

Voices from Nagaland



At the Innovation Center, we are continually inspired by partners who integrate youth leadership and youth-adult partnerships into their community development and social justice work. One such partner is Seno Tsuhah, a young woman leader from the village of Chizami in Nagaland, a remote state of northeastern India. Nestled between the foothills of the Himalayas and the Burmese border, Nagaland has a rich cultural and social tradition and a complex history of political unrest.

We met Seno and her organization, the North East Network (NEN) through the International Youth Development Exchange Program organized by the Innovation Center and our Indian partner [CREA](#) in 2002. This month we share the story of how Seno and her community have adopted youth development and youth leadership to achieve human rights and community development.

Seno is a member of the Chakhesang tribe of Nagaland, one of several small ethnic communities in the state



Seno describes herself as "...passionate and concerned about the wellbeing of my community, especially the women and the natural resources of my native land. I was always involved with voluntary activities of the school, village, church particularly through the Chizami Women Society and the North East Network who inspired me to do community development work and gave me the space to explore and develop my skills as a young community leader."

Seno's dedication to her community is palpable. In her own words: "My community is special and cohesive because of the goodwill, sense of sharing, togetherness, rich cultural heritage and belongingness within the community members. People are peace loving. The community is hard working, hospitable and democratic. The people still live very closely in harmony with nature and have rich traditional knowledge for a sustainable future."

However, Seno's region and community face myriad challenges, including adverse impacts of more than sixty years of unrest, negative effects of globalization, growing corruption and weak governance, and more recently, increasing violence against women, substance abuse, and extortion. According to Seno, the community is struggling to overcome the social tensions and problems caused by growing inequality between rich and the poor. In this context, the [North East Network](#) works to improve health, livelihood, human rights, natural resource management and achieve peace through alternative means.



Seno's participation in the Innovation Center's and CREA's international youth development exchange prompted her to see the potential of engaging youth as agents for change in her community. According to Seno: "After the program, I was more confident as a leader to adopt new approaches in my community work. Before going to the Innovation Center, my focus was only on women...however, I realized the value of building youth leadership skills after meeting and interacting with young leaders in USA. Since then I have been working with great zeal and enthusiasm to engage young people in my village to take up community development work. In particular, the two important concepts of youth-adult partnership and [using an] asset-based approach have helped us."

Seno and her colleagues established a local resource center exclusively focused on engaging youth in community change. Now managed by a team of young people performing different leadership roles, the resource center runs programs to engage youth through creative and performing arts, livelihood initiatives and other outreach. The results have been impressive: according to Seno, many youth leaders have emerged and the center has opened up new, unconventional career options. For example, one young man attended a workshop where he discovered the fascinating world of creative arts. Eventually, he put these skills to work by illustrating educational materials for local agencies. Another young woman, a former program participant, now leads food processing and baking programs for other young people, and manages 'Chizami Weaves' - a livelihood program of NEN where 200 weavers are involved.

Most importantly, young people and adult community members now recognize the value of youth leadership, while young people are regaining their sense of community connectedness and preserving their cultural heritage. As Seno notes: "Young people, when given a chance can make remarkable changes for themselves and the community they live in. We can harness the hidden talents amongst the youth and provide them the platform to excel in their fields and make them leaders for social change."

With this vision in mind, Seno and her colleagues are expanding their program to provide further social, technical and financial training, and are seeking opportunities to engage their young people- particularly young women-in educational and exchange initiatives to build their leadership and capacity to carry on the work into the future.



To learn more about the work of Seno and her colleagues in the NEN Resource Center visit the [NEN Website](#).

To learn more about free resources used by Seno and our other partners, go to the [Innovation Center Website](#).

