

## Press Release on Dampa Consultation

### **Stakeholders consulted for planning sustainable livelihoods, wild cat conservation in Dampa Landscape, West Phaileng, Mizoram**

Guwahati, March 27: A long-term conservation project that aims to establish sustainable livelihood and participatory conservation models, monitor biodiversity and create awareness among the communities has been initiated at Dampa landscape, West Phaileng in Mizoram.

Premier research-driven biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak ([www.aaranyak.org](http://www.aaranyak.org)), in partnership with Office of the Field Director, Dampa Tiger Reserve under the Environment, Forest and Climate Change Department, Government of Mizoram and Department of Zoology, University of Mizoram has initiated the project to address the challenges and ensure long term conservation and sustainable use of the natural resources.

Dampa Tiger Reserve (DTR) is the treasure trove of Mizoram's biodiversity particularly the wild cats, and also a source of direct and indirect ecosystem services for the local communities residing in the adjoining areas.

Ethnic communities belonging to Mizo, Bru and Chakma residing in the buffer area of DTR are highly dependent on forest resources for sustenance and daily use purposes. With increasing population pressures, unsustainable extraction of natural resources and changing climatic conditions are posing serious challenges to Dampa, its buffer areas and the communities.

With this backdrop, a day-long grassroots stakeholders' consultation workshop was organised recently at West Phaileng, which was participated by 98 individuals from various organisations including the Village Council, Village Level Young Mizo Association (YMA), Mizo Upa Pawl (MUP), Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), a Mizo Women Organization and SHG leaders from the select project villages.

The consultation discussed the outcome of the socio-economic assessment in the villages, potential intervention strategy to ensure project impact and sustainability and

scoping for future convergence and collaboration. The project villages include Lallen, Saithah, Teirei Forest Village, Damparengpui, Tuipuibari and Rajiv Nagar.

The workshop was inaugurated by Pu Agni Mitra, IFS, Field Director, DTR. In his speech, Pu Mitra expressed his happiness over Aaranyak and the people of the villages for coming together to initiate this long-term project on sustainable livelihoods that will support conservation of key species like tiger, leopard, clouded leopard and other species in Dampa TR.

He also assured that the DTR authority is promoting sustainable livelihood in the form of ecotourism from 2025 with the celebration of EcoFest 2025 to promote Dampa as a tourist destination.

Pu H T Lalremsanga, Professor and Head of the Dept of Zoology, Mizoram University, briefed the participants about the objectives and activities of the project in simple terms and emphasised that if communities participate and work sincerely, the project would bring much-needed change and sustainable economic uplift in the remote villages of the region.

Pu M Firoz Ahmed, Coordinator of the Natural Resource Management Programme of Aaranyak also gave a short background about the consultation and importance of participatory approach to co-create effective community led sustainable conservation model.

Pi Carolyn L.B. Khiangte, ADC, Mamit, expressed her gratitude to DTR Authority and Aaranyak for initiating the project and encouraged the participants to come forward and join the activities with hard work to bring the much-needed and expected changes in the rural economy and livelihoods that are sustainable and environmentally prudent. Pi Carolyn appealed to the participants to seek long-term sustainability with collective effort in the villages to be successful and impactful through the project.

Pu Joe Rz Thanga of Zoram Tours spoke about the importance of nature conservation for ecotourism and as alternative and sustainable livelihoods in DTR.

Pu Jayanta Kumar Sarma, Senior Programme Associate of Aaranyak presented the outcome of the socio-economic study carried out in the project villages with language support from Pu Ht Decemson to apprise the participants on the background of the villages and trends in social and economic sector. Pu Sarma also presented the potential interventions the project could emphasize in coming years which are based on traditional skills and local natural resources including various skill sets available within the communities. This was followed by a group discussion among the village representatives on proposed activities in the villages where they incorporated various suggestions to improve rural livelihoods and overall development.

The event was made successful by the support from the members of YMA, West Phaileng and team of Aaranyak led by Pu Partha Sarathi Ghose and team members like Pu Decemson, Pi Siami, Pu Rodingiana, Pu Vobhika and Pu Angel.

Aaranyak is committed towards conservation of rich biodiversity and natural heritages of NE India by supporting our indigenous people and local communities for alternative and sustainable livelihoods and other nature-based solutions. The Natural Resource Management Programme of Aaranyak at Dampa TR is supported by IUCN-KfW.

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