



Assam promotes participatory eco-learning through Nature Conservation Clubs

Government: Assam, India

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Summary

Assam, the most populous north-eastern state of India, is situated in the foothills of the eastern Himalayas. The southwest monsoon that showers average annual rainfall of 1807.1 millimetres or more, along with the state's unique topography, creates a conducive environment to support its rich bio-diversity. The changing climate challenges the developmental journey as the state's large population depends on agriculture and forests for livelihood.

The Nature Learning Centre (NLC), Assam, was implemented during the period 2018-2021 with a motto of capacity building of various stakeholders on nature conservation through a holistic and coordinated effort to create an enabling environment for nature-based learning and sustainable developmental action to mitigate the impacts of climate change in the region.

The NLC, through its exclusive school-level initiative, Nature Conservation Club (NCC) carried out several interactive learning programmes, practical activity-based learning, and exposure visits to reserved forests. The centre also produced audio-visual training material and reading materials for different stakeholders to promote nature conservation for sustainable development and climate adaptation. The majority of the activities targeted the students and the community living in and around the fringes of the protected forests.

Background

Assam is blessed with unique biodiversity and rich forest areas that cover more than one-third of the state's total geographical area. Traditionally, a large population of Assam lives nearby the forest and is dependent on forest resources. Variability in climate can potentially impact the forests of Assam and subsequently detriment the livelihoods of these communities. To reduce vulnerability to climate change and improve the resilience of these communities, conservation of the forests is vital as a mitigation measure.

Assam State Biodiversity Board (ASBB) and the Department of Environment and Forests, Government of Assam implemented the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) funded project '**NMHS Him - Nature Learning Centre (NLC) – Assam,**' during 2018-2021. The project aimed to build the capacity of various stakeholders on nature conservation and create a dedicated group of conservationists through a unique approach of interactive learning programmes to promote nature-based learning, participatory conservation efforts, and sustainable use of natural resources to minimise pressure on forest resources.

Intervention taken up under the project includes the formation of **103 Nature Conservation Clubs (NCCs)** in remote forest fringe government schools in all the districts of Assam. The NCCs prepared their own climate action plans and promoted efficient energy use, ex-situ conservation, 3Rs' principle (reduce, reuse and recycle) in the school and their locality. To stimulate self-awareness and compassion among the students towards nature and conservation, **23 exposure visits** to the protected areas and reserve forests were organised that provided nature-based learning to young students. Students also took part in **awareness and sensitisation programmes** on biodiversity conservation and environmental issues. The community members, farmers, Self Help Groups (SHGs) of the forest-fringe areas have been trained on vermicomposting, beekeeping, nursery development and mushroom cultivation as a means of alternative livelihood options through **57 hands-on training programs**.

Objectives:

- To develop and promote conservation awareness and sensitisation on bio-diversity and resources.
- To create a cadre of trainers among the various stakeholders, leading the conservation actions and capacity building at multiple levels.
- To promote participatory conservation action and management of wetland resources for livelihood generation.
- To facilitate alternative livelihood generation capacities to reduce pressure on forest resources and promote efficient utilisation of natural resources base.

12,560

people participated in different awareness, training and capacity building programmes

Results

- 103 NCCs were formed for awareness and sensitisation on biodiversity conservation and to generate young cadres for the conservation of biodiversity.
- 57 training and capacity-building programmes on alternative livelihood were given to community members, farmers, women's SHGs to promote sustainable use of natural resources.
- Conservation and plantation of rare endemic plant species and medicinal plants at Assam state zoo and Nellie sub-centre.
- Development of nature learning sub-centre at Nellie and Kakoijana.
- Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) exercise conducted at Upadbeel for wetland restoration.

Next steps

- NNCs can provide a dedicated group of young conservationist cadres at district levels. The sustainability of these districts can be monitored under biodiversity management committees.
- The sustainability of nature learning centre-Ex situ site and sub-centres can generate revenue and promote conservation and nature-based learning facilities. The functionality of these centres may be monitored by the Assam state biodiversity board, Assam climate change management society and the Department of environment and forests, Government of Assam.

Enabling conditions

- Strong advocacy and support at the grassroots level by the Department of environment and forests, Government of Assam in biodiversity conservation and alternative livelihood options.
- Technical support from Assam agriculture university, Krishi vigyan kendra, Khadi and village industries commission and collaboration with local NGOs lead to effective and successful programme implementation.
- Fruitful collaboration with biodiversity management committees, Joint forest management committees and Eco-development committees at the ground level.

Key lessons learned

- Meaningful active participation of local communities in project activities is the key to successful conservation efforts and the sustenance of the initiatives.
- Formulating a climate action plan with inputs from the grassroots stakeholders can enrich climate change mitigation at the regional and national levels.
- Ex-situ conservation sites and Nature interpretation centres at district levels can be a place of conversation and motivate locals to take conservation initiatives of their own.
- Collaboration with local government officials, civil society organisations and self-help groups aids in successfully implementing the activities.

*This case study was developed as part of **Climate Group's Indian States Climate Leadership Project.***

About Assam Climate Change Management Society

Assam Climate Change Management Society (ACCMS) - a special purpose vehicle was created in the state under the Chairmanship of Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of Assam. It was registered under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860 on October 15th, 2018.

The society focuses on handholding various departments in implementing various climate change activities, capacity building programmes, accessing national and international climate finance, mainstreaming climate change into departmental planning & budgeting and knowledge management.

More information

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