



Beyond the lens, storytelling for a change

This photo story series on Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems in Khweng village was created as part of a four-day Photography & Visual Storytelling Workshop (July 7–10, 2025), facilitated by documentary photographer and NatGeo Explorer, Sayan Hazra. The workshop equipped young storytellers with skills in composition, fieldwork, and narrative design, helping them translate moments into powerful visual stories aligned with our communication goals.

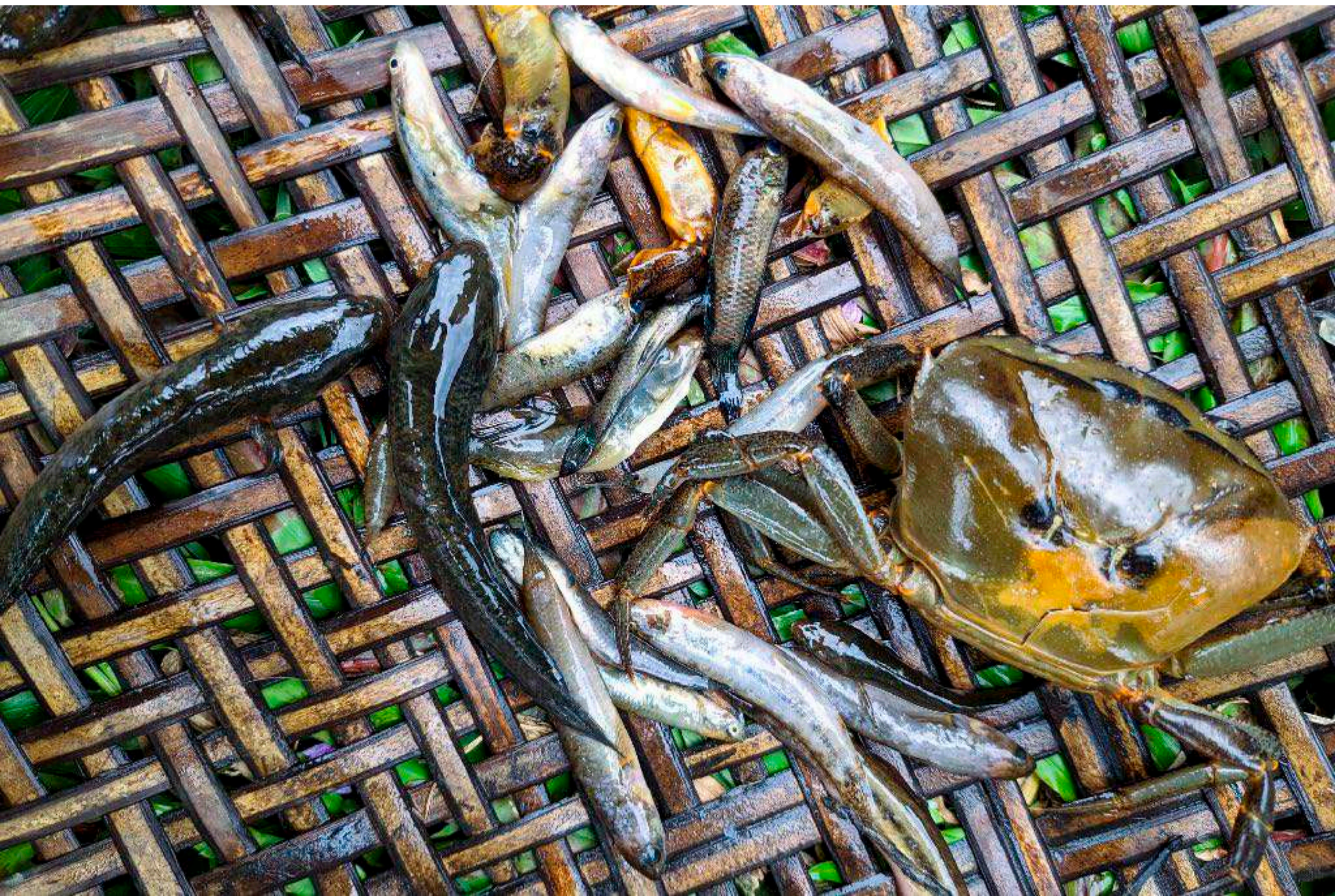
FISHING

Naphishihsa Nongsiej, Mark B Thabah, and Labetnylla Kharlyngdoh

Khweng is a village located in Ri Bhoi District, Meghalaya, where paddy cultivation is widely practiced and nearly every household is engaged in farming. In Khweng, paddy fields are not just agricultural land they are thriving ecosystems that support a diverse range of fish species alongside rice cultivation. Kong Bari Lamare, a young mother from the village, shared, "Every year, during the ploughing season, the fields come alive with movement as fish begin to surface in the stirred waters. That's when we prepare our fishing gear and get ready." Fishing is an integral part of the community's way of life and is practiced throughout the year using traditional tools. For paddy field fishing, tools like the ruh, jasi or tynsong, and khnam are commonly used, while fishing rods are preferred for catching fish in ponds, streams, and rivers. Kong Battinylla Jalong shared, "The two peak fishing seasons are during the ploughing and just before the harvest. During this time, the community comes together for a day to repair the upstream check dams so they can be opened to release water into the fields." The paddy fields are home to fish species such as dohthli dkhar, dohchabiat, dohktungiong, dohpyrthih, dohsnah, and tham. In the ponds, common species include Kha Mrigal and dohktung. This traditional practice reflects a unique intersection of biodiversity, sustainable harvesting, and culture.















KITCHEN GARDEN

Badaridshisha Nongkynrih and Bajanai Diengdoh

Khweng village, located in Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya in Northeast India, is home to around 120 households. The communities follow diverse food systems, with kitchen gardens being one of them. Each family typically cultivates small plots of land near their homes, growing vegetables, fruits, and herbs commonly referred to as home gardens or nutri gardens. These kitchen gardens play a crucial role in promoting health, nutrition, and self-sufficiency. They enhance family nutrition, reduce household expenses, provide easy access to fresh produce, and encourage the use of indigenous crops. In times of natural disasters, pandemics, or disruptions in food supply, kitchen gardens help ensure basic food security. During our assignment on July 9, 2025, we were joined by two inspiring young growers who are also school teachers, Kong Darisha Ryngkhlem and Kong Badeinylla Khymdeit. Both cultivate vegetables in their kitchen gardens primarily for household consumption and sell any surplus in the local market. They shared a touching insight that crops, like all living beings, respond to care and attention. That before the harvest, they deserve to be spoken to and nurtured with kindness. The practice of kitchen gardening has helped communities revive indigenous farming traditions and restore their deep-rooted connection with the land and nature. It serves as a bridge between generations, passing down ancestral knowledge through the simple yet powerful acts of tending the soil, respecting natural cycles and cultivating diverse crops that nourish both body and culture. This reflects a harmonious relationship between people and their environment, one that honours the wisdom of the past while sustaining life in the present. "We are deeply proud of our land, especially because it blesses us with such diverse food systems."









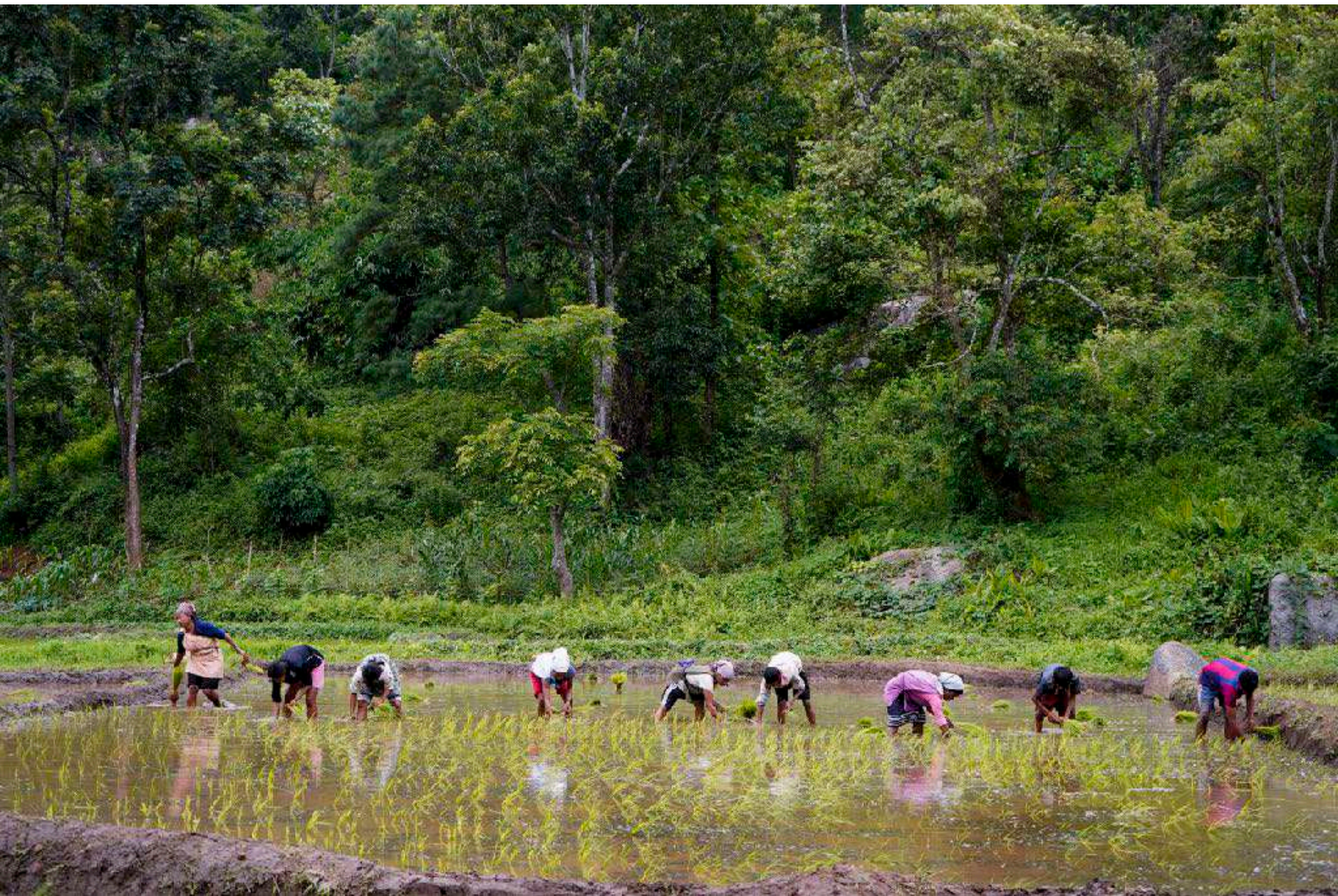




PADDY TRANSPLANTATION

Wanyo Rumnong and Gratia E. Dkhar

Our project documents the vibrant and communal process of rice seedling transplantation—a crucial step in paddy cultivation and a significant component of the Khasi Peoples’ food systems of Khweng and Liarsluid in Ri Bhoi District, Meghalaya. The journey begins with the Kong Erien Syiem and Bah Wosly Mukhtieh sharing about two traditional rice varieties such as Mynri and Lakang cultivated in the region. The rice are carefully raised in nurseries located near the fields or in the uplands. Kong Khymdiet she pulls out and bundles the young seedlings, readying them for transport to the main fields. Kong Ereian Syiem carries these bundles with care, which are then distributed across the main field in preparation for sowing. The field is levelled using wooden logs and flooded, ready to receive the seedlings. In another field, men are seen repairing a broken power tiller, oil spilling onto the soil—an image that reflects both the promise and pitfalls of adopting modern tools in traditional systems. This labour is sustained through the age-old practice of exchange labour, where mutual support reinforces productivity and community bonds. On this day, farmers from both villages gather in Liarsluid to help sow Bah Edwin Jalong’s field. Children and youth, guided by elders, sow in rhythm—a powerful image of intergenerational knowledge-sharing. The story concludes with a communal meal in a humble field hut, shared after a day’s hard work. Kong Merlin Khymdiet is seen collecting wild edibles from the bunds, which are served alongside local rice, long beans, and meat. This meal symbolises the biodiversity and resilience of the Khasi food system—rooted in community, culture, and care for the land.















JHUM

Riteilang Khongrangjem and Daiolin Jyrwa

Khweng village in Ri-Bhoi, Meghalaya, has diverse food production systems and livelihoods, including traditional weaving. Jhum cultivation, or shifting cultivation or rep shyrtie in khasi, is a traditional farming practice still followed by many Indigenous communities in Meghalaya. Jhum cultivation here is different, burning is done first, followed by bed preparation, unlike Sohra where beds are made before burning. In Khweng, ginger and potato are planted in the first year, with other crops added later. The practice is eco-friendly, chemical-free, and supports both soil health and biodiversity. Kong Rosilian Khymdeit, a farmer from Khweng leads a vibrant life through farming, silkworm rearing, silk spinning, and livestock. She believes, "Farming is life for us all," and hopes to preserve Khweng's traditional food systems and cultural heritage.

















FORAGING

Pyniarbor Kharshiing and Bashisha Kharsohnoh

Khweng is a village located in the Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya, comprising around 120 households. It is a rural community where traditional knowledge and a close relationship with the forest are still actively maintained. Forest foraging remains an integral part of daily life, practiced by villagers such as Kong Ridian and Kong Pliemon, who regularly depend on forest resources like wild edibles and firewood. Even the local school incorporates wild edibles into its mid-day meals, showing how deeply this practice is embedded in community life and wellbeing. Forest foraging, also known as wild harvesting, is the practice of gathering edible plants, fruits, herbs, and other resources directly from the forest. In Khweng, it is a daily necessity, not merely a backup plan. Villagers rely on it to supplement their diet and to collect firewood for cooking and warmth. Rooted in tradition, this practice supports self-reliance, cultural identity, and sustainability. During challenging times like the pandemic, it helped families cope, underscoring the forest's role in food security and resilience. In Khweng, forest foraging is not just a livelihood activity—it is also a process of intergenerational learning. As Kong Ridian shares, young people observe and learn from their elders what to harvest, when to harvest, and how to do so responsibly without harming the ecosystem. This promotes knowledge-sharing, cultural preservation, and a sustainable way of life that strengthens community ties. In Khweng, land, people, and nature are closely connected. The forest provides; the people protect. Forest foraging reflects this balance—taking only what's needed, in harmony with nature. This relationship helps both the community and the environment thrive.















