

Press Release

Aaranyak receives support from the LIC HFL for multifaceted community-based project

Guwahati, March 6: The LIC Housing Finance Limited (LIC HFL) is providing financial support to Aaranyak, a reputed environmental and biodiversity conservation organisation of the country to work for innovative and sustainable solutions for communities of the selected villages in Udalguri District of Assam to enable the people to reduce the risk of water scarcity, human-elephant conflict (HEC) and climate change.

The project will be implemented in 29 villages of the Bhergaon, Udalguri, and Majbat Development Blocks of the Udalguri District, which is recognised as an aspirational district of Assam.

Large parts of the Udalguri District that lie on or very close to the foothills of the Bhutan Himalayas, and fall in the Bhabar zones, accessing ground water is very difficult due to peculiar geohydrological properties of the landscape. The perennial and ephemeral rivers that flow down from Bhutan to the district and some springs in the hills are the primary sources of water.

The locally practised Dong system derives water from such rivers and springs and distributes water to different villages through canals. With the rivers drying up almost completely in the upstream area in the lean season and the springs gradually drying and degrading, the Dongs are also not carrying enough water to cater to the needs of the communities adequately.

Several Dongs have become defunct due to over siltation and lack of flow. As a result, many areas of the district like Dimakuchi are suffering from a serious scarcity of potable water, as well water for agriculture and day-to-day use. Agriculture has been widely affected due to diminishing rainfall, degradation of the Dongs and crop raiding by elephants.

Thus, besides the causes mentioned above, other human-induced and climatic factors like rampant deforestation, erratic rainfall patterns and longer dry spells due to climate

change can be considered to have interacted affecting the livelihoods of the people, reducing their food and nutrition security, increasing poverty, resulting in local displacement and migration, thus undermining the overall well-being of the people.

The interventions planned by Aaranyak (www.aaranyak.org) and LIC HFL are expected to raise awareness about climate change and how it is affecting their lives and livelihoods, increase people's adaptive capacity through training, increase water security through watershed conservation and rejuvenation of water canals (Dongs), promote climate-smart agriculture and alternative livelihood options, and help people mitigate the HEC-related problems.

Recently, a team of LIC HFL represented by Shekhar Mishra, Manager (Operation), LIC HFL (Back Office), Guwahati, and Abhinav Das, CSR Department, Northeast Region, LIC HFL visited several project villages in the Dimakuchi area where they interacted with the Aaranyak Team and the local communities to understand the issues to be addressed by this project. They were accompanied by Dr Partha Jyoti Das, Head, 'Water, Climate and Hazard Division' and Dr Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar, Head, 'Elephant Research and Conservation Division', Aaranyak along with Abhijit Saikia and Dibakar Nayak of Aaranyak.

The project has been designed to explore sustainable solutions to the problems through participatory methods combining community perception with scientific assessments using a climate resilience framework.

(For more information, please contact Dr. Partha J Das, (9435116558/ partha@aaranyak.org), Head, Water, Climate and Hazards (WATCH) Division, Aaranyak

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