Press Release from the Forest and Environment Department, Mangan District.

World Bank Mid-Term Review Continues in Hee Gyathang, Dzongu, Highlighting Community-led Ecotourism and Biodiversity Conservation

Hee Gyathang, Dzongu, North Sikkim , 20 November: The second day of the World Bank Mid-Term Review (MTR) field visit under the Sikkim INSPIRES Programme focused on community-led ecotourism, preservation of Lepcha cultural heritage, traditional livelihoods and biodiversity conservation in Hee Gyathang, Dzongu.

The day began with a visit to Tashi Choeling Gumpa, where the team was introduced to the monastery and its cultural and spiritual significance to the Lepcha community.

The team subsequently visited the Sudur Knowledge Sharing Centre, where local community members and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) showcased traditional weaving practices, particularly the use of locally available nettle fibre to produce yarn, fabrics and traditional products. The interaction highlighted the potential of nettle weaving as a unique cultural and livelihood experience for visitors, while promoting indigenous skills, local entrepreneurship and community-based ecotourism.

An important part of the day's programme was the visit to Tungkyong Dho, a community-protected biodiversity site. The team was briefed on the community's conservation efforts, the ecological significance of the area and its potential for nature-based ecotourism. The delegation was also apprised of key State Government initiatives, including **Mero Rukh Mero Santati (MRMS)**, which promotes tree plantation in the name of newborn children, and **Mero Bato Mero Bot (MBMB)**, which encourages roadside plantations and green corridors. The team was further briefed on the **Sikkim Shishu Samriddhi Yojana (SSSY)**, under which eligible children receive a green fixed deposit of ₹10,800. Bank passbooks were distributed to beneficiaries under the initiative.

The visit provided an opportunity for the team to interact with local residents and understand how community participation, traditional knowledge and conservation initiatives can be integrated with ecotourism development. The programme highlighted the potential of Hee Gyathang to promote responsible tourism while ensuring that local communities remain at the centre of tourism-related opportunities and benefits.

The World Bank MTR team is undertaking field interactions to review the progress of activities under the Sikkim INSPIRES Programme, implemented by the Government of Sikkim through the Project Management Unit (PMU), in coordination with the Directorate of Ecotourism (DET) and other concerned stakeholders.

The visit reaffirmed the importance of a community-centred approach to ecotourism, where conservation of natural and cultural heritage goes hand in hand with sustainable livelihoods and local economic development.

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