

UMKLAI AREA INTEGRATED COOPERATIVE SOCIETY IN RI-BHOI DISTRICT OF MEGHALAYA

“Scrubbing away poverty to prosperity through Sponge Gourd (Sohprew) the Indigenous Loofah”

Umklai village, a small quiet hamlet lying a little off the main road from the hustle and bustle of the national highway, skirting the busy Nongpoh market is fairly nondescript, as villages go, but on the slopes surrounding the little hamlet, dangling from clumps of trees is a wonder plant-the **Sohprew**.

Used centuries ago, by the Khasis as a natural body scrubber, sponge gourd, or the humble Sohprew as the Khasis call it, has today metamorphosed in its modern avatar into an eco friendly loofah, which has a huge demand both in the domestic & foreign market. As per recent reports, globally the demand for the organic loofah is 50 lakhs annually, and Meghalaya presently produces only about 1.5 lakhs which reflects the huge potential and market.



Fig:Luffa



Dried Luffa

It is a niche product which has become an indispensable item of both use & luxury in various categories of spas & resorts. It is commonly sold dried unpeeled in its raw form at various markets and haats in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

It's a widely known that every day a human being sheds 4% their skin cells. Which is a natural regenerative process. If however the dead skin is allowed to remain, it settles as a thick layer and becomes impervious to moisturizers. Exfoliation involves vigorous skin massage, either and with the hand, a body brush, loofah or mitt and Loofahs are highly effective in stimulating blood circulation, loosening dead cells and leaving the skin, soft, supple and glowing, exfoliation also loosens the blockages that help decrease the likelihood of ingrown colour, besides improving

circulation. Loofahs also softens those areas prone to hard
Overall Loofahs have a highly therapeutic effect & more
organic and natural!

The Managing Committee of the Society
which comprises 7 members, under an innovative
Loofah farmer Shri. Him Synkli who informed that
they have been regularly participating at Trade Fairs
and Exhibitions in the Region and also at the national
level, where their Sohprew products are proving to be
quite a hit. Sohprew making (valued added items) was
started by Shri. Himrose Syngkli since 1994 with 40 nos.

of Luffa which were carried to Exhibition at Goa through District Industries (DIC) in 1996. On
seeing the commercial potentiality, the nos were increased to 200 by 1997-1998 which were sent to
Kamaykhia Mandir (Tourist destination) at Guwahati.



A pressing machine



Worker at Luffa processing unit

By the year 2000, the finished products
were sent to various retail outlets in Nongpoh.
Now the products can be seen in places like
Guwahati, Shillong, Tourist Centers, etc.
However, the actual shape of his business took a
new turn when Mr. H. Synkli met Shri. E.
Shanpru (then DHO, Nongpoh) who encouraged
and help in realizing the potential of this venture
by assisting in providing Water Tank, Sewing
Machines for value addition and also brought
new areas under cultivation of Sponge Gourd.

About 15 units were brought under area
expansion in 2004-05. At present (2010) the
production capacity of this Unit is 36000 nos.
which were already sold. However the real
prospect of this project could be realized only
by bringing new areas under cultivation with
latest Technical Know-How together with
improving the producing capacity of this unit by

upgrading the Machineries as well as Post Production Treatments.



Society member

membership is about 50 members decided to boldly foray into the hitherto inchartered enterprise of mass producing Sohprew – 100% natural loofah on a commercial basis along with value addition. For this innovative attempt help came in the form of the ICDP (Integrated Cooperative Development Project), financed by the NCDC, and **facilitated by the Office of the Registrar of Cooperative Societies, under the Cooperation Department.** An amount of Rs. 1.35 lakhs was provided under Share capital Contribution, loan component availed by the Society amounted to Rs. 1.65 lakhs, with the total cost amounting to Rs. 3.00 lakhs.

The Umklai Area Integrated Cooperative Society

whose total



For long, the members of this society had been growing the sponge gourd in their village and in surrounding areas, thereafter processing the harvested product in its most rudimentary form & selling the same at the local market at Nongpoh, while fetching a very meager & insubstantial price which was not enough, and that too much was being spent for so little, Under

the Leadership of Bah Him Syngkli, the chairman of the Society, the Members applied for a paraphernalia in an effort to give value addition to their Sohprew. A more finished and packaged product was gradually fashioned to make the product more designer and user friendly.

Presently ,besides, loofahs of different shapes & sizes, an impressive range of product diversification has occurred which has dramatically transformed the product range. A plethora of items are now rolling out of this new unit which include an eclectic array of products that range from one of a kind novelty products like sohprew magnets, enlivened with a hint of orchids, to Sohprew decorative items in the shape of monoliths, pen stands, bathroom slip-ons, and even handbags.

As a vibrant, successful & dynamic cooperative society besides, providing regular dividends to its immediate primary members, this activity is also creating avenues of alternative livelihood for village residents & also playing a significant role towards augmenting additional income of not only for Umklai village but also for the surrounding areas. Employment and jobs are being created through teams of workers who give the finishing touch to the loofahs like plucking ,cutting, soaking, drying & designing the finished products into various shapes and forms, etc. Women are generally involved in the sewing and stitching and in the more delicate aspects which go into giving the product a finished look. This overall, is creating a virtuous cycle, which in turn is emboldening the society to attempt newer and more creative products& designs.

The future prospects are bright, and emphasis has to be laid on more product diversification, distribution, generation of adequate volume to meet the demand and on better and wider marketing. Another challenge facing the society is easy availability of the raw product which at present is being grown abundantly only in and around Umklai village

What is laudable is the humble attempt by a small & determined Cooperative society to market & produce a unique indigenous niche product the Sohprew which not only is 100% organic and natural but also therapeutic and in great demand in the present day and age where such products are widely in use in homes, spas, resorts& boutique hotels the world over in a world which is increasingly inclined towards the natural where organic is not only the flavor & fashion of the day but is here to stay as well!

Cost benefits analysis at Farmers' Field and the Processing Center/Yearly.

The present method of cultivation is by following the Loofah to creep in tall trees. This is usually done in their homestead farming as well as Jhum field where trees are retained for growing loofah. Thus it is difficult to find the actual area under cultivation always be counted.

At Farmers Field

Area= 1ha.

Total loofah creeper/ha=150 Nos

Av.Production/tree-50Nos of elongated loofah.

Av. Selling price=Rs.10-20/No.

Av Income yearly/ha=Rs.1,12,500/-

Rupees(One lakh Twelve Thousand Five Hundred)only.

At the Processing Unit.

SL.No	Products	No.	Av.Amount	Amount Rs.(in Lakh)	Remarks.
1	Loofah scrubber(2010	40	14.40	14.40	
2	Loofah value added products	5000	40	2.00	
3	Gross Profit	`		16.40	
4	Maintenance of machine, water pump,etc			.20	
5	Wages unskilled	10	200	7.30	
	Wages skilled	2	300	2.19	
				9.69	
	Net Profit			Rs. 6,71,000/-	
