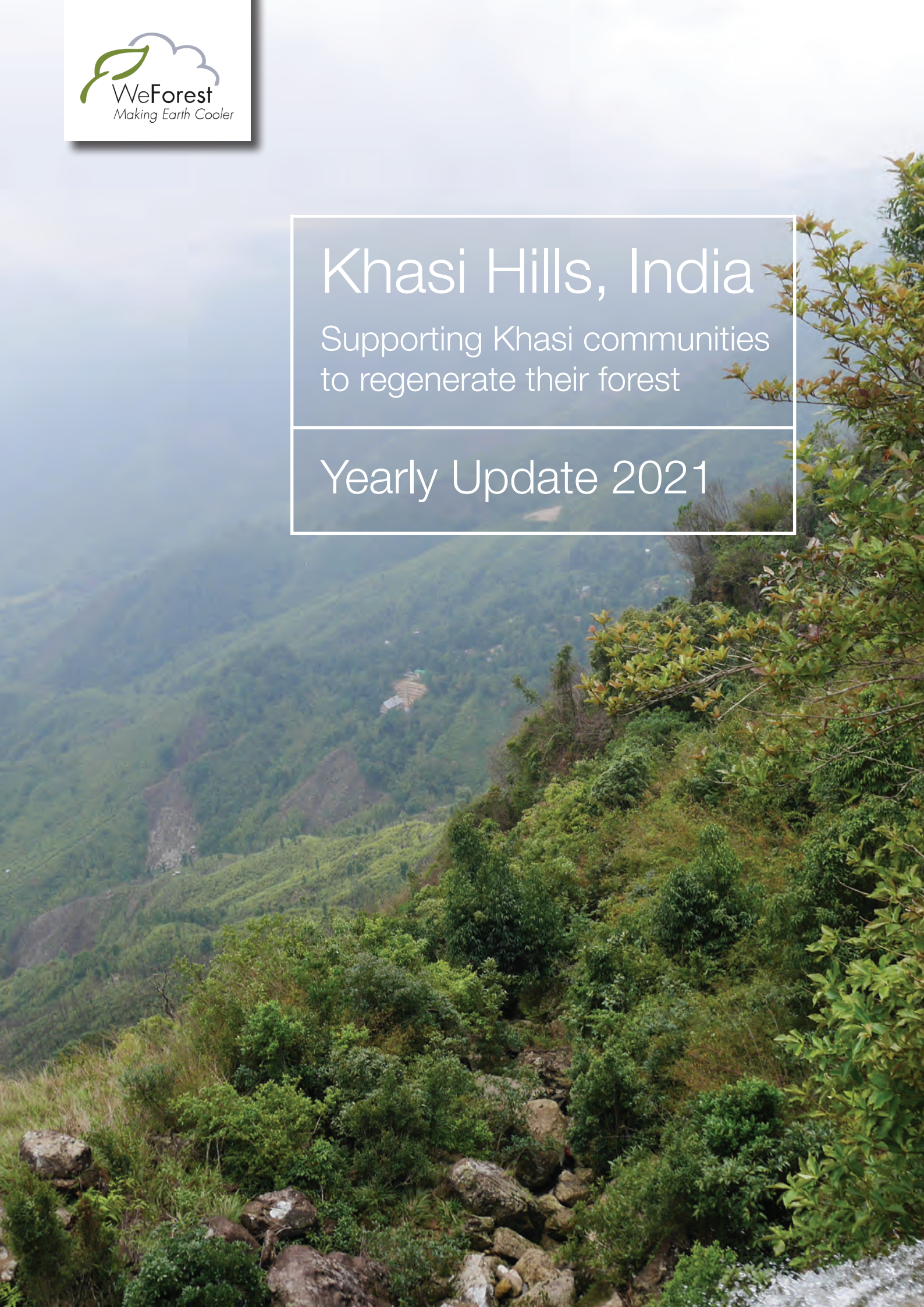
WeForest
Making Earth Cooler

Khasi Hills, India

Supporting Khasi communities to regenerate their forest

Yearly Update 2021



Summary

The Khasi hills are inhabited by the Khasi people, an indigenous ethnic group who are traditionally forest-dependent and use the native cloud forest for shelter, firewood, medicine, food and even spiritual traditions.

These hills in the Indian ecoregion of Meghalaya are one of the wettest places on earth, and are classified as a global biodiversity hot spot under the Eastern Himalayan Endemic Bird Area. With such high rainfall, the region is home to a wide range of amphibians, some of which are endemic like the endangered Khasi Hill toad and the critically threatened Shillong bush frog.

Unfortunately, the area is now at risk as the forest is being cleared for charcoal production, stone quarrying, timber and animal grazing by the Khasi. As 90% of their households are below the poverty level, they need other and more sustainable ways of income.

With the KSKHAWUM Welfare Society, WeForest is supporting traditionally forest-dependent villages in the east and north Khasi Hills to protect and restore their forests. This community project manages tree nurseries, carries out thinning and weeding, and establishes natural firebreaks to protect the forest.

2021 in numbers

372.33 ha restored in **22** villages (representing **309 876** trees) using Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR) and enrichment planting

61 058 seedling planted

320.8km firebreaks constructed

70% tree survival rate

86 self-help groups

The project also promotes forestry-friendly income generation to reduce deforestation, such as mushroom cultivation, vermicompost production and improved livestock rearing. Introducing more fuel-efficient (smokeless) stoves is further reducing pressure for firewood and improving family health.

This report shares an update of our progress during 2021. Thank you for all your support!

Restoration

Assisted Natural Regeneration and enrichment planting increases forest cover on community land

During 2021, the tree planting programme took place in 22 villages and involved the clans, individuals and community members with the assistance of community facilitators, assistant community facilitators and youth volunteers. Planting started in June at the beginning of the monsoon and was completed in September.

Three home-based nurseries are fully functional and supplying sufficiently good quality seedlings to meet the planting needs of the project. Alongside the 5940 saplings (wildlings) transplanted from the forest, 61 058 saplings were planted in 64 hectares to supplement the assisted natural regeneration. 81 species were planted, most of which were acquired from the home-based nurseries operated by self-help groups and individuals.

In 2021, the active part of restoration for this project was finalised. WeForest will be monitoring the sites annually for the next five years, until 2025.

Communities are engaged and income streams are diversified

During 2021, more responsibility fell on community facilitators as a strict lockdown took place preventing movement into the project areas. Since facilitators were in frequent communication with the project team, they were able to train youth volunteers to help lead planting and monitoring activities.

The team also conducted Participatory Rural Appraisals in several villages to discuss with community members the benefits and challenges that they face as a whole, and work out a plan to preserve forested areas and regenerate degraded ones.

The project's livelihood activities include livestock rearing, mushroom production and temperate fruit tree cultivation. The average income from chicken-related sales, including eggs, for the 80 households engaged in rearing chickens in the project area in 2021 was Rs.15 750 (US$207.45).

A training programme on pig husbandry was presented to 121 community members who learned about best practices in pig rearing, nutrition, and common diseases affecting pigs in the region.

Over 50 people attended the mushroom cultivation training in two villages in Ri-Bhoi district that demonstrated how to grow oyster mushrooms that can sell for a good price at market (Rs.200-300 per kg).

Engagement has been more successful in self-help groups than in Farmers Clubs, despite both being formed to provide alternative income generation opportunities. The majority of the self-help groups are only run by women from the poorest villages of the region, and they are investing 5% of their annual income in group activities. The programme provides them with in-kind donations such as chicken, piglets or seedlings. Each group has a treasurer taking care of the finances and the group members are able to take loans from the group. The KSKHAWUM Welfare Society assesses their performance annually, and good grades mean local communities have the potential to cooperate with the local government to receive additional funding.

Clean energy moves communities away from using forests unsustainably

Fuel efficient cooking stoves use liquid propane gas, which reduces fuelwood consumption and has a much better carbon footprint than charcoal and firewood, as well as practically no negative impact on health or local forests. Four training sessions on the use of fuel efficient stoves were held in 2021.

Of the 225 households who have received an energy efficient cookstove throughout the project, 130 have effectively decreased their consumption of fuelwood or charcoal for cooking purposes by at least 20%.

How do we know our restored forests are growing and making an impact?

Every hectare under restoration is mapped with GPS points to generate polygons (areas on a map) that are assigned to sponsors. Permanent monitoring plots are established in our sites and our forestry and science teams conduct surveys to monitor progress of biomass growth, tree density, survival rate and species diversity, among other indicators. Where social impacts are also critical, we measure socio-economic indicators such as the number of individuals or families directly benefiting, people trained, and income generated from forest-friendly livelihood activities.

Please visit our **Why and How** webpage for more information.

What's Next?

The active part of restoration for this project is now complete and WeForest will be monitoring the sites annually for the next five years, until 2025.

Thank you for the incredible work you have made possible!

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Stay up-to-date with your interactive **Khasi Hills map**, and check out the **photo album** of the project on Flickr.

Thank you for supporting the Khasi Hills project!