

FOSTERING COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE SHARING¹

Across the world indigenous peoples and local communities have conserved natural ecosystems for cultural, religious, political and livelihood purposes. Increasingly, such areas are being declared formally as ‘[Community Conserved Areas \(CCAs\)](#)’ with specific rules being formulated by communities for their governance and management. [Since the late 1990s, Kalpavriksh has been working with local communities across India to facilitate and support their conservation efforts through the declaration and management of CCAs.](#) As a founding member and the India co-ordinator of the [ICCA Consortium](#), we also network with organizations and individuals involved with CCAs at the global, international, national and local levels.

One of our major engagements has been in the state of Nagaland, where, in partnership with local organisations, we focus on research, documentation, advocacy, facilitating visibility and awareness about CCAs, promoting dialogues on CCAs and engaging with CCAs on ground to provide any need-based assistance. [With over 432 CCAs](#), Nagaland has emerged at the forefront of a movement to recognise, preserve and strengthen indigenous people and local community-led conservation. Nagaland assumes a special position in the Indian sub-continent due to its biogeographic location, a rich assemblage of flora, fauna, and traditional knowledge, as well as its socio-cultural history. The rich biodiversity and abundant forest cover of the state is, however, threatened by several factors including deforestation, degradation of forest resources, change in land-use patterns, hunting and illegal trade of wild flora and fauna.

Despite challenges, Nagaland's community conservation can serve as a model for local communities nationwide seeking to formalize long-standing conservation practices in their traditional habitats. This came to the fore during the second author’s visit to Ladakh in June 2024, facilitated by the [Snow Leopard Conservancy - India \(SLC\)](#), for a capacity building programme on ‘Community-led and rights based conservation approaches’. During these workshops, local community participants expressed a desire to understand various dimensions of declaring natural ecosystems under their customary control/ occupation as ‘CCAs’. This inspired us to facilitate a community exchange visit to Nagaland in November 2024. Village representatives from three Ladakhi villages - ‘Tar’, ‘Saspoche’ and ‘Nyaraks’, and members from SLC and Kalpavriksh participated in the exchange. The purpose of the visit was to shed light on the process of declaring CCAs, the formulation of rules and guidelines for activities

¹ This report has been prepared by Neema Pathak Broome and Esha Joshi from the Conservation and Livelihoods Team at Kalpavriksh (21/03/2025).

within a CCA and the management of a CCA. The participants were a good mix of village elders, women, youth and researchers from SLC.

In the first part of our journey, we traversed through the rich landscapes of Eastern Nagaland during which we were hosted by the team from [LEMSACHENLOK](#), a community based organisation. Along with visits to CCAs in Longleng and Noklak districts, the Ladakhi group participated in a workshop of nearly 50 CCAs from various eastern districts of Nagaland, hosted by Choklangan village. One of the objectives of the workshop was to discuss how community-based conservation could further the Sustainable Development Goals. The villagers of Choklangan district furthered this in letter and spirit. Every item utilised was sourced and made in the village, guests were put up in local homes and every item was made from local bamboo ensuring zero plastic use. All of this also generated significant revenue for the village economy. Overall, it was a unique opportunity to understand the diversity of approaches employed by various communities in championing biodiversity conservation through CCAs. For instance, several Naga communities discussed the efficacy of a blanket prohibition on hunting within the boundaries of the CCA as opposed to a seasonal prohibition, as well as the advantages and limitations of both traditional jhum and modern terrace farming. Valuable discussions also took place on issues related to community livelihoods, changing land use patterns, the role of youth, women and elders in CCA governance, and management and biodiversity conservation potential of CCAs.

The Ladakhis also gained insights into how Choklangan village had used an integrated farming system combining Jhum and terrace farming; how their cultural activities are linked to the lived reality of the people; their water conservation efforts; their conservation of the habitat of Hoolock Gibbons, and their quest to integrate traditional knowledge and modern education in the village school run by the local youth. Many of these activities are led by the youth and women and are supported by LEMSACHENLOK.

The group from Ladakh in turn, shared the stories of their struggle with rapid and unregulated commercialisation, infrastructure development and tourism. It shed light on how these, as yet nascent, threats in Nagaland have the potential to disrupt local ecology, socio-cultural bonds and livelihoods.

The second leg of the trip, planned by our partners at [Kenono Foundation](#), included visits to two of the oldest formally declared CCAs in the state, Sendenyu and Khonoma,. In Sendenyu, a hike through the community reserve allowed the participants to understand, in depth, the governance and management mechanism of the CCA, and learn about various initiatives for livelihood generation, including community enterprises such as coffee cultivation and trade, and initiatives for creating awareness about local biodiversity among the local children.

Khonoma, as an iconic CCA in the state and consequently a hub for eco-tourism in the state, demonstrated effective methods for equitable tourism practices, including an impartial homestay booking system facilitated by village institutions rather than individuals, waste disposal techniques and increasing livelihoods options through involvement of locals as tour operators, tour guides and birdwatchers.

A pit-stop at the Hornbill Festival in Kisama village in Kohima between these two visits, proved fruitful in providing a macro-level view of Naga culture, food systems, languages, modern life and conservation initiatives. The Ladakhis also met with the office-bearers of the Nagaland Community Conserved Areas Forum (NCCAF), to deliberate on challenges faced by community led conservation initiatives, particularly, in light of a lack of state policy to support CCAs, and lack of consistent and regular legal, regulatory, advisory and financial support.. They also discussed how various protected area categories under the Wild Life Protection Act of India may not be the appropriate legal framework to support CCAs in the state. In light of Ladakh's demand for protections under the VI Schedule of the Constitution, the special Constitutional status of Nagaland under article 371A and its implications vis-a-vis conservation was also deliberated upon.

The topography, culture and legal protections available to Ladakh and Nagaland are starkly different. Yet, the connection to nature and the struggle to amalgamate or balance traditional wisdom and ways of life with the pressures of commercialisation and modernity unite them. While Nagaland has done it for the past few decades, the villages in Ladakh are just beginning the process of declaring their community commons as CCAs to protect them from over exploitation, bio-cultural diversity, address water scarcity and as a climate change adaptation mechanism. Tar village has become the first village in Ladakh to declare a CCA in November 2024.

Thus, the village communities in both the states, like in other parts of India, are contributing towards achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals and various Targets under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). In particular they are contributing towards achieving [Target 3](#), which calls for the effective conservation and management of 30% of all terrestrial, inland water, marine and coastal areas by 2030. Significantly, the Target stresses on recognising and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities especially, over areas traditionally occupied by them.

The state governments of Ladakh and Nagaland have no official policy on CCAs nor have they officially recognised CCAs and the role they play in the fulfilment of conservation goals such as Target 3. As such, customary commons, in general, and CCAs, in particular, in both the states face serious threats. Thus, the exchange visit was significant not only for knowledge sharing about various mechanisms for management and governance of CCAs, but also to identify key threats to community-led conservation in both the states. These included the lack of individual and community titles over land surrounding Ladakhi villages, the decreased autonomy in the absence of protections such as those provided through the Sixth Schedule and Article 371A of the Constitution of India and, the dangers of unregulated tourism and exploitation of natural resources. The trip also enabled both the communities to understand from each other various mechanisms they had employed to counter the threats and address issues faced by the communities



A community fishery pond in Longleng District, Nagaland.



The team from Ladakh attended the 'A Camaraderie of Network of Eastern Nagaland Community Conserved Areas' Event organised at Choklangan village.



A community interaction on farming techniques at the Choklangan Village CCA.



The group poses outside Sedenyu Community Biodiversity and Wildlife Reserve.



Learning about Naga culture at the Hornbill Festival.



Discussing sustainable tourism and community-led management of CCAs with community leaders in Khonoma.
