

North East Slow Food & Agrobiodiversity Society



ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15

Envisioning a future where indigenous food and rural livelihood,
are defined by a strong bond between people, planet, plate and culture.

Defining a strong bond between...

Planet  **People** 

Plate  Perspective 

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Photo: Raibha Sayoo - 'Ka trap', a traditional umbrella.

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Section Four

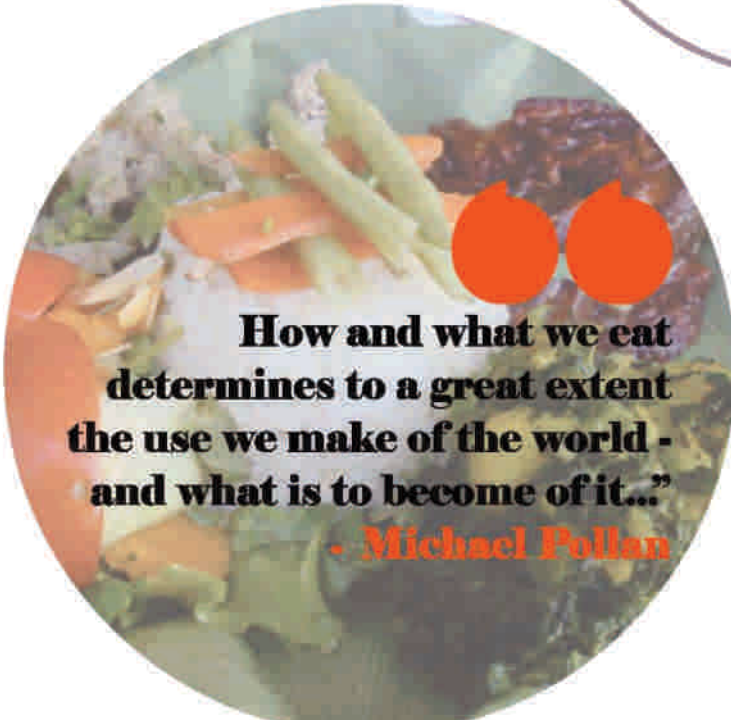
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How and what we eat determines to a great extent the use we make of the world - and what is to become of it..."

- Michael Pollan

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Content:
NESFAS Team

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An Idea called **NESFAS**

Deeply rooted in its intention of nurturing a biocultural diversity via farming and securing a healthy, flourishing agricultural future of our Indigenous communities, NESFAS was born out of collaborative activities between the Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty (The Indigenous Partnership) and Slow Food International. NESFAS's strategic initiatives facilitate platforms for people at the grassroots level to voice themselves, exchange knowledge and reaffirm pride in their indigenous lifestyles.

While Slow Food International emphasises on enjoying the rights and responsibilities towards good, clean and fair food practices, the Indigenous Partnership reaffirms the importance of the age-old role of Indigenous People as the guardians of agrobiodiversity, agro-ecological practices, cultural identity and their rights to food sovereignty and food security. In being so, they also are the connecting links to their significant heritage and practices in these changing times.

T h e J o u r n e y



2010: Carlo Petrini, Slow Food Founder, visits Meghalaya. Impressed by the agrobiodiversity and the people's close connection to their land, Petrini proposes an international event to be held here.



2011: The 2nd Mei-Ramew Festival took place. NESFAS was conceived as an idea that went on to become a reality in 2012

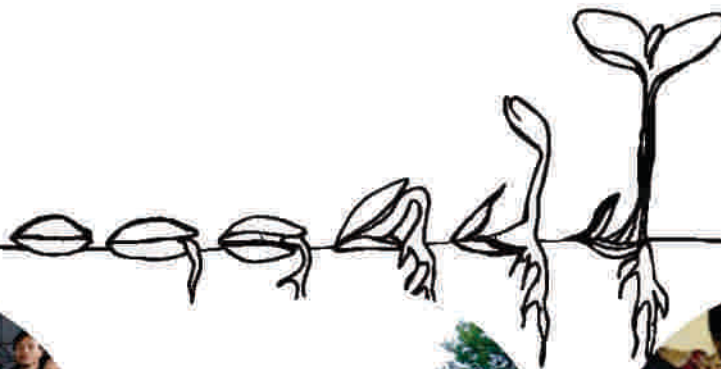


2012: NESFAS is born. Agro-biodiversity networks and activities sprout at the grassroots via NESFAS's initiatives.



Food for us comes from our relatives, whether they have wings or fins or roots. That is how we consider food. Food has a culture. It has a history. It has a story. It has relationships.”

- Winona LaDuke



2013: The NESFAS team expands.

The year-end sees 12 full-time staff members become a part of NESFAS and the launch of new initiatives.



2014: International Mei-Ramew (IMR) groundwork for 2015.

Networks and activities multiply. Staff learns new Participatory Techniques for agrobiodiversity management.



2015: Gearing up for the International Mei-Ramew (IMR) 2015.

41 villages join hands with NESFAS to host the IMR in November 2015.

The MISSION

NESFAS aims to CONNECT people to the PLEASURE and IMPORTANCE of tasty, local food that is inextricable from our responsibility towards the environment and the preservation of agrobiodiversity.

In doing so, the organisation attempts to create a platform where people at the grassroots-level 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 lifestyles.

A Partnership for progress



SLOW FOOD is a non-profit member-supported grassroots association which was founded in 1989 to counter the rise of fast food and fast life; the disappearance of local food traditions; and people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, how it tastes; and how our food choices affect the rest of the world.



**GOVERNMENT OF
Meghalaya**

The GOVERNMENT OF MEGHALAYA is the supreme governing authority of the state of Meghalaya and its 11 districts. The Government of Meghalaya supports the activities of NESFAS, especially the International Mel-Ramew 2015.



THE INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIP FOR AGROBIODIVERSITY AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY supports indigenous people, local communities and their representatives to celebrate, defend and revitalise their food systems and agricultural practices at local and global levels through research, participatory initiatives and associated advocacy activities.

Letter from the CHAIRMAN

I am very fond of the African saying "until the lion has his or her own storyteller, the hunter will always have the best part of the story". NESFAS was established in 2012 to be a storyteller for the lions of agriculture – to let the world know that there exist sustainable and just food systems, safeguarded by diverse, often ignored, local and Indigenous communities. These stories continue to be told amidst the spectre of modern diet-related illnesses and harsh production methods that degrade our lands and cause climate change. Indigenous Peoples around the world are collectively attached to their ancestral lands and territories. For them, success is beyond the narrow concepts of productivity and price. Rather, it is measured in well-being, social justice and cultural landscapes – how connected they are to each other and to the world around them. This Annual Report gives a short account of a Study of Well-Being that NESFAS has undertaken, and tells the stories of select communities and their vital role in environmental stewardship.



NESFAS is an emerging organisation that helps communities to reaffirm their pride in and commitment to their own local food systems. It is led by a pride in, and commitment to, a group of young professionals, most drawn to this work fresh from postgraduate studies, yet still deeply rooted to their rural and agrarian heritage. They are being mentored by a global community of some of the most experienced people in the field, who willingly give their pro-bono time to support them with capacity-building and training. NESFAS is always looking to develop mission-driven partnerships and to build a professional team determined to innovate for the future of a sustainable food system that has a neutral or positive environmental impact, that protects the bicultural diversity of North East India, that is driven by local economies and that will provide fair and enduring jobs for the youths of the region.

This is the third Annual Report of NESFAS and it is the first time that it is being produced within three months of the end of the fiscal year. I would like to thank the staff and consultants of NESFAS for the documentation and articulation of the many oral stories of local communities, the unique initiatives of NESFAS along with its partners and for the preparation of this comprehensive Annual Report within the stipulated time.

NESFAS is also very grateful to the Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty (Indigenous Partnership) for all of its support in introducing fresh ideas and new partners and for its capacity-building initiatives. Through the Indigenous Partnership, NESFAS has had the good fortune to work with world-class people like Mr. Rathindra Roy, Ms. Sara Manetto, Mrs. Radha Kunke, Ms. Carol Cassidy, Ms. Anna-Louise Meynell, Ms. Elizabeth Hacker, Mr. Nick Lurch, Mr. Christopher Atkins and Ms. Dunja Mijatovic. We are indebted to visitors we have had from ICIMOD, IFAD, Caring Friends, Clover Organic, Bethany Society and Samaj Pragati Sahayog (SPS).

We are also thankful for the support we have received from Slow Food International, especially from Ms. Anandi Soans, Director, South Asia and Indigenous Terra Madre. NESFAS greatly benefitted from the Slow Food contacts we had in 2014-15 as indicated in the Annual Report.

In 2012, when NESFAS was barely a year old, we took up the challenge to organize the Indigenous Terra Madre 2015. We would not have dared to think of this idea without the unstinted support of the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Dr Mukul Sangma; the Chief Secretary to the Government of Meghalaya, Mr. Barkos Warjri; the Principal Secretary, Mr. R M Mishra; and Principal Secretary, Mr. Pochister Kharkongor. The support of the Indigenous Partnership and its funders has also been very much appreciated. We are confident that the Indigenous Terra Madre 2015 will be a unique opportunity for the participating delegates, as well as the local public, who will be invited to portions of the programme. Indeed, the 41 local host communities have suggested that the event be given a local name, and hence, it is being called the International Mei-Ramew 2015 (IMR 2015).

I'll see you at IMR 2015 and thank you for your interest in our work.

Phrang Roy
Chairman, NESFAS.

The NESFAS Board

The NESFAS Board is a coming together of global and local community members who are custodians of different areas that make up the organisation's larger vision. The members are esteemed representatives of the society who guide the agendas relating to social, cultural, academic, Indigenous, organisational, civil society, and its Implementation. They steer the NESFAS ambition to the grass root level ensuring the organisation's steady growth leading to indigenous development.



Ms. Patricia Mukhim,
Editor, Shillong Times, Journalist
and Promoter of local food.



Dr. A. K. Nongkynrih,
Professor of Sociology,
North Eastern Hill University
(NEHU), Shillong.

Ms. Anita Roy,
former teacher, AMBRIT,
International School, Rome;
Interior Designer; Resource
Mobilisation Campaigner;
Creative Cook and Slow
Food member.



Mr. Bibhudutta Sahu,
Project Director and
Member Secretary, NESFAS.



Dr. Glenn Kharkongor,
Pro Vice Chancellor, Martin Luther
Christian University (MLCU), Shillong.



Mr. Priak Riahtam,
Executive Director, Khatarshnong Socio Organisation (KSO), Sohra - a civil society organisation for the upliftment of the rural people of East Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya.



Ms. Jarjum Ete,
Indigenous Women's Leader of Arunachal Pradesh and currently Chairperson of the Arunachal Pradesh State Commission on Women.



Mr. Phrang Roy, Chairman, NESFAS; Member, Advisory Board, at AgroEcology Fund; Chairman, Meghalaya Water Foundation; Coordinator, The Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty; International Councillor, Slow Food International; Member, International Panel of Experts on the Future of Food (IPES-Food).



Ms. Biblana Rane,
Grass-roots Activist from Nongtraw Village, East Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya.



Ms. Rosemary Dzuichu,
Senior Asst. Professor, Department of English, Nagaland University; Member of various Steering Committees of Northeast Women's Network; Member, Committee for Dalit and Tribal Women; Advisor, Naga Mothers Association and President of Nagaland University Teachers' Association.



Mr. G. P. Wahlang,
IAS (Retd.), Former Chief Information Commissioner, Meghalaya, Information Commission.

Project DIRECTOR'S Note

Dear Friends and Well-Wishers,

By the time NESFAS comes up with its Annual Report for the year 2015-16, we would have crossed a momentous milestone that we have been looking forward to and working our way towards, for the past 3 years - the Indigenous Terra Madre (ITM) 2015 or International Mei-Ramew (IMR) 2015. NESFAS was developed as the nodal agency to ideate, excite, coordinate and implement this landmark event that will see over 600 international indigenous delegates and many more participants converge in Meghalaya to celebrate and deliberate on the issues of Indigenous Peoples and their contributions on a global platform.

While we are on the verge of making this landmark international event possible, it was only 5 years ago that Mr. Carlo Petrini, Founder of Slow Food Italy, had proposed that Meghalaya should be hosting an international event. This is much more than just the hosting of an international event. It is about the bonds that are being forged in time with so many well-wishers and supporters- NESFAS has no qualms in admitting that this landmark feat would not have been possible without our many partners - local, national and international.

First and foremost, the acceptance of our invitation to the 41 communities to be a part of this incredible journey, to build a sustainable relationship between the people, planet, plate and culture, has been our steady source of motivation. The formation of the Mei-Ramew Committees and the continued endeavour to be a part of an indigenous movement that promotes sustainable food systems and indigenous practices, has been the core value of our interventions.

Following the invitation to host the ITM 2015, the Government of Meghalaya under the leadership of Hon. Chief Minister, Dr. M. Sangma, has been instrumental in promoting sustainable agricultural practices as well as playing a pivotal role in fast-tracking the interventions at the community level, thus fostering stronger ties with them. The Departments of Agriculture, Horticulture and Sericulture have been instrumental in the identification of the Ark of Taste products and the progress achieved in the Khasi Mandarin Presidia Project and the Mei-Ramew Weaves respectively, amongst other means of support.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the support and contributions of one and all involved in this journey of collaborations, development of ideas and the overall growth in our outreach. They have enriched our experience by adding new dimensions to our work during the past year. They are, in no particular order, Hima Mawphlang, the Bethany Society, the Botanical Survey of India, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Mr. Mihir Shah, Mr. Rathindra Roy, Ms Radha Kunke, the Khatarshnong Socio Organisation, the North East Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCORMP), the Meghalaya Basin Development Association (MBDA), the North East Network (NEN) and the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU).

NESFAS would also like to acknowledge the contributions of the Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty (The Indigenous Partnership), as they have been instrumental in developing the networks through the Land Sparing and Land Sharing Study, conducted with Biodiversity International. Their support has resulted in capacity-building via the Well-Being Studies and the Participatory Video Initiative. They provided us with a platform for exposures to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The review missions from The Indigenous Partnership challenged us to strive for better standards of accountability and transparency. Also valuable was their support to the Mei-Ramew Weaves initiatives, under the guidance of Carol Cassidy, who shared her deeply ingrained experience with textiles for this cause.

Our work on Flavour Development and the understanding of food systems has been enriched through our partnership with Slow Food International. This has facilitated the visits of Aurélien Culat to activate the Youth Food Networks, Chef Fabio Antonini to sensitise the urban mindset about underutilised foods; the publications of stories related to Meghalaya's Khasi Mandarin; as also a visit to Turin by a 16 member delegation, for the Terra Madre 2014. Terra Madre 2014 provided much needed perspective for the task at hand, in terms of conducting an event at an international scale.

The NESFAS staff, accepting of every new challenge with conviction and commitment, are the bedrock of the work that NESFAS has done so far. Each and every member of the team has been encouraging the other to push further and higher. Despite the learning curves and hiccups along our constant strive to attain international standards, the team has never been deterred.

The NESFAS Board of distinguished and accomplished individuals has been the guiding force for NESFAS's activities and ambitions, supporting our work through their push for policies that enable and influence change at the state and local levels.

For NESFAS however, the journey has just begun and the ITM 2015 will be a part of a wonderful experience that sees unity in collaboration and richness in diversity.

Towards Collective Change and Transformation,

Bibhudutta Sahu
Project Director, NESFAS



NESFAS Year 2014- 2015

In the third year of establishment, NESFAS built on its existing networks, established new partnerships, took on challenging initiatives and began preparing for the upcoming International Mei-Ramew (IMR) 2015.

The team grew in strength and its capacities were built with the aim to create better professionals and bring out NESFAS as a centre for excellence.

More than 100 food items were nominated by NESFAS communities for the Slow Food International's Ark of Taste. NESFAS drew greater involvement from the communities in the on-going development of the Khasi Mandarin as a Presidia Product.

Through the brand name of Mei-Ramew Weaves and Mei-Ramew Cafes, NESFAS addressed livelihood issues. The team immersed itself in working even more closely with the communities and building upon initiatives as a part of their involvement in the upcoming IMR as co-hosts.

VISITORS AND MEETINGS

When	What
2014	
APRIL	8th April Dr. Sunil Kaul and Mr. Nimesh Shah visited NESFAS along with Ms. Patricia Mukhlm, Editor, Shillong Times, following the recommendation of Dr. Mihir Shah, Member Planning Commission, who visited NESFAS earlier that year in March. They are part of a network called 'Caring Friends' that supports NGOs that display an incredible potential to grow.
	10th April Mr. Kit Kharkongor, Joint Director, Agriculture Dept., Government of Meghalaya, provided the NESFAS team with valuable insights on Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and their uses in the modern scenario.
	16th April Mr. Carmo Noronha, Executive Director, Bethany Society, and his team conducted a workshop on Natural Farming at the NESFAS office. The session majority focused on feeding the earth using lactic acid bacteria and indigenous microorganisms to enhance farming.
	22nd April NESFAS met with the Rongbah Shnong and Rongbah Dong (Local administration) of Laitumkrah to discuss initiatives to develop Laitumkrah as a model urban community. The first result of the meeting was the NESFAS community Garden that shares its harvests with underprivileged families living in Laitumkrah.
	23rd April Freelance Journalist, Mr. Sanat Chaudhury, visited NESFAS to discuss Indigenous Perspectives and grassroots journalism. The gathering also discussed sustainable housing, food and clothing.
	24th April NESFAS in collaboration with the Lyngam Indigenous Federation (LIF) and the communities of Khatarshnong, organised the first ever Lyngam Mei-Ramew Food Festival at Umdang (Riangiong), West Khasi Hills District.

When	What	
2014		
28th April	Ms. Sara Manetto, Programme Officer of The Indigenous Partnership, Rome, visited NESFAS to conduct an overall Mission Review of the organisation.	
28th April	On the occasion of Swami Vivekananda's "150th" Birth Anniversary, NESFAS conducted its first ever large scale Sensory Games session with about 1000 people at the Vivekananda Cultural Centre, Shillong.	
29th April	The NESFAS community garden initiative was kick started with the plantation of the first batch of local vegetables in accordance with the Traditional Lunar calendar.	
MAY	22nd May	Interaction on "Local Food Clubs" with Mr. Aurélien Culat, a contributor to the Slow Food Youth Food Movement, Ms. Thereza Terri and college students from Martin Luther Christian University, St. Edmund's, St. Anthony's, St. Mary's and Women's College, some of their lecturers and friends of NESFAS.
	26th May	1st Board Meeting of the year took place.
JUNE	4th June	Discussion on Partnerships with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.
	5th June	NESFAS took part in the National Conference on Biodiversity at Women's College Shillong on World Environment Day.
	5th June	On World Environment day, NESFAS took the initiative to raise awareness on food sustainability and nutrition by the inauguration of a School Garden at Khliehumstem, Presbyterian School, RI Bhoi District, Meghalaya.
	6th June	NESFAS took the opportunity to create awareness on Local Indigenous Food at the Nongrim Hills Food Fest through a food stall.
	12th June	Interaction with Ms. Nirupama James, Nutritionist and HOD, Dept. Home Sciences, St. Mary's College, Shillong, on procedures of setting up a Food Club within her department - they were to host the first Youth Food Club in Shillong. Ms. James was already engaged with NESFAS in discussions on nutrition and strategies on related research work.
	16th June	Capacity-building on Financial Monitoring Systems and Internal Audit with Mr. Puran Jha, Facilitator - Finance & Accounts at FMSF (CPA).
	18th June	Meeting with the officers of the Dept. of Agriculture and Horticulture on the matters such as Schemes, Membership, and Presidia.
	20th June	Interaction with Ms. Elizabeth Hacker and Mr. Sanju Gurungon w.r.t. Well-Being Studies with a special focus on Digital-Storytelling and Volunteerism.
	20th June	Ms. Elizabeth Hacker and Mr. Sanjay Gurung conducted a session on Well-Being Studies with the NESFAS staff and developed a template for the same.
	23rd-27th June	The first of the Well-Being studies in the North East India conducted at Nongkynrh, Jaintia Hills.
JULY	1st July	Workshop on Youth Food Club & Indigenous Food was conducted at Sankardev College.
	4th July	Clover Organic visited the NESFAS office to discuss potential partnerships.
	5th-7th July	Training program on Planning, Implementing, Monitoring and Evaluation was conducted by FMSF with the NESFAS staff.
	7th July	Meeting with Mr. P. Kharkongor, Principal Secretary, and Ms. D. Syiemiong, Director of Dept. of Agriculture, Meghalaya, on the mobilisation of resources for Ark of Taste documentation.
9th July	A visit to Mawphlang with Mr Maximilian Manderscheid, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Ms. Hemelyne Lyngdoh, District Horticulture Officer, East Khasi Hills, to survey the area for the William Lewis Boys' Home kitchen garden and an irrigation management system.	

When	What	
2014		
20th August	Signing of Letter of Agreement with Bioversity International in collaboration with Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research (PAR).	AUGUST
15th September	Interaction with Ms. Daisy Hasan on the overall technical aspects and deliverables for the Cultural Heritage Project.	SEPTEMBER
6th-9th October	Workshop in Rome, organised by Bioversity International in collaboration with Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research (PAR) on methodologies used for research on Land Sparing Land Sharing attended by Mr. Reuben Mendakor Shabong, Junior Research Fellow, NESFAS.	OCTOBER
23rd-27th October	Sixteen delegates from NESFAS participated in the International Terra Madre in Italy.	OCTOBER
30th October	The NESFAS team visiting Italy for Terra Madre visit IFAD and FAO offices.	OCTOBER
13th November	Puran Jha, CPA visits NESFAS for the de-briefing on the Financial Management Services.	NOVEMBER
18th November	Ms. Anna Louise Meynell from Scotland joined NESFAS as a consultant working in close collaboration with the weaving communities in Khweng.	NOVEMBER
23rd November-26th November	NESFAS team including community members from Nongnah, South West Khasi Hills, Kong Melina Syiemlieh, Mr. Kitboklang Rangad, Mr. John Shangdiar, Dr. Carl O Rangad, Former Director, Dept. of Horticulture, Meghalaya, NESFAS attended the biodiversity festival there.	NOVEMBER
2nd December	Meeting with Prof. P. Shukla, Vice Chancellor of North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, where IMR 2015 conference will take place.	DECEMBER
4th December	A small Diversity Fair was organised in Pyrda in observance of the Terra Madre Day (December 10).	DECEMBER
8th December	Meeting with Dr. Carl O Rangad, Former Director, Dept. of Horticulture, Meghalaya, on the shifting cultivation work and perspectives on the work that NESFAS has been doing.	DECEMBER
8th December	The NESFAS team met for an outing at Rikynjai Hotel, Barapani.	DECEMBER
11th December	An Eat-in was organised in at Samanong, West Jaintia Hills in observance of the Terra Madre Day (December 10).	DECEMBER
11th December	Meeting with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH for collaboration in the field of Eri-weaving.	DECEMBER
15th-19th December	Well-Being Study was conducted in Lyngam, West Khasi Hills District.	DECEMBER
17th December	Tastings at the NESFAS office in observance of the Terra Madre Day (December 10) with members of the NESFAS Board Members - Ms. Patricia Mukhim, Mr. P Riahtam and Dr. Carl O Rangad, former Director of NESFAS.	DECEMBER
16th December	In observance of the Terra Madre Day (December 10), the Cooks' Alliance members from Pyrda set up food stall at the Mawkyrwat food festival.	DECEMBER
17th December	Weaving expert from Laos, Ms. Carol Cassidy visited the NESFAS office to review NESFAS's Eri-weaving initiative.	DECEMBER
17th December	An Eat-in was organised in the village of Thawkhong, West Khasi Hills, in observance of the Terra Madre Day (December 10).	DECEMBER



Student of RCLP Nongkdaif, West Khasi Hills enjoying a Mid-Day Meal after a school garden plantation.

When	What
2015	
JANUARY	
4th-11th January	Mr. Francesco Sottile, member of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity and the International commission for the Ark of Taste, Italy, makes a second visit to Meghalaya to Review the Presidia Project status.
9th January	De-briefing meeting with Mr. Francesco Sottile on the outcome of his last visit to Meghalaya with regards to the Presidia Project.
9th January	Meeting with the Department of Horticulture to discuss the visit of Mr. Sottile and the department's collaborative efforts with NESFAS.
11th-28th January	Mr. Christopher Atkins and Mr. Nick Lunch from Insight Share meet with the Participatory Trainees and conduct further training on PV techniques and visit the various PV "Hubs".
14th January	Event management consultant, Mr. Kaushal Upreti, met with NESFAS to discuss the various elements of the ITM 2015.
19th January	Meeting with Environmentalist, Mr. H H Mohrmen in West Jaintia Hills to explore the possibility of collaborating with the community.
28th January	Launch of the scheme for the construction, including the metalling and black-topping of the different link-roads in Mawphlang, relevant to the IMR 2015, by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Meghalaya Dr. Mukul Sangma.
29th January	Meeting with Mr. Peter Wallang, One World News, on collaboration on the dissemination of positive news and work at the community levels leading up to the ITM 2015.
FEBRUARY	
5th February	Meeting with Mr. Rangu Rao, co-founder Samaj Pragati Sahayog (SPS) and CEO, Safe Harvest to discuss the work of NESFAS.
14th February	Two Eri stoles woven by NESFAS communities were displayed at the Indigenous Forum at International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Rome under the banner of Mei-Ramew Weaves.
16th-22nd February	Students from the University of Gastronomic Sciences (UNISG), Bra, Italy, visited various parts of Meghalaya (facilitated by NESFAS) as a part of their study tour.
23rd February-2nd March	Mr. Pius Rane, Associate, NESFAS, visits Nairobi to conduct Well-Being Studies in the Isiolo County.
MARCH	
6th-7th March	NESFAS team meets for a retreat with Mr. Rathindra Roy - Facilitator of Learning, Strategic Thinking & Change, Ms. Radha Kunke - Communication Consultant, Ms. Sara Manetto - Programme Officer of The Indigenous Partnership, Ms. Anita Roy - NESFAS Board Member, Mr. Phrang Roy - NESFAS Chairman and Ms. Anandi Soans - Consultant, Slow Food India.
22nd February-7th March	Ms. Dunja Mijatovic, PAR Researcher, visited NESFAS to help Junior Researcher, NESFAS, Mr. Reuben Mendakor Shabong with Participatory Mapping and Socio Ecological Resilience Assessment for the Land Sharing Land Sparing Studies being conducted in Lyngam Area.
5th March	Meeting with The North East Network (NEN) to discuss the role of NEN in the IMR 2015.
30th March	10 members of the NESFAS Cooks' Alliance met with Chef Alliance member Chef Fabio Antonini from Pianeta Terra, Amsterdam.
31st March	NESFAS organised a fine-dining event showcasing local foods in collaboration with Chef Fabio Antonini and Chef Joel Basumatari.



Section One



**Biodiversity is a Gift to our Senses.
By protecting biodiversity we protect
our privilege to choose.”**



Linking Biocultural Diversity

NESFAS closely works with producers who influence agrobiodiversity by virtue of what they choose to cultivate and are directly responsible for what is available in the market. It also tries to reach out to consumers who, through their food choices, affect market trends. Thus, NESFAS facilitates community-led agrobiodiversity networks, to collectively address issues and share modern and traditional knowledge. Community interactions have resulted in networks on topics considered important by the them, namely- millet, pollinators, shifting cultivation and rice, which are actively involved in reviving forgotten crops and in discussing crop-diversity and agro-ecological practices. A network of cooks, the 'Cooks' Alliance' highlights the role of these artisans as indisputable change-agents in connecting people to their food, while the Custodian Farmers' Network brings together farmers who play an active role at protecting their local agrobiodiversity.



Photo: Rabih Amro

CO-OPERATIVES TO CONSERVE MILLET NETWORK

The Foxtail Millet, locally known as 'Kral'.



Photo: Dombomkang Rajan

Members of the millet network took the opportunity to exchange seeds to ensure the promotion of diversity and seed sovereignty.

One of NESFAS's first networks, the Millet Network was born out of interactions with a small cluster of communities, from Khatarshnong, in the East Khasi Hills District in 2010. They voiced their concerns on the disappearance of millet from their food systems, where less than 40 years ago, it was one of their staple foods. Kral's (local name for millet) declining relevance in the communities' dietary habits is evident from the fact that their younger generation had never eaten millet. Erstwhile grown as a supplementary food grain, millet has also become redundant in many other communities now.

Albeit resilient and possessing irrefutable health benefits, the drudgery of processing millet on a stone mill, the absence of taste innovation and the increase in popularity of rice led to a decline in millet production.

The network thus works at connecting communities which wish to reintroduce millet as a grain of cultural and dietary importance in their communities. The network has since, slowly grown from one community - Nongtraw, in the East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya, in 2010, to a handful of partners in 2012, to more than 40 communities throughout the state and Nagaland.

A Millet Workshop organised by NESFAS on February 13, 2015, brought together 15 millet growers from various regions of Meghalaya including the East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills and West Garo Hills. The workshop revealed that these farmers together grow an impressive, 30 varieties of local millet. After a day of exchanging ideas, the day closed with the significant act of an exchange of millet seeds between the participants.

The workshop also marked the addition of Nongnah, the first community from the South West Khasi Hills, to be included in this network.

As of today, we have 37 members in the Millet Network.

Replenishing Lost Seeds

With millet slowly becoming an obsolete grain reserved mostly as fodder for cattle and for making fermented beverages, numerous varieties began to disappear. Luckily this trend did not go unnoticed by many community elders. One such person, is custodian farmer and Anganwadi worker, **Kong Billalmon Swer** from Laitsohpliah, East Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya. As a delegate representing NESFAS and her community at the International Women's Day 2014 and the International year of Family Farming celebration organised by the North East Network, Chizami, Phek District, she identified some of the millet varieties that she recognised from her youth, during a Seed Fair there. She took back with her a few variety of seeds including Sorghum and "Rai Saw" - a type of millet lost to her community. She planted the seeds in a small plot in her garden in the month of February 2015. Today, she has millet grasses sprouting healthily.

Kong Melina Syiemlieh a farmer from Nongnah, South West Khasi Hills, too, took the opportunity to bring back with her three millet varieties, locally known as 'Rai Truh', 'Rai Soh' and 'Rai Saw', that were no longer found in her village, from her visit to Chizami, in the Phek District of Nagaland, for the local agrobiodiversity festival, that was facilitated by NESFAS.



Photo: Raisa Dalmay



Photo: Carl O'Rourke

Left: Melina Syiemlieh
Right: Billalmon Swer

THE CUSTODIAN FARMERS' NETWORK

Custodian Farmers can be defined as local producers who maintain, adapt and promote a large crop-diversity and thereby contribute actively to the global efforts to enhance the overall biodiversity. NESFAS has identified more than 117 custodian farmers over the last three years. It was necessary to find these individuals and empower them, so as to help them realise the important role they play as protectors of the biodiversity.

The workshop for custodian farmers that took place on the February 13, 2015, at the NESFAS office became a stage where experiences, challenges and issues relating to biodiversity conservation and knowledge-management were shared. Putting their daily engagements on hold, 11 custodian farmers from 10 different villages across Meghalaya, shared their valuable time to participate in the workshop.

The participants were trained on the creation and maintenance of the People's Biodiversity Registers (PBR). This tool involves a participatory approach to documenting crop species and the insights on their requirements, production, uses, characteristics, history and changes in the current production scenario. The final outcome of the PBR is to ensure that no traditional knowledge, especially the ones collected orally since ages, should be forgotten.

The workshop also saw a great opportunity for the attendees to start a network of their own. Amidst the list of shared topics discussed, many agreed on the fact that a network is essential if they are to develop collectively, though separated by geographical distances. Seed-exchange events and follow-up meetings were also discussed during the meet.



Custodian Farmers' Network member Mr. Sinmorin Marbaniang filling out the People's Biodiversity Register.

The Future of Farming – Perfection Suchiang

Perfection Suchiang, an 18 year old farmer from the village of Mulum, West Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya, was amongst the 11 participants of the Well-Being studies conducted in his area.

One of the seven children in his family, Perfection began helping his mother with their three-acre family farm and a half-acre kitchen garden, since he was 11 years old. While custodian farmers are mostly elderly individuals, this young farmer remarkably tries to sustain and maintain his field and garden's diversity.

Perfection grows almost 25-30 crop varieties- both in his garden and in the field. They include corn, potato, beans, pumpkin, yam, cucumber, banana, cauliflower, cabbage, tomato, ginger, turmeric, mustard, perilla, five types of rice and different types of fruits. He practices shifting cultivation as well as a permanent form of cultivation of paddy. Perfection mostly grows local crops, but unfortunately his garden also supports some hybrid varieties, which he wishes to gradually stop cultivating. He is amongst a few farmers who still grow the Tohja, a local variety of soya bean which was later nominated as an Ark of Taste product by him.

Perfection promotes multi-cropping in the community by practicing it in his own garden and tries to cultivate as much crops as he can, even if in a small quantity. Multi-cropping ensures the continuity of the species and availability of seasonal foods leading to food security. Besides being responsible for feeding his family, Perfection also tries to influence his siblings and the youth of his community to follow his footsteps. Perfection Suchiang is one of the few shining examples of the upholders of the future of agro-biodiversity.



Perfection Suchiang

FOR THE LOVE OF ECO FOOD COOKS' ALLIANCE

Cooks have an understated hand in the promotion of agro-biodiversity. Cooking requires some degree of love for the ingredients and thus the Cooks' Alliance comprises a group of people who respect their ingredients. Prior to establishing a network, it is necessary to connect with cooks who understand the importance of good food and help them realise the nature of their role. While the network is still in its nascent stage, the response has been strong.

NESFAS's trip to Pyrda in December marked the beginning of a dynamic activity in the village, where the team began a cooking workshop that would soon see the Cooks' Alliance network extend to interested chefs in the village. Met with great reception, the entire episode marked the beginning of NESFAS's intervention in culinary training in the village. This was to build the community's preparation for, the then awaiting Mawkyrat Food Fest.

On February 27, 2015, NESFAS gathered interested chefs from the host villages for the Cooks' Alliance Workshop at its office in Laitumkrah. Attended by 38 community members, it unfurled many possibilities in carrying the network forward, with cooking demonstrations. Chef Joel Basumatari from Nagaland along with the NESFAS flavour development team and the community members cooked together and explored new flavours using local ingredients that day. The workshop also served as a great platform for cooks in the region to share, relate and connect with each other.

The Cooks' Alliance met once more on March 30, 2015, to interact with Chef Fabio Antonini from Pineta Terra, Amsterdam. Chef Fabio, a passionate cook, a spokesperson for local and organic foods and an active member of the Chefs' Alliance in Amsterdam, not only met with the local alliance to share his expertise and experience, but also enriched his own reserves of knowledge. The 10 participants, Chef Fabio, Chef Joel Basumatari and the NESFAS flavour department members, connected their love for food and their understanding of themselves as biodiversity defenders. The meeting reinforced amongst the participants the pride in their role and the importance of such a network.

With his experience in running a restaurant adhering to certain guidelines set by the Slow Food for the Cooks' Alliance, Chef Fabio stressed on the need for a set of guidelines for the local Cooks' Alliance. It was decided that the guidelines will be co-developed and based on their fulfilment as criteria, individuals will be accepted as members. The guideline considers aspects of hygiene, fair-pricing, visual appeal of the food served and flavour exploration, wherein ingredients play the main role.

The group also discussed the creation of fair markets for the local foods and wild edibles that support an agrobiodiversity-friendly local economy. Chef Fabio also suggested the use of internet tourism to further eco-food tourism. Branding and marketing, creation of standard menus and stalls were also discussed for a public image. The Cooks' Alliance members also spoke about the need for workshops on kitchen set-up, herb gardens, markets and other technical aspects.

The response has been heartening, where cooks have shown a deep interest in not just maintaining the Alliance, but also in raising standards via vocalising a desire for capacity-building.

As of today, the Cooks' Alliance is 150 members strong.



Photo: Donbokiang Majaw



Photo: Donbokiang Majaw



Photo: Donbokiang Majaw

NETWORKING FOR NATURE

NESFAS sought to create networks in these fields mentioned below, given their importance to the various communities. Although the networks have been initiated, NESFAS now hopes to actively get involved with individuals and communities that wish to join these networks.

POLLINATORS' NETWORK

The locals believe that bees indicate a family or a community's well-being. It is also believed that bees do not live in houses where family members quarrel. Bee-keepers throughout Meghalaya have noticed that over the last few decades, bee swarms have reduced in size and the bees themselves have become smaller. They also noticed that bees are easily domesticated these days, thanks to roads, deforestation, mono-cropping and the popularity of house-gardens. NESFAS facilitated the Pollinators' Network with interested communities to create awareness amongst the communities that bees, indeed, indicate the land's health and to connect bee-keepers and indigenous knowledge holders to share ideas, information and discuss issues faced by traditional bee-keepers. Although the network is yet to be fully active, NESFAS has begun work by identifying bee-keepers who agree with NESFAS's philosophy.

Bee Keepers Identified so far: 114



INDIGENOUS RICE NETWORK

Interaction with the Nongkynrih community members, in the Laskein District, Jaintia Hills, revealed the need for a 'Rice Network', and rightly so, rice being the staple food of all North-East Indian communities. They pointed out that today in Jaintia Hills itself, at least 100 indigenous varieties of rice are grown.

At the Mei-Ramew 2013 food festival, they were able to display 32 of these seed varieties. NESFAS recognises the potential of local rice to enhance nutritional security and market independence for local communities. The network is currently focuses on surveying and understanding the indigenous rice varieties and their agricultural significances.

Rice growers Identified so far: 637



SHIFTING CULTIVATION NETWORK

More than just an agricultural practice, 'Jhum' links the hill communities closely to their culture. Many communities reiterated to NESFAS the importance of Shifting Cultivation or 'Jhum' in their food security and sustainable livelihood.

'Jhum' is also vital to biodiversity conservation; at one time farmers are known to grow more than 20 different types of crops. There is an increasing acknowledgment in the international science community too, that shifting cultivation can be a biodiversity enriching practice. NESFAS believes that 'Jhum' cannot be done away with and sustainable ways and means to practice Shifting Cultivation need to be worked upon.





**Food, in the end, in our own tradition,
is something holy.
It's not about nutrients and calories.
It's about sharing. It's about honesty.
It's about identity.”**
- Louise Fresco

Section Two



Going Beyond 'Farm-to-Table': Unlearning Convenient Food Lifestyles

For eons, globally, food and agriculture have been reviewed from an agronomical view-point, preferring quantity over quality.

NESFAS was founded on the philosophy that traditional food systems highly express the qualitative aspects of food. Unfortunately, while many research and development initiatives turn a blind eye to these highly comprehensive aspects, traditional food systems' most salient features are actually, their intrinsic values. These values, though context specific, well support a sustainable and bioculturally diverse food system, dictated by socio-cultural norms based on how man interacts with his ecology. They embody the Traditional Ecological Knowledge and its umbrella practices, ranging from means of production and land uses, to taste-appreciation and culinary skills within a food system. NESFAS believes that these values are critical to developing a good, clean and fair food system.



Photo: Roderick Hangrum

Yellow Brinjals, saved for seeds in Thawkhong.

KIDS' KITCHEN INITIATIVE



Photo: Dombobong Majew

Participants during their class assignments

A visit to the William Lewis Boys' Home, owned by the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Assembly, in Mawphlang on June 2014 by NESFAS Chairman, Mr. Phrang Roy, Board Member Ms. Anita Roy, Consultant Mr. Rahul Antao and the then Flavour Innovation Intern Ms. Kritika Suratkal, revealed that the meals served to the boys at the William Lewis Boys' Home needed a considerable upgrading in its flavour and nutritional aspect.

The Kids' Kitchen Initiative was a plan proposed thereafter, aiming to build the boys' capacity in cooking through consistent training in basic culinary skills through cooking demonstrations and DIY assignments, followed by frequent assessments and reviews by the NESFAS Flavour Development team. Designed to impart the boys and the caretakers with culinary awareness, as also to connect them to their local food heritage, the training guides them towards growing up with the tools to make good food choices. It can also serve as a possible base for a career option in the food industry and other related areas, via capacity building.

Seven cooking classes, the first held on July 26th with an attendance of 19 participants, have been conducted so far, wherein each session addressed various cooking skills such as peeling vegetables, chopping, boiling, frying and presentation, amongst others.

NESFAS is also eager to develop three small plots around the Boy's Home as Kitchen Gardens. Hoping to create completely organic gardens, NESFAS met with Mission Organic to develop a working plan. Unfortunately, the plot's size did not meet the minimum area requirement for implementing the same. Nonetheless, Ms. Hemelyne Lyngdoh, District Horticulture Officer, East Khasi Hiss, extended her department's support by providing organic seeds for plantation. She also offered to provide planting material and equipment to the orphanage in future. While NESFAS sees man-power to make the kitchen garden functional, the boys are in the meantime, in charge of its daily maintenance.

Meanwhile, the NESFAS team has begun work with soil preparation, as the next stage in the Boy's Home Kitchen Garden initiative. A basic survey of the area, along another one to improve the water management for the irrigation system to be implemented in this area, was conducted by Mr. Maximilian Manderscheid, from the Germany aid agency, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, along with NESFAS.



Photo: Ralfes Delimery

Participants of the Kids' Kitchen Initiative - (Left to right, first row) Banrikupar Reeborn (front), Deffer Theba (front), Banjop Khonjoh (front), Banlamahwa Kharkrang (front), Lhos Nongoh (front), Lightnomingstar Syiemlieh (back), Kularskhem Hongspung (back), Kyshan Kharir (back), Willman Syiemlieh (back), Banshanbor Bamae (back)

URBAN COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

With globalisation spreading thick over the urban landscapes, convenient commercial market demands are rapidly eating into our farmlands, making us easily forget the simple pleasures of fresh, organic food and completely dependent on pesticides and/or preservatives-laden processed foods that add to our health woes at an alarming rate.

While a majority of its activities involve people at the grassroots-level, NESFAS undertakes a number of initiatives in the urban scenario too, aiming to re-connect people to their culture and traditional foods, via their taste and food choices.



Photo: Dambodang Majaw

The Banana Millet Cake - a big hit with the children.

TASTE WORKSHOPS

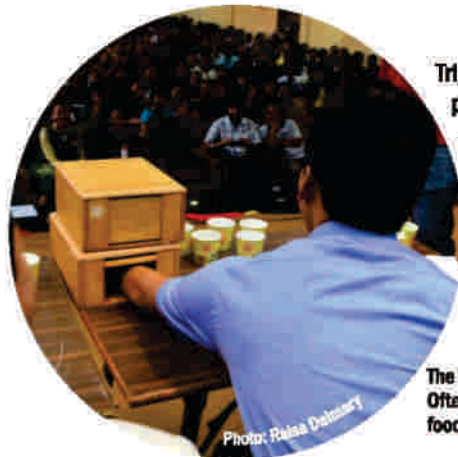


Photo: Raisa Dalmary

Triggering our gustatory senses, taste whisks us through the collective memory of a unique place and time, introducing us to all the people that put a meal on our plates, especially our farmers and our cooks.

Through Taste Workshops, NESFAS attempts at imparting sensory education, which is about the rediscovery and appreciation of our collective heritage and diversity in all its facets through food. Thus inspired by Slow Food, NESFAS engages people in workshops and games that remind us of our foods' incredible diversity through sensory education via smell, taste, touch, sound and sight. This interactive approach is critical to make participants, especially children, develop an appreciation for their unique and local foods.

The 'Feel Box' tests one's sense of touch. Often people find it hard to guess what food item they are touching.

NESFAS was given the opportunity to reach out to at least a thousand people by the Ramakrishna Mission on the occasion of Swami Vivekananda's 150th Birth Anniversary. On April 28th, 2014, the Vivekananda Cultural Centre, Shillong became witness to a Sensory Games session that involved as many as 1000 people at one time. While a handful of people were chosen from the audience to try some of the taste-sensory games, the rest were engaged in visual, audio and olfactory-related games. The session worked at creating a curiosity that could lead to a better understanding of the food that they eat.

NESFAS consultant Rahul Antao addressing the audience.



Photo: Raisa Dalmary

Sensory games during the Nongrim Hills Food Fest in June, tested the participants' sensory skills, wherein people more in tune with their various senses were awarded with a slice of Millet Banana Cake.

As part of its initiative to create Youth Food Clubs with interested institutions, sensory games were also conducted with students of Sankardev College, Shillong on July 1st.



Photo: Raisa Dalmary

The Banana Millet Cake



Photo: Dambodang Majaw

The Sankardev students taking part in the Sensory Games



Photo: Sudeep Sahu

The NESFAS community garden covers a small area of approximately 216 sq ft.

COMMUNITY GARDEN

The NESFAS community garden, which began as a small idea, was translated into action on International Earth Day (22nd April), with a meeting with the local headmen of Laitumkhrah, Mr. S. B. Nongdhar- Rangbah Shnong, Laitumkhrah, Mr. G. Lyngdoh - Rangbah Dong, Nongrimbah and Mr. W. Pohshna, Rangbah Dong, Nongrimmaw.

Aimed at making Laitumkhrah a model community and labelled as the 'Laitumkhrah Initiative', the Community Garden grows local, chemical-free vegetables, which are shared with the local community.

The small scale operation began with the planting of the Community Garden at the NESFAS Headquarters on April 29, 2014. The day was picked in accordance with the Lunar Agricultural Calendar that the local farmers of Meghalaya follow, which pronounces a new moon's eve as 'Ksang Bnai' - the best day to plant any form of flora.

The later stages of the initiative involved the collection of the vegetables which were then distributed amongst the underprivileged families of Laitumkhrah, the list of which was attained via a week-long survey with the help of the local administration. On June 27, the first lot of the harvested vegetables were distributed amongst four families at Punjabi Line, Lum Sohra. The first batch of the community garden vegetables yielded for six harvests after that.

The winter batch of vegetables planted in September was distributed to the Mother Teresa Children's Home, run by the Missionaries of Charity in Nongrimbah Road. NESFAS hopes that this initiative not only serves its local community, but also influences others to pick up the spade and grow foods that are local, organic and good for health.



Photo: TSS Intern/ Pooza Sayini

A local Brinjal.



Photo: Rakita Dalmy

Mr. Arms planting saplings in the NESFAS Community garden.



Photo: Rakita Dalmy

Our winter vegetables were shared with the Mother Theresa Children's Home.



Photo: Donhokiang Majaw



Photo: Donhokiang Majaw



Photo: Raisa Dalmaty

"Slow" stewed-pork with fresh seasonal vegetables, hand-crafted tortelli and panna cotta with local mulberries and wild honey.

FINE DINING EVENT

On March 31, 2015, 72 diners sat down to partake in NESFAS's first ever fine-dining event. A member of Slow Food Chefs' Alliance- Amsterdam and co-owner of Planeta Terra, Chef Fabio Antonini along with his young team, including Chef Joel Basumatari and NESFAS flavour development team members- Rahul Antao, Esther M. Sawian and Roderick Nongrum, put together in two days, food that proudly achieved exactly what the event aimed for- a celebration of local food.

The three-course meal of hand-crafted pasta, "slow" stewed-pork with fresh seasonal vegetables and panna cotta with local mulberries and wild honey, glamorised the local ingredients to show the diners that these humble food products can be much more than just home food. Chef Fabio along with the core kitchen staff, studied the local market, hand-picked the ingredients and also incorporated what they had learned from a discussion with the local Cooks' Alliance, to create this grand fusion of tastes.

Commenting on how events such as these have the potential to change people into more conscious eaters by giving them a choice over fast food without deviating from their roots, Chef Fabio pointed out the importance of holding onto one's traditional systems while taking the good from other cultures. He also spoke about how people can become co-producers rather than just consumers, by choosing what they eat instead of being subject to what the market offers them and thus directly communicating their choice to the farmers.

NESFAS is heartened by the overwhelming response it received to its first attempt ever at hosting such an event. With guests requesting more of such get-togethers, NESFAS hopes to imbibe learning from similar events and host even better sessions, where local food ingredients are in the limelight.

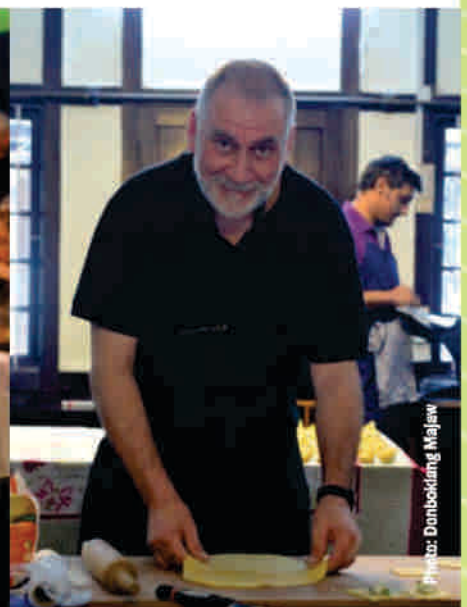


Chef Basumatari talking with the diners

Photo: Raisa Dalmaty



The diners



Chef Fabio in the kitchen

Photo: Donhokiang Majaw



THE MAWPREM INITIATIVE

Mr. Carmo Noronha, Director of the Bethany Society, gave his audience the five "R"s of waste management- 'refuse', 'reduce', 'reuse', 'rebuy' and 'recycle'- during a workshop on Zero Waste in Mawprem, Shillong. He built upon the idea that "waste management and energy conservation are not exclusive".

Held at the Mawprem Modern Secondary School on 26th April 2014, this waste management programme was jointly steered by NESFAS and Bethany Society. With help from the local administration - the Dorbar Shnong, the local women's group - the Seng Kynthei and the local youth group - the Seng Samla, the programme sensitised the members of the locality about waste-management at home, energy conservation and solar power.

The workshop resulted in the participants taking the decision to make Mawprem into a model locality for waste management.



Mr. Carmo Noronha addressing the gathering.

YOUTH FOOD CLUBS

NESFAS has consistently reached out to the youth since its inception as they are evidently the most vulnerable to the changing food practices and dietetic patterns.

Currently, taking steps towards widening the network throughout the state by meeting students across colleges in forming food clubs for the "Local Food Movement", NESFAS's Youth Food Clubs was initiated to connect youths to their local food and to further expand their food choices so as to transmit the idea on to the next generation. It is an effort that tries to give local food a fighting chance where, today, city dieters actively opt for fast food.



Aurélien Culat talking about the Slow Food Youth Food Movement.

- ◆ Mr. Joris Lohman, Europe's Youth Food Movement's President, in his engagement with Meghalaya's youth in 2013, emphasised on the need to form a youth movement for sustainable food and agricultural practices.

- ◆ An interaction with Mr. Aurélien Culat, a French freelance journalist working with a Paris Convivium and a contributor to the Slow Food Youth Food Movement and his friend Ms. Thereza Terri from Italy, drew many students, lecturers from Martin Luther Christian University, St. Edmund's, St. Anthony's, St. Mary's and Women's College, and other interested participants.

These various talks and discussions spawned the idea of a Youth Food Club (YFC) - a place for young people to actively participate in protecting and preserving their food system. NESFAS has reached out to schools, colleges and universities to setup their own Youth Food Clubs based on their individual strengths and potential to pave young initiatives addressing the issues of youth vulnerability.

July 1, 2014: "Promoting Agrobiodiversity", a one day workshop at Sankardev College, Shillong, saw 60 enthusiastic students from the Departments of Languages, Philosophy and Botany, followed by an interactive session on how they can contribute towards promotion of agrobiodiversity through Food Clubs with them.

September 17, 2014: An awareness program at the Department of Home Sciences, St Mary's College, Shillong, also ideated on Food Clubs. Plans for this club have been included in NESFAS's follow-up chart for future actions.

Albeit the youth and their institutions' good-will and support, they will need more than a mere push in the right direction, with stronger initiatives by NESFAS to make the YFCs more active.



The Sankardev students brainstorming on ways to create YFCs.



YFC, Department of Home Sciences, St Mary's College, Shillong.

Section Three



**Knowledge is Power,
Indigenous Knowledge is Wisdom.”**



Preserving Traditional Knowledge

NESFAS discovered a wellspring of knowledge among the grassroots - their wealth of knowledge defined by decades of close interaction with nature and shaped by keen observation of what affected their existence. Their agricultural practices were, over time, designed to adapt to nature and always aimed at maintaining a balance through sustainable systems.

NESFAS empowers this Indigenous treasure with formal science dialogues and discussions, through dissemination of strategic trainings and workshops to the communities, aiming to enable the Indigenous communities to participate in different forums that allow space for inclusion of traditional knowledge, whilst easing challenges with the help of modern techniques, science and highlighting of outstanding indigenous practices. The latter is promoted through conferences and important meetings. NESFAS also tries to help communities preserve and transmit their traditional knowledge in a participatory manner by targeting various sectors such as school children, youth and farmers.

Via digital media and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools, NESFAS has managed to create a knowledge bank that archives photos, videos and agrobiodiversity information. Guided by its core values, the knowledge bank has always operated through participatory and inclusive approaches, that repatriates knowledge gained to the communities facilitated, via 'experience-sharing' and 'knowledge-exchange', instead of extractive research methodologies.



Planting seeds for a greener classroom (RCLP Nongkdat, West Khasi Hills).

SCHOOL GARDENS

The School Garden projects are a fun yet educational approach towards nutrition, knowledge-transfer and agrobiodiversity promotion. These have been successfully adopted by many NESFAS communities. Reserving special areas around schools for cultivation of local vegetables and fruits with assistance from the Indigenous communities, self-help groups and agencies like the Anganwadi, the NESFAS School Gardens match the Slow Food principles of 'good, clean and fair', focusing on disseminating indigenous knowledge to children and promoting the use of local vegetables.

NESFAS strives to become a model in the implementation of such community and school gardens. It also holds a guideline manual for agencies, schools or partners who wish to follow this initiative.

Involving community members, volunteers, school teachers, students, parents, Anganwadi workers, Village-Heads/Sordars and dignitaries, the following are a successful list of NESFAS School Garden Initiatives:

2013-2014 ●

1. Khliehumstem
2. Khweng
3. Nongtraw
4. Dewlieh
5. Laitsohpliah
6. Dombah

2014-2015 ●

1. Umtyngngar
2. Sohliya
3. Porksai
4. Tmar
5. Thawkhong
6. Pydengmawlieh

- June 5, 2014
- July 31, 2014
- September 5, 2014
- September 18, 2014
- October 27, 2014
- October 27, 2014

7. Mulum - October 23, 2014
8. Mulieh - October 29, 2014
9. Dewlieh - December 2014
10. Nongriangka - March 25, 2015
11. Mosakhia - March 19, 2015



Photo: Janak Preet Singh

ARK OF TASTE (AOT)

An up-hill task of documenting a hundred food products to be nominated for the Ark of Taste list (a Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity initiative), between July-September 2014, was taken up by the NESFAS team. It was managed thanks to the innumerable local treasures that fit the Ark's bill of rare, distinct and disappearing gustatory jewels in the North East India, also known to be one of the eight biodiversity hot-spots in the world. The list was prepared with immense help from various individuals and communities from Meghalaya and Nagaland, the Department of Agriculture of Meghalaya, partner groups like the North East Network (Nagaland) and the interns and field staff of NESFAS, who concentrated all their efforts to bring the list together.

Designed to preserve at-risk foods that are sustainably produced, have a unique taste and are native to a distinct eco-region, the AOT highlights their existence by bringing focus to a food's risk of extinction, inviting everyone to actively partake in its protection by seeking them out, buying and consuming them, spreading their story, supporting their producers and in some cases (such as in the case of endangered wild species), promoting their conservation and reproduction- thus seeking their rediscovery and addition of value, to strengthen the local economies. The AOT, which could be any food product such as a single crop, an animal breed, a recipe or even a traditional method of preparation, is characterised by its potential risk of extinction within a specific area/community.

In the North-East, where indigenous communities are the stewards of local knowledge and agro-biodiversity, the documentation has to be carried out by seeking their advice and consent. A good and practical way of identifying an AOT is by applying Participatory Rural Appraisal tools such as the Four-Cell Analysis, which gives an overview of the overall biodiversity in a community and distribution in a specific area/community, while simultaneously highlighting under-utilised or at-risk crops.

The NESFAS, through the Cooks' Alliance actively promotes the use of these Ark of Tastes in innovative ways with hopes that these products can find a way back to our plates.

In 2014, NESFAS's nomination listed 20 items to the Ark of Taste, from which the **Sha Shla Krot** (wild root tea), **Sohnlamtra** (the Khasi Mandarin) and the **Lapunel** (a variety of wild herb), were accepted as passengers of the Ark.

Today the nomination list consists of 150 products!

Ark of Taste - Products

The **Allarut** is a tuber with a mild and slightly sweet taste. It secretes a liquid that looks like milk. People in Meghalaya have traditionally used Allarut like chewing gum while working in the fields. The white liquid collected by squeezing the tuber has also been used as a substitute for milk for babies. While the Allarut was once found at local markets, it is now mainly grown for personal consumption.



The name **Khnlang Kseh** literally translates to "pine tree insect". These giant caterpillars can grow up to 15-18 cm long and as the name suggests, live out most of their lives on pine trees. Eaten by people from all around Meghalaya, they are harvested twice a year, in the months of May and June and again in September and October. Used fresh or preserved for future by drying in the sun, the **Khnlang Kseh** is usually served with rice and was eaten in the past by people who could not afford meat or fish.



Soh Janel grows to be about as large as an apple and contains round seeds that are the size of marbles. The fruit is green when unripe and yellow once mature and extremely sour to taste. It grows on large trees and is rubbery or chewy in consistency. Some communities believe that its tartness can be used to remove poison from a human body. The fruit is also consumed to stave off dehydration. Due to its extreme sourness the fruit is often dried and eaten. It is preserved by drying and can be stored in this state for years.



Lashing (*Curcuma zedoaria*), also known as white turmeric or zedoary, is an aromatic herb with large, above-ground leaves found all over Meghalaya. It grows up to 1 meter in height and has a purplish hue along the middle. The swollen underground stems are yellow or orange coloured inside. These rhizomes have a white interior and a scent reminiscent of mango. In India, the **Lashing** root is often used fresh or pickled; however in the East Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya the flower is also consumed.



Soh Prengum is a wild fruit that grows on small trees. The fruits have four layers - the edible peel, the seed cover, the seeds and the heart. The first layer is thick and spongy with red wine colour and has a slightly sweet taste. A thin cover separates the peel from the red wine-coloured seeds which are hard. A small white heart is found inside the fruit. The trees are mostly found in dense forests and the fruits becomes ready for consumption from the month of April onwards.



The name '**Ka nub**' translates to "giant jungle bean." Its pods are brown, while the beans are white. They are harvested between October and January, using a traditional knife called a '**Ka walt**'. **Ka nub** is nutritious and filling and so has been known to be used as a replacement for meat in meals. Besides being used in cooking, mature **Ka nub** was also used in the past as soap for washing clothes and bathing and as an antiseptic medicine applied to heal wounds.



BIODIVERSITY WALKS

An exploratory walk with the community knowledge-holders through their available forest areas that brings to light the varieties of wild edibles and medicinal plants available in these areas, NESFAS's Biodiversity Walks concentrate on including children- the future knowledge-holders of the community. Hence, the identification of local knowledge-holders is of prime importance, for the place is selected by them as per their knowledge of the food diversity. Often, these walks lead to Eat-ins with wild edibles collected from the forest leading to yet another level of education, where the participants learn how the plants that they had identified should be used.

Biodiversity walk at the St Margaret's LP School, Mulum.



BIODIVERSITY WALKS 2014

Porksai, West Khasi Hills District, October 17th

22 participants explored the nearby lands for two hours and documented 13 wild edible species.

Pydengmawlieh, West Khasi Hills District, October 22nd

16 treckers across various age groups documented 13 edible plant species.

Thawkhong, West Khasi Hills District, October 28th

Led by the Sordar (the local Headman) himself and a school teacher, six people documented 11 wild edibles, 9 species of fresh water fishes and one species of crab.

Mulleh, Jaintia Hills, October 30th

Led by the two teachers- Mrs. Gloria Dhar, Mrs. Piartna Dhar, the Lumwasieh LP School's students, documented a whopping 20 edible plants from a nearby forest area.



The Pydengmawlieh Biodiversity Walk.



A Biodiversity walk at Lumwasieh, Mulieh.

WELL-BEING and DIGITAL STORY-TELLING (DST)

Given the global context of debates about what the pursuit of human well-being, as also what the post-2015 development agenda should be, happiness and well-being was chosen to be one of the key themes that will be discussed at the International Mei-Ramew 2015 (IMR). In preparation, NESFAS, in collaboration with The Indigenous Partnership, sought to facilitate space for indigenous communities' understanding of Well-Being as a basis for interpreting modern ways in relation to their own.

Community framework for Well-Being in the indigenous scenario was found through collection and analysis of indigenous stories and Well-Being in select communities; the use of stories is an established technique in development work, when spaces between perspectives need to be navigated to enable shared understanding and action. As a technique, stories supported the plurality of understanding of Well-Being that this research project aimed to capture. The Well-Being studies, thus, conducted used Digital Story Telling (DST) as a tool for documenting as well as sharing stories. Through DST, which uses video and photos to create a narrative, the communities were able to share details about their lives and the issues that affect their lives with people who do not know their local context. This workshop in general helps prompt reflection on the various factors that contribute to their happiness and Well-Being.

The approach taken up for this study tries to provide an environment for learning for the participating communities and aims to empower them to feel confident in the use and refinement of participatory techniques and approaches. It was hoped that a replicable research protocol would be developed from this study.

The research is also aimed at providing wider educational value and a pathway to the exploration of how mainstream world-views and thinking can possibly learn from Indigenous approaches towards human Well-Being and happiness by shedding light on their diverse viewpoints.

It is expected that the study will extend beyond the 'psycho spheres' of modernity, which informs most of the policy level discussions about Well-Being and happiness, and will be robust enough to allow high-level decision making.

Between June 2014 and March 2015 two Well-Being studies were conducted in Meghalaya in Nongkynrih, Jaintia Hills, and Lyngam, West Khasi Hills, along with one in Isiolo County, Kenya.

WELL-BEING STUDIES NONGKYNRIH

Jaintia Hills, June 2014.

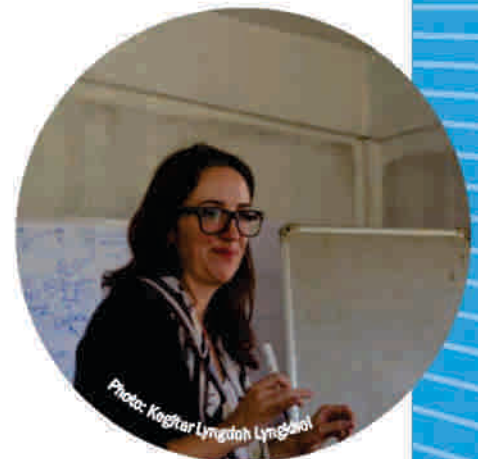
A five-day "Well-Being study" workshop was conducted at the Nongkynrih village, by NESFAS along with Ms. Elizabeth Hacker and Mr. Sanju Gurung (via NESFAS's partnership between the 'Power, Participation and Social Change' (PPSC) Team at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and the 'Voluntary Services Overseas' (VSO)). The two were introduced to NESFAS by The Indigenous Partnership through Mr. Jody Aked, an experienced facilitator, specialising in the study and application of well-being research to community and organisational development.

Post a briefing by Ms. Elizabeth and Mr. Sanju on the tools required to develop and present information collected from such a study, the NESFAS team along with the facilitators headed to Nongkynrih for the workshop.

From 23rd June onwards, 11 people from the Madankynsaw, Nongkynrih, Mulum, Mokyndeng, Rallang and Mulleh villages participated in the workshop. Digital Story Telling (DST) was implemented as a narration tool and to digitally record and share the people's perspective on well-being.

Translating locally into "I Bha I Mit", the participants further identified the following elements to be critical to their definition of 'well-being': Good and collective governance, access to resources, love and mutual respect, preservation of traditional culture and lifestyle, agriculture, sense of community- support and co-operation, peace and harmony, education, health, nature and environment, food and seed sovereignty and spirituality.

For digital story-telling, the participants were given basic training in creating story-boards photography, video production and editing. The workshop resulted in three digital stories on "Being a Farmer", "Preserving Tradition and Promoting the Present" and "Hard Work Resulting in Well-Being" - all narrated and produced by the participants themselves. The workshop also offered many insights to NESFAS on conducting such studies.



Ms. Elizabeth Hacker in Nongkynrih.



The Nongkynrih community members creating story-boards during the DST workshop.



Digital Story Telling : Im Myrhiang

The Lyngams considered farming as a crucial factor upholding their sense of well-being, locally known as "Ka Im Myrhiang".

The DST made by the people of Lyngam talks about how life of the people in the region revolves around agriculture and their ability to farm, whichever plot of land they desire, as long as it falls in their "clan's jurisdiction".

WELL-BEING STUDIES LYGAM

West Khasi Hills, 2014

Home to the Lyngams, a sub-tribe of the Khasi populace, the workshop in the village of Umdang, revealed that 'Im Myrhiang' meaning "live a good life" describes 'well-being and happiness' aptly for the Lyngams. The inheritance of land and the matriarchic legacy as the foundation of "Im Myrhiang" was a concurrent belief of the participants, linked to the "we feeling" - of doing things together and being part of something bigger than themselves. The research for the study took place over a period of five-days, from December 15 to 19, 2014.

NESFAS facilitators assisted the participants in making three digital stories by analysing various topics that they viewed as well-being indicators, covering the following core themes:

- ◆ Inheritance of land and family legacy to all the daughters
- ◆ Access to resources (land, forest, clean food & clean water)
- ◆ Sense of 'we feeling' - strong connection with their clan
- ◆ Clean governance- both men and women taking part in the decision-making
- ◆ Preservation of traditional culture and lifestyle



Well-Being studies being conducted at Umdang.

WELL-BEING STUDIES KENYA

February-March, 2015

The seven-day Nairobi Well-Being study at the Isiolo County, Northern Kenya, that began on February 23, 2015 and went on till the first week of March, saw 12 participants (five women and seven men), ranging from the age of 18 to 78 years, from four different pastoralist (livestock agriculturalists) ethnic groups - Borana, Gabbra, Turkana and Sakuye.



Community members of the Isiolo Community.

Following the work done by NESFAS for the Well-Being Study, Plus Renee, Associate, NESFAS, was selected by the Indigenous Partnership to participate in the studies in Nairobi. Using storytelling to explore the community well-being's complex and dynamic nature and their lifestyle, three videos documenting portions of the participant's understanding of well-being were shot, produced and were presented to 52 people from the four ethnic groups, who came to see and discuss the work of the storytellers. Satisfied with the stories produced, they consented to share the DSTs with the world.

The participants identified seven core factors as critical to the well-being of the Isiolo County's pastoralists:

- ◆ working together through labour exchange
- ◆ sharing of resources among the same tribes
- ◆ good health, wealth or the ability to meet basic needs
- ◆ tradition and culture
- ◆ spirituality
- ◆ peace in the environment
- ◆ good leadership and governance

The UK government think tank, Foresight, that conducted a large-scale review of the current state of knowledge on well-being in 2009, through the centre for well-being at the New Economics Foundation (NEF), lent to these studies the "Five ways to Well-Being". It is based on key themes that included social relationships, physical activity, awareness, learning, and giving as the sort of activities that support well-being. The framework was reflected in the studies done in Nongkynrih, Lyngam as well as Isiolo County with slightly different results. It was found that though social relationships, physical activity, awareness, learning, and giving, are highly important to them, it was only possible to maintain these in presence of a central element-

- ◆ Peace and Harmony for the people of Nongkynrih, Meghalaya
- ◆ Peace and security for the people of Isiolo County, Kenya
- ◆ Inheritance of land and farming legacy to the Daughter in Lyngam, Meghalaya.

With the completion of the studies in three areas, the capacities of the four NESFAS staff who were engaged with the studies were developed. They will be further engaged in the studies independently, to add to the information gathered to make for a more empirical outcome.

PARTICIPATORY VIDEOS

As the name itself suggests, Participatory Video (PV) is a tool that NESFAS uses to help communities document relevant issues, so as to encourage their visibility to a wider audience and ensure that traditional knowledge is documented, archived and transferred through videos made in a participatory manner. The various topics range from agricultural practices, cultural diversity, plants and most importantly, people's own stories. The videos' participatory approach entails the participating community's substantial obligations to the content's nature and theme. Story telling through Participatory videos was brought to NESFAS by The Indigenous Partnership in collaboration with the London based organisation, InsightShare which is known for facilitating participatory video documentation all over the world. The Indigenous Partnership further supported the PV initiative not only as a donor, but also by playing a part in the production of the videos by coordinating the efforts and monitoring the progress. Since April 2014, the organisation has been working on creating participatory video hubs around the North East region starting from Meghalaya. On 7th August, a PV "hub" was set up in Garo Hills. Participants were trained in the various phases of video production- story-boarding, script-writing, shooting and editing. The two week-long training programme was facilitated by Mr. Christopher Atkins from InsightShare and the NESFAS team in three villages.



Nagaland PV team members.

Two more PV hubs were set up in the East Khasi Hills (Nongtraw and Mawphu) while two more were established in the Nagaland districts of Chizami and Noklak in presence of Mr. Christopher Atkins and InsightShare founder, Mr. Nick Lunch, later in August.

Till date, 17 videos have been produced by the three hubs addressing issues such as people's hope for the future, a visit to Italy for the Terra Madre 2014, weaving, traditional beauty products, seed-keepers, traditional method of fermenting soybean, traditional fishing practices and cooking, religion, traditional method of making soda, folk songs, traditional methods of producing thread from plant bark, traditional ways of making rice beer, Biodiversity Walks, important landmarks, agricultural practices and Shifting Cultivation.

The videos produced in the villages will be screened at the IMR 2015. The purpose of this activity is to provide a platform for the village communities to share their stories with people across the world.

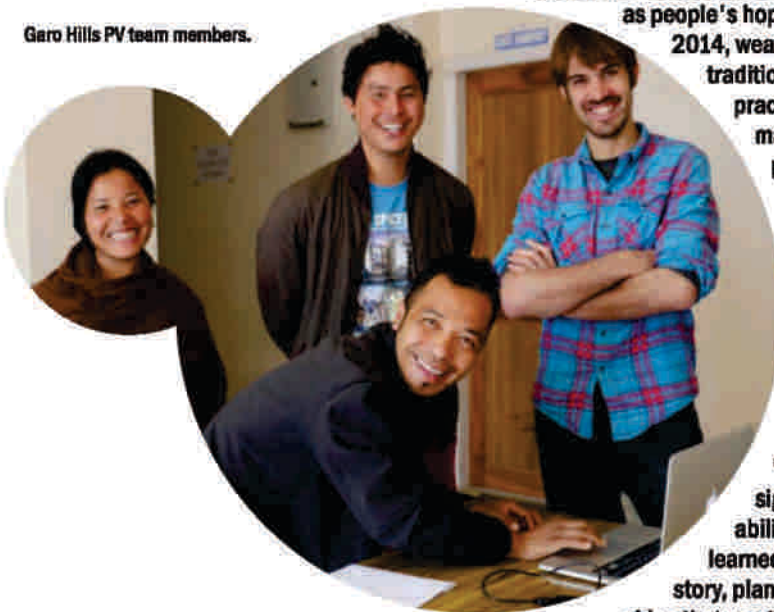
"The PV Training has significantly improved our ability of storytelling. We learned how to identify a good story, plan and produce a good video that can tell a story better. Also prior to this training, we never had any technical

skills; we didn't know how to script a story, use a video camera and edit. We learned so much over these last few months not only in terms of technology but also about ourselves and our culture. I think PV will serve as a powerful tool for the cultural projection of Mawphu and the region as a whole." - Mr. Christopher Sohtun, PV trainee, Mawphu



Khasi Hills PV team members.

Garo Hills PV team members.



PV Team Noklak, Nagaland

The farmers in Noklak District, Nagaland, have been practicing Shifting Cultivation, also known as 'Jhum' for decades, ever since their immigration from Khamnlungan, their place of origin.

The shifting cycle otherwise known as the fallow period maintained by the people of Noklak, runs a period of 10 years, a cycle that gives the soil ample chance to recuperate.

In fact, 'Jhum' cultivation has been the primary upholder of a niche biodiversity of the region, where multiple varieties of crops can be grown, in contrast to mono-cropping. Mr. Bumoi, a local farmer in Noklak states in the video, "In a paddy field, we can grow only three to four crop varieties, as compared to the fifty five crops that we grow in a 'Jhum' field."

The video also talks about the fact that the community is aware that millet, one of their 'Jhum' crops and a staple food for them, is a climate-smart and pest resilient crop. They also state that millet is a chief source of their food security.



LAND SPARING AND LAND SHARING

Land Sharing is an agricultural approach that aims at conserving biodiversity on a landscape where croplands are integrated with wild habitats in order to attain a sustainable yield. Land Sparing, on the other hand, is an agricultural approach where patches of natural habitat are left undisturbed but croplands are intensified so as to get a high yield for the growing population.

From June 3-6, 2013, the Platform for Agro-biodiversity Research (PAR) conducted an International workshop in Chiang Mai, Thailand that focused deeply on Land Sharing and Land sparing. The participating countries included Thailand, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Iran, Zimbabwe, Bolivia, Cuba, and India.

Later, on October 6, 2013, the PAR decided to conduct another workshop with partners from eight different countries, including India, to move forward with another project - "Supporting agro-biodiversity and maintenance in the context of land management decisions". The project considered information from sites of these eight countries to support either sides on the Land Sharing and Land Sparing debate and concentrate on rural/Indigenous communities along with their land use and management.

For the studies in Land Sparing and Land Sharing, initiated by PAR, NEFAS was asked to play for The Indigenous Partnership the role of an implementing and local partner. Based on this, three villages involved closely with NEFAS were chosen for the study- Porsal, Pydengmawlieh and Thawkhong, close to the Umdang village in Mawshynrut Block, West Khasi Hillis District, Meghalaya. Following a workshop in Rome organised by Bioversity International in collaboration with PAR on methodologies to be used for research on Land Sparing Land Sharing, Reuben Mendakor Shabong, Junior Research Fellow, NEFAS, began his research work in these three villages. Reuben's efforts were supported by PAR Researcher Ms. Dunja Mijatovic who visited Meghalaya for a brief period between 22nd February to 7th March to help him with Participatory Mapping and Socio Ecological Resilience Assessment of the three villages.

Method for data collection on agro-biodiversity richness and livestock ownership involves:

- ◆ Household survey
- ◆ Questionnaires
- ◆ Focused Group Discussions
- ◆ Participatory Mapping
- ◆ Socio-ecological Resilience Assessment

The study gave the surveyors an understanding of crop and livestock diversity, but the process was not easy as various factors did not conform to simple yardsticks such as:

- ◆ Production and unit for production was hard to assess as most farmers grew very little for personal consumption and farmers generally did not weigh harvested crops.
- ◆ Production area was difficult to assess as most of the utilised land was clan-owned. (Sometimes different farmers would use the same patch of land. Farmers there were given rights to a farmland depending on their own capacity for cultivation which varied annually.)
- ◆ Seeds were hard to be accounted for, as they were mostly inherited from previous stocks or harvests. Thus tracing their origins was tough, except for a few accounted seeds from the nearby areas, Garo Hills and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

Based on this study, a second phase of the study was planned to be conducted in the same area. The findings of the two studies will serve as content for the publication of a paper, as also comparative discussions between the eight participating countries, which would also have conducted similar studies in July 2015. It is hoped that this joint study will lead to the publishing of a book on the subject of Land Sparing and Land Sharing.

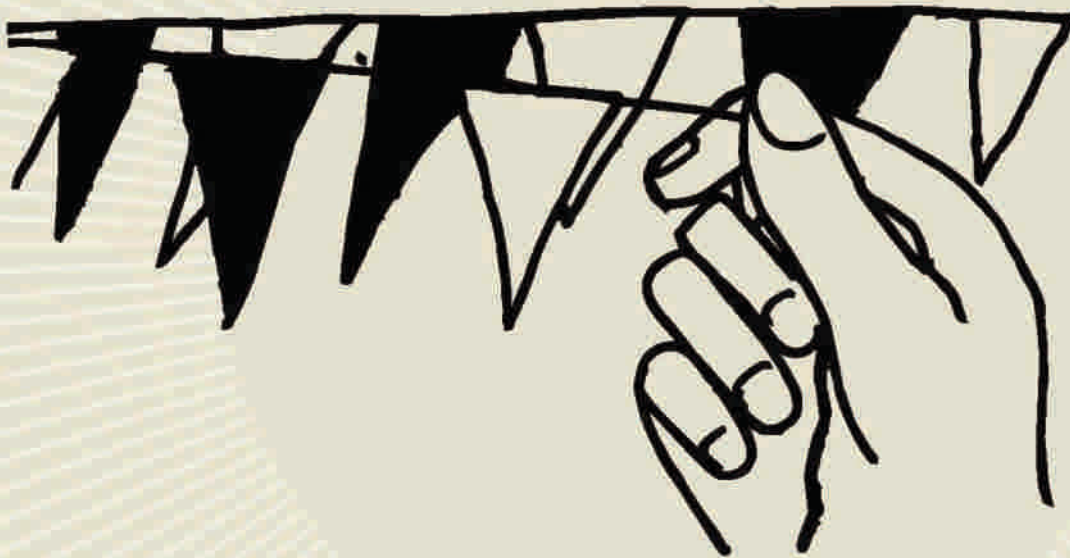


Section Four



Most cultures traditionally link food and celebrations directly with nature making them punctuations throughout the year.”

- Marcus Samuelsson



Celebrating Cultural Pride & Supporting Local Livelihoods

NESFAS works closely with interested communities to strengthen local economies through various novel interventions. Aiming for economic benefits in sync with social, environmental and cultural sustainability, NESFAS's initiatives lead to the economic promotion of local products, foster close relationship between producers and consumers and instill pride in oneself and one's occupation. The Presidia Project, Mei-Ramew cafes, food festivals and Eri-silk weaving are some of the approaches adopted by NESFAS.



Photo: Annelie Bernhart

MEI-RAMEW CAFÉS

Building on the four decisive traits of a Chef - Knowledge, Skill, Attitude and Identity, a Mei-Ramew café is a public eating space, where sustainable produce is served as glamorised cuisine to conscious consumers. NESFAS works with interested café owners, who wish to convert their already existing establishments by providing training and giving advice on areas of customer service, hygiene, menu, flavour development, management and presentation, amongst others. These initiatives enhance local economies by bridging the gap between local producers and local consumers. The most challenging aspect of starting or converting a restaurant to a Mei-Ramew café was the finances toward which NESFAS contributes by assistance in the planning.

MEI-RAMEW CAFÉ, KHWENG

Kong Plantna Kharmujal, proud owner of the first Mei-Ramew café in Khweng village, Ri Bhoi, ventured to transform her tea and food stall in line with the Slow Food principles of good, clean and fair food in the month of March 2014. She has undergone trainings in managing a Mei-Ramew café and serves fresh local food in clean, hygienic conditions. Her café features traditional food from Ri Bhoi which is strikingly different from the rest of the state. She cooks and serves food that incorporates wild edibles collected from nearby forests and vegetables grown locally.



Photo: Raksa Dilliparty

MEI-RAMEW DHABA, SOHRARIM

The Mei-Ramew Dhaba along the highway between Shillong and Sohra, popularly known as Cherrapunjee, in Sohrarim at Khatarshnong, Laitroh, CB Block, in the East Khasi Hills is owned by Bah Hamlet Khongngain. He is supported by NESFAS with culinary trainings, menu creation, food presentation, cleanliness, hygiene and basic management. The dhaba, set up as a Mei-Ramew café in June 2014, caters to the locals and people travelling to and from Sohra and serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. Hamlet supplements ingredients he sources from local markets, with herbs and vegetables that he grows in the vegetable garden behind the café.



Photo: Annesha Khongngain

MEI-RAMEW CAFÉ, LAITUMIONG

Iatrellang was established as a Mei-Ramew café, seven months post its opening in May 2014. Based in Laitumiong, East Khasi Hills District, it sits pretty on top of a hill overlooking the Sohra Valley. Constructed mostly out of bamboo, the café carries a rustic but neat look. Named after the Self Help Group that supports it, it is run by Kong Lucy Khongngain and serves simple food. Iatrellang has many patrons, but it is the truck drivers who specifically come to this café because the kitchen is open to them to cook their own food. Kong Lucy says that her cooking style has been greatly influenced by them. NESFAS supports Lucy through trainings and workshops in maintaining a café in line with NESFAS's principles of "good, clean and fair".



Photo: Esther M. Sawitan

MEI-RAMEW WEAVES

NESFAS began work on preservation of the traditional skill of Eri-weaving in early 2014 with Carol Cassidy's visit to the weaving communities of Bymihat, Khweng, Plasha and Rongjari in March 2014. Carol Cassidy of Lao Textiles (South East Asia) has been involved in the regeneration of weaving in Laos and Cambodia for over 25 years. Over a period of three days, she assessed traditional weaving skills, existing products and the quality and quantity of the Eri silk woven there, also locally known as 'Ryndia'. She observed the challenges faced by the weavers and recommended NESFAS develop a traditional Eri silk preservation and handicraft programme. On analysis of the existing product and under Carol's design direction, an order was placed with weavers in Khweng to produce a small collection to present for initial market feedback at the Terra Madre conference in Italy in November 2014. The initiative triggered a sense of confidence and pride among the weaving community here while the stoles received much international appreciation.


The Eri produced from Khweng was later showcased at the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) conference in February 2015, under the brand name of Mei-Ramew Weaves. The response was very encouraging with over half of the stock being sold. Profits of the sale will be put towards future orders and support of Eri-weaving activities. Since then, through the continued input of local weaving expert Lajoplin Nongsiej and Anna Louise Meynell, a weave consultant from Scotland, the project has developed.

Lajoplin and Anna-Louise's efforts are directed towards aspects of quality control, training and addressing the issue of raw materials' supply, alongside product design and branding. The various aspects of consolidating a collection were looked into in January 2015. Additional market materials were prepared for the branding and promotion of the products. The progress of spinners in Khweng was monitored, showing an increase in the number of women spinning since the initial intervention. The demand for hand-spun yarn is far greater than the current availability, and is one of the factors limiting production capabilities.

Another factor to consider is the balance of Eri productivity and the yearly cycle of the agricultural communities. The hand-spun, naturally dyed and hand-woven Eri silk is a reflection of the local environment and NESFAS actively supports these traditional methods of production. The weavers use traditional floor-loom and frame-loom, and production time can vary up to at least one week for one stole. In terms of quality control, maintaining product consistency proved to be a challenge as the final product is a combination of the skills of both the spinner and the weaver. Maintaining the colour consistency is also difficult given the use of natural dyes which differ in strength, resulting in stoles of different colour intensities. These irregularities, in fact add a positive and individual aesthetic to the product.

NESFAS considers local collaboration essential for long term success and is working towards cross institutional collaboration. To date, this includes the Department of Sericulture and Weaving, Meghalaya and other local and international development agencies working in the field of Eri silk. The first collaborative effort between NESFAS, the Department of Sericulture and the Department of Forestry will be a plantation day of food plants for the Eri silk worms, in Khweng village.

Eri is one of the many different types of silk found in Meghalaya, drawn out from the cocoon of the Eri silk worm, which feeds on the leaves of a variety of food plants, including castor. There is very little investment required for Eri cultivation, hence Eri silk has earned the name, "poor man's silk". It is appreciated for its beautiful texture and flexibility. The fabric remains cool in summer and warm in winter. Eri silk is also known as "ahimsa silk" or "peace silk" as the extraction of the thread from the cocoon does not involve killing of the worm.



Stoles displayed at the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) conference.

Photo: Anitha Roy



Village women engaging in hand-spinning of Eri silk yarn.

Photo: Dooababang Meijaw



Photo: Lajoplin Nongsiej



Products from the Mei-Ramew Weaves brand.

Photo: Anna Louise Meynell

KHNENG EMBROIDERY

Kheng embroidery is a traditional craft from Mustoh, Shella and other nearby villages. It caught NESFAS's attention as a beautiful yet endangered art. The NESFAS team found only three women in the entire Mustoh region, who could do the Kheng embroidery.

Traditionally used to embellish the Eri silk fabric with a signature pattern unique to Mustoh and Shella people, this embroidery is done on Eri shawls ('Jainkup') and wrap-arounds ('Jainpein'), a red and yellow square check fabric, using black acrylic wool as a design thread. The locals lost the traditional knowledge of making a thread from Indigenous grass, used to make the patterns of Kheng. Efforts are being made to find a suitable, locally available and natural raw material to replace the acrylic. It takes good eyesight, steady hands, patience and time to master this craft.

A Kheng embroidery workshop, aimed at reviving the craft and transferring the knowledge was organised by NESFAS, in collaboration with the Special Purpose Vehicle Society (SPVS). The first workshop saw the training of nine women by Ms. Bliwtibon Mawa, Ms. Asibon Mawa and Ms. Victoria Synrem, three local women who knew how to do the Kheng embroidery. The workshop was facilitated by NESFAS consultants Anna-Louise Meynell and Lajoplin Nongsiej and supported by the village administration. The workshop not only served as a capacity-building opportunity, but also equipped the trainees with traditional skills and built their confidence. It was a step towards creating awareness as well as preserving a unique traditional skill.

A second workshop has been planned for the month of April 2015.



Ms. Victoria Synrem, one of the three experts teaching a trainee the Kheng embroidery.



The Traditional Mustoh attire embellished with Kheng.

Photo: Dottiholding Majew

Photo: Rukha Dalmtry



Photo: Francesco Sottile

SAVING EARTH'S VANISHING TREASURES

The Khasi Mandarin.

THE PRESIDIA

Presidia, a Latin word for 'Stronghold', symbolises the defending and promotion of agrobiodiversity products by showcasing them as well-established quality "Presidium" produce and linking them to ethical market value chains. Run by the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, it is a project geared towards plants, animal products and cooking practices that are at the risk of disappearing. Looking beyond vital economic benefits, NESFAS follows the Slow Food objectives of social, environmental and cultural sustainability. Presidium products are at risk of disappearing because of a lack of economic assurance for the future. Thus, in partnership with Slow Food, NESFAS strives to support local economies that are built upon unique products and practices of our indigenous custodians.

The Khasi Mandarin, locally known in Meghalaya as "Sohnlamtra", was first nominated for the Presidia project in February 2014. The Sohnlamtra, was accepted into the Presidia project after its assessment by Mr. Francesco Sottile, member of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity and the International Commission for the Ark of Taste, Italy, as a product that fulfils the criteria for being culturally significant, tied to a terroir and declining in production.

Mr. Francesco re-visited Meghalaya early in January, 2015, to meet with the Khasi Mandarin growers identified by NESFAS - Nongnah Area, Ranikor Block, South West Khasi Hills; Mawphu Village, Shella Block, East Khasi Hills and Tmar Village, Pynursla Block, East Khasi Hills.

During the visit, a thorough group discussion with the producers brought out many insights about the fruit and the process of growing it, such as seed selection, maintenance and upbringing of the tree, production of the fruit and various issues faced by the producers.



The Khasi Mandarins from Mawphu are carried by porters who climb up 10,000 steps to reach the nearest market. Each basket weighs at least 40 kilos and each Mandarin is sold at a rate of 5 to 10 INR, depending on their size and quality.

Photo: Pradipita Uraiah



Photos: Damboklang Majlew

Producers' Meeting, Mandarin growers from Tmar, Nongnah and Mawphu met with Francesco Solille to discuss problems pertaining to the Khasi Mandarin production.

PRODUCERS' MEETING – 8TH JANUARY 2015

The Producers' Meeting was an important step for the project because it allowed the producers to share their thoughts, ideas, stories and problems and find solutions of these problems that surround the Khasi Mandarin production.

The meeting revealed interesting traditional methods of mandarin production, as also that producers do not venture into the business of processing food products out of the Khasi Mandarin as it is beyond their capacity. The producers not only lack funds, but also the technical knowledge in production, storage and marketing. Since the Presidia Project looks into the product's value addition, these issues were taken into consideration. A discussion on step-by-step strategy for the Presidia Project, starting from the extraction and storage of the product to processing the product and its marketing, was carried out. Another important subject of discussion was the kind of finished product that the mandarin would be made into. To have a clear understanding, other successful Presidia products were also looked at.

At the end of the meeting it was decided that, since the Khasi Mandarin Presidia Project will take years to develop, the producers would join together in the common aim to at least have good quality mandarin products during the IMR 2015. Simultaneously, the producers will document all traditional knowledge pertinent to the Khasi Mandarin Production.

MEETING WITH THE HORTICULTURAL DEPARTMENT - 9TH JANUARY 2015



Photos: Mawphu PV Team

Young Khasi Mandarins.

The Department of Horticulture has been exceedingly supportive of NESFAS and has shown a keen interest in the Presidia Project on the Khasi Mandarin, a product which it also tries to promote. Thus NESFAS, the Horticulture department and the communities will join hands to bring the project to realisation.

As part of their agreement, the Horticulture Department will help NESFAS in the various areas that require technical know-how and necessary intervention. The Department will provide assistance in areas such as seed selection, setting up of processing units, extraction process, capacity building and technical assistance to fight the fall of the Khasi Mandarin production due to climate change, diseases, pests and poor management system. The Department will also help in packaging and designing of the final product together with the Slow Food Foundation, a necessary aspect to help promote the product as well as the producers.

Collection of information on the fruit will also be done in collaboration with the department; a nodal person from the Horticultural Department will work with the NESFAS counterpart, Ms. Phidarilin Uriah, to coordinate these activities.

It was also decided that Nohwet Village, East Khasi Hills, District, would also be included in the Project as it is renowned for the Khasi Mandarin production.



The NESFAS stall at the International Terra Madre 2014.

BONDING OVER CELEBRATIONS

Since its inception, NESFAS has concentrated on building local community networks by organising local food festivals to help them bond and also serve as effective entry points for building networks with new communities. They also help amplify the local people's expressions by bringing them together to discuss issues and share ideas relevant to indigenous livelihoods.

TERRA MADRE 2014

Launched by Slow Food in 2004, Terra Madre is a network of food communities and groups of food producers. It is wholly dedicated to producing quality food in a responsible and sustainable way. Today, this network has more than 2000 food communities in the world, including some in the North East India. Held from October 23rd to October 27th, Terra Madre recognised 2014 as "The International Year of Family Farming".

Sixteen delegates from the North East representing NESFAS participated in the global event that entailed a week long involvement. Some of the NESFAS activities that were presented at Terra Madre included the School Garden initiative, the Youth Food Clubs idea, the Cooks' Alliance and Digital Story Telling (DST).

The following team displayed indigenous food items, handloom and handicrafts and also took part in various presentations, apart from attending many.

- ◆ Ms. Dorothy Syiemiong, Director of Agriculture, Meghalaya - Ark of Taste
- ◆ Mr. Dharmen Gabil, PV trainee from Garo Hills - Nutrition Security
- ◆ Chef Joel Basumatari, from Nagaland - Taste Innovation
- ◆ Mr. Bibhudutta Sahu, Project Director, NESFAS -Issues pertaining to producers and the challenges that they face (at Slow Food Youth Network); BBC Radio talk on the Ark of Taste
- ◆ Ms. Roibha Sayoo, Community Member, Jaintia Hills-Well-being & Happiness
- ◆ Mrs. Patricia Mukhim, Editor, Shillong Times- Gender Issues
- ◆ Ms. Phidarlin Uriah, Associate, NESFAS- Interaction with SFYN, on Improving Local Food Systems
- ◆ Mr. Janak Preet Singh, Associate, NESFAS- Interaction on School Gardens
- ◆ Mr. Phrang Roy, Chairman, NESFAS- Under utilised Crops (Focusing on Millet Network)
- ◆ Ms. Wansalan Passah, ITM Coordinator- Slow Fish
- ◆ Mr. Rahul Antao, Consultant, Capacity Building on Slow Food Issues and Networks, NESFAS- BBC Radio talk on the Ark of Taste
- ◆ Ms. Rikynti Syiem, Community member, Ri Bhoi District-Slow Fish
- ◆ Mr. Daniel Syiem, Designer, Shillong- display of indigenous weaves
- ◆ Mr. Markus Rani, Driver cum Office attendant, NESFAS - Rural Facilitation
- ◆ Ms. Seno Tsohah, NEN Nagaland- AoT/ indigenous artefacts display
- ◆ Mr. Tirdip Mandal, Senior Executive producer, CNN IBN- Reporting



Left to right
Row 1: Anandi Soans, Rikynti Syiem, Phidarlin Uriah, Seno Tsohah, Patricia Mukhim, Dorothy Syiemiong, Markus Rani, Roibha Sayoo
Row2: Wansalan Passah, Daniel Syiem, Joel Basumatari, Bibhudutta Sahu, Janak Preet Singh,
Row 3: Rahul Antao.

LYNGAM FOOD FEST

On April 24, 2014, NESFAS in collaboration with the Lyngam Indigenous Federation (LIF) and the communities of Khatarshnong, organised the first ever Lyngam Mei-Ramew Food Festival at Umdang (Riangiong), West Khasi Hills District. Supported by the Shahlang Area Local Labour Association (SALA), this festival aims to connect people via the pleasure of good, clean and fair local food and promote its production and sale, thus leading to the preservation of the local agricultural biodiversity.



NONGRIM HILLS FOOD FESTIVAL

NESFAS participated in the Nongrim Hills Food Festival on June 14, 2014 and amassed quite a number of good reviews on the millet dishes served. The festival was jointly organised with the opening of the new MS Complex "Ozone", to mark its inauguration day.

NEAT FEST

On September 2, 2014, the North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCORMP) invited NESFAS to partake in its annual NEAT FEST (North East Agro-business Trade Festival), organised to promote the North East communities and their produces, customer demands and tastes, which would build market connections. The Festival is a joint developmental initiative of the North Eastern Council (NEC), Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDONER), the Government of India and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). NESFAS set up a stall that sold food, Sha Shiah Krot, local honey, millet and Sohiong (local cherry), cooked by the Nongtraw community, East Khasi Hills District. Promoting the use of millet, the NESFAS flavour development team also sold banana millet cake which became very popular with children and adults alike.



TERRA MADRE DAY, 17th December

NESFAS HQ, 17th Dec: A small group of people including the NESFAS staff and a few Board Members including Ms. Patricia Mukhim, Editor, The Shillong Times, Mr. Bah Priak, Secretary Khatarshnong Socio- Organisation, Meghalaya and Mr. Carl O Rangad, former Director - Horticulture, Department of Agriculture, Government of Meghalaya and NESFAS got together on the December 17, 2014, to sample food prepared by the NESFAS Flavour Development Department, to celebrate the Terra Madre Day. At the heart of the endeavour is the wish to present local ingredients in more attractive avatars.



◆ Well-Being Studies Project Lyngam, 17th December: Following the well-being studies project in Lyngam, West Khasi Hills District, the NESFAS team took the opportunity to organise an eat-in in the village of Umdang, West Khasi Hills to observe the Terra Madre Day.

◆ Participatory Video Project, Samanong, 11th December: As a part of the Participatory Video Project in the Samanong village, in observance of the Terra Madre Day, the NESFAS team along with members of the local community, local Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) worker, local school teachers and the village headman, Bah Pasha Bareh, who generously sponsored the merriment, shared a meal together.

◆ Pyrda Biodiversity Fair, 4th December: Pyrda, a small agrarian village of about 304 people divided into 50 families, saw the celebration of Terra Madre Day through a small Diversity Fair.

Mawkyrwat Food Festival, 16th December: In keeping the Terra Madre Day, the NESFAS Cooks' Alliance members from Pyrda presented a stall at the festival that promoted good, clean and fair food with a difference.

MAWKYRWAT FOOD FEST

A team of eleven from Pyrda, East Khasi Hills, took NESFAS's mission of bringing diversity on a plate to the two-day 'En Kyrhal Festival' (Festival of Abundance) organised by the District Administration, Khawkylia Community Resource Management Society North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCORMP), in collaboration with DCIC, Horticulture, Fisheries Department that took place on the 15th and 16th of December at Mawkyrwat, headquarters of the South West Khasi Hills District. It was an attempt of the Cooks' Alliance members from Pyrda in collaboration with the NESFAS Flavour Development team, to present local ingredients differently. It also served as an opportunity to gauge the acceptance of such foods in the rural scenario.



Section Five



Someday in the distant cyborg future, we may come to possess infinite knowledge. But that's not the same thing as wisdom."

- Joshua Foer



Making Better Professionals The NESFAS Team

NESFAS is driven by a passionate young team trained to hit the ground running. As the organisation grows, the team accumulates skills that it develops while in action and also through various training processes. From time to time, NESFAS welcomes organisations and individuals that help develop the young team as better professionals.



Photos: Donbolkimf Majew

LOG FRAME TRAINING -

NESFAS Staffs working on the Log Frame Matrix.

BUILDING A CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE

In continuation to NESFAS's partnership with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation (GmbH), an international enterprise owned by the German Federal Government, the NESFAS team engaged in a nine-day training program from July 7-15, 2014, on Planning, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation, with special focus on the Log Frame Approach, aiming at the staff's capacity-building, with a larger agenda of furthering NESFAS as a centre for excellence.

The training was facilitated by the Financial Management Service Foundation (FMSF), a development resource organisation involved primarily in financial monitoring of development projects, capacity building of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) in the areas of financial management, legal regulations and governance related matters. The facilitators of the training included a team of two, Ms. Rashmi Sharon, Project Monitoring Coordinator, FMSF and Mr. Pravanjan Mohapatra, Team Leader - Monitoring and Evaluation Department for International Development (DFID), Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), Poorest States Inclusive Growth (PSIG) Programme and a consultant to the Financial Management Service Foundation (FMSF).

The learning process took the team through presentations, games and live examples. At the end of the session, the participants were handed tools to tackle problem identification, creation of an objective tree, result-based management, methods of improving development effectiveness, creation of a result chain, creation of a logical framework-matrix and finally, the creation and use of an effective monitoring and evaluation system. Budgeting was also an important issue addressed during the training.

The NESFAS staff has begun implementation of these insights from the trainings and has created individual work plans using the Logical Framework approach.

INTERNSHIPS

The NESFAS internship programme serves as a double-edged tool to the realisation of an activity, a project or an area of work for both the organisation and the intern. During the programme, the intern is encouraged to perform under close guidance on a given work area. Border-lining volunteerism, internship applications are welcomed from any interested individual or student, across different sectors and professions, thus enabling capacity-building and honing the skills of freshers, budding professionals and career seeking individuals.

Within six months, 20 interns from various colleges and institutes have contributed to the organisation via collaborating with the communities, their food, agriculture, livelihood and the necessary interventions to fulfil them; as also documenting the 100 Ark of Taste products.

Flavour innovation is another sector where interns are making considerable advancements in creative cuisines with readily available local food products. They are also involved in facilitating various trainings and workshops, most notably, the Kids' Kitchen Initiative at Mawpliang and the flavour development routines at Mei-Ramew Cafés in the region and the Cooks' Alliance. Communications and branding, Participatory Video and School Garden initiatives are also supported by interns.

There are three types of Internship programmes that the organisation has employed so far:

- ◆ St. Edmund's College and Women's College (Shillong) requires their BSW and MSW students to complete their Field Work programme- a long extended internship that allows the students to simultaneously attend classes and work with NESFAS only on certain days of the week.
- ◆ Another internship programme which other universities such as the Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU) and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) had agreed upon, is the "Block Placement" programme, wherein students must complete their internship within a definite number of days - 30 days, at one go.
- ◆ There is also the internship-cum-training programme for individuals interested in working with the organisation. The interns are trained in various sectors that NESFAS is involved with, for a period of 6 - 12 months before being absorbed as permanent staff.

INSTITUTIONAL INTERNS

Tata Institute of Social Services (October 10- November 10 (30 days): Noranchi CH Momin, D Sayini, Trishna Sarma, Four-Cell Analysis (FCA), School Gardens, Biodiversity walks, Seed Fair in Porksai, Pydengmawlieh, Thawkhong, West Khasi Hills.

St Edmund's (24 days): Amenia Jamir, Veposelli Naroh, Banisha Myllemngap, Aaron Pyngrope, Welka Sumi, Sandartsha Warjri-Survey for Community Garden distribution of produce, Food Festivals, Ark of Taste, Biodiversity Walks and School Garden.

Women's College (24 Days): Tenni Lyne Syiemlieh, Arkidaroi Susngi, Athiphro Nipuni-Urban and Rural youth Initiatives, School Garden and Food Festivals.

Don Bosco (30 days): Onika Dhar-Study on Food and Culture.

Martin Luther Christian University (24 Days): Krutavi Shuya, Panacea Mary Majaw- Urban and Rural youth Initiatives.



Kritika Suratkal- Flavour Development

Sudeep Sahu- Branding and Marketing

Esther Mercia Sawlan- Flavour Development
Roderick Nongrum- Flavour Development

Habadel Kharsati- Ark of Taste
Merrysha Nongrum- Participatory Video

Donbokiang Majaw- Communications

VISIT TO ROME

On October 30, 2014, the NESFAS team including Ms. Phidarlilin Uriah, Mr. Janak Preet Singh, Mr. Rahul Antao, Mr. Bibhudutta Sahu, Mr. Markus Raneer and Ms. Wansalan Passah, along with Ms. Sara Manetto, Programme Officer of The Indigenous Partnership, Rome and Fashion Designer, Mr. Daniel Syiem, visited the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) office. They met with Mr. Fabrizio Felloni, Senior Evaluation Officer, Independent Office of Evaluation, IFAD and Ms. Fumiko Nakai, Evaluation Officer, Independent Office of Evaluation, IFAD, of the Monitoring and Evaluation team, who shared an overview of their evaluation strategies. The NESFAS team took the opportunity to share their own experience of working with the communities.



NESFAS delegates with the IFAD team.

The team also met with Ms. Antonella Cordone, Senior Technical Specialist, Indigenous Peoples and Tribal Issues, IFAD and Ms. Anne-Laure Roy, Senior Technical Specialist, Farmers' Organisations, IFAD, to discuss issues pertaining to the Indigenous communities. The team touched on subjects such as the Youth Food Clubs, Flavour Innovation, Cooks' Alliance and the networks that NESFAS wishes to build in the North East India. They also spoke about activities with children, such as school Gardens and Agrobiodiversity Walks, which help in reconnecting children, their land and the local food, while also acting as platforms for inter-generational knowledge sharing. The Eri silk, indigenous to Meghalaya, also gained focus during the discussions, especially with regards to Mr. Daniel Syiem's work on sustainable fashion using this elegant fabric.

The NESFAS team visited the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations for an organisational visit.



MANAGEMENT

NESFAS sought to build the capacity of the finance team through external support by partner organisations. The Indigenous Partnership, Rome, supported NESFAS through Ms. Sara Manetto, Programme Officer of The Indigenous Partnership, who reviewed NESFAS's finance structures. The Centre for Promoting Accountability (CPA) was employed by NESFAS as a finance accompanier to look into matters of governance, policies and finance. Mr. Puran Jha, Facilitator - Finance and Accounts at FMSF, CPA, who was visiting NESFAS as a reviewer, congratulated the organisation on the improvement of its finance management. He however reiterated that there is always room for improvement.



Left to right:

Row 1: Rahul Antao, Phrang Roy, Plus Raneer, Donbolkang Majaw, Markus Rani, Janak Preet Singh, Habadel Kharsat, Bibhudutta Sahu
 Row 2: Esther M Sawian, Xavier Sunn, Anandi Soans, Radha Kunke, Raisa Dalmary, Wansalan Passah, Sara Manetto, Hunlang Mawroh, Phidariin Uriah, Rathindra Roy, Kagitar Lyngdoh Lyngkholi, Merrysha Nongrum

RETREAT

From March 6-7, 2015, the NESFAS team accompanied by board member Ms. Anita Roy, Communication Expert, Ms. Radha Kunke and Mr. Rathindranath Roy, an International Consultant and Facilitator engaged in an introspective retreat. Scheduled at the Silome Guest House, Barapani, Meghalaya, the retreat served as space for interaction, retrospection and planning. The take away from the retreat was a clearer vision for the road ahead to the International Mei-Ramew and beyond.

ZERO WASTE WITH BETHANY

Early in April 2014, Mr. Carmo Noronha, Executive Director of the Bethany Society, a non-profit charitable organisation conducted a session on 'Mindfulness and Natural Farming'. The former emphasised on the importance of breathing and subsequently increasing the space between stimulus and response, thus creating a better work environment. The latter was a hands-on activity serving as training on the usage of friendly micro-organisms. Mr. Noronha and his associates taught the NESFAS team about Lactic Acid Bacteria and indigenous micro-organisms and making potent healthy formula for natural farming, using these organisms and household ingredients such as rice wash, milk and jaggery.

Natural farming is based on the principal that we must feed the soil and not the plants. Therefore diluting a small amount of any of these micro-organisms and adding them to the soil, animals or plants, will ensure that they flourish and grow healthy, as they are known to kill and digest harmful micro-organisms and waste particles, and also improve the general quality. This knowledge was later applied in the creation on the NESFAS community garden, where natural farming methods were used.



Mr. Carmo Noronha giving a demonstration to the NESFAS team.

Photo: Raisa Dalmary

Section Six



If you really want to make a friend, go to someone's house and eat with him... the people who give you their food give you their heart."

- Cesar Chavez



Joining a Global Movement - The International Mei-Ramev 2015

The International Mei-Ramev (IMR) 2015 is a major milestone for NESFAS and all individuals, communities and partners engaged in NESFAS's various activities in its preparation for the mega event. A meet dedicated to Indigenous communities across the world, IMR 2015 will bring indigenous issues under a magnifying glass, while giving stake-holders the opportunity to network and share knowledge.



INTERNATIONAL MEI-RAMEW 2015

This edition of the event, tentatively slated for November 3-7, 2015, will be the second of its kind and will be held in Meghalaya. The first was held in Jokkmokk, Northern Sweden, from June 17-19, 2011, as an initiative of the Sami people of Sweden and was organised in collaboration with Slow Food Sápmi, Slow Food Sweden and Slow Food International.

The North Eastern Hill University will be the venue for the first three days of the program, while the magical Sacred Groves at Lawkyntang, Mawphlang, a small town located about 20 kilometres away from the capital of Meghalaya, Shillong, has been chosen as the venue for the finale of the event, for its cultural significance and natural beauty.

Shillong has never held such a large-scale event, involving people from more than 60 countries, speaking more than 10 ethnic languages. NESFAS aims to meet international standards and is working hard in collaboration with partners, co-hosts and service providers, to ensure that the event will stand out as a landmark in the history of events surrounding Indigenous people. To guarantee that international standards are met, NESFAS sought to hire an event management company through a 'Request For Proposal', which was answered by six of India's best event management firms.

The Government has from the very beginning shown its unwavering support to NESFAS and the IMR 2015. In fact, the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Dr. Mukul Sangma chairs the Steering Committee of the IMR. Senior officials are also part of the committee with the Secretary to the CM, Mr. Sampat Kumar, acting as Secretary to the Committee.

Thus in preparation for the 500 people expected to attend the five day IMR 2015, the NESFAS headquarters has been abuzz with activity, putting elements together to make the event a wholesome and enriching experience. NESFAS is managing this challenging responsibility, while working in close proximity with the communities co-hosting the event with NESFAS, the Government of Meghalaya and The Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty and Slow Food, along with partner organisations and individuals.





IMR 2015's 41 HOST VILLAGES

Through the execution of the IMR 2015, a world class event that will bring together on one platform, Indigenous Peoples from every corner of the globe, NESFAS as an organiser, hopes to further uplift the very communities that the event was created for, by sharing with a select number of villages from amongst them, the honour of hosting the event.

The general basis for selection besides the reflection of NESFAS's principles, is the community's propensity, passion and proactive steps towards the protection of their own biocultural diversity. A set of criteria were also drawn up, according to which the selection is being done.

The first step of selection began with the identification of potential host villages based on the pre-set criteria. Following this, the potential communities were approached by the field staff to invite them to enter into a partnership with NESFAS, whereby they agree to take up NESFAS activities to fulfil the given set of criteria or further strengthen their existing activities as a host village for the IMR 2015. Once a community agrees to participate in the IMR 2015 as a host, the NESFAS field staff begins full-scale work on conducting or further strengthening the NESFAS activities in their villages.



Pyrda village, East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya.

- | | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Laitsophlah | 12. Rangshangkham | 23. Porksai | 34. Madan Ritiang |
| 2. Laitthemlangzah | 13. Nongnah Nongbah | 24. Nongmawlong | 35. Daribokgre |
| 3. Dewlieh | 14. Nongnah nongkdait | 25. Thawkhong | 36. Chandigre |
| 4. Nongtraw | 15. Nongnah Nongktieh | 26. Langshonthiang | 37. Sasatgre |
| 5. Wahsohra | 16. Mulieh | 27. Nongmawlai | 38. Wakringtonggre |
| 6. Laitumlong | 17. Mulum | 28. Nongjalaw | 39. Wakringtonggre |
| 7. Pyrda | 18. Mosakhia | 29. Sohlyia | 40. Rangwakamgre |
| 8. Mustoh | 19. Samanong | 30. Khweng | 41. Perkseh |
| 9. Tmar | 20. Dombah | 31. Khlieumstem | |
| 10. Mawhiang | 21. Nongriangka | 32. Thadnongiaiw | |
| 11. Nongwah | 22. Pydengmawlieh | 33. Liarluid | |

10 Village Visits: According to the tentative programme scheduled for the IMR 2015 in November, the fourth day will entail a visit to some of the host communities' villages, for the delegates to have a closer interaction with them.

The ten villages will be selected from among -Musakhia, Mulieh, Laitsophlah, Pyrda, Nongtraw, Dewlieh, Khweng, Thadnongiaiw, Mawhiang, Nongwah, Perkseh, and Dombah.

Mei-Ramew Committees: For each of the host communities to be more involved and for decisions be taken in a collaborative way, Mei-Ramew Committees will be created to directly liaise with NESFAS. These committees will be set for individual villages or clusters of villages. Members of the committee include the local Headmen, custodian farmers, elders and school teachers, among others.

Mei-Ramew Committees have been created in the villages of Mulieh, Samanong, Mawsukhia, Khweng, Dewlieh, Laitsophlah, Laitumlong, Laitumlangsoh and Nongtraw.

CRITERIA FOR THE 41 VILLAGES TO HOST IMR2015: (Annex)

Total Sanitation: Proper sanitation system befitting its socio-economic structures.

Zero Waste: Proper disposal of wastes and waste management, leasing for a clean environment.

School Garden: One of the major activities of NESFAS aimed at food education, food security and participatory learning at the school level.

Pollinators' Network: Regarding pollinators as important to biodiversity, NESFAS puts immense stress in setting up a Pollinators' Networks in the local communities.

Food Festivals/Seed Fairs: NESFAS promotes the celebration and sharing of biodiversity wealth, traditional foods, indigenous knowledge and seeds.

Participatory Research: In sustaining the traditional knowledge of agrobiodiversity, participatory approach is of great importance in the documentation and research processes taking place at the community level through tools such as PRA, PV or DST.

Agrobiodiversity Walks: This activity focuses on the passing on of traditional knowledge on wild edibles and medicinal herbs via walks through the sprawling local forests with the elders and knowledge holders of the communities and the youth of the community.

Taste Workshops: The underlying idea of this activity is to impart an understanding of food tastes, by reconnecting people's five senses to the local flavours through sensory games and tastings respectively.

Cooks' Alliance: NESFAS recognises cooks as potential change agents who could reconnect people to their culinary traditions, which are unfortunately rapidly being replaced by foreign foods. The Alliance brings together cooks from all walks of life to form a network of like-minded cooks.

Ark of Taste: The Ark of Taste is an international catalogue of endangered heritage foods, maintained and coordinated by the international Slow Food movement based in Bra, Italy. NESFAS is making efforts to identify and document these foods around the North Eastern states of India.



Photo: D. Whittor

Young Khasi men

DOCUMENTING ETHNIC HERITAGE

NESFAS, through the sponsorship of the Government of Meghalaya's Arts and Culture Department, has taken up the mantle to document cultural stories that are unique and rare; driven by strong characters, compelling voices and narratives, with insights into events and issues that are local but resonate globally. While these stories will talk of practices that will connect with the youth, our future and the world at large, NESFAS will also work with story-tellers, to put forward the essence of their accounts through film and photography.

The diversity of life found in man's environment which is related to the food, the land and the people that live in it, also known as the "biocultural diversity", is made up of many varieties of plant and animal species, ecosystems, cultural traditions, and languages existing on this planet. We often notice that these diversities are intimately related to and are shaping the way we live and conduct our activities on Earth. Archiving these aspects is another driving force for the initiative, looking to identify, document and revisit the indigenous cultural heritage. Thus on September 24, 2014, NESFAS had released a tender notice inviting bids for making innovative and engaging short documentaries and video/photo-documentation from individuals, journalists, photographers, videographers (or cinematographers), film-makers and production companies on the unique cultural heritage aspects of our local food and livelihood systems.

First objective: To capture the unique cultural practices of the Indigenous people in Meghalaya, through participatory documentation and knowledge-sharing, so the end product will be the community's as much as it would be ours.

Second objective: To partner in promoting lesser known dances, arts and culture through a quality product.

Third objective: To identify some of the lost practices no longer followed by the communities, so as to have an understanding of the current situation and to subsequently create an awareness about the rich history of Meghalaya, amongst the present generation.

Fourth objective: To showcase the link between culture and ecology at the IMR 2015. The themes for documentation include people, food and land.

In all of this, NESFAS provided the necessary support to the consultancy firm by connecting them to the various communities for executing the assignment. The selection of the firms for documentary making and photography was done by a panel of experts in October 2014.



Photo: Annette Bernhart

NESFAS Team

Bibhudutta Sahu, Project Director
Wansalan Passah, ITM coordinator
Hunlang Mawroh, Associate Finance and Administration
Pius Raneer, Associate
Janak Preet Singh, Associate
Phidarlln Uriah, Associate
Kegitar Lyngdoh Lyngkhol, Associate
Ralsa Daimary, Sr. Associate, Communication
Xavier Sunn, Admin. & Livelihood Manager
Anandl Soans, Slow Food Coordinator, ITM
Rahul Antao, Consultant, Capacity Building on Slow Food Issues and Networks
Lajoplin Nongsie, Local Consultant, Weaving
Markus Raneer, Driver and Office Attendant
Merry Mawnluh, Office Attendant
Regina Raneer, Office Attendant
Wankyrshan Warshong, Gardner
Am Kharbukl, Gardner



SUPPORT Team

LAND SHARING AND LAND SPARING
Reuben Mendakor Shabong, Junior Research Fellow

PARTICIPATORY VIDEO TRAINEES

Noklak Hub, Nagaland
Niokai
Chentei

Chizami Hub, Nagaland
Vizoli Khamo
Tshenyico-V Chirnah

East Khasi Hills Hub, Meghalaya
Denis Sngibon
Christopher Sohtun
Saphina Kharshandi

Garo Hills Hub, Meghalaya
Dharmen G. Momin
Chakseng T. Sangma
Mithera T. Sangma





LIST OF PARTNERS (2014-2015)

International

Biodiversity International
Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment (CINE),
McGill University, Canada
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
(ICIMOD)
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty
(The Indigenous Partnership)
InsightShare
Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development
(LI-BIRD)
Slow Food International
Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research (PAR), Rome, Italy

Governmental

Botanical Survey of India
Directorate of Agriculture, Government of Meghalaya
Department of Arts and Culture, Government of Meghalaya
Department of Sericulture, Government of Meghalaya
Directorate of Horticulture, Government of Meghalaya
Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA)
Meghalaya Small Farmers AgriBusiness Consortium (MSFAC)
North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project
(NERCORMP)
Office of the Deputy Commissioner, East Khasi Hills
Department of Tourism, Government of Meghalaya

National

Bethany Society
Keystone Foundation
Financial Management Service Foundation (FMSF)
North East Network (NEN)
The Timbaktu Collective
One World News
Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) Society, Meghalaya

Institutional

Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU), Shillong
North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Shillong
St. Edmund's College, Shillong
Synod College, Shillong
Don Bosco University, Shillong
MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai
Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Guwahati
Department of Home Sciences,
St Mary's College, Shillong
Women's College, Shillong
Sankardev College, Shillong

Community Organisations

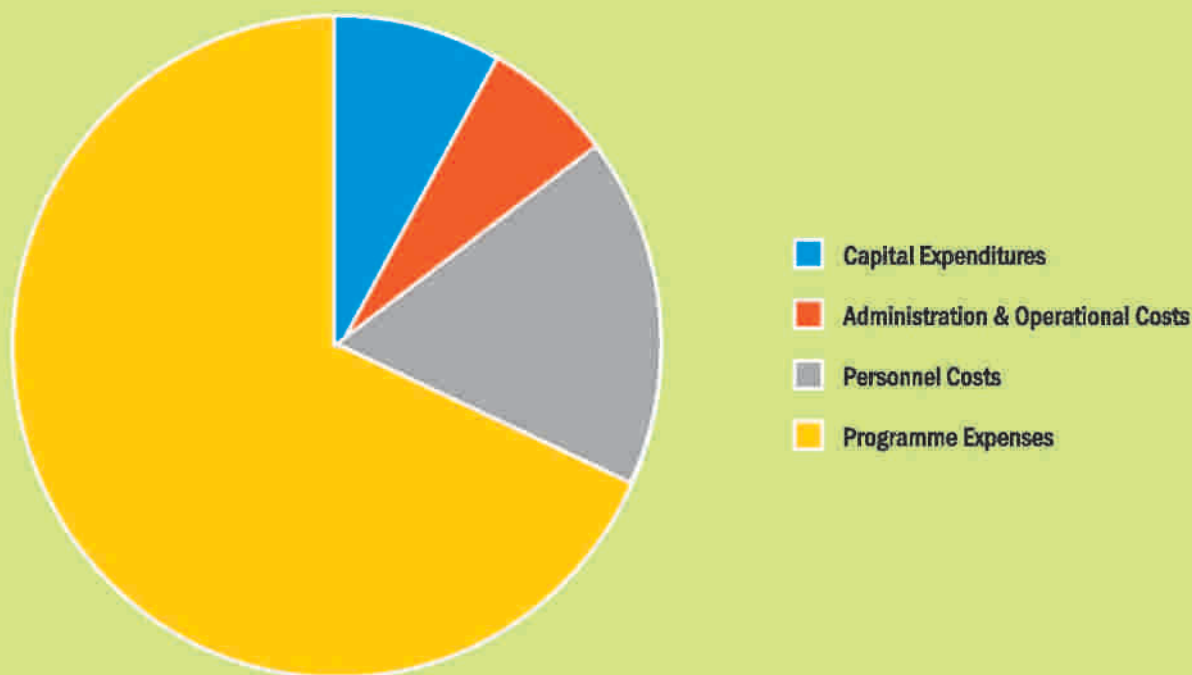
Khatarshnong Socio-Organisation (KSO)
Kshiad Beekeepers Society
Pynroi Cluster Level Federation (PCLF), Jaintia Hills
Tehsonglang Tyma Cluster Federation, East Khasi Hills
Tynrai Foundation
Lyngam Indigenous Federation (LIF)
Shahlang Area Local Labour Association (SALA)

FINANCIAL OVER VIEW 2014-2015

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Description	Amount (INR)	
Donation & Grants		18521250.76
Opening Balance (Cash & Bank)	61409.73	
Programme Grant	18459841.03	
Expenditures		12990528.17
Capital Expenditures	1009538.00	
Administration & Operational Costs	850024.70	
Personnel Costs	2315025.00	
Programme Expenses	8815940.47	
Closing Balance (Cash & Bank)		5530722.59

EXPENDITURE BREAK-UP



GLOSSARY

A

Agrobiodiversity: Agricultural biodiversity, sometimes called 'agrobiodiversity' encompasses the variety and variability of animals, plants and micro-organisms which are necessary to sustain key functions of the agro-ecosystem, its structure and processes for, and in support of, food production and food security.

Agrobiodiversity Networks: Initiated by NESFAS, these networks namely - Millet, Pollinators, Shifting Cultivation, Rice, and Cooks' Alliance, connect individuals, communities, institutes and organisations working in these fields.

Agro-ecology: The study of ecological processes that operate in agricultural production systems.

Agronomy: The science and technology of producing and using plants for food, fuel, fibre and land reclamation.

Anganwadi: Meaning "courtyard shelter" in Indian languages, they were started by the Indian government in 1975 as part of the Integrated Child Development Services programme to combat child hunger and malnutrition.

Ark of Taste: An international catalogue of endangered heritage foods maintained and coordinated by the international Slow Food movement based in Bra, Italy.

B

Biocultural: Biocultural diversity is defined by Luisa Maffi, Co-founder and Director of Terralingua, an international NGO devoted to sustaining the biocultural diversity of life, as "the diversity of life in all its manifestations: biological, cultural, and linguistic - which are interrelated (and possibly co-evolved) within a complex socio-ecological adaptive system."

C

Custodian farmers: Farmers, who maintain, safeguard and promote agrobiodiversity and traditional knowledge of farming practices.

D

Digital Story Telling: A short form of digital media production that allows people to share aspects of their life story.

F

Family farming: A means of organising agricultural, forestry, fishery, pastoral and aquacultural production which is managed and operated by a family and predominantly reliant on family labour.

Food Security: This concept is defined as including both physical and economic access to food that meets people's dietary needs as well as their food preferences.

Food Sovereignty: A concept that allows communities control the way food is produced, traded and consumed.

I

Indigenous: Originating or occurring naturally in a particular place; native to a region.

Indigenous Terra Madre: Organized for the first time in 2011 in Jokkmokk, Sweden, the Indigenous Terra Madre is Slow Food's event dedicated entirely to Indigenous people.

J

Jhum Cultivation: Jhum also known as Shifting Cultivation, Swidden Farming or 'Slash and Burn Agriculture' is an ancient form of agriculture practiced by hill-dwelling communities. It is characterised by the use of fire to prepare fields for cultivation and the subsequent abandonment of those fields to let the soil recover its nutrients.

M

Matriarchy: A form of social structure in which the mother is 1) co-head of the family, 2) custodian of land resources 3) determining factor in family or clan decisions and legacy. Not to be confused with 'Matrilineal' where the descent is reckoned in the female line.

Mel-Ramew: The Khasi (local language of the Khasi people of Meghalaya, India) expression for Mother Nature.

Mel-Ramew Café: Local food joints that work in line with the principles of 'Good, Clean and Fair'.

Mel-Ramew Festival: An annual festival organized by NESFAS.

N

Natural Farming: A form of sustainable agriculture that dictates the use of natural materials, observes the laws of nature and respects the rights of crops and livestock along with the avoidance of manufactured inputs and equipment.

Participatory: Affording the opportunity for individual participation; "participatory democracy".

P

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA): A set of participatory and largely visual techniques for assessing group/community resources, identifying and prioritising problems and appraising strategies for solving them.

Participatory Video: Participatory video is a form of media in which a group or community creates their own film, allowing them to explore issues, voice concerns or simply be creative and tell stories.

People's Biodiversity Registers (PBR): Biodiversity registers documented and maintained by communities.

Pollinators: Agents (mostly biotic) that help in carrying pollen grains from the male anther to the female stigma of a flower to complete the natural process of how plants reproduce.

Presidia: A project run by the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity strives to protect unique regions and ecosystems, recover traditional processing methods, and safeguard native breeds and local plant varieties.

S

Sensory Games/Taste Workshops: Games that use innovative approaches to food and taste education by getting participants to use all their five senses of taste, touch, sound, smell and sight to guess what a given food item is.

T

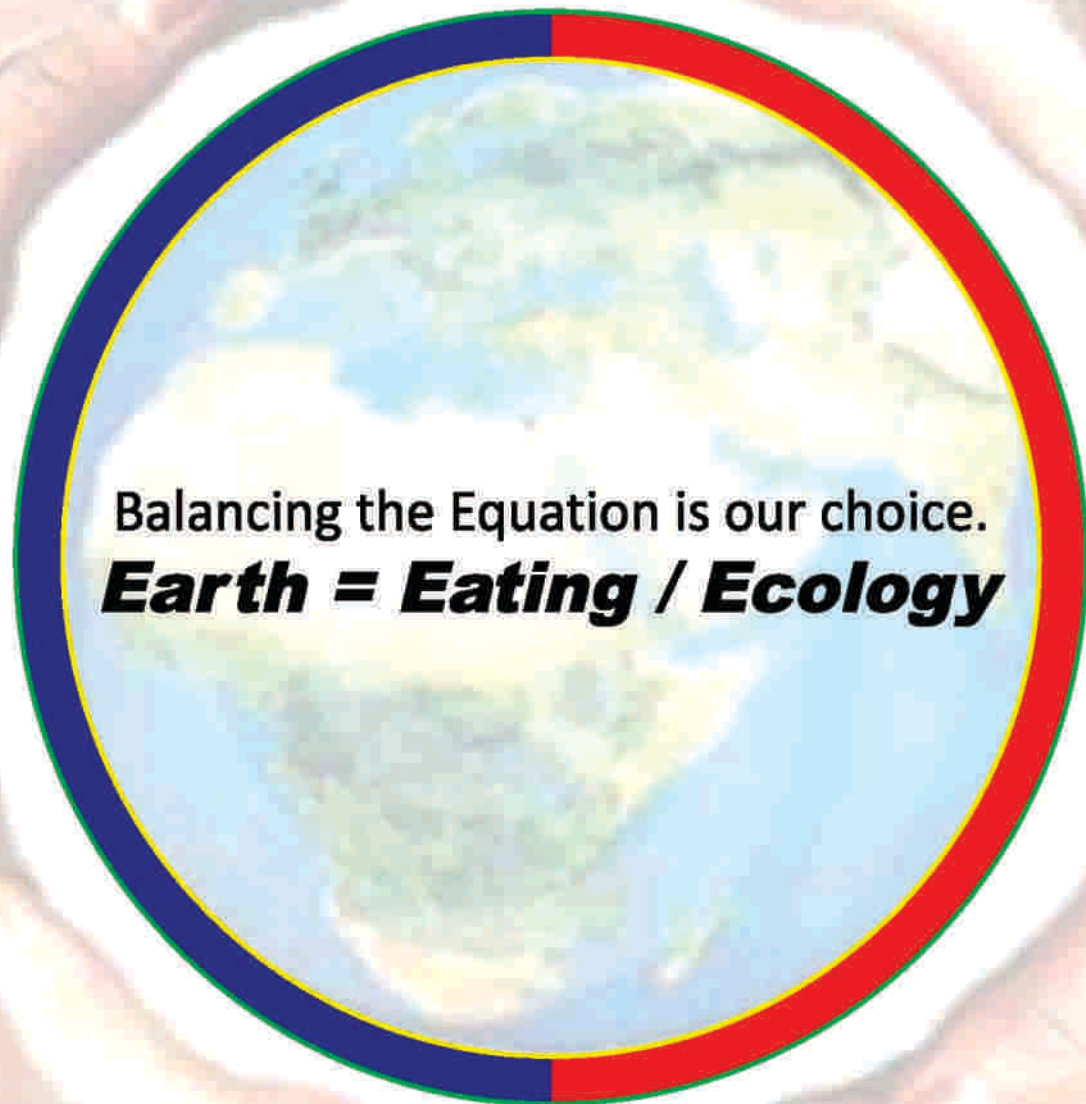
Terra Madre: Launched by Slow Food, Terra Madre is a network of food communities, that comprises groups of small-scale food producers committed to producing quality food in a responsible and sustainable way.

Traditional Knowledge: Knowledge, know-how, skills and practices that are developed, sustained and passed on from generation to generation within a community, often forming part of its cultural or spiritual identity.

Y

Youth Food Movement: The Youth Food Movement is part of an international network which was launched in Australia in 2011. It aims to bring young people together around food and make them aware of their power as conscious consumers by building understanding and value for the food we eat.

600 International
Indigenous Delegates



Balancing the Equation is our choice.
Earth = Eating / Ecology

100
World
Tribes

5 Days, 50+ Events

Join the Moment...it's a Global Movement!

World
Renowned
Minds

41 Host
Villages

60
Participating
Countries



As the world searches for sustainable ways of growing food that avoid and ideally mitigate ecological crisis, scientists and policymakers are, today, turning a thoughtful gaze toward indigenous peoples and their long-standing practices that help to maintain ecological balance.

ITM 2015 will gather indigenous food communities working with the Indigenous Partnership, Slow Food International, UN Agencies and other global supporters to showcase their traditional knowledge, evolving skills and sustainable practices that safeguard natural resources and contribute to a resilient food system that promotes a more humane future for a diverse world. ITM 2015 will be a platform for these food communities to interact and engage with a future we want.

**All rooted in the indigenous way...
the timeless way.**

ORGANISED BY



**INDIGENOUS
PARTNERSHIP**
FOR AGROBIO-DIVERSITY
AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY



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