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The International Treaty
ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

**Views, Experiences and Best Practices as an example of possible options for
the national implementation of Article 9 of the International Treaty**

Note by the Secretary

At its [second meeting](#) of the Ad hoc Technical Expert Group on Farmers' Rights (AHTEG), the Expert Group agreed on a revised version of the [template](#) for collecting information on examples of national measures, best practices and lessons learned from the realization of Farmers' Rights

This document presents information on best practices and measures of implementing Article 9 of the International Treaty submitted by Institution: North East Slow Food & Agrobiodiversity Society (NESFAS) on 26 February 2021.

The submission is presented in the form and language in which it was received.



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Template for submission of

**Measures, Best Practices and Lessons Learned from the Realization of Farmers' Rights
as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty**

Basic information

Title of measure/practice

Strengthening the local seed systems of Meghalaya and Nagaland (North-East India) through crop festivals, farmers seed exchanges and community seed banks

Date of submission

February 26, 2021

Name(s) of country/countries in which the measure/practice is taking place

India

Responsible institution/organization (name, address, website (if applicable), e-mail address, telephone number(s) and contact person)

Institution: North East Slow Food & Agrobiodiversity Society (NESFAS)

Website: <http://www.nesfas.in/>

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Shillong 793003

Meghalaya, North-East India

Type of institution/organization (categories)

Non-Governmental Organization

Collaborating/supporting institutions/organizations/actors, if applicable (name, address, website (if applicable), e-mail address, telephone number(s))

Society for Urban And Rural Empowerment (SURE), Iawmusiang, Jowai, Meghalaya - 793150

Social Service Centre (SSC), Lachumiere, Shillong, Meghalaya - 793001

North East Network (NEN), Chizami, Phek, Nagaland - 797102

The Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty, Rome, Italy

Description of the examples



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Mandatory information:¹

Short summary to be put in the inventory (max. 200 words) including:

Since 2018, under the project, "*No one shall be left behind Initiative- Biodiversity for Food, Nutrition and Livelihood Security*", NESFAS has been working in partnership with the Indigenous communities of Meghalaya and Nagaland to preserve and promote the diverse Indigenous food systems of the region. Seeds of crops have been the basis of the food chain and food security, and as part of a movement to protect traditional seeds, NESFAS and its partner NGOs are engaging and supporting communities to strengthen their local seed system through activities such as seed festivals, seed exchanges and community seed banks. The main objective is to create awareness on the importance of local crops and their seeds, revive seed varieties that are lost, promote in-situ and on-farm conservation of PGRFA, raise awareness on seed sovereignty, and promote and popularise local seeds and associated traditional knowledge. The core interventions include participatory crop diversity mapping, displaying indigenous seed varieties, informative sessions, farmer-to-farmer exchange of knowledge and seeds, and facilitating the creation of farmer seed networks. Seed fairs and seed festivals have served as an important vehicle that acknowledges farmers' effort and traditional knowledge for the conservation of PGRFA.

Brief history (including starting year), as appropriate

North-East India is the most biodiverse region in India, and it is one of the global hotspots of biological and cultural diversity. The region is dominated by indigenous tribal groups, for which agriculture and local genetic resources are of fundamental importance. Established in 2012 in Shillong in Meghalaya, NESFAS emerged as an outcome of the collaboration between The Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty (TIP) and Slow Food International. It is a platform that connects people to the pleasure and importance of local food. NESFAS embraced the framework of agroecology in promoting local foods that are responsibly produced, protect the environment and enhances human health and wellbeing. Conservation and sustainable use of agrobiodiversity has always been the core of NESFAS mission. More intense strengthening of the local seed systems started in 2018 with the project, "*No one shall be left behind Initiative - Biodiversity for Food, Nutrition and Livelihood Security*".

Core components of the measure/practice (max 200 words)

Display of Indigenous seed varieties

Seed fairs and festivals provide a platform to showcase diversity of local crop varieties, creating awareness amongst farmers, researchers and extension workers.

Participatory crop diversity mapping

Through research and seed fairs, farmers are involved in the participatory mapping of crop diversity.

Farmer-to-farmer exchange of knowledge

Farmers from different regions share their learnings. These include exchanging knowledge of best farming practices, seed characteristics and methods of good seed management.

Farmer-to-farmer exchange of seeds

Farmers' sale and exchange of small quantities of local seeds are facilitated to encourage conservation, revival and dissemination of crop diversity.

¹ This mandatory information is required in order for the measure/practice to be included in the Inventory.



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Informative awareness sessions

This includes raising awareness on crop diversity, campaigns about the nutritional value of neglected and underutilized species, sharing of information about seed selection and storage.

Building seed networks

Farmers from different areas are connected through seed networks to improve farmers' access to seeds.

Community seed banks

Community seed banks (CSBs) are set up in agrobiodiversity rich areas. CSBs are managed by farmers organized into Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) groups, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) or Agroecology Learning Circle (ALCs) consolidated with the technical capacity to identify, save, regenerate and distribute good quality seed for strengthening community seed security.

Description of the context and the history of the measure/practice is taking place (political, legal and economic framework conditions for the measure/practice) (max 200 words)

The Indigenous food systems of Meghalaya are characterized by a diversity of production systems that includes shifting cultivation fields, wetlands, agricultural terraces, kitchen gardens and forests. A tremendous amount of agrobiodiversity is found in these systems, including wild foods harvested from the landscape. For a long time, the farmers have been conserving and saving traditional seeds. With the introduction of modern agriculture, farmers in many areas are gradually moving towards monoculture, replacing diverse traditional crops with single cash crops, improved varieties and increasing the use of chemical inputs. While communities still maintain and save seeds of diverse crops, many indigenous seeds are facing extinction. There is decreasing awareness and valuation of existing crop diversity, traditional knowledge and practices. Moreover, there is a limited commitment from the policymakers as well as the local governing body to support the conservation of traditional crops and local seed systems. NESFAS and this initiative focus on addressing this gap and creating knowledge and awareness on securing the local seed systems to ensure sustainable food production.

To which provision(s) of Article 9 of the International Treaty does this measure relate

- Art. 9.1
- Art. 9.2a
- Art. 9.2b
- Art. 9.2c
- Art. 9.3

Other information, if applicable

Please indicate which category of the Inventory is most relevant for the proposed measure, and which other categories are also relevant (if any):



No.	Category	Most relevant ²	Also relevant ³
1	Recognition of local and indigenous communities', farmers' contributions to conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, such as awards and recognition of custodian/guardian farmers		x
2	Financial contributions to support farmers conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA such as contributions to benefit-sharing funds		
3	Approaches to encourage income-generating activities to support farmers' conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA		x
4	Catalogues, registries and other forms of documentation of PGRFA and protection of traditional knowledge		x
5	In-situ/on-farm conservation and management of PGRFA, such as social and cultural measures, community biodiversity management and conservation sites		x
6	Facilitation of farmers' access to a diversity of PGRFA through community seed banks ⁴ , seed networks and other measures improving farmers' choices of a wider diversity of PGRFA.	x	
7	Participatory approaches to research on PGRFA, including characterization and evaluation, participatory plant breeding and variety selection		x
8	Farmers' participation in decision-making at local, national and sub-regional, regional and international levels		x
9	Training, capacity development and public awareness creation		x
10	Legal measures for the implementation of Farmers' Rights, such as legislative measures related to PGRFA.		
11	Other measures / practices		x

In case you selected 'other measures', would you like to suggest a description of this measure, e.g. as a possible new category? Farmers' rights to food self-determination, food sovereignty and nutrition.

Objective(s)

- a. To strengthen the farmer's empowerment and the capacity of farmers to effectively contribute to seed conservation, seed security and seed sovereignty.
- b. To enhance farmers' access to high-quality local seeds from farmer-managed local seed systems.

²Please select only one category that is most relevant, under which the measure will be listed.

³Please select one or several categories that may also be relevant (if applicable).

⁴ Including seed houses.



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- c. To create awareness, promote and popularise local seeds by connecting farmers with consumers and create a demand for farmers' seeds and products for potential livelihood opportunity.

Target group(s) and numbers of involved and affected farmers⁵

Indigenous people, women farmers and youths from 100 communities (villages).

Location(s) and geographical outreach

Meghalaya, North-East India

Resources used for implementation of the measure/practice

The Rural Electrification Corporation has provided funds for the on-going project. NESFAS is the main implementor. The communities provided in-kind support such as time, land or seeds with FPIC.

How has the measure/practice affected the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture?

- a. The measures have significantly contributed to increasing awareness amongst farmers, general public, and decision-makers on the strengths and threats to the local seed systems. It acknowledged and supported the role of farmers in conserving local seeds and plant genetic resources.
- b. Farmers from different regions share knowledge and seeds to conserve, sustainably use and propagate their traditional seeds and plant resources in their production systems.

Please describe the achievements of the measure/ practice so far (including quantification) (max 200 words)

- Thus far, two rice festivals, three biodiversity festivals, one citrus festivals and seven seed sharing festivals were organized. Six community seed banks (CSBs) were established. This enhanced knowledge and access to seeds among more than 348 farm households.
- More than 30 varieties of traditional varieties are preserved in each CSB. CSBs were able to source out seeds to farmers during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Through seed exchanges, two millet varieties were revived in communities that have lost them.
- The seed festival in Ri Bhoi district brought out 35 (6 extinct) and 27 (8 extinct) varieties of rice from Umling and Umsning Block, respectively.
- NESFAS found that interventions conserving local seeds also led to the preservation of numerous wild edible plants which co-exist in traditional farming systems.
- It was documented that a farmer from Ri Bhoi district created a new rice variety *Kba-Jwain*.
- NESFAS established 15 Agroecology Learning Circles (ALCs). This activity is enhancing the farmers' knowledge, skills and confidence.
- Meghalaya State Rural and Livelihoods Society and Government of Meghalaya extended their support and committed to establishing CSBs in other locations. Also, the Block Development Office of Mawkynrew has agreed to support the establishment of CSB in Umsawwar village.
- The church body at Pathso Nonkeng allotted land for the establishment of a CSB in the community.

⁵ Any classification, e.g. of the types of farmer addressed, may be country-specific.



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Other national level instruments that are linked to the measure/practice

Relevant national laws: The Seeds Act, 1966; The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, 2001; The Biological Diversity Act, 2002.

Are you aware of any other international agreements or programs that are relevant for this measure/practice?

UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), particularly art 19, 2018; Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from Their Utilization, 2010; UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), particularly art 26, 2007; United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous People, 2007; International Treaty on Plant and Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, 2001; Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992.

Other issues you wish to address, that have not yet been covered, to describe the measure/practice

Lessons learned

Describe lessons learned which may be relevant for others who wish to do the same or similar measures/practices (max 250 words).

- Despite the high agrobiodiversity in indigenous lands, there is a lack of research and documentation. The participatory crop mapping highlighted the agrobiodiversity managed by indigenous communities and it identified preferred, resilient and micronutrient-rich species.
- Farmers are selective in the varieties stored by individual households, thus the diversity of varieties and also seed quantities varies from farmer to farmer. Seed festivals and seed fairs allow farmers to collectively display and appreciate local crop diversity.
- Seed exchanges facilitate the recovery of species and varieties that have been lost or that are rare.
- There is a decline in the intergenerational transfer of indigenous knowledge related to seeds and agroecological practices. The Agroecology Learning Circles (ALC) provided an opportunity to engage custodian farmers, women, and youths to share best practices, prioritise their own varieties, and increase production and conservation strategies.
- Networking and collaboration are key to the success of CSBs. NESFAS empowers communities by facilitating dialogue with government officials to contribute to development plans towards promoting and conserving traditional seeds. The attendance of governmental representatives in seed related events contributes to the recognition of farmer-managed seeds and local seed systems. Regularly organized meetings with partners and members of different NGO further enable common understanding and exchange of good practices and experiences.
- The CSBs stores both generative and vegetative planting materials. Every season, farmers managing the CSB distribute seeds among themselves to increase the production of seeds in respective fields or in diversity blocks.

What challenges were encountered along the way (if applicable) (max 200 words)

- Agrobiodiversity and community seed systems are under threat from spreading monocultures and land-use changes.



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- Limited data and documentation of crop diversity, traditional knowledge, innovation and practices.
- Growing acceptance of farmers of improved varieties and cash crop monocultures.
- Decreasing numbers of knowledgeable and dedicated farmer breeders.
- Limited government participation in the process of promoting practical measures to realize Farmers' Rights.
- Lack of science based-technical guidelines to address issues inherent to the operation of seed banks specific to the local context in which they are located.
- Lack of awareness of the potential of diverse local seeds and community seed banks for local livelihood and income-generating initiatives.
- Lack of information and encouragement for developing ideas on how traditional knowledge and contemporary science could interculturally work together to support the productivity, research and advocacy of seeds of locally important and nutrient-rich species that are currently neglected.

What would you consider conditions for success, if others should seek to carry out such a measure or organize such an activity? (max 100 words)

- To ensure successful maintenance of agrobiodiversity, it is important to facilitate a long-term interactive process with the custodian farmers, who still keep traditional varieties of seeds and associated traditional knowledge.
- Inclusion of all stakeholders especially women farmers and youths in organizing and promoting the scope of seed festivals and seed exchanges to strengthen local seed systems.
- The collaboration with government institutions and alignment with the relevant schemes.
- Integrating seed conservation activities with income generation for the communities will sustain the communities' benefits and motivation in the long-term.

Further information

Link(s) to further information about the measure/practice

<http://www.nesfas.in/>

<http://www.nesfas.in/communities-showcase-50-types-of-indigenous-seeds-at-an-inter-village-seed-fair/>

<http://www.nesfas.in/farmers-from-rihboi-visit-mulum-seed-bank-west-jaintia-hills/>

<http://www.nesfas.in/9-communities-showcase-indigenous-seeds-at-seed-fair-in-umsawwar/>

<http://www.nesfas.in/madanritiang-community-aims-to-revive-save-old-local-traditional-seeds/>

<http://www.nesfas.in/pandemic-induces-importance-of-seed-exchange-at-communities/>

<http://www.nesfas.in/reviving-an-old-lost-indigenous-seed-in-garo-hills/>

<http://www.nesfas.in/several-rice-seeds-displayed-at-mukhap-rice-festival-held-by-sure/>

<http://www.nesfas.in/securing-seed-sovereignty/>

<http://www.nesfas.in/laitsohplich-starts-community-seed-bank/>

<http://www.nesfas.in/ki-symbai-tyrnai-ka-lawei-ba-phyrnai-seed-fair/>

<http://www.nesfas.in/success-experiment-khweng-community-member-reaps-new-tomato-variety/>

<http://www.nesfas.in/garo-hills-communities-exchange-saplings-to-increase-diversity/>