

Stakeholders Consultation |  
অংশীদাৰসকলৰ সন্মিলন

# Our Lives, Our Future: হমার জীবন, हमार भविष्य

Access to Skills, Employment & Entrepreneurship, and  
Adapting to Climate Change for a Sustainable Future  
for Assam's Indigenous Tea Tribes and Adivasis"

দক্ষতা, নিযুক্তি আৰু উদ্যোগৰ প্ৰৱেশাধিকাৰ, আৰু অসমৰ থলুৱা  
চাহ জনজাতি আৰু আদিবাসীসকলৰ বাবে এক বহনক্ষম  
ভৱিষ্যতৰ বাবে জলবায়ু পৰিৱৰ্তনৰ সৈতে খাপ খোৱা পদ্ধতি



November 13, 2024

NEDFi Campus, Guwahati, Assam





**Organisers:** Council for Social and Digital Development (CSDD), Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), Internet Society Foundation North East Development Foundation (NEDF)





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# SUMMARY

- A major problem is that many skill programs aren't relevant to the Tea Tribe & Adivasi Communities, and youth lack access to opportunities. It's easy to build training centres, but keeping them running and useful is the challenge.
- The communities have valuable traditional skills (like weaving, farming, and medicine) that are part of their heritage and could be economically important. These skills need to be preserved and updated to fit modern markets.
- Current training programs often don't work because they are designed for urban areas, don't consider local culture or language, and ignore the communities' limited access to information and money. Training needs to be local, culturally sensitive, and delivered in ways that fit their daily lives. Partnerships with local leaders are essential.
- Job help should include mentorship and understanding workers' rights, while business support needs practical guidance and market connections, including online platforms. For example, a program for AC repair training received no applications from the community, highlighting this disconnect.
- Due to historical disadvantages and poor facilities, a new way of thinking about skills and livelihoods is necessary. Instead of just preparing people for jobs, the goal should be to help them create their own opportunities and become self-reliant. This means - Letting communities lead their own development; Building on their existing strengths (traditional skills, local resources); Encouraging various ways to earn money, not just one; Creating a supportive environment with access to money, materials, and guidance; Ensuring they know and can use their rights to government help and fair wages.
- Many initiatives have failed because they don't address the deep-rooted issues of exploitation and systemic exclusion faced by these communities for over 200 years. They are often forgotten except during elections.
- Teaching digital skills to young people in these communities offers huge potential for jobs and starting businesses. It gives them access to information about markets, farming techniques, and government help.

- Basic digital skills (like using computers and the internet) are now essential for many jobs, and advanced skills (like digital marketing) can lead to remote work. Online platforms can allow them to sell their traditional crafts or products directly, boosting their income. Digital banking can help them manage money and get loans. Digital can empower them to access government services and speak up for their communities.
- Currently, tea garden workers earn very low wages (less than ₹250 a day), which hasn't changed since 2020, despite hard work. This severe economic reality, combined with the impacts of climate change (like reduced tea leaf growth due to heavy rain), makes their future grim.
- Many workers, especially women, face physically demanding work with little security. It's crucial to change the perception that these communities are only "tea garden labourers" after 200 years. They need to be recognized as tribal people with dignity and rights.



# 1. Introduction



Assam's Indigenous and Tea Tribes and Adivasis communities have historically faced significant challenges in accessing opportunities for sustainable livelihoods, skill development, employment, and economic growth. The changing climate is also impacting lives and livelihood. This stakeholder consultation aimed to bring together key players from government, industry, academia, NGOs, and the communities themselves to foster dialogue, collaboration, and the co-creation of innovative solutions to address these challenges.

## 2. Background

Assam's Indigenous and Tea Tribes and Adivasis communities, comprising nearly 20% of the state's population, have historically faced significant socio-economic challenges. These communities, with unique cultural identities and traditional livelihoods, often grapple with limited access to quality education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. A lack of diversified livelihood options, coupled with skill gaps and limited access to markets, have hindered their economic progress. While government schemes and NGO interventions have made strides, persistent challenges remain.

Way back in 2018, the government emphasised that the skill development centres in 19 tea garden districts in the State need to be strengthened to render skill development training to the youth. "Enabling the skill centres to live up to their mandate will not only hone the income generating faculty of the youth, but also increase their employability", it was stated. In 2023-2024 budget, the Government of Assam had attributed Rs 200 crore allocated for construction of 500 Mahaprabhu Jagannath Community Hall cum Skill Centres in prominent localities of Tea Gardens.



Further, significant crop loss due to adverse climate condition, pest infestation and drop in export prices have pushed the tea industry in Assam and West Bengal towards "an ill-starred future", Tea Association of India, said. According to the data released by Tea Board of India, the gardens in Assam reported around 11 per cent drop in production till July, 2023.

"With the natural circumstances beyond one's control, the tea industry in Assam is looking at an ill-starred future in the days to come and continuous increase in prices of essential inputs including wages and outflow on account of higher bonus in near future will put the tea industry on the rack," a statement said.

This conference seeks to deliberate upon these complexities, leveraging data-driven insights and collaborative action to forge a path towards sustainable livelihoods, skills development, and economic empowerment for these communities.

### 3. Consultation Objectives

#### **Understanding the Current Landscape of Climate Change, Livelihood, Skills & Employment**

Gain a meaningful understanding of the current socio-economic realities of Tea Tribes and Adivasis communities in Assam, including the challenges they face in climate changes, and accessing livelihoods, skills training, & economic opportunities.

#### **Identify Key Barriers & Opportunities in skills, employment & entrepreneurship**

Identify the key barriers, including climate change, that hinder the economic progress of these communities, as well as the existing opportunities that can be leveraged to drive positive change.

### **Role of Digital Technology**

Share and learn from successful initiatives and practices that have effectively promoted climate mitigation strategies, sustainable livelihoods, skill development, and economic empowerment for similar communities within Assam and other regions.

### **Showcase Good Practices & Stories**

Share and learn from successful initiatives and practices that have effectively promoted climate mitigation strategies, sustainable livelihoods, skill development, and economic empowerment for similar communities within Assam and other regions.

### **Foster Collaboration and Partnerships**

Build a platform for collaboration and partnerships between various stakeholders, including government agencies, private sector companies, NGOs, academic institutions, and community-based organizations.

### **Develop an Actionable Roadmap**

Co-create an actionable roadmap with specific recommendations and strategies to adopt sustainable livelihood and economic practices to overcome barriers in access to livelihoods, skills & employment, and entrepreneurship and impacts of climate change for Assam's Indigenous Tea Tribes and Adivasis.

## 4. Key Themes & Discussion Points

**Inaugural Session:** "Our Lives, Our Future: Access to Skills, Employment & Entrepreneurship, and Adapting to Climate Change for a Sustainable Future for Assam's Indigenous Tea Tribes and Adivasis" / "আমাৰ জীৱন, আমাৰ ভৱিষ্যত: অসমৰ খিলঞ্জীয়া চাহ জনজাতি আৰু আদিবাসীৰ বাবে দক্ষতা, নিয়োগ আৰু উদ্যোগীকৰণৰ সুবিধা আৰু বহনক্ষম ভৱিষ্যতৰ বাবে জলবায়ু পৰিৱৰ্তনৰ লগত খাপ খুৱাবলৈ সম্প্ৰদায়ক সক্ষম কৰা"



### Key Questions

1. How do we see the reality of climate change in our tea gardens and upon the Tea Tribe & Adivasi communities (TTAC) dependent on it?
2. In what ways do we see climate change affecting or going to affect lives and livelihoods of the TTAC in Assam?
3. Do we think our TTAC are prepared or need to be prepared to face and overcome the impacts of climate change on tea plantations and its adverse effect on livelihood and security?
4. How do you see the current level of skills and diversity of skills for employment, livelihood, entrepreneurship for the TTAC and preparing them from impacts of climate change?
5. Are mainstream skills, trainings, designs, processes and delivery relevant or adequate for the TTAC given the very different social, cultural, economic background of the community?
6. Do we require new approaches or strategies for the TTAC for alternative skills, trainings for sustainable alternative livelihood, jobs, employment, entrepreneurship for greater social and economic security?

## > Discussion Summary

1. The primary focus of the discussions was the intersection of climate change with the socio-economic realities of Assam's Indigenous Tea Tribes and Adivasi communities. A key area of deliberation was understanding the recent trends and patterns of climate change in tea gardens and their initial impacts on tea production, cultivation, and the overall market. The dialogue aimed to explore the community's perspective on how these climatic shifts are directly affecting their livelihoods and income generation, and to identify potential measures to mitigate these adverse effects. The conversation also acknowledged that significant crop loss due to adverse climate conditions and pest infestation is pushing the regional tea industry towards a bleak future.
2. A central theme of the consultation was the challenge to existing livelihoods and the urgent need for diversification. Discussions were planned to address the difficulties and challenges these communities face, which have historically included limited access to quality education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Panelists shared about exploring viable alternative income sources beyond traditional occupations, such as agriculture, handicrafts, and eco-tourism. Furthermore, the importance of ensuring secure land tenure, access to natural resources, and enhancing financial inclusion and literacy were slated as critical points for building sustainable livelihoods.
3. The discussions also centered on skills, employment, and entrepreneurship, particularly for the youth. There was an emphasis on evaluating the relevance of traditional skills and the necessity for upskilling to meet current demands. A critical look at mainstream vocational training programs, job placement initiatives, and entrepreneurship support systems was on the agenda to determine their effectiveness and whether a different approach is needed for the community. The goal was to bridge the gap between education and meaningful employment by providing demand-driven skills training and fostering an entrepreneurial mindset within the community. This included reviewing government initiatives, such as the plan to strengthen skill development centers in tea garden districts.
4. Digital empowerment was identified as a crucial enabler for progress. The session discussed the challenges and difficulties in accessing and using relevant digital skills for livelihoods, employment, and entrepreneurship. Key discussion points included the need to invest in digital skills training to enhance employability and to promote broader digital literacy within the community. The development of relevant digital content and solutions was also highlighted as a way to support the community's overall development.

## TECH SESSION 1: "Difficulties and challenges in access to relevant skills, employment and entrepreneurship and impact of climate change / প্রাসংগিক দক্ষতা, নিয়োগ আৰু উদ্যোগীকৰণৰ অসুবিধা আৰু প্ৰত্যাহ্বান আৰু জলবায়ু পৰিৱৰ্তনৰ প্ৰভাৱ"



### Key Questions

1. Is existing tea based and plantation skills are relevant and effective for the Tea Tribe & Adivasi working Community to make their plantation-based work productive, efficient and safe in a changing climate change conditions and its effect on tea plantations?
2. Are there huge gaps between needs / demand for and supply of relevant skills for employment, livelihood and entrepreneurship for the TTAC youth, women and men?
3. Are mainstream skilling programmes equally effective and relevant for the TTAC youth, women and men? Are the skill gaps due to designs, processes, and relevance of skill programs or due to lack of access to these skills that are available in the 'market'?
4. Are Accessibility, Affordability and Meaningfulness of Skills a huge challenge for the community?



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**TECH SESSION 2: "Investing in Relevant Skills, Employment and Entrepreneurship for the Tea Tribe and Adivasi Youths & Community and Role of Digital Access and Technology / চাহ জনজাতি আৰু আদিবাসী যুৱক-যুৱতী আৰু সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ বাবে প্ৰাসংগিক দক্ষতা, নিয়োগ আৰু উদ্যোগীকৰণত বিনিয়োগ আৰু ডিজিটেল প্ৰযুক্তিৰ ভূমিকা"**



## **Key Questions**

1. Need and Importance of traditional skills, relevance and upskilling for the Tea Tribe & Adivasi Community – Why and How?
2. Making mainstream Vocational training programs, Job placement initiatives, Entrepreneurship support more relevant for the community – Why and How?
3. Need for a different Skilling, Livelihood and Entrepreneurship approach and focus for the community – Why and How?
4. What Investing in digital skills for employment and entrepreneurship for the Tea Tribe & Adivasi youths would mean?

## > Discussion Summary



1. There is an urgent need and importance to acknowledge, preserve, and revitalize the rich traditional skills inherent within the Tea Tribe and Adivasi communities. These skills, ranging from intricate weaving, bamboo and cane craftsmanship, and pottery to indigenous farming techniques and traditional medicine, are not just cultural markers but possess significant economic potential. These represent a unique heritage, often connected to sustainable practices, and can cater to niche markets. Exploiting these skills not only preserves identity but also offers a distinct competitive advantage. For this, re-skilling and upskilling is crucial.
2. Existing mainstream vocational training programs often fail to adequately address the specific needs and contexts of the Tea Tribe and Adivasi communities. They are frequently designed for urban or semi-urban settings, lack cultural sensitivity, and do not consider the prevailing social and economic realities, including limited access to information, financial resources, and geographical isolation. The content might not be relevant to local livelihood opportunities, leading to low uptake and high dropout rates. To make them more relevant, programs must be localized and culturally sensitive. This means incorporating local languages, traditional knowledge, and community-specific challenges into the curriculum.
3. Training should be delivered at the grassroots level, potentially through mobile training units, and adapted to the community's daily work and living schedules. Partnerships with local community leaders, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and traditional institutions are vital for building trust and ensuring participation. Job placement initiatives need to go beyond simply providing a list of vacancies; they must include mentorship, soft skills training (communication, teamwork), and awareness about workers' rights.

4. Entrepreneurship support should move beyond generic business plan templates to encompass hand-holding, micro-financing tailored to small-scale ventures, and facilitating market access through local fairs, government schemes, and online platforms.
5. A fundamentally different approach to skilling, livelihood, and entrepreneurship is required for these communities. Their historical marginalization, limited access to education, often poor infrastructure in tea garden areas, and the inherent socio-economic vulnerabilities necessitate a completely different strategy.
6. A top-down approach will highly remain ineffective. This involves Community-led Development by empowering communities to identify their own needs and design solutions, with external support acting as a facilitator rather than a director; Building upon existing strengths – traditional skills, local resources, and social capital – rather than focusing solely on deficits; promoting integrated livelihoods with a diverse portfolio of income-generating activities rather than reliance on a single sector (e.g., combining traditional crafts with small-scale agriculture and tourism); Creating a supportive environment that includes access to affordable credit, raw materials, mentorship networks, and sustainable market linkages; Focus with a Rights-based Approach by ensuring awareness and access to government schemes, land rights, and fair wages, which are foundational for sustainable livelihoods.
7. Investing in digital skills for Tea Tribe and Adivasi youths represents a transformative opportunity, holding immense potential for employment and entrepreneurship. Digital literacy provides access to a vast repository of information, including market trends, best practices in agriculture or crafts, government schemes, and educational resources, previously inaccessible due to geographical isolation or lack of awareness.





8. Basic digital skills (computer literacy, internet usage, email, online communication tools) are increasingly essential across all sectors. More advanced skills in areas like data entry, digital marketing, graphic design, content creation (especially for promoting traditional crafts and culture), and even basic coding can open up new avenues for remote work and diverse job roles.
9. Digital platforms offer direct access to wider markets, eliminating intermediaries and ensuring better prices for products. Youths can learn to set up online stores, market their traditional crafts or produce through social media, manage online payments, and connect with customers. This can significantly boost their entrepreneurial ventures and financial independence.
10. Digital banking, mobile payment systems, and online loan applications can help overcome barriers to financial services, enabling better financial management and access to capital for small businesses. Digital skills shall empower youths to access government services, apply for jobs and educational programs online, and connect with healthcare and other essential services more efficiently.
11. Digital platforms can be powerful tools for community advocacy, allowing youths to share their stories, highlight their challenges, and engage with policymakers, amplifying their collective voice. By creating local opportunities and connecting them to markets, digital skills can help stem distress migration and encourage talented youths to contribute to their own communities' development.



# Gallery









# Annexure

## 1. List of Tea Tribe & Adivasi Stakeholders participated in the Consultation

### LIST OF DELEGATES AND PARTICIPANT ORGANISATIONS

Sl. No	Name	Designation	Organisation
1	Anjali Tirkey	Founder Director	INJOT Trust
2	Amarjyoti Surin	General Secretary	All Adivasi Students Association of Assam (AASAA)
3	Arfan Hussain	Vice President	Socio Educational Welfare Association (SEWA)
4	Arun Kanwar	General Secretary	Assam Chah Janagusthi Jatiya Mahasabha
5	David Kujur	Director	District Community Development Programme (DCDP)
6	Dr Stephen Ekka	Director & Secretary	PAJHRA (Platform for Adivasi Joint Action and Rights Advocacy)

Sl. No	Name	Designation	Organisation
7	Evan T Munsong	Deputy General Manager	NABARD Assam Region
8	Sangeeta Tete	Advisor	All Assam Adivasi Women Association (AAWA)
9	Prabhati Baruah Khound	Assistant provident fund commissioner-cum-recovery officer	Assam Tea Employees Provident Fund Organisation (ATEPFO)
10	Mridul Hussain	Assistant provident fund commissioner-cum-recovery officer	Assam Tea Employees Provident Fund Organisation (ATEPFO)
11	Pinku Choudhury	State Project Manager	Assam Skill Development Mission
12	Dr Kamal Kumar Tanti	Assistant Professor	Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva University
13	Dr. Rajdeep Singha	Associate Professor	Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change & Development (OKDISCD)
14	Monjib Mochahari	Director	Bodoland Development Foundation
15	Godfrey Here	Director	Nawa Bihan Samaj

## LIST OF DELEGATES AND PARTICIPANT ORGANISATIONS (contd.)

Sl. No	Name	Designation	Organisation
16	Francis Lakra	Coordinator	Bodoland Development Foundation (BDF)
17	Bhrigu K. Medhi,	Deputy Manager, Skill & Livelihood	NERAMAC
18	Dr. Shivani Chauhan Barooah	Assistant Professor and Chairperson	CLSSP TISS
19	Manik Lal Mahato,	Ex- President	Assam Chah Janogusti Sahitya Sabha
20	Sonia Tanti	District Coordinator	All Assam Adivasi Women Association (AAAWA)
21	Monumati Kurmi	General Secretary	Sadou Assam Lekhikah Samaroh Samity, Assam
22	Netaji Basumatary	Executive Director	The Action North East Trust (ANT)
23	Dr Gauranga Mahato	Professor	College of Veterinary Science, Guwahati
24	Nabajit Bharali	State Project Manager -Skills	Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission (ASRLM)
25	Gyan Doley	Sr. Vice President	CSC-SPV

Sl. No	Name	Designation	Organisation
26	Pritam Kashyap	State Project Manager - CwSSM and other SSI	ASRLM, Assam
27	Sajjad Zahir	Senior Technical Assistant	NIELIT Guwahati
28	Nakul Kurmi	Member	Sub-Committee for reforms in Education for Tea Tribes Community of Assam
29	Ranjan Kumar Baruah	Advisor,	SEED, Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Govt. of Assam
30	Dr Syed S. Kazi	Director	Council for Social and Digital Development (CSDD) / Digital Society Foundation
31	R. Phukan	Head	North East Development Foundation (NEDF)
32	Nahid Jubair Borbhuyan	Deputy Director	Digital Empowerment Foundation
33	Farheen Jia	Communications Lead	Council for Social and Digital Development (CSDD)

## 2. Programme



### Our Lives, Our Future हमार जीवन, हमार भवय

**Access to Skills, Employment & Entrepreneurship, and Adapting to Climate Change for a Sustainable Future for Assam's Indigenous Tea Tribes and Adivasis**

আমাৰ জীৱন, আমাৰ ভৱিষ্যত: দতা, িনযিু আ ডেদাগৰ েৱশিধকাৰ, আ অসমৰ থলুৱা চাহ জনজাত আ আদবাসীসকলৰ বোৰ জলবায়ু ুপিৰত নব সেত খাপ খাৱা এক বহন ম ভৱিষ্যত

Date : November 13, 2024  
Time: 11:00 am – 4:00 pm

Venue: NEDFi Campus, Dispur,  
Guwahati, Assam

#### Morning Session

**10:00 AM – 10:15 AM** Registration and Tea

**10:45 AM – 11:00 AM** Welcome and Opening Remarks

**11:00 AM – 11:45 PM** Main Plenary Session  
**Our Lives, Our Future: Access to Skills, Employment & Entrepreneurship, and Adapting to Climate Change for a Sustainable Future for Assam's Indigenous Tea Tribes and Adivasis**

Keynote Address

Discussion with Representatives from:

- Indigenous Tea Tribes and Adivasi Communities
- Government Agencies
- NGOs and Development Organizations
- Private Sector

**11:45 AM – 12:00 PM** Tea Break

12:00 AM - 1:30 PM

Technical Session 1

**Difficulties and challenges in access to relevant skills, employment and entrepreneurship and impact of climate change**

সংগিক দ তা, িনেয়াগ আ উেদ গীকৰণৰ অসুিবধা আ  
ত ান আ জলবায়ুপিৰত নৰ ভাৰ

- Recent trends in climate change in tea gardens
- Initial impacts of climate change in tea gardens, production, cultivation and livelihood
- Challenges and difficulties in access and using relevant skills including digital skills for livelihood, employment, entrepreneurship
- Mainstream programmes and their relevance, issues, challenges

## Afternoon Sessions

1:30 PM - 2:15 PM

Lunch Break

2:30 PM - 4:00 PM

Technical Session 2

**Investing in Relevant Skills, Employment and Entrepreneurship for the Tea Tribe and Adivasi Youths & Community and Role of Digital Access and Technology**

চাহ জনজাত আ আদবাসী যুৱ ক যুৱ তী আ স দায়ৰ বোব  
সংগিকদ তা িনেয়াগ আ উেদ গীকৰণৰ তিৰিনেয়াগ আ ডিজিটেল  
যুিৰ ভমিকা

- Traditional skills, relevance and upskilling
- Relevance of mainstream Vocational training programs, Job placement initiatives, Entrepreneurship support
- Whether need for a different approach and focus for the community
- Investing in digital skills for employment and entrepreneurship.



