



THE HABITATS TRUST

In collaboration with



CMS VATAVARAN

presents

Assam LiFE for Nature Summit

সহজ – জীবন বিধান
Sahaja – Jeevan Vidhanam

December 16 & 17, 2025 | Novotel Guwahati, Assam

REPORT



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Overview

The **Assam LiFE for Nature Summit** organised at Guwahati on December 16 & 17, 2025 by CMS VATAVARAN in collaboration with The Habitats Trust. This Summit was organised with support from by Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Government of India; UNEP India, UNWFP, IUCN #Natureforall and state partners: the Assam Pollution Control Board, Assam Agroforestry Development Board, Assam Science, Technology & Environment Council, Assam State Biodiversity Board, Assam Climate Change Management Society, and the Assam State Disaster Management Authority, the Brahmaputra Board, WWF India, Aaranyak, Care Luit, PHD Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Assam Skill University and the Guwahati Press Club.

Anchored in the principles of **Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment)**, the Summit created a multi-stakeholder platform to bridge policy intent, ground realities, and citizen action. Across five diverse yet interconnected sessions, the Summit foregrounded lived experiences from Assam's rivers, forests, wetlands, towns, and villages, while situating these within long-term development and conservation goals. This two day Summit brought together policymakers, civil society leaders, conservation practitioners, media professionals, youth, academics, and community representatives to collectively reflect on Assam's pathways towards regenerative, climate-resilient, and nature-positive development.





Key themes emerging from the Summit

1. Nature and People Are Inseparable in Assam

Across all sessions, a central message emerged: nature, livelihoods, culture, and wellbeing in Assam are deeply interconnected. Rivers, wetlands, forests, and biodiversity are not only ecological assets but also the foundation of livelihoods, identity, and resilience.

Speakers repeatedly emphasised that conservation and development cannot be pursued in silos. Floods, erosion, wildlife interactions, and livelihood insecurity were discussed not as isolated issues, but as interlinked outcomes of climate change, land-use decisions, and governance choices.

2. Climate Change as a Lived Reality

From leadership dialogues to citizen interactions, participants consistently highlighted that climate change in Assam is no longer episodic but cumulative and structural.

Examples shared included:

- Recurrent flooding and riverbank erosion along the Brahmaputra and its tributaries
- Shrinking recovery time for communities between climate shocks
- Loss of agricultural land, housing, and local livelihoods

The Summit underscored the need to move beyond emergency responses towards long-term adaptation strategies, including wetland restoration, nature-based solutions, improved planning, and community preparedness.



3. Human–Wildlife Coexistence and Conservation Challenges

Discussions across sessions highlighted the realities of living alongside wildlife in forest fringe landscapes such as Kaziranga, Manas, and other protected areas.

Community voices and practitioner experiences revealed:

- Everyday coexistence practices that often go unrecognised
- Economic and emotional costs borne by local communities
- Gaps in communication and consultation around conservation actions

The Summit reaffirmed that effective conservation requires trust, participation, and recognition of communities as stewards and partners, rather than viewing them solely as beneficiaries or sources of conflict.

4. Governance, Trust, and Participation

A recurring insight across the High-Level Roundtable, Torch the Town Hall, and Media Roundtable was the centrality of trust.

Participants and panelists emphasised that:

- Policies and programmes are most effective when communities are engaged early
- Lack of communication can undermine even well-intentioned interventions
- Participatory governance and grievance redressal are critical

The Summit highlighted the importance of continuous dialogue platforms that allow citizen voices to inform policy design and implementation.

5. Role of Media in Shaping Environmental Narratives

The Media Roundtable brought attention to how narratives influence public understanding and policy responses.

Key reflections included:

- Tendency towards event-driven, conflict-focused reporting
- Ethical and time pressures faced by journalists
- Strength of Assam's regional and vernacular media in contextual reporting

Speakers emphasised the need for responsible, contextual, and solutions-oriented journalism, supported by stronger interfaces between media, experts, and institutions.

6. Youth as Present-Day Actors

Youth participation was a strong and visible thread throughout the Summit. Students and young professionals raised questions around climate anxiety, livelihoods, migration, and meaningful participation.

Across sessions, speakers stressed that:

- Youth are not future stakeholders but current change-makers
- Education, skills, and employment must align with green and nature-based sectors
- Youth leadership should be supported beyond awareness campaigns

7. Mission LiFE: From Awareness to Action

Mission LiFE served as a unifying framework across discussions. While awareness around environmental issues is growing, participants repeatedly called for clear, locally relevant pathways for action.

The Summit emphasised that Mission LiFE must:

- Translate into everyday practices linked to local realities
- Be supported by institutions, incentives, and partnerships
- Recognise and amplify existing community actions

Summit Takeaways

1. People-centred approaches are essential for climate resilience and conservation success.
2. Climate change in Assam demands long-term, nature-based, and inclusive solutions, not only emergency responses.
3. Communities living closest to nature are also its strongest stewards and must be central to decision-making.
4. Trust, transparency, and participation are as important as technical interventions.
5. Media plays a critical role in shaping narratives and must be supported to report responsibly and contextually.
6. Youth engagement must move from tokenism to leadership, skills, and livelihoods.
7. Mission LiFE provides a powerful framework to connect policy, community action, and individual behaviour.

The Assam LiFE for Nature Summit reaffirmed that Assam's journey towards a regenerative and climate-resilient future must be rooted in its people, landscapes, and lived experiences. By bringing diverse voices into sustained dialogue, the Summit strengthened a shared vision where nature protection, human wellbeing, and development goals advance together.

The proceedings underscored that the Summit is not an endpoint, but a catalyst—for partnerships, learning, and action that continue beyond the event and contribute meaningfully to Assam's long-term vision.





Session Proceedings

1. Inaugural

Assam LiFE for Nature Summit | Day 1

The inaugural session of the Assam LiFE for Nature Summit set a strong, values-driven foundation for the two-day dialogue. Speakers underscored Assam’s unique ecological identity, the urgency of climate action, and the need to move beyond extractive development towards regenerative, people-centred pathways aligned with Mission LiFE.

Mr. Sabyasachi Bharti, Deputy Director, CMSVATAVARAN

Mr. Bharti welcomed participants and positioned the Summit as a platform for **meaningful convergence**—bringing together government, civil society, media, youth, and practitioners.

“This Summit is about dialogue that leads to action—where policy, people, and practice meet.”

He acknowledged the partnership with The Habitats Trust and the support of MoEFCC, UNEP, UNWFP, and IUCN, noting that the Summit reflects a growing collective commitment to nature-positive development in Assam.



Dr. Vasanti Rao, Director General, CMS

Dr. Rao outlined the **purpose, uniqueness, and design** of the Summit, highlighting Assam’s lived experience of coexistence with nature and communities at the frontline of climate impacts.

“Assam does not need imported solutions—it already holds living examples of resilience, coexistence, and regeneration.”

She emphasised that the Summit goes beyond discussion, aiming to generate **actionable policy insights** and a **state-level White Paper** rooted in grassroots realities, leadership dialogue, and youth engagement.



Mr. Anup Bokkasa, Lead – Impact & Strategy, The Habitats Trust

Mr. Bokkasa stressed that ecological integrity underpins long-term economic stability and praised Assam’s progressive policy steps.

“There can be no enduring economy without ecology at its foundation.”

He highlighted Assam’s leadership in green budgeting, climate planning, and wildlife conservation, expressing confidence in the state’s potential to lead nationally and globally.





Shri Anurag Singh, IFS, Member Secretary, Assam State Biodiversity Board

Mr. Singh spoke about Assam’s exceptional biodiversity and the role of communities in safeguarding it.

“Biodiversity conservation in Assam is not only about species—it is about people, culture, and shared stewardship.”

He highlighted the work of Biodiversity Management Committees, conservation of indigenous rice varieties, and the notification of Biodiversity Heritage Sites as key tools for climate resilience and food security.



Dr. Arup Kumar Misra Chairman, Assam Pollution Control Board

Dr. Misra offered a reflective and ethical perspective on environmental responsibility.

“There is a difference between appearing to be environmentally conscious and truly living it.”

He called for deeper behavioural change and integrity in environmental action, emphasising the role of institutions, media, and culture in shaping values.



Dr. Jaideep Barua Director, ASTEC

Dr. Baruah highlighted Assam’s collaborative institutional culture and science-based initiatives supporting Mission LiFE.

“When institutions work together rather than in silos, transformation becomes possible.”

He cited eco-clubs, school-level initiatives, and EIACP hubs as examples of how environmental consciousness is being nurtured from an early age.



Dr. Yash Veer Bhatnagar, Country Representative, IUCN India

Dr. Bhatnagar placed Assam in a global biodiversity and climate context.

“Assam is both a biodiversity hotspot and a climate frontline—solutions here can inspire the world.”

He stressed nature-based solutions, coexistence with wildlife, and the importance of global tools and standards to support local decision-making.

Chief Guest Address – Mr. M.K. Yadava

Special Chief Secretary, Environment, Forests & Climate Change,
Government of Assam

“True sustainability is in simplicity and harmony with nature.”

Delivered a **philosophical and deeply contextual reflection** on development, sustainability, and Assam’s ecological identity.

Critiqued mainstream notions of “sustainable development,” urging a return to **simple, nature-aligned living (Sahaj Jeevan)**.

Highlighted Assam’s traditional self-sufficient rural systems as examples of regenerative economies.

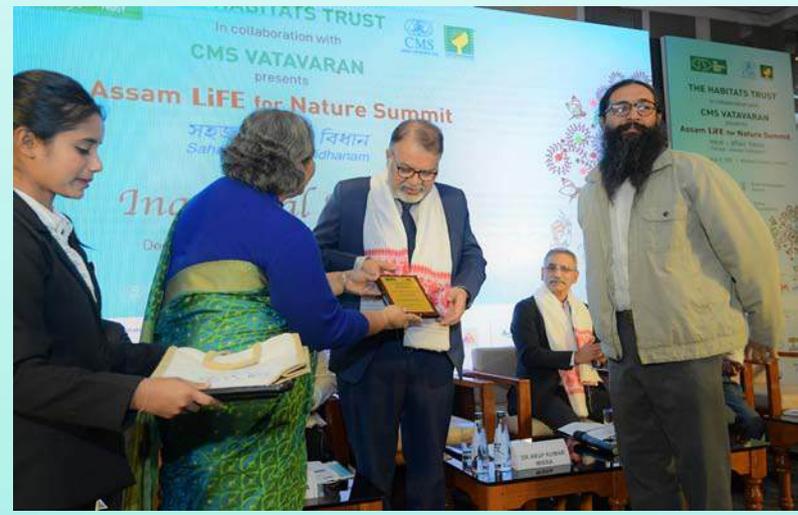
Shared powerful field experiences demonstrating **Assam’s unique culture of coexistence with wildlife**, especially elephants and rhinos.

Detailed significant conservation achievements like Large-scale **encroachment removal** from forest lands; Expansion of protected landscapes, including Kaziranga–Orang; and Creation of new national parks.

He paid tribute to frontline forest staff, underscoring their **sacrifice, courage, and emotional bond with wildlife**.

Reaffirmed the Government of Assam’s strong political commitment to **nature-positive development and ecological restoration**.







Book Release – Dihing–Patkai Landscape

A pictorial book documenting the ecological and cultural richness of the **Dihing–Patkai landscape** was released, celebrating community-led conservation efforts and the region’s natural heritage.

“This book captures not just a landscape, but the spirit of people who have protected it.”

Assam Green Ambassador Awards

During the Summit Inaugural, the **Assam Green Ambassador Awards 2025** were given to honour individuals who have made outstanding contributions to environmental protection and sustainable livelihoods in the state. Based on the unanimous recommendation of an independent Jury, the awardees honored were:

- **Mr. Neelam Dutta**, Founder of *Pabhoi Greens*, for reviving indigenous seed varieties and empowering farmers through Assam’s first organic seed movement
- **Ms. Roopjyoti Gogoi**, for creating sustainable livelihoods for women by upcycling plastic waste near Kaziranga National Park
- **Special Jury Mention: Dr. Oinam Sunanda Devi**, Scientific Officer, Assam State Biodiversity Board, for her dedicated work in biodiversity conservation, community engagement and capacity building across Assam

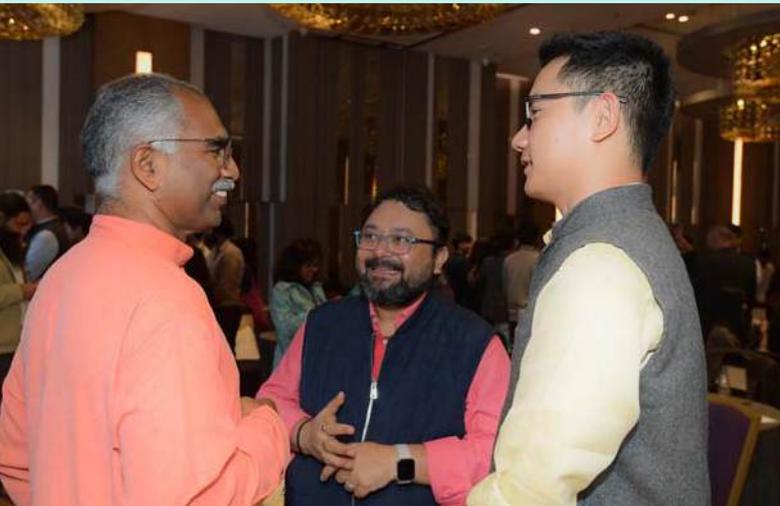


The Awards recognised grassroots leaders translating conservation into tangible outcomes:

- **Mr. Neelam Dutta** – Reviving indigenous seed diversity and farmer resilience
“Seed diversity is the foundation of our food security and freedom.”
- **Ms. Roopjyoti Gogoi** – Women-led plastic waste solutions around Kaziranga
“Waste can become livelihood when communities are trusted with solutions.”
- **Dr. Oinam Sunanda Devi** – Long-term biodiversity governance and capacity building
“Conservation succeeds when communities are recognised as custodians, not beneficiaries.”

Takeaways from the Inaugural Programme

- Assam possesses deep-rooted cultural, ecological, and community strengths that align naturally with Mission LiFE.
- Regenerative development, not extractive growth, emerged as the guiding principle for Assam's future.
- Community stewardship, indigenous knowledge, youth leadership, and ethical governance are essential to climate resilience.
- Strong political commitment, combined with civil society and institutional collaboration, positions Assam as a national leader in nature-positive development.
- The inaugural session set a reflective yet action-oriented tone for the Summit, grounding policy dialogue in values, lived experience, and long-term vision.



2. High Level Roundtable

Assam LiFE for Nature Summit | Day

Advancing Regenerative Development and Climate Resilience in Assam: Grounded Pathways towards Viksit Assam 2047

Assam stands at a pivotal moment in its development trajectory. Endowed with rich forests, wetlands, rivers, biodiversity, and deep-rooted cultural traditions, the state also faces intensifying climate risks—floods, riverbank erosion, ecosystem degradation, livelihood stress, and unplanned urbanisation.

The development challenge before Assam is no longer *whether* growth will occur, but *how* it will unfold. Traditional, extractive, and short-term development models are increasingly misaligned with the state's ecological fragility and climate realities. There is a compelling need to transition towards **regenerative development**—an approach that restores ecosystems, strengthens community resilience, supports inclusive livelihoods, and ensures long-term wellbeing.





This High level Roundtable had invited participants to share candid thoughts in a closed room moderated discussions and mentimeter responses. The following are the summarized insights from a high-level leadership dialogue convened during the Assam LiFE for Nature Summit, drawing on **experience, community-led practices, and field-based evidence** shared by government officials, civil society, researchers, and practitioners.

What Is Already Working: Evidence from Assam

a. Community-Led Conservation and Livelihood Integration

Across Assam, multiple examples demonstrate that **ecological restoration and livelihood security can be mutually reinforcing** when communities are placed at the centre.

- **Kaziranga Landscape (North and South Bank of the Brahmaputra):** Under climate adaptation initiatives supported earlier by national funds, community-based livelihood programmes (dairy, mushroom cultivation through women’s SHGs, wetland restoration, community fisheries) significantly reduced dependence on protected areas for fuelwood and fishing.
 - Restoration of multiple *beels* has revived migratory bird habitats, renewed eco-tourism interest, and created local employment (homestays, guides).
 - This has also contributed to reduced human–wildlife conflict and pressure on Kaziranga National Park.
- **Greater Adjutant (Hargila) Conservation:** Community-driven stewardship led by women’s groups (popularly known as the *Hargila Army*) has transformed a critically endangered species found largely outside protected areas into a symbol of pride and livelihood-linked conservation. This model demonstrates how social mobilisation and cultural ownership can deliver globally significant biodiversity outcomes.
- **Manas and Pobitora Landscapes:** Former poachers and conflict-affected youth were trained as conservation workers and eco-tourism service providers, contributing to Manas National Park’s recovery and the establishment of zero-poaching regimes in Pobitora. These experiences show how regenerative development can support peace-building and social reintegration.

b. Indigenous Knowledge and Traditional Resource Management

Several practices shared during the dialogue highlight how **traditional systems already embody regenerative principles**:

- **Dong Irrigation System (Bodoland Territorial Region):** A community-managed gravity-fed irrigation system that equitably distributes water in a water-scarce landscape, demonstrating resilience, cooperation, and sustainability.
- **Agroforestry and Homestead Systems (Bari–Pokhari–Orchard):** Traditional homesteads integrating ponds, fruit trees, kitchen gardens, and livestock historically ensured food security, biodiversity, and water retention. Their decline has directly contributed to livelihood stress and ecological vulnerability.
- **Sacred Groves and Cultural Protection:** In Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao, and other areas, sacred groves continue to function as community-conserved biodiversity refuges. These sites have provided the foundation for Community Conserved Areas and biodiversity heritage site declarations.
- **Biodiversity Heritage Site – Maibang (Dima Hasao):** Community-led protection of a wetland associated with endangered soft-shell turtles, rooted in cultural beliefs, has resulted in official recognition as a Biodiversity Heritage Site. Post-notification, eco-tourism, bamboo crafts, and beekeeping have expanded local livelihoods.

c. Policy and Finance Innovations Showing Promise

- **Green Budget Tagging (Assam):** Assam’s green budgeting exercise has scaled from 15 to over 30 departments, with climate- and nature-positive allocations growing from approximately ₹4,000 crore and expected to increase further.
 - The inclusion of Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) as a core pillar differentiates Assam from other states.
 - Departments are increasingly redesigning schemes (urban wetlands, blue–green infrastructure, soil erosion control) to align with green criteria.





- **Assam Disaster Risk Reduction Roadmap 2030:** Developed through a bottom-up process reaching village, block, district, and state levels, this roadmap integrates community knowledge, climate risks, and sectoral priorities.
 - State Disaster Mitigation Funds now provide an opportunity to finance non-structural and nature-based solutions, though this window remains underutilised.
- **Climate-Resilient Village and Youth Fellowship Initiatives:** Postgraduate fellows supporting villages to document climate risks and traditional solutions have already reached dozens of villages and received international recognition as innovative adaptation approaches.

Identified Persistent Challenges

Despite these successes, participants highlighted systemic constraints that prevent scaling.

- 1. Short-Term Planning Horizons** Development remains infrastructure-centric, with limited attention to long-term ecological and social costs.
- 2. Adaptation Finance Deficit** While mitigation investments (solar, energy) are expanding, adaptation, ecosystem restoration, and livelihood resilience lack stable funding. The discontinuation of national adaptation funds has left a significant gap.
- 3. Data and Evidence Gaps**
 - Lack of baseline data on wetlands, river morphology, biodiversity, springs, and ecosystem services.
 - Fragmented data systems limit evidence-based planning, despite emerging platforms in disaster management.
- 4. Institutional Silos and Capacity Gaps** Nature-based solutions, agroforestry, wildlife habitat management, and community stewardship often fall between departmental mandates.
- 5. Livelihood Stress and Migration** Climate impacts and declining agricultural productivity (e.g. flood-protected but ecologically degraded areas in Dhemaji–Lakhimpur) are accelerating distress migration, creating new urban vulnerabilities.
- 6. Under-integration of Culture, Health, and Education** Cultural institutions (satras, festivals, belief systems), planetary health linkages, and environmental education are insufficiently embedded in development planning.





Emerging Policy Directions and Strategic Recommendations from this Discussions

1. Institutionalise Regenerative Development

- Integrate regenerative principles into state planning, infrastructure appraisal, and sectoral schemes.
- Shift success indicators towards ecosystem health, resilience, and livelihood outcomes.

2. Strengthen Convergence and Financing

- Align Green Budgeting, SAPCC actions, disaster mitigation funds, and multilateral programmes through structured convergence platforms.
- Prioritise State Disaster Mitigation and resilience budgets for wetlands, agroforestry, floodplain restoration, and community-based adaptation.
- Establish a state-level green and climate finance facilitation mechanism to mobilise adaptation finance.

3. Invest in Data, Research, and Knowledge Systems

- Create dedicated funding for baseline ecological and hydrological data, including springs, wetlands, wildlife habitats, and floodplains.
- Strengthen science–policy–community interfaces and applied research linked to decision-making.
- Enable interoperable data platforms across departments.

4. Scale Community and Indigenous Knowledge-Based Solutions

- Recognise communities as co-managers and stewards, not beneficiaries.
- Scientifically strengthen and scale proven practices (Dong irrigation, agroforestry, wetland stewardship, traditional fisheries).
- Support women-led and youth-led green enterprises linked to restoration and conservation.

5. Integrate Culture, Health, and Education

- Leverage satras, sacred landscapes, and traditional institutions as anchors for conservation and resilience.
- Integrate planetary health, disaster risk reduction, and climate adaptation.
- Invest in long-term environmental education and green skill development rooted in local ecosystems.

6. Adopt Landscape-Based Pathways

- Promote district- and landscape-specific strategies rather than uniform models.
- Use successful landscapes (Kaziranga, Manas, BTR, Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong) as learning and replication hubs.

This interactive and frank Hi level roundtable discussion concluded that Assam already possesses a rich repository of **tested, lived solutions** rooted in community stewardship, cultural wisdom, and ecological knowledge. The priority now is to scale what works, finance what matters, and govern through convergence.

By embedding regenerative development across policy, finance, and institutions, Assam can position itself as a national leader in climate-resilient, nature-positive, and inclusive development—well before 2047.



3. Role of Media in Environmental, Wildlife and Climate Reporting

Assam LiFE for Nature Summit | Day 2

The Media Roundtable examined the critical role of media in shaping public perception, policy discourse, and community relations around environment, wildlife, and climate change in Assam. Drawing on first-hand reporting experiences, the session reflected on ethical challenges, narrative gaps, and opportunities for strengthening responsible, contextual, and solutions-oriented journalism.

Participants acknowledged that Assam’s media operates at the frontline of human–nature interactions—covering wildlife encounters, floods, erosion, conservation actions, and community livelihoods—often under conditions of urgency and limited information.

The following are the key themes and insights from this roundtable:

Framing Human–Wildlife Interactions

Speakers noted that media coverage of wildlife encounters in landscapes such as Kaziranga, Manas, and forest fringe villages is frequently incident-driven, focusing on conflict, casualties, or damage. Journalists shared experiences where deeper field engagement revealed coexistence practices, community tolerance, and adaptive strategies that rarely find space in headlines.

“When we report only the conflict, we erase the everyday coexistence that communities practice with wildlife.”

The session emphasised the need to shift from fear-based narratives to context-rich storytelling that explains ecological drivers and social realities.

Reporting Conservation Actions and Evictions

Participants reflected on the complexities of reporting forest clearances, encroachment removal, and protected area expansion. Journalists acknowledged that rapid reporting cycles often limit access to verified information, leading to partial narratives that overlook legal frameworks, ecological objectives, and rehabilitation processes.

“In fast-moving situations, the absence of clear information pushes the media towards one-sided stories.”

The discussion highlighted the importance of proactive communication and briefing mechanisms between authorities and the media.

Disaster and Climate Reporting

Speakers drew on experiences of covering Assam’s annual floods and riverbank erosion, noting that reporting peaks during emergencies but fades quickly afterward. This episodic coverage weakens understanding of long-term drivers, including wetland loss, embankment design, and land-use change.

“Floods are reported as events, not as outcomes of repeated policy and planning choices.”

Participants stressed the need for sustained follow-up journalism to strengthen accountability and public awareness.

Ethical Pressures and Sensationalism

Journalists candidly discussed ethical dilemmas arising from competitive media environments—pressure to publish quickly, use dramatic visuals, or adopt emotive language. Several speakers emphasised that ethical lapses are often systemic, not individual.

“The pressure to sensationalise is real, but it comes at the cost of trust and accuracy.”

The session called for environment- and wildlife-specific ethical guidance to complement general journalism codes.





Strength of Assam’s Regional and Vernacular Media

Participants highlighted that Assam’s multilingual media ecosystem often demonstrates greater sensitivity and depth than national coverage. Vernacular media was noted for consistently reporting on wetlands, birds, community conservation efforts, and cultural links to nature.

“Local media understands the landscape because it belongs to it.”

However, speakers noted that such reporting remains under-supported and under-recognised.

Capacity and Knowledge Gaps

Journalists openly acknowledged gaps in ecological literacy, climate science, and legal understanding, particularly during early-career reporting. Many shared experiences of learning through field exposure rather than formal training.

“Most of us learn environmental reporting on the ground, often during crises.”

This underscored the need for structured capacity-building initiatives.

Key Takeaways From this Media Round Table

- Media plays a decisive role in shaping narratives around conservation, climate risk, and coexistence in Assam.
- Sensational, conflict-driven reporting can deepen polarisation, while contextual and grounded storytelling can foster empathy and understanding.
- Ethical challenges in environmental reporting require specialised guidelines and institutional support.
- Assam's regional and vernacular media represent a significant strength that should be nurtured.
- Sustained engagement between media, policymakers, scientists, and civil society is essential for accurate and responsible reporting

The session concluded that strengthening environmental journalism is a strategic investment in climate resilience and Mission LiFE. Supporting journalists with knowledge, ethical frameworks, access to experts, and trust-based interfaces can significantly improve the quality of public discourse and policy outcomes.





4. Torch the Town Hall

Assam LiFE for Nature Summit | Day 2

Public Interaction Session with Dr. Rizwan Zaman, Dr. Oinum Sunanda Devi & Dr. D.J. Rajkhowa

The *Torch the Town Hall* session created an open forum for citizens, youth, community representatives, practitioners, and civil society members to directly interact with the three eminent panelists drawn from policy, conservation practice, science, and social sectors. The session foregrounded lived experiences from across Assam, enabling an honest exchange on climate impacts, conservation challenges, livelihoods, and governance.

Rather than formal presentations, the session unfolded through reflections, questions and responses rooted in everyday realities from floodplains, forest fringes, towns, and educational institutions.

Key Contributions and Discussions

Bridging Climate Policy and Ground-Level Action

Dr. Rizwan Zaman (Assam Climate Change Management Society) highlighted that Assam has robust climate planning instruments, including the **State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC 2021–2030)**, developed through extensive consultations with government departments, civil society organisations, research institutions, and community stakeholders.

He shared concrete examples of how policy is being operationalised:

- Adoption of **agro-climatic zone–based planning** rather than uniform state-wide prescriptions
- Creation of the **Assam Agroforestry Board**, conceived during SAPCC preparation
- Value-chain analysis of crops such as ginger and mustard to improve farmer incomes
- Efforts to link farmers and communities to **carbon credit mechanisms** for long-term income generation

At the same time, he acknowledged that policies succeed only when communities **buy into them**, stressing the importance of communication, locally relevant messaging, and sustained engagement.



Communities as Custodians of Biodiversity

Dr. Oinum Sunanda Devi (Assam State Biodiversity Board) outlined how the **Biological Diversity Act, 2002** legally empowers communities through **Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs)**.

Key experiences shared included:

- Formation of **2,549 BMCs across Assam**, including Panchayat and Autonomous Council areas
- Community ownership of biological resources through **People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs)**
- Engagement of over **300 students and young researchers** in biodiversity documentation and mapping
- Linking biodiversity conservation with **livelihoods through documentation of edible and marketable bio-resources**

She emphasised that BMCs represent a unique governance mechanism where communities are not just participants, but **rights-holders and stewards of biodiversity**.

Natural Resource Degradation and Climate Vulnerability

Dr. D.J. Rajkhowa (Eminent ICAR scientist) provided a scientific assessment of Assam's natural resource challenges, drawing on decades of research experience.

Key issues highlighted included:

- Severe **soil erosion**, with losses of up to 40–45 tonnes per hectare per year
- Declining **soil health**, including micronutrient deficiencies despite low chemical input use
- Heavy dependence on monsoon rainfall, with **only 20% irrigation coverage**
- Reduced cropping intensity and limited second-crop cultivation
- Shortening of **jhum (shifting cultivation) cycles**, leading to land degradation in hill areas





He stressed that regeneration must focus on **soil health, water management, traditional practices, and recycling of biomass**, rather than input-intensive models.

Participant Interventions

Participants reflected that while awareness about environmental issues is increasing, clear and accessible pathways for action are often missing. Everyday questions were raised about waste management, water conservation, and sustainable livelihoods at the local level.

Participants from civil society, start-ups, academia, and schools raised practical concerns and experiences, including:

- Need for stronger **urban water body protection, waste management, and river restoration**, particularly in Guwahati and other river-bank towns
- Challenges of **data accessibility** for research and planning, despite significant academic and project-based work being conducted in Assam
- Concerns about loss of **indigenous crop varieties** and traditional food systems
- Questions on **meaningful youth participation**, beyond awareness, in conservation and climate action

Youth participants, including school students, expressed a strong desire to be involved in decision-making and solution-building, reflecting growing climate awareness across age groups.

Panelist Responses and Way Forward

In response, panelists collectively emphasised:

- Awareness must be continuous and action-oriented, extending from households to institutions
- Traditional practices such as **homestead gardens, indigenous crops, and soil regeneration methods** remain highly relevant
- New crops and technologies should complement—not replace—local biodiversity, and be adopted in the **right place and scale**
- Stronger collaboration is needed between government, civil society, media, researchers, and citizens

Key Takeaways

- Climate change and environmental degradation are experienced as daily lived realities, not abstract risks.
- Communities living closest to forests and rivers demonstrate resilience and coexistence, but require greater recognition and support.
- Livelihood security and climate resilience are deeply interconnected.
- Trust, transparency, and participation are essential for successful conservation and development outcomes.
- Youth are eager to contribute and lead, provided pathways, skills, and opportunities are made available.
- Platforms like Torch the Town Hall are critical for aligning policy intent with lived experience.

The *Torch the Town Hall* session reaffirmed that Assam's pathway towards regenerative and climate-resilient development must be people-centred, inclusive, and grounded in lived experience. By bringing citizen voices directly into dialogue with panelists, the session strengthened the Summit's emphasis on participation, trust, and co-creation as foundations for Mission LiFE and Viksit Assam 2047.



Selected Quotes from *Torch the Town Hall Session*

“People living closest to forests and rivers bear the highest cost of conservation and climate impacts, and their voices must shape solutions.”

“Coexistence is not a slogan in Assam; it is a daily practice that needs stronger institutional support.”

“Policies will succeed only when communities are treated as partners, not just beneficiaries.”

“Youth are not waiting for permission to act—they are asking for pathways, skills, and trust.”

“Awareness alone is not enough; citizens need clear ways to translate concern into local action.”

“Trust between communities, institutions, and decision-makers is as important as technical solutions.”

“Regenerative development must begin with listening—to people, to place, and to lived experience.”



5. Valedictory Session

Assam LiFE for Nature Summit | Day 2

The Valedictory Session marked the formal conclusion of the Assam LiFE for Nature Summit, bringing together organisers, partners, government representatives, and participants to reflect on the two days of dialogue and to reaffirm collective commitment towards regenerative, people-centred development in Assam.

It was emphasised that the Summit was intentionally designed to move beyond expert-led discussions by creating spaces such as leadership dialogues, media roundtables, and public forums like *Torch the Town Hall*. It was underlined that the most important outcome of the Summit was listening—particularly to communities and young people living closest to ecological change.

Mr Sabyesachi, Deputy Director CMS VATAVARAN in his closing remarks traced the **origins and evolution of the Summit**, highlighting the months of consultation, drafting, and collaboration that led to its realisation. Speakers emphasised that the Summit emerged from shared conversations with partners, particularly The Habitats Trust, and was shaped through iterative dialogue rather than a top-down approach.

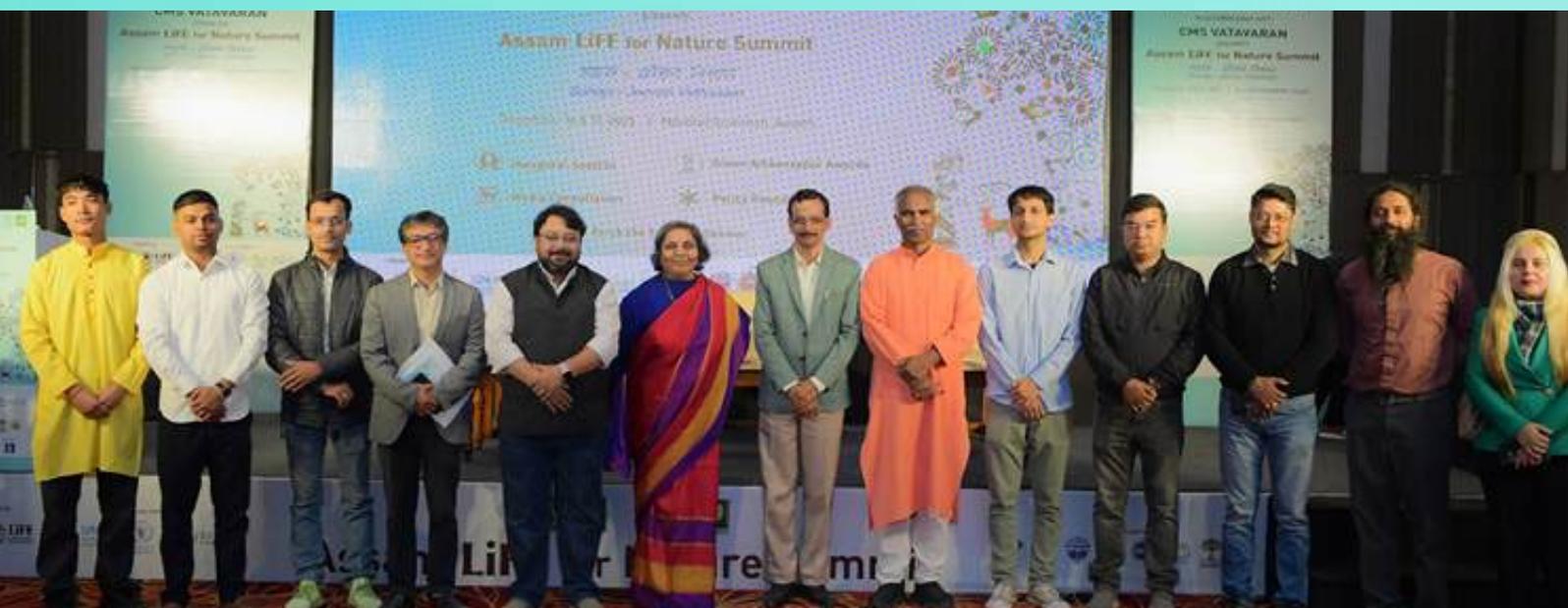
The Summit was positioned as the **first in a planned series of LiFE for Nature Summits** to be held across different states, beginning with Assam.

Dr. Vasanti Rao, DG, Centre for Media Studies (CMS)

Dr. Rao emphasised that CMS's engagement in Assam is **long-term and relationship-based**, not event-driven. She underlined that the Summit was designed to foster **continued conversations**, grounded in Assam's rich research base, lived traditions, and community knowledge.

Reflecting on the proceedings, she noted that the Summit successfully brought together **climate action, biodiversity conservation, disaster resilience, and Mission LiFE** as interconnected pathways rather than isolated themes. She highlighted that many solutions already exist within Assam's landscapes and cultural practices, and that the real need is for **alignment, collaboration, and continuity**.

Dr. Rao also expressed deep gratitude to partners, state institutions, knowledge organisations, media partners, volunteers, and the CMS team, acknowledging the Summit as a **collective achievement**



Mr. Anup Bokkasa, Lead – Impact & Strategy, The Habitats Trust

Mr. Bokkasa reflected on the strong presence of **youth and students**, particularly Gen Z, emphasising their attentiveness and engagement throughout the Summit. He stressed that environmental challenges can no longer be addressed through **siloed approaches** focused only on species or habitats.

Using examples from marine ecosystems (such as the collapse of sardine populations) and riverine grasslands closer to Assam, he illustrated how **climate change, economics, human behaviour, geopolitics, and communication** are deeply intertwined. He highlighted the need for partnerships that cut across disciplines and geographies.

He underscored why organisations like CMS and platforms such as this Summit are critical—because **communication, media, and storytelling** are central to solving large-scale ecological challenges. He concluded by affirming that the Summit marked the **beginning of a long-term partnership**.

Dr. Jayadip Barua, Director, Assam Science Technology and Environment Council (ASTEC)

Dr. Barua reflected on the Summit as an **enriching space for exchange**, noting that even organisations working within the same state often lack opportunities to deeply understand each other’s work. He emphasised that the Summit enabled meaningful dialogue across government, science, civil society, and youth.

He raised a critical concern regarding **Mission LiFE awareness**, noting that despite significant governmental efforts, awareness among educated youth remains limited—highlighting the urgent need for more effective communication and engagement strategies.

Dr. Barua stressed that policies on renewable energy, climate action, and green development will only succeed if **people participate through everyday actions**. He illustrated how small behavioural changes—reducing waste, conserving water, switching off unused appliances—collectively contribute to sustainability.

He also urged students to take **field-based learning and community engagement seriously**, highlighting traditional practices in Assam such as water harvesting ponds and indigenous agricultural systems as powerful examples of sustainable living.

This session prominently acknowledged the participation of **universities, schools, and students**, many of whom contributed as volunteers and active participants despite academic commitments. Speakers highlighted youth as **central actors** in Assam’s environmental future and encouraged deeper engagement through education, research, and hands-on practice

The Valedictory Session concluded the Summit with a strong sense of **collective purpose and renewed partnerships**, reaffirming that Assam’s path towards a sustainable and regenerative future lies in **collaboration, continuity, and people-centred action**.



“Environment today is not just an environmental problem. It is about ecology, economics, geopolitics, behaviour, and communication—and none of us can solve it alone.”

— Mr. Anup Bokkasa,
The Habitats Trust



“Policies will only succeed if people participate. Small actions, repeated by many, are what finally make the difference”

— Dr. Jayadip Barua,
ASTEC

6. Programme Agenda



THE HABITATS TRUST

In collaboration with



CMS VATAVARAN

presents

Assam LiFE for Nature Summit

সহজ - জীবন বিধান

Sahaja – Jeevan Vidhanam

DAY 1: DECEMBER 16, 2025

INAUGURAL PROGRAM (10:00 AM - 01:00 PM)	
10:00 AM – 11:00 AM	REGISTRATION & TEA
11:00 AM – 11:10 AM	Arrival of <i>Chief Guest</i> and other dignitaries
11:10 AM – 11:15 AM	Welcome Address & Summit Introduction – Dr. Vasanti Rao , Director General, CMS
11:15 AM – 11:30 AM	Lighting the Lamp & Felicitations of Dignitaries
11:30 AM – 01:00 PM	Overview of the Summit – Mr. Anup Bokassa , Lead, Impact & Strategy, The Habitats Trust
	Special Address - Dr. Jaideep Baruah , Director, Assam Science Technology & Environment Council
	Special Address - Shri Anurag Singh, IFS , Member Secretary, Assam State Biodiversity Board
	Release the Coffee Table Book developed under Project Elephant
	Special Address – Dr. Arup Kumar Misra , Chairman, Assam Pollution Control Board
	Special Address - Presentation of Assam Green Ambassador Award, Male to Mr. Neelam Dutta
	Presentation of Assam Green Ambassador Award, Female to Ms. Roopjyoti Gogoi
	Presentation of Assam Green Ambassador Special Jury Mention to Dr Oinam Sunanda Devi
	Keynote Address- Dr. Yash Veer Bhatnagar , Country Representative International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), India
	Inaugural Address – Mr. M.K. Yadava , Special Chief Secretary, Environment, Forests & Climate Change Department, Government of Assam
Vote of Thanks	
Group Photograph followed by lunch	

EVENING SESSION:
**High-Level Roundtable On “Life For Nature: Leadership Dialogues
 For Regenerative Development In Assam”**
 5:00 PM to 7:30 PM (followed by dinner)
Chaired by Dr. Ranbir Singh, IAS (Retd.), Chairman, Brahmaputra Board

OBJECTIVE: This Roundtable Aims to Facilitate Strategic Dialogue among High-Level Policymakers, Institutional Leaders, and Experts on Embedding Sustainability, Resilience, and Equity across Assam’s Environmental and Developmental Planning. Discussions will culminate in Key Recommendations for a Post-Summit White Paper.

05:00 PM – 05:05 PM	Welcome & Context Setting - Dr Vasanti Rao , Director General, CMS
05:05 PM – 05:10 PM	Screening of the film “Kati Bihu: Assam’s Tale of Tradition & Resilience” by The Habitats Trust
05:10 PM – 05:15 PM	Chair’s Opening Remarks – Dr. Ranbir Singh, IAS (Retd.) , Chairman, Brahmaputra Board
Co-Moderator: Dr Vasanti Rao & Dr Pranab J Patar	
<p>Topic 1: Climate-Resilient Infrastructure & River Basin Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Yash Veer Bhatnagar – Country Representative, IUCN India • Dr. Jaideep Baruah – Director, Assam Science Technology & Environment Council • Dr. Surajit Baruah – Senior Consultant, Assam State Disaster Management Authority • Dr. Kripalijyoti Mazumdar – Project Officer (Response & Recovery), Assam State Disaster Management Authority • Dr. Mrinal Kumar Hazarika, General Secretary, Assam Science Society • Dr. Simanta Kalita, Adviser, Center For Environment Education • Ms. Preeti Buragohain, AFS- Deputy Conservator of Forests & Dy PD, Assam Agroforestry Development Board <p>Topic 2: Green Finance & Sustainable Growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Mrigen Barua- Nature-based Solutions (NbS) Expert, Assam Agroforestry Development Board • Mr. Anup Bokassa – Lead, Impact & Strategy, The Habitats Trust • Dr. Rizwan Uz Zaman, Technical Consultant, Assam Climate Change Management Society (ACCMS), Government of Assam • Ms. Meghmala Choudhury – Assistant Resident Director, PHD Chamber of Commerce & Industry • Mr. Rituraj Borah – National Programme Manager, UNIDO <p>Topic 3: Human–Wildlife Conflict & Community-Led Conservation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Oinam Sunanda Devi – Scientific Officer, Assam State Biodiversity Board • Dr. Bibhab Kumar Talukdar – Secretary General, Aaranyak • Dr. Parimal C. Bhattacharjee – Emeritus Member, Wildlife Trust of India • Prof. Mahesh Uniyal – HoD, Department of Tourism, Assam Skill University • Dr. Anirban Datta-Roy – Lead, Community-Based Conservation, WWF-India Assam 	
7:30 PM Onwards	DINNER & NETWORKING: HOSTED BY CMS & THE HABITAT TRUST

DAY 2: DECEMBER 17, 2025

MORNING SESSION

Media, Civil Society & Youth Roundtable

“Communicating Climate Action: Voices from Assam”

10:30 AM to 01:00 PM (followed by lunch)

Session Theme & Objective: This Roundtable will bring together editors, Senior Journalists, Journalism Educators, and Communication Specialists from Assam to Explore the Role of Regional Media in Shaping Public Narratives around Climate Change, Biodiversity, and Ecological Justice. It will unpack how Local Storytelling, Vernacular Reporting, and Citizen Engagement can Accelerate Climate Action through Media. The Dialogue will also explore how Digital Advocacy, Mobile Journalism, and Visual Storytelling are Transforming Environmental Communication in the State—from Rural Campaigns to Smart City Transitions.

10.30 AM – 11:00 AM	REGISTRATION & TEA
11:AM – 01:00 PM	<p>MEDIA ROUNDTABLE “Narrating Nature: Strengthening Climate Communication in Assam”</p> <p>SESSION FORMAT: Roundtable Dialogue with Media, Journalism Schools & Communication Experts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. P. N. Vasanti, Director General, CMS • Mr Khagen Kalita, President, Guwahati Press Club • Dr. Kalyanjit Sarmah, GIS Specialist at Assam Agroforestry Development Board • Mr. Debasish Sarma, Agroforestry Expert, Assam Agroforestry Development Board • Ms. Mrinalinee Khanikar Lead, Livelihoods. Assam Agroforestry Development Board • Mr. Khoshbub Alam Ahmed, Founder & Director, Eco System Protection Trust(ESPT) • Mr. Rushikesh Chavan, Director, The Habitats Trust • Ms. Jyotsna Neog, Vice President and Co-Founder of The LitArt Foundation • Mr. Anup Bokassa, Lead, Impact and strategy, The Habitats Trust • Dr. Bibhab Kr. Talukdar, Secretary General, Aaranyak • Mr. Pranab J Patar, Award-winning environment & sustainability professional • Ms. Archita B Bhattacharyya, State Director, WWF-India Assam • Ms. Kanak Angirish, Lead - Communications and Outreach, The Habitats Trust • Mr. Masfick Hazarika, Program Manager, WRI India • Dr. Aal Mamun Islam Laskar, Joint Director, Assam Skill University • Mr. Debajit Das, National Project Coordinator, UNIDO India • Dr Sayanika Dutta, HoD, Department of Mass Communication, Cotton University • Dr Abhinandan Saikia, Assistant Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati Campus, Dean, School of Social Sciences and Humanities • Mr. Nayan Pratim Kumar, Editor & Reporter, Pratidin Time, Assam • Mr. Sunil Bora, New Editor, NewsLive • Mr. Sanjay Roy, Senior Staff Reporter, Assam Tribune • Mr. Ranjita Rabha, Chief Reporter, Pratham Khabar • Mr. Jitumoni Bora, Chief Editor, The Crosscurrent • Mr. Arup Kalita, Editor, The Crosscurrent • Ms. Sushmita Goswami, Senior Correspondent, PTI • Ms. Barsha Das, Independent Journalist • Mr. Jitendra Choudhury, Bureau Chief, Dainik Asom • Mr. Prasanta Mazumdar, Principal Correspondent, The New Indian Express • Dr. Kushal Kalita, Senior Journalist, NKTV Plus • Mr. Nayan Pratim Kumar, Sport Editor, Pratidin Times • Mr. Prasanta Mazumdar, Senior Assistant Editor, The New Indian Express
1:00 PM Onwards	GROUP PHOTOGRAPH AND LUNCH

EVENING SESSION

Torch the Townhall & Validictory Session

Venue: Novotel, Guwahati, 03:00 PM to 06:00 PM

(followed by high tea)

Session Objective: This session aims to spark an honest, forward-thinking conversation on how state policies, media narratives, and development investments can work in synergy with local aspirations to drive inclusive, environment-friendly governance. It will explore how Assam can build trust, transparency, and transformative change at the grassroots level.

03:00 PM – 03:30 PM	REGISTRATION & TEA
03:30 PM – 05:00 PM	TORCH THE TOWNHALL: “Voices for a Regenerative Assam: From Policy to People”
	<p>Moderator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. P.N. Vasanti Rao, Director General, CMS <p>Panel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Rizwan Uz Zaman, Technical Consultant, Assam Climate Change Management Society (ACCMS) • Dr. Oinam Sunanda Devi, Scientific Officer, Assam State Biodiversity Board • Dr. D.J. Rajkhowa, Ex Joint Director at ICAR Research Complex for NEHReion, Meghalaya
05:00 PM – 06:00 PM	VALIDICTORY SESSION
05:00 PM	Arrival of Guests
05:10 PM–05:20 PM	<p>Welcome Address</p> <p>Dr Vasanti Rao, DG, Centre for Media Studies (CMS)</p>
05:20 PM–05:35 PM	<p>Key Learnings & Strategic Reflections: LiFE for Nature – Assam Summit</p> <p>Mr. Anup Bokassa, Lead, Impact & Strategy, The Habitats Trust</p>
05:35 PM- 5:50 PM	<p>Address by Dr. Jaideep Baruah, Director, Assam Science Technology & Environment Council</p>
06:50 PM Onwards	Vote of Thanks, Group Photograph and Networking High Tea

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