



The Lahanti Club: How young people in rural India are using modern tech to document traditional practices

In rural India, 45% of tribal children under 5 years old are underweight¹. Rural tribal communities are particularly vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity. The Sustainable Food Systems project, part of the Global Research Translation Award (GRTA), is working with grass-roots community groups to upscale innovations that lead to a better understanding of dietary diversity. One of these community groups is called the Lahanti Club, a collective of young people from the Santhali tribe in Bihar state, who are making films about traditional foods foraged from the forest.

'Filmmakers in the making'

The [Lahanti Club's YouTube videos](#) describe themselves '*as filmmakers in the making... imagining different sustainable futures, one shot at a time!*'

The collective of 27 members was formed in 2017, to inspire the younger generation to embrace their Santhali roots. Using modern technology, the young members of the group have been working in schools, interviewing older members of the community, and most recently capturing knowledge about traditional food practices on film.



A frame from a Lahanti Club YouTube video introducing the group

Modern tech and traditional practices

The Global Research Translation Award (GRTA) is supporting the Lahanti Club through the Sustainable Food System partner organisation PRADAN (Professional Assistance for Development Action). The GRTA project is working in a number of countries to encourage innovations that promote sustainable development. This funding from the UK government has enabled the Lahanti club to receive cameras and training to create their own films. PRADAN field staff are able to provide expert input to the filmmaking process where required, although they encourage the Lahanti club to develop their own storylines, then shoot and edit the films themselves.



Members of the Lahanti Club

¹Indian National Family Health Survey 4 (2017) <http://rchiips.org/NFHS/NFHS-4Reports/India.pdf>

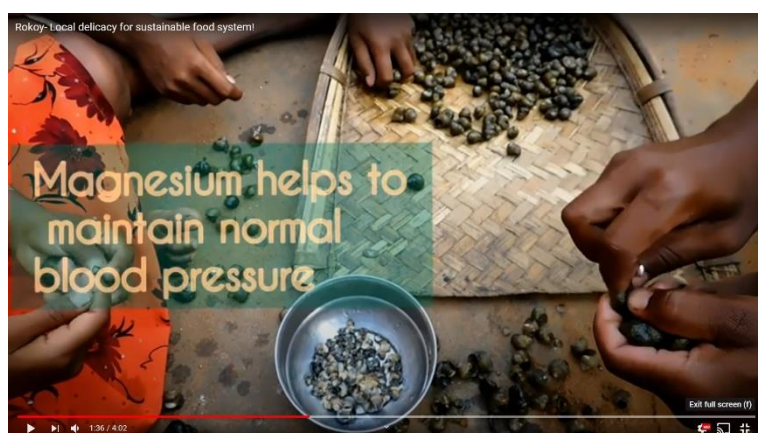
“Shooting films on wild forest foods gives the Santhal community contextual knowledge and helps them develop a sense of pride in their traditional culture,” said Shuvajit Chakraborty, an executive with PRADAN.

Foraged fruits, leaves and snails

The Lahanti Club’s films about wild forest foods each start with an introduction to the scale of food insecurity and nutrition deficiencies facing tribal communities in rural India. Each film focuses on a different foraged food, showing the method of collection, preparation and eating, and highlighting the nutritional benefits.

[Bade Billi](#) is the Santhali name for the fruit of the Banyan tree, which has been collected by tribal communities for generations. The filmmaker Sonalal Marandi interviews village children to find out what they have learnt from their elders about the health benefits of eating Bade Billi, for example boosting the immune system, and shows them tucking into the small round fruits, straight from the tree.

[Munga Ara](#) is the Santhali name for the Moringa tree or Drumstick tree. The leaves provide various micronutrients, vitamins, anti-oxidants and fibre. This film, directed by Motilal Hansda, shows women from the community collecting the leaves, processing them and cooking them on a villager’s stove, accompanied by a soundtrack of beautiful singing by Kusum Hansda, another member of the Lahanti Club.



A frame from the Rokoy video, showing preparation of the snails

[Rokoy and Ghongha](#) are Santhali names for a periwinkle snail, a valuable source of protein, vitamins and micro-nutrients. The filmmaker Kavita Marandi shoots footage of young girls heading out from their village to some wet grassland to forage for hundreds of the small snails. Once collected, the girls painstakingly pull the molluscs out of their shells using safety pins, before cooking up with spices, onions and rice to create a nutritious meal for the whole family, served on bowls fashioned from large leaves.

Becoming more...

In the Santhali language, Lahanti means ‘to become more’. These youngsters are becoming more literate about food and nutrition, indigenous practices and sustainable development, whilst improving their digital and technology skills. In the Covid-19 lockdown, many families became more reliant on foraged foods than ever. Their films will become an invaluable part of the digital hub being developed by the wider Sustainable Food Systems project, amplifying their learning to other tribal communities through online and audio platforms, and raising awareness to local government offices and education providers. Already they are receiving [media attention](#) and [government awareness](#).



Blog written by Hannah Gray, GRTA Project Officer at University of East Anglia, UK on 4 August 2020.

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