

40-yr-old who works with farmers in Nagaland wins inaugural Rohini Nayyar prize

The prize has been instituted in memory of Rohini Nayyar, renowned economist who worked with the Planning Commission. She died last year.

By: [Express News Service](#)

New Delhi | Updated: December 21, 2022 06:12 IST



Sangtam, 40, was presented with cash prize of Rs 10 lakh, a citation, and trophy at a ceremony here on Tuesday. (Express Photo: Sahil Walia/File/Representational)

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Sethrichem Sangtam, who runs an NGO that works with farmers in eastern Nagaland, has won the first Rohini Nayyar Prize for Outstanding Contribution to Rural Development.

Sangtam, 40, was presented with cash prize of Rs 10 lakh, a citation, and trophy at a ceremony here on Tuesday.

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The Nayyar Foundation for Social and Economic Purpose, a foundation set up by her family, will give away the annual prize to those under 40 for their contribution to rural development. Nayyar's husband, Deepak Nayyar, emeritus professor of Economics, JNU, is one of the directors of the foundation, along with Dhiraj Nayyar, director, economics and policy, Vedanta Resources.

Sangtam, who runs the NGO 'Better Life Foundation', said that he works with nearly 1,200 farmers in Nagaland's Tuensang and Kiphire to promote sustainable farming practices and help farmers' transition from slash-and-burn to settled cultivation. He helps farmers grow fruit such as kiwi and [apple](#). The NGO also assists farmers with marketing their products, in addition to promoting three cooperative societies of farmers that help with marketing of produce, Sangtam said.

After dropping out of National Law School of India in [Bangalore](#), Sangtam moved to New York as a member of the Global Youth Advisory Panel to the UN Population Fund. He returned to Nagaland in 2009. "We co-create sustainable solutions. A farmer innovation centre was created with contributions from the local community to invite farmers to share best practices and innovative ideas, and to document and archive," Sangtam said.

"To divert attention from rampant hunting, we began training young boys and girls in folk dance," he added.

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The jury comprised Ashok Khosla, founder, Development Alternatives; Rajesh Tandon, founder, Participatory Research in Asia; and Renana Jhabvala, national coordinator, SEWA.

Sangtam was selected winner from among 102 entries. Jhabvala said entries were invited from among people in academia, government and civil society and their work was to be judged based on its impact and innovation.

Recalling Rohini Nayyar's work, NITI Aayog vice-chairman Suman Bery, chief guest at the event, said, "There are so many established programmes now, which, no doubt, rest on the commitment and ideas and convictions of Rohini and the people she worked with... an institutionalized dimension of the agenda that Rohini worked on is something that's lead by UNDP, called the multidimensional poverty index."

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An IAS officer, Nayyar worked with the Planning Commission of India from 1987 to 2005. She retired as principal adviser, Rural Development. She worked on implementation of rural employment programmes and played a key role in instituting the India Human Development Report.

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