

Almora Group – June Newsletter

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Immersing in India: Culture, Community, and Contrasts

Over the past month, we had the opportunity to see more of India. We headed west into Rajasthan, where we visited Jaipur and Agra, then made our way south to Mumbai and Goa. The geographic and cultural diversity we encountered was striking. From the arid deserts and historic forts of the west to the bustling urban sprawl of Mumbai and the relaxed coastal atmosphere of Goa, each region offered a valuable, distinct perspective and rhythm of life.

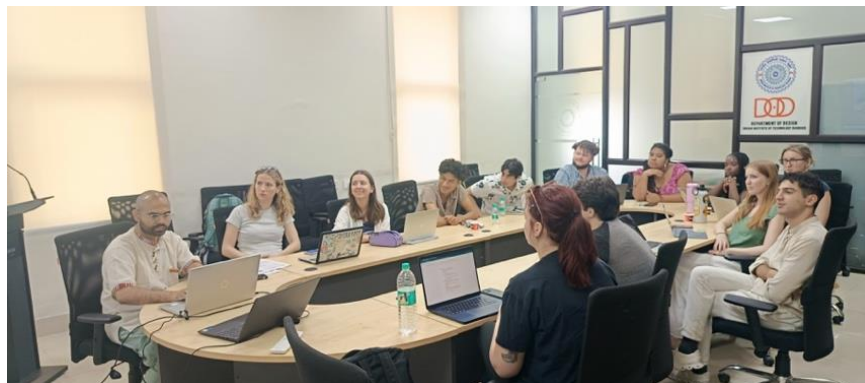


Returning to the quiet, hilly villages of the north, the contrast became even more apparent. Life moves slowly here, and the challenges such as water access, youth migration, and limited infrastructure feel more deeply rooted. Experiencing this diversity has deepened our understanding of the complexities of working in India, there is no universal solution. Each region presents unique needs, opportunities, and cultural contexts. Engaging with this diversity has not only broadened our perspective but highlighted the importance of locally grounded approaches in any development work.



Working Toward Policy: Supporting Sustainable Change

As a part of our fieldwork in Almora, we have been drafting a policy proposal and vision statement that could help shape the next phase of NEHIR's work. Our goal is to build a roadmap that connects grassroots innovation with institutional support, especially from state-level bodies like the Sericulture Department, whom we've met with recently. The plan is grounded in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 6 and 8, focusing on clean water access and sustainable employment through rural agriculture.



A major focus has been addressing the lack of awareness around the benefits of mulberry farming. Despite its potential, scaling sericulture in this region faces serious barriers: water scarcity, rocky terrain, land fragmentation, and youth migration. Even successful crops often lack access to markets that can turn raw material into income.

To address this, we're combining technical research with community outreach, investigating low-cost, frugal development technologies to support cocoon cultivation and silk harvesting, analyzing governance gaps hindering economic growth, and exploring partnerships with NGOs near Dehradun who might offer better market access. We're also

developing a website for NEHIR to promote its ongoing projects and amplify its impact. The site will serve as a platform for education and advocacy, while also showcasing local women's handicrafts for sale, helping to empower artisans and generate sustainable income.

Integrating farmers more directly into this ecosystem remains essential, not just to improve livelihoods, but to foster long-term sustainability that doesn't rely solely on external intervention, grounded in local knowledge and ownership.



Looking Ahead

The conditions here make long-term impact difficult, especially with our short amount of time. With limited water, ongoing out-migration, and systems still slow to support new ideas, sustaining change is a real challenge. As we move into the next phase of our work, our focus is on practical integration: connecting farmers to markets, developing education plans centred around the benefits of mulberries, and translating our experience into policy recommendations. Progress is incremental, but each piece contributes to a larger structure that we hope will last.

What's been most rewarding is working closely with village leaders, women's groups, and politicians not just to collect data, but to listen. We've come to understand that economic development isn't just about infrastructure or programs, it's about trust, representation, and shaping change that reflects the diverse realities of rural life. This experience has been a reminder that real change doesn't come from quick fixes, but from community-led strategies, focusing on people first.