Press Release from the Forest and Environment Department, Mangan District

World Bank Team Visits Lum and Hee Gyathang in Dzongu as Part of Sikkim INSPIRES Mid-Term Review

Dzongu, North Sikkim, 19 November: A team from the World Bank, along with the Programme Management Unit (PMU) of Sikkim INSPIRES and the Directorate of Ecotourism (DET), Forest & Environment Department, is visiting Lum and Hee Gyathang villages in Dzongu from 19 to 21 November 2026 as part of the Mid-Term Review of the World Bank-supported Sikkim INSPIRES Programme.

The delegation includes Ms. Verena Phipp, Task Team Leader (TTL), World Bank, and her team, along with Ms. Rohini Pradhan, Programme Director, Sikkim INSPIRES, the PMU team and representatives of the Directorate of Ecotourism.

The visit aims to review the progress of the programme, engage with local communities and explore opportunities for developing ecotourism and creating sustainable livelihood opportunities for the people of Dzongu.

The visit began with a traditional welcome by the villagers at Lum, followed by interactions with the Village Panchayat and community members. The team also interacted with Shri Tshering Gyatso, popularly known as the ‘Millet Man’, on traditional food, wellness practices and medicinal plants, and with the Bongthings (traditional shamans) to learn about the rich cultural traditions and indigenous knowledge of the Lepcha community.

The team was briefed on ecotourism initiatives and ongoing trail development efforts in the area under the Sikkim INSPIRES Programme, including the **Lum–Sakyong trekking route**, which offers opportunities to experience Dzongu's diverse natural landscapes, from its lower reaches to the high-altitude mountain terrain.

The team also experienced the natural beauty of Dzongu, including panoramic views of the Teesta River and the surrounding mountains.

The visit provides an opportunity to understand the needs and aspirations of local communities and explore how ecotourism can create new income opportunities while protecting Dzongu’s rich natural environment and cultural heritage. The initiative aims to promote responsible tourism that benefits local people, strengthens community participation and encourages them to take an active role in conserving their surroundings.