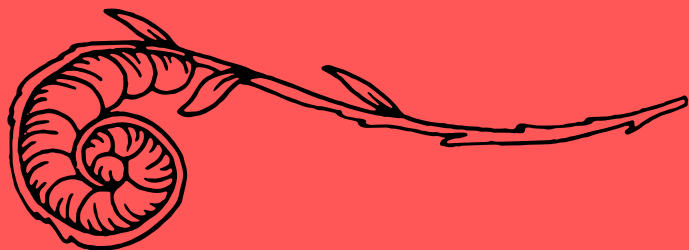




Food Cultures across the IHR: Connecting the dots

AUGUST 12, 2021

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY
TRANSFORMING FOOD SYSTEM-
YOUTH INNOVATION FOR HUMAN
& PLANETARY HEALTH





“

*Food is much
bigger than
what is on your
plate*

UN Deputy Secretary-
General Amina
Mohammed.



BACKGROUND

The Indian Himalayan Region has a rich diversity of food cultures from cultivated, foraged and pastoral agroecology which include culinary processes, preparation and preservation. This diversity has provided nutritional security and livelihoods to mountain people.

However, mountain food cultures are fast eroding with the onslaught of the food industry, globalisation and homogenisation of food and taste. This impacts the socio-ecological landscape, agrobiodiversity, traditional knowledge and practices of food, loss of dietary diversity and nutritional security. An added impact in the mountains brought about by changing dietary preferences to packaged and processed food has been the rise of plastic pollution.

With this backdrop, International Youth Day, was organised by Integrated Mountain Initiative and Darjeeling Himalaya Initiative as a build up to the Sustainable Mountain Development Summit X to be held in Darjeeling / Kalimpong. The online programme was mainly put together by the DHI Youth Group and also conducted by them.

The programme aimed to understand some of the key initiatives that were ongoing in the mountain states, and to get participants' opinions on the changing scenario around food.

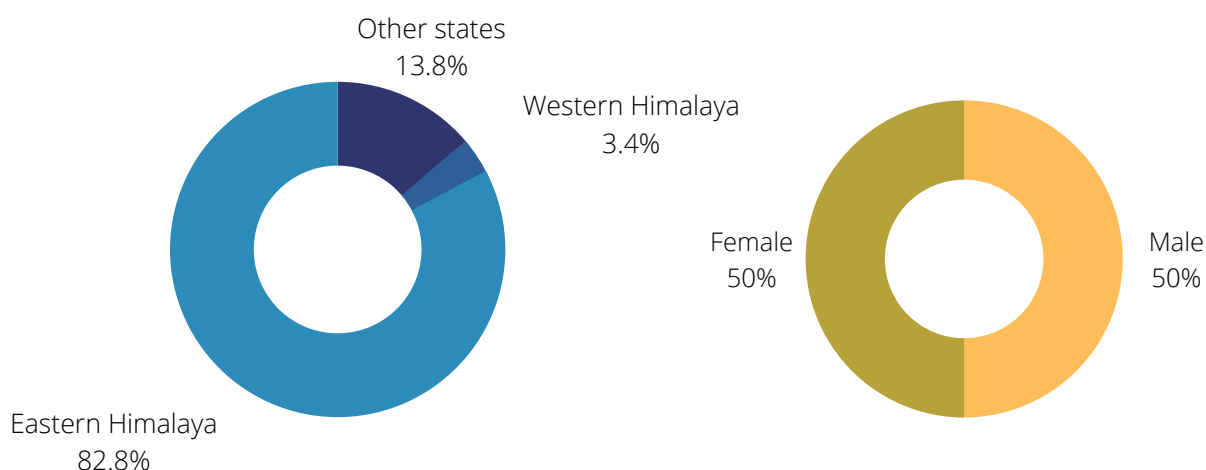
Key speakers from ICIMOD and NESFAS presented on their experiences at the event, and there were interactive sessions through polls and quizzing around local food cultures and food stories.



Welcome and objectives

Youth representatives of the Darjeeling Himalaya Initiative, Ms. Shalini Thapa and Ms. Shreya Gurung welcomed the participants and shared the objectives of the webinar. Sharing and learning about food cultures and to unite youth on standing up to onslaught of packaged food culture were mentioned as the main objectives.

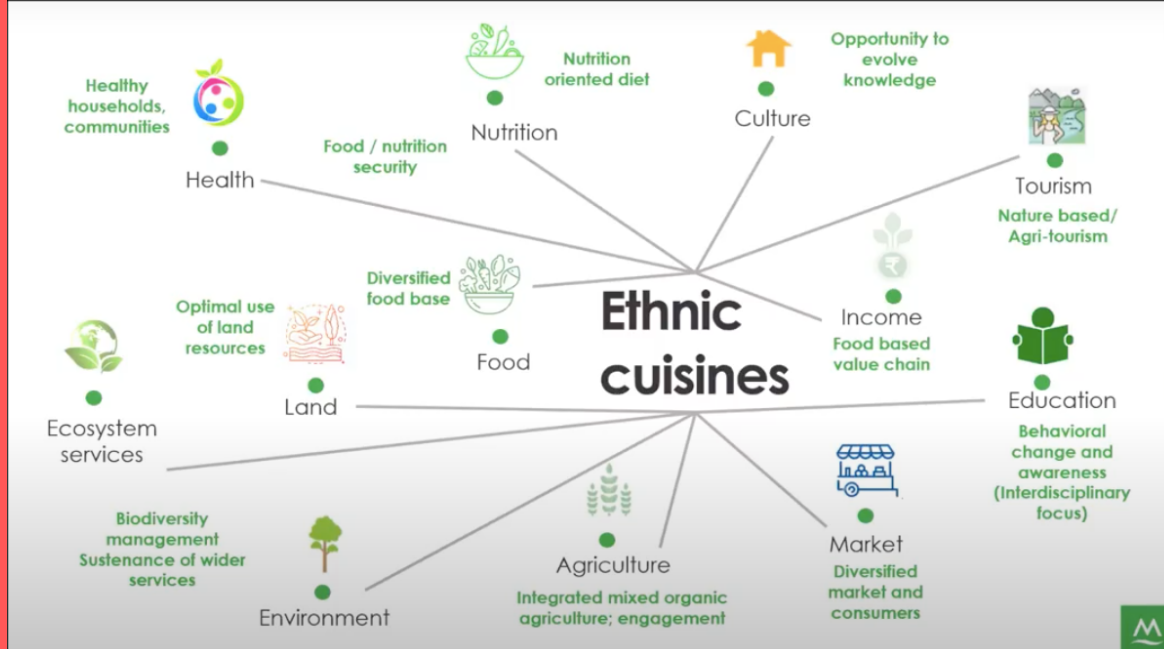
A quick poll captured the participants' background at the beginning of the webinar.



Setting the context

Mr. PD Rai, President of Integrated Mountain Initiative set the context of the meeting and expressed his gratitude to the Darjeeling Himalaya Initiative for organising the event.

Mr. Rai mentioned the need for reflecting deeply on questions around food cultures and how quickly things were changing and that connecting to the youth around these questions of food and culture, food and people was very important. What do food cultures mean for the IHR and how do we connect it to how things are rapidly changing in the world, are some of the important questions to bear in mind. For IMI, that prioritises youth action, conversations around food cultures therefore had immense significance.



KEY NOTE ADDRESS

UNDERSTANDING FOOD SYSTEM AS A DYNAMIC SYSTEM

DR. BANDANA SHAKYA, AGROBIODIVERSITY SPECIALIST, ICIMOD

Dr. Shakya's presentation started off by explaining how food is an important part of a mosaic of other elements such as ecosystem services, health, nutrition, culture, tourism, market, land and environment. The inter linkages between these various elements are not so simple and one that needs to be understood in its entirety. She mentioned that having a balanced sustainable scenario of environmental, socio- cultural and economic backed by enabling mechanisms would be essential.

With reference to the UN Food System Summit points for food system to be transformative, holistic action is needed for access to safe energy, shifting to sustainable consumption, promoting nature positive production, equitable livelihoods and actions. Dr. Shakya also mentioned the challenges that are prevalent such as loss of biodiversity, loss of traditional knowledge, narrowing food base, push of packaged food, etc.

Providing some examples of interventions, the presentation focused on - **Food based value chain** that linked ethnic cuisine with environment, society and economy, **entrepreneurship and tourism** with value addition and product diversification, and **institutions** to tackle food-water- energy nexus. Technology and capacity enhancement were also key focus of ICIMOD's work.

The last part of the presentation focused on connecting dots for ethnic cuisine, that its promotion would lead to sustainable agriculture, safeguard the environment, provide nutrition security and promote good health, and also conserve traditional cultures which would be beneficial for tourism.



A bar chart with four bars representing the frequency of use for the word 'fascinate'. The x-axis categories are 'All the time', 'Very Often', 'Seldom', and 'Not at All'. The y-axis represents the percentage of respondents. The bars are colored blue, pink, red, and yellow respectively. The values are 31, 38, 3, and 1.

Frequency	Percentage
All the time	31
Very Often	38
Seldom	3
Not at All	1



local market and garden

supplied by neighbours

local village vendors

the local market

cultivated in home steads

nearby market

neighbors farm

local and homemade foods

distant market processed

from farmers local

grocery store

online purchase

foraged wild edibles

haat bazaar

from relatives

own agricultural area

shop

neighbourhood shop

nearby local haat

foraging

local vendors

roadside shops

retail store

shop in the market

weekly market

from my land

reliance fresh

restaurants

corner store

from market

shopping centres

from kitchen garden

nearby bazar

from our own land

wet terrace field

also from market

grocery stores

stores

neighborhood shops

shops in bich galli

grow in farm

online delivery

from the market

farmer's market

way side road stalls

local market mostl

from jhum field

market and home garden

from local market

market and kitchen garden

local markets and stores

nearby villaage shopping

from the wholesale

home delivery services

fields that we have

own greenhouse

from the fields

local vegetable market

neighbouring farms

corner shop

garden home

garden and market

fresh out of farm

agro forest

shopping mall

local shops

house

big bazaar

restaurant

online purchases

home grown

home cooked

haat bazar

nearby shop

local shop

online

ration shop

super market

rationwala

local farmers

local markets

vegetable market

local sellers

local vegetable sellers

forest

own field

haat bazar

street vendors

departmental stores

shifting cultivation

garden

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village

farm land

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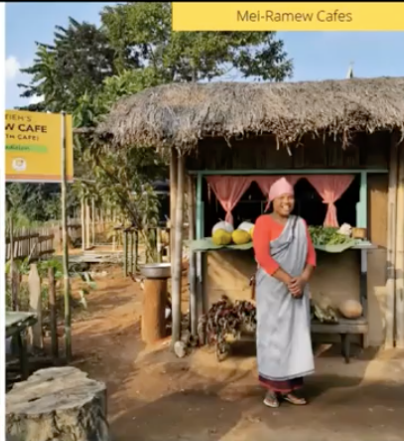
neighbouring farms

corner shop

garden home

garden

Creating Experiences (influencing peoples' perceptions towards Indigenous food systems)



KEY NOTE ADDRESS

INDIGENOUS FOOD SYSTEMS - GAME CHANGING SOLUTIONS FOR THE WORLD MR. JANAK PREET SINGH, NESFAS

Mr. Janak Preet Singh from NESFAS shared the journey of NESFAS in conserving food systems. He mentioned that for the mountains it was more of reviving the lost cultures rather than transforming it. NESFAS worked to highlight the role of indigenous peoples as custodians of the rich biodiversity and strived to connect people to the pleasure and importance of local responsibly produced food. Revitalising and defending traditional food systems which was NESFAS' main goal was important for maintaining traditional and cultural identity, as well as for ensuring access to safe and nutritious food, and building resilient through nature positive production.

Explaining Food Systems, Mr. Singh mentioned that all activities and factors associated with food production till its consumption are part of a food system, and that they could be broadly described as traditional, modern and mixed food systems. Mono and Industrial plantations which are highly extractive were slowly eroding the traditional food systems such as jhum, terrace farming, paddy cultivation and home stead gardening, which are much more resilient systems. Under these changing scenario, he stressed on the importance of creating evidences on the richness of traditional mountain farming systems. NESFAS' mapping on this had revealed that an average of 200 food plants were produced under a traditional food system. A FAO study in 18 villages on prevalence of food insecurity had shown that severe food insecurity was non existent and moderate food insecurity was experienced only at 11.3% as compared to global 30.38%.

Creating experiences to influence people's perceptions towards indigenous food systems through local food cafes, food walks, cooking classes, etc. were very important components NESFAS' interventions.



POLL - WHY DO WE PICK PACKAGED FOOD?

An interesting poll to understand some of the reasons for increasing preference for packaged food threw up some interesting insights. Convenience, time saving, wide availability, ease of cooking, busy lifestyle, marketing, etc. were some of the responses that were highlighted by the participants. These insights show that changing narratives in food systems and how one needs to respond as we build back better.



QUIZ - FOOD OF THE IHR

The pictorial quiz that was conducted asked participants to identify the local food being shown in their local languages, and also the processes involved in making them.

Participants also reflected on the various aspects food that were harvested from the forest.

Traditional beverages, the crops used and the processes involved were also discussed.

Discussions on the variety of grains, chillies, etc. also yielded some interesting information on agro-biodiversity and their links to language and culture



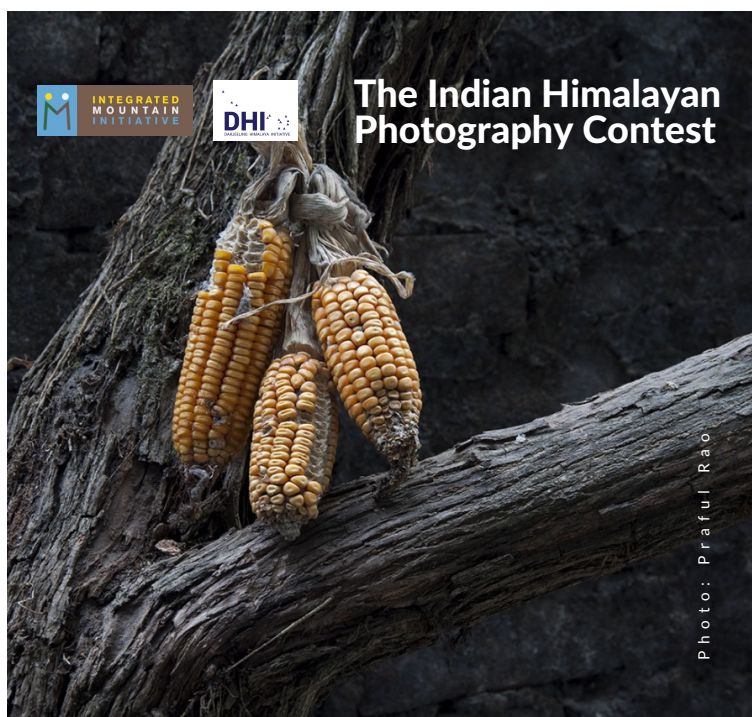


FOOD STORIES OF THE IHR

A quick video presentation showcased food stories from different mountain states. Assam's food story was on the *Xandoh* which was a type of roasted rice which was ground using a traditional device. From Uttarakhand, there was a presentation on the *Baranaja*, which was about 12 traditional crops consisting of grains, lentils, creepers and tubers grown in harmony for better yields. A typical cuisine - Dham made from all locally grown food crops that was served during festivities was presented from Himachal Pradesh. Manipur showcased their traditional dish made of fermented fish and local ingredients. Kalimpong talked of farmstays and how it connects the dots between food, farming, and traditional architecture. Darjeeling presented on the Shamanic culture of the hills and importance of conserving the local knowledge. Nagaland talked about innovative food recipes being promoted by a popular youth Chef and a sports cafe that promoted healthy local food. Ladakh showcased the initiatives of Ladakh Basket and Local Futures Ladakh that worked to promote local food systems through young farmers.



LAUNCH OF HIMALAYAN PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST



Mr. Praful Rao, President Darjeeling Himalaya Initiative announced the Indian Himalayan Photography Contest which was an annual feature of the SMDS.

The theme of this year's contest announced as - 'Food Cultures of the IHR' and prizes for 3 best photographs.

More details would be available on the IMI and DHI social media pages.

www.mountaininitiative.in



POLL - IDEAS FOR PROMOTING LOCAL FOOD

Traditional Food festivals
Make local foods fashionable
More farmers markets
Involve youth in urban areas

Introduce policies to finance, subsidize and support opening of zero waste stores that stock local produce.

Educational institutions and to promote innovative recipes

Put science in Local & Traditional food.

Preserve and regenerate Local variety seeds. Make the PDS system with locally grown food for distribution

Food education and creating opportunities for participation of youth in food system

awareness campaigns and programmes, knowledge making

Start with yourself and your own home - changing food habits

Introducing traditional food in a new way with proper local branding.

Promote local agri, bring youth to farming, promote health prospective

Families have a big role in how they choose to produce, shop and cook meals. Also the need for youngsters to learn and engage with local food producers/sellers so that they feel connected to local culture, food, knowledge and food ways

Working together with local community we can provide our local food in outer market which will provide both employment and promotion

By giving awareness on health benefits of local food over convenient package and process foods. There should be more youths coming up with innovative recipes with local foods and share these among rural urban youth.

Innovate local food recipes. Provide health reasons. Educate.

awareness, support the local food vendors, food exhibition, accessibility of ease



SUMMING UP

Mr. Amba Jamir, Vice President of IMI summed up the IYD event, mentioning that food systems affect everybody, from production, to consumption, and the role of youth is critical as they are the biggest consumers of food - be it junk or traditional and they could play a role in steering it in the right direction.

He congratulated the youth representatives of DHI for conducting the wonderful event and mentioned that the event had set the tone for the upcoming Indian Himalayan Youth Summit to be held as part of SMDSX in November 2021.

The vote of thanks was proposed by DHI youth representative Mr. Abishek Pradhan, who thanked the speakers from ICIMOD and NESFAS, contributors of the food stories and IMI and DHI members.



Linguistic narratives of food cultures in the IHR

FERMENTED SOYABEANS

Azungkenshi - Ao Naga
 Suklyangsar - Lepcha
 Bethu - Thadou-Kuki
 Axone- Nagamese
 Tasang - Zeliang
 Tungrymbai - Khasi
 Kinema - Nepali
 Dacie - Angami ,nagaland
 Theishui - Tangkhul
 Sisig - PhilippinesLanguage
 Worho - Lotha, Nagaland
 Bekang um - Mizo
 Longphiank - Nocte

(Also mentioned by participants)

Nato - Japanese
 Tempeh - Indonesian

Bamboo shoots

Gotui in Thadou-Kuki
 Gotuai - Paite Dialect, Manipur
 Bahor goja in Assamese
 soibum in Meitei
 Tama / Tusa - Nepali
 Podung - Lepcha
 Usoi - Meitei
 Misi - Nocte
 Rechak - Nagaland
 Rawtuai - Mizo

Fern

Ningro - Nepali
 Tungtokbee -Lepcha
 Yendang - Meitei
 Chan - Nocte
 Khawkcha - Mizo

SOYABEANS

Azungken - Ao Naga
 Suklyang- Lepcha
 Bhatmas - Nepali
 Bekan - Paite, Manipur
 maranthei - Tangkhul
 Rymbai - Khasi

Nettle

Slsnu - Nepali
 Suhrongbii - Lepcha
 Langtana -
 sipin

Orchid flower

Nakima - Nepali
 Purfekbi - Lepcha
 Langtana -

Wild avocado

Pamsi / Kawlo- Nepali
 Fampot in Lepcha

Chilli Varieities

Nepali	Lepcha	Thadou- Kuki	Meitei
Dalley	Sungkar Bare	Malchapom	Umurok
Akabaray	Lasi Sungkar	Malcha dong	Murok atekpa
Jirey			
Akasay	Khasi	Paite	
Dheri	sohmynten pylon	Sap malta,	
Boksi	sohmynten beb	Malta hing	
Lamchey	soh mynten rakot	Zusa ek malta	
	soh mynten kba		
	sohmyntenjhur		





Integrated Mountain Initiative (IMI) is a civil society led network platform with the mission to mainstream concerns of the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) and its people in the development dialogue of India. It functions as a platform to integrate the knowledge and experiences of multiple stakeholders working across the IHR, and uses this to inform and influence policy at the national and state level.

Darjeeling Himalaya Initiative is the Chapter of IMI for Darjeeling -Kalimpong Districts of West Bengal and is a platform represented by various civil society organizations and individuals. It is the host for the Sustainable Mountain Development Summit X.