

FROM HOUSEWIFE TO ENTREPRENEUR: KENILA CH. MARAK 'S PATH TO EMPOWERMENT



In the rural areas of Garo Hills, most women remain heavily dependent on their husbands for financial support. Their daily lives are consumed by household responsibilities and childcare, leaving them with little opportunity to pursue independent ventures. This lack of exposure not only prevents them from achieving financial empowerment but also limits their ability to emerge as leaders within their communities. As a result, many women are unable to participate meaningfully in decision-making platforms or contribute to broader social development.

Kenila's First Step toward Change

Kenila, a woman from Asil Dikagre in East Garo Hills, devoted herself entirely to her family and household duties, leaving little room to explore her own potential. Like many others in her community, she remained financially dependent on her husband. Her story, however, began to change when she chose to step beyond traditional boundaries and take a loan under the Piggery Mission. Although she was eligible for Rs. 2,02,500, she opted for a smaller amount of Rs. 90,000. With this, she courageously started her own piggery farm, a step that not only marked her entry into entrepreneurship but also symbolized her determination to build a sustainable livelihood for herself and her family.

Growth after Piggery Mission loan

Before receiving support from the Piggery Mission, Kenila's pig-rearing activities were very modest. She managed only 1–2 pigs annually, which provided little income and limited scope for growth. However, after accessing a loan of Rs. 90,000 under the scheme, she was able to expand her farm significantly.



Expanding production and income

With the new investment, Kenila began rearing 5–6 pigs each year. Once fully grown, each pig fetched between Rs. 23,000 and Rs. 30,000 in the market. This shift allowed her to generate annual revenue of approximately Rs.1.5 lakh from the sale of mature pigs.

Diversifying through piglet sales

In addition to this, Kenila also ventured into selling piglets. She consistently sold at least 10 piglets per year at Rs. 3,500 each, earning an additional Rs. 35,000 annually. This dual income stream from both mature pigs and piglets, has transformed her financial situation, giving her a total annual revenue of nearly Rs. 1.85 lakh.

Marketing of Piglets

She markets her piglets both locally and in the Williamnagar market. When selling within her local area, each piglet is priced at Rs. 3,000; however, when she takes them to Williamnagar, the price increases to

Rs. 3,500 per piglet. This price difference highlights the stronger demand and better market opportunities available in Williamnagar compared to local sales. By selling in multiple locations, she is able to maximize profits and reach a wider customer base.

Marketing of Mature Pigs

In addition to piglets, she also raises pigs to full maturity. These pigs are kept for a minimum of one year before being sold. Fully grown pigs fetch significantly higher prices, which vary depending on their weight, health, and prevailing market conditions. This strategy allows her to balance quick income from piglet sales with larger profits from mature pigs, ensuring a steady and diversified source of revenue throughout the year.

Current Rearing Status

At present, she is rearing seven piglets. This indicates her ongoing commitment to maintaining a sustainable piggery business, with both short-term and long-term income streams.

Livestock Rearing

Alongside raising her own livestock, she also extended her efforts by entrusting three piglets to three different individuals, giving one piglet to each. This arrangement not only supported her own farming activities but also encouraged others to participate in animal rearing.

Revenue Sharing

Once these piglets are fully grown, they will be sold in the market. The income generated from the sale will be shared equally among her and the three caretakers. This system ensures fairness and mutual benefit, fostering cooperation and collective growth.

Community Impact

By distributing piglets to others, she created an opportunity for shared responsibility and profit. This approach strengthens community ties, promotes sustainable farming practices, and helps everyone involved gain financial benefits from livestock rearing.

Training and Skill Development

Kenila strengthened her entrepreneurial journey by attending a 10-day intensive training program at the Bolmoram Training Centre on piggery farming. This program provided her with hands-on experience and practical knowledge in areas such as pig rearing, feed management, disease prevention, marketing strategies, and overall farm management. The training not only improved her technical skills but also boosted her confidence to run her enterprise more efficiently and profitably. By applying these improved techniques, she has been able to enhance productivity, reduce risks, and ensure better returns from her piggery business.

Training and Support for Off-Season Vegetable (OSV) Service Provider

In addition to livestock farming, Kenila expanded her livelihood opportunities by becoming an Off-Season Vegetable (OSV) Service Provider (SP) under the Meghalaya Livelihood and Access to Markets Project (M-LAMP). In November 2023, she attended a one-week specialized training program at Bolmoram, East Garo Hills, where she learned modern cultivation practices, pest management techniques, and methods to improve soil fertility.

Following the training, she received a support fund of Rs. 50,000 in 2024 to initiate vegetable cultivation. With this financial assistance, she diversified into growing crops such as okra, brinjal, chillies, pumpkin, potato, turmeric, and snake beans. This initiative not only provided her with year-round income opportunities but also reduced the risks associated with seasonal farming. By combining skill development with institutional support, Kenila has successfully built a sustainable agricultural base that complements her piggery enterprise and strengthens her financial independence.



Crops Cultivated

With the support fund, she ventured into cultivating a diverse range of vegetables, including ladies' finger (okra), ginger, brinjal (eggplant), chilli, pumpkin, potato, turmeric and snake beans. This diversification not only ensured year-round availability but also reduced risks associated with seasonal farming.

Annual Profits from Cultivation

Her diverse cultivation efforts have yielded significant profits across multiple crops

Crops	Annual Profit (Rs)
Turmeric	15,000 / 20,000
Potato	25,000
Chillies	20,000
Ladies' Finger	6,000
Snake Beans	6,000
Brinjal	25,000
Pumkin	20,000
Ginger	20,000
Total (Off Season Vegetables)	1.5 Lakhs Annually

Banana Cultivation Initiative

Her active participation in IVCS and involvement in various activities under MLAMP reflect her strong commitment to agricultural development. The East Garo Hills Horticulture Department also extended support to her, enabling her to take on impactful projects. One of her notable achievements was the successful plantation of Rs. 50000 banana saplings, which highlights both her initiative and dedication to horticultural practices.



This project not only strengthened her role within the department but also provided measurable financial benefits. Through this cultivation, she earned an approximate annual profit of Rs.25,000, showcasing her ability to transform agricultural activities into sustainable income opportunities. Her efforts contribute meaningfully to community growth and demonstrate how individual initiative, combined with institutional support, can lead to long-term success in farming.

Fishery Development Initiative

In addition to her horticultural activities, she also received valuable support from the East Garo Hills District Fishery Department, which came forward in 2021 to assist her in constructing a fishery pond. This initiative opened up new avenues for income generation through aquaculture. By rearing and selling fish, she has been able to earn more than Rs. 20,000 per season, further diversifying her livelihood opportunities.

This achievement highlights her ability to make effective use of departmental support, expand into multiple agricultural sectors, and establish sustainable sources of revenue. Her success in fisheries complements her horticultural ventures, showcasing a well-rounded approach to rural entrepreneurship and community development.

Challenges

Challenges in Pig Feeding

One of the most pressing challenges in her pig farming activities is the availability and affordability of feed. She often struggles to secure sufficient quantities of quality feed, as it is not only scarce but also prohibitively expensive. Since feed accounts for the largest share of production costs in pig rearing, this issue places a heavy financial burden on her operations. The limited access to affordable feed directly impacts the growth, health, and productivity of the pigs, making it increasingly difficult for her to maintain profitability and sustain the farm in the long run.

Shortage of Water

During the winter season, she faced a significant shortage of water, which made it difficult to properly wash and maintain the piggery sheds. This challenge affected the overall hygiene of the livestock environment, as regular cleaning is essential to prevent disease and ensure healthy growth. The scarcity of water during colder months highlights the need for better resource management and sustainable solutions, such as water storage systems or alternative cleaning methods, to support livestock rearing throughout the year.

Challenges in Vegetable Cultivation

Access to Vermicompost

One of the major difficulties faced in vegetable cultivation is obtaining good-quality vermin compost. Farmers often struggle with limited availability, inconsistent quality, and high costs, which directly affect soil fertility and crop yield.

Pest management

Pest infestation remains a persistent challenge. Although organic pesticides were used, prepared by farmers themselves through techniques learned during training—managing pests effectively requires continuous effort and monitoring. Organic solutions are safer but sometimes less potent compared to chemical alternatives, making pest control a demanding task.

Vegetable marketing

Marketing of vegetables was primarily done locally, with sales taking place in nearby villages and in the Dobu market which is 5 km from her village. While this ensured a steady outlet, limited market reach restricted opportunities for better pricing and larger-scale sales. Expanding to regional or urban markets could potentially improve profitability but requires better logistics and market connections.



Water Scarcity

One of the biggest hurdles she faces in vegetable cultivation is the irregular availability of water. Since most small-scale farming in the region depends on rainfall, the unpredictability of monsoon patterns often leaves crops vulnerable during critical growth stages.

Future Plan

She intends to participate in a 45-day training program focused on livestock management, particularly rearing mixed species of piglets. This initiative is aimed at increasing revenue and profitability through diversified farming practices. Alongside this, she is planning to expand her vegetable cultivation to strengthen her agricultural base and ensure a steady income stream. Furthermore, she will also work on

developing better organic pesticides to enhance productivity, improve crop health, and maintain sustainability in her farming methods. Altogether, these efforts reflect her commitment to building a more resilient and profitable farming enterprise.

"Before, I was just a housewife and completely dependent on my husband for financial support. Now, through IVCS, I am able to earn on my own. Even line departments have come forward to support me because of IVCS, which has completely transformed my lifestyle. I would like to encourage other members, especially women, to step forward, work through IVCS, and experience the benefits. Empower yourself, bring change to your life, and be an example for others." — *Keniala Ch. Marak*