

## Success Story on Knitting Prosperity: Women Empowerment at Sardar Patel High School Relief Camp, Khurkhul Village, Imphal West-District, Manipur

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### INTRODUCTION

The ethnic clash that unfolded on May 3, 2023, in Manipur, stands as a tragic testament to the region's ongoing socio-political challenges. Among the many victims of this violent upheaval were 20 households from Leimakhong village in Imphal West- district, Manipur. Forced to flee their homes, these 77 individuals sought refuge at the Sardar Patel High School Relief Camp, leaving behind their belongings and livelihoods. The event not only displaced these families but also underscored the vulnerabilities of hand-to-mouth communities and the long-term impacts of ethnic conflicts on livelihoods, education, and day-to-day survival. The violence erupted suddenly, giving the residents of Leimakhong Chingmang and Ingourok village little time to prepare or safeguard their possessions. The urgency to escape left them with no choice but to abandon their homes, farms, and the few belongings they possessed. Among the displaced were farmers, daily-wage labourers, and other economically marginalized individuals who depended entirely on their daily earnings for sustenance. This displacement uprooted them from their ancestral lands and forced them into an uncertain existence at the relief camp.

### 2. Life at Sardar Patel High School Relief Camp

Sardar Patel High School was transformed into a relief camp to accommodate the displaced families. The government and local organizations provided food, water, and essential livelihood materials. These measures ensured basic survival, yet the camp's resources were insufficient to meet the broader needs of the displaced individuals. Families struggled to adapt to their new environment, with no privacy, limited facilities, and an overwhelming sense of loss. While food and basic amenities were provided, the lack of economic opportunities left the displaced families without a way to plan for their future. The majority of the displaced households were subsistence farmers.

Their livelihoods were inextricably tied to their land, which provided food and a source of income. The sudden displacement severed this connection, leaving them jobless and dependent on aid. For these hand-to-mouth communities, the loss of their land meant not only an immediate halt to their income but also a deeper emotional disconnection from their heritage. Farming is a way of life for these families, and losing access to their fields has long-term implications for their economic independence and community identity.

### 3. Day-to-Day Struggles

Beyond food and shelter, the displaced families faced numerous day-to-day challenges. Clothing, personal hygiene items, and household necessities were often in short supply. The lack of financial resources made it difficult for families to address medical needs, transportation, or any form of recreation for children. These struggles compounded their stress, making it harder for them to cope with the situation. The trauma of fleeing violence, combined with the uncertainty of their future, has had a profound psychological impact on the displaced families. Many individuals experience anxiety, depression, and a sense of hopelessness. Socially, the displacement fractured established community networks. This social disconnection further exacerbates the sense of loss and insecurity felt by the displaced families. Re-establishing educational opportunities for the displaced children is crucial. Temporary learning centres at the camp, along with access to nearby schools, can help ensure that children do not fall behind in their studies. Providing books, uniforms, and other educational materials will enable children to resume their education and bring a semblance of normalcy to their lives. Long-term investment

in education is essential for empowering the younger generation to overcome the challenges of displacement.

### 4. The Role of ICAR and KVKs in Community Rehabilitation

With the intervention of ICAR Manipur Centre and its five KVKs (Krishi Vigyan Kendras), the displaced individuals at the Sarder Patel High School Relief Camp found a new lease on life. Through innovative programs in poultry rearing, vegetable cultivation, food value addition, and skill-oriented training such as crouching knitting and hand embroidery, the camp's residents were empowered to rebuild their lives. These initiatives, particularly the special classes on crouching knitting and hand embroidery for 25 farm women, have become a beacon of hope for the displaced community.

### 5. Training and Empowerment through Handicrafts

The ICAR-led initiative provided targeted training to 25 farm women in crouching knitting and hand embroidery. These women were taught to craft a variety of items, including household decorative pieces, woollen clothes, and baby toys. The training sessions were conducted with the dual objectives of utilizing their time productively and equipping them with skills that could lead to financial independence. For many of these women, the training was more than just a learning experience; it was a therapeutic intervention. The act of creating something with their hands allowed them to channel their energy into productive work, reducing feelings of anxiety and depression. The creative process not only boosted their self-esteem but also fostered a sense of community among the participants, as they shared ideas, techniques, and encouragement.



Fig. 1. Training programme conducted on crouching knitting and hand embroidery for Inmates.

## 6. Economic Transformation

The skills acquired through these training sessions have had a profound economic impact on the women. Once the training was complete, the participants began producing high-quality handcrafted items that quickly gained popularity. Depending on the demand for their products, the inmate women now earn between Rs. 5,000 and Rs. 8,000 per month. This income has enabled them to provide better food for their families and invest in their children's education, creating a ripple effect of positive change. The success of their products extended beyond the local markets. Handcrafted items made by these women have been sold in other states across India and even abroad. This exposure has not

only increased their earnings but also boosted their confidence and broadened their horizons. By turning their skills into a sustainable livelihood, these women have set an inspiring example of resilience and determination. The combined effect of these livelihood programs went beyond economic benefits. For many individuals, the sense of purpose and achievement gained from productive work helped alleviate the psychological burden of displacement. Feelings of anxiety, depression, and hopelessness were replaced by optimism and a renewed sense of agency. The social interactions during training sessions and group activities also helped rebuild community ties that had been disrupted by the displacement.



Fig.2 Selling of embroidery products at the CAU Agri-fair at Dimapur Nagaland and handing of monetary benefits from selling embroidery products by Dr. Ramgopal Laha, HORC, ICAR Manipur Centre

## 7. Food Value Addition: Enhancing Skills and Earnings

Food value addition was another area where ICAR's intervention made a significant impact. Participants were trained to process and package food items, such as pickles, jams, and snacks,

which they could sell in the market. This training added value to their agricultural produce and opened up new income-generating opportunities. The emphasis on hygiene, quality, and attractive packaging ensured that their products met market standards, further increasing their appeal to customers.



Fig.3 Training programme on Food Value Addition for the inmates at Sardar Patel Relief Camp

## 8. CONCLUSION

The efforts of ICAR Manipur Centre and its KVKs demonstrate the critical role that agricultural and rural development organizations can play in disaster rehabilitation. By combining traditional knowledge with modern techniques, these institutions empowered displaced individuals to become self-reliant. The success of the programs at Sarder Patel High School Relief Camp highlights the importance of a holistic approach that addresses both immediate needs and long-term sustainability. The intervention of ICAR Manipur Centre and its five KVKs at the Sarder Patel High School Relief Camp has transformed the lives of displaced individuals

through skill development and livelihood programs. The 25 farm women trained in crouching knitting and hand embroidery are now earning a dignified living, providing for their families, and contributing to the economy. Programs in poultry rearing, vegetable cultivation and food value addition have further diversified income sources, ensuring stability and resilience. This success story is a powerful example of how targeted interventions can empower communities, restore hope, and pave the way for a better future. It underscores the importance of integrating skill development and livelihood restoration into disaster response strategies, ensuring that affected individuals not only survive but thrive.