



Tasting Tomorrow: Exploring Climate-Adapted Cuisines in Nagaland

TÜMÜZO KATIRY, AKUMTONG IMCHEN, SAKTUM WONTI¹

This article describes a series of workshops on climate-adapted cuisine held at The Highland Institute, Kohima, between August 2023 and December 2023. The workshops are a contribution to the international Tasting Tomorrow project, which examines how cultural heritage can adapt to climate change through food and cuisine. During the sessions, Highland Institute staff prepared popular Naga dishes, but instead of adding all the usual ingredients, they exchanged some for food items that were likely to be available after 50 years of climate change. Workshop participants were then invited to comment on the climate-adapted dishes and compare them with the originals. The adapted dishes drew mixed responses.

Keywords: Climate-Adapted Cuisine, climate-analogue mapping, Naga cuisines, resilience, traditional knowledge systems

Nagaland, nestled in the northeastern region of India, boasts rich culinary traditions closely intertwined with its diverse cultural heritage. However, as climate change poses new challenges to agricultural practices and food security, there will be a need to adapt traditional Naga cuisines to ensure sustainability and resilience. To address this issue, Jonathon Keats, a Fellow of The Highland Institute (THI), encouraged Institute staff to participate in the ground-breaking Tasting Tomorrow project (<https://tastingtomorrow.org/pages/about.html>) through a series of Climate-Adapted Cuisine workshops.

Tasting Tomorrow uses climate-analogue mapping (CAM) to project a given geographic location's future climate. Using this data, it is then possible to suggest the anticipated impact of climate change on food and related cultural customs. Once a future climate is known for a particular area, it is possible to search for ingredients that will be locally sustainable in the future and learn how to use them in ways that retain heritage flavours. Notably, CAM forecasts that, in 50 years, Nagaland will have a climate similar to that of the Lower Dir district in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.

The Climate-Adapted Cuisine workshops at THI served as platforms for culinary exploration, allowing participants to engage in re-imagining traditional dishes through the lens of climate adaptation. The participants represented several different Naga communities, each bringing unique culinary traditions

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Figure 1: Key ingredients for Climate-Adapted Cuisine workshop

and perspectives to the table. Through collaborative cooking sessions, participants experimented with adapted recipes, incorporating alternative ingredients appropriate to future climatic conditions (Fig. 1). Subsequently, participant feedback and reflections provided valuable insights into the sensory, cultural, and socio-economic dimensions of climate-adapted cuisines.

The first workshop on 16 August 2023, yielded three different climate-adapted dishes: rice-millet staple food, millet, and mung-bean chutney. Participants lauded the use of proso millet as a substitute for the indigenous foxtail millet in the staple food, noting its distinct texture and flavour profile. On the other hand, the substitution of jalapeno for traditional king chilli in the mung bean chutney elicited mixed reactions, with some embracing the new spicy tang while others lamented the departure from familiar tastes.

On 18 November 2023, in collaboration with food historian Devin Creed, we meticulously crafted a selection of traditional Naga dishes, including the popular corn tea, galho, and a flavourful kidney beans curry. Within the Naga culinary tradition, the consumption of corn tea is often associated with times of scarcity and holds cultural and historical significance, thus serving as a poignant reminder of the region's resilience. The galho created during our workshop represented a contemporary reinterpretation of its traditional counterpart, deviating from historical conventions by including meat as one of the ingredients. Similarly, our exploration extended to the preparation of a black-eyed pea curry, offering a glimpse into the culinary evolution of Naga cuisine as it innovatively substituted black-eyed peas for traditional kidney beans, reflecting both adaptability and culinary foresight. The subsequent Tasting Tomorrow workshop on 15 December 2023, during the Highland Gathering conference further explored culinary adaptations, with a focus on jowar and black-eyed peas as substitutes for traditional ingredients, revealing nuances in flavour and texture perception (Fig. 2-3).



Figures 2–3: Preparing the climate-adapted dishes

Reflection on Climate-Adapted Heritage Cuisine

The culinary landscape of Nagaland reflects a dynamic interplay between tradition, adaptation, and globalisation. While traditional dishes serve as cultural touchstones, adapting to changing climatic conditions necessitates innovation and experimentation. Participant reflections underscored the complex relationship between food, culture, and environmental change, highlighting the resilience of traditional knowledge systems and the imperative of embracing new culinary paradigms.

The Climate-Adapted Cuisine workshop provided a glimpse into the evolving culinary traditions of Nagaland, where age-old recipes intertwine with modern adaptations to navigate the challenges of climate change. Moving forward, initiatives such as these serve as catalysts for culinary innovation, fostering resilience and sustainability in the face of environmental uncertainty. As Nagaland embraces the ethos of climate-adapted cuisines, it heralds a new chapter in the region's gastronomic journey, rooted in tradition yet poised for adaptation.

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