



Centre for Disaster Management and Research
Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati



FIELD VISIT TO "SPREAD NE"

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About The Visit

We visited the NGO on 7th of January. The NGO “**SPREAD NE**” is a Farm Learning Centre located in Rupnagar, Sonapur district, Assam which is approximately 48 km distance from IIT Guwahati. It is 1-2 km distance from main road to the farm. On reaching there our contact was farmer Sameer Bordoloi who is a Secretary General and studied agriculture but learnt the art and science of healthy food production from the small forest which he converted into a food forest in the last 7 years. He is not that farmer who loves a butterfly but kills it's baby eating leaves of the food crop. He is the one who believes in building the “wood wide web” to enable the plants to be strong to feed us and other creatures like the baby butterfly or the moth.

About The Organization

SPREAD NE is a non-governmental organization dedicated to transforming agricultural practices in the northeastern region of India from conventional to organic methods. Focused on increasing natural resource efficiency, the organization aims to build the competitiveness of the farm-to-fork



value chain through innovations in organic food production, input use, and market dynamics.

Emphasizing the principle of local consumption of locally sourced food, **SPREAD NE** encourages the conversion of bio-wealth into a bio-economy. The organization promotes ecological farming for ecosystem management, targeting young farmers, women, and children to engage in sustainable agriculture. Through mass economic development initiatives in Assam and the broader Northeast, **SPREAD NE** trains small and marginal farmers to develop organic nutrition gardens, ensuring nutrition security and fostering sustainable livelihoods by marketing surpluses through cooperatives and Farmers' Producer Organizations.



Purpose of The Visit

There could be several purposes for visiting the NGO "SPREAD NE."

- **Learn Sustainable Agricultural Practices:** If you want to understand how SPREAD NE promotes ecological farming methods to manage ecosystems in a climate-friendly way. This includes learning about sustainable land use, water conservation, and biodiversity preservation.
- **Climate-Resilient Agriculture:** The organization's focus on climate-friendly farming practices, such as promoting bamboo cultivation and educating about the climate-friendly qualities of bamboo, may attract individuals or organizations interested in climate-resilient agriculture.
- **Assessing Adaptation Strategies:** Climate change poses challenges to agriculture, and SPREAD NE's efforts to empower farmers with skills and technologies may be of interest to those seeking effective adaptation strategies in the face of changing climate patterns.
- **Promoting Localized Climate-Friendly Food Systems:** SPREAD NE's approach of promoting local people eating local food from local resources contributes to building resilient and climate-friendly food systems. One may explore how this approach can be replicated or adapted in other regions.
- **Engaging in Climate Education:** The NGO's initiatives, such as the Attracting Students to Agripreneurship (ASAP) program, focus on educating youth about climate-friendly practices. Visitors may be interested in learning about successful methods for engaging and educating the younger generation on climate change and sustainable agriculture.
- **Witnessing Successful Models:** Individuals or organizations interested in replicating successful models of organic farming, cooperative formation, and market-led extension programs may find value in visiting SPREAD NE as a source of inspiration and learning.



Events of the Day

With arriving our visit to the NGO run by Sameer sir, involved a comprehensive introduction to **sustainable agriculture** and **Agro-tourism**. The experience started with the serving of rose tea, noted for its health benefits like boosting the immune system and reducing stress and anxiety, along with other varieties like bamboo tea. After breakfast, we hiked to a bamboo-made classroom for an introduction to the organization and works of Mr. Sameer Bordoloi.



He explained the food-forest model where farmers grow food organically, making agriculture as lucrative and respectable as a government job. He discussed the importance of **agri-trade** and business, emphasizing organic production and effective marketing strategies, including proper grading, packaging, and branding, while reducing dependency on external inputs.

The NGO's program, **Attracting Students to Agripreneurship (ASAP)**, aims to engage youth in agriculture. It involves training them to establish school nutrition gardens with local nutritious herbs and vegetables, and planting bamboos in their home gardens or villages. This program highlights the climate-friendly qualities of bamboo and its potential as a source of income.

"**Lahe Lahe**," meaning 'slowly, slowly' in Assamese, is the organization's motto, emphasizing a slower, more thoughtful approach to farming. The NGO also promotes agro-tourism, offering an immersive experience in agricultural activities, local culture, and the natural environment. Our tour included sightseeing of farming activities, where Sameer sir discussed the shift from bamboo to oil palm cultivation due to its high market demand and diverse applications. We also learned about dry seed farming, which relies on natural rainfall for crop cultivation.

A significant focus was on **natural bamboo mycorrhizae abstraction**. This practice enhances nutrient uptake in plants through symbiotic relationships between fungi and plant roots, benefiting soil health and crop productivity.



The concept of a mycorrhizal network, or "**Wood Wide Web**," allows plants to communicate through fungal threads, exchanging information and potentially sharing resources. This network illustrates a complex, interconnected ecosystem within plant and fungal communities.

It also focuses on creating "**Green Commandos**" through hands-on training at their Farm Learning Centre. These Green Commandos, after being trained, return to their villages to promote eco-friendly and climate-conscious farming practices. They establish farms and social enterprises, with over 50 such Commandos already making significant impacts in their areas as social entrepreneurs.

He is very much active on social media platforms like **Instagram (@greentribesamir)** and **LinkedIn (@Famer Samir Bordoloi)** to glamourize farming, an essential step in revitalizing the agricultural sector. He shares success stories, documentaries, videos, and articles about innovative and successful farmers, making agriculture more relatable and inspiring.

One of the notable mentions is "**Water Burial**," a film awarded for Best Film on environment conservation/preservation. Based on a dark ritual of a tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, it depicts a man's struggle for food after a natural disaster, leading to cannibalism. The film's trailer is available on the **Facebook channel of "Ok North East"**.

There are **micro village models** under this initiative:

- **C2N Organic Trove, Jalukie, Nagaland:** This one-acre organic farm is run by a woman entrepreneur, Mrs. Nenem Singson, with the support of SPREAD-NE. It includes an Agro Tourism venture, technically and continuously mentored by SPREAD-NE, which was launched at the World Organic Congress in New Delhi in 2017
- **Tribal Women Empowerment in partnership with Assam Agricultural University:** Under AAU's Tribal Development Plan, SPREAD-NE is creating two model villages, Mairakuchi and Rupnagar in Kamrup (Metro) District. 50 tribal women received two piglets each for breeding, along with feeds and backyard poultry production. Training programs on piggery breeding and backyard poultry were conducted with the College of Veterinary Science, AAU, at the SPREAD-NE Farm Learning Centre.



Challenges Faced by the NGO

- It began with **terrace farming** but concerns arose about the potential harm to the natural landscape hence shifted to a more sustainable model involving Green Commandos and the establishment of a Farm Learning Centre to address environmental concerns.
- **Land mafias** are illegally encroaching on farmland for urban development, disrupting traditional farming practices and displacing farmers who depend on land for their livelihoods impacting traditional farming practices and causing environmental degradation.
- **Tora farming** also faced a series of challenges as porcupines were initially observed damaging the crops, followed by the intrusion of wild boars and even a leopard. This succession of wildlife disruptions posed a significant threat to the agricultural efforts, leading to concerns about crop loss and potential damage to the farming ecosystem.
- The global impact of the **COVID-19** pandemic, adding layers of complexity to their agricultural efforts.

Daya Das, a key figure in the organization, leads a diverse lifestyle encompassing herbal medicine, farming, and bamboo craft, indicating a holistic approach to sustainability and traditional knowledge.



The 5C model (Cultivation, Conservation, Consumption, No Surplus, Crop rotation) represents the NGO's sustainable farming system, emphasizing resource conservation and waste reduction.

Designed Farm Connect is a platform that connects city dwellers with local farmers for holidays or short-term farming experiences. This allows people to have a direct connection with nature, typically offers affordable options for exchanging labor for food or other benefits, with the goal of promoting community engagement and supporting small-scale farming.



Key farming activities include:

- Intercropping turmeric, elephant grass for mutual benefits.



- Producing biochar through pyrolysis for agriculture



- Indian coffee plum in agroforestry



- Innovatively using bamboo setups for growing and selling King chilli.
- Utilizing traditional Ayurvedic formulations like Triphala for health benefits.

- Broom grass, also known as Andropogon



- Non-tillage farming, helps reduce soil erosion, increase crop yields.



- Seed bombing



- Producing and marketing premium Elephant apple tea.
- Producing traditional cuisine through the Pranik food brand
- Integrating wild tea gardens with honey production



Behind the Idea of Farm Learning Centre..

Sameer Bordoloi, who is an agripreneur from Assam and is on a mission to **promote organic farming and local foods** by providing training to farmers, believes the region has the potential to make its farmers independent self-sustaining entities. It is a classroom with a difference. The teacher is Sameer Bordoloi, a graduate from Assam Agricultural University, who now teaches budding farmers and small entrepreneurs from the Northeast and helps them adopt innovative farming and food techniques.

He runs a society for promotion of rural economy and agricultural products, Northeast **Spread NE**, which has an aim to get local people to eat local food from local resources. After passing his agricultural degree, he got a job in the government to serve as an agricultural extension officer. Then he left the job and worked in the corporates, in the Tatas, in **Relays India Limited**, and **Agrochemical Division**. And after that, he left the corporate job also. Then thought of starting something for the farmers, which can directly connect to the farmers, not giving them inputs. Because working in the government sector and looking at the policies, working with the corporates, there is always a hunger to push in the inputs, which are very costly for the farmers.

Farm Learning Centre, consisting of a **fishery and a food forest**, this is one of the six model organic farms created by him in the North East. He has centres in Jorhat and Tinsukia in Assam, Dhimapur and Jaluki in Nagaland, and Imphal in Manipur, who have produced hundreds of green commandos to spread knowledge about local foodisms. Beyond learning how to manage organic waste, but also to manage the environment, also how to link managing organic waste through composting and ecological farming.

He won the **Agripreneur of the Country Award 2017**, conferred by Manage Hyderabad and the Government of India. Since its launch in 2014, he has attained success in promoting **farmer independence, alternative livelihood skills and youth employment**. His vision was to sow seeds of agri-entrepreneurship among young minds and later, he went on to implement the programme in many government schools of Assam through NGO like **Driti and Farm Food II Foundation** with the support of the **Assam Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan**. The programme is still continuing in the schools. It is worth noting that under the strong guidance of him, many school going children are engaged in making products out of vermi compost and are successfully selling it in the local market which is in a way making them self-reliant from such tender age. He has also created farmer cooperatives and adopted schools to help the farming community in the region.



Team CDMR.

