Success story on livelihood improvement of *jhumias* through strawberry cultivation in Saiha district of Mizoram.

Saiha approximately 400 km from Aizawl is the remotest and backward district of Mizoram as identified by Planning Commission and is bordering Myanmar on the eastern and southern side. The age-old practice of *Jhum* is a predominant farming system in the district. Three villages, viz. Km sawm (VC-III) and Niawhtlang (VC-I and II) of the district were adopted by the ICAR Research Complex for NEH region, Mizoram centre under the National Agriculture Innovation Project (NAIP, Component-III) since 2011-12. In order to raise the farm income and improve the livelihood of farmers in the district, strawberry cultivation with improved technological interventions were introduced by the centre under the project.

Jonathan (age 28) is a young farmer of the village Km Sawm (VC-III) of Saiha district. He had very less resources to get a decent earning to run his family of four members. He was selected as one of the strawberry beneficiaries of NAIP in the area. Land was selected based on various factors like slope, availability and vicinity of water source, length of *jhum* cycle, sun orientation etc. Like Jonathan, ten more progressive farmers were selected based on the suitability of resources. On an average 1000 m^2 area was selected for each farmer. Those farmers were targeted to implement the interventions and were closely monitored. After clearing of land, terraces of 1-1.5 m width of convenient length were made manually. Ridges were opened with 10-15 cm height from the base of the furrows. Due to inherent acidity of the soil, liming @ 4.5 ton/ha was made before laying out of mulch polythene. Black polythene rolls of 1m width were laid out in terraces which covered both the ridges and furrows. Planting were done in ridges. Excess water of monsoon and water from natural streams was trapped in *Jalkunds* for irrigation purpose in winter. *Jalkund* (30,000 litre capacity) excavation in selected sites was completed before the onset of monsoon. Use of vermiculture and organic manure through low cost vermicomposting unit was started to sustain soil productivity. Low cost polyhouses were constructed for nursery raising of strawberry. Farmers were trained with disease and pest management, packages and practices, quality improvement and post harvest technologies. After getting all the technical inputs, Jonathan is getting a bumper crop. He is packing the fruits in 250g strawaberry punnets and selling them at Rs. 50/punnet to the middleman. He is also selling directly in Saiha market at Rs. 500-600/kg. The middlemen marketed the produce mostly to

Aizawl and Champhai districts of the state. He is earning 3.5-4 lakhs per annum from one hectare of area.

After realising the success of Jonathan and other beneficiaries, thirty *Jhum* farmers in the area got motivated and have diverted from *Jhuming* to strawberry cultivation in small scale. Thus, the interventions have decreased the dependence of farmers on *Jhuming* and also improved the standard of living, livelihood and socioeconomic status of the villagers.

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