

PRESS RELEASE



Meghalaya partners with BAKDIL to enhance Early Childhood Development (ECD) interventions in Garo Hills region

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In a significant move toward strengthening community-led early childhood development (ECD) initiatives, the Government of Meghalaya signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with BAKDIL, the social service wing of the Catholic Diocese of Tura. The MoU was signed in the presence of Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Conrad K. Sangma during an ECD inaugural programme held at St. Luke's Church, Tura today.



The agreement formalises a two-year collaboration under which Parish Priests, Village Catechists, Pocharoks, and Touring Sisters will work alongside the Meghalaya Early Childhood Development Mission (MECDM) to promote nurturing care, maternal health, and early learning across the five districts of Garo Hills- East Garo Hills, West Garo Hills, South Garo Hills, North Garo Hills and South West Garo Hills.

The MoU was signed by Shri Sampath Kumar, IAS, Principal Secretary & Development Commissioner, and Rt. Rev. Andrew R. Marak, Bishop of Tura Diocese. Mr. Ronald Kynta, Chief Operations Officer, MECDM, and Fr. Cyril Sangma, Director of BAKDIL, were also present.



The programme highlighted the unique opportunity to align faith-based values with the science of early childhood development, emphasising that holistic interventions during the first eight years of life are key to unlocking a child's full potential. MECDM's collaboration with BAKDIL will integrate ECD concepts into premarital courses, church gatherings, and community outreach, leveraging the trusted position of religious institutions.

The event saw the participation of over 100 individuals, including Parish Priests, Touring Sisters, SHG representatives managed by BAKDIL, and senior officials such as Shri Vibhor Agarwal, IAS, Deputy Commissioner, West Garo Hills, Smti. Rikse R. Marak, MCS, Joint Secretary, CM's Secretariat Tura, and Shri Abraham T Sangma, IPS, SP West Garo Hills.

In his keynote address, Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Conrad K. Sangma, who was the chief guest, underscored the importance of situating ECD within a life-cycle approach to human development. He remarked: *"This program is part of a larger picture—and that larger picture is the life of an individual, from the moment of conception to the realisation of their full potential as adults."*

The Chief Minister also showcased Meghalaya's digital governance tools—such as the MOTHER dashboard and MMDSL—highlighting how real-time data is enabling more responsive maternal and child health interventions. He affirmed the state's belief that investing in early years yields lasting returns, adding: "Be rest assured, what you are doing today will be a game-changer for generations to come."

The welcome address by Fr. Cyril Sangma, Director, BAKDIL, traced the roots of the collaboration to field-level interactions with the Development Commissioner and emphasised that, "The goal is to assist children in realising their full potential. The Church is ready to extend its support—this programme cannot succeed without your involvement."

In his address, Rt. Rev. Andrew R. Marak, Bishop of Tura Diocese, reiterated the importance of collective action, stating: "It is crucial to work together for the betterment of our people."

The event also featured a cultural performance by Balkasin SHG, who presented a hymn and their theme song to underscore the message of collective responsibility.



Introducing the ECD Mission, Shri Sampath Kumar, Principal Secretary and Development Commissioner, explained the long-term societal benefits of investing in the first 1,000 days of a child's life. Drawing from both scriptural wisdom and neuroscientific evidence, he stressed the importance of early investment to harness Meghalaya's demographic dividend. "Proverbs 22:6 reminds us: 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.' That is the power of early guidance." He encouraged Parish Priests and Touring Sisters to use weekly meetings as spaces for ECD outreach, drawing parallels between churches and village institutions like SHGs and VHCs.

The second session began with a hands-on brain wiring activity for participants, illustrating the difference between nurturing and toxic caregiving environments. Discussions followed on maternal health—framing it as central to child development. Six critical concerns were discussed, including maternal anaemia, mental health, birth spacing, and nutrition, as well as the need for equitable parenting roles.



Field stories highlighted the complex realities of young mothers, barriers to care-seeking, and the importance of shifting social norms around adolescent pregnancy.

Concluding the event, Fr. Cyril Sangma clarified the roles of religious leaders in the partnership, including supporting home visits, sharing information after Mass, and participating in upcoming training—“You are not alone—we will ensure you are supported and trained. Together, we can build stronger, healthier communities.”

This collaboration with BAKDIL builds upon the success of last year’s partnership with A’chik Baptist Dal’gipa Krima (ABDK), where over 200 women church leaders were sensitised on ECD, making Meghalaya one of the few states to systematically engage faith institutions for early childhood development.