

# ANNUAL REPORT 2012- 2013



North East Slow Food &  
Agrobiodiversity Society

**Content:** Nesfas Team

**Photographs:**

NESFAS/ Adrian Marbaniang

NESFAS/Kunal Chandra

NESFAS/Rahul Antao

NESFAS/Annelie Bernhart

**Published by:**



**North East Slow Food & Agrobiodiversity Society**

Kerie Ville, Arbuthnott Road, Laitumkhrach

Shillong 793003, Meghalaya, India

Tel. +91 8575016289/ +91 36100868

[www.nesfas.org](http://www.nesfas.org)

**Edited & Designed by:**



**Ground Zero+**

[www.groundzeroplus.org](http://www.groundzeroplus.org)

[radha@groundzeroplus.org](mailto:radha@groundzeroplus.org)

# Annual Report 2012-2013



North East Slow Food and  
Agrobiodiversity Society



# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	.....	<b>6</b>
<b>Philosophy</b>	.....	<b>7</b>
<b>NESFAS Background</b>	.....	<b>8</b>
<b>The NESFAS Board</b>	.....	<b>9</b>
<b>Overview of Activities 2012-2013</b>	.....	<b>10</b>
<b>Activities - April 2012 - March 2013</b>	.....	<b>14</b>
<b>Communications and Advocacy</b>	.....	<b>15</b>
Advocacy - local and regional	.....	15
<i>Local Mei Ram-ew Festivals</i>	.....	16
<i>Mei Ram-ew day in Mawphlang</i>	.....	17
Advocacy - national and international level	.....	20
<b>Establishment and Expansion of Networks</b>	.....	<b>21</b>
Millet Network	.....	21
Pollinators' Network	.....	22
Shifting Cultivation Network	.....	22
<b>Capacity Building &amp; Documentation</b>	.....	<b>23</b>
Indigenous Storytellers	.....	25
Youth Involvement	.....	26
Slow Food activities	.....	27
Indigenous Cafés (Slow Cafés)	.....	28
<b>Science–Traditional Knowledge Dialogue     for Agroecological Solutions</b>	.....	<b>29</b>
<b>Financial Overview 2012-2013</b>	.....	<b>30</b>



# Foreword

This is the first Annual Report of the North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society (NESFAS) for the financial period ending on 31 March 2013.

The initiator of the organization, the Rome based Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty (the Indigenous Partnership) supports Indigenous Peoples and their local communities to celebrate, defend and revitalize their local food systems and agricultural practices through research, participatory initiatives and associated advocacy activities. Inspired by the Food festival initiatives of the Christensen Fund in the African Rift Valley, Ethiopia, the Partnership held its first Food festival in Mawphlang in North East India in 2010 in line with the Slow Food Terra Madre Day (Mother Earth in Italian) that is celebrated worldwide every year in December. The Founder of the Slow Food movement, whose call for all to be reconnected to the pleasure of local food caught the imagination of thousands across the world, was present at the Mawphlang Food Festival as its Chief Guest. The interest shown by the participating communities and the support that the general public gave, convinced both these organizations that they need to work together around the theme of promoting local cuisines, agrobiodiversity and the pleasure of natural food. The North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society (NESFAS) was born out of the common interest of these two organisations.

NESFAS, in its first phase has focused on building the ground for those communities that will co-host the Indigenous Terra Madre 2015 (ITM 2015).

The numerous food festivals that have been held in Meghalaya since 2010 and persistently throughout 2012 & 2013 have indeed proven to be successful entry points for bringing communities together in order to celebrate traditional cuisines and to reaffirm pride in local Agrobiodiversity. Feeling reminded of the pleasure perceived through unique cuisines, these festivals motivated communities to take grassroots action such as documenting their diverse species and to take ownership for biocultural conservation. At the same time, these events gave way to discussing common problems and finding sustainable solutions that involve traditional knowledge and modern science.

The initial grant from the Government of Meghalaya has enabled NESFAS to work with agrobiodiversity advocacy, hold exchange visits, employ field consultants and organize the annual Mei Ram-ew festival for which we are extremely thankful. The generous support by the Indigenous Partnership, Slow Food International, and the two International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) funded projects - Meghalaya Rural Development Society (MRDS) and North East Region Community Resource Management (NERCOMRP) - for organizing grassroots events have significantly contributed to the network. Though working in the initial stages, NESFAS is evolving constantly, especially on a grassroots level where new activities are generated regularly. We are also very grateful for the local support we have received from the William Boys Home, Mawphlang, Hima Mawphlang and the students of the University of Gastronomic Sciences, Pollenzo, Italy, University of Kent, UK, Synod College, Shillong, Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU), Shillong and St. Edmund's College, Shillong.

The activities of NESFAS in the field are growing from day to day and we are encouraged by the all round support. We have, for example, two custodian farmers who, together, have knowledge about more than 100 different plants species and who have inspired others to exchange seeds and join the network of custodian farmers. Likewise, we feel proud of those communities that have on their own taken up the initiative of conserving their rich heritage by the simple act of growing a variety of food and sharing this knowledge through a variety of NESFAS' activities such as Biodiversity Walks, Seed Fairs or planning of Slow Cafés etc. These activities will be appropriately highlighted in our next Annual Report.

We hope you will enjoy this Annual Report and, as always, we look forward to your comments, suggestions and proactive support in a cause that is for the well being of all and especially of those invisible guardians and knowledge holders of the rich biocultural diversity of North East India.

Phrang Roy  
Chairman, NESFAS

# Philosophy

The mission of NESFAS is to connect people to the pleasures of tasty, local food that is inextricable from our responsibility towards the environment and the preservation of agrobiodiversity.

In doing so, the organization attempts to create a platform where grassroots peoples can voice their opinions, exchange knowledge amongst each other and reaffirm pride in their local food systems. NESFAS believes that food, when responsibly produced, protects the environment, enhances our health and well being and highlights the role of women as custodians of our agrobiodiversity and our food ways.

In this way, NESFAS therefore envisions a future where our food systems are defined by a strong bond between people, planet, plate and culture.



# NESFAS Background

NESFAS (The North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society) was established in March 21st, 2012 and is registered under the Meghalaya Societies Registration Act, XII of 1983 with number SR/NESFAS-5/12 OF 2012.

NESFAS emerged as an outcome of the collaborative activities between the Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty (The Indigenous Partnership) and Slow Food International. While Slow Food brings into play the importance of pleasure through good, clean and fair food, which goes hand in hand with our responsibility towards the environment, the Indigenous Partnership reaffirms the importance of local food systems and the age old role of Indigenous Peoples as guardians of agro biodiversity which is inextricably linked to their cultural identity and their rights towards food sovereignty and food security.

NESFAS attempts to bring together partners from different sectors that can help in the enhancement of agrobiodiversity, leading to food sovereignty.

As a platform, NESFAS believes that traditional ecological knowledge is equally important to modern science and therefore facilitates a mutually respectful dialogue for sustainable progress.

NESFAS especially focuses on facilitating community-level networks to empower local communities to celebrate and defend their diverse food and agricultural practices and to have a say at local, national and international levels for food policies that will sustain their well-being and protect their lands, territories and resources.

NESFAS is a platform to promote the importance of local agricultural practices for livelihood and well-being of local communities. It does so by connecting people to the pleasure and importance of local food that is:

- responsibly produced,
- protects environment and land,
- preserves biodiversity and cultural practices and knowledge,
- enhances our health and the well-being of local communities,
- reaffirms pride in traditional culture and identity,
- recognizes the role of women as custodians of local cuisines and food ways.

# The NESFAS Board

The Board of Directors of NESFAS currently has 11 members from diverse professional and social backgrounds.

	Board Members	Designation
1	Mr. Phrang Roy	Chairman, NESFAS
2	Dr. A. K. Nongkynrih	Professor of Sociology, North East Hills University (NEHU), Shillong.
3	Dr. Glenn Kharkongor	Pro Vice Chancellor, Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU), Shillong.
4	Mr. Priak Riahtam	Executive Director, Khadarshnong Socio Organisation (KSO), Sohra – a civil society organisation for the upliftment of the rural people of East Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya.
5	Ms. Bibiana Raneer	Grassroot Activist from Nongtraw Village, East Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya.
6	Ms. Patricia, Mukhim	Journalist, promoter of local food and Editor, The Shillong Times.
7	Ms. Anita Roy, Former Teacher	AMBRIT, International School, Rome, interior designer, resource mobilisation campaigner and creative cook, Slow Food member.
8	Mr. G. P. Wahlang	IAS (Retd), Former Chief Information Commissioner, Meghalaya Information Commission.
9	Ms. Jarjum Ete	Indigenous women's leader of Arunachal Pradesh and currently Chairperson of the Arunachal Pradesh State Commission on Women.
10	Ms. Rose Dzuvichu	Adviser to the Mothers' of Nagaland Organisation.
11	Ms. Wansalan Passah	Acting Director and Member Secretary, North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society.

# Overview of Activities 2012-2013

<i>Activity &amp; Description</i>	<i>Highlights</i>	<i>Impact / Outcomes</i>
<p><b>Connecting with Communities</b></p> <p>NESFAS initiates its work as a grassroots platform by visiting communities identified as potential protectors and promoters of traditional food, local cuisines and agrobiodiversity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 22 communities visited and their response to the idea of a network documented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communities participate in Mei Ram-ew where they displayed their unique food items and participated in thematic workshops</li> <li>▪ 2 communities have started school gardens.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Local Mei Ram-ew festivals</b></p> <p>Mei Ram-ew (Mother Earth) festivals at community level serve as an excellent entry point for creating awareness of agrobiodiversity and to promote exchanges and discussions at the absolute grassroots level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 31 festivals held across the districts of Jaintia hills, West Khasi hills and East Khasi hills covering more than 150 villages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The festivals helped in bringing out some of the unique crops and cuisines that were almost forgotten. These now come under the community's purview for revitalization.</li> <li>▪ More than 150 of disappearing crops have been documented</li> <li>▪ A greater awareness generated on the importance of local foods for food security and well-being.</li> <li>▪ Communities initiate their own small events and take ownership for the preparations of the Indigenous Terra Madre-2015.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mei Ram-ew day in Mawphlang</b></p> <p>The event hosted a variety of stakeholders and visitors who came to taste, experience and learn about traditional foods and their medicinal and culinary use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 3000 visitors participate in the Mei Ram-ew</li> <li>▪ Homestays for 195 participants were hosted by the local community</li> <li>▪ Seminar organised and presided by farmers. Topics ranged across Shifting cultivation, soil fertility, youth and their role in preserving culture and biodiversity, as well as revival of forgotten crops and traditions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 200 varieties of edible food crops were documented in local language together with their English and scientific names for most of them.</li> <li>▪ Recipes of more than 150 dishes were recorded in written form.</li> <li>▪ A declaration that includes the opinion of all participants was produced and distributed to the public and governmental bodies</li> </ul>

<i>Activity &amp; Description</i>	<i>Highlights</i>	<i>Impact / Outcomes</i>
<p><b>International Terra Madre</b></p> <p>In October, 2013 the 4th edition of the annual Terra Madre was held in Turin, Italy to bring together Slow Foods food communities from across the globe.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 13 representatives from the North East of India presented the largest number of delegates within the entire Slow Food movement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Concerns of North East Indigenous Peoples highlighted and shared with an international community</li> <li>▪ Highlighting of indigenous cuisines and agrobiodiversity at an international level.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Establishment and Expansion of Networks</b></p> <p>NESFAS initiates 3 networks emerging from the communities' sharing of concerns and priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Millet Networks</li> <li>▪ Pollinators' Network</li> <li>▪ Shifting Cultivation Network</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ NESFAS connects with North East Network (NEN), Nagaland</li> <li>▪ NESFAS begins working with millet producers in three districts of Manipur &amp; Assam as well as in two districts of Garo Hills</li> <li>▪ NESFAS deepens the discussion on millet in East Khasi hills</li> <li>▪ NESFAS begins working with communities through nodal institutions, societies and organisations to document and review the many issues revolving around pollinators</li> <li>▪ Documentation to give a deeper understanding of how NESFAS can move forward on shifting cultivation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 10 communities/villages in the Khatarshnong (East Khasi hills area are actively involved in reviving millet and are recognised for the increase in production by 25% within the pilot area of Khatarshnong, where the millet network started</li> <li>▪ 3 villages in Garo hills that are millet producers come under the NESFAS umbrella</li> <li>▪ Existing beekeepers' societies (Kshaid Beekeepers Society) have approached NESFAS to collaborate further.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Capacity Building</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participation of community members and their representatives in an exposure trip to South India.</li> <li>▪ Participation in an international workshop on plant conservation biology and visit to Bioversity International, Delhi.</li> <li>▪ Internal capacity building during team workshop with former Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) consultant in Cherrapunji.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Purchase of a millet processing machine with support of MRDS</li> <li>▪ Initiation of seed fairs and seed exchange in East Khasi hills and a plan for further capacity building of custodian farmers</li> <li>▪ Identification of the first custodian farmers .</li> </ul>

## Overview of Activities 2012-2013 (contd..)

<i>Activity &amp; Description</i>	<i>Highlights</i>	<i>Impact / Outcomes</i>
<p><b>Documentation</b></p> <p>NESFAS has taken collaborative measures to document food festivals, storytellers, agricultural practices, cultural diversity, plants and ethno-botanical information and of other related activities and events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Local and scientific names of more than 200 different edible crops documented</li> <li>▪ 100 wild vegetables that are threatened documented in Sheilla Block, East Khasi hills</li> <li>▪ a thematic photo documentation archive of more than 1000 pictures created</li> <li>▪ 150 local recipes documented.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 4 villages gather to document local seed saving practices in Khatarshnong cluster</li> <li>▪ 5 villages in Jaintia Hills participate in documenting wild edibles together with their cultural background and challenges.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Slow Food activities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Documentation for 10 Ark of Taste and Presidia products initiated.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Khasi Mandarin enters Slow Food's Presidia</li> <li>▪ Sha Shashiakrot under the evaluation in the commission of Slow Food's Ark of Taste.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Slow Food Cafés</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Workshop for young start-up entrepreneurs conducted.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 3 groups from Tyrna and Sohra ideate on starting Indigenous Cafés.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Youth involvement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Biodiversity Walks</li> <li>▪ Wild vegetable festivals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 2 school gardens set-up and plan for further 2 gardens initiated</li> <li>▪ Concept for biodiversity walks and wild edible festivals initiated.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communities select workshop topics that they feel are important and needs to be discussed at the festival</li> <li>▪ Nongtraw village decides to attach a school book to the garden which contains small lectures on local crops.</li> </ul>



# Activities - 2012-2013

NESFAS' activities in 2012-2013 ranged across 4 broad themes:

## *Communications and Advocacy*

This theme involves facilitation of Indigenous Peoples as advocates of agrobiodiversity and food security so that their knowledge and concerns get highlighted in the mainstream while interchange happens between them and they appear as credible spokespersons in local and international conferences. Community representatives also engage with other villages to promote and preserve local food and biodiversity.

## *Expansion and establishment of Networks*

The objective of this theme is to establish strengthened networks of indigenous communities that are active on millet cultivation, honey and shifting cultivation. NESFAS has selected these themes after listening carefully to the voices from the ground in order to find the right starting points for ground-up solutions to common agroecological challenges. The expected outcome is to enable community members to be actively involved in the revival of forgotten crops and in community-to-community discussions on crop diversity and pollinators.

## *Capacity Building & Documentation*

This theme focuses on facilitating indigenous communities to document their traditional agricultural practices and help them initiate concrete activities for biodiversity conservation.

## *Science – Traditional Knowledge Dialogue*

This theme involves facilitation of indigenous knowledge and formal science dialogues through strategic trainings, workshops and discussions. The expected outcome is to enable indigenous communities to participate in different fora that allow space for and inclusive of traditional knowledge whilst easing challenges with the help of modern techniques and science, and highlighting outstanding indigenous practices in conferences and important meetings.

# Communications & Advocacy

## Advocacy - Local & Regional

NESFAS initiated its work as a grassroots platform by making a series of visits and connecting with communities that have been identified as potential protectors and promoters of traditional food, local cuisines and agrobiodiversity. This was carried out with a close collaboration with North East Region Community Resource Management (NERCOMRP) and the Meghalaya Rural Development Society (MRDS) that gave a strategic entry point to connect with the most active communities and empowering them to become active guardians of agrobiodiversity.

From the commencement of our work in July until the preparation for the annual Mei Ram-ew festival in Mawphlang, two consultants (one supported by NESFAS and the other by the Indigenous Partnership) travelled extensively throughout Meghalaya and two districts in Manipur. The objective of the visits was to scout for and identify communities that support and share the values of NESFAS. Besides selecting motivated and knowledgeable communities and

individuals, the team also implemented small pilot projects such as school gardens, awareness programs and preparations for local food festivals. In total, 22 communities, some of them in extremely remote areas, were visited and their response to the idea of a network documented for strategic follow up. NESFAS received extremely positive responses and the willingness to join the network through participative activities, especially in secluded and neglected areas. The natural and eager interest in local foods on behalf of the visiting staff evoked passion, pride and alacrity amongst communities to glamorize and revive forgotten local practices.

NESFAS continues to strengthen the relationship with and between these communities by creating spaces for dialogue, facilitating tangible ground-level activities and focused follow-ups with interested groups. NESFAS plans to expand the advocacy work to other districts in Meghalaya as well as to other states of North East such as Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.



## Local Mei Ram-ew Festivals

NESFAS’ innovative approach to agrobiodiversity protection and revitalization is through the vehicle of local food. Food, being the basic necessity of every person, is a unique entry point to introduce and discuss the dangers of eroding biodiversity and brings to fore the need to strengthen existing practices and revitalize those that are being forgotten. The process of dialoguing, showcasing, and exchanging local food production, consumption and preparation practices highlights and mainstreams the cultural knowledge and strengths of Indigenous Peoples.

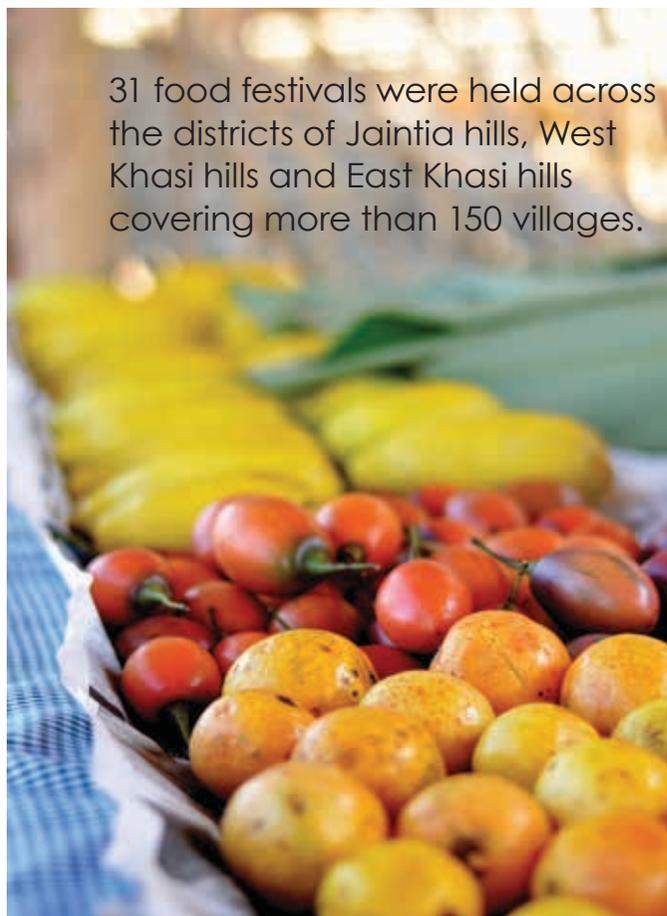
NESFAS initiated a series of local Mei Ram-ew (Mother Earth) Food Festivals in the villages that celebrated and highlighted unique crops that are disappearing and cuisines that are almost being forgotten. This was

done with the support of MRDS, NERCORMP, and St. Edmunds College.

The events brought together communities from **155 villages** that are now part of the NESFAS network. This strengthened existing contacts between the communities, highlighted the value of local foods and reinforced the need for community-based action. A greater awareness has been generated in the communities on the importance of local foods for food security and the well-being of local communities.

The participating groups and visitors are now committed to reviving and revitalizing their food culture, and thus their agrobiodiversity. They have also initiated their own small events and are taking ownership in the preparations of the Indigenous Terra Madre (ITM) to be held in 2015.

Custodian farmers who are unique in their ways of promoting, protecting and maintaining a large amount of biodiversity have also been identified during these festivals and are recognized and involved as important partners for the preparations towards ITM 2015.



31 food festivals were held across the districts of Jaintia hills, West Khasi hills and East Khasi hills covering more than 150 villages.

**Local Mei Ram-ew Festivals held**

District / City	Villages involved	Festivals held
East Khasi hills	78	17
West Khasi hills	12	3
Jaintia hills	40	9
Shillong	25	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>31</b>

## Mei Ram-ew day in Mawphlang



**The event hosted 3,000 visitors who came to taste, experience and learn about traditional foods and their medical and culinary value.**

On the 14th and 15th of December 2012, the 2-day 4th edition of Mei Ram-ew was organized by NESFAS with strong support from the Government of Meghalaya, the two IFAD funded projects, MRDS and NERCORMP, Synod College, St. Edmunds College and Martin Luther Christian University, Shillong. Hima Mawphlang, Myllem and the William Boys Home in Mawphlang and the overseeing staff of the Indigenous Partnersip and Slow Food International supported the efforts by sending in their staff and volunteers.

The objective of the Mei Ram-ew Festival was to identify and honor the local communities who, against all odds, are defending and promoting their local food traditions, and who appreciate that their culture is an unrecognized pillar of sustainable development.

An Eat-In was organised to bring in a sense of solidarity and to appreciate and explore the splendour of local food.

The event featured stalls that showcased the local architectures of different states and districts. These were partly designed by Paolo Carlucci, a contemporary architect from Rome, based on the knowledge shared by the different tribes.

Homestays for 195 participants were hosted by the local community of Mawphlang, which provided intercultural experience and engendered exchange of knowledge.

Cultural display in the form of dances, songs

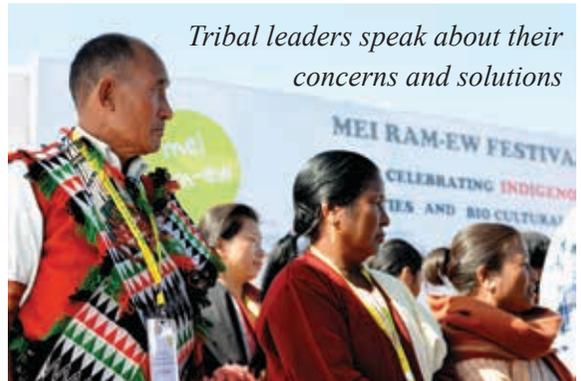
handicrafts, pottery, 50 designs of tribal weaves and books added more value to the festival.

A team of 23 first year botany students from Synod college, Shillong and 22 social work students from the Martin Luther Christian University, Shillong interviewed the participants and documented the plants, their use in the kitchen as well as related customs of the various communities.

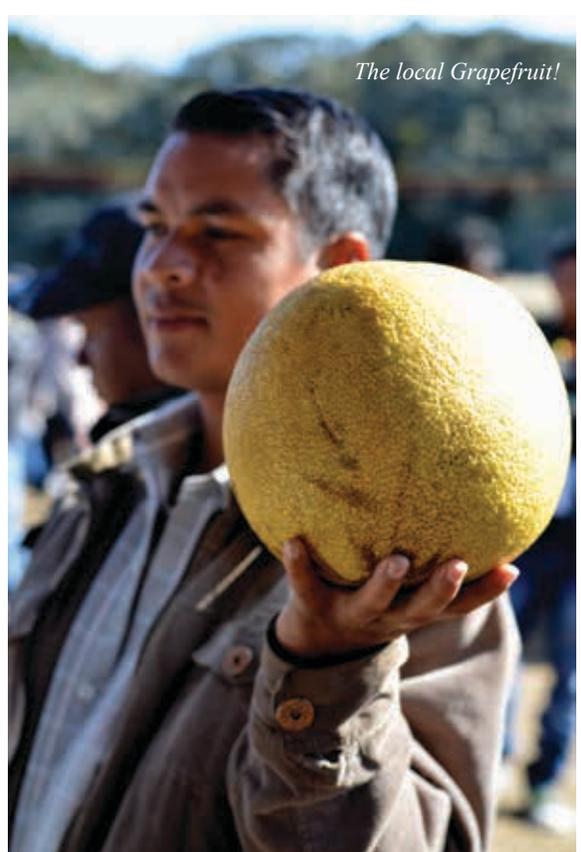
*A variety of local foods and products on display*



*Honorable Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Mukul Sharma inaugurates the Mei Ram-ew 2012*



*Tribal leaders speak about their concerns and solutions*



*The local Grapefruit!*

## Workshops at Mei Ram-ew

The participating communities held an interactive seminar where they discussed their concerns:

- how to combine traditional knowledge and modern science in a sustainable manner - the example of shifting cultivation?
- how to increase soil fertility with traditional methods?
- the broom grass dilemma: can broom grass cultivation be a sustainable livelihood?
- how can the youth become active in the preservation of culture and biodiversity?
- how to inspire other community members to take part in the revival of forgotten crops local foods?

A common declaration was drafted that took into account the opinions expressed by the participants and speakers alike. The declaration raised the following key points and stated:

- that millets are climate-smart and thus need to be revived and mainstreamed;
- reiterated that shifting cultivation - the source of the more than 185 plants displayed during the Festival - is important and relevant for the food security and sustainable practices of millions of Indigenous Peoples;
- urged the local communities to revitalize and

strengthen the intergenerational linkage between the elders and their young people and to facilitate a youth movement;

- valued the food foraged from the forest and the need to highlight their importance to the local indigenous communities;
- called on women to take a leadership role in promoting the good, clean and fair approach of the Slow Food movement.

NESFAS along with the local communities plans to continue to:

- \* raise awareness on the issues of biodiversity through community based follow up meetings
- \* facilitate the communities to document local food crops and build linkages with institutions for the gathering of scientific names
- \* enhance the use of local food crops both in kitchen gardens, school gardens, and Slow Food Cafés
- \* spread youth programs that were presented as models by a few communities of NESFAS such as school gardens and teaching modules on traditional knowledge.
- \* include the responsibility of knowledge preservation in the VDC (Village District Council) and include biodiversity related topics in the memorandum.

## Media Impact of Mei Ram-ew

The Mei Ram-ew had a considerable media impact. Newspapers, both local and English language, reported the event extensively. The food and nightlife magazine featured the event on January 2013 as one of the indications for our change in thinking about food.

Internationally, the event was reported on the Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research and the Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty as well as on the Slow Food International websites which featured the event as part of the annual Mother Earth day which is celebrated every year in December by as many as 1200 food communities around the world.

## Advocacy - national and international level

### *Exposure and Exchange Visits*

In September 2012, NESFAS organized a visit of community representatives from North East India to Southern India to M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) and Keystone Foundation, both located in Tamil Nadu. The group exchanged ideas with farmers and researchers who are working with the Bioversity International supported Neglected and Underutilized Species (NUS) Project.

The highlight of the exposure was the eye-opening many different culinary ways of using millet as part of a nutritious diet. Furthermore, the participants understood the advantages and feasibility of a millet-processing machine for relieving women's drudgery. Lastly, the group also witnessed a network of millet growers that actively preserve millets and other seeds through a community driven seed bank. All these inputs have now resulted in a further discussion amongst NESFAS supported communities and will be the one of the subjects of future activities.

### *International Terra Madre*

In the week from the 25th to the 29th of October, the 4th edition of the annual Terra Madre was held in Turin, Italy to bring together Slow Food's food communities from across the globe. An impressive 13 representatives from the North East of India made for the largest number of delegates within the entire slow



food movement.

The event gave the delegates a unique opportunity to exchange their knowledge on millet and shifting cultivation with other farmers. Moreover, the presentation of unique food products from Meghalaya and Garo hills found great interest amongst international visitors and producers due to their particular flavors and aromas. Thanks to the ITC chef, who is originally from Shillong, the North Eastern cuisine was glamorized which led to a great appreciation of it.

Strong connections and networks were built with the Slow Food movement and a good understanding was built between the North East delegates and Rome based Scientists during the Terra Madre meeting in October 2012 and the Indigenous Partnership training workshop held in Rome between 1-3 November 2012.

### *NESFAS goes to COP-11*

During the COP-11 Convention on Biodiversity, Hyderabad, the idea of building an Afro-Asian millet network was discussed. The presence of the Chairman and Director of NESFAS, as a representative of North East communities, resulted in a formal agreement between the German Institute for International Collaboration (GIZ), the Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty, Rome, the Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research (PAR), Rome and NESFAS to conduct a research study on ecological indicators that will include the knowledge and voice of indigenous people together with modern science in order to understand the role of indigenous farming practices in climate change mitigation.

*13 representatives from the North East of India made for the largest number of delegates within the entire slow food movement.*

## Establishment and Expansion of Networks

One of NESFAS' objectives is to facilitate community level networks that can create spaces within and between communities to share, dialogue and exchange their concerns, issues, and innovations at the ground.

The continuous dialogue with the communities brought out 3 topics – millets, honey, and shifting cultivation - as being important to them and needing focus. As a result of these dialogues and the emergence of these being a critical concern for communities it was decided to bring focus by establishing community level networks on these topics.

NESFAS' work towards this has been identifying key influencers, connecting them to one another, conducting workshops, creating spaces for dialogue and exchanges with other communities in the country. 3 networks have been facilitated and are being expanded (i) Millet networks (ii) Pollinators' networks (iii) Shifting Cultivators networks

### *Millet Network*

Since millets are hardy, locally-adapted plants that can survive under difficult conditions they are recognised as a climate adaptive food source. Millets have also been recognised as climate-smart food by the local communities during the Mei Ram-ew Festival.

The outcome of this has been a decision to network millet growers in Meghalaya and connect them to other millet-growers networks in the North-East as well as the rest of the country.

A millet network is currently expanding in several districts of Meghalaya and is involved in reviving and promoting millets as climate-smart, nutritive food.

Millet producers from **12 villages of East Khasi hills** have been connected to one another out of which 10 communities/villages in Khatarshnong (East Khasi hills area) are actively involved in reviving millet.

**3 villages in Garo hills** that are millet producers have been brought under the NESFAS umbrella.

In **Manipur & Assam**, NESFAS is working with millet producers in three districts to increase millet consumption by working with recipes and offering alternative methods of production. Discussions with two communities of Assam who are pearl millet producers have also been initiated.

In **Nagaland**, NESFAS is partnering with the North East Network (NEN). A thorough study has been conducted by NEN in Nagaland on the nutritional value of millet that shows a significant amount of iron and other minerals that are much lower and sometimes deficient in other staples such as rice. NEN also sent ten of its members to the 2012 Mei Ram-ew Food Festival in Mawphlang.

The Kyntonkseh Cluster Federation of Diengsong with MRDS partnership and their management is going ahead with starting a **millet processing unit** in Sohrarim village. NESFAS along with the community from Diengsong Cluster will organise a millet festival in November 2013 so that these villages too have an opportunity to share and learn the benefits of producing and consuming millet.

Well-known **Chefs** are being integrated into the network so that the importance of millets can be mainstreamed through innovative recipes.

## *Pollinators' Network*

Although in a nascent stage in the North East, NESFAS envisions stronger networks of beekeepers in the near future.

The Kshaid Beekeepers Society has agreed to step on the platform of NESFAS to collaborate and further develop and strengthen the network. Meetings with other bee keepers from additional districts are planned for the near future.

Given the various culinary and medicinal uses of honey, NESFAS is working towards inserting Honey into the Slow Food Ark of Taste or Presidia.

Communities from Assam, Manipur, East Khasi hills and Garo hills have agreed to start the network through documentation and knowledge sharing. An initial meeting is foreseen before the end of 2013 together with NERCORMP district staff members.

A training Workshop between FAO's Chief Pollination Specialist and the indigenous participants will be held in August 2013.

## *Shifting Cultivators' Network*

Many of the communities in contact with NESFAS reiterated the continuing importance and relevance of shifting cultivation in food security and the sustainable livelihood practices of indigenous peoples and its role in biodiversity conservation. Regretting the lack of understanding of many mainstream development workers, researchers and policy makers of the value of shifting cultivation to these local communities, many of these communities agree with the views of more informed researchers and policy makers that shifting cultivation is indeed a flexible, dynamic, low carbon emitting, energy efficient and sustainable



production system that also enhances resistance to pests and diseases. NESFAS however observed that shifting cultivation is practised in many different forms depending on the terrain and the communities involved. Communities have also stated they face new challenges in areas where the regeneration period is less than 3 years or so.

There is, therefore, an urgent need to document successful indigenous strategies and innovations.

The limited experience of NESFAS has made it very clear that almost all the biodiversity that has been documented by NESFAS, through its Food festivals, have emerged from communities that still practise shifting cultivation. Doing away with shifting cultivation, hence, will certainly lead to greater agrobiodiversity loss and the marginalisation of communities that have practised it for centuries. Millet is also an important crop of shifting cultivation.

The mutually reinforcing links of the millet, pollinators and shifting cultivation networks must and will therefore continue to be an important work of NESFAS.

# Capacity Building & Documentation

## Capacity Building

NESFAS strongly believes that it is necessary to listen to the voices on the ground first in order to link capacity building strategies directly to the needs perceived by grassroots peoples. At the same time, as a young organization, NESFAS draws from its strong international network of experts to address the areas of improvement, both at an institutional level as well as on the ground. The following strategic visits and trainings further improved the capacities of NESFAS.

**Exchange Visits:** Three community representatives traveled from 10-19 September 2012 to the Deccan Development Society (DDS), Hyderabad to study their agrobiodiversity fairs, and the work done by the Millet Network of India (MINI).

**Agrobiodiversity Training Workshop:** NESFAS participated in the training workshop organized by Indigenous Partnership, Rome, on the heels of Terra Madre 2012. The Indigenous Partnership Training Workshop was held from 1-3 November 2012, with support from local staff and sympathizers, Slow Food, Institute of International Education (IIE) and The Christiansen Fund. The initiative gathered 44 indigenous representatives, researchers and concerned scientists, with 31 participants belonging to indigenous communities. The workshop aimed to deepen participants' understanding of agrobiodiversity and agroecological solutions, providing practical tools for supporting and promoting grassroots research and documentation. A few key messages emerged during the training:

We must search for a more meaningful modernity. The key to this is in knowledge that indigenous people hold.

Food is not only about production. It is an affirmation of our values that uphold agrobiodiversity, traditional knowledge and a sustainable and ecological approach to well-being.

Food sovereignty is about the basic human right to produce, consume and market the food of our choice, and is a way out of the current food crisis. Without food sovereignty at the local level, there can be no political sovereignty.

There is a real need for network building, and NESFAS with its partners need work to bring as many interested and appropriate contributors together.

Indigenous people must take advantage of the window opened by progressive scientists to dialogue on diverse knowledge systems, specifically within the newly formed Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Such dialogue can help local communities appreciate and value their complex knowledge systems.

**Internal Capacity Building:** Several workshops and trainings have been taken up to strengthen the capacities of the NESFAS team. This has included Organisational Analysis, LogFrame building, Envisioning, communications etc.

**Building Communications Strategies:** An envisioning workshop was conducted by Rathindra Roy, Villgro Foundation, which guided the organisation's vision, aims and objectives and helped develop a dissemination strategy. Similarly, a 2-day workshop was conducted by Slow Food International. A Logframe was finalized under the guidance of a programme specialist of the Indigenous Partnership.

## Documentation



NESFAS has taken collaborative measures to document food festivals, storytellers, agricultural practices, cultural diversity, plants and ethnobotanical information and other related activities and events. The documentation of agrobiodiversity is paramount for maintaining visibility to a wide audience. This information gathering is combined with local knowledge for accumulating ethnobotanical information that requires local knowledge of best practices related to it.

The documentation is carried out through dialogue with local knowledge holders, events that showcase such knowledge, and through activities like biodiversity walks, Slow Food activities etc.

During Mei Ram-ew a team of documenters gathered the local and scientific names of more than **200 different edible crops** that are safeguarded by communities in the North East. This is an impressive number when confronted with the state that of our major global crops and global statistics that show that are no more than 30 crops that make up the diet of an average person in India.

**Two focused events on wild edibles** in Sheilla block, East Khasi hills documented as many as **100 wild vegetables** that are threatened in terms

of consumption and in-situ protection. NESFAS integrates these documentation into biodiversity walks, livelihood activities such as indigenous cafés, and strengthening local markets.

**5 villages in Jaintia Hills** have participated in documenting wild edibles together with their cultural background and challenges.

Participatory documentation in East Khasi Hills has resulted in pilot initiatives such as herbaria, self-documentation as well as a festival on wild edibles and innovative recipes.

In Khatarshnong, a cluster of 4 villages has gathered to document local seed saving practices that have culminated in a **local seed fair**. This has resulted in documentation of **20 land races of potatoes** together with other recipes, taste aspects and cultivation methods. An interactive public event was also held where communities exchanged seeds to revive some of crops that are being lost.

A **schoolbook on traditional food** has been initiated that is expected to be an example that can inspire the youth to take up revival and promotion of local biodiversity.

A photo documentation archive of more than **1000 pictures** has been archived thematically so that it can be used for presentations at a national and international level. Some of the themes include local agrobiodiversity, custodian farmers and Youth

**Community biodiversity registers (CBR)** have been discussed with communities and initiated through pilot documentation activities. In the future NESFAS plans to concretize these People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs) with the help of given formats and strategic planning.

## Indigenous Storytellers

NESFAS has taken up a sincere interest in the field of folklore and oral storytelling as a means of communication of indigenous cultures. As a platform, the organisation aims to understand the subject in more detail and to strategically support the preservation of this intangible cultural heritage by directly linking it to tangible values such as biodiversity preservation, food sovereignty and food security.

Being in contact with experts and storytellers from Darjeeling through a nodal organization that is supported by the Sikkim Government, called Acoustic Traditional (AT), NESFAS represented storyteller

communities through a visit to Darjeeling where insights were gained on how to initiate the gathering of impressive storytellers.

The learnings from the meeting with AT were further discussed and applied in the field together with the head of the department for cultural and creative studies at NEHU, Shillong. Besides collaborative field visits that resulted in the identification of impressive storytellers in Ribhoi, a one-day workshop elaborated a baseline strategy on how to identify storytellers for ITM 2015 and beyond.



*Indigenous storytellers from Ribhoi narrate about the importance of biodiversity.*

*2 villages in Ribhoi have been identified as potential storytellers - representative of oral stories that are directly linked to the importance of food, culture and biodiversity.*

## Youth Involvement

### *School Gardens*

School and community gardens, participatory documentation of traditional knowledge and intergenerational knowledge sharing were initiated with the people. Communities have taken steps to involve the children in the village school to learn the names of the crops that they grow and their importance and nutritional value.

This activity has directly helped the communities identify their concerns which they put up for discussion

in the workshops held during the Mei Ram-ew.

**2 school gardens** have been set-up in the villages of Nongtraw and Dewlieh. Both schools continuously improve their gardens by increasing seeds diversity and introducing newer learning modules.

Nongtraw has decided to prepare a **schoolbook** from their experience, which will include information on local crops.

Both school gardens are continuously evolving through novel ideas, modifications, local seed supply and teaching activities.

*Biodiversity Walks help youth to understand the value of local food.*



## Slow Food activities

Being a strong network partner of Slow Food at an international level, NESFAS has also included activities that aim at connecting to other communities around the world that are facing similar challenges and issues.

### *Ark of Taste*

The Ark of taste is a listing of endangered food species, stretching across the globe and highlighting unique food items that are at neglected today due to the industrialisation of our food production and the marginalization of small-scale food producers.

The Khasi Mandarin has been extensively documented, adhering to the stringent selection criteria and has entered the Ark of Taste. Sha Shiakrot has been similarly documented and is being prepared for presentation to the Ark of Taste

NESFAS has set an initial goal of **10 Ark of Taste products** until the end of 2013. NESFAS also plans to continue the documenting such products for its own record and to initiate locally based activities for the preservation of such foods.

### *Presidia*

Presidia is a Latin name that literally translates into English as ‘Stronghold’ and symbolizes the defending of agrobiodiversity products and their producers. It is a project run by the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity to directly have a relationship with food producers. The project is geared towards plants, animal-products, production and cooking practices that are at risk of extinction. The objective is to protect unique regions and ecosystems, and recover traditional processing methods, and safeguard native breeds and local plant varieties.



*The Sha Shiakrot is root from which a delicious and refreshing tea is made.*



*The Khasi Mandarin, unique to Meghalaya, has made its way into Slow Food's Ark of Taste.*

Both Ark of Taste and Presidia projects are intended to be spread across the North East rather than being restricted to only Meghalaya. For this purpose, NESFAS is currently initiating first documentations with partners in Assam and Manipur and will submit the first items before January 2014.

<i>Products listed for Ark of Taste / Presidia</i>				
<i>Product name in local language</i>	<i>Product name in English language</i>	<i>Product name in scientific language</i>	<i>Ark or Presidia</i>	<i>Status</i>
Sohsohnamtra	Khasi mandarin	Citrus rediculata	Presidia intended	Passenger of the Ark of Taste
ShaShiakrot	Tea from the thorny plant	Smilax ferox	Ark of Taste	Application form submitted
Ngap (Khasi),	Wild honey	-	Presidia intended	Documentation process ongoing
Jaiur	Prickly pepper	ZanthoxyiumKhasi-uanum	Ark of Taste	Documentation process ongoing
Lapunei	Lemon basil (tulsi)	-	Ark of Taste	Listed
Sohpoh	Bread fruit	Pyruscommunis Linn.	Ark of Taste	Listed

## Indigenous Cafés (Slow Cafés)



The many local food festivals have proven the potential of local cuisines as a livelihood opportunity when glamorized through innovative preparation methods as well as hygienic and attractive presentation. Besides showcasing cultural diversity through tasty local food, an Indigenous Café has the potential to encourage the local economy through direct involvement of small-scale producers and consumers. The most challenging aspect seems to be the financial factor and NESFAS will contribute by assisting in planning potential solutions.

A total of **3 groups from the villages of Tyrna (1 group) and Sohra (2 groups)** have started ideating on Indigenous Cafés and are being trained in building project proposals, market surveys and menu planning for the same.

A cluster of 4 villages, Tyrna, is determined to bring issues of agrobiodiversity and food sovereignty to the limelight. The village has witnessed detrimental changes in agricultural practices and dietary habits. Once a land of oranges and today home to only four trees, Tyrna sees the café as a place to share and exchange ideas and knowledge. The village located at one of Meghalaya's popular tourist destinations (Cherrapunji) can set a trend that has the potential to push its agenda of preserving and conserving traditions and sustainable practices. A concept note is in preparation that includes ideas for construction of the café, menu and activity planning.

A workshop for start-up entrepreneurs is being planned with Rathindra Roy, Villgro Foundation, to help these groups in local enterprise development.

# Science–Traditional Knowledge Dialogue for Agroecological Solutions

Considering the many requests for assistance with problems such as seed saving, knowledge sharing and documentation raised by communities, two field consultants were sent for a course on Conservation Biology conducted by the National Plant Bureau for Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR). The course was on the various methods of in situ and ex situ conservation with particular focus on on-farm conservation practices.

The NBPGR course resulted in establishing a relationship between NESFAS and the Botanical Survey of India (BSI). BSI has agreed to liaise with NESFAS for biodiversity documentation and participatory activities.

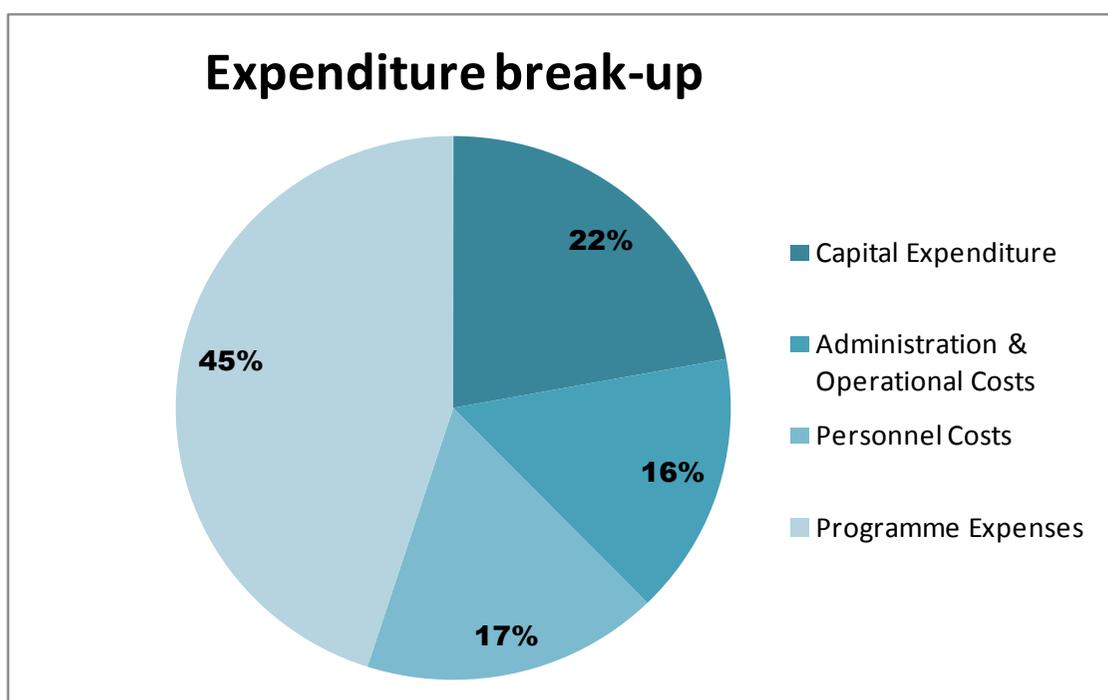


*Biodiversity mapping in villages*

# Financial Overview 2012-2013

## Financial Statement

Description	Amount (in Rs.)	
Donations & Grants received		<b>63,12,290</b>
Donations	10,000	
Programme Grants	62,56,000	
Miscellaneous receipts	46,290	
Expenditures		<b>37,47,243</b>
Capital Expenditure	8,29,563	
Administration & Operational Costs	5,82,412	
Personnel Costs	6,50,200	
Programme Expenses	16,85,068	
Closing Balance (Cash & Bank)		<b>25,65,047</b>





**Published by:**



**North East Slow Food & Agrobiodiversity Society**

Kerie Ville, Arbuthnott Road, Laitumkrah

Shillong 793003, Meghalaya, India

+91 8575016289/ +91 36100868

[www.nesfas.org](http://www.nesfas.org) / [info@nesfas.org](mailto:info@nesfas.org)