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NEHIR NGO Field Visit:

This past week, we had the incredible opportunity to journey into the heart of the Almora mountain region with NEHIR NGO, an organization deeply committed to revitalizing and empowering rural communities.



The Vision of NEHIR

NEHIR operates on a powerful, frugal innovation model aimed at building market opportunities and combating water scarcity in rural mountain villages in Almora. Their current strategy revolves around the plantation of mulberry trees, which have immense potential to yield silk, wine, tea, livestock fodder, and other value-added products.

The Crisis of Water Scarcity

One of the most pervasive challenges in Almora is water scarcity. Springs and groundwater are insufficient, and deforestation has only worsened water retention. A big contributor to the agricultural decline is the prevalence of pine trees in the area. The pine needles add to the threat of forest fires and soil degradation. Villages are battling forest fires and pollution, further complicating access to clean water.

Interventions by NEHIR and the local communities include:

- Cleaning and creating wells for better water management
- Building **trenches** to encourage groundwater recharge

- Promoting **forestation** to retain soil moisture



Mulberries Matter!

Mulberries are more than just plants—they are lifelines in Almora! Their drought resilience and soil conservation properties make them ideal for the region. Additionally, mulberries offer a range of economic benefits:

- Leaves for **sericulture** (silk production)
- Fruits processed into **jams, teas, and wines**
- **Fodder** for livestock, improving health and productivity

Voices from the Villages

We visited four distinct villages, each with its own story of resilience but also unique hurdles to overcome.

Village 1 aspires to market its local products but struggles with labor shortages, packaging costs, water contamination, pests, and lack of sustainable raw materials. Despite owning land, plots are fragmented and difficult to manage.



Village 2 wants to expand its woven goods to broader markets but faces uphill battles—literally. With steep roads and no established transportation, they remain isolated. They rely on imported materials, although NEHIR may soon provide silk to encourage local production.





Village 3 is eager to foster **youth empowerment** and revive local commerce but is plagued by communication breakdowns with area representatives, water contamination, barren lands, and aging demographics. NEHIR's turmeric and ginger plantations offer hope, but infrastructure gaps remain—especially the lack of a nearby school and healthcare.





Village 4 dreams of revitalization. Although the community is willing to contribute, many have migrated in search of opportunity, leaving behind an aging population. Pest infestations and geographic isolation (downhill and far from main roads) worsen their situation



Reflection

This field trip was not just an observational journey—it was a deep learning experience. It taught us that the challenges in Almora are not merely technical, but social, economic, and infrastructural. Empowerment, we learned, means addressing water, roads, communication, and market access hand in hand. NEHIR's work reminds us that sustainable change takes root only when innovation respects local knowledge and builds long-term trust with communities.

As we continue to engage with these issues, we're reminded of the power of small, context-aware interventions that ripple into long-lasting impact.