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TRENDING

The Logical Indian Crew

After Building Sustainable Practices Among 1000's Of Northeastern Farmers, 40- Yr-Old Receives Recognition

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Giving up the prospects of a cushiony foreign life, forty-year-old Sethrichem Sangtam returned to his homeland to help transform the lives of thousands of marginal farmers. He has now been named the inaugural winner of the Rohini Nayar Prize for his dedicated work in the northeast.

At a time and space where the majority of the population is hustling for high-end careers and migrating for better opportunities, a 40-year-old has set an example of how development can find its roots right within one's home ground. Going back to his roots, Sethrichem Sangtam established a non-governmental organisation (NGO) - Better Life Foundation, to work closely with the farmers of eastern Nagaland. Helping them switch from the traditional slash-and-burn culture, he has introduced sustainable fruit farming practices and revived local arts in the region.

As a result, the project is giving the residents a new lease of hope and making waves among the rural development circles. For the dedicated work he has put forth over the years, Sangtam has now been named the first Rohini Nayar Prize winner for Outstanding Contribution to Rural Development.

Reviving Roots With Arts And Agriculture

Dropping out of the reputed National Law School of India, Bangalore, Sangtam moved to New York as a member of the Global Youth Advisory Panel to the United Nations (UN) Population Fund. Leaving behind a job many aspire for, he returned to Nagaland in 2009 to work for his homeland. He took the leap by starting the 'Better Life Foundation' and collaborating with marginal farmers in Eastern Nagaland. Since then, the region has been growing toward becoming an example for rural development projects across the state and nation.

Under the NGO, the lives of over 1,200 farmers in Nagaland's Tuensang and Kiphire have transformed, and they have been co-creating sustainable solutions within the agriculture sector. Sangtam has helped the farmers switch to sustainable practices of settled cultivation and established farmer innovation centres to exchange thoughts and ideas on practices that would suit the lands best. Over time his efforts bore fruits as large groups of farmers began getting involved in permanent farming techniques through fruit cultivation.

The NGO also aided the farmers in marketing their products and promoting cooperative societies for this purpose. The farmers who earned about ₹34,000 from four acres now earn at least ₹1,33,000. However, the efforts of the NGO have been progressing further, and they have addressed multiple more concerns of the region. According to a report by the [Indian Express](#), Sangtam has begun training young boys and girls in folk dance to divert their attention from the rampant hunting that plagues the locality.

Recognition For Tireless Efforts

For his consistent efforts towards reviving and improving the cultural practices of the northeastern regions, Sangtam has been named the recipient of the inaugural Rohini Nayar Prize for outstanding contribution to rural development. He was recognised with a cash prize of ₹10 lakh, a citation, and a trophy at a ceremony held on December 20. Sangtam was selected from hundreds of entries for the award, and the jury comprising Ashok Khosla, founder of Development Alternatives; Rajesh Tandon, founder of Participatory Research in Asia; and Renana Jhabvala, national coordinator, SEWA, found him the most deserving. The entries had a range of people coming in from academia, government, and civil society spaces.

This was the first Rohini Nayar prize awarded since the foundation's inception. It has been instituted in memory of the late Rohini Nayar, a renowned economist who worked with the Planning Commission of India from 1987 to 2005. She helped conceptualise groundbreaking projects such as NREGA and India Human Development Report during her tenure. She passed away in 2021, after which her family established the foundation to honour the efforts of people working for rural development.

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