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# Environmental Awareness and Sensitization of Various Stakeholders in Dima Hasao District of Assam, India: A Ground Report

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# Introduction

- The Indian Himalayan region (IHR) is very fascinating as it supports unique landscapes, species, populations, communities, and ecosystems.
- But the human-induced disturbances in these areas are putting enormous ecological pressure.
- In this regard, National Mission on Himalayan Studies (NMHS) was launched by Govt. of India and under this program the Him-Nature Learning Centre (NLC), Assam was established in Assam, India. This project is being implemented in Assam by the Assam State Biodiversity Board and the Assam Forest Department.
- This centre has been working for the promotion of environmental outreach activities in mountains of India including Assam.
- This report is based on the ground level experiences gathered during execution of the NLC, Assam project in the Dima Hasao district of Assam, which is a part of the Barail Mountain Range, a mountain range of Himalayan orogeny.

# The Study Area

- The Dima Hasao district is located at 92°37–93°17E, 25°3–25°27N and it covers an area of 4,890 km<sup>2</sup> .
- 86.13% area of the district covered by forests against a state average of 35.83% (FSI Report, 2017)



Fig: Location of the Dima Hasao district in Northeast India. India map by Ganeshk. State map from d-maps.com

# Need Statement

- Dima Hasao is a district in Assam, India with the maximum forest covered geographical area in the state. In the contrary its biodiversity has been facing anthropogenic threats due to lack of awareness among the local population.
- Many mainstream conservation programs do not reach in many areas of the district due to their remoteness, hence such areas need to be included in the global map of these programs.
- Hence, people living in these areas needed to be sensitized and young students were our main target group.

# Objectives

- To create awareness and sensitize the masses on issues related to biodiversity and natural resources.
- To create cadres of young students for the promotion of participatory conservation
- To understand challenges of local population in terms of livelihood and make them aware of sustainable livelihood options.

# Methodology

## Step 1

- Gathering secondary information on various local Environmental and livelihood issues from the local Forest Department, Biodiversity Management Committees, Joint Forest Management Committees, etc.

## Step 2

- Visit to select schools, interaction with students and teachers in order to know their understanding about environmental issues.
- Setting up of Nature Conservation Clubs in those schools to involve students in future conservation activities.

## Step 3

- Awareness Programs in the Nature Conservation Clubs highlighting significance of local biodiversity, natural resources, threats and way forward to conserve them.
- Interaction with local Women Self Help Groups and awareness on environmental issues and sustainable livelihood options.

## Step 4

- Taking students of the Nature Conservation Clubs on Exposure Visits to help them explore and experience nature from close proximity.
- Involving concerned Govt. departments for providing trainings to the Women Self Help Groups as per their interests.

## Step 5

- Follow up actions to get information on ground level conservation activities carried by the clubs.
- Regular monitoring of the schools and the SHGs.

# Setting up of Nature Conservation Clubs

3 such clubs were set up in 3 ecologically significant places of the Dima Hasao District

## 1. Jatinga Govt. M.E. School

- Famous for the mysterious suicide of birds.
- This mysterious phenomenon happens during late monsoon months, September-October.
- During this period several migratory and local birds commit mass suicide.



Source: <http://www.assaminfo.com/tourist-places/29/jatinga.htm>

# Contd.

## 2. Haflong Govt. Girls' Higher Secondary School

- District Head Quarter of the Dima Hasao district.
- Well known for its beautiful hills and the lakes.
- It is the only true Hill Station of Assam.





# Contd.

## 3. Waising Engti M.E. School

- Located along the Kopili river, bordering West Karbi Anglong district of Assam.
- Situated near a small industrial town called Umrangso, which is well known for a number of big industries such as Kopili Hydro Electric Project and a few cement factories.
- Panimur, also known as Niagra Falls of Assam is close to it.



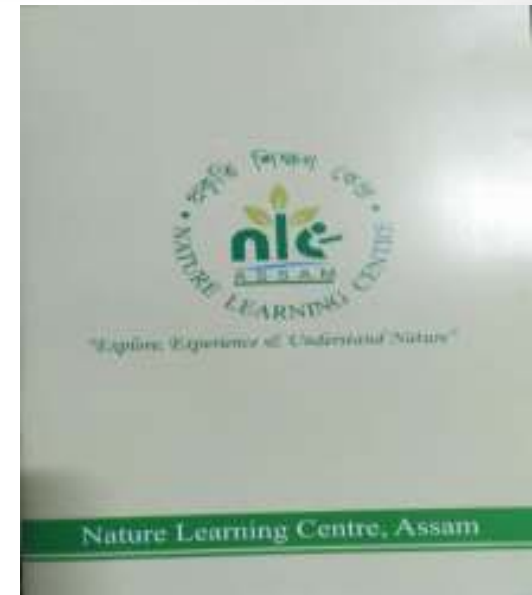
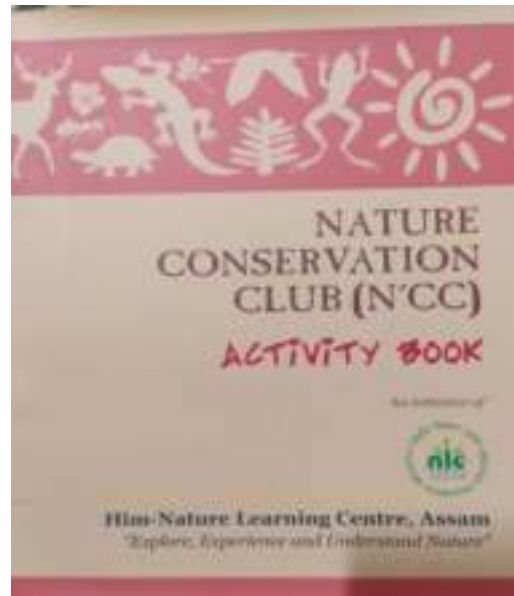
# Awareness & Sensitization Programs at the Nature Conservation Clubs

- Awareness on geography, forests, species diversity, wild plant species used as food and medicine, etc. of Dima Hasao district.
- Awareness on impact of Nature in Culture and tradition of the region.
- Awareness on Tourism prospects of the region.
- Awareness on threats towards biodiversity and natural resources of the region.



# Tools used for Awareness

Information Education Communication (IEC) Materials such as brochures, booklets, audiovisuals, etc. were used.



# Exposure Visit for Cadres of the Nature Conservation Clubs

- Visit to local places of Ecological importance.
- Visit to Ex-situ conservation site of Nature Learning Centre, Assam.
- Visit to Kaziranga National Park of Assam.



# Awareness for Women Self Help Groups (SHG)

- Awareness on alternative livelihood options.
- Discussion on challenges faced while implementing projects by the SHGs.



# Outcomes

Nature Conservation Clubs (NCC)	Women Self Help Groups
3 NCCs were set up involving almost 300 students and the students were prepared for further conservation activities.	More than 150 Women from 20 SHGs, represented their organizations; Long Lou Lom, Toilou Lom, Kalchoilom, Solom, Society for Welfare of Women & Children, Ujala SHG, Jyoti SHG, etc. to name a few.
The NCC of Jatinga Govt. ME School reported hunting of birds at Jatinga area and tried to educate locals.	As most of the women were from agricultural background, challenges of farming in hilly terrains and environmental impacts of jhum cultivation were discussed.
The Waising Engti ME School NCC organised awareness campaigns at Panimur Tourist Spot to aware tourists against littering the area.	It was observed that the SHGs did not have formal hands-on trainings on their areas of interest.
Students of Haflong Govt. Girls' HS School NCC carried out mass plantation programs, that included fruit bearing plants, ornamental plants, especially an endemic orchid species, <i>Phalaenopsis cacharensis</i> .	The SHGs communicated NLC team after the awareness program and expressed their interest in certain areas suggested by the team such as mushroom cultivation, bee keeping, horticulture, etc.
All the clubs are regularly engaged in celebrating days of ecological importance such as World Environment Day, International day for Biological diversity, Wildlife Week, etc.	A network of SHGs was established that is a potential source for getting ground level reports of the area.

# Follow up Actions

- Regular monitoring of all the activities conducted by the clubs are being done.
- The number of clubs are proposed to be increased every year.
- The interests of the SHGs were communicated to concerned Govt. departments and the women are expected to get formal training in their desired fields shortly.
- This is an ongoing project, hence more awareness programs and field activities have been planned to be conducted from time to time.

# Discussion

- Similar conservation works under a scheme of the Ministry of Environment Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC) called National Green Corps (NGC) Eco Club is also running in the district.
- Under the NGC program 186 schools have been enrolled as Eco Clubs. But, it was observed that the 3 NCCs set under our program have not been a part of the NGC scheme yet. Thus, we have successfully brought these schools into the conservation network.
- The NLC, Assam project is focused into enrolling more schools as Nature conservation clubs to increase the conservation network remote yet ecologically significant areas like these.



Thank You