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Programme on problems of tribal people concludes



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A collaborative effort by the Keystone Foundation, and Cornell University to study various issues plaguing tribal communities, wildlife and urban spaces, has concluded here.

The Nilgiri Field Learning Center, which has been functional from 2015, features a handful of students from Cornell University, from the departments of anthropology, natural resources, agricultural sciences and human ecology, teaming up with student leaders from Adivasi communities in the Nilgiris, in an effort to identify problems and collaborate on efforts to remedy them.

Pratim Roy, founder director of the Keystone Foundation said that the 16-week-long collaborative learning process hopes to bring together the knowledge and understanding of both the foreign students as well as the Adivasi student leaders, who have their own traditional knowledge bases to draw from.

“We have all these students from different fields of study, sharing ideas with Adivasi youths who also have their own knowledge bases, customs and traditions, which can be used to formulate long-term solutions,” said Mr. Roy.

Neema Kudva, an Assistant Professor from Cornell University, who teaches urban planning and is also the faculty lead, Nilgiri Field Learning Center, said that research was done by the students and tribal youths on various topics, including waste and water, diet diversity of tribal people, infant feeding, community wellness, fallow lands and behaviour of animals such as gaur in urban spaces.

The topics were arrived at after consultations with local communities and also based on the needs of the Keystone Foundation. The research focuses on the drivers and causes of unsustainable practices leading to detrimental effects on indigenous communities and forests. Some of the research has focused on how urbanisation and loss of forests, as well as dietary shifts among tribal communities has affected nutritional and health indices. Research on fallow lands among tribal communities have revealed that increase in man-animal interactions, and recently, the lack of water, have led to the increase in land being left fallow. Work is also being done to understand the scope of the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, the impact of Community Forest Rights and other issues.