

Food Security Project Saves Hills

Caritas teaches cultivation skills to transform lives and environment

Magdaline D'Silva, Bandarban
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A tribal woman in a field in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

A Caritas food security project has ensured a steady food supply for thousands of tribal people in southeastern Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) as well as transforming barren land into fertile pastures.

The project, which focuses on scientific cultivation, has introduced systemized crop production on more than 3,000 hectares of land since last year.

It has also overseen the training of 2,000 tribal farmers in scientific agricultural methods and supplied seeds, saplings and tools that have been regarded as a godsend by thousands of families.

The food plan, supervised by the CHT Integrated Community Development Project (ICDP) follows in the footsteps of another initiative – the Horticulture Development Project which began in 1991.

It has been steering ethnic tribals, mostly Buddhists, away from reliance on traditional jhum (slash and burn) plantations that destroyed much of the region's lush forests.

"Local inhabitants say only 30-35 years ago the CHT had one of the lushest forests in the country, with diverse wildlife, flora and fauna. Today it is barren because of a population explosion, the encroachment of settlers, poverty and lack of awareness," said FSP official Rupna Das.

Due to forest clearing the ecosystem was heavily affected, rainfall decreased and eventually many natural fountains and streams, which were the only sources of drinking water, have dried up, she added.

The food security project has been a blessing for thousands in Bandarban, Rangamati, and Khagrachhari districts said many tribal people who have benefited from the project.

They now have enough food to eat as well as an acute awareness about the environment.

"Caritas taught us that burning forests is very harmful for our future, it also destroys the land.

After training I'm skilled at producing food from my own land," said Abu Mrong Marma, 56, a tribal Marma said on June 5, World Environment Day.

Athui Marma, 35 said other people who have not directly benefitted from the food security project are also learning environment-friendly cultivation.

This Report collected from Union of Catholic Asian News <http://www.ucanews.com>.