

NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2025

HOLY CROSS COLLEGE TRICHY STUDENTS VISIT SIGN: On the 24th morning, SIGN Ranchi had the joy of welcoming 29 PG Social Work students and two faculty members from Holy Cross College, Trichy for an exposure and learning visit. The purpose of the visit was to understand the social work initiatives carried out in Jharkhand and to experience community-based development on the ground



The students were given a traditional tribal welcome, which deeply touched and surprised them. The warm and respectful reception helped them immediately feel at home. Fr. Bipin Pani, Director of SIGN, added grace and energy to the event by guiding the programme with clarity and enthusiasm

A detailed presentation followed, where Mr. Walter Zaphed Kerketta introduced

SIGN's work in Agriculture and Safeguarding, and Ms. Prabha Bara explained the project

focused on preserving and promoting tribal culture and heritage. The students actively interacted, asked thoughtful questions, and



appreciated the insights they received from the SIGN team



A historic moment of the day was the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between SIGN and Holy Cross College, Trichy. This step marks a strong beginning of future collaborations, mutual learning, and long-term partnership in social development work. The students and faculty recognised the importance of such formal ties in

strengthening field exposure and academic growth

The visit was a meaningful field-learning experience in several ways. Students witnessed cultural sensitivity in practice through the tribal welcome, observed effective leadership through Fr. Bipin's guidance, and understood how different departments within SIGN



work together for community engagement. They also appreciated the supportive atmosphere created by SIGN and Caritas, which boosted their confidence to visit and work

with other organisations in the future. The Holy Cross team expressed deep gratitude for the warm hospitality, the rich cultural exposure, and the valuable insights they gained. For SIGN, the visit reaffirmed its commitment to sharing knowledge, building partnerships, and strengthening future social workers. This visit truly bridged classroom learning with real-life social work practice – an inspiring milestone for both institutions.

THREE INTERNS FROM ST. XAVIER COLLEGE AT SIGN: Three students from the Economics Department of St. Xavier's College, Ranchi, joined SIGN for a one-month internship and gained valuable field experience in our ongoing community initiatives. On 19th November, the interns visited the project villages of Lali Panchayat to study SIGN's



agricultural interventions. They observed paddy fields where farmers are adopting the System of Root Intensification (SRI) along with organic fertilizers. The difference between traditional farming and SRI was striking. Traditional fields

had shorter plants with thin and fewer *baliyans*, while SRI-grown paddy showed taller plants and each *balliyan* carried nearly 370 grains. The interns also noted the growing practice of mixed cropping, which improves soil fertility and supports better yields. On 20th November, the interns met members of the SHGs in Lali Panchayat. The women's groups impressed them with their unity and open communication. Sitting together in a circle, the members discussed their issues, shared solutions, and spoke about their hopes for their children's future. The interns expressed admiration for the confidence and leadership displayed by the SHG women. On 26th November, accompanied by Prabha

Lankra and Sunita Lakra, the interns travelled to Lohardaga for an exposure visit on tribal heritage, Gram Sabha structures, and traditional governance. They interacted with village elders who spoke about the rich cultural traditions of the Munda and Oraon tribes.



The elders shared how, in earlier times, tribal communities were self-governed, self-sufficient, and deeply rooted in their customs. However, they expressed concern that today's younger

generations are slowly moving away from their language, customs, and cultural practices. Traditional dances are being replaced by DJ music, and many youths no longer play tribal drums or participate in cultural activities. The elders reminded the interns that language, customs, and culture are the true heritage of tribal communities. They form the identity of the people and must be preserved with pride. While education and better opportunities are important, losing one's cultural roots is a serious concern. The community must work together to protect and pass on this heritage to future generations.

This internship offered the students a meaningful understanding of sustainable farming, community solidarity, and the importance of preserving tribal identity. SIGN is grateful for their enthusiasm and hopes this experience inspires them in their future careers.

PESA AND TRIBAL HERITAGE WORKSHOP AT BARIGAONWA GARHWA DISTRICT: On 28 November, SIGN organized a workshop on PESA and Tribal Heritage at Barigaonwa village, Bhandaria block, Garhwa district. Around 70-80 villagers actively participated in



the

programme. The workshop was facilitated by Mr. Sunil Minz, writer and independent journalist, and Mr. Bishram Kachhap, who served as the

resource persons.

The programme began with an introductory session by Ms. Jyoti Lakra, SIGN Animator. She introduced SIGN and explained that this workshop was part of a larger campaign of the JHAAN (Jharkhand and Andamans) region Bishops' Council. The campaign aims to revive and protect disappearing tribal culture, customs, traditions, and heritage. She stressed the importance of understanding tribal rights and traditions and encouraged participants to take pride in their tribal identity.

Mr. Sunil Minz spoke in detail about Gram Self-Governance under the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA Act). He explained that the PESA Act

empowers tribal communities in Fifth Schedule areas to govern themselves through the Gram Sabha. This law helps villagers manage their natural resources, preserve traditions, and plan development according to their own needs. He highlighted that regular Gram Sabha meetings can strengthen village institutions and help communities claim their rights over minor minerals, water, and minor forest produce. Through Gram Sabha meetings,



villagers can also select beneficiaries for government schemes and approve village development plans, leading to holistic village development.

He further emphasized the

need to protect tribal traditions and respect social, cultural, and religious values. He explained that traditional Gram Sabhas hold powers similar to government institutions at the village level. By making rules in the interest of the village and implementing them collectively, communities can solve their problems independently and improve their quality of life. During the discussion, participants expressed the need to reconstitute their Gram Sabha.

The workshop concluded with a vote of thanks by Mr. Rifnus. He shared that in the upcoming village meeting, the Gram Sabha would be reformed and new office bearers would be elected to strengthen village governance. He thanked all participants for their active participation and valuable time.