

REPORT ON THE TECHNICAL SESSION

UNESCO HERITAGE SITES IN NORTHEAST INDIA



AT GREEN HUB FESTIVAL 2016

14th May, 2016

Venue : Green Hub, Jonak, Kumargaon, Tezpur, Assam



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Introduction and Background

UNESCO Category 2 Centre (C2C) for World Natural Heritage Management and Training for Asia and the Pacific Region was established with an aim to strengthen implementation of the World Heritage Convention by building the capacity of professionals and institutions involved with world natural heritage site inscription, protection, conservation and management in Asia and the Pacific region, through training, research, dissemination of information and network building (website : http://www.wii.gov.in/unesco_category2_centre). In order to fulfill one of the objectives of the centre, UNESCO C2C India collaborated with Green Hub which is a youth and community-based video documentation centre for recording environmental and people's biodiversity in the North East Region, and with a vision to engage and empower the youth and community in conservation of biodiversity through an innovative model of using the visual medium to renew and revive love and respect for nature and its resources.

In this process UNESCO C2C supported the first batch of Green Hub fellows for video documentation of Natural World Heritage Sites of North East , India. After successful completion of first year, Green Hub organized a workshop with UNESCO C2C, Wildlife Institute of India from 13th May, 2016- 16th May, 2016 in Tezpur, Assam. On this occasion a special session on UNESCO heritage sites in North East, India was conducted on 14th May, 2016 at Green Hub. Around 100 participants from different organizations such as Forest department, Local and national NGO's, journalists, Academicians and film makers from various Institutions participated in the programme. In this context, site representatives of different heritage sites of North East gave presentation on the topic "Opportunities and challenges to document the OUVs of World Heritage". Further a panel discussion was conducted on the topic 'Taking heritage to the commons' in which Media professionals, NGO's, and Academicians provided their inputs. At the end of the programme, an award winning film on Manas World Heritage Site by Mr. Praveen Singh titled "Return of the gentle giants" was screened in the sprawling campus of Tezpur University. This was followed by the graduation ceremony of Green Hub Fellows wherein they were handed over certificates of completion and also commended for their exemplary work in the last one year.

Team Members of the UNESCO Heritage Session

UNESCO Category 2 Centre, WII

- Dr. Sonali Ghosh, IFS Scientist 'F' and Ms. Jyoti Negi, World Heritage Assistant Volunteer
 - Ms. Amrita Baruah, TISS Guwahati
- Rapporteurs
- Ms. Manisha Ashraf, and Ms. Banaani Deka, TISS Guwahati

Objective of the World Heritage Session

The objective of the Session on UNESCO Heritage Sites in Northeast India in GreenHub Festival held in Tezpur on 14th May, 2016 are –

- **To raise awareness amongst civil society with respect to World Heritage Sites and their biological and cultural importance.**
- **To discuss on World Heritage (inscribed/ tentatively listed) sites, their management and current challenges with multiple stakeholders.**
- **To initiate and coordinate for audio-visual documentation of world heritage sites in northeast India**

Report on the session on UNESCO Heritage Sites in Northeast India

SESSION 1: UNESCO Heritage Sites in Northeast India

Dr. Sonali Ghosh, IFS, Scientist F of UNESCO C2C on World Natural Heritage Site Management and Training for Asia Pacific –Wildlife Institute of India, made a presentation entitled *World Heritage Sites-Process and Nomination*. Dr. Ghosh clarified about what the process for nomination and the OUVs required for designating a World Heritage Sites. Further she also gave reasons about the need to inscribe more world heritage sites from northeast India which is a cauldron of unique cultural and biodiversity values. The ten criteria for designating a Natural Property or Cultural Property or Mixed Property or a cultural landscape as World Heritage Sites were also discussed. As of May 2016, there are 1031 Heritage Sites in the world out of which 32 are in India. The Heritage sites in Northeast India are Manas National Park and Kaziranga National Park, both of which were inscribed as Natural sites in 1985. There are few sites from Northeast which are currently on the tentative list of the State Party (India) such as Apatani Cultural Landscape and Thembang Fortified village of Arunachal Pradesh, Majuli and Charaideo Moidams of Assam. New sites which are vying for a slot on the tentative list include Keibul Lamjao National Park of Manipur and Garo Hills Conservation Area of Meghalaya. The presentation elaborated on the role for involvement of local communities and civil society at every stage of the nomination process (as this usually lasts for a minimum period of 4 years), with special reference to protection and preserving the site's integrity/authenticity. The benefits as accrued from WHS include enhanced tourism activities, engagement of local communities and greater protection to the inscribed site. The presentation also gave insights into the linkage between the C2C programme and the funding support provided to Green Hub fellows for documentation of two sites in northeast India in which they had done a commendable job. It is expected that the programme will be continued for this year.

The second talk was by Ms. Bahar Dutt, Environmental editor and columnist for CNN-IBN who lucidly discussed her own long term association with northeast India and the media's role in handling stories and bringing up the issues pertaining to this region to mainland India. On a lighter mode, Miss Dutt said that if she were included in the process of nomination, then she would have nominated the entire North-East as a world heritage site. She emphasized that through documentation of World Heritage Sites, one can tell an international story with a local flavor.

The Chief Guest of the session, Mr. A.K Johari, IFS, Addl PCCF & Member Secretary, Assam State Biodiversity Board in his key note address, emphasized on making local people legal owners of traditional ecological knowledge and biological resources. He gave examples from the various activities as implemented by the Assam State Biodiversity Board such as formulation of PBR (People's Biodiversity Registers) and BMCs (Biodiversity Management Committees) in which he has encouraged local youth to be actively involved at every stage of the process. He offered his support and encouragement to the Green Hub Fellows to get associated with the various activities of the Assam State Biodiversity Board which could be initiated with the new batch.

The next phase of the programme saw presentations given by site representatives. The overall emphasis of these presentations was to discuss the *Opportunities and Challenges to Document the OUVs of World Heritage Sites in Northeast India*. The brief synthesis in accordance with the order of the presentation is detailed in the following pages.

1) Apatani Cultural landscape, Thembang Fortified Village and Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh

Ms Radhe Yampi, gave a presentation on Apatani Cultural Landscape as a site representative. She highlighted the unique cultural practices and indigenous traditional system of sustenance and natural resource management in the site. She stated that ACL was included in the tentative list of world heritage site only in April 2014 under the criteria (iii) and criteria (v). The traditional council system, fine imposition system and customary laws keeps the society cohesive and continuing the system. The systematic tapping of water from different sources, well engineered irrigation channels, open duct, internal ducts, traditional dams(bogo), wells in the villages and the wet rice cultivation are typical to ACL that are very much well retained and maintained. Presentations on other two tentatively listed sites could not materialize but a general reference was made to the sites.

2) Kaziranga National Park(KNP), Assam

Mr. Suvasish Das IFS, Divisional Forest Officer, Eastern Assam Wildlife Division (Kaziranga National Park) and Dy Field Director, Kaziranga Tiger Reserve made a presentation titled *Kaziranga National Park Landscape-Enhancing Values*. Acknowledging the rich natural habitat for *in-situ* conservation of biological diversity, he

pointed out that it is under criteria (ix) and criteria (x) of the Natural Heritage that KNP was declared as a World Heritage Site in the year 1985. He expressed his concerns over rhino poaching that requires maximum attention of the Park staff and provided details on the actions taken. The second cause of concern was the loss of habitat due to annual flooding in river Brahmaputra that led to constant erosion and accretion of silt in the landscape. This natural hydrological process added to the unique dynamics of the flood plain ecosystem but the faster rates of erosion were indeed a cause of worry. He also gave details on aspects of local community involvement and participation which would be a priority with the department in the coming year. Special focus on developing ecotourism would be a major thrust area in which the local communities could be involved.

Questions

Dr. Shiela Bora : She enquired if there was any concrete plan to revive the Eco Development Committees as majority of them were not fully functioning as per her knowledge.

Smt Monisha Behal : She enquired about the role of wildlife police stations and whether street plays could be used as a medium to increase environmental awareness among the general public.

Speaker's Response : Some of the EDCs are in a nascent stage because the Park manpower is fully involved in anti-poaching surveillance. However some EDCs especially in the eastern range of the Park have been able to initiate alternative livelihood support activities. As regards to wildlife police stations, these would be specially designated around Kaziranga to ensure greater conviction rates and speedier disposal of cases related to rhino poaching. The police personnel posted at such stations would be sensitised towards the various sections of Wildlife and Forest laws and it is expected that this will result in greater coordination and cooperation between the law enforcement agencies of forest and police. The idea of street plays was also welcomed.

Charaideo Moidams, Sibsagar District, Assam

Smti. Ranjana Sharma, Deputy Director, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Assam in her presentation stated that the unique mound burial system of Ahom dynasty makes *moidam* very special to be included on the World Heritage Site. The Moidams are only of its kind in the world and are comparable to the Buddhist Stupas ,Great Pyramids of Egypt etc in their history and architecture. She gave a detailed account of the Ahom kings and the ritual for creating *Moidams* for departed royalty. Her office is currently involved in detailed documentation of the site especially with reference to its cultural authenticity and it is expected that the nomination dossier will be able to meet up the WHS standards.

3) Keibul Lamjao National Park(KNLP), Manipur

Mr. Arun RS, IFS and incharge of Keibul Lamjao National Park, Manipur gave a lucid presentation on KLNP and Loktak Lake which are known as the pride and lifeline for Manipur. He stated that it is the only home to the critically Endangered Sangai, Manipur Brow Antlered Deer/Dancing Deer (*Rucervus eldii eldii*) in the world. It also has a unique ecosystem of *Phumdi* (floating mats of soil and vegetation) and the largest area of Phumdi is in KLNP, which forms the natural habitat for Sangai. According to the recent Sangai census completed by KNLP in April 2016 there are 260 Sangai present in KNLP which is a good sign for the critically endangered species. It is an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) and also a RAMSAR site. People of Manipur are socially, economically, culturally and ecologically connected with Loktak Lake and KLNP and thus their community and cultural ideas and are intrinsically associated with Sangai and Keibul Lamjao. Therefore he justified the OUVs of KLNP in this manner. According to the Criteria V, VI, IX, X; KLNP has been included in the tentative list of World Heritage Sites under the mixed category.

4) Garo Hills, Meghalaya

Mr, Lam Shabong, OSD with Meghalaya Basin Development Authority stated that there are numerous natural and cultural assets in Meghalaya which can be included in the world heritage site list. Meghalaya constitutes 98 genera and 352 species, i.e. 27.08% of orchid flora in the world. Similarly 45 rare species, 6 endangered, 44 Endemic, 2 vulnerable, 1 critically endangered and 1 extinct species of butterflies have also been recorded from Meghalaya. In his detailed presentation he mentioned the superlative climatic conditions of Meghalaya, as it receives the highest rainfall in the areas of Southern Khasi Hills between Cherrapunjee and Mawsynram (average rainfall ranging between 11777 to 11873 mm per year) that can be represented as a rain sanctuary. Some of the longest limestone cave systems are present in Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills such as the Siju cave in Garo Hills which is the third longest limestone cave in South Asia. Garo Hills also has the highest density of elephants in India with more than 1700 wild elephants that are present in Nokrek National Park, Siju Wildlife Sanctuary and Balpakram National Park. The area also provides a natural habitat for the Western hoolock gibbon (*Hoolock hoolock*) which is well represented in the area. The living root bridges in the Khasi Hill dense sub-tropical rain forests are commonly found to form 1 or 2 storeys but in rare cases go upto 3 stratum formations at some locations. There were many challenges which were being faced in the documentation process of these cultural and natural heritage especially with the rate in which degradation and loss of such values were being observed in the modern rural and urban settings. The increased poverty-population nexus has resulted in environmental degradation and destruction which is a cause of concern. The complex milieu of land tenure systems, customary laws and governance models makes the task even more difficult to come to a semblance with respect to documentation and synthesis of information for inscription and also for maintaining the site's integrity in the long run. Yet, the Govt of Meghalaya firmly believes that the process of UNESCO nomination must be carried out and the convention will provide with a greater opportunity to showcase the uniqueness of the state. At the same time

it will provide options of enhanced ecotourism, something which the state economy was keen to bank on for earning revenue and also provide international technical and financial support towards management and better conservation of such sites.

Questions

Ms. Monisha Behal :When it comes to Meghalaya it is a matrilineal society. But the *dorbars* still are not inclusive, as women are not allowed to be a part of it. Why it is that women are not fully included in natural resource management and conservation?

Answer: Yes, this situation is prevalent even in the current times in Meghalaya, but since the property remains with the women so men preferably take acceptable decisions. However measures are being taken to include women in the decision making process and also in the conservation process.

5) Manas Wildlife Sanctuary

Mr. H.K Sharma, Field Director of Manas Tiger Project stated that Manas is the only Protected Area in India which has been accorded with five different national and international designations (Biosphere Reserve, Tiger Reserve, IBA, WHS, National Park, Elephant Reserve) of conservation significance. In 1985 it was recognized as a world Heritage Site and in 1990 as a national park. In 1992 it was declared as a world heritage site in danger while in 2011 it was removed from the list due to concentrated efforts to revive and regain the OUVs of the site. Mr. Sharma stated that insurgency has decreased compared to earlier times and on the other hand tourism has increased to a great extent. But sometimes media play a negative role in depicting Manas as an unsafe tourist destination.

Questions

Mr. Praveen Singh: MNP is a world heritage site but has steps been taken for up-gradation of Manas Tiger Reserve into a world heritage site? Since Manas is a trans-boundary Protected Area, is there a formal agreement management for protection between the two countries?

Response : The process for extending the property to cover the Manas National Park / TR is a tedious one as it involves minor boundary modifications of the property as per Operational Guidelines of the WHC. At the same time, the WHC has also recommend three stage extension of the property which includes the nomination of Royal Manas National Park , Bhutan and Manas RF, India to become part of the expanded property. The Park authorities on both sides of the border meet regularly for coordination and exchange of information, although a formal process for management of the property as a trans-boundary Protected Areas is still awaited.

6) Majuli, Assam

Mr. Umananda Doley, ACS Joint Secretary, Cultural Affairs and Managing Director, Assam State Film(Finance & Development) Corporation gave a presentation on Majuli Cultural Landscape which is on India's tentative list since 2004. The largest river island in the world has a historical cultural legacy that is integral and still living in the norms of the Assamese society. He gave the genesis of the world heritage proposal and the problems faced therein, as the nomination dossier was prepared and updated by ASI till 2012. The technical error in preparing the nomination dossier based on 2008 Operational guidelines of the WHC led to a referral and the dossier was sent back to Assam for further corrections. Since then, Assam Govt has now taken over the task for preparation of the nomination dossier and have also involved renowned academician Dr Jyoti Hosagrahar from Columbia University.

Panel Discussion

The topic of the Panel Discussion was -Taking World Heritage to the Commons.

Discussant: Dr. Shiela Bora-formerly: Coordinator, Centre for Tourism Management &Prof. Dept. of History, Dibrugarh University, Assam.

She led the panel discussion and gave an elaborate presentation on the importance of 'heritage' to the people of northeast India. She stated that it is a legacy that has been left to us and hence it depends on people as to how they preserve it with a sense of pride and responsibility. It totally depends on the 'common people' as how we pass this legacy to our future. A World Heritage site is not an asset of government or some agency. It is a site that belongs to everyone. She particularly focused on northeast India as a hub of rich biodiversity and intangible cultural heritage. It is a prism of indigenous knowledge. Here the relation between nature and human is based on traditional Ecological knowledge and customary laws and traditions. She reiterated that in current times, our cultural and natural heritage needs urgent attention and conservation because of its lost importance and lack of awareness among the younger generation. It is only through a process of conservation that the future generation can be made aware of our traditional values. The second part of her presentation focused on Sustainable tourism as it is only possible at places of cultural and natural heritage sites that are maintained and managed by the local community and that they feel a sense of pride in doing this. Citing Assam as a special example she said that the intangible forms of Art like folk music, dance, mask making etc are still alive in areas such as Majuli island. Pertaining to the current insensitive development approach of the modern era she firmly emphasized that conservation of heritage is only possible with the help of the common man. This will also prevent any outsiders from taking control over the rich traditional techniques and resources. The pressure to the western culture and technology would result in losing our rich roots of agriculture, forests, cooking and identity. The wealth of knowledge and skills available in this domain needs to be documented and brought to the notice of the authorities.

Lastly, she talked about the means of bringing heritage to the common people. All forms of media—print, visual arts, performing arts, television, radio and internet can help in exhibiting and building some community appreciation of heritage. Most importantly local administration and universities can serve among the potential resources in this matter. She also talked about the need of pressure groups that would promote cultural awareness in their area through publications, CDs or DVDs, workshops, film shows, festivals and seminars by involving people in the revival and celebration of their cultural heritage through dissemination of information. She also urged all of us to think upon the gender disparity that exists when it comes to the benefit sharing from biological and cultural resources.

Discussant: Ms Amrita Baruah, Student, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati

She believed World heritage sites should not only open more conservation opportunities but also it should pave path for social benefits like recognition, rewards etc for the local communities. The communities should be able to associate themselves with the heritage site.

Discussant: Ms Laetitia Syiemiong, IFS DCF, Govt of Meghalaya

She highlighted the need for research initiatives in universities in the field of heritage conservation and to customize training and academic programs around it.

Discussant: Ms. Shibani Choudhry, Film maker

According to her, common people should be the major stakeholder in managing their biological and cultural resources.

Discussant: Mr. Dhruba Jyoti Das – Green Hub fellow

He believed video documentation is an important tool for assimilating cultural practices and also disseminating it to the larger platform. He gave examples from his own experience of working and documenting in a Protected Area.

Discussant: Mr. Anoko Mega– Green Hub fellow

He appreciated the entire session as it exposed him to a new horizon of the process of selection of a world heritage site. He said he never experienced any session of this sort.

Discussant: Mr Sanjeev Shankar, Meghalaya

He highlighted the plight of unplanned development that has threatened the survival of living roots bridges in Meghalaya and urged the civil society to come up with some concrete actions on the ground that would be more than words and discussions held in closed door meetings.

Discussant: Mr. Praveen Singh, Wildlife filmmaker

Green hub has provided a platform for budding film makers to record their local biodiversity. He stated visual documentation is an important medium for knowing about nature.

Discussant: Mr. Krishnendu Bose- Filmmaker

He appreciated the initiative taken by UNESCO C2C and Green Hub, and deliberated the importance of documentaries as a powerful medium for creating awareness and bringing conservation to the commons.

Ms Rita Banerji, Wildlife Filmmaker and Director of Dusty Foot Foundation appreciated the entire session for being extremely informative and she thanked UNESCO C2C for being a part of this three day workshop. The session was concluded by the vote of thanks presented by Ms. Jyoti Negi, UNESCO C2C, Wildlife Institute of India.

Media coverage

News Channel: [Rajya Sabha TV](#)

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOZ15C3E44g>



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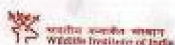
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UNESCO HERITAGE SITES IN NORTHEAST INDIA

May 14, 2016

Tezpur, Assam

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Photogallery



Picture 1. Session overview by Dr. Sonali Ghosh, IFS, Scientist – F, UNESCO C2C



Picture 2. Dr. Radhe Yampi, DRO/ Nodal Officer giving presentation on Apatani Cultural Landscape.



Picture 3. Keynote Address by Mr. A.K. Johari, IFS Addl. PCCF and Member Secretary, ASBB



Picture 4. Open Panel discussion



Picture 5. Lunch and venue overview

Picture 6. First Batch of Green Hub Fellows after graduation

Annexure I

Programme Poster



Annexure II

UNESCO Category 2 Centre on World Natural Heritage Management and Training for Asia and the Pacific Region, Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun



14th May, 2015

Venue: Green Hub, Jonak, Tezpur Assam

PROGRAMME

Saturday, 14 th May 2016	
0900 – 0930 h	Registration
INAUGURAL SESSION	
9.30-9.45 hrs	Welcome and felicitations
9.45- 10.00 hrs	Presentation by Dr Sonali Ghosh, IFS UNESCO C2C - Wildlife Institute of India on 'World Heritage sites- process and nomination'
10.00-11.00 hrs	<p><u>Session on Opportunities and challenges to document the OUVs of world heritage sites in Northeast India</u></p> <p>Presentation by Site representatives (Kaziranga, Manas, Khangchendzonga, Majuli, Apatani Cultural Landscape, Thembang village, Moidams, Keibul Lamjao, Garo Hills, Namdapha)</p>
11.00 – 11.15hrs	Question & Answers session
11.15--11.30 hrs	Address by Chief Guest <i>Mr. A.K. Johari</i> , IFS Addl PCCF & Member Secretary, Assam State Biodiversity Board, Govt of Assam
11.30 – 11.45 hrs	Tea Break
11.45 – 13.30 hrs	<p>Panel Discussion on “Taking world heritage to the commons”</p> <p>Chair: Question & Answers Concluding Remarks by Chair Vote of Thanks by Ms. Jyoti Negi, UNESCO C2C-WII</p>
13.30 – 14.30 hrs	Lunch and Departure