



nesfas

The Voice of the Community

People  
Partnership  
Practices

**khubor**

NESFAS' journey of tastes, traditions, technology and teams



Partners



APRIL-JUNE 2019

## NESFAS hosted the 1st leg of the TIP Fellowship Programme 2019 in Meghalaya



(L-R) Chenxiang Marak, Yani Nofri, Phrang Roy, Kevin Gallagher, Merrysha Nongrum, Shoko Hayakawa, Edgar Monte, Melari Nongrum and Pius Rane

Meghalaya welcomed indigenous youth from around the world for The Indigenous Partnership Youth Fellowship Programme 2019. NESFAS, their local partner, hosted the first leg of the programme.

The four Fellows who were part of the 2019 Fellowship were Nofri Yani from Indonesia, belonging to the Minangkabau community; Edgar Osvaldo from Mexico, belonging to the Mayan community; Merrysha Nongrum and Chenxiang R Marak from India, belonging to Khasi and Garo tribes respectively. The Fellows attended several programmes hosted by NESFAS across Meghalaya.

Since 2012 NESFAS has worked with its communities to create a large basin of information resource on agrobiodiversity. Over the span of a month, the Fellows and other participants were part of a number of workshops and field trips that exposed them to the rich indigenous bounty of the North-East, that NESFAS is a guardian to. The month long visit aided in more intense interaction with the communities and ensured better understanding of Meghalaya's indigenous knowledge and food systems. The interactions and working together also facilitate understanding of each other and their community. The initiative for the field work was supported by the Rural Electrification Corporation Limited of India and the Government of Meghalaya.

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### From the Desk of the Executive Director

Dear Friends,  
We have come to the fourth quarter of interventions of the 'No one shall be left behind' initiative. While engaging with the communities, we observed that they have realised that traditional knowledge is the basis for an agroecological approach, and this needs to be preserved through practice.

During this quarter, our focus has been to strengthen the engagement with children, women, youth and farmers through various activities highlighted in this newsletter. Consciousness on importance of traditional food and agrobiodiversity has been aroused in rural and urban areas. There is a need to therefore sustain this interest, and we are thankful for your support towards their promotion.

**Dr. Melari Nongrum**  
Executive Director  
NESFAS

### 9<sup>th</sup> April '19 @ U SosoTham Auditorium



The food was packed in biodegradable areca nut plates

## Cooks' alliance members catered lunch at the #GOVOTE event

### #GOVOTELok Sabha Election Voter Awareness

Kong Plantina Mujai and Kong Dial Muktieh from Khweng and Kong Babika from Plasha collaborated to cater lunch to 1500 participants and officials at the #GOVOTELok Sabha Election Voter Awareness event. NESFAS believes in strengthening the indigenous food systems to address nutritional security and also create livelihood opportunities that promote the indigenous people. The three local food entrepreneurs are known for serving interesting food prepared from locally available ingredients. This event presented yet another opportunity to showcase and promote our local food to a larger audience.

Prior to the event, the communities were given an orientation on utilising the rich diversity of food crops to meet a balanced diet and meeting the guidelines of hygiene and standards mandated by the service sector.

## World Earth Day

For World Earth Day 2019, the NESFAS team had an in-house celebration to commemorate the event and planted a bayberry sapling and organised a pot-luck lunch. An episode of 'Our Planet' was also screened for all the staff and members at the office. The members played a small part to 'Save Mother Earth For A Secure Tomorrow'

## Going global

1000 Days Nutrition for mother and child  
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World Environment Day  
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Wash Campaign  
Page 2

## Going local

Monthly Mei Ramew Markets  
Page 2

First Aman A•song  
(Mei Ramew) Market  
in the Garo Hills  
Page 3

a 'No One Shall Be Left Behind' initiative

## 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Apr '19



## 1000 Days Nutrition & WASH Campaign

@ LP School Mawpynthymmai, Mawpynthymmai, East Khasi Hills

NESFAS field coordinators (FC), with the help of interns and students from Womens College, Shillong, organised an awareness program at Mawpynthymmai village on the 1000 Days Nutrition and WASH Campaign for mother and the child.



**Activities:** #Home visits #Roleplay #Agrobiodiversity walk #Cooking demonstration

## 18<sup>th</sup> April '19

@ Laitsohpliah, East Khasi Hills

## Laitsohpliah starts a Community Seed Bank

Phrang Roy, Chairman, NESFAS, inaugurated a Community Seed Bank at Laitsohpliah, East Khasi Hills. After the inauguration, he congratulated the community members and said they should preserve the seeds and revive the ones that have been lost.



### Objectives:

- Preserving local seeds and the environment
- To provide food security and sovereignty
- To generate income through food supply
- To increase accessibility to quality seeds
- To document knowledge related to seeds
- To create an information centre for future
- To promote seed exchange among neighbours

“We have many varieties of seeds which are available in this village alone and some of them are on the verge of extinction. Farming is very important to the residents here as it is a source of livelihood for them. The community seed bank will help them achieve many goals as now they do not have to depend on other villages for seeds. Also, now we can sell the seeds for a price to people from other villages as well.”

**Nestar Kharmawphlang,  
Headmaster,  
Laitsohpliah RCUP SSA School**



“It is a good initiative as we get an opportunity to get a chance to get hold of local products which are not available in the mainstream market. It also helps boost the economy and livelihood of farmers. It helps people gather knowledge about wild edibles and indigenous crops and this in return helps us conserve the biodiversity.”

**Lambinus Raliang,  
Masters of the Social Work  
Department,  
Assam, Don Bosco University**



## 13<sup>th</sup> April '19

@ NESFAS office, Laitumkhras

## Monthly Mei Ramew Farmer's Market starts

A platform for consumers to access organically produced food items and varieties of wild edibles and to directly interact with food producers

Three communities from Meghalaya, namely, Liarsluid (Ri-Bhoi district), Mawlum Mawjakhsew (West Khasi Hills district) and Umsawwar (East Khasi Hills district), participated in the monthly Mei Ramew Farmers' Market organised by NESFAS. The market showcased and sold various produce from shifting cultivation, wild edible plants and kitchen gardens, brought by the three partner communities.



The ESAL Meghalaya group also showcased various Garo and modern progressive cuisines, like cabbage roll dumplings, gomindawak (pumpkin pork stew-soup) and jakep and special brewed tea, at their first pop-up show of the year.

On the other hand, Rostina Mujai, Liarsluid (Ri-Bhoi district), took pride in explaining the steps of cooking a special vegetable brought from her community called 'Lashing'. Members of the NESFAS kitchen also showcased a few local cuisines like smoked beef with pumpkin, cucumber with chameleon plant chutney, wild edible dried fish chutney, millet cake and many more.

“Since most of the plants are dying these days, it is nice to see that there are farmers who are preserving these and are bringing them back. It is also a good way to connect with the farmers and the rural communities.”

**Leshipro Kashena,  
Innovation Associate,  
National Innovation Foundation  
India**

“This market is a wonderful and excellent venture and I think it should be supported further as rural communities should have a space for organic food and local produce. This whole idea of the kitchen and getting a taste of the samples is a great way to engage with people.”

**Shraddha Bandy,  
Member, People's Science Institute**

## 23<sup>rd</sup> - 26<sup>th</sup> April '19

@ Upper Shillong

"I am satisfied with all that was taught to us today. I am glad I got the opportunity to learn new things and I am looking forward to sharing it with other people in my village."

**Shanbor Kharbani,**  
participant farmer



## Training on Sustainable Green Technologies

The Bio-Resources Development Centre (BRDC) on Tuesday launched a five-day training programme on Sustainable Green Technologies at their office premises in Upper Shillong. Farmers from NESFAS' partner communities participated in the workshop where they had an introductory session on sustainable green technologies with junior scientist T langjuh. He encouraged the farmers to share the knowledge and insights of what they learnt with other community members. NESFAS will facilitate the sharing of the workshop lessons along with the participants in other villages.

Raja Rishi Bhattacharya, a researcher from Rain Forest Research Institute (RFRI) Jorhat, spoke about healthy soil and composting, focusing on vermi-composting and vermi-wash on the third day of the workshop. Krishna Giri, a scientist from RFRI, on the other hand, briefed the participants about the importance of application of bio-fertilisers and bio-pesticides for sustainable agriculture.

### Hands-on demonstrations:

Composting

Botanical pesticide

Using biodegradable waste

Trapping insects

Vertical farming

Energy pillar technology



Demonstration of integrated pest management



Raw materials for making organic insecticide

## 22<sup>nd</sup> May '19



ABD Walk at Laitsohpliah

## International Day for Biological Diversity

NESFAS celebrated the International Day for Biological Diversity with Khasi, Jaintia, Bhoi and Garo custodian farmers, Mei-Ramew Café entrepreneurs, Women Group members, youth from six villages and students of the Department of Environment and Traditional Ecosystems, Martin Luther Christian University. As part of the celebration, an early morning agrobiodiversity walk from MadanRngi to Laitsohpliah village was conducted along with the local youths of the area. They identified 21 wild edibles during the walk under the leadership of Nestar Kharmawphlang, a custodian farmer from the village.

Acknowledging the problems community members have with pests in their fields, NESFAS organised within its premise a practical sharing of ideas on how to undertake pest management with the members of the Agroecology Learning Circle (ALC) from Mawhiang, Liarsluid, Umsawwar, Pyrda and Darichegre (Garo Hills). Participants also agreed to a suggestion to test the various pest management methods discussed in one season and to try some hands-on learning methods such as having in each of their villages an 'insect zoo' as demonstrated by Kevin Gallagher.

The emphasis was on the sharing of local knowledge amongst farmers themselves together with the acknowledgement that modern science can also make useful contribution to the current local knowledge.

## 6<sup>th</sup> May '19

@ Police Parade ground, Tura



Farmers' Market at Tura

## 2nd edition of the Aman A•song (Mei-Ramew) First Farmers' Market in the Garo hills

Farmers from four different communities of West Garo Hills assembled at the Police Parade Ground, Tura and participated in the monthly AmanAISong (Mei-Ramew) Farmers' Market. Several local fruits, vegetables, wild edible plants and other food items were together brought by the four partner communities- Rangwalkamgre, Selbalgre, Tosekgre and Ganol Songma. Members of Ganol Songma also took the opportunity to sell food like sticky rice, rice along with meat. Members of the NESFAS kitchen also showcased a few local cuisines like millet pancake with strawberry and chocolate sauce topping along with banana slices and juice made from the local available fruit 'Tepattang'.

## 11<sup>th</sup> May '19

@ NESFAS office, Laitumkhras



Farmers' Market in Shillong

## Mei Ramew Farmers' Market- May 2019



Farmers' Market in Shillong

"I found vegetables and fruits which are usually not available in the local markets. So, I hope we can introduce these to everyone, especially the young crowd, through this initiative by NESFAS."

**Chukam R. Marak, Visitor at the market**

"This Farmers' Market will help us get local foods which are chemical free, fresh and healthy."

**Salirikak D. Marak, Visitor at the market**

6<sup>th</sup> June '19

# World Environment Day 2019

## NESFAS celebrates with its partner communities

Our partner communities united together to combat air pollution and celebrate World Environment Day across Meghalaya.

Mawmihthied LP School (East Khasi Hills) organised an **agrobiodiversity (ABD) walk** for the students and teachers along with two knowledge holders of the village. They identified 36 varieties of wild flowers, wild edibles and medicinal plants.

On the other hand, Dombah RCUP School (West Khasi Hills) held a **tree plantation drive**, an **essay competition** on environment day, a **drawing competition** and a **grow-my-crop competition**. The grow-my-crop competition is an initiative of NESFAS where school children are assigned to grow crops, monitor and care for the plants till the time of harvest.



Students of Wakritongre L P School



Students of Khliehumstem Presbyterian School



These ABD walk helps the children gather knowledge about their own environment as it is something that they are forgetting about these days at an alarming rate."

**Robin Nongrum, head teacher, Mawmihthied LP School**

At Khliehumstem (Ri Bhoi), community members and a team from NESFAS took part in a **cleaning drive** organised by the Raid lapngar Sports and Cultural Association (RISCA). The programme was supported by Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan and Umsning block. Students of Khliehumstem Presbyterian LP/ UP School also took part in the ABD walk followed by a **cooking demonstration** of indigenous food items.

Several partner communities also participated in the state government's **'One Citizen One Tree' campaign**, which is on a mission to plant 1.5 million trees on the occasion. Around 500 plant saplings were planted as part of the campaign in Khliehumstem.

The NESFAS team in Garo Hills conducted a programme in Wakringtonggre, under Rongram Block (West Garo Hills) at the Wakringtonggre Government LP School as part of the campaign. Teachers, community members and the students, along with their parents, participated in the programme where they planted tree saplings at the school and church compound and areas in the locality. A cleaning drive was also held in the school premises.

"On this Environment Day, when several of our partners and communities in Meghalaya are taking part in the One Citizen One Tree Campaign, I am reminded of the Cree Indian Prophecy: 'Only after the last tree has been cut down, only after the last river has been poisoned and only after the last fish has been caught, only then will you find that money cannot be eaten.'

**Phrang Roy, Chairman, NESFAS**



26<sup>th</sup> June '19

## First Mei Ramew Phawar competition

A total of seven groups participated in the first ever Mei-Ramew Phawar Competition (couplet competition) hosted by NESFAS. The couplet competition is an important activity under the project 'No One Shall Be Left Behind' initiative that aims to promote and generate awareness on Indigenous Food Systems and its contribution towards food sovereignty and nutrition among the youth. The themes of the competition were: traditional food, mother earth and its problems, products of traditional farming system, health and nutrition with the help of traditional food and farming systems.

@ Good Shepherd School ,  
Jongksha village, East Khasi hills

- 1<sup>st</sup> prize-** Kharumnuid group, From Mawpyrshong, East Khasi Hills
- 2<sup>nd</sup> prize-** Noristar Nongpluh and group, From Jongksha, East Khasi Hills
- 3<sup>rd</sup> prize-** Anthony Lyngdoh and group From Rapleng, East Khasi Hills

"These couplet competitions should be held regularly in schools and other educational institutions so they would not be a dying art. It is a great way to spread general awareness about our traditional food systems and climate change so as to change the mindset of people." He added, "It is not about the prize money, it is about what we can absorb from the couplets which is meaningful."

**L T Tariang, Block Development Officer, Mawkyntse Block**



Mei-Ramew Phawar Competition at Jongksha

### Inauguration

Meghalaya welcomed indigenous youth from around the world for The Indigenous Partnership (TIP) Youth Fellowship Programme 2019. NESFAS hosted the first leg of the programme in Shillong at its local villages.

20<sup>th</sup>

### Biodiversity International Day

NESFAS celebrated the International Day for Biological Diversity by hosting several programmes throughout the day. They had a celebration of biodiversity at their office premises through a formal programme that highlighted the importance of biodiversity for food security. The TIP Youth Fellowship Fellows attended the celebration and gained insights about indigenous methods that they can use in their own communities.

22<sup>nd</sup>

### FIELD TRIPS



International Day for Biological Diversity

Fellows at Garo Hills

Fellows at Umsawwar, East Khasi Hills

Fellows and Dr. Kevin Gallagher visit Mawhiang

### Laitsohpliah village, East Khasi hills

Field visit to a community seed bank and interaction with farmers working to form a Participatory Guarantee Scheme (PGS) network for organic production and linking it to traditional ecological systems.

21<sup>th</sup>

### Liarsluid, Ri-Bhoi district

The Fellows were taken to a NESFAS school garden to orient them about the activities done in a community. They also visited farms to exchange ideas on traditional pest management methods. They then met Eri weavers and learnt about “ahimsa” weaving.

23<sup>rd</sup>

### Mawhiang, East Khasi hills

The Fellows, along with Dr. Kevin Gallagher, expert on Farmers Field Schools (FFS), met with the Agroecology Learning Circles of Mawhiang community. Dr. Kevin demonstrated the concept of ‘insects zoo’ using some pests that the farmers picked, and how it can be executed in Mawhiang.

24<sup>th</sup>

### Umsawwar community, East Khasi hills

TIP Fellows Merrysha Nongrum and Nofri Yani visited Umsawwar where they were trained by Dr. Bhogtoram Mawroh, Senior Associate, NESFAS on Agroecology Learning Circles and PGS. They visited the e Mei Ramew cafe, where the knowledge group held a cooking demonstration. Then followed an agrobiodiversity walk and a visit to a school garden.

25<sup>th</sup>

### Darechikgre community, West Garo Hills

Fellows along with Lukas Pawera interacted with the community and initiated an ABD Walk to identify wild edibles and fruits along with cultivated fruits. The custodian farmers explained relationships and the taste variation. The youth also participated and helped in the foraging activity and then to categorise them in the local context.

### SILOAM Retreat

The Fellows were part of a three-day work retreat titled ‘Briefing and Exchange of Ideas Sessions’ at the SILOAM Facilitation Centre in Umsaw Khwan (Ri Bhoi). The gathering facilitated sharing of similar findings across indigenous communities in Indonesia, Mexico and Meghalaya. The purpose of the retreat was to learn more about basic concepts for sustaining indigenous food systems and well-being. The meet became an avenue to understand indigenous lessons that food systems and cultural heritage provides for agrobiodiversity propagation.



NESFAS team and Fellows at SILOAM Sessions



27<sup>th</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup>



BRDC

### Session on Movement Building

The Fellows had a session with Rathindra Roy and Ajay Nayak about building a movement and changing the narratives through the power of numbers and mutual voice. Movies on indigenous school movements in Indonesia and differences between formal and informal education became reference material. Ajay stressed the difference between community needs/feelings and how we can bridge this gap through strength of their stories. Similarly how the Farmers’ Market could become the movement.

30<sup>th</sup>

### IFS Profiling Dietary Diversity : Capacity Building for FAO Presentation

Each fellow had the opportunity to present for seven minutes in front of the entire NESFAS team, where they mapped their communities. This was followed by discussion and brainstorming on agrobiodiversity and dietary diversity. Identification of key strength and weaknesses of the 4 communities. This involved topics on strong regulations, community mind set and supportive education system.

June

10<sup>th</sup>

### Visit to BRDC (Bio-Resources Development Centre)

The session started with an orientation about the BRDC Centre activities by Ms Susan Warjri. The centre’s activities include promotion of Sustainable Green Technologies for improved crop productivity, soil and environmental health, bio research, composting, organic growth promoters and broad spectrum Bio-Pesticides, Integrated Pest Management, field trials and experiments on Bio-inoculants, micro propagation of indigenous orchids. Their work also includes documentation of traditional practices and promotion of the Indigenous System of Medicine.

13<sup>th</sup>

#### DIALOGUE AND DISCUSSIONS FOR KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

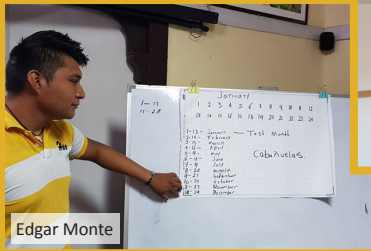


Merrysha Nongrum



Yani Nofri

The fellows make presentations to the mentors and to each other to express their community data on dietary diversity and other indigenous know-how.



Edgar Monte



Chenxiang R Marak

#### Key findings of IFS profiling

The Indigenous Food System profiling between the four fellows allowed a strong framework to be formed to understand the dietary diversity and the landuse.

#### Youth & Future

Dialogue to understand Youth perspectives and their visions on Indigenous Food System (IFS) based on traditional farming system.

#### Knowledge & Culture System and Food Consumption

To know about how community follows the traditional seasonal or intensive cropping patterns and how the knowledge is managed in the four communities. There was a focus on the customary land management, relationship among clans Ceremonies, heritage, Community connection with nature, coping with calamity and Membership of social groups etc.

#### Food, diet and agrobiodiversity

The session started off through general reflection on methodology of indigenous food profiling and had some thought on Power point Presentation (PPT) content and looked for the key finding messages of the Indigenous Food System. Its nine key aspects are: 1. Land use (farming), 2. Ways of obtaining, 3. Agrobiodiversity, 4. Food consumption, 5. Livelihood, 6. Food processing, 7. Culture, knowledge, spirituality, 8. Influencing factors, and 9. Youth & Future.

3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>

5<sup>th</sup>

6<sup>th</sup>

7<sup>th</sup>

#### NESFAS Farmers' market

NESFAS team and TIP fellows prepared for the market to facilitate the participants and farmers to display their produce in the stalls. Nofri Yani prepared Indonesian style chicken satay and chicken stew with mix vegetables for the consumers. The farmers from Dombah and Khliehustem displayed their produce with varieties of home grown and wild forest produce. The Dombah farmers participated with objective of strengthening their self help group. A tasting table for the press was organised where the fellows talked about their communities diets, diversity and the role of flavours.



Preparation for the Farmers' Market

8<sup>th</sup>

#### Indigenous Tasting Table programme

Fellow Yani Nofri explaining about the food prepared by her at the Indigenous Tasting Table programme organised by NESFAS for the media.



The tasting table hosted by NESFAS chairman for the media fraternity

8<sup>th</sup>

### Learning & Experiences

The Fellowship Program gave me a lot of exposure to various tools and methods. The first exposure was learning my own community food system and sources of procuring food during the time of food shortages. Importance of land use system and intercultural experience how clan system is important in management of land from Minangkabau community.

The most important thing about my stay in India is to have met several young community leaders who are interested in improving indigenous production systems, because this event motivated me to move forward with my dream of improving the situation of my community, since this movement is inspiring for me and surely for many other young people.

The process allowed me to make a case study of the Indigenous Food System (IFS) of my own community. Also the discussion with other fellows, I learned their unique practices. I have gained knowledge of various tools and methodologies that I could apply in my field area and also a holistic way of thinking for identifying root problems and finding relationships and linkages that exist in the system through practical exercises.

A very valuable experience for me is being able to meet and interact directly with the Indigenous community in North East India. I learned the concept of farmer's market, community participatory project development, nutrition campaign on local food promotion and farmers exchange visit. Project activities on NESFAS inspired me to develop schools garden and seed bank in my community for food sovereignty.

Chenxiang R Marak,  
Garos tribe, India

Edgar Osvaldo,  
Mayan community, Mexico

Merrysha Nongrum,  
Khasi tribe, India

Nofri Yani, Minangkabau  
community, Indonesia