

Turn! Turn! Turn!

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Tribal Hamlets of Sundarbans

Hingalgunj, 20th October, 2022: More than two lakh tribal people remain the most marginalised demographic group in the Sunderbans. This, despite the fact that they were the earliest settlers of the place.

In the 18th century, British judge Tilman Henckell floated the Sunderbans Plan. Under this plan, known as the first land reform initiative in the state, the vast wasteland was converted into agricultural land and the revenue was distributed among the people. The initiative, however, got derailed due to the British government's fight with the zamindars, and was floated again in 1831. This time, tribal people were brought in from what was known as Rarh Bengal — Bankura, Birbhum and surrounding areas — and Chhotanagpur and Odisha. The tribals cleared the forests. According to the data of the state forest department that could be accessed, between 1881 and 1916, 700 people were killed by tigers in the Sunderbans; most of them presumably tribal. Clearly, a century and more later, the trend continues.

We visited the villages of Kothabari and Nebukhali under Hingalgunj block in the Sundarbans in North 24 Par-

ganas. Both these villages are inhabited by the people of the Munda tribe. Strangely, no sign of Mundari culture could be traced in their language. All of them talked in the local Bengali language. An old Munda gentleman who was a primary school teacher had attended our meeting. "Boys and girls of the younger generation cannot speak Mundari now. They have lost their original language. Now their only language is Bangla." The middle-aged men and women said that they speak Mundari while communicating among themselves, but gradually it is getting replaced by Bangla. Other than conversation, the children have no other way to learn the language, because the local schools have no provision for teaching any language other than Bangla and English.

The other thing which attracted our attention was their custom of wearing one-stringed necklace of tulsi beads typically worn by followers of Vaishnava religion propagated

by Chaitanyadev in Bengal in the 16th century. The lowliest of the lowly, who were social outcasts, who did not have the right even to worship the gods of the mainstream society embraced this new Vaishnava religion. This gave them a religious identity and showed them the avenue to lead the life of a righteous human being. But it had no affinity to the tribal religion of worshipping totems of Nature's agents like Earth or Fire. On being asked they said that they had not forsaken their original religious practice of worshipping

singboma, but continued with both Vaisnava and the tribal practices.

Saline floods through the breaches in the embankments of the river flowing by inundate the crop fields and home gardens of the area almost every year. During the dry season, ground water level goes so low that the handpumps fail to lift any water. The road conditions are so bad that there have been many miscarriages while taking pregnant mothers to the hospital. Villagers find it very difficult to reach the market or anywhere in the vicinity because of the deplorable condition of the roads especially during the rainy season. The govt. school of the village has only one teacher for all the classes, naturally there is more chaos than learning. One has to spend Rs.100 to Rs.150 to take a serious patient to the nearest govt. hospital which is way above the affordability of the poor farmer families.

When we asked them, they said that the topmost needs they had at the moment are a) sweet water for the purposes of drinking, doing household chores and for irrigation in their fields and home gardens; b) proper roads for commuting to the city or hospital; c) education for children; and d) an alternative low-cost functioning health infrastructure.





Invoking the third generation for increasing productivity

Chhatna, 21st Oct 2022: Sovaboti Hembram, a mother of three living in the tribal-dominated Kendua village of Bankura had always found it difficult to run the family with limited income opportunities. Her husband, the sole breadwinner of the family is a small farmer from the rainfed region. In a desperate bid to overcome her pecuniary problems, she joined Kendua Adibashi Jior Jharna Mahila Dal five years ago. Coming under the umbrella of DRCSC, she first learned to secure nutrition for the household using the sustainable techniques of utilizing the homestead land.

Enthused by the training she received from DRCSC, she started using every inch of her space productively. She found that the existing bottle gourd plant was not yielding any fruit. When she shared the problem with our field staff, she came to know about 2G and 3G cutting. The meaning of “3G” is Third Generation. In simple terms, it means third-generation branches. The lateral branch growing directly from the main branch or 1G branch is called a 2G branch. The branches that arise from 2G branches are 3G branches. “It was rather magical for me to see the secondary

branches appearing out of the main branch after pruning. I learnt that the magic lies in increasing the number of female flowers in each plant. It feels great now when I see so many fruits hanging from the same plant”, said Sovaboti with zeal.

Now she cultivates bottle gourd in 1 katha of homestead land along with other crops for consumption in the family and for earning hard cash as well.

“In the last two months, we took 50 kg bottle gourd to the local market which could be sold for Rs.1000. Another important feature to which I want to draw

your attention is my produces sell very fast when taken to the market as these are fresh, organically grown and tasty” she added. “Thus, just the incorporation of a small technique has helped me a lot in improving my condition. In my nutrition garden I cultivate different crops throughout the year from which after meeting the consumption needs of my family I can sell the surplus. I use this money for the wellbeing of my family.” Sovaboti is hopeful of learning many more effective techniques for extending her venture in the coming days.

Single Stick Paddy -- a proven climate adaptive technique

Haribandi, Bankura, Nov 9, 2022: Suparna Murmu is a small farmer from this village. Her family depends on a small plot of ricefield. In case of a crop failure, her family has to starve or work as wage labourers in others’ fields.

The rainfall situation this year



in Bankura, Purulia and the adjoining region has been pretty bad. The nursery bed had already been prepared. According to the SRI method of cultivation, only 12-day old saplings must be planted. But there was no sign of rain at that time. Suparna and her fellow farmers were at a loss to decide what should be done.

The facilitators of DRCSC had to take an instant decision. In recent times late arrival of monsoon has become almost a regular phenomenon. So they were more or less prepared for an impending calamity. They decided

to take a chance. Suparna and her fellow farmers were advised to keep the saplings in the seedbed and transplant them at the time of the arrival of monsoon.

The rains finally arrived when the saplings had become 40-day old. Without much hope they transplanted the saplings. Last week when we went there, Suparna’s paddy plants had an average of 32 tilths per plant, which promises her of an yield at least 30% more than what they would have got in case they had planted in bunches as is the usual practice.



Nutrition science expert Dr. Ananya Bhowmick releasing the NUS Recipe Booklet at the workshop

Market Chain Analysis Workshop

Kolkata, Nov 4, 2022: The Participatory Market Chain Analysis Workshop 2 was organized under the CROPS 4 HD project supported by SWISSAID at Hotel Regenta Orkos, Kolkata. The objective of the workshop was to explore business opportunities around Neglected and Underutilized Species of Crops (NUS crops) and invite collaboration and participation of potential stakeholders for market development. A total of 60 stakeholders including producers, consumers, retailers, nutrition and recipe experts, policy makers from the state all were present in the workshop. Important outcome of the workshop is emphasis need to be given on nutrition and recipe development of NUS crops for greater consumer awareness and business, explore processing opportunities of identified produces and support for infrastructure through different Govt schemes.

Development Research Communication & Services Centre Presents

An Exposition
of NUS crops and
Agro-Ecological Products

a get together celebration

3 December 2022 (Sat) 1pm - 8pm
4 December 2022 (Sun) 9 am - 8 pm

Bibek Nagar Youth Association
16 Jheel Road Kolkata 700 075

Ready outlets for local Produce, healthy, Poison-free food items

To make people more aware of eco-friendly lifestyle and underutilized varieties
A drive to design a

Producer-Retailer-Consumer combine

- Chemical free vegetables, Indigenous Rice, Pulses,
- Indigenous Seed
- Date palm Jaggery • Honey, Ghee, Damppling, Oil
- Handicraft • Innovative recipes & food items

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