

PRESS RELEASE

Arunachal community leaders explore ecotourism model in Assam's Karbi villages

Guwahati, January 18: Premier research-based biodiversity conservation organization Aaranyak (www.aaranyak.org) facilitated a three-day exposure trip on indigenous community-managed ecotourism and natural resource management for a group of community leaders including members of the Eco Development Committee (EDC) from the fringe of Daying Ering Wildlife Sanctuary near Pasighat in Arunachal Pradesh.

The team from Arunachal Pradesh which also had the DFO of D'Ering WL Sanctuary T Taga, was hosted by Aaranyak among Karbi tribe villagers in Kohora River Basic in the proximity of Kaziranga National Park (KNP) to help them experience first-hand the community-driven eco-tourism as well as natural resources management as part of larger biodiversity conservation efforts.

The exposure trip was organized under the Journey for Learning (J4L) initiative of Aaranyak to enable the visiting delegates learn from the experiences of the indigenous forest fringe communities in establishing community-based eco-tourism ventures at the fringe of the famous rhino abode of KNP. The exposure visit during January 10 to 12 was organised under Aaranyak's Natural Resource Management Programme at Kohora River Basin (KRB) in Karbi Anglong, Assam.

The team from Arunachal Pradesh was sponsored by Aaranyak under the combined aegis of its Natural Resource Management Programme and Legal and Advocacy Division (LAD).

The team was invited for attending an LAD-organised sensitization workshop on January 9 at Aaranyak Research Office here on formation of Community Surveillance and Monitoring Teams (CSMTs) in fringe area of D'Ering WL Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh with the objective to facilitate community role in mitigation of wildlife crime.

They were then led by LAD officials Dr Jimmy Borah and Ivy Farheen Hussain to Aaranyak's community-based Natural Resources Management Programme in Kohora River Basin so that they experience the eco-tourism model that is thriving there and later utilize their experience to replicate the same to sustain the CSMTs that are being formed near D'Ering WL Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh.

An orientation on 'Geo-Ecology of Kohora River Basin, People and Culture' followed by discussions was conducted for the visiting team by Aaranyak's resource persons Dr Jayanta Kr Roy, and Sarlongion Teron to set the tone for the exposure trip.

The 'Ingam Kengkam' (walking in the forest) - in Karbi was also conducted for the guests to allow them to experience the richness of the natural ambience. The trekking exercise through community forests was led by Dr M Firoz Ahmed, senior scientist from Aaranyak and Sanjit Bey, local expert from the community.

Bey sensitized the visitors on wild edibles and medicinal plants spicing the talk with folk stories. Dr Ahmed complemented Bey's efforts with scientific inputs and by anchoring of isolated discussions on how to build eco-tourism using local natural resources without any investments.

Delicious traditional Karbi lunch cooked in bamboo nodes was served to the visitors after the trekking. A small exhibition of products of Pirbi, a community-owned enterprise that sells farm & non-farm produce, was also showcased.

Maksam Tayeng, an EDC member-cum-journalist, who was part of the visiting team, said, "Being from indigenous Adi tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, the guests were overwhelmed by innovative ways of running a nature trail, food cooked in indigenous style which are easily replicable in Arunachal Pradesh."

Post lunch, the guests were guided through Phumen Engti village by Aaranyak's team member Bhargavee Rava. Laki Beypi, a backstrap loom weaver, demonstrated her weaving process and enlightened the guests on Karbi motifs and their significances.

For evening tea, the guests visited Engle Pathar village. Meena Tokbipi, a local, guided the guests through her homestead tea garden, explaining tea plucking and hand-rolled tea making process and served a handmade tea (Smoked tea) variety to the guests.

An interactive session on 'Working with forest fringe villages' took place at the Community Resource Centre in Chondrosing Rongpi village in the evening. This session was facilitated by Jayanta Kumar Sharma a senior resource person from Aaranyak. Sanjit Bey, Dhoniram Rongphar and Bapu Ingti from the community also joined for the session. The DFO of Kaziranga National Park, Ramesh Kumar Gogoi attended the session and shared his experience and management techniques with the D'Ering delegates' team.

Aaranyak team members Bhaskor Barukial, Deepika Chhetri, Joshna Terangpi, Rowel Engti, Mujameel Haque and Ratul Das contributed a lot in making the three-day 'Journey for Learning' programme a smooth sailing.

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