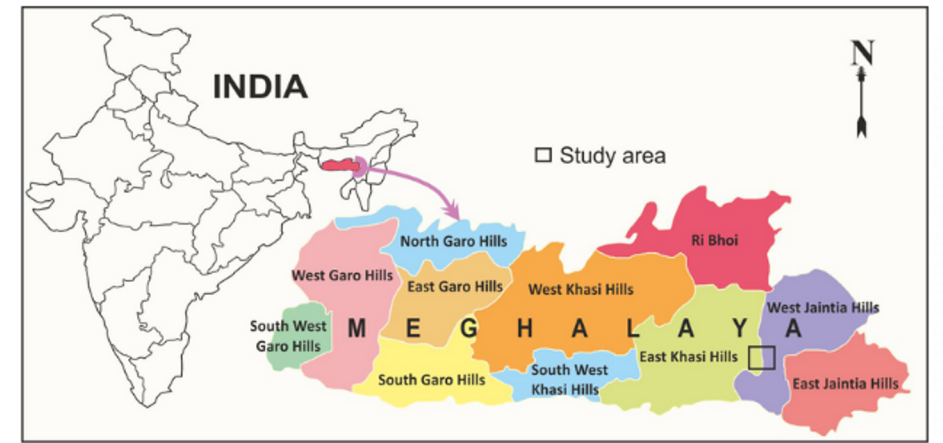


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Location: East Khasi Hills and the North Khasi Hills (Ri Bhoi) districts

Place



Land size:
The project holds the possibility to regenerate over 4 million trees spanning across 5,000 Hectares.

The Meghalaya is not only a high biological and ecological value forest, it is also inhabited by outstanding indigenous tribes with high social or cultural values, namely the Khasi tribe, who are the most represented.

Animals



According to WWF, over 110 large mammals are found here, such as endangered tiger (*Panthera tigris*) or clouded leopard (*Pardofelis nebulosa*). Moreover, most of the bird life is only found here or restricted to South Asia.

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Since Summer 2017, the project also employs female community facilitators as promoters of natural resource management. They also serve as managers in the respective villages to keep the restoration activities running and create a bridge between socio economics and forestry.

Women

Women hold an increasing stake in forest restoration and management, forming half of the LWC elaborating the Forest Management Plans.



For more details about this project and others please go to www.treesisters.org
Most photos courtesy of WeForest; Clouded Leopard by Frieda Bredesen