



Routes TO ROOTS

NEWSLETTER

April – June 2026
Vol. I No. 1

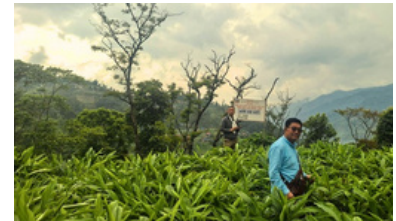
Rejuvenation of Large Cardamom

The case for Cardamom Rejuvenation in Sikkim – to reclaim our leadership in quality and production of Sikkim's Large Cardamom

For 25 years, the Ecotourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim (ECOSS) has been dedicated to conservation and sustainable development in the region. We are now turning our focus toward a critical issue: the serious decline of Large Cardamom production in Sikkim. It is not only a cash crop but an important biodiversity element and a huge agro-forestry resource. Large Cardamom is endemic to Sikkim and already we possess the geographical indicator for this produce.

While many institutions are currently working on cardamom revival, most initiatives follow a traditional top-down model. ECOSS intends to pivot this strategy by adopting a bottom-up approach, centering rejuvenation efforts on the lived experiences and farm level innovations of the farmers themselves. We believe the key to a sustainable solution lies in "scientific parsing" the indigenous knowledge and practical adaptations already developed by local growers. We have already begun this journey.

ECOSS is uniquely positioned for this work. By collaborating with a pool of scientists who are often constrained by institutional formalities, we can act as a flexible bridge, integrating rigorous science with local wisdom. Our goal is to develop an actionable protocol that can eventually be scaled to support farmers within Sikkim and in other states facing similar challenges.



The Cardamom Chronicles (milestone activity)



- Phase 1
Groundwork**
1. Stakeholder consultation
 2. Grassroot farmer meet

- Phase 2
Science**
1. Soil sample collection & Field observation
 2. Establishment of pilot areas

- Phase 3
Market**
1. Understanding markets for Large cardamom
 2. Meeting the spices dealer

- Phase 4
Learning**
1. Cross border knowledge sharing (Nepal)
 2. Research & experiments

Collaboration with Maple Orgtech Ltd.

Mr. P.D. Rai, Chairman, ECOSS and staff had a meeting with Ms. Asit Das, Head of Maple Orgtech Ltd., and Mr. Dawa Sherpa, Area Manager for Sikkim to discuss various aspects of large cardamom farming in Sikkim and explore opportunities for collaboration. The discussion focused on improving cultivation practices and supporting farmers through sustainable agricultural solutions.

Maple Orgtech Ltd. expressed its interest in signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with ECOSS and proposed conducting training programmes on its products and technologies for the benefit of farmers and other stakeholders.

Later Mr. Rai spoke with Mr. Madan Mohanka who is the Chairman of the Maple Group and he fully endorsed the idea. They will provide all the training, package of practices and inputs free of cost to our farmer community.

Youth engagement

Rateychu Pulse

On 22 March 2026, ECOSS conducted a scientific assessment of the Rateychu pulse, Gangtok's primary drinking water source, with 18 science students. The field study evaluated water quality and quantity while providing hands-on scientific training. Guided by experts, participants measured stream flow, collected water samples, and observed ecological changes along the altitudinal gradient. The assessment found the source water to be clear and of high natural purity, with a discharge of approximately 49,000 litres per second, highlighting the importance of conserving this critical Himalayan water source.

Debriefing session:

8th April 2026: Debriefing session and certificates distribution marking the successful completion of the Rateychu Pulse Program, conducted on 22nd March 2026 "World Water Day"

Celebrating participants learning field experience, awareness about Water issues and commitment to water conservation.

The Himalayan Cleanup

On 5th June 2026, ECOSS volunteers participated in the Himalayan Clean up at Chorten, Deorali, Gangtok



From the editor's desk:

Why a Newsletter? Why Now?

At one level, these are straightforward questions. Newsletters exist to keep stakeholders informed — and in this case, to keep you connected to ECOSS and everything we are doing.

But there is a deeper reason. ECOSS is on a renewal journey, one underpinned by reimagination and the hard, exciting work of turning that reimagined vision into reality. At a moment like this, it feels vital to keep our members and the wider community not just informed, but genuinely involved — because the best ideas and energy will come from all of you. Which brings us to why now. A new financial year has begun, and we have resolved to mark every quarter with a newsletter worthy of the season — a progress report, yes, but also a window into some of our most interesting engagements. Take our work with young people through ECOSS YORP, our Youth Outreach Programme. We are embarking more boldly than ever on bringing young minds, fresh ideas, and boundless energy into our work — and we want you to witness that journey as it unfolds.

There is much else to share. Read on, and if you are in Gangtok, come visit us at our newly renovated office. We would love to see you. You can also write to the editorial team — we are listening.

— The Editorial Team

Regional workshop on development of Buddhist Circuit through women-led rural tourism '6-7 May 2026'



Weaving a South Asian Buddhist Circuit: Tawang Hosts Regional Workshop on Women-Led Tourism

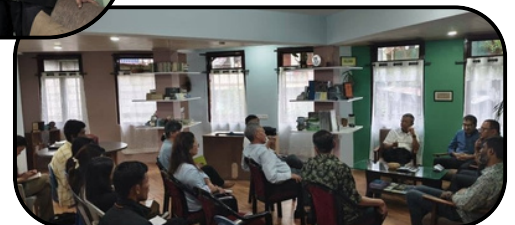
A two-day workshop in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, brought together delegates from Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka to advance an integrated South Asian Buddhist Circuit anchored in women-led rural tourism. Organised by Ambassador Veena Sikri (SWAN) and Ms. Fantry Mein Jaswal(IMI) in partnership with the Arunachal Pradesh government, the workshop was inaugurated by Deputy Chief Minister Shri Chowna Mein and Minister Smt. Dasanglu Pul, who spotlighted the proposed Tawang Initiative to deepen Buddhist tourism links across the region.

Building on conversations from the SWAN Conference in Bhutan, discussions ranged across ecotourism, cultural heritage, homestays, branding, and regional cooperation. The Sikkim delegation, led by Ms. Usha Lachungpa of ECOSS, presented the state's own Buddhist Circuit and cross-border tourism opportunities; Ms. Yangchen Lepcha spoke to community homestay initiatives, while Ms. Barsha Sharma shared her experience in women-led entrepreneurship.

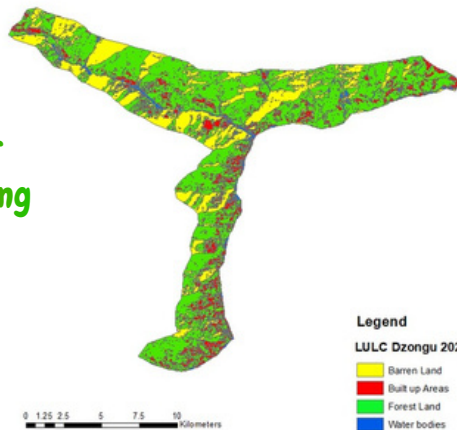
The workshop closed on a note of momentum, with Sri Lanka volunteering to host the next edition — a step toward a unified South Asian Buddhist tourism corridor, and a natural extension of ECOSS's continuing work in responsible tourism.

Ridgeline Reflections: A New Conversation Begins

On 12 June 2026, ECOSS launched its new talk series, Ridgeline Reflections, with an inspiring lecture by Dr. Vinish Kathuria. His talk explored the links between public policy and environmental challenges, drawing on research ranging from the conservation of Nainital Lake to air pollution and renewable energy. The session brought together ECOSS members, students, faculty from Sikkim University, Governing Board members, and Ambassador Chewang Topden, fostering meaningful dialogue between experts and young environmentalists. Held every two months, Ridgeline Reflections promises to be a vibrant platform for learning and exchange.



Working Together for Climate-Resilient Farming in Sikkim



The National Mission on Himalayan Studies (NMHS) project has continued its work in the border villages of Dzongu, North Sikkim, to support farmers, protect traditional farming systems, and improve livelihoods. The project focuses on combining local knowledge with scientific methods to help communities face the challenges of climate change.

During the past few months, the project team has worked closely with local farmers by organizing meetings, visiting villages and encouraging more people to join the farmers' cooperative.

The project conducted field surveys across villages, documenting climate change impacts, traditional farming practices, and local knowledge from over 120 households.

Research has been another important part of the project. A scientific study on the agroecology of Dzongu and the impact of climate change has been completed, along with a published article on the indigenous seed systems of the Lepcha community. At the same time, mapping of land use changes has shown that many agricultural fields are slowly becoming forest due to the decline in farming activities.

Team also develop the process of registering important local crop varieties under the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPV&FR) Authority.

Meet a Farmer: The Seed Guardian of Dzongu

In the peaceful village of Gnon –Sangdong, Dzongu, lives Mr. Chewang Lepcha, a farmer who has dedicated his life to protecting the traditional seeds of the Lepcha community. For many years, he has carefully collected, preserved, and shared indigenous crop



varieties that have been grown in the region for generations. His seed collection includes red paddy, maize, millets, buckwheat, beans, perilla, and several local vegetables, all stored using traditional methods such as bamboo baskets, jute bags, and metal containers.

Mr. Chewang believes that every seed carries the history, culture, and identity of the community. Before storing them, he carefully selects healthy seeds, dries them naturally, and protects them from moisture and pests. Farmers from nearby villages regularly visit him to exchange seeds through the traditional "Barter" system, where seeds are borrowed before sowing and returned after harvest. This practice has helped many families continue farming even after poor harvests or natural disasters while maintaining the purity of local seed varieties.

Through the NMHS project, Mr. Chewang's traditional seed conservation work is being strengthened by establishing a community seed bank.



The ECOSS team participated in the State Consultation on "Understanding the Emerging Development Issues and the Voluntary Sector Ecosystem," organized by Roots to Branches Foundation, Guwahati, on 21–22 May 2026 at Hotel Polaris, Gangtok. The consultation brought together development practitioners and organizations to discuss emerging challenges and opportunities in the sector, with a focus on education, community health, gender equality, child protection, ecology, and livelihoods. The event also provided valuable insights on strategic planning, fundraising, and strengthening engagement with the broader CSR and development ecosystem.

