



NURTURING RESILIENT FARMS

Tales of incredible human collective spirit, strength and kindness from the rural hinterlands of the Northeast Region of India steered by the FARM NORTHEAST Program

MISEREOR
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FOREWORD

Northeast India's unique cultural and ethnic diversity has always captivated the rest of the world. The region is also endowed with a diverse range of flora and fauna. In the diverse ethnic societies, the region serves as a clear example of collectivization in various spheres of life.

Facilitating Agricultural Regeneration Measures (FARM) Northeast (NE) has been a development journey in the country's seven North-Eastern (NE) states to empower smallholder farmers. In its nine years of operation, FARM NE has promoted smallholder collectives in order to increase their agro-based income. These interventions have been made possible thanks to the collectivization of the various communities. Caritas India has been promoting People-Led Development (PLD) to scale up the existing systems in ethnic societies. The pre-existing PLD approach has been re-lived with the community through value addition in response to contemporary needs.

Caritas India has walked with her partners for the last 9 years under the FARM Northeast programme, assisting smallholders in improving their livelihoods through various interventions. This book celebrates the empowerment and resilient efforts of the community to become the decision maker and master of their own destiny. It highlights the local wisdom, innovative models, traditional practices and fusion of local and scientific measures to achieve food and nutritional security in the communities. Hope you find inspiration in reading how Caritas India and its partners were able to lead the regional effort that resulted in an increase in food sufficiency and sovereignty.

I appreciate all the 16 implementing partners for a successful implementation of the FARM programme in their operational areas.

I sincerely thank Misereor, Germany, for their assistance in helping the underprivileged

DR FR PAUL MOONJELY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
CARITAS INDIA





MESSAGE FROM ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Caritas India is strongly committed to working towards building food and nutritional security in the changing climate conditions. This commitment is reflected in Northeast India through its cluster programme Facilitating Agricultural Regeneration Measures (FARM) which has been concentrating on raising the living standards of smallholder farmers through agro-based and other thematic interventions. The programme's main focus has been building food security and sovereignty, supporting native wild food systems, and agricultural climate adaptation.

The Rural markets have also been prioritized in order to encourage smallholders to sell their chemical-free products at prices set by themselves. Collective actions in producing food and transporting it to market have assisted smallholders in increasing their income levels.

With the impending climate crisis in mind, Caritas India has been instrumental in promoting conservation measures at the community level through large-scale plantation measures. Caritas India has also attempted to improve the pre-existing agricultural system by incorporating scientific principles to strengthen such practices.

The case stories encapsulated in this knowledge product complement the overall vision of climate-adaptive agriculture and food sovereignty for smallholder farmers. It will benefit the readers to get ideas, innovations and models which can be replicated in similar agroecological geographies. This document will also help to understand the nine-long year of the development journey in North-East India. Sincere words of appreciation to all the 16 implementing partners who have put in their hard work behind the programme. My sincere gratitude to Misereor, Germany for providing timely financial assistance.

DR FR JOLLY PUTHENPURA
ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
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STORIES OF RESILIENCE

How to plant one-lakh trees

Caritas India

What does it take to plant one lakh trees? Pursuit and commitment. As a run up to World Environment Day 2022, Caritas India planted 1,20,877 trees within a week in its program areas. The plantation drive started on the eve of World Environment Day 2022 and continued for a week across 20 States in the country.

Plantation and nature conservation underpins all interventions of Caritas India as an imperative because of numerous benefits such as clean air, water, biodiversity, social impact, health and regulation of climate. All the thematic programs contributed to this plantation drive covering 26 States including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, Nagaland, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Punjab, Odisha, Puducherry and Haryana.

Planting trees are one of the biggest and cheapest ways of taking CO₂ out of the atmosphere to tackle the climate crisis. Trees absorb and store the carbon dioxide emissions that are driving global heating. According to an estimate worldwide, plantations could remove just under one-third of all the emissions from human activities that remain in the atmosphere.

The initiative was owned by the people themselves. Men, Women, Children and elders from the community came forward to participate by planting tree saplings in individual and community land including Schools, Churches, Parishes, dioceses, panchayat premises, highways, and forest areas. Some of the programs committed to continuing the plantation drive in the coming few months. The saplings and trees for the drive were mostly arranged by the community through the Government line departments and their contributions.

The plantation that runs across different themes has promoted people to plant different species of trees to protect their future. In many program areas, fruit, vegetable trees and forest plants are promoted including mango, betel nut, coconut, jackfruit, papaya, moringa, krishnachura, peepal, and aojar to secure the nutrition of the families.

Apart from tree plantation, the community also prepared and dispersed seed balls. A seed ball is a technique of planting trees by embedding organic seed balls in the ground. The FARM program in North-East India used more than 6000 seed balls in the barren, fallow and forest land to increase the green cover.

In Assam, Dibrugarh Caritas India has promoted the 'Gift a Plant' model to encourage the community towards using plants as a gift rather than any article. This practice not only created mass awareness and ownership but also embodies respect and responsibility toward nature. Now, the practice is commonly seen during public and private functions including meetings, birthdays, and anniversaries.

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Through this initiative, people and communities have created mass plantations to conserve the environment but what is more important is to sustain the effort to realise the required outcome in future.



When women surmount challenges

Bongaigaon Gana Seva Society (BGSS)

Covid 19 brought the world to a standstill rendering the lives and livelihood of scores of rural people to a stand off. But despite the odds not in favour, women of Ansaima Self help group in Chirang District of Assam led from the front. This story stands tall as a living evidence of how the FARM NE programme interventions have been able to sustain beyond the completion period.

Ansaima Self Help Group (SHG) was formed with 10 active women members in Sisubari village of Chirang district of Assam in 2016. The group was already involved in various activities prior to the FARM programme. While they were involved in kitchen gardens and silk rearing, they were not able to extract results out of their hard work until the team from BGSS came and showed the way, said Ms Sitra Narzary member of the group.

Bongaigaon Gana Seva Society (BGSS) during the FARM NE phase II interventions facilitated the formation of this 10 member-women's group. They were involved in activities like kitchen gardening, livestock rearing, silkworm rearing and weaving. BGSS has supported this group with all the necessary technical inputs from time to time. With support from BGSS, the group continued to work hard for 4 years.

Ansaima SHG was now ready with an array of products in their repertoire and it was time for them to take these products to the market. BGSS assisted them to reach out to the market. Marketing has always been a challenge for us, yet we tried to link this group to the nearest possible market, said Fr Linesh Chacko, Director, BGSS.

"In our society, women are very hard-working and we see them working almost twice as much they usually did, to achieve their goal of achieving financial security", said Anthony Basumatary, Programme Coordinator of FARM NE. The women in this part of the country, belonging to Scheduled Tribes are usually involved, not only in household chores and their tending to their children, but also in agriculture and other livelihood activities. They have this ingenious art of striking a balance as they are left with no other choice. So these set of women continued to put in their hard work for months and years together to earn a living- oblivious of the fact that this hard work will pay dividends in the most unexpected times- the Covid 19 lockdown.



As the pandemic struck hard on the poor, people in the FARM intervention areas were not an exception. The national lockdown followed by a series of lockdowns at the state level spelled havoc for the daily wage earners and all other poor income groups including the agriculture sector.

However, Ansaima SHG stood strong. Their bank passbook had a handsome amount of Rs 1,75,000/- at that critical time. A part of the amount was utilised for common interests. Of the balance of Rs 1,00,000/-, the members distributed Rs 8,000/- among themselves to sustain during the pandemic days. Love and care for others is an inherent nature of women and this found expression in the most incredible ways when this group offered a loan of Rs 20,000 to different families in their villages during the crisis.

"I felt content that today our hard work has brought some success in the group. Although we were severely affected by the Covid -19 Lockdown, we could not just withstand but surmount these challenges. With the money distributed from the group, we could buy food and other essential items for our families and help others, too. Some of us could even buy more poultry and goats for rearing", expressed Ms Sumitra Basumatary, secretary of the SHG.





Small farmers in Meghalaya realise big dreams

BAKDIL

Small farmers do not have it easy. With limited land holdings, such farmers require finances for inputs such as seeds, irrigation, cover the loss due to disasters such as floods and erratic monsoons- with farming characterized by high transportation costs and low returns. Smallholder farmers who are mostly on subsistence farming require loans to carry forward their seasonal farming.

The story was no different for Prinith Marak, a smallholder farmer of Waksogre village of East Garo Hills district of Meghalaya with a family of seven. Prinith used to grow paddy once a year but it failed to give him enough for sustenance. Owing to limited earnings, smallholder farmers depend on multiple activities like livestock rearing, poultry, fishery etc. for their survival. However, this does not often fructify enough due to lack of know-how in management of these resources and optimum utilization. Prinith, too, despite having some resources at his disposal, could not envision his way through.

As such, BAKDIL the social service society in Tura, Garo Hill, Meghalaya reached out to Prinith with the Boro paddy seed support. The same helped him to cultivate paddy two times a year, unlike before. Prinith, with his small savings could also manage to plant betel nuts in about 2 acres of his land. However, all this was hardly enough to sustain his family.

It is at this juncture that the BAKDIL team asked Prinith to join the Caritas India's FARM program aimed at small and marginal farmers' food and nutritional security in the Northeast region. With high hopes, he joined the farmers' club and learnt a multitude of things. With active participation in the training programme, Prinith's dreams were now finding the right tools, informed Chingchak D Areng, Coordinator, BAKDIL.

Equipped with this new knowledge, Prinith approached the BAKDIL team to help him in restoring his fishery pond that was hardly giving him any returns. The team connected him to other farmers who had been trained on fisheries management- where Prinith found a support group. Seeing his urge to work hard and earn, BAKDIL facilitated a loan of Rs 4,46,600 on a 50% subsidy from the State Fisheries Department. Without wasting any time, Prinith applied his learnings from the training and spent this amount to repair his pond and introduce fish fingerlings to the pond in May 2020. The pond is expected to give at least Rs. 20,000 per season as a return.

As a member of the Piggery Cooperative society, he also received a loan of Rs 2,50,000 on 0% interest from the Piggery Cooperative mission in February 2021. He further availed a loan of Rs 12,000 on 0% interest from PM Kisan Yojana that he utilised in his farms. With all this Prinith now expects an annual income of Rs. 3-4 lakhs, a multifold increase to his original earnings.



"This is the beginning for me, and I can see a future with full potential and opportunities," says Prinith. He also expressed that he would be happy to support and help other farmers in his village to take activities that help them to grow. BAKDIL as an organisation has been spearheading the cause of farmer in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya and this is one out of several success stories that they have created.



The sacred mantra of diversification


Bongaigaon Gana Seva Society (BGSS)



"Don't put all your eggs in one basket", they say. This is a piece of advice which means that one should not concentrate all efforts and resources in one area as one could lose everything. This is the mantra adopted by Jithon Narzary. His life was marred by poor farm income and endless struggles, until he decided to take on a different approach- diversification.

Small and marginal farmers constitute 86% of the total farmers in India. Most of them are poor and food insecure with limited access to markets and services but depend on their own acumen for decisions on when and what to plant, irrigate, store, how much to retain and what to sell. These choices are purely motivated by the capacity and family needs like health and education.

Constrained by these impediments, the life of Jithon Narzary, 35, from Amteka Balagari village of Chirang District in Assam was no different. As his main occupation, Jithon used to grow seasonal vegetables and cash crops on his one-acre land. The production was not sufficient to cater to the needs of his family. Every season, he used to tirelessly cultivate rice, jute, mustard, yam, ginger, and other crops. Despite all the hard work, he could only get a profit of only about Rs. 1,85,000/- per year. He also started keeping a few local chicken but that too did not yield much profit as the chicken died of diseases. It is then, that Jithon decided to try another proposition- to diversify his income through livestock rearing.

A photograph of a man standing in a coconut grove. He is wearing a white and blue striped t-shirt and is holding a white bowl. In the foreground, several chickens are visible, including a black one on the left and a brown one in the center. The background is filled with tall coconut trees and a blue net fence.

Food and Nutrition Security program, FARM Northeast in Assam has promoted several farmers in the Region to upscale their production by diversifying their farm and income. Funded by Misereor and supported by Caritas India, the program through its technical support has provided regular trainings and handholding to the farmers.

Jithon attended one such exposure cum training program on Livestock Rearing and Management at Umran, Meghalaya. Topics of improved management aspects of poultry management, breeds of poultry, vaccination schedules of poultry against major diseases helped in understanding the detailing of the care and management. The training program motivated the participants to learn and start the poultry business. Jithan had then got what he wanted- the right idea and the right knowledge to help realise it.

The knowledge and skills gained from the training motivated him to invest some of his savings to buy livestock. By applying this new found knowledge and skills, he could now save the livestock from diseases and sell more than before. His shed is now chock full with goats, cows, pigs, rabbits and poultry. He also earns by selling milk and eggs on a daily basis. From the sale of eggs, milk, chicken and other livestock, his monthly income has increased a great deal.

"The average landholding of smallholders in this area is hardly between 0.5 to 1 acre which limits the potentials of farmers to cultivate and could be perhaps one of the reasons that they try to diversify their cropping patterns. Such diversified systems also include rearing of livestock which smallholder tries to meet his ends. Caritas India while promoting a farmer-led approach is promoting such farmers with possible assistance through the FARM programme." informed Fr Joseph Toppo, Director, Bongaigaon Gana Seva Society (BGSS)

The additional income Rs. 1,20,000/- per year from livestock products is a bonus for Jithon's family. Through his hard work, his monthly income has increased from Rs. 15,000/- to 25,000/- (approx.) Other than livestock, he still cultivates ginger, yam and seasonal vegetables in his one acre of land. With this money at his disposal, he plans to invest in more livestock and has extended the area of net fencing. Through his constant hard work, Jithon has not only improved his family's living standard but has also become an inspiration for other farmers. He also shares his knowledge and skills with people who visit his farm to seek solutions.

Strengthening agriculture when climate plays truant

Caritas India

Daniel Maring, a 34-year-old farmer from Manipur, had given up on farming. Although his family had been farming for decades, he was desperate to exit.

"I remember watching my father toiling hard on his farm, growing maize, potatoes, and pulses." Those were happy days. In recent years, however, times changed. "We are now living in a different world. It is the world wretched by climate change, unseasonal rainfalls, belated monsoons, and unexpected wind storms," said Daniel.

In the wake of drastic change in weather patterns that has wreaked havoc on his village, on the people's farms, he had made up in his mind to now look for a job. He was tired of farming, of living in his village.

Troubled by the losses incurred due to the loss of crops, Daniel frequented government offices to search for a job believing that a regular income would be much better than toiling the entire year in the fields only to be disappointed in the end.

But he couldn't get a job. Deeply disappointed, Daniel later said, "There was no space left for a farmer like me with little experience."

Now his only resort was to trust in prayer. Faith kept him sane and he would visit the church, pray for an end to the crisis, and for a decent future for himself and his family.

Then one day three years ago, Daniel's prayers were answered when he heard about a farmer in a neighboring village planting grapes, seemingly undaunted by the changes in the weather patterns. Daniel went to the farmer with hopes high. He was given about a hundred saplings to plant. But things did not turn out as he had expected. The saplings did not grow.

However, this time, Daniel's spirit remained undeterred. "I was sure that God has shown me the path even if it is riddled with hardships." He did not surrender.





He realized that he was in a hurry and that resulted in his loss. Now equipped with his retrospection, he resolved to get the proper training before plunging into a new project.

He learned of a program for farmers conducted by Caritas. Daniel joined that and learned of traditional farming practices that are more sustainable, resilient and efficient. Armed with new knowledge, Daniel now started an orange orchard with some 200 saplings. "I nourished them and focused my entire attention on the farm. It was a kind of do-or-die situation for me," he said.

After some time, the saplings were bubbling with life. Today, Daniel's farm has become the talk of his village. The saplings have turned into trees and fruits. With the help of Caritas, he was also able to find a market for the oranges.

Last year, Daniel's farm produced more than 600 kilograms of oranges. "I sold them and earned more than Rs 48000. He said he plans to expand his farm and make farming his source of living.

Through the FARM NE program, Caritas has been endeavouring to strengthen agriculture and empower communities and farmers like Daniel have become role models for others to go into alternative farming methods.

Daniel is now planning to grow seasonal fruits, such as lemon, pineapple, and bananas and has plans of further expanding his farm.

Lockdown and a plate-full of hope

Caritas India

The Covid lockdown had left millions unemployed and stranded. It also raised the much larger concern of food and nutritional security of the most vulnerable. But even in a situation when food production and supply was greatly hampered, the small farmers of FARM NE villages were self-sufficient in taking care of their food and families.

As the sudden outbreak of the Covid 19 global pandemic took the world by surprise and affected humans causing millions of deaths, lockdowns, migrations, and loss of jobs made lives more miserable. However, the conviction and commitment of Caritas India led her to reach out to the millions in the country with humanitarian support. Food security of the smallholders in North East India has been one of the top priorities of Caritas India. Caritas through various interventions has been instrumental in helping rural communities to strengthen their food security.

As the issue of food security especially during the national lockdown loomed large and affected people. Given the unprecedented disaster hitting hard on food security, a random survey was carried out by the Programme Associate, NE zone to assess the status of food security was carried on the previous FARM villages. The survey was carried out in the FARM phase II areas with a sample size of 20 households in each village during July-August 2020. A total sample size of 300 samples was taken into consideration to make the assessment.

Given the fact that the food security of the poor was jeopardized with the onset of Covid 19, this rapid survey showed that the communities from the FARM programme intervention areas showed resilience and build upon food security. It reflected that the target communities were able to survive through the disaster. The core focus was not just implementing or supporting a programme but to ensure that the interventions of that programme sustain.

For smallholder farmer Sika Kropi, her backyard garden in Assam's Karbi Anglong District never looked so significant as it appears now. During a lockdown when her family income was severely constrained, the local vegetables from her backyard and paddy became the regular part of their family meal. "I had enough food from my backyard garden and the fields during this challenging time," she said.

Sika Kropi's husband, who used to work in Nagaland also could not save his job and came back to his village. All the economic activities were at standstill and every livelihood option was ceased. The situation was only saved by her vegetables grown in her backyard and the paddy from the field. Local Brinjal, Chili, ladyfinger, pumpkin, Bottle gourd and beans were her routine food items during the lockdown.

The rapid survey revealed that not only did nearly 52% of the target community have food stock during the lockdown, these families also reached out to the needy in their respective villages with food. A staggering 67.8% of the target families were deriving food from their own farms. This testifies that the target communities have been able to work towards food sovereignty and sustaining it, as also sharing it with collective efforts of the community.

Saving money was not popular among the communities in the region as they did not have much access to the banks and financial institutions. The FARM programme while facilitating the core idea of food sovereignty also focused on family-level savings out of the income they do in groups from various activities. This intervention helped the community to some extent to save money and this money came in handy during the pandemic.

Collective efforts steered by the community has been the soul of FARM and the programme has community deciding and taking action for their common good while Caritas India with her partners take on the role of facilitators.



Building food security- one trellis at a time

Caritas India

Once a key element of traditional backyard gardens, trellises or 'Chaang' was losing ground in many households of NER. The trellises nowadays are observed to be growing only a handful of vegetable crops in a given season rendering minimal output.

Backyard gardens are a popular site at the villages across the region and many other parts of the country. These are a promising source of food for smallholders. Not only are these a source of nutrition for them but a major portion of their food requirement is met from these backyard gardens. Grown using mostly with indigenous seeds, the smallholders as per their traditional agricultural calendars grow a variety of vegetables throughout the year in their backyard gardens. These vegetables are mostly grown atop a bamboo structure called 'Chaang' or Trellis that have either creepers or climbers growing over.

Backyard gardens of late are being observed as not so productive or being able to serve as a source of food security to the smallholders in NER. Though such gardens are found everywhere, they have not been able to serve the purpose due to various reasons like non-availability of inputs and manpower and low interest. This leads to an increased dependence on the external markets for food. As such, the trellises observed in the backyard gardens are not being optimally used to give food all the year round.

Caritas India while promoting the smallholders for attaining food sovereignty tried to look closely at how these trellises could be redefined so the farmers receive maximum returns, thus reducing dependency on external sources for food. "From my past experiences, I tried to visualise a way on how these trellises could be modified with diverse vegetable crops by optimising the space available", said Prabal Sen, Programme Associate, North East Zone.



The main idea behind redefining the trellis is to generate maximum returns while utilising every inch of the space available- layer by layer. If smallholders adopt such models, they may be able to grow surplus food. The modified trellis is all about converting the pre-existing systems into a multi-tier cropping model that allows the growing of diverse crops.

This modified trellis is designed to use the resources available within a household for growing vegetables. Bamboo being one of the most omnipresent resources in this region is a key ingredient. Bamboo, strings, seeds, and available green biomass for composting are the basic requirements for designing a trellis. The fundamental principle is to carefully select a combination of vegetable species out of their traditional crop calendar for the given season. The selection would include a combination of pungent-smelling species like coriander, ginger, chilli, and others. These species help in repelling pests and therefore, protect the companion crops. Turmeric could also be a choice, especially for the nematodes.

The next step is to decide on the space available and design the trellis structure accordingly. The posts used in the trellis could either have a pit dug or a basket placed to be used for composting. The number of pits in such cases could be as per the size of the or requirement of the trellis. The farmers can take a liberty to design the structure as per their needs.

A trellis requires minimum inputs and can guarantee maximum returns and entails optimum space utilization by using resources that are easily available. Gaining experience from the recent pandemic that challenged food security, Caritas India has put forward this model as a choice for smallholders under the FARM programme. It is expected that trellises would help farmers in strengthening food security.



Love thy neighbour

Bongaigaon Gana Seva Society (BGSS)

As the Covid 19 lockdown hit the world hard, an unexpected gesture of compassion was kindled among the Self -Help Groups of Lakhipur Village of Chirang district in Assam.

With the lockdown in 2020, like all rural areas, most of Farm Northeast project villages were also badly affected, with women especially bearing the brunt in terms of health and livelihood.

The Rupali Self Help Group of Lakhipur village under Farm Northeast project, of Chirang district, Assam was one of the 14 groups to receive livestock and seed support from the Covid Response program, 2020. The group received two female goats, ten ducks and vegetable seeds.

But in the most unexpected times--in the peak of the pandemic, the group decided to extend their help to other groups and poor families. The Rupali Self Help Group decided to help their neighbours by giving away a goat and some ducklings, through the support they had received.

Rupali Self- help group is an enterprising one. Under the leadership of Mrs. Sukuntala Lakra and assurance from the BGSS farm team, the group has made plans and carried out various activities to improve their economic condition. Initially, they invested some Rs, 3,000.00 and managed to take an acre of land on lease for 2 years. They used it to cultivate yam and other vegetables which they sold in the nearby market. In the beginning, they made Rs, 5,000.00 in profits by selling vegetables. They also collected some money among themselves and extended help to other groups and individuals by giving out loans of Rs, 50,000.00 on minimum interests. The group also invested another Rs, 15,000.00 on yam and potato cultivation and are expecting to generate a profit of Rs, 35,000.00. Due to their hard work and cooperation, the economic condition of the group members is significantly improving. They have also increased the size of their livestock and are planning to rear some pigs collectively.

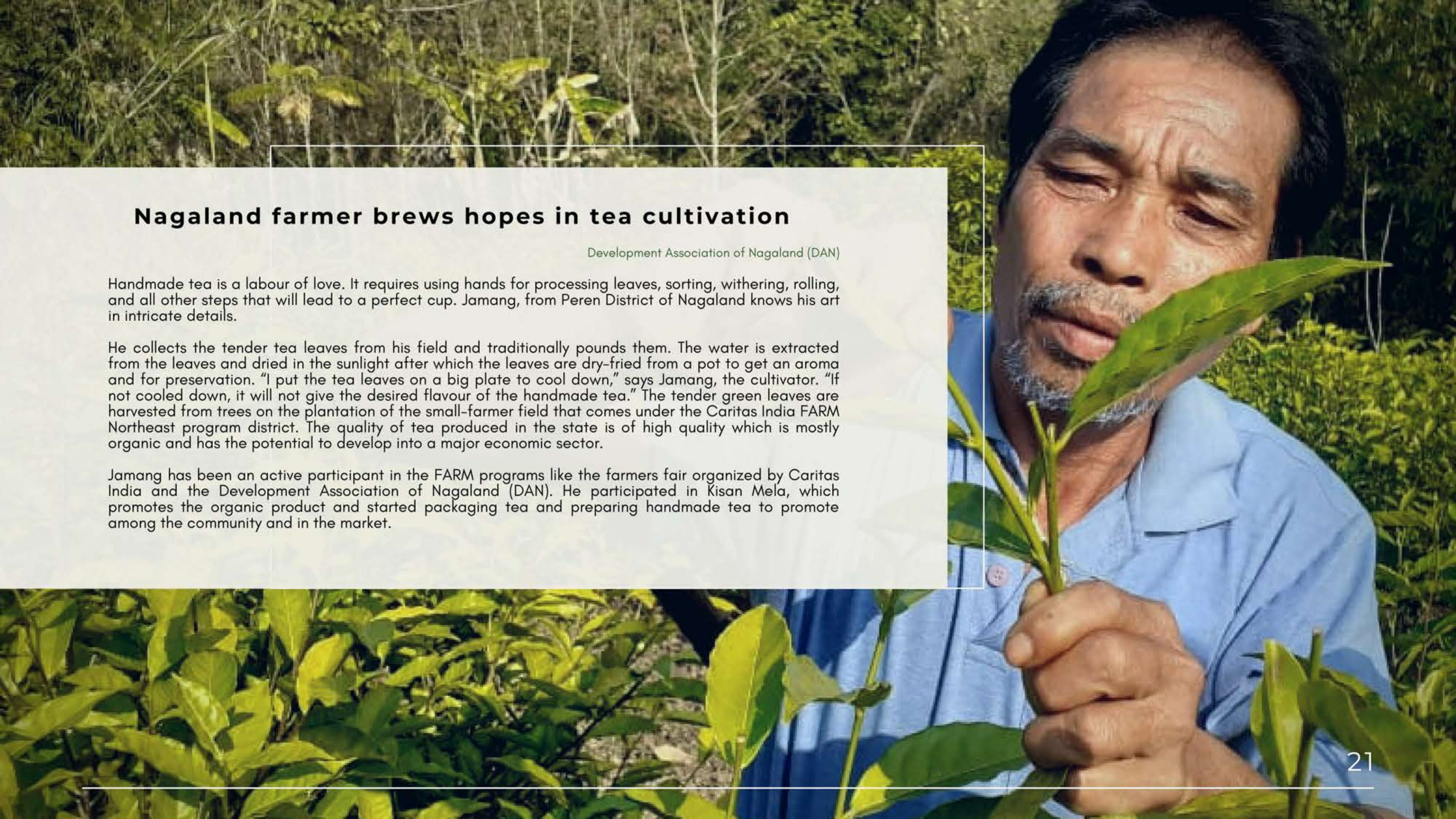
Other than carrying on group activities the members have also become active in their individual pursuits by continuously growing various varieties of crops and doing small businesses for their livelihood.



The Rupali Self Help Group has helped the others in more ways than one. Not only have they helped other groups directly but have also emerged as a model for other farmers. New individuals and groups are now trying to emulate the same practices in their own lives.

Realising the success of their peers, another group called the Sonali SHG group has also decided to rear livestock and cultivate seasonal vegetables. If this was also not enough, other groups like Mukta SHG and Rongjali SHG have also absorbed the values of kindness and compassion by sharing their livestock-thus extending the support system for other needy families.



A man with a grey beard and mustache, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, is holding a tea branch with several green leaves. He is looking down at the leaves with a focused expression. The background is a lush green tea plantation with rows of tea bushes under bright sunlight.

Nagaland farmer brews hopes in tea cultivation

Development Association of Nagaland (DAN)

Handmade tea is a labour of love. It requires using hands for processing leaves, sorting, withering, rolling, and all other steps that will lead to a perfect cup. Jamang, from Peren District of Nagaland knows his art in intricate details.

He collects the tender tea leaves from his field and traditionally pounds them. The water is extracted from the leaves and dried in the sunlight after which the leaves are dry-fried from a pot to get an aroma and for preservation. "I put the tea leaves on a big plate to cool down," says Jamang, the cultivator. "If not cooled down, it will not give the desired flavour of the handmade tea." The tender green leaves are harvested from trees on the plantation of the small-farmer field that comes under the Caritas India FARM Northeast program district. The quality of tea produced in the state is of high quality which is mostly organic and has the potential to develop into a major economic sector.

Jamang has been an active participant in the FARM programs like the farmers fair organized by Caritas India and the Development Association of Nagaland (DAN). He participated in Kisan Mela, which promotes the organic product and started packaging tea and preparing handmade tea to promote among the community and in the market.

Though his journey started in 2017 with his tea garden with the support of a Government Scheme, he could only save 2,000 of his 3000 planted saplings. Due to lack of marketing know-how, he started losing interest in his tea farm. It was then that the FARM North East DAN team facilitated and encouraged him to promote his local handmade tea- a rare piece of art.

Gradually, he gradually started developing his process of making handmade tea. Jamang's tea cost Rs 50 for 150 gm and on the whole, he earned Rs. 10,000 in the year 2020 and it is only growing. He has extended the land for the tea garden to 3 acres to produce more which will not only be available in the village area but also supply in the market.

"I thank Development Association of Nagaland (DAN) under FARM programme for assisting and supporting me to promote tea garden in our locality and in the market which enhance my family's financial condition," says Jamang.





Margaret's brooms of profit

Development Association of Nagaland (DAN)

Twenty-five year old Margaret is a headstrong, hard-working woman of Songlauh village. It is one of the oldest villages in Athibung block of Peren District, Nagaland, populated by the Kuki tribe. Born in a farming family and being the eldest in the family, Margaret grew up taking responsibilities from a very young age. She is the bread earner of the family with 5 siblings who are still pursuing their studies. Margaret is one among the few women in her village who withstood all hurdles when things went spiraling down during the Covid pandemic and her parents could not earn their wages. She took up an initiative to sell brooms- a resource locally available, and easily overlooked.

Documentation and dissemination of non-cultivated food and vegetables motivates the communities towards consumption and conservation of products which are found in the forests. In Athibung block, most people are shifting cultivators. They cultivate paddy along with varieties of vegetables like yam, tapioca, ginger, chilly, brinjal, sesame etc.

Margaret is a member of the Songlauh Farmers Club (FC). She came to realize the importance of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) through the FARM Team of Development Association of Nagaland (DAN), a Caritas India partner, who shared about the importance of NTFPs and their value addition.

This opened her up her mind. She came up with the idea of collecting brooms from the forest, even though it is available for a very short period- January and February. Since household chores kept her on her toes, Margaret could not manage much time to harvest brooms from the forests. She would request members of her FC to collect brooms in lieu of money. This helped the other members as well to earn money as well. 16 FC members came forward to support her and harvested around 6,000 kgs of brooms from the forests at Rs 10 per Kg.

"When brooms are partially dry, I bind together in a bundle of 10 Kgs which makes things easier for conveyance to the market", said Margaret. She received help from her friend Mr. Cobtinggam who is from Athibung, just 2 km away from Songlauh village. Cobtinggam, who is a dealer of various items like brooms, timbers etc., carries the brooms to Dimapur and to sell at a price of Rs.60 per kg. Margaret made a whopping profit of Rs, 1,20,000 initially from the first sell out.



"We facilitated her to learn and understand the benefits, uses and the process of making a livelihood with NTPFs", said Ms Roko Senuo, Coordinator, FARM. In 2022, she started to collect brooms in the month of January and first week of February. She has collected around 6000 kilograms of brooms again. When the brooms will get dried and ready for sale, she is expecting a profit of Rs. 2,000,00.

She admits that it was not an easy business as the brooms needs a lot of care. They need to be dried under the sun and in the evening. They also must be kept safe from rains and dew drops. But thanks to the low labour cost, the business is highly remunerative compared to selling vegetables.

Her business of brooms is really helping the community as brooms can be easily collected even by children. Inspired by her success, as soon as the month of January arrives, villagers start the collection process. Margaret's work not only helped her earn a livelihood but motivated others as well.

Women leader plants gardens of abundance

Diocesan Social Service Society (DSSS)

Rilram Centre is a tiny sleepy village in Tengnoupal district of Manipur with a population of 343 spread across 60 odd families, dependent on agriculture for their survival. Over the years, the land has started losing its essential nutrients which are necessary for the growth of the crops. K. Todar used to work hard in her field to earn a livelihood for the family but despite all the efforts, the produce was not enough to fulfill her family need.

The villagers were ignorant about the modern-day information on farmers collectives and improved methods of organic cultivation. Diocesan Social Service Society (DSSS), Imphal, a Caritas India partner took the initiative of adopting this village under the ongoing FARM programme supported by Misereor, Germany.

In November 2020, DSSS reached out to Rilram Centre and facilitated the formation of the Farmers' Club (FC). The FC members were oriented by the DSSS team through different program and trainings to increase production and improved way of agriculture. The farmers were specifically trained on technologies like organic manure making, multiple or mixed cropping, types of seasonal cropping, and promoting handicrafts etc., by elders.

The techniques helped in increasing the revenues and the health of the soil through bio-inputs such as green manure, mixed-cropping, a method of growing more than one crop in the same field that involves growing several compatible crops on the same land. The aim is to use the plants' natural synergies efficiently to improve the yield. The system naturally provides nutrients to the soil that the other crop needs to grow or perhaps repel or trap pests affecting the other crop.



The community from Rilram Centre responded in affirmation to the improved means of cultivation and began to practice their learning in their backyards and fields.

Todar was one of the members of the FC who took these learnings to the field and started cultivating what she learnt. She started earning by cultivating organic vegetable such as mustard leaves, cabbages, tender leaf shoot of beans, onion, banana etc. She started earning Rs. 5000/- per month which she utilises to educate her children in the school, buying daily food and other household needs, expanding backyard garden by buying and cultivating organic seeds.

"I used to pay only Rs 10 as membership fee to the farmers' club but today I am in a position to pay Rs 100 per month and I want that my people to work hard and be successful," says Todar. She has been instrumental in promoting handicraft in the FC which inspired many to follow the path. Todar has shown the way that even a tiny village with no access to modern amenities can set examples for the rest.

Mr. Gangmei Samuel, Programme Coordinator, FARM adds that "following the footsteps of Ms Todar, the community also learned and has plans to expand their kitchen gardens or farm by growing organic vegetables for consumption and marketing. Apart from that, the community has also taken up handicrafts making to generate collective income. They have plans to work together once or twice in a week apart from their own daily fieldwork".



Leaving a legacy of seeds

Guwahati Gana Seva Society (GGSS)

Not too long ago, farmers grew their own food. Now, farmers mostly grow for the market and buy their food from the money they make. Before the green revolution, there were over 100,000 different seed varieties. But with the advent of international seed corporations, the control of farmers over seed was shifted to the market and this diversity was replaced by monoculture.

It was observed that mostly, the farming families in Assam were preserving and using indigenous seeds for growing paddy but for vegetables, except for few families, they were dependent on seeds from the markets.

It was realized by FARM NE that there was a need to sensitize the community on the importance of promotion and preservation of an indigenous variety of seeds not only for paddy but for seasonal vegetables as well.

The intervention of Caritas India FARM N.E. Phase III programme in 13 villages under Guva, Nellie and Silchang Gaon Panchayat, Mayong Block, Morigaon District required a lot of rapport and confidence building to initiate a process in an area that was completely new. Household visits and interaction with the farmers helped to understand the community and their cultural habits, especially farming practices. The community understood the situation they were in and were ready to take necessary action to address the problem.

But then they came across another challenge. The indigenous seeds that were preserved by the families were very limited and only 2-3 varieties per family. That was too small a quantity, it was difficult to do seed collection and exchange seeds among the farmers. Therefore, to initiate the process, hand-holding support was an imperative.





"FARM team of Guwahati Gana Seva Society (GGSS) also started looking for an indigenous variety of seeds within and beyond project villages and it was then we came across to some of the lead farmers from FARM Phase I and Phase II villages", said Prabin Minz, Coordinator, GGSS.

As they were approached, they agreed to help the farmers and they took the responsibility for the collection of seeds from their respective villages. Within a week's time, they collected 12-14 varieties of indigenous seeds of seasonal vegetables. The seeds included Lady's finger 2 kg, Cucumber 2 kg, Sponge gourd 2 kg, Coriander 5kg, Spinach 6 kg, Chilly 5 kg, Bitter Gourd 2 kg, Bean 2 kg, Pumpkin 2 kg, Brinjal 2.5 kg and Long bean 4 kg. "We remember we were in similar kind of situation and were very much depended on market seeds, we started with a handful of seeds and over the years have multiplied them, now we are in a position to help other farmers, we expect the same from you so that the quantity of the indigenous seed increases and many more farmers are benefited," said Keshab Das, a farmer from Khaloibari Phase I village Dimoria block, during his address to the community of phase III villages. The farmers also rejected the money offered to them for the seeds.

This is how a legacy was created on trust, kindness and legacy in the form of a seed bank.

As the seeds were used by the farmers in FARM III, they have now increased the number of seeds through multiplication and are ready to contribute to help the farmers in need.



When women call the shots (ducks)!

Guwahati Gana Seva Society (GGSS)

Bondita Kowar, Gurigaon village in Morigaon District, Assam was distressed about the livelihood situation of her family due to the lockdown and pandemic situation. Her family was dependent on the 0.5 acre of family land for paddy which was not sufficient. The husband, used to do farm in one season and work in other's land for their survival. She was worried about her children's future and felt the need to do something.

This urge drew Bondita to persuade more women to join her. The following month, ten women along with Bondita gathered to form a group with a quest in their hearts- one of finding a sustainable source of income. Guwahati Gana Seva Society (GGSS), a Caritas India partner for the FARM NE programme facilitated the group in identifying a workable and feasible income generation activity. "We met Bondita and helped her to introspect with her group members to see what scopes are available for them, as a group," said Prabin Minj, Coordinator, GGSS.

The group decided to pursue duck farming due to its better market demand. They also identified a neighbour who was willing to offer space for duck rearing by the edges of their fishpond. Setting up a duckery at the edge of the pond is beneficial as the droppings from the duckery is a good source of food for the fishes. The group has contributed bamboo, tin sheets, and labour to make the duck shed. GGSS, under the Covid 19 response of FARM programme supported this initiative by providing 30 ducklings to the group with a condition that they would return the same number of ducks in one year time so that other families or groups can be supported. The response was carried out during July to August 2020. The group readily agreed and initiated duck rearing in August 2020. They were also provided training on duckery. In its earlier phase, the FARM Northeast program had promoted lead farmers who train the community. One such expert farmer from another village conducted training on caring of ducks, feed, medicine and vitamins etc.

Within a span few months, the group sold Rs. 6,600/- worth of eggs and also used some for self-consumption while also kept some for brooding in the next batch. The group unanimously decided to reinvest the whole amount in the next batch so the members can start reaping better benefits in future. It is expected that by the next 5 to 6 months the group will be in a position to sell ducks at a price of minimum Rs 400 per Kg and this would take the income to their expected levels or even more.

The group members are elated as they have found a way that will help them to earn some income to support their families. In days to come, they will hand over 30 ducks to support a new group. The group members are also taking initiative to develop their backyard kitchen garden, preserve indigenous seeds, cultivate seasonal vegetables throughout the year, and introduce nutritional fruit-bearing trees, a wild edible and medicinal plants in their improved kitchen garden. They are exploring other possibilities as well for the source of income and means of livelihood.

“Along with duck farming, we are learning new things and are putting those into practice, we are also exploring every possibility in the field of the farm that could give us more income,” added Bondita.





Farmers could solve the food wastage issue with demand and supply

Guwahati Gana Seva Society (GGSS)

Thousands of rupees worth of food used to get wasted as farmers from 4 No. Kuthuri village, Morigaon district of Assam were growing surplus of perishable items grown in their farms.

A large quantity of fresh produce grown in the village are wasted to rot, fed to livestock, or left unattended. Almost every household in the village had food crops i.e., drumstick, papaya, wild edibles, and seasonal vegetables in their kitchen garden. The families used to consume those products, but the surplus used to get wasted as there was no scope of selling it in the market because of lack of time and opportunity.

“We grow food for our household consumption, but we find it difficult to manage the surplus and we had no choice other than wasting the food,” says Ms. Bilasi Baraik, a housewife from 4 Kuthuri villages. As the earning member of the family is employed in the tea garden, they hardly have time to sell their products in the market.

Guwahati Gana Seva Society (GGSS), an NGO partner of Caritas India under the FARM Northeast III program has observed this wastage of food. Over the years, the organisation has been promoting several sustainable models of food security among the people and chemical-free farming is one of the highlights of this village. GGSS realised that despite the availability of plenty of food it was getting wasted beyond consumption due to the above reasons.



FARM Northeast program has promoted market linkages in 2 No. Kuthuri, a neighbouring village of 4 No. Kuthuri village. Within 2 years of market linkage, families of the 2 No. Kuthuri villages could earn an additional average income of Rs. 1,500 to 2,000 per family. The effects are so visible that the demand for their products increased day by day and they run out of supplies. "The community of 2 No. Kuthuri village during one of the meetings with them revealed their challenge of running short of products for the market and this is where we immediately facilitate to link them with 4 Kuthuri villages where food was otherwise wasted," said Prabin Minz, Coordinator of GGSS.

In what could be termed as a landmark, 4 No. Kuthuri village is sharing its surplus products with 2 No. Kuthuri at market price. The surplus is being marketed at 2 No. Kuthuri village markets to cater for the increasing demand of food supply. Both the villages came together to ensure the food security of each other. The average income per family of 4 No. Kuthuri has increased from Rs. 1,500 to Rs. 1,800. "We saw a new beginning when we started Sharing our surplus food to 2 No Kuthuri farmers group. This has helped us to raise our income levels and we look forward to do more", said Shefali Baraik from 4 no Kuthuri village. GGSS has plans to take forward this achievement by procuring products from 4 No. Kuthuri villages to their market established near the national highway.



The mushrooming of abundance

Itanagar Diocesan Empowerment Association (IDEA)

In Arunachal Pradesh, naturally grown mushrooms are consumed widely by the local people. However, due to the short period of availability of naturally growing mushrooms, their commercial cultivation has lots of potential in the state. This idea was groomed by Itanagar Diocesan Empowerment Association (IDEA) under the FARM Northeast program. The result- 37 farmers managed to harvest 299 kgs of mushrooms and earned about Rs 60000 in their first stint itself!

Farmers use paddy, millets and maize straw for feeding animals. The idea was to make use of straw and generate alternate income from waste. As such, oyster mushroom production was introduced to the farmers of the project area at Sagalee block in Arunachal Pradesh. Mushroom cultivation, recently has gained popularity in Arunachal Pradesh owing to its low input cost. The favourable climatic conditions further provided ample opportunities for the farmers to make mushroom farming as a business for better sustainability.

IDEA carried out the technology demonstration on Oyster Mushroom Cultivation to select farmers comprising all the 12 villages, which would help them to consume mushrooms for the whole year. A training programme on "Oyster Mushroom Cultivation" was conducted for 26 farmers to cultivate oyster mushrooms on intact paddy straw with the steam disinfection method and it's marketing.



After the training, the IDEA team distributed a bag filled with prepared mushroom bags to find out the possibilities of a successful result in the locality of the farmers. Fortunately, the result benefitted all the farmers. Thus, the trainees were supported with 4 kgs of oyster mushroom spawn & PP bags. As a result, 37 farmers initiated the oyster mushroom production units for the first time in their homes.

"We the members of Rigo Colony SHG never understood the value of mushroom. Fortunately, with the earnest support from the FARM Northeast program, we cultivated it for the first time and got a very good result instantly. It can be a good source of income all throughout the year as it has high demand all around, says Ate Ane, President, Rigo Colony SHG.

Arunachal Pradesh has a great scope for commercial mushroom cultivation by recycling paddy, millets and maize waste for higher income generation. It can cater to the growing food demand; solve unemployment issues and environmental pollution to a significant extent. More than 75% of the farmers in the state are small and marginal farmers and oyster mushroom cultivation can be of immense importance for ensuring additional income by utilizing available resources like paddy straw.

"I am very happy with the result of the training I availed and continued to practice the cultivation with all my effort. After being trained by IDEA, on the intervention of mushroom cultivation, I conducted training for my neighbour, where I passed on the skills of mushroom cultivation to many other farmers in my village", says Mr. Chula.

Due to this intervention, 15 lead farmers with low-cost production units are profitably running in villages like Nimte, Rigo & Rach Tabio of the projected area in Sagalee.



Bridging the farmer-market divide

Itanagar Diocesan Empowerment Association (IDEA)

Smallholder farmers have the potential to alleviate poverty and hunger, but the poor farmers often cannot come out of this situation due to lack of access to improved seeds, knowledge, infrastructure, linkages, agricultural input, better market, and value addition for their agricultural support.

"We produce a lot of fresh vegetables in our agricultural field. But selling is a challenge as we have to travel to the nearest town which requires money at least Rs. 500 on one side and a total of Rs. 1,000, says Gita Nana, a smallholder farmer from Papum Pare District of Arunachal Pradesh. Gita and two other women from Balapu village under Sagalee Block in the district of Papum Pare, Arunachal Pradesh used to collect agricultural products (cultivated vegetables and NTFPs) from the village for selling. Owing to this widespread problem among the farmers in the area, there was a felt need to provide an outlet for surplus cultivation, NTFP and handicrafts to the outer world and to get additional income for the families.

Itanagar Diocesan Empowerment Association (IDEA), Arunachal Pradesh with support from Caritas India and Misereor Germany have established a rural market in the programme area under the FARM programme. Rural markets are considered the nerve-centres of the economic, social, and cultural activities of rural life. The producer farmers not only depend on these markets for the disposal of their produce for cash, but also for the procurement of agricultural inputs as well as for social contact.

"We came to know about IDEA and with their support, we are able to set up this shop. Many farmers have a lot of agricultural produce but do not have a market to sell. We go to 4-5 villages and collect the produces on wholesale rates and sell in this market which eventually helps them," adds Gita Nana.



The initial challenge was to sell out chemical-free agri-products and create a sustainable demand-supply chain and provide the best prices for the farmers and consumers and earn a livelihood. The elders in the village supported the initiative and provided a space at the national highway roadside. The market was initiated in October 2021 and has been able to benefit 50 families with an income of Rs 4,000 per month.

IDEA plans to cover more farmers under such markets in other project areas in near future and support the smallholder farmers to live sustainable lives. The initiative not only stimulates economic growth but also reduces poverty by opening new avenues of income generation.



Babu's mantra- don't break, just bend

Jirsong Asong

Of late jhum (shifting cultivation) has been considered as a painstaking effort by the farmers due to its reduced cycle of 1 & 2 years over the years and is attributed to the low soil fertility due to various factors induced by climate change. Babu Teron, a jhum farmer from Karbi Anglong District of Assam has a different story to tell though.

He tweaked his cultivation practices and stockpiled his granary from time to time with paddy, millets and other seasonal crops during COVID-19. As a result, when the rest of the world was struggling for food, Babu and his family had an oasis of enough food during the nation-wide lockdown triggered by the pandemic.

Babu was a part of the Caritas India's Facilitating Agricultural Regeneration Measures (FARM) North East Phase II programme supported by Misereor Germany which promotes traditional farming practices which are more sustainable and resilient in meeting the food and nutrition needs of tribal communities.



Jhum is a diversified agricultural system that helps farmers ensure food by growing a host of food crops, with paddy and millets as the major crops. Implemented by Jirsong Asong, a Diocesan partner in Assam, the program has helped farmers to scale up cultivation practices in jhum fields. Babu's wife also followed his step to ensure that the family has some income. She reared silkworms, a promising income generation activity and also practised backyard garden to fulfill the need of fresh vegetable needs of the family.

Farmers like Babu has proved this notion true with their hard work and enthusiasm. Babu also helped his neighbours and villagers with food supply when it was needed the most. He has become an inspiration to show the potential of empowered rural communities to cope with the crisis. COVID-19 had a silver lining as it has revealed the glaring examples of farmers self-reliance from its intervention areas to ensure food security during the crisis.

"We have identified Babu as a role model for the farmers under FARM phase III and Babu is happily extending his support to fellow farmers to strengthen their food security," shared Mondol Teron, Programme Coordinator of Jirsong Asong.

It is worth mentioning that the Northeast region and its people are woven together with a culture that does not allow anyone to starve, no matter what. This has been a part of the parcel in the ethnic societies of the region and Caritas India has been working in NER to strengthen this sentiment of oneness among the people in the rural areas.

From Jhum to home- a climate change adaptation initiative

Jirsong Asong

Jhum (shifting cultivation) has been a part of parcel of the ethnic people living in the North-Eastern states of India. Over the years, Jhum that has sustained has seen a sea of change but is now struggling due to low sustainability.

Due to frequent loss in soil fertility, erratic rainfall regimes, the system is going through immense challenges thus leading to a decrease in agronomic yield. Today youth from the villages are going out in search of better avenues and this has brought about a drop in the number of helping hands in the fields.

Ethnic groups still keep Jhum close to their heart as this age-old system binds them together through festivals and rituals associated either during sowing or harvesting. Culturally, jhum and ethnic groups of the region can never be separated. The practice is unique, and this can be seen in terms of the diversification of crops. A Jhum plot is never complete without an array of crops along with the staple crop (paddy). It is all about hand sowing, weeding and harvesting and carried out in the hill slopes by clearing plots in the forests. The farmers shift to another plot as soon as they realize that the present plot of land has lost its fertility and it's time to move on to the next, so the previous plot regains its fertility through the regeneration of forests. Therefore, forests are an integral part of Jhum and farmers cannot cultivate unless forests are there and this is in contrary to a general statement blaming Jhum farmers for destroying forests.



However, climate change has triggered a reduction in the numbers of years of Jhum cycle which puts pressure on the ecosystem. Today, the farmers who are practising Jhum face an immense struggle for securing food with more severe uncertainties gnawing at them. But it is only in necessity, that inventions (innovations) are made!

In Karbi Anglong district of Assam, a unique climate change adaptation practice is observed in Jhum. The area is part of Caritas India FARM NE III project supported by Misereor, Germany. This adaptation has been recorded as a transformation of the existing system of Jhum into a new improvisation. The ongoing pandemic also had a role in this, when it almost crippled the farmers and did not allow them to go to their fields.

Around 10 households in three villages decided to cultivate in their backyard gardens. "It has been a difficult decision for me, but I was left with no choices as I had to feed my family", said Kasang Teronpi, a Jhum farmer from Sam Teron village in the district. Such transformation of jhum took place in three project villages some 5 to 6 years ago. The farmers who resorted to cultivate paddy in their backyard gardens continued with the similar methods as applied in Jhum. The backyard gardens have diversified cropping pattern as Jhum and included paddy along with seasonal crops like sesamum, beans, brinjal, tapioca and yam etc.

The Jhum in the backyard has species like bananas which was otherwise not visible in the regular Jhum fields in that area. The only visible difference is of the transformation of the shifting cultivation to the settled cultivation.

Such transformations are a result of the climate change which is compelling farmers to adapt to the regimes of changes in the new environmental setups. The transformation has resulted in a kind of compromise with the situation as the practice of Jhum is associated with the cultural thread of the community. However, cultural practices cannot be rigid always as survival of the community is important.

As of now the farmers are practicing paddy cultivation in alternative years and it remains to be seen how they succeed in taking forward this practice. Caritas India is working with these farmers and extending technical support to sustain their lives and livelihood.





Lakadong Turmeric sustain West Jaintia Hills Women

Jaintia Hills Development Society (JHDS)

In Northeast India, people call Turmeric a miracle spice due to its wide popularity and health benefits. In Ayurvedic medicine, the spice is valued for its anti-inflammatory, antioxidants, anti-depressant properties and is also vital for Alzheimer's Disease prevention. Lakadong Turmeric is special turmeric found in Meghalaya with medicinal properties.

Lakadong Turmeric is a special turmeric variety from a place called 'Lakadong', in Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya. Unlike other turmeric varieties, the curcumin content present in Lakadong turmeric is 7 to 9% (tested in 2019), which is one of the highest, as against 2 to 3% in regular turmeric.

A 13 member women's group from Lumuriap village in West Jaintia Hills District, Meghalaya, are cultivating Lakadong Turmeric as the source of sustenance. However, due to lack of necessary capital were losing interest to continue this income source. Jaintia Hills Development Society (JHDS), a Caritas India partner under the FARM programme took the initiative and helped the group to learn improved scientific methods cultivation of Lakadong Turmeric.

JHDS encouraged this group in the year 2019 by supporting them with a grinder, solar-powered drier for value-addition and also provided technical expertise on the cultivation of Lakadong with the help of the Department of Agriculture, Government of Meghalaya.





This women's group cultivated 5,000 quintals of Lakadong in 2 acres of land in the year 2021 which was dried in the solar-powered drier. As of date, the group has sold nearly 70 kg of Lakadong powder for Rs 300 per kg. The group earning has increased from Rs 1,50,000 in the year 2020 to a staggering Rs 2,70,000 to date. The profits are equally divided among the members and the members are utilizing the amount in meeting their needs which was otherwise not possible.

Although the global pandemic has slowed down the process, it has not been able to dampen the spirit of the group as they continued to work in their fields with whatever little they could. "Earning this way, it has given us confidence as we can now afford things which were otherwise not possible", said Ms. Merita Dhar, a group member.





Planting hopes for posterity

Jaintia Hills Development Society (JHDS)

They say the best time to plant a tree was 25 years ago, the next best time is now. This adage has found a lease of life from a small group of people of Sohmynting village in Meghalaya's West Jaintia Hills District as this group in one of the FARM Northeast III project areas decided to conserve the environment.

On January 2021, the FARM team facilitated a meeting of the villagers with the allied department to create an interface to apply for a project on Nursery Plantation. The FARM facilitated the Tylli Dei Lang group in getting the project under the Village Natural Resource Management Committee (VNRMC) from Meghalaya Basin Management Agency (MBMA), an SPV under the Planning Department of the Government of Meghalaya, is implementing the CLLMP, which is sponsored by the World Bank.

The support helps in establishing community nurseries for the production of planting materials required for afforestation (protection and conservation)/multi-layered plantation/agroforestry. Afforestation and reforestation initiatives are also undertaken along with measures to conserve and protect bio-resources.

Jaintia Hills Development Society (JHDS), Meghalaya with support from Caritas India and Misereor Germany have been able to facilitate the group comprising 8 women and 6 men from this village by promoting them to practice nursery for trees sapling and fruits tree sapling to earn income from it.



Starting with the nursery plantation, the group had a meeting to discuss and plan the process of establishing and maintaining the nursery which was estimated up to one lakh fifty thousand. Fifty-percent of this amount was supported by MBMA for poly house and the balance amount was spent by the group. They spent Rs.1,20,000 for a temporary poly house and Rs.30,000 for purchasing 7,000 tree seedlings. The group also took the initiative to find tree seedlings and saplings from the forest for nursery plantation.

Since its formation in 2021, the SHG group of Tylli dei Lang could not sell due to COVID-19 and other reasons, but this year they have started selling from their tree nursery and earned Rs. 60,000 till date.

The group plans to utilise the money for the extension of the nursery. JHDS is already in the process of further extending such successful interventions and planting more seeds of change.



Insulated during unprecedented times

Jana Unnayan Samiti Tripura (JUST)

When the lockdown dawned upon the country, Sukuram Debbarma from Uruabari village in West Tripura was among the few farmers who faced the situation better than the rest. He is one of the lead farmers in his area and toils hard in his fields to produce food for his family. He counts himself among the rarest ones who did not have to face food crisis as he had enough food stocks to support his family, unlike majority of the small farmers.

Sukuram's food stocks included paddy, bottle gourd, a variety of beans, bitter gourd, chillies, maize, pumpkin etc. Sukuram is among those rare lead farmers who set examples by building resilience during such an unwarranted situation.

He is dependent on agriculture for his sustenance and cultivate vegetables, paddy and has a small rubber garden which is a valuable cash crop. The variety of production gives him an edge to withstand the adversity of any time. Sukuram is an active member of the FARM Northeast farmers group and has received various technical trainings on farming with the help of Jana Unnayan Samiti Tripura (JUST).



"Going for cultivation was the necessity to ensure food security of my family", says Sukuram. "Though I have taken all the necessary precautionary measures."

"FARM team has supported me and many other farmers with seeds outsourced from the ICAR. During the third phase of lockdown, I devoted my time in sowing the seeds", says Sukuram. Earlier he could harvest enough to support his family's requirement during the lean period. However, the pandemic had an impact on his earnings. Sukuram could not sell his products during the peak lockdown months.

However, the silver lining was that Sukuram did not have to depend on relief support. This was possible only because he had food stock that could last for almost 5-6 months. "I never imagined that such situations could also arise, thankfully I grew enough food that could support my family and now I am experienced enough to ensure my food no matter what the situation", shares Sukuram.





How the right push propelled higher yield and greater returns

Jana Unnayan Samiti Tripura (JUST)

Forty-seven year old Sambhu Debbarma, owned over 7 acres of land. He like most other farmers from his village, Kolaghat para under Hezamara R.D Block, West Tripura used to practice mono-cropping along with other seasonal crops and duck rearing. However, all he could make was about Rs 60000-65000 in a year. Sambhu realized that it was not going to work for long like this and that he had to do something.

Farming is the lifeblood of the people of Northeast India. However, it calls for improvement in productivity and efficiency to bring sustainability to the sector. Some of the reasons behind this are inappropriate agriculture practices, lack of knowledge and a relevant support system.

Unable to live with his present low yielding farm practices, Sambhu joined Kolaghat Farmer's Club promoted by Caritas India partner Jan Unnayan Samiti Tripura (JUST). Caritas India's FARM Northeast program has promoted farmer groups to create a sense of belongingness, collective actions and empowerment in decision-making. The JUST team also facilitated training on multi-cropping, trellis farming, and other improved practices. From there on, Sambhu has undertaken different types of crop cultivation. His main mantra was to become so resilient that he can always provide enough for his family.



JUST also linked the group to different Line Departments, like the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Agriculture Departments, etc. On one field visit by ICAR and JUST, they noticed Sambhu's eagerness and farming initiatives and were impressed to see the improvement in his practices. As an outcome, they started supporting him with different seeds. With that, Sambhu's efforts gained a new momentum.

Today, Sambhu's income has quadrupled and he earns approximately Rs 2,40,000 to 2,70,000 annually by selling crops like maize, bitter gourd, lady's finger, ash gourd, chillies, etc., in the local market as well as the main market. The introduction of Trellis farming has also added more nutritional items to his plate.

"I was motivated and empowered by the awareness programs conducted by JUST through the FARM NE programme," says Sambhu. He has also received Rs. 9,000 from the Agriculture Department and a water pump from ICAR for doing exemplary farming in March 2022. He was also awarded as the 'Best Farmer' during the farmer's program conducted by JUST in February 2021.

Sambhu, with his sheer hard work and grit has set an example for farmers. He further plans to do more cultivation and increase his income.

Sowing the seeds of indigenous ingenuity

Nongstoin Social Service Society (NSSS)

Driving through the road, it is easy to spot the vegetable farm of Skhendar. Sprawling over 5 acres, Skhendar's farm is a locus of indigenous knowledge and a true example of sustainability.

Skhendar, 51, is a Seed Leader and a resident of Mawthong village under C & RD Block Mawkyrwat in South West Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya. For him, seeds are precious carriers of traditional ingenuity and resilience. He keeps different varieties of indigenous vegetable seeds in a well-preserved place in the house.

"I used to work in a coal mine as a daily wager until 2011 but the situations were not adequate which forced me to quit the job. Initially, I started vegetable farming in 2 acres of land, and I was encouraged to see my first harvest and earn more than Rs. 6000. This has motivated me to extend the vegetable farming to another 3 acres with cabbage, mustard green and radish," says Skhendar.

The District Agriculture Officer (DAO), once while passing through spotted his gardens and approached him with the idea of selling his seeds to the Departments. Since then, Skhendar is recognized as an indigenous seed supplier.

Having known the success of this farmer as an entrepreneur on indigenous seeds, the FARM programme Team of Nongstoin Social Service Society (NSSS), a partner of Caritas India met him and got to know more about his indigenous seeds. "Growing food was a necessity for me to sustain my family and I am happy to see how a necessity turned into an opportunity for me," said Skhendar. Looking at this excellent endeavour, Skhendar has been recognized as a "Seed Leader" by NSSS under the FARM programme.




Through the FARM programme, this initiative is reaching out to the fellow farmers in other project villages by sharing his seeds at a very cheaper rate. What is interesting to observe is that Skhendar cultivates indigenous seeds of cabbage which otherwise has not been reported by any partner in the region. Indigenous cabbage seeds are a rarity and while it is encouraging to see its presence in the district, it is equally important to conserve it. FARM programme under the current phase is promoting indigenous seeds as one of its major objectives.

Skhendar now earns around Rs 1,00,000 annually from his vegetables and indigenous seeds. He is determined to work harder and help those in need. With this money, Skhendar is able to give a good life to family and make some savings as well.

Skhendar was among the few resilient farmers who did not give in the uncertainty of food during the peak lockdown during the pandemic. He was able to manage and plant vegetables by following the protocols issued by the government and produced approximately 30 Kgs of different types of seeds during the time. Now, Skhendar is expanding his garden with carrots and he plans to cultivate ginger next year given its high demand in the market.

The FARM team under NSSS is working to benefit farmers in the other villages through Skhendar's seeds. Skhendar's story has inspired many and would help create more seed leaders.





A school for 'herbs' run by the village

Nongstoin Social Service Society (NSSS)

Mingstar Kharjarin was a traditional practitioner Sohparu village in West Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya. A humble keeper of traditional knowledge, Mingstar was famous for his deep and intense understanding of herbal medicines. Due to his precious skills, Mingstar was identified as the main instructor for a village school for transferring this knowledge of medicinal plants.

As part of the FARM NE Phase II programme, it was suggested that setting up such a school help in reviving the traditional wisdom and practices which were slowly vanishing from the community. The school could help in knowledge transfer and in keeping the traditional heritage of the communities intact and preserved. Such wisdom are fast eroding from the ethnic societies and NGOs and institutions are limited to only documenting such practices. Therefore, this intervention could well be a step in popularising traditional practices and ensuring that they remain in the community. As such, the school was established on World Environment day 2018 to inculcate the feeling of preservation of herbal medicinal plants and the environment.

Mingstar started teaching students both theory and practical sessions for preparing herbal medicines. The school started running smoothly albeit with limited students. However, as feared, the sudden demise of Mingstar brought the initiative to a standstill. It was this very fact that had inspired starting a school of this sort- the traditional knowledge these days often goes buried with the person who had it.

But this story had to change.

In what may be called a perfect silver lining, Mingstar's family rose to the occasion. They stepped in to carry forward his legacy and volunteered to run the school for the benefit of the people. Late Mingstar's wife and children had learnt the traditional wisdom from the legend himself and now was the time to redeem it.

The people of Sohparu named the school in the loving memory of Mingstar. The community along with Nongstoin Social Service Society (NSSS) team encouraged Mingstar's family to practice use medicinal herbs by following the footsteps of their father. Golenstar Marwein, a resident volunteered to help the villagers in running the school for the next four months after the demise of Mingstar. His wife along with the volunteer started running the school once in a week. And now, 13 students are attending the school regularly.

During 2019, NSSS contributed Rs.5000 to develop the medicinal garden of the school and the villagers volunteered to construct the garden by contributing sand, stone and labour. After the completion of FARM phase II, the community is taking steps and have contributed Rs 15,000 to expand the community medicinal garden. The community has planted 20 medicinal herbs in the garden and is managing the medicinal school. The popularity of the school has now reached outside the village and people from other villages are coming to learn in this medicinal school.

"We aspire that this traditional practice should be preserved, nourished and enriched by the people and we are working on exploring possibilities to replicate this model elsewhere and also bring it to the notice of the State Government," expressed Fr George Lyngdoh, Director, NSSS. The organisation is also working on a medicinal plants manual which could be part of the curriculum in the schools for children to learn and practice.

And in this way, a small intervention has been able to create ripples beyond the village- an intervention that involves the community to lead from the front to ensure that such rich wisdom is not only documented but is also kept intact among the people.



Collective Farming: Pulling the right strings for food security

Seva Kendra Arunachal East (SKAE)

The idea of group farming is not new, but over the decades it has taken different forms. The concept of collective farming is to overcome poverty and identify small and marginal farmers in a small area or group.

While the global concern is towards food security, poverty, and sustainable livelihoods but very little attention is paid to the institutional transformation of agriculture. The sector has the potential to reduce rural poverty and absorb a large number of existing and new entrants to the new workforce, but it is not lucrative.

It was this pressing need that drove the farmers from B.S Chora farmers club, Dharmapur-III, in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh to step up together for collective or group farming- as a way out of the perils of small scale farming.

Biren Chakma, president of B.S Chora Farmers club, a smallholder farmers' group convinced his fellow members for collective cultivation. As a result of his persuasion, 14 members including the Secretary jumped in for collective farming. The group consisted of 5 single mothers, housewives, small landholders and 9 men who were unemployed and small landholders. Armed with grit and gusto, the group was unstoppable.

Paddy and seasonal crops are a norm in Dharmapur. The group initiated collective cultivation in 8 acres of land from the month of May 2021. The field was prepared by pooling money together. They invested Rs 33,000 for ploughing and leveling of field and Rs. 5,000 on farm equipment like bamboo, water pipe, etc. Starting mid-May to August, they cultivated some local food crops like maize, turmeric, chilly, ginger, pumpkin, ash gourd, and some other crops like cucumber, bottle gourd, okra, bitter gourd and brinjal for their own consumption as well as for sale in the market. Now was the time to wait for harvest.



Come September- October 2021, the group made a total income of Rs 2,60,000 from surplus, which they sold at the market. Collective farming helped them to do multiple cropping at a low cost within a short period. This not only ensured food security but also ensured safe food through organic farming.

At first, the group was faced with several challenges like poor prices, lack of market information, decision making, etc., but with continuous support and guidance from Team Seva Kendra Arunachal East (SKAE), the farmers' collectives have gained necessary skills on agriculture, are able to take better, informed decisions and developing leadership qualities. "We are happy to have a piece of land where we can cultivate and gain experience in organic farming. We are proud to be farmers, to produce, eat and feed our families with poison-free food and thus ensure better health," says Mr. Biren Chakma, President of B.S. Chora FC.

With this success, the motivation of these farmers has reached new highs. They have now started their second cultivation of seasonal crops like cabbage, cauliflower, lai sak, palak, coriander, green pea, mustard, radish, brinjal, capsicum, beans, tomato, and chilli since October. In this edition, they sold some vegetables like mustard, mustard green, radish, beans and coriander and are expecting an income of a minimum of Rs. 4,00,000.

According to Mintu Moshahari, Coordinator, SKAE, collective farming is about holding on to the age-old practice and ensuring a secured livelihood along with food security of the smallholder farmers. He adds that SKAE, with support from Caritas India shall work harder to replicate such models in the programme villages.





Cumulative efforts give farmers compounded returns

Seva Kendra Arunachal East (SKAE)


Exacerbated by climate change, farmers in Changlang District of Arunachal Pradesh have been struggling to make a living in their degraded dry land for the past few months. Scarcity of water due to erratic rainfall patterns has led to low yields. However, realising the gravity of the looming crisis, the Pudu Udok farmers' club from Dharmapur III in Changlang District of Arunachal Pradesh has come together to sustain earnings from their farming.

In the year 2021, Pudu Udok farmers club was formed with the help of Seva Kendra Arunachal East (SKAE), Miao with 20 members. The group also received training support and motivation in plenty from SKAE.

Plugging the gap of institutional support, SKAE encouraged the club members to start group cultivation. As a run up for winter, the members got together in mid-October 2021 to grow peas, cabbage, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and long beans on a 5 acre plot offered by the President of the FC, Swapan Kumar Chakma, for commercial and subsistence use.

They invested a total of Rs 55,800 for ploughing and levelling the fields, irrigation pipes, seeds and some essentials such as bamboo.

"Due to the high yields and market demand, we were able to make a total profit of Rs 2,45,640 from the produce, especially peas, cabbage and tomatoes," said Swapan. "It is interesting to work together with a group because it helps us in many ways, like a dependable labour force, more investable funds and skills inherited from other groups," he added. Swapan pointed out that as a first group initiative, the farmers were quite satisfied with the results.



The group is looking to compound their produce by growing more organic crops that are popular in the market such as cauliflower, okra, potatoes, cucumbers, peppers, etc. and to expand the cultivated area for commercial purposes. "This method of group farming promotes profitability and consumer confidence by producing high-quality products that meet and exceed their expectations," said Mintu Mosahari, Coordinator, SKAE.

Today, the members of the FARM group enthusiastically work together to produce safe and affordable products for the village, thus fostering a bridge between the farmer communities. This new approach has triggered a temperament amongst them to constantly strive to identify common links to improve their understanding of a situation.



Adapting to climate change- layer by layer

Seva Kendra Arunachal East (SKAE)

For food growers, sustainability depends on climate adaptation tools and practices which can help address the current threats and manage the risk and uncertainty associated with it. Concerned with the imminent risks of climate change, the farmers from Pan Bari Farmers club have started to take necessary actions to enhance their crop production by using trellis on their lands. This form of practice saves space, grows more number of crops and reduces the risk of diseases and pests- all of which spell resilience.

With the current pattern of erratic rainfall, fluctuating temperatures, and the emergence of new pests and diseases in Dharmapur II village, growing seasonal crops and yield are severely challenged calling for urgent and immediate integration of climate change adaptation within agriculture for food security.

Seva Kendra Arunachal East (SKAE), the Caritas India partner under the FARM Northeast program has created awareness of climate change and shared this climate-adaptive model in the targeted farming community. This climate-adaptive practice has turned out to be a popular idea in the region wherein they grow paddy along with other food crops in the backyard gardens. Such models are an adaptation or customization of shifting cultivation--which is a living example of crop diversification. Shifting or Jhum farming is severely challenged due to impacts of climate change and is considered to be non-sustainable in many parts of the region including the Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh. However, replication/adoption of the diversified systems like shifting cultivation helps ensure food security of the smallholders and also allows them to stick to the age-old patterns of agricultural systems.



The cultivation was planned on the ground and on trellis simultaneously to get more in the same season. The farmers used 1½ bigha (0.68 Acres) of land to start this climate-adaptive practice in the month of May 2022. The crops grown on more than 5 trellises include pumpkin, bitter gourd, bottle gourd, ash gourd, and cucumber whereas paddy, chilli, okra, taro, maize and local coriander were cultivated on land. Thirty members of the farmers club work 4 days in groups for the preparation of field ploughing, leveling, sowing of seeds and setting up trellises.

“We invested Rs. 30,000 to set up the bamboo trellises and collected the indigenous seeds from each member,” said Sontosh Chakma, Secretary of Pan Bari FC. The farmers started selling their produce in the local market twice a week to earn approx. Rs. 1,500 every time. The crops are not fully harvested at once.

By the final harvest, farmers are expecting to earn around Rs. 70,000 or more from their surplus crop production from this practice. Farmers are now looking forward to adding more crops and fruit trees to their repertoire to get a more diversified produce. At the individual level, they want to pursue this climate-adaptive practice in their own land to get optimum results.

Two more farmers clubs from Dharmapur have picked up the idea and are setting up the climate adaptive models. The SKAE team is providing handholding support to the farmers and continues to promote the climate adaptive models and practices in the targeted villages.



The boon of collective efforts- a win-win for all

Seva Kendra Dibrugarh (SKD)

Tucked away on the eastern edge of Assam, almost 57 km away from district headquarter Golaghat, No 2 Tengaholla is a non-descript village with 62 Adivasi families in a total population of 274. While this village may seem like an unlikely place to find inspiration, that is exactly what makes this village different.

Here, a five-member farmer group has taken up various works like gardening, cleaning of roads, paddy plantation or harvesting for families that are unable to support themselves due to poverty. This type of arrangement helps the family save money because the standard daily labour charge is Rs. 300/-person- not affordable for them. But that is not all. The group helping them also benefits equally.

Seva Kendra Dibrugarh (SKD), the implementing partner of the Caritas India FARM III programme is working in this village since Nov 2019. This forgotten practice was promoted by the team to encourage group work among farmers groups. This has been a replication of a successful model carried out SKD during FARM Phase II in the Jorhat district.

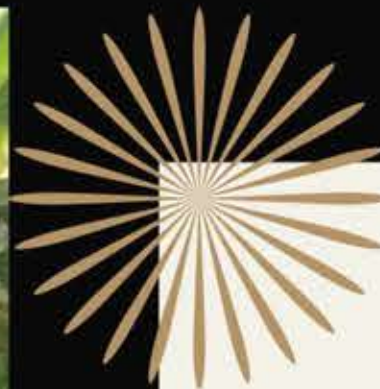
By extending their services to a family for 97 days towards gardening and 12 days for harvesting, the group has earned a total sum of Rs 10,850/-. They have formed guidelines for the work that includes fundraising for sustenance of the group. For every hour of work in gardening, they deposit Rs 10/- per member and Rs 100/- per member for harvesting. This sum was spent on preparing land for group's farming facilitated by the FARM team where SKD supplied the seeds.



Moreover, the group of farmers can easily tend to a kitchen garden and carry out other works in a short span of time without fatigue- thanks to the unity and cumulative strength among them. The benefits of working together galore- families are eating fresh and healthy vegetables product from their own garden, their long pending works are completed, they are able to spare extra time for daily wage work and so forth. Taking inspiration from this group, farmers from the adjacent project village Lotajuri have also started this system of work.

Through this system of work, the farmer's group is elated to discover how they are able to not only reduce their expenses but also work out fundraising for their developmental activity.

Many of these activities evolved out of necessity and the imperative to adapt for survival by keeping the indigenous practices alive. In addition, it incites the interest of the farmers with vacant land to produce. This is a model of empowering animation, which eventually can lead to community action.



Returning migrants find hope back home

Seva Kendra Dibrugarh (SKD)

It was the peak of covid 19 lockdown, Nobin Dhanwar's worst nightmare had come true. Nobin worked in car servicing company in Kerala for Rs 14000 a month that helped him sustain himself and his family. But the lockdown compelled the company to close and Nobin, like scores of other migrant workers lost his job and had a bleak uncertainty staring at him.

Finding no other option, Nobin returned to his village, Tengaholla. He had the same problem as any other migrant worker; he was jobless and wandered endlessly in search of work and alternatives, only to come up empty-handed.

From November 2019, Caritas India, through Seva Kendra Dibrugarh (SKD), the local partner, has been implementing the FARM III programme in district of Golaghat under Sarupather Block in Assam. Tengaholla (No.1) is one of the project villages with 99 Households covering 425 populations under Tengaholla GP, the inhabitants mostly Adivasis, surviving on agriculture as their primary source of livelihood.



In 2021, a small number of migrant workers were given chicks to start alternate sources of income and the SKD team tended their handholding support to ensure maximum profit possible. They even facilitated other migrant workers to go for an alternative solution to meet their wants. Moreover, they have suggested options of pig & goat rearing, poultry and other agriculture activities for income.

When Nobin came back home, all he found was despair in the wake of the joblessness and bleak future. At this time, team SKD met him and discussed the possibilities of several alternate livelihood solutions like Poultry, Goat farming, Piggery and other agriculture activities. Nobin found some redemption. He attended the project activities and programs on different Income Generation Activities (IGA). He witnessed the Caritas India's Covid 19 response to the migrant workers who were given hens, and he saw how they were able to return the chickens after the number of hens increased in seven-eight months. All this was an rekindled hope for him. He gathered confidence and started a farm with zero budget, finding alternative support from other sources.

He also decided to start pig farming but did not have any resources. So, he approached a few people who had materials stocked but unutilized; they supported him with materials for the construction of the farm, and made an agreement that he would return the favour in cash or kind. This way he was able to start the construction work. He has now planned to start the farm with ten piglets which costs Rs. 6,000 per piglet. He is expecting Rs. 2,00,000 after eight to ten months.

Nobin Dhanwar hopefully exclaims, "I am happy and confident in doing this and I am inspired because of the SKD team. Many of my friends are encouraged by my presence, and my parents, too, are encouraging me in this work."

Nobin is a true example for others, especially the migrant workers to start their livelihood with sheer hard work and dedication. The SKD team continues its effort to facilitate and strive to support the vulnerable people in need for their long-term sustainability and development.





A farmer comes home

Seva Kendra Silchar (SKS)

The unemployment situation in the Northeast region is a steady and disappointing phenomenon that has triggered rampant out-migration of the youth to different parts of the country. About 137.6 million youth were reportedly workers in 2011-12, accounting for 29.1 per cent of the total workforce in India (NSSO 2014).

This rural exodus has impacted the agriculture sector in a big way with no takers for farming among the youth. Neither the children nor others view agriculture as an attractive profession anymore. It is considered a thankless, risky and arduous job yielding nothing when it comes to livelihood and sustenance. Younger generations do not want to follow their parents' footsteps, and leads to a neglect of traditional farming and rural life. In the target villages of Seva Kendra Silchar (SKS) partner of Caritas India, FARM programme observed that 60% to 70% of the youths opt out of their family traditions which depends on farming and prefer to go out and work in other parts of the country.

The story of Dimchui Rongmei, a youth from Ramgaizang village in Barak Valley district of Assam, was no different. He is the youngest son of Phunguanpou Rongmei, a frail, ageing but hardworking farmer from Ramgaizang who used to work in his 3.5 acres farm and earn around Rs. 40,000 to 60,000 annually until his health started deteriorating. Dimchui, the youngest boy out of his four siblings who are not interested in farming, instead wanted to work outside for the livelihoods in different states. Dimchui also followed others and started working in Chennai.



But there is a twist. In the last four years outside, whenever Dimchui used to come home for his holidays twice a year, he used to attend the different meetings organised by SKS. The organisation used to conduct different meetings, trainings for the farmers to teach good agricultural practices to boost their income, increase profitability and resilience.

As such, the farmers in his village used to motivate Dimchui to give up his job and come back to farming where he can earn Rs. 30,000 - 40,000 every month- way above his salary. Considering his father's ill health, Dimchui decided to take forward the legacy of his father and started working in his farm. He also took interest in the programmes of SKS under the FARM programme. Slowly, Dimchui's urge to upscale his agricultural grew bigger and he started growing crops in different seasons. During 2018, Dimchui started getting involved in farming as he could foresee a better future ahead. He started cultivating tapioca, beans, pumpkin & other different types of seasonal vegetables as well as cash crops to generate income from his parental land. In 2019, he gained a profit of Rs 30,000 which motivated him to work harder for a better income in the days to come. "As a youth, I have realized that sticking to my cultural values would go a long way to not only uphold my culture but also make a livelihood," says Dimchui.

Youth like Dimchui are setting examples for the rest to take up farming as a sustainably lucrative profession. It is critical to ensure that the ethnic youths are given a clear sense of direction and see agriculture as a profitable, respectable profession. Caritas India is committed to promoting the idea of involving youths in agriculture, thus motivating them to take a sustainable future in agriculture.





How infrastructure support helped the small farmers of Barak Valley

Seva Kendra Silchar (SKS)

In Lakhimpur block, Cachar district of Assam, tribal women were facing challenges in selling their products to larger consumers. Due to lack of proper infrastructure, support services and institutions, they used to sell their seasonal vegetable products including Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) at the National highway roadside in an unorganised manner and a somewhat unsafe environment.

This problem is widespread among small farmers. While the demand for high-value food is increasing like never before owing to the growing population, rising incomes, and increasing health awareness, these market opportunities for farmers and agribusiness entrepreneurs call for quality, timely deliveries, and sustaining power- a huge challenge for smallholders.

These women in Lakhimpur used to sell their organic produce in a very unregulated manner in the absence of resources, guidance and proper channelisation. Such a situation robs the farmers of any agency for price determination or negotiation. Taking note of this situation, Seva Kendra Silchar (SKS), one of the Caritas India partners under the FARM Northeast program discussed this issue and the hardships faced by these women.

SKS along with the community approached the Lalpani market committee and requested them to grant a space for setting up a separate market-shed for these hard-working farmers. The market committee needed no further motivation and gave away 40' by 20' space within the market area to set up this dedicated market-shed in October 2021. With the space support sorted, the SKS extended material support to construct the market shed and assigned the Gideon Farmer's club of Lobonkhal village as the Management Committee for the market-shed. The organisation tried to ensure that chemical-free products and wild edibles get the preference in the market as per popular demand.



This market space has brought the farmers close to consumers- a mutual benefit for both. The group's income rose to Rs 5,000-6,000 and by the end of the ongoing programme, the income is expected to reach Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 25,000 per season. This support has enabled the farmers to sell their produce most effectively, provided financial backing and improved the food security of poor farmers.

Now, the group is also involved in inter-loaning of their money to its members. Not only this, group is also encouraging other farmers from nearby villages to sell their vegetables to sustain themselves.

"We see a new avenue of income from this market today," says Lalhmathuoi Hmar, President of Gideon Farmer's club. Bonani Bhattacharjee, the programme coordinator of the FARM Northeast team opines that there is an urgent need for improved storage facilities as the farmers are growing in bulk.

With Caritas' support, the market committee and the group are leveraging every possible opportunity for its sustenance so they can meet the demand, sell their surplus and manage their risks collectively.



When the wild proves bountiful

Social Service Centre (SSC)

At the helm of the pandemic induced food and market crisis, people in Jaud village found a safe haven of nutrition and abundance closer home. Wild edibles have been a part and parcel of myriad communities in the North East Region and people of Jaud village under Sohiong Block of East Khasi Hills District are setting an example in sustainable utilisation of such wild edibles to ensure food security during the crisis.

This realisation came at a time when the government had announced total lockdown of all public places including markets, stores to buy essentials like food and other supplies. During the pandemic, the people realized that they must find out ways and means to help themselves and their families to survive and eat healthy to strengthen their immune systems to fight any dreaded disease. It also dawned upon them that they can go back to nature for survival when they cannot just depend on the food sold in the market anymore.

Social Service Centre (SSC), Shillong in its journey has been working and taking initiative in bringing back the wild edibles that many of the community people have neglected and forgotten. We have encouraged and motivated community people on the importance of consumption of wild edibles, and to conserve for the future as they are available in the community, Said Fr Bernard Laloo, Director SSC.





Despite the difficulties and hardship due to lockdown, Social Service Centre (SSC), Shillong tried to find out ways and means to spread knowledge on the importance of wild edibles during the crisis. This initiative has been crucial in educating the people about the usefulness of their forests from where we can find a wide range of edibles, which are healthy and nutritious.

There is a wide variety of both edible and non-edible flora in the forests but what separates the people of Jaud is their discretion and wisdom to select the correct food option for them from the available resources. "I never knew how important the wild edibles are as many of us have forgotten and neglected it but this pandemic made us realize that we can always turn back to nature and depend on it for food because they are good for health and are easily available in our vicinities for free", says Mondaris Mawlong, a farmer from the village.

Jamyrdoh, (*Houttuynia Cordata*) is commonly grown as a leafy vegetable and is used as a fresh herbal garnish, it is commonly used in salads, salsas, or cooked with other vegetables, and as a garnish over side-dishes. The tender roots can also be ground into chutneys along with dry meat or fish, chillies, and tamarind. The vegetable provides a rich amount of calcium, carbohydrates, fibre, essential fats and protein.

Another species Pading Khleh (*Musa balbisiana*) of banana used as a popular ingredient in many food dishes and rich in Calcium, Carotene, Vitamin C, Iron, fibre, and protein essential for a healthy body. Khlieng Syair (*Centella asiatica*) is used as a culinary vegetable and also has medicinal properties. People of the village consume the leaves and the stem of this herb. Some people eat the leaves on their own, while others prefer them mixing with other bland green leaves. The fresh or dried leaves can be made into a caffeine-free and theobromine-free tea. This herb is high in iron, carbohydrate, fibre and protein.

With such mobilization, villagers started going to the nearby forests to collect wild edibles so that they can support the family with healthy and nutritious food instead of buying chemical laden edibles of low quality sold in the market. This also saved them some money.

Getting positive feedback from the people proved that the initiative has brought additional education, motivation and encouragement to the people to be aware and conserve the wild edibles. The Caritas India supported FARM Northeast programme has a definite plan to protect the biodiversity of wild edibles and the green belt initiative taken by SSC is a part of this initiative. The green belt initiative will support collective action of the people to conserve the forests with wild edibles.

Championing the walks to paradise

Social Service Centre (SSC)

The garden's entrance is filled with pineapples. Native species of wild edibles dot the sprawl spreading on an acre of land in a communal forest. This may pass off as a description of paradise but it is not.

This is an attempt to conserve the environment, particularly eco-friendly and sustainable wild species in the form of a Biodiversity Garden. It is both a model and an educational instrument that will be passed down to future generations. However, the idea came up as a follow up of Biodiversity walks. A biodiversity walk is a useful tool for practical learning since it is linked to local knowledge about indigenous flora that nature freely provides.

Biodiversity Walks are designed for groups at schools and colleges to encourage and appreciate the existing biodiversity in their local environment. These biodiversity walks are led by the community knowledge holders who introduce their group to a variety of edible and medicinal plants and how to use them.

The Social Service Centre, (SSC) under the FARM Northeast program took the initiative in March 2021 to organise Biodiversity Walks for youth and women in Ribhoi District's Nongtyrlaw Village. The objective was to encourage young people to appreciate the diversity of their area's medicinal and micronutrient-rich indigenous flora. The FARM project focuses on food sovereignty and security, ensuring that all farmers have food security without relying on others.

Recognizing the threat of extinction of these wild edibles, SSC staff developed this programme to educate young people about the importance of wild edibles, which they should pass on to their children. SSC conducted an intervention to encourage the community to establish a biodiversity garden in order to domesticate wild edibles that can be grown in a controlled environment. SSC has also taken the lead in encouraging the community to protect forest areas with wild edibles.





Following the biodiversity walk, the Kyrsoilang group, one of the farm groups, came up with an idea to take on the duty of planting and caring for wild edibles in a specific garden. In April 2021, they planted 16 wild edibles brought from the forest that was on the verge of extinction, such as Jakari, Jowla, Wangsihktung, JadohBlang, Tyrkhang, Jatira, Jamahek Jamyrdoh Kymbat Shiah Jalyngjar, Soh Ngang, Soh Ladow Khynnah, JajowRiting (Local term), and Until now, all 16 wild edibles have remained in good form.

"God has given us a variety of natural resources and it is our responsibility to protect and preserve them since we have the right to use and utilise what has been given to us," Says Meris Maring, one of the villagers.

The Biodiversity Walk and Garden model was first implemented in Nongtyrlaw village and later replicated in the East Khasi Hills District in Wahramkhar, Jaud, ShilliangKthieh village of Sohiong Block, and Lasain village of Jongksha the following year. SSC wants to encourage people to plant more biodiversity gardens in their yards.

"There are many wild edibles that are really healthy, but we are so selfish that we didn't eat them ourselves and instead sold them," Kmen Lyngdoh, an ASHA, explained.

Deisy F. Thongnibah, the field animator says, learning about and observing the biodiversity garden in Nongtyrlaw village with numerous types of wild edibles is a fascinating experience.

"Nature has so much to offer, but many people treat it with disdain. Each and every one of us has a responsibility to care for Mother Earth. We appreciate the SSC staff who, from time to time, motivates us to be grateful for the free gifts that nature has bestowed upon us and to respect nature by preserving the natural delicacies that we have in abundance," stated Johnny Lyngdoh, one of the kids from the village.



Community forest to save the climate

Social Service Centre (SSC)

Every one talks about climate change but only a handful of people take the initiative to work towards a solution. One among them is the community forest, under the FARM North East program. It is an endeavour to re-green the forest and plant trees. Mawiong, one of Caritas India's FARM project villages consisting of 75 households has created this astonishing initiative.

"Today we have seen that the forests are decreasing steadily, which calls for community action to preserve and rejuvenate our mother earth, especially water sources," says Mattheus Maring, the Headman of the Village Bah. He added, "Luckily, we still have our own Community Forests which can be used by the whole village for water supply."

In 2012, the community started planting 3500 saplings for domestic use only but now once a year, the community has adopted tree planting as their main activity. It helps in protecting soil erosion, reducing the risk of flooding and provides habitats for a vast range of animals and other plant species.

With the advent of the Social Service Centre (SSC), a Caritas India partner in Mawiong village through the FARM NE Project, the awareness and mobilization about the climate change and forest conservation has flared in people's minds and behaviour. During various programmes on forest conservation, the SSC staff encourages the community people to identify one community land to plant trees along with wild edibles. The community forest provides for water storage and for various wild edibles from the forest.

The community took an initiative in August 2021 to increase the number of saplings by asking all 75 households to provide 30 roots that produced water with 2,250 trees in total. Thousand saplings of each of *Michalia Champaca* (Idiengrai) and *Duabanga grandiflora* (Dieng Mului) and 250 *Drimy carpus* (Dieng Sali) saplings were planted which helps in producing a quick water source. During the day, huge participation from the 'Longkpa' (Men), 'Longkmie' (Women) and 'Samla' (Youths) were seen to strengthen the water source coming from the roots of the trees. They make sure to visit and take good care of the forest by cleaning once a year especially during the winter season to prevent wildfires.

Kong Nomita Lyngdoh, a member of Seng Longkmie, said "Mawiong village has been lacking water resources in the past 2 years but the community as a whole carried out tree plantation for the preservation of the forest, and for collecting water source from trees".

The idea behind this initiative is to preserve forests for posterity so that the water resources are rich. They also plan to make it a nutri-garden by cultivating wild edibles or traditional vegetables at the same time. They plan to bring innovations in the summer season during June to collect various wild edibles for preservation and cultivation at the same spot for examples like '*Colocasia esculenta*(L)'(kaWang), *Musa balbisianacolla* (Pashor Kait) and various wild edibles that need to be cultivated for preservation by dividing the community forest to make a nutri-garden.





Lockdown brings back the farmer in Ranjit

Tezpur Social Service Society (TSSS)

This is a story of persistence and belief, of how a small job holder found confidence in farming as he journeyed through the helplessness of Covid 19 lockdown and its aftermath.

Ranjit Swargiary was a small-time contractor from Jerusalem village of Biswanath District and worked in Arunachal Pradesh for the last five years and had a good earning to support his family. But the Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020 brought a rain on his parade. Due to the spread of Covid-19 because of which Ranjit had to come back home leaving his job in Arunachal Pradesh.

After having returned from Arunachal Pradesh, it was hard for Ranjit to stay home. After elapse of almost a month, and no signs of easing out of the lockdown, his patience was running out. All the sources of income were closed for Ranjit, he wanted to do something but had no idea what to do.

It was on one usual mundane days that his wife asked him to join in for cleaning the backyard garden. This backyard garden was managed by his wife and his daughter- a tiny part of their 2 bigha land space which was mostly left unutilized. Since then, it became a routine for him to spend a part of his day in attending to the garden. But this let Ranjit on to something bigger.

This routine work started growing on him and he developed a keen interest in it. Every morning he would visit his backyard garden to check the growth of the saplings that he had planted, water them and put manure. Slowly his interest in farming grew and he spent most of his time gardening. In not much time, his hard work turned his backyard garden into a small but rich vegetable farm. For him, the picture of the garden was turning out to be quite pleasing. Vegetable farming attracted him so much that he spent the whole day planning new things for his small farm. The neighbours also started visiting his vegetable garden and they started purchasing vegetables from his garden. "On seeing my backyard garden growing bigger, it gave me a feeling of happiness and satisfaction", says Ranjit.



And then, Ranjit took some time out and visited some of the lead farmers of his village and found that cultivation can also be done by installing trellises. He built three trellises and cultivated pumpkin, bottle gourd, ridge gourd, long beans and other vegetables on it. By the end of the lockdown, he was able to earn a good income by selling vegetables off his home. The FARM team while visiting their villages came to know about Ranjit's farm and visited his house to meet him. He narrated his story of how he came into vegetable farming and how he can earn money from it. Later the FARM team supported him with indigenous seeds and saplings.

Last winter, he cultivated tomato, chilly, bottle gourd, bitter gourd, long beans, coriander, radish and other vegetables and received a good harvest. He earned a good income of Rs 28,000 by selling the vegetables from home as well as from the nearby market. Within a short period, he has shined as a lead farmer in his village.

He is very supportive of FARM programme and whenever there is training, he actively participates. With support from the FARM programme, Ranjit was able to repair the old trellises and also install two more trellises so he could start an optimal space utilization model and cultivate vegetables like chilly, coriander, onion, brinjal and roselle plant under the trellises.

As a farmer, he is very supportive of other farmers of the village and never hesitates to share his knowledge with others. Tezpur Social Service Society (TSSS) also invites him as a resource person in training at the village level and farmers come to his farm for exposure visits from other project villages of the FARM project.

"The most pleasant thing we can see is that the 2021 lockdown has not affected him in any way, this time even without a job, his income continues", said Wilson Kandulna, Programme Coordinator, TSSS.

"Now the whole family is involved in the farming of organic vegetables, and I have stopped working in Arunachal Pradesh, I am happy doing organic farming and shall continue to earn a livelihood by growing organic vegetables," expresses Ranjit.



When the women move forward, the village moves forward

Tezpur Social Service Society (TSSS)

In the wake of Covid 19 pandemic, scores of people lost their livelihoods in 2020 resulting in a rampant unemployment. Reverse migration triggered by the lockdown has put added pressure on the rural areas.

Assam also faced the brunt of this lockdown as most of the migrant labourers returned home due to the loss of jobs or livelihood opportunities. Due to closure of markets, the farmers were unable to sell their products in the markets.

Tezpur Social Service Society (TSSS), supported by Caritas India under the Misereor funded FARM Northeast program extended livelihood support to the affected marginalized families in Rangajan, Borpathar, Tinsekia and Balichang villages.

Keeping their programmatic strategies on top of things during the pandemic, funds were reapportioned to support these affected families by introducing support in the setting of nutrition garden, nursery development, poultry, and Agri product processing and allied activities. However, resources were limited and the challenge to cater to everyone's needs was staggering.

So, once again, the organisation followed the programmatic collective approach and provided poultry support to women's collectives. It was decided that after one year the same support can be extended to the non-beneficiary groups by the first collective for free. The indigenous variety of 200 poultry chicks was given to four women collectives each having 20 members each in 4 villages. This support not only opens new avenues of livelihood by selling the chickens and eggs but also fulfils their nutritional requirement of a protein-rich diet for self-consumption.



Apart from the high demand in the market, another reason for selecting poultry is that it does not require big space or investment to start a poultry farm and shows profits in short period of time- a perfect combination for the resource-poor.

Among the groups supported with indigenous poultry, one group exceeded expectations. The group named Epil in Rangajan village in Biswanath district of Assam reared the chicks and made sure that they survive through the thick and thins. All the chickens are kept in a house together which they built as a farm and work is shared and all decisions are taken equally and collectively for the upkeep and management of the poultry farm. Within a few months, the group had started receiving results as the chickens started laying eggs.

Initially, the chickens were taken to market for sale but now the buyers come to the villages to buy chickens due to their good quality. On completing one year, the group has handed over 20 chicks to the next non-beneficiary group in the presence of FARM Animator and the Preacher of the village. The preacher of the village said, "I am happy seeing that the members of the Epil group are helping other fellow women of the village and fulfilling their commitment."

From 200 chickens, the group today is a proud owner of more than 950 chickens. The group has sold 345 chickens and earned Rs. 138,000. With that money, the members are able to support their children's education and health.

"I treated my husband during his sickness with the money I saved by selling chickens", expresses Carolina Hasda, the women collective member gratefully. The women are now much more empowered in taking care of the farm and have a greater say in decisions of their families.

Some members have also taken up poultry rearing at their homes to raise additional income apart from a poultry farm. Presently, the group is planning of expanding the poultry farm into every household of the village and expand to livestock farming like pig farming or goat rearing which can give them better income for their livelihood support in future.

Farming together, growing together in the face of uncertainty

Tezpur Social Service Society (TSSS)

For years, the smallholder farmers of the Bishwanath district in Assam worked on their small land in an unorganised manner using age-old techniques, and tools but struggled to produce sufficient crops for their sustenance. They had no resources, facilities, or access to advance agriculture knowledge.

In 2019, Tezpur Social Service Society (TSSS), the partner of the Caritas India FARM program organised these farmers into farmer groups and started assisting them. The Covid-19 slowed down their progress, but the spirit and enthusiasm kept them going. By December 2021, TSSS approached the farmers of Samukjuli and Milonpur villages again to assist them in upscaling their agriculture production. TSSS supported them with water pumps, pipes, and agricultural tools which helped them to increase their monthly income by more than Rs. 3,000.

Though the crisis of COVID-19 is still fresh in the memory, farmers helped each other in this dire situation. Ms Monika Topno and Ms Albina Guria led the group in cultivating seasonal crops such as cabbages, beans, chillies, brinjal, yam, lady's fingers, bottle gourds, and bitter gourds etc. These groups divide their shifts to work in the morning and afternoon to manage the farming. From time to time, they pooled their resources to meet the requirements in the field.

Initially, the group used to sell their vegetables in the villages, but TSSS facilitated and connected them to the weekly market to set their produce and also built a roadside stall for them to sell vegetables on the National Highway and get a better price for their produce. The stall is managed by the FARM team members and the income is shared with the group members on a weekly basis.





The farmers realised the importance and benefit of collective farming and initiated diversification of crops to fulfil the market demand. They also started winter crop cultivation in consultation with the FARM team, and TSSS provided indigenous seeds from their Seeds Resources Centre. The group began harvesting cabbages, coriander, chillies, bottle gourds, beans, and brinjals by the end of January 2022. They harvested 200 kg of cabbages, 80 kg of chillies, 57 kg of bottle gourds, 72 kg of brinjal, and 55 kg of beans. The group was overjoyed to see their first fruits and vegetables and took them to the market as suggested by TSSS.

Soon after the first cultivation, the group planted long beans, bitter gourds, pumpkin, bottle gourds, ladyfingers, and maize in the fallow area and are expecting a bumper harvest.

The profit is shared among the farmers and is mostly used to pay for children's education. With the additional income from the group, three members have also begun farming on their own land, and two members have started banana cultivation. Currently, at least seven other groups have been inspired by this group and are growing ginger, turmeric, and other vegetables. Farming together and growing together!

Lalmalsawmsaki makes her way through pig farming

Zoram Entu Pawl (ZEP)

Rural women, the key players in the country's agriculture sector are facing double challenge both at the field and house level. In North Eastern states, agriculture is a predominant livelihood and women are mainly engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Against the backdrop of the country's staggering food insecurity and plummeting investments in agriculture, the challenges befalling rural women are manifold.

Hailing from the Chhingchhip village in the Serchhip district of Mizoram, Lalmalsawmsaki had only a pineapple garden as a source of sustenance for her five-member family. The whole year of hard work and labour could only fetch her Rs 50,000 annually from her pineapple garden which was not sufficient to meet the ends. Despite the difficulties, she wanted to give her children a good future and proper education.

Lalmalsawmsaki decided to try her hand at piggery to contribute to the family's meagre income. Once, she made up her mind, her conviction knew no bounds.

In August 2019, Lalmalsawmsaki purchased a female pig worth Rs 6,500 from her savings. Challenges followed Lalmalsawmsaki here as well. Due to the pandemic, movements were restricted inside the state as well as the villages. She struggled hard to arrange feeds for the pig. Due to lack of money, she could not afford to buy the feed from the stores. She used to collect green leaves from the jungle or ask neighbours for leftovers.





Caritas India FARM Northeast III project team witnessed her struggle and passion for pig farming. Zoram Entu Pawl (ZEP), a local partner of Caritas India India in Mizoram chipped in by linking Lalmalsawmsaki to the North East Initiative Development Agency (NEIDA), a not-for-profit organisation promoted by the Tata Trusts to improve the quality of lives of communities in the North-eastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland. The organization helped her with the construction materials to build pigsty.

“Lalmalsawmsaki was struggling in those days and we as a team decided to extend some monetary support to her to sustain her pig farming,” said Samuel Zothantluanga, Project Coordinator, ZEP. Lalmalsawmsaki continued working hard and ZEP provided her with the technical support required for pig farming from time to time with the help of the Department of AH & Veterinary.

In May 2020, the pig had given birth to 13 offsprings. “I was so happy to see my hard work shaping to results,” said Lalmalsawmsaki. However, she was unable to keep all the 13 piglets as she could not feed them all. She sold 12 of them and earned Rs 84,000. With this amount, she purchased two more pig sows and 4 piglets which added to the numbers in her pigsty.

As on date, Lalmalsawmsaki has earned Rs 2,66,500. “It has been a tough journey through many challenges but at the end of the day I can see my family’s income growth and that makes me happy,” said Lalmalsawmsaki. She also borrowed a soft loan and expanded her pigsty to increase her pigs. ZEP’s linkage with AH and Veterinary Department helped her to access medicines for her pigs.

Now, Lalmalsawmsaki’s success has inspired at least 10 more families and ZEP is trying to replicate such a model in other project villages as well. Lalmalsawmsaki is now a part of the farmer club’s where she shares her experiences and knowledge on pig farming to motivate others.





Recipe for a bumper harvest!

Zoram Entu Pawl (ZEP)

In the past, Laltharlana, a farmer from Chhingchhip 5 village in Mizoram, like most other farmers in his village practiced multiple cropping without using improved seeds, seed treatment, organic fertilizers and plant protection measures. Traditionally people are using multiple cropping to grow more food from the same piece of land. As such, the farmers initially got increased production and income but in the long run, they could hardly meet the needs of their families.

The practise of crop rotation in the Sloping Agriculture Land Technology (SALT) booklet provided by the Caritas India FARM Northeast-III programme has significantly improved the soil quality and crop yield of the farmers. Crop rotation practice concentrate and reuse the same plot of land to gain a huge quantity of productions. The booklet arms the farmers with knowledge on how to improve their agriculture production and introduce scientifically proven new agriculture practices.

Laltharlana under the Caritas India FARM Northeast-III programme applied this practice on his paddy field last year. He learnt how by cultivating crops on the same land using crop rotation and he can produce huge profits without any improvement of seeds and their treatment and protection measures.

Through crop rotation practice, he was able to preserve the soil productivity, reduce pests, minimize the use of chemicals, maximise yields, reduce reliance on one set of nutrients and develop weeds.

As a result, Laltharlana has received a bumper harvest! His paddy has grown almost up to the height of a human before harvest. He expects to harvest at least 45 tins of paddy from his 0.5 acres of land by October. Besides paddy, he has already harvested a large fraction of crops like vegetables from his field. He has become a source of inspiration for his fellow farmers of his area. They have become educated about crop rotation to get huge benefits. Thanks to his achievements, farmers are trying to adopt the SALT model on their lands.

SALT has been successful to help the shifting cultivators of the North East region to sustain their cultivation. Such models promoted under FARM shall be a shot in the arms to sustain shifting cultivation and thus help combat climate change induced shocks and stresses.



Pi Lalsangliani's motivation knows no barriers

Zoram Entu Pawl (ZEP)



Pi Lalsangliani, 60, has a renewed sense of spirit. At an age, when the people start retiring from work, Pi Lalsangliani is taking experiments to extend her agricultural production. But this has not happened in a vacuum. Her yearning for knowledge and growth was fulfilled when she came in to learn new techniques and practices under the FARM Northeast program.

She is a Jhum farmer. She has been using shifting cultivation methods on her 4-acre land for the past several decades. However, she wanted to expand and grow vegetables to supplement her income. But she ran out of land by cultivating some horticultural crops and had no more suitable land for engaging in agricultural activities.

Pi Lalsangliani has gained many insights and experiences through the capacity-building training conducted under the FARM program. The hands-on learning about good practices has renewed her passion for agriculture. In one of the meetings under the Serchhip VC-I Farmers' Club in the Aizawl district of Mizoram under the Project, she expressed her desire and requested any assistance and advice. Seeing her passion and commitment, the Farmers' Club Chairman, Pu RL Biakvara lent Pi Lalsangliani his 1.5-acre land for farming. However, he cautioned her about the steep land that could be a challenge in pursuing her dreams. He also mentioned that she would need to take action to stop soil erosion. As such, the participants of the meeting suggested creating bunds using bamboo to arrest soil erosion. Pi's dreams were beginning to unleash.

As soon as she set fire to the field, she began using bamboo bunding to stop soil erosion and rainwater runoff. These bunds also made it easier and more comfortable for her to move around the field. She grew a variety of common vegetables, including aubergine, mock tomato, ginger, maize, pumpkin, and various mustard varieties. Owing to her grit and persistence, she had already made more than Rs. 10,000 from selling her products from the field at this point in the current season. "I would not have been able to overcome my difficulties if it weren't for the helping hands I received from my fellow members. I want to express my sincere gratitude to Pu RL Biakvara and my fellow Farmers' Club members for their assistance. Without them, I could not be here growing all these vegetables," says Pi Lalsangliani.

Pi Lalsangliani, now has become a role model for many young farmers in her village and people frequently visit her field to see the growth and outcome.

FARM North East program has empowered many marginalised farmers to improve their food sovereignty through sustainable agriculture practices by increasing sufficient food production at the family level and nutritional intake as per their cultural food habits.



From homemakers to Farm-preneurs

Development Association of Nagaland (DAN)

Kygum, a mother of three from the village of Jalukie B in the Nagaland district of Peren, is an epitome of grit and persistence. This is the story of how she transformed the fate of 10 other women of her village by grooming them as farm-preneurs.

Kygum's journey of becoming a sustainable farmer started in 2017 when she got in touch with the Development Association of Nagaland (DAN), a Caritas India partner. She then began focusing her full-time attention on developing better farming techniques. But that was not enough for Kygum; she wanted more women to come into active farming. "I have always hoped to empower women to take action and increase their awareness and respect for the dignity of work, said Kygum.

Kygum constantly urged the women of the village to engage in activities that will keep them from idly chatting or wasting their time. However, she was unable to persuade them to practice agriculture.

Then, in 2017, with the help of the DAN Animator who frequently visited her village, a group called Bata (meaning self-reliance) farmer's club was established. Kygum now supports 10 other women who make up the group to promote organic products and traditional crafts.

In 2018, she leased her land to the Bata Farmers Club so they could create a community garden and grow a variety of crops, including cucumber, ginger, yam, and maize. Anywhere they came across unused land in their villages, the group members would plant betel nut saplings. The group suggested that the potential buyers in the Jalukie area purchase the saplings. They received Rs 20,000 from the betel nut sapling each year. Not only this, long-lost indigenous seed of millets and cotton from Old Jalukie village were also revived by the group in 2019. The group has also grown Job's tears. Five of the group's families are currently growing millets.





Seeing the commitment of the group, DAN suggested the group to start with value addition like making ginger candies or pickles. As such, the group began to make a monthly income of between Rs 20,000 and 25,000. The group currently has two community gardens where various crops such as millets and fruits are grown as well as a farm that produces dragon fruits, from which they receive a monthly income between Rs 3,000 and Rs 5,000.

Kygum was only a farmer, but through determination, labour and persuasion, she not only became independent but also helped her group members market their goods to make money. Kygum's contributions were acknowledged by Caritas India, which provided her with a chance to participate in the Kisanotsav in March 2019.

Recently, she has been awarded the 2022 best Lead Farmer in the FARM Northeast programme for her contributions to the community by promoting food and nutrition security initiatives for self-reliance. The model of farm entrepreneurship is not just confined to her village but extended to other programme areas. She has become a lead model for all the women in the village to follow her steps to achieve great progress in life.

The wonder of mixed fruit farming

Diocesan Social Service Society (DSSS)

Jacob Jajo is a 45 years old farmer from Poirou village in Kangpokpi district of Manipur. Poirou is a sleepy village of 55 households with the total population of 295. Most of the villagers depend on the farm products to maintain household needs. Jacob was one among them until a year back. He used to live out of his pineapple farm that fetched him around Rs 16000. But today, Jacob is a champion of sorts in his village who gave his farm and his life a 360-degree face-lift.

Ten years ago, Jacob had visited his friend's farm where he saw different types of fruits planted. He was inspired by the sheer multiplicity but never thought of replicating his own during those years. Then in 2021, he participated in the FARM review meeting as a farmer representative at Guwahati. What he experienced there was eye-opening for him!

Jacob intently learned and was highly inspired by the presentations made by different partners from the NE region in the meeting. His excitement knew no bounds! Soon after coming back from Guwahati, he started banana and papaya plantations along with pineapples that were already there in his farm. As the trees started fruiting, his labour also started bearing results.





His earlier income of Rs. 16,000/- that came only from pineapples, had now surged to Rs. 33,000/- double the amount as he could harvest bananas and papaya along with pineapples. He also planted tapioca in the surrounding areas of the farm. Recently, Jacob has planted lemon, litchi etc. in between the bananas, pineapples, and papayas and is expecting more income in the days to come. His farm today is a delight to watch!

Jacob's farm has inspired the youths in the village so much that they are now trying to replicate his model by planting different varieties of fruit saplings. He has encouraged and helped the youths to farm in different ways by sharing his valuable knowledge. He believes that one day his village will be a champion in producing vegetables and fruits in the market.

Asian honeybees show a way to Arunachal farmers

Itanagar Diocesan Empowerment Association (IDEA)

Nabam Nigla from Langper village in Arunachal Pradesh had no experience in beekeeping. He picked up this skill through a "Commercial Honey Production" training organised by the Itanagar Diocesan Empowerment Association (IDEA) under the Caritas India FARM programme in 2019. He started his small enterprise with three bee boxes of Honeybee colonies and beekeeping accessories. However, despite the boxes being still functional, his motivation soon ran out.

Bees and its products are not only well known with high market value but also provide sustainable livelihood to many smallholder farmers in remote areas. Asian honeybees or *Apis cerana* are found in the Northeastern part of India especially Arunachal Pradesh. Asian honeybees are managed for honey production and are excellent pollinators of many crops including spice crops, fruits, nuts, oilseeds, cauliflower, okra, and onion. The honey produced by bees has high nutritional and therapeutic value; therefore, farmers in Arunachal Pradesh are being encouraged to take up beekeeping to ensure sustainable income. There has been increasing demand for honey in the domestic and international markets.

Pollination in most parts of the world is under immense threat owing to anthropogenic factors, which cause pollination deficits. This deficit can only be controlled by enhancing efforts in beekeeping on a large scale. Up to a 30 percent increase in the productivity of field crops can be achieved by bee-supported pollination.



IDEA under the Caritas India FARM programme conducted another beekeeping training in August 2022 for a group of farmers, who were trained in having natural bee colonies and the multiplication of such colonies. The initiative was taken for subsistence farmers who are keen to boost their income while raising crop yields through increased pollination. Nabam Nigla also attended this training and his love for the bees was rekindled.

"FARM interventions have motivated him to start over," informed Ratan Lal Deka, Coordinator of the FARM programme. Nigla increased the number to 36 boxes by dividing the colonies and by collecting the colonies from nearby forest areas within a short span of one year.

"August to starting October is the peak swarming season for beekeeping and several local colonies can be captured which are more stable, strong and disease resistant than the ones procured from distant places," says Nabam, a 52-year-old farmer.

As of date, he succeeded in harvesting 5 times in a year with 2-4 kgs of honey per harvest which he sells for Rs. 500/kg and earned Rs. 1,80,000. IDEA takes pride in promoting smallholders like Nigla who motivated another 13 smallholders to take up beekeeping as a livelihood option. It has proved that it takes persistence and consistence in order to achieve something.



Mushrooming of dreams

Seva Kendra Dibrugarh (SKD)

In a context where women stay at home to take care of household chores and males earn the majority of the family's income, many women's dreams die a natural death. But thanks to continuous engagement and motivation through mushroom cultivation of Seva Kendra Dibrugarh (SKD), a Caritas India local partner for FARM North East program, aspirations of many rural women in Golaghat district, Assam are coming true.

SKD encourages women to find a way to supplement their income. SKD wanted to reverse this thinking and give equal rights to women to earn and live a dignified life. The intention was to empower women so that they could provide additional support to their families.

Team SKD organised the women into groups and assisted them in pursuing some form of income-generating activity. Following a planning meeting, the women formed a 10 member on group and decided for oyster mushroom cultivation. SKD supported them with seeds and other materials required for the entire process.

This was perhaps the first time these women had come together to engage in an income-generating activity as a group, and mushroom cultivation was new to them, said Vincent Xalxo, Coordinator, SKD.



An experienced mushroom farmer from a different project village was invited by SKD to mentor the women group. It was a new experience for the women's group to learn the process of mushroom cultivation. "I had heard of mushroom cultivation but never tried it, so it was new for me and many of us. I thought it was a quick and easy way to make money," said Rosemary Baghwar, one of the women group members from Golaghat district of Assam. The group meticulously followed all the steps and activities involved in the processing, such as straw cutting, wetting in lime water, and packing.

The group's devotion and commitment paid off. They harvested several rounds of mushrooms which lasted for three months, beginning in April 2022. They have earned Rs. 5,500 so far and expect to earn around Rs 15,000 per month by the end of the programme. They initially struggled with marketing their products; but SKD connected them to the Dimapur market, where they regularly sell their product at a reasonable price. With such success, the group's motivations have surpassed all limits and they intend to grow their business significantly.

"As a widow, I have no source of income, and my son earns a daily wage. I am delighted to be a part of the group and to work for a living", said Bijonti Indwar, a group member.

Seeds of change have started to blow. Other women who are not part of this group are now motivated and eager to participate in such income-generating activities.





The rise of women farmers

Seva Kendra Arunachal East (SKAE)

"Being a homemaker, I did only domestic chores. But that did not satisfy me as I too had dreams of earning a decent income," expressed Titseng Khimhun, a 40-year-old mother of two children from New Longkey village in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh.

Titseng's husband, a farmer worked hard in his fields for his family's sustenance. But what he could garner was barely enough to feed his family, in absence of any savings or security. They survived on the food they grew and depended on the market for the rest. These situations strengthened and further pushed Titseng's conviction that she must act to better support her family.

Caritas India through its FARM Northeast programme has been delivering agriculture information and training to the women farmers to enhance their knowledge and skill in agriculture. The programme has been working to promote gender justice by including women in decision-making and collective community actions.

Seva Kendra Arunachal East (SKAE), a Caritas India partner under the FARM Northeast programme formed Longkey Farmers club in Titseng's village to support the marginal farmers. The farmers' club give the marginal smallholder farmers collective power to access farming inputs such as seeds, plant material, water, fertilizers and pesticides, and to aggregate produce to reach larger markets. Social and economic empowerment places them in a better position to improve their food security and move out of poverty.



"Titseng actively participated in the meetings even earlier, but from 2021 she has been intently engaged in agricultural work and this has made all the difference," says Mintu Moshahary, the FARM Coordinator.

This was a turning point for Titseng and she has never looked back ever since. She actively participated in a number of training programmes and awareness campaigns on food sovereignty, climate change, traditional organic farming, preserving indigenous seeds, bio-pest repellent, etc. that were run by SKAE during 2021-2022.

Her backyard kitchen garden today is filled with lush green crops like pumpkin, ash gourd, bitter gourd, taro, local basil, local coriander, and maize. Titseng exclaimed, "I can't believe that I could have what I have."

Titseng's family also has a small tea garden of 1acre, but they were unable to do much as her husband was too busy working in his fields. Titseng also took over the tea garden and started working to ensure some profits and soon enough she started getting good returns.

As of now, Titseng sells her tea leaves for Rs 9,000 to 10,000 and makes Rs 1,500 to 2,000 per month from her vegetables.

Motivated by Titseng's success, 10 other local women from the village have adopted the same model in their backyard gardens. Titseng is a champion inspiring and motivating her fellow farmers to start an organic kitchen garden in their backyards.



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