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Assam • India

LONGDING

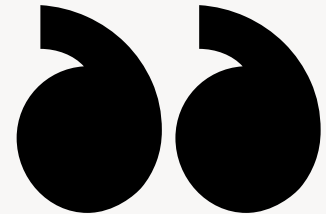
ARUNACHAL PRADESH



EASTERN HIMALAYAN
NATURENOMICS™ FORUM

INTELLIGENCE REPORT

UNDERSTANDING LONGDING



Nestled in the Tirap District of Arunachal Pradesh, Longding is a town and administrative circle known for its breathtaking natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. Covering an area of 233 km², this picturesque region forms part of the Patkai ranges and is enveloped in lush evergreen forests. Longding shares its eastern border with Myanmar, adding to its geographical and cultural significance.



The region has been historically inhabited by the Wancho people, a vibrant tribal community known for their craftsmanship in gun-making, wood carving, and bead-making. Their rich traditions come alive during Oriah, the main festival of the Wancho tribe, celebrated between March and April after the sowing of paddy in jhum cultivation plots.

Longding, now recognized as the most recently created district of Arunachal Pradesh, continues to thrive as a hub of indigenous traditions and natural splendor, making it an essential part of the state's diverse cultural landscape.

POPULATION



According to the 2011 Census, Longding Circle has a population of 16,897 residents, with 4,234 living in urban areas and 12,663 in rural settings. The population density stands at 72.44 inhabitants per square kilometer, with a total of 2,924 households —926 urban and 1,998 rural.

The region exhibits a nearly balanced sex ratio of 997 females for every 1,000 males. However, literacy levels remain a challenge, with an overall literacy rate of 34.87%. Among the literate population, 43.97% are males, while only 25.74% are females, highlighting the need for greater educational outreach, especially for women.

Despite these challenges, Longding's resilient communities and deep-rooted traditions make it a unique and significant part of Arunachal Pradesh's cultural and ecological landscape.

As per the Constitution of India and the Panchayati Raj Act, Longding Circle is administered by a Zilla Parishad and local governing bodies responsible for village administration.

The elected representatives play a crucial role in governance and decision-making for the development of the region.

In Longding Circle, out of the total working population, a significant percentage of workers are engaged in formal employment or earning livelihoods for more than six months in a year, while the remaining population is involved in seasonal or short-term livelihood activities lasting less than six months. The region's economy is primarily driven by agriculture, traditional handicrafts, and forest-based livelihoods, reflecting the strong indigenous practices of the Wancho community.



BIO DIVERSITY

The region's biodiversity thrives under the stewardship of the indigenous Wancho community, whose traditional practices have long supported the sustainable use of natural resources.

Nestled within the Patkai Range, Longding in Arunachal Pradesh is home to a rich and diverse ecosystem shaped by its tropical evergreen and semi-evergreen forests, rolling hills, and river valleys. The region's biodiversity thrives under the stewardship of the indigenous Wancho community, whose traditional practices have long supported the sustainable use of natural resources. The forests of Longding are teeming with valuable tree species such as Hollong, prized for its timber, and Agarwood, known for its fragrant resin. The landscape is further enriched by medicinal plants like Teeta, diverse bamboo species used for construction and handicrafts, and wild edible plants that play a vital role in the local diet. Rhododendrons paint the higher elevations with seasonal bursts of color, while orchids, including Dendrobium and Cymbidium species, flourish in the humid forest canopies. Cane varieties, essential for furniture and traditional crafts, add to the region's botanical wealth.

The wildlife of Longding is just as remarkable, with its forests forming part of an important elephant corridor stretching from Assam's Joypur Rainforest through Tirap and into Nagaland, allowing Asian elephants to migrate freely. The region shelters elusive and threatened species such as the Clouded Leopard and the Red Panda, while the Himalayan Black Bear and the agile Goral navigate its rugged terrains. The forests also provide sanctuary for rare birds, including the endangered White Winged Wood Duck, the critically endangered Bengal Florican, and the striking Temminck's Tragopan. The presence of unique species like the Mishmi Wren Babbler highlights Longding's importance as a biodiversity hotspot. In addition, the forests are home to a vast array of reptiles, amphibians, butterflies, and other insects, further contributing to its ecological significance.

Despite its rich natural heritage, Longding faces conservation challenges due to deforestation, habitat degradation, agricultural expansion and the practice of hunting. However, the Wancho community's deep-rooted knowledge of forest management and resource sustainability continues to play a crucial role in preserving its biodiversity. Integrating indigenous wisdom with conservation efforts could ensure the long-term survival of Longding's rich flora and fauna, securing its place as an ecological treasure trove of Arunachal Pradesh.



INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE REGION

Longding is home to the Wanchos tribe, one of the major indigenous communities of Arunachal Pradesh, known for their rich cultural heritage, traditional craftsmanship, and deep connection to the land. The Wanchos have historically been self-sufficient, relying on shifting (jhum) cultivation for sustenance while maintaining strong communal bonds. Their agricultural practices, though evolving, still reflect a deep understanding of the region's ecology, balancing resource use with environmental conservation. The community is renowned for its intricate wood carving, beadwork, and gun-making—a craft that holds historical significance. The vibrant Oriah festival, celebrated in March-April, is a major cultural event where the Wanchos express gratitude to nature through

traditional dances, songs, and rituals, reinforcing their spiritual bond with the environment. Despite modernization, the Wanchos continue to preserve their ancestral traditions while adapting to contemporary challenges, making them key players in conservation efforts and sustainable development in Longding.



RURAL ECONOMY

The rural economy of Longding is primarily agrarian, with the majority of the population engaged in traditional shifting (jhum) cultivation. Rice, maize, millets, and a variety of vegetables form the backbone of local agriculture, sustaining households and contributing to food security. Alongside farming, the collection of forest products such as medicinal plants, wild fruits, and bamboo plays a crucial role in livelihoods.

The Wancho community, known for its craftsmanship, particularly wood carving, beadwork, and gun-making, serves not only as cultural expressions but also provides economic opportunities. Livestock rearing, including poultry and pig farming, further supplements household incomes. With limited infrastructure and market access,

economic activities remain largely subsistence-based, though initiatives in farming, eco-tourism and skill development have the potential to boost livelihoods. The growing emphasis on community-led conservation and government support for rural development are gradually shaping Longding's economic landscape toward a more resilient and diversified future.

Longding is not widely known as a major tourist destination, but it holds potential for eco-tourism and cultural tourism due to its rich biodiversity, scenic landscapes, and vibrant indigenous heritage. If sustainable tourism initiatives are promoted, Longding could emerge as a destination for responsible travelers seeking immersive cultural experiences and unspoiled natural beauty.

TRADITIONAL HUNTING PRACTICES AND CONSERVATION CHALLENGES

Hunting has traditionally been an integral part of the cultural and subsistence practices of the indigenous Wancho community in Longding. For generations, hunting was not only a means of securing food but also deeply embedded in social customs, with certain rituals and festivals incorporating elements of hunting as a demonstration of skill and bravery. However, with modernization, population growth, and increasing pressure on wildlife, traditional hunting practices have contributed to a decline in biodiversity. Many species, including birds, deer, and small mammals, have faced population threats due to overhunting.

In recent years, conservation awareness has been growing, with efforts from the government, NGOs, and community-based organizations encouraging sustainable alternatives to hunting. Some local youth and village councils have taken initiatives to promote wildlife protection, advocating for the preservation of Longding's rich biodiversity while also respecting the community's cultural heritage. Balancing tradition with conservation remains a challenge, but growing environmental consciousness is slowly shaping a shift towards more sustainable practices.

RURAL FUTURES INDEX SURVEY: *IN-DEPTH SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILING OF BISWANATH VILLAGE*

The Balipara Foundation carried out an in-depth research survey using secondary sources such as government records, newspaper reports, and interviews with local residents. The study sought to emphasize the deep connection between nature and the economic as well as cultural well-being of indigenous and rural communities. By analyzing these sources, the research traced the evolving relationship between the community and its natural surroundings, assessing shifts in perceptions and the well-being of indigenous farmers and local forest authorities. It also explored the interplay between social, economic, and cultural well-being with ecological factors, offering a comprehensive perspective on human satisfaction and overall well-being in Longding.

SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT



Governance and Administration

As one of Arunachal Pradesh's newest districts, Longding has a dynamic socio-political landscape shaped by its indigenous communities, geographical location, and historical influences. Governance in the region is a blend of traditional tribal systems and modern democratic structures. Customary laws remain deeply ingrained, with village councils playing a pivotal role in dispute resolution and social order. Leadership is traditionally vested in Wanghams (village chiefs), who, along with a council of elders

and warriors, oversee decision-making, conflict mediation, and the preservation of cultural practices. Clans further structure the community, each with distinct roles and responsibilities. However, Longding's proximity to the India-Myanmar border has made it susceptible to security challenges, including insurgent activities, which impact stability and development. To address these issues, government initiatives, including the Panchayati Raj system, focus on integrating the district

into broader development frameworks while safeguarding its cultural heritage. Political participation has been steadily increasing, accompanied by efforts to enhance infrastructure, education, and livelihood opportunities. Despite challenges like limited connectivity and economic diversification, the district continues to navigate its socio-political complexities, striving for sustainable growth and stronger representation in state affairs.



Cultural Diversity

Longding is rich in cultural diversity, deeply influenced by the traditions of the Wancho tribe, its primary inhabitants. The Wancho people have a distinct cultural identity, reflected in their vibrant festivals, intricate craftsmanship, and strong oral traditions. Oriah, their most significant festival, is celebrated with great enthusiasm, featuring community feasts, traditional dances, and rituals that honor their ancestors and deities. The Wanchos are skilled artisans, known for their wood carvings, beadwork, and gun-making—a craft historically linked to their warrior heritage.

The region's cultural landscape is also shaped by interactions with neighboring tribes and communities, leading to a fusion of indigenous traditions with modern influences. Music and storytelling play a vital role in preserving folklore, while traditional governance structures continue to coexist with contemporary political systems. Despite modernization, the people of Longding have managed to retain their unique customs, ensuring that their rich cultural heritage remains a vital part of their identity.



Social Structure

The social structure of Longding is predominantly patriarchal, with leadership, inheritance, and decision-making largely vested in men. The Wangham (village chief) and council of elders, primarily composed of men, play a central role in governance and conflict resolution. While women contribute significantly to agriculture, household management, and traditional crafts, their participation in leadership and decision-making remains limited. However, women hold an essential role in preserving cultural heritage, passing down oral traditions, and maintaining social cohesion within the community. Despite the strong patriarchal norms, modernization and external influences are gradually shaping gender roles in the region.

Infrastructure and Development

Longding has witnessed notable infrastructure and development initiatives since its establishment as a district in 2012. Recognizing the region's rich agricultural and horticultural potential, the state government has actively promoted double cropping and the cultivation of crops like rice, millet, maize and betel nuts to boost the local economy. To enhance connectivity, significant road projects have been undertaken, such as the construction of the Satinaguri-

Longding road via Kanubari, Banfera, Wanu and Zedua, and the improvement of the Longding-Pumao road. These infrastructure developments aim to integrate Longding more effectively with neighboring regions, facilitating trade and access to essential services.

Additionally, efforts have been directed towards improving the agricultural sector, with studies examining government measures to enhance farming practices and farmer satisfaction in the district. Collectively, these initiatives underscore a commitment to the comprehensive development of Longding, focusing on both economic growth and infrastructural advancement.



Conservation and Environment

Longding, like many parts of Arunachal Pradesh, faces significant environmental challenges due to unsustainable land-use practices and limited awareness of conservation. The region's hills and valleys have been heavily deforested over the years, primarily due to shifting cultivation (jhum), slash-and-burn agriculture, and unregulated extraction of forest resources. As forests shrink, soil erosion and land degradation have intensified, reducing agricultural productivity and threatening local.



Hunting, a traditional practice in the area, further impacts wildlife populations, leading to ecological imbalances. Despite these challenges, conservation awareness remains low among many communities, with limited access to alternative sustainable livelihoods. However, integrating community-driven conservation initiatives, promoting agroforestry, and introducing sustainable farming techniques can help restore degraded landscapes while ensuring ecological and economic resilience for the people of Longding.

DISCUSSANT TOPICS & KEY FINDINGS



Income and Livelihood

Longding's economy is primarily agrarian, with most of the population engaged in traditional farming and allied activities for their livelihood. Shifting cultivation (jhum) remains a predominant practice, though it has led to soil degradation and declining productivity over time. Farmers grow rice, maize, millet, and vegetables, while cash crops like betel nut and tea are gaining prominence as alternative income sources. Livestock rearing, particularly poultry and pig farming, provides supplementary income for many households. Small-scale trade, handicrafts, and forest-based livelihoods, including the collection of medicinal plants and non-timber forest products, also contribute to the local economy.

However, due to limited infrastructure and market access, economic opportunities remain constrained. To improve livelihoods, there is potential for introducing sustainable agricultural practices, agroforestry, and value-added processing of local produce, which could enhance income stability and economic resilience for the people of Longding.

In Longding, income and livelihood patterns are closely connected to its rural environment and cultural diversity. The community's dependence on agriculture, tourism and traditional skills, along with the active involvement of women, shapes a distinctive economic landscape that mirrors the vibrant heritage of an Eastern Himalayan town.

Deforestation Patterns

Deforestation in Longding follows a pattern closely linked to traditional land-use practices, population pressure, and limited economic alternatives. Shifting cultivation (jhum) is the primary driver, where forests are cleared and burned for agriculture, only to be abandoned after a few years due to soil depletion. However, with increasing land constraints, the fallow period has significantly reduced, leading to persistent land degradation and loss of forest cover. Additionally, logging for timber, firewood collection, and expanding settlements have

accelerated deforestation across the district. The hilly terrain, once covered in dense forests, is now marked by patches of degraded land and secondary vegetation struggling to regenerate. Hunting and unsustainable extraction of forest resources further disrupt the ecosystem. Without targeted conservation efforts and sustainable land management interventions, Longding's forests may continue to decline, exacerbating soil erosion, biodiversity loss, and climate vulnerabilities for local communities.

Climatic conditions of the region

Longding experiences a humid subtropical climate with distinct seasonal variations influenced by its hilly terrain and proximity to the Eastern Himalayas. The region receives heavy rainfall during the monsoon season (June to September), with annual precipitation exceeding 2,500 mm, making it prone to landslides and soil erosion. Summers (March to May) are warm and humid, with temperatures ranging from 20°C to 35°C, while winters (November to February) are relatively cool, with temperatures dropping to around 5°C in higher elevations. The high humidity and persistent rainfall contribute to lush vegetation, but also accelerate soil degradation in deforested areas. Climate change is increasingly impacting Longding, leading to erratic rainfall patterns, prolonged dry spells, and increased risks of extreme weather events, posing challenges for agriculture, water availability, and overall ecological stability.

Climate vulnerabilities

Longding is highly vulnerable to climate change due to its fragile hilly terrain, heavy dependence on rain-fed agriculture, and ongoing deforestation. Erratic rainfall patterns, prolonged dry spells, and unseasonal weather fluctuations have disrupted traditional farming cycles, affecting crop yields and food security. Intense monsoon rains often trigger landslides and soil erosion, especially in deforested areas, further degrading agricultural land and damaging infrastructure. Rising temperatures and changing precipitation trends also threaten water availability, making it harder for communities to sustain livelihoods. Additionally, climate-induced habitat changes are impacting biodiversity, leading to shifts in local flora and fauna. With limited climate adaptation strategies in place, Longding's communities face increasing risks to their economy, food systems, and overall resilience. Urgent interventions in sustainable land management, agroforestry, and climate-resilient farming are needed to mitigate these vulnerabilities and ensure long-term environmental and economic stability.

Transport and Communication

Transport and communication in Longding remain challenging due to its remote location and hilly terrain. Road connectivity has improved in recent years, with key projects like the Satinaguri-Longding road and the Longding-Pumao road enhancing access to neighboring districts. However, many interior villages still rely on poorly maintained roads, making transportation difficult, especially during the monsoon when landslides and heavy rainfall often disrupt movement. Public transport options are limited, and private vehicles are the primary means of travel. The nearest railway station is in Naharkatia, Assam, approximately 70 km away, providing connectivity to major cities.

The closest airport is Dibrugarh Airport, around 140 km from Longding, offering flights to Guwahati, Kolkata, and other major hubs. The nearest major town is Khonsa, the headquarters of Tirap district, which serves as a commercial and administrative center for the region. Mobile network coverage and internet access have expanded but remain inconsistent in remote areas, affecting digital connectivity and access to information. While efforts are being made to improve infrastructure, further investment in all-weather roads, bridges, and communication networks is essential to support economic activities, education, and overall development in Longding.



Our Engagements in Longding

The Balipara Foundation, in collaboration with the Wancho Literary Mission, hosted the Regional Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics™ Forum in Longding, Arunachal Pradesh, on 20th February 2025. The Forum, titled "Promoting Awareness on Hunting and Exploring Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities," took place at Kamua Noknu Village, providing a vital platform for community members to share their perspectives on nature and biodiversity. The discussions highlighted their innovative conflict management strategies and solutions to climate-related

challenges, emphasizing their deep-rooted connection to the environment and commitment to conservation. The Forum also explored sustainable livelihood opportunities, with participants expressing keen interest in agroforestry, habitat restoration, and sustainable income-generating practices such as poultry farming and fisheries. These discussions underscored the community's willingness to transition toward environmentally friendly and economically viable alternatives to traditional hunting practices.

COMMUNITY CASE STORY



Pioneers of Sustainable Livelihoods in Kamua Noknu Village in Longding

In the heart of Kamua Noknu village, where traditional practices dominate and alternative livelihoods are scarce, Senyai Losu stands out as an example of being the only person in the entire village of Kamua Noknu to be engaged in fishery. He took the bold step of rearing local fish species in a small yet thriving pond—just 2 meters deep and 10 feet by 5 feet in size.

Despite limited resources and no formal training, he remains dedicated to his work, proving that even small-scale fisheries can contribute to sustainable income. His journey is not just about personal gain but about setting an example—showing his fellow villagers that self-sufficiency is possible through sustainable, locally adapted methods. With the right support, Senyai hopes to expand his fishery, ensuring that local fish species continue to thrive while creating economic opportunities for his community.

While many in Longding depend on hunting and shifting cultivation for survival, Khojum Dokam saw a different future—one rooted in sustainability. He started his poultry farm with 50 hens, selling fresh eggs to nearby villages. What began as a small initiative has now sparked a vision for something much greater.

Khojum is determined to expand his farm and involve more from his community, proving that poultry farming can be a viable alternative livelihood. With consistent effort, he dreams of creating a self-sustaining model where local youth and families can participate, reducing dependence on unsustainable practices and ensuring a stable income source for his community.





A RIPPLE EFFECT OF CHANGE

Both Senyai Losu and Khojum Dokam embody the spirit of resilience and innovation. Their efforts demonstrate that with determination and sustainable practices, communities can thrive without harming their environment. As more villagers take inspiration from their success, Longding is on the path toward a future where livelihoods flourish in harmony with nature.

Their stories remind us that change begins with one person—and one bold step toward sustainability.

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