



Research Paper

## Gender and the Role of Self-Help Groups in the Development of Darlong Community in the Darchawi Village

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### Abstract

The Darlong Community in Tripura, India, encounters both obstacles and prospects in creating a small-scale enterprise via the Araa Agro Producer Company Limited (AAPCL). The study examines government initiatives, the involvement of Farmer Producer Organizations, and challenges encountered, with a specific emphasis on rural development, namely in Darchawi village. Although the government initially provided support, AAPCL is now facing funding constraints, transportation challenges, and technological limitations. NERLP's participation diminished in 2020, resulting in a void in development endeavors. Nevertheless, AAPCL's objective is to enhance the capabilities of farmers and promote environmentally-friendly horticulture methods. Achieving success could result in the Darlong community attaining economic autonomy and safeguarding their cultural heritage.

### Keywords

Farmer, self-help groups, tribes, development, community, Rural development, Government schemes, challenges, horticulture

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### I. Introduction

The state of Tripura is home to 19 different indigenous communities. The Darlongs are presently recognized as an ethnic group in Tripura, also known as Darlong (Kuki).

The Darlongs primarily reside in the northeastern part of Tripura, namely in three districts: Dhalai, Unokoti, and North Tripura. They have established a well-organized system of self-governance. The Darlongs, with a population of approximately 9723 according to census conducted by *Darlong Hnam Inzom* (DHI) in 2023 constitute a numerical minority. Although the Darlongs are a small group, they have made significant contributions in various fields such as education, music, art, culture, and administration. As per the records of *Darlong Hnam Inzom* (DHI) which is the highest apex body of the Darlong Community has a total of twenty-four (24) villages which are located in three districts i.e., Unakoti, Dhalai and North. Darchawi village is under Kumarghat Subdivision in Unakoti district of Tripura state in India. According to Pu. Tuahnila Darlong (2012), the Darchawi village began in the year 1923 by Pastor Zatuaha (Father of R. Tawna) along with 6 (Six) followers settled at Darchawi village (in their architected village). They proclaimed and said, "Let this village be called God's Chosen village". They named it 'Darchawi' (Raise the Bells). The village Darchawi is located at 24° 8' 37" N 92° 2' 41" E with an elevation of 60m above sea level. This study mainly explores the difficulties and challenges faced by the Darlong people to establish a small-scale industry and profit-making institution through the SHG federation.

### **Objective of the study**

1. To study the possibilities of rural development in Darchawi village through government schemes.
2. To highlight the role of Farmer Producer Organization and Company.
3. To explore the difficulties and challenges faced by the Araa Agro Producer Company Limited (AAPCL) in Darchawi village.

### **Economic Activities of the Darchawi village for cultivation**

Tripura is well-suited for a wide range of tropical and sub-tropical fruit crops, including banana, pineapple, citrus, coconut, mango, jackfruit, papaya, litchi, and guava. The ground in Darchawi hamlet is naturally fertile and well-suited for horticulture. After the village was settled, orange plantations were established. Starting around 1930, the quality of oranges became favorable for both traders and local consumers. Subsequently, the villages achieved financial stability. Their reliance on jhum agriculture has abruptly ceased, with the exception of a few households. However, starting in 1937, the orange trees became afflicted with various illnesses, which had a negative impact on their earnings. The Village Council of Darchawi village embarked on this significant course of action to ensure their future survival. By the conclusion of 1937, the people made the decision to transition to pineapple agriculture. Subsequently, the Darlong people have gained a reputation for cultivating the most superior pineapple in the state. Currently, pineapple plantations were scattered among fruit-bearing trees. This initiative has fostered environmental consciousness among the Darlong people in Darchawi village, enabling them to sustain their livelihoods while minimizing any negative impact on the environment.

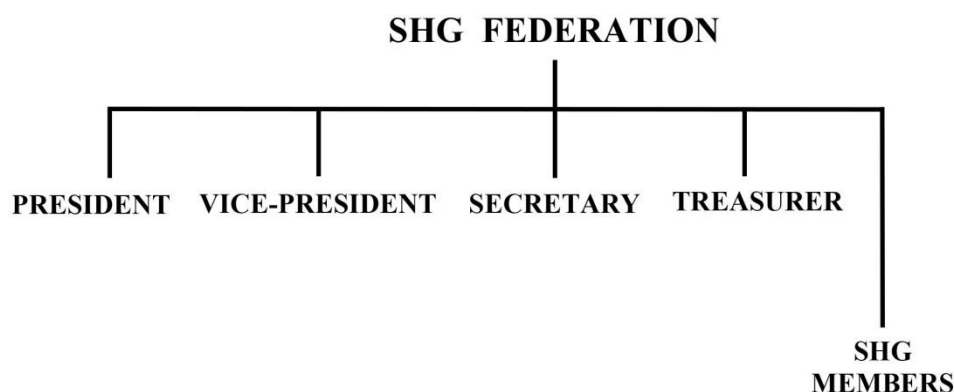
### **Rural Development through NERLP (North East Rural Livelihood Project)**

In February 2016, the North East Rural Livelihood Project (NERLP), which operates under the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) of the Government of India, arrived in Darchawi village. They collaborated with the local community to establish a Self Help Group (SHG). The overall number of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) is nine, with each group comprising ten members. The members consist of women who share similar social and economic origins. In the context of providing financial services to group members, particularly impoverished women in rural areas, C.S. Reddy (2012) emphasizes the significant role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in facilitating financial intermediation. This approach holds great potential for promoting ongoing financial inclusion and integrating underprivileged families into mainstream society. Additionally, it serves as a development model that can be applied more broadly. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are crucial for the advancement of women at the local level. Every member of the group is required to donate a monthly amount ranging from Rs. 50 to Rs. 100. Members of the SHGs have the option to borrow a small amount of money at a low interest rate. They attempt to generate the quantity in this manner, but occasionally they were limited to a certain degree. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are unstructured collectives comprising a mere 10 individuals each group, all of whom have economic challenges. There is a high likelihood of SHG members withdrawing themselves, and it is necessary to use mechanization in order to provide customized support to the SHGs. Despite being considered reliable and efficient allies by many, they are currently encountering several limitations and difficulties.

### **SHG Federation Structure**

NERLP has provided a loan of approximately 50 lakhs to establish a small-scale industry for business initiation. A Farmer Producer Organization and Farmer Producer Company are established, comprising of a President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and members of the Self-Help Groups (SHGs). As the members of the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are all women, they are requesting the appointment of educated male farmers to join their organization. From now on, all 10 Board members are male, each in their respective positions. The primary goal of the Farmer Producer Organization is to serve and benefit the farmers, being initiated, operated, and owned by them.

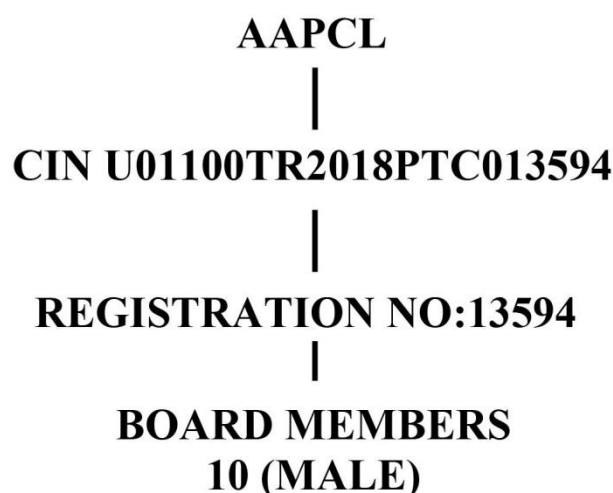
Driven by public interest and recognition, a Farmer Producer Company was established and officially registered as AAPCL (Araa Agro Producer Company Limited) on 20 September 2018.



Primary Source: 2021 March-April

### **Company Structure**

The SHG Federation, in accordance with government regulations, is unable to operate the company officially. Therefore, a Farmer Producer Company was established and registered under AAPCL (Araa Agro Producer Company Limited) on September 20, 2018. The company is also registered under CIN (Company Incorporation Number) U01100TR2018PTC013594, with a registration number of 13594. The company is composed of 10 board members, with 5 serving as directors and the other 5 as promoters. The objective is to enhance the acquisition and growth of specific skills within the Darlong community, enabling them to broaden their range of jobs and increasingly reap the advantages of national development initiatives. The non-performing personnel are affiliated with the Self-Help Group (SHG), and certain SHGs are responsible for producing raw materials.



Primary Source: 2021 March-April

### **Vision and Mission of Araa Agro Producer Company Limited**

Araa Agro Producer Company Limited is a privately held firm that was established in 2018. The company is categorized as a Non-Government Company and operates as a Company limited by Shares. It is officially registered at the Registrar of Companies, RoC-Shillong. Their office is situated in Darchawi village and is now seeing significant growth. They have intentions to engage in processing, packing, branding, and marketing their products throughout the entire state, and are even considering expanding internationally. Their main concentration is on producing and selling a variety of seasonal fruits in the hamlet, including pineapple, lime, lemon, mango, tamarin, and other fruits. To ensure year-round availability for the consumer. However, AAPCL has a clear vision and mission that is centred around the farmer, with the farmer, and for the farmer.

#### **Vision**

- To be a global player in food processing, enriching lives with innovation, integrity and superiority

#### **Mission**

- To exceed the expectations of all the stakeholders in the procurement, processing, distribution and marketing of safe, healthy, tasty and high-quality farm products from seed to shelf.
- To base our operations on values, commitment, experience and knowledge of our people, partners and investors.

- To create, control and monitor the quality and origin of the crops and the final produce by constant value addition to the farmers and dealing with the challenges presented by the current market scenarios.

#### **Establishment of SHG federation by Darlong Community in Darchawi Village**

The case study was undertaken in Darchawi village, where the Darlong population is extremely small, consisting of approximately 1569 individuals according to the census conducted by DHI, the *Darlong Apex Body*. Indian anthropologists have characterized tribes as small, self-contained, self-sufficient, and autonomous societies that rely on subsistence economies and have limited external trade. These cultures are represented as lacking exploitation and social conflict.

In February 2017 SHG Federation was initiated consisting of the President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer and the member of the SHGs. All the members of this federation are female along with SHG members. The purpose of the SHG Federation was for institutions to mobilize, train and support the groups. C.S. Reddy (2012) clearly mention the benefits of federations include those arising from (a) economies of scale, (b) reduction in transaction costs, (c) reduction in default rates at all levels, (d) value-added services, (e) reduction in the cost of promoting new SHGs (that is, the cost of reaching out to every poor woman) and (f) increasing levels of financial discipline and accountability among SHGs. NERLP constantly monitors the development of the Darchawi village through the SHG Federation.

The NERLP initiative was integrated with the SHG (Self Help Group), consisting of the farmers themselves. A complete and developed land was necessary. The land was leased by the SHG Federation and the proprietor for a duration of 20 years, with no rent required. The landowner, who was also a farmer, generously donated approximately 2 Kani (equivalent to 2700 square meters) for the benefit and improvement of the town. During this timeframe, there was an anticipation to foster the growth and progress of the Darlong community and the surrounding villages

#### **Development in Darchawi Village**

Darchawi village depended on the nearby market or itinerant merchants who purchased goods at a very low price. Each year, the village would clear edible plants and herbs by replacing them with rubber or betel nut trees, or for slash-and-burn agriculture. Currently, Tripura is experiencing a significant unemployment rate. In response, the government has actively promoted entrepreneurship, particularly among the youth in Tripura. Based on the data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) as of 24 March 2021, the unemployment rate in Tripura, India, decreased to 11.1% in February 2021. Predicting the future outlook for the next generation is challenging.

Certain farmers who are members of the Self-Help Group (SHG) oversee the processing and packaging operations and receive compensation for their labor. The farmer receives a larger remuneration compared to the prevailing market prices. As a result, they anticipate creating additional job opportunities and increasing income for the beneficiaries in the upcoming years. In order for consumers in different regions of the state and country to obtain fresh fruits, growers engage in basic activities such as acquiring, packaging, and selling raw materials.

#### **Challenges faced by the AAPCI in Darchawi village**

Initially, the Tribal Welfare Department, Government of Tripura gave financial support for the establishment cost in 2019. However, no more assistance or support has been received from the government since then. Therefore, being an expanding firm, they are unable to secure any loans from banks that necessitate the submission of two years' worth of bank account statements. As a result, they are unable to receive any assistance.

The organization encounters numerous financial issues due to the absence of transportation vehicles for both commuting and official purposes. Acquiring raw materials and distributing products is a significant necessity that becomes burdensome for them due to the cost of renting vehicles. They claim that it is necessary for them to provide their own transportation in order to ensure timely delivery of the raw materials for rapid processing. They require appropriate tools and machinery. The purpose is to seek financial resources and investors from those who have good intentions, in order to support the overall growth and progress of the Darlong community. Horticulture has a colossal potential to create profitable work, advance the handling business and lift trades. It, therefore, needs to energize the turn of events, development and extension of cultivation. For the advancement of the agriculture situation, there is the need to present improved innovation and creation of value cultivation produce. Since most agriculture produce is transient and requirements cautious taking care of and esteem expansion, sufficient specialized help is crucial for the supported improvement of the area. Besides, there is the need to give the required infrastructural support at each place of the Food Value Chain, address issues of

creation and efficiency, give more noteworthy advertising to get to and empower more prominent private area interest.

NERLP was expected to bring development for the village but in 2020 they ceased to function and handed over to TRLM (Tripura Rural Livelihood Mission), till date they have visited 3-4 times but due to the Covid-19 meeting could not be called.

AAPCL is expected to provide a consistent rate in terms of a better price for the farmers. Create a constant demand to the farmers to motivate them to grow more and produce more edible fruit trees and to stop cutting down. They also look on the consumer for a better price locally made for that there are challenges in consumer preferences and attitudes, technological improvements, food safety issues and related regulations. Due to a lack of tools and machinery, AAPCL is unable to operate at its maximum capacity. Currently, they are barely coping on their own.

## **II. Conclusion**

The Darlong people are deeply interconnected with their forest habitat, relying on it for both their subsistence and cultural identity. They are often considered the most skilled and experienced cultivators of their land for many generations. Agriculture is a fundamental component of their rudimentary agricultural methods. This investigation revealed that the Darlong people have ceased the practice of deforestation in relation to edible fruit trees, as the farmers have recognized their significant profitability. The company is currently in its preliminary stage, and the production process has commenced, albeit on a trial basis. Employers are supplied with training and encouraged to use accessories to develop critical skills. The food processing industry encountered numerous challenges as a result of the pandemic. Following the lifting of the lockdown, activity resumed gradually, and there is an optimistic outlook for producing a substantial quantity of products in the near future. If AAPCL is successful, the community has the potential to become self-sufficient and regain its former economic sustainability, ensuring a prosperous future for generations to come.

In the current context, the younger generation has prioritized education as their primary avenue for advancement, as opposed to the traditional focus on agriculture and cultivation. Darchawi village has made significant progress in terms of social, educational, and economic development in both government and private employment sectors since embracing the new faith of Christianity in 1919. The AAPCL has devised strategies for the processing, packaging, branding, and marketing of its products within the entire state and potentially even internationally. Many villagers are currently endeavoring to obtain benefits from AAPCL and are facing challenges in their efforts.

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