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Assam • India

NAGALAND

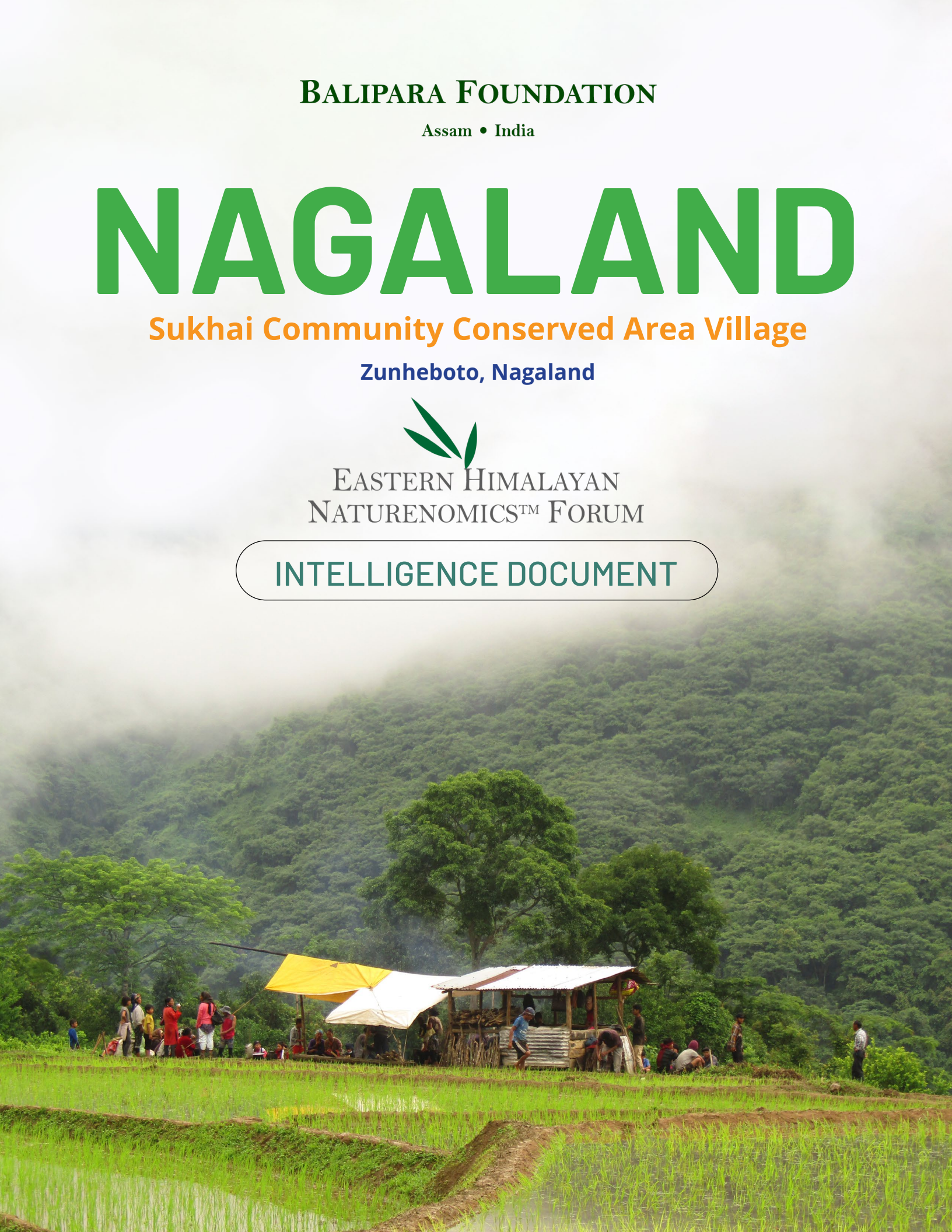
Sukhai Community Conserved Area Village

Zunheboto, Nagaland



EASTERN HIMALAYAN
NATURENOMICS™ FORUM

INTELLIGENCE DOCUMENT



UNDERSTANDING SUKHAI

Geography

Forests provide the essentials of life—clean air, fresh water, food, fuel, medicines, and livelihoods—for billions of people. They are also critical to the fight against climate change. Trees already capture and store nearly a third of human-caused climate pollution and forests naturally cool the planet's surface and regulate rainfall. Roughly 60% of India's \$3 trillion economy is mid to highly dependent on the healthy functioning of ecosystems for their future growth and sustainability. 57% of rural Indian livelihoods depend on healthy forests – forests which are rapidly disappearing across the country today. Deforestation in India's Eastern Himalayas alone represented 74% of India's total deforestation between 2017 – 2019 (FSI, 2019).



Communities

Sukhai is one of the ancestral parent village of the indigenous Sema tribes of Nagaland. According to anthropologists, the Sema Nagas which accounted to be 48,000 in population predominantly inhabited the valleys of three major rivers of Nagaland, the Doyang, Tizu and Tita rivers. Traditionally the Sema communities from Sukhai village shares an intimate relationship with Nature, based on a foundation of interconnectedness between God, people and nature. The indigenous populace of Sukhai clearly interprets the ecological value of diverse fauna, and relies the need for harmonical co-existence with other species, even if it means sharing a portion of their harvests with other creatures.



Biodiversity

Sukhai village lying in the heart of Nagaland has Khasi sub-tropical wet hill forest primarily overlapping with the Assam sub-tropical pine forest, and is representative of the overall common flora and fauna of Nagaland. The village which is a part of the Satoi range is considered to be paradise for ornithologists and bird watchers with endemic species like Blyth's Tragopan, Kalij Pheasant and Peacock Pheasant amongst others. The village also acts as an important green corridor between the biodiversity rich forests of Satoi range and Ghosu bird sanctuary that harbours endangered and threatened species like the Blyth's Tragopan, Fishing Cat and Wild Dog.

Land Ownership Patterns

The land ownership in Sukhai village is governed by the Article 371 A of the Indian constitution, articulating that the land belongs to community, and is owned by communities. The village chief controls the land and hence all power and privileges lie with him. The chief decides who gets a piece of land (forest) to farm based on the needs of each member of the village community. The Nagaland state government regulated the Nagaland Village and Area Council Act which called for the creation of a Village Council in each village. This act allows the village councils to select their members based on their own customary traditions and practices and thus fosters the continuation of existing governance and management norms. In the case of Sukhai villages, the village council makes all the decisions on where cultivation is allowed and violators are sanctioned. The village council also has the power to supersede individual property rights and impose restrictions on village members, for example in terms of cutting for firewood.

There are also a number of Community conserved areas (CCAs) formed by Forest Department, organization such as NEPED (Nagaland Empowerment of People through Economic Development). These conservation areas include the community forests and there is an effort to conserve the bio diversity of the area, with schemes for alternative livelihood for the communities, leading to both conservation and empowerment.

Agricultural patterns

Farming in Suukhai is mostly subsistence in nature. The indigenous farmers of the village continue to practice slash and burn agriculture or jhum cultivation. After clearing, each jhum area is cultivated for two to three years along with the current Jhum. Sukhai village earlier followed a nine-year jhum cycle, but due to a dip in the population of Sukhai the jhum cycle has lengthened to 14 years due to increased fallows. Lengthening of the jhum cycle provides improved scope for natural biodiversity to regenerate. This is an extremely positive sign as jhumming is an excellent way to protect forests and biodiversity and yet grow crops, provided that long fallow periods allow for the forest to regrow. Paddy is the staple crop and it is grown both on jhum land and on the river bed. Miyeghu the local variety of paddy is sown in the jhum fields, whereas the hybrid variety of paddy, procured from government agricultural centres are planted near the river bed. According to the village farmers, jhum cultivation provides sufficient grains for subsistence for a year. The wood drawn from felling of trees, at the time of clearing and burning operations, is used as fire wood, to repair houses, and for fencing. Apart from grains including paddy and maize, farmers of Sukhai also grow vegetables like tomato, egg-plant, pumpkin, cauliflower, lady finger, amongst others.



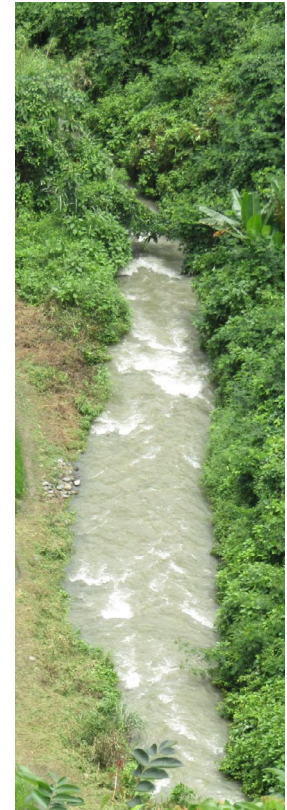


Rural Economy

Sukhai's economy is largely agriculture and forest-centred. Farming is the primary occupation for the communities of the village. Paddy, maize and pulses are the main crops. Though farming is mainly for subsistence, high dependence prevails on the other abundant resources of Jhum lands. The indigenous communities rely on wood derived from the clearing of Jhum lands for cooking, house repair or maintenance, and it also forms a large part of their income. Certain fruits, vegetables and grains harvested from the forest also forms a part of their daily diet. Adding to it, each family is involved in animal husbandry which is a source of additional income. Commonly raised animals include pigs, hens and dogs. There is growing interest amongst the youth of the village for in in the organized sector. A few of them are engaged in government services, and have migrated to nearby towns such as Sataka, Zünheboto, Kohima and Dimapur.

Water

Sukhai is dependent on water from the three rivers flowing in and around the village, viz. Tizü River, Loyi Stream and Yai Stream. The villagers have laid a sophisticated water distribution system. The water from these river and streams is collected in a tank which is further distributed to each household with water pipes laid over ground. The village also has four natural springs with an opportunity to develop the local fishery within village, and reduce pressure on the Tizü River.



Participants Distribution



Village Council
(GBs & Members)

10

SHG Members
(Women)

7

Farmers

8

Youth

7

Total

35

Community Case Stories



Awoto Awomi
Rural Futures Forester,
Nagaland



Awoto Awomi a 26 year old youth from the Sukhai Community Conserved Area village of Nagaland's Zunheboto district is a successful case story of a hunter turned into conservationist.

An indigenous youth from the Sema community, Awoto was a traditional hunter until 2012. Being exposed to various training and awareness programs on need for conservation orchestrated by national and international non profits like The Energy and Resources Institute, he made up his mind to contribute passionately for habitats and wildlife conservation projects.

He is now instinctively inculcating his hunting skills for designing interventions and conservation strategies in context to wildlife and habitats across the Community Conserved Areas of Sukhai village. Replacing his guns with binoculars and cameras, Awoto in the last five years have documented approximately 100 + diversity of avian species, 100 + diversity of butterfly, 5 – 6 species of mammals, identified in and around the Tizu Valley.

"I would request youth of the region to contribute and act proactively for preserving the rich biodiversity and habitats across our the beautiful landscapes. We are also blessed with valuable resources and the mindful allocation and utilization of the same can drive in economic benefit for our indigenous communities", Awoto expressed.

In 2021, Awoto got involved to the Rural Futures Rewilding – Habitats and Agroforestry project of Balipara Foundation in Sukhai village and since then he has been instrumental in and designing and mobilizing the local folks towards conservation and thereby leading to successful implementation of the project in the remote village.

Designated as a Rural Futures-Forester, Awoto in past two years have supervised the successful restraon drive of 95,643 saplings in 90 hectares of, and implementation of 75 agroforestry plots in 3 villages. He is an inspiration for the local youths of Sukhai and many other hunter youth are being mobilized towards conservation under his mentorship.



Village Level Organisation, Women SHG, Sukhai, Nagaland

The Village Level Organisation, is a 10 member women SHG functioning under the aegis of Sukhai Village Council of Nagaland's Zunheboto district.

The SHG is operating various agricultural and animal husbandry related activities in Sukhai village with support under schemes of the state and central government like National Rural Livelihood Mission. In the past, the VLO SHG facilitated and empowered rural women folks of Sukhai village by providing them economic leverage through livestock and mushroom cultivation, to support their household incomes.

In 2021, the SHG members got inducted to the Rural Futures Rewilding – Habitats and Agroforestry project of Balipara Foundation in Sukhai village. Since then they have been mobilized towards conservation initiatives by getting involved in the habitat restoration programs as community planters which provided them with a seasonal income opportunity of INR 300 as daily wage for approximately a period of three months.

In addition to it, Balipara Foundation also supported the SHG in establishing a community agroforestry plot thereby providing them with

Ginger and Turmeric saplings of 150 kg and 100 kgs respectively. With the successful participation of all women members in the community agroforestry, the SHG in 2023 harvested a total of 400 kgs ginger and 350 kgs of turmeric from the same agroforestry plot. These harvests of the SHG have provided them with an additional income benefit of INR 12,000 from ginger and INR 7000 from turmeric.

Now the VLO is utilizing this economic benefit to establish a rural enterprise for local farm produce from Sukhai as well as a percentage of it is being distributed among the members to support the educational expenses of their children.



Rural Futures Index Survey : In –Depth socio-economic profiling of Sukhai Village

Precursory Brief-

Sukhai village comes under Satakha circle of Zuhneboto district in Nagaland. It is located 25 kms away from the district headquarters of Zuhneboto. The FGD was conducted with 6 women members of the SHG. For the purpose of this document, excerpts from the discussion with the village council have also been included.

Socio-political context-

For the purpose of acknowledgement, it can be considered mandatory to mention that Nagaland is a state of active insurgency. This history of the region has been shaped by the Naga nationalist movement which even at present shapes the political scene. While ceasefire regulations are followed, it does not deny the specific needs of the area as insurgency is a reality in all parts especially in remote areas. While there are little to no known incidents of violence towards villagers, there is suspicion of outside activity. Villages and insurgent outfits both are welcoming towards tourists as over the last few years tourism has been a source of livelihood.



Language and dialect-

Majority of the people speak the Sema dialect. Nagamese is spoken by a few, but it is not the most common language. Nagamese Creole is a language that emerged from the interaction in the haats or marketplaces between the Naga tribes and the communities from the Assam plains. As such, it is the language of currency between tribes, however in context to remote areas such as Zuhneboto which are not connected directly to markets, Nagamese is not the most spoken language.



Discussant Topics & Key Findings

Topics/ Thematics	Key findings
Income and Livelihood	<p>Sustenance farming, foraging, and animal rearing are the most common economic activities.</p> <p>Mithuns are reared commonly due to their low maintenance and significance in the cultural practices, especially those revolving around marriage.</p> <p>In recent times, people are discouraged from keeping mithuns as there has been a spread of disease. There are no veterinary services available close.</p> <p>Chickens, ducks and pigs are also commonly reared.</p> <p>Hunting of wild fowl is practiced widely.</p>
Youth and Migration	<p>Most youth of the village migrate to larger cities like Kohima and Dimapur due to lack of opportunities in the villages.</p> <p>Government jobs such as policemen are also lowly paid. They get an average salary of INR 3000/- month</p> <p>The possibility of the youth coming back is not easily pictured by the people in the village as there is a lack of basic assets as well.</p>
Relationship with nature	<p>Most participants did not express a strong religious connection with nature. As the majority religion is Christianity there are no elements of folklore or religious texts which signify a connection with nature.</p> <p>They expressed a need-based relationship of hunting and foraging from nature for sustenance- consuming and selling forest products.</p>
Environmental challenges	<p>Weather conditions have been changing with extreme winter and summer. However, people did not express vulnerability to environmental changes as they felt the changes were only mild.</p> <p>They have experienced lower yields over the years and crop damage due to weather.</p> <p>When asked what they thought these changes could be attributed to them said they “did not know”</p>
Economic sustenance and forests	<p>Bamboo shoot is the most widely foraged food item. Wild apples are one of the most foraged fruits- used in making dried snacks, juices and wine. However, it is not sold and mostly used in household consumption.</p> <p>Mushrooms are available for foraging and can be made a part of the nutrient profile. The knowledge surrounding the types of mushrooms available needs to be documented and developed on.</p>

Topics/ Thematics	Key findings
Division of labour and gender rights	<p>Land is cleared and jhum is conducted by men. Women are engaged in the planting and harvesting.</p> <p>Women are not part of the village council. Nor are they part of any board in the community conserved areas.</p> <p>Women only participate in the SHGs which are active in almost every village. Apart from the SHGs at the village level, women also participate in State level women's tribe councils which look into matter of violence against women.</p> <p>Generally, women are engaged in work throughout the year. Farming and daily wage labor are two main seasonal occupations.</p>
Land ownership and Allocation	<p>Land is individually and separately owned. With everyone farming their own land. SHGs may come together during harvest season.</p> <p>At the death of the husband, the land is transferred to the son. The wife does not inherit it, but the understanding is that they continue to harvest the land.</p> <p>Tuloni is the harvest festival celebrated during the month of July when the entire clan comes together to celebrate.</p>
Governance and welfare	<p>The Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) provides support for agriculture and livestock.</p> <p>They expressed more knowledge-based workshops would help farmers.</p> <p>There are no specific schemes that they have benefitted from- however they get rice and sugar (occasionally) from ration card (BPL)</p>
Universal Basic Assets	<p>Satakha is the closest block which gives access to basic amenities such as primary, middle and high school and healthcare centres. Satakha is located 10 kms from Sukhai.</p> <p>According to Nagaland Survey 2020 about 10.6% of the State Govt. buses connect the villages of Zunheboto district. Taxi service is the most popular mode of transport and accounts for 99% of transportation between villages.</p> <p>In terms of access to basic amenities within Zunheboto district, there is a large difference in between villages- on average, Ghathashi block is found to have the maximum access while Satakha block has the minimum.</p> <p>Less than 10% of villages in Zunheboto district have access to basic amenities.</p> <p>Zunheboto is the closest market 1 hour away by car.</p> <p>Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI) Government of India SURVEY REPORT ON LOCAL/ BLOCK LEVEL STATISTICS FOR LOCAL LEVEL PLANNING 2020 online access</p> <p>https://statistics.nagaland.gov.in/storage/statistical_data/2020/2651601245766.pdf</p>



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