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2024



Exploring Alternatives in the Heart of the Himalayas

Learning, Collaboration, and Sustainability in the Himalayan Landscapes

Western Himalaya Vikalp Sangam Annual Gathering
October 27th to 30th, 2024 | Ganderbal, Kashmir



A WHVS Initiative



MOOL SUSTAINABILITY
RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTER



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Contents

Executive Summary	1
Background	2
The Program: Highlights	2
Day 1	3
Day 2	5
Day 3	12
Day 4	16
Acknowledgements	18



Executive Summary

This report summarizes the four-day gathering organized by the Western Himalaya Vikalp Sangam (WHVS) in collaboration with the MOOL Sustainability Research and Training Center and the School of Rural Development and Environment, Kashmir, held from October 27 to 30, 2024. The event took place at SAGG Eco Village in Kashmir, bringing together 35 participants from across the Western Himalayas and other parts of India. These participants represented nearly 25 organizations working on ecological regeneration, sustainable livelihoods, climate action, community well-being, and empowering education.

The gathering aimed to foster knowledge sharing, strengthen collaboration, and promote ecological awareness and cultural exchange. Key discussions centered on learning, collaboration, and sustainability. Participants explored sustainable transformation initiatives across the region and addressed shared challenges, such as land laws, lack of dignified livelihoods, and overtourism. A key activity involved engaging with the "Flower of Transformation," a framework developed through the national Vikalp Sangam process. This tool facilitated the evaluation of initiatives across critical areas like ecological integrity and social well-being, encouraging deeper dialogue and understanding of interconnected themes.

The event featured an enriching session with renowned Kashmiri poet and writer Zareef Ahmad Zareef, who shared insights on ecology and community. It also included a visit to Wular Lake in Zurimanz, guided by Naseer Ahmad Dar of the Wular Fisherfolk Union, where participants learned about the challenges and successes of local unions.

The gathering provided a platform for participants and organizations to reflect on shared values and explore pathways for collective transformation. Collaborative initiatives included drafting a people's charter, planning ongoing virtual and in-person meetings, facilitating cultural exchanges, documenting stories, and addressing regional gaps.

This report offers further insights into the discussions, activities, and collaborative outcomes that emerged from this meaningful gathering.

Background

The annual gathering, a key component of WHVS activities for 2024-2025, was initially planned earlier in the year. During the Core Group Meeting in Delhi in March 2024, the MOOL Sustainability Research and Training Center (MOOL) decided to co-host the event in Kashmir in collaboration with the School of Rural Development and Environment (SRDE). After months of planning and preparation, the gathering was held at SAGG Eco Village, bringing together 35 participants from Kashmir, the Western Himalayas, and various regions of India. The event addressed regional challenges and explored collaborative solutions focused on learning, sustainability, and community development.

The Program: Highlights

Day 1: 27 October 2024

Participants arrived and settled in, followed by a welcome session that included discussions on the Flower of Transformation, the Alternative Framework, and the history of Vikalp Sangam. The day continued with detailed participant introductions and concluded with dinner.

Day 2: 28 October 2024

The day centered on challenges, collaboration, and the future of WHVS as a network. Participants engaged in discussions on outcomes, pathways, and alternatives, including sessions on connecting the Western and Eastern Himalayas. The evening concluded with a movie screening, followed by dinner and a bonfire.

Day 3: 29 October 2024

Following an optional nature walk, participants engaged in discussions on the WHVS Charter and a conversation with poet Zareef Ahmad Zareef. The afternoon and evening featured a community visit.

Day 4: 30 October 2024

The final day began with a nature or village walk, followed by reflections on Kashmir's perspective. The event concluded with closing thoughts and departures.

The following pages contain a detailed summary.



Day 1

The opening day began with a culturally significant ritual of Izband (burning harmala seeds), led by Shaheena Parveen and the team at MOOL, setting an auspicious tone for the event. The fragrant smoke created a serene atmosphere deeply rooted in Kashmiri tradition. Following this, Fayaz Ahmad Dar, Founder of MOOL and SAGG Eco Village, delivered a warm welcome note, highlighting the integration of traditional and modern Kashmiri lifestyles at SAGG Eco Village and its alignment with MOOL's values of nourishment, empowerment, and sustainability.

Akanksha Panday, Project Coordinator at WHVS, outlined the three-day agenda, followed by a presentation by Ashish Kothari from Kalpavriksh on the origins and principles of Vikalp Sangam.

Brief discussions following the presentation touched on energy crises, collaborative successes, and international expansion, with participants sharing inspiring stories of conservation, community livelihoods, and indigenous knowledge. The day underscored the power of collaboration and the blending of traditional wisdom with modern approaches for sustainable change in the Himalayas.

Highlights of the Day

Presentations and Discussions

- Origin and Vision of Vikalp Sangam
 - Ashish Kothari, *Kalpavriksh*: Ashish shared insights into the origins, vision, and principles of Vikalp Sangam, emphasizing its unique approach compared to other movements.
 - He mentioned collaborations with bioregional working groups that operate independently of regular Sangam meets.
- Energy as a Key Topic in the Himalayas and International Expansion
 - Soumya Dutta, *Movement for Advancing Understanding of Sustainability and Mutuality*: Soumya stressed the significance of addressing energy-related crises in the region. He also suggested exploring processes in Nepal and South-East Asia in the future.

Participant Introductions

In the introduction session, facilitated by Shaheena Parveen from MOOL, all the participants shared their journeys, experiences, expertise, and the impactful work they are doing in their respective fields.

Pradeep Chavan, *Kalpavriksh, Pune*

Soumya Dutta, *Movement for Advancing Understanding of Sustainability and Mutuality (MAUASM)*

Sanjay Sondhi, *Titli Trust, Uttarakhand*

Kunzang Deachen, *Local Futures, Ladakh*

Ashish Kothari, *Kalpavriksh, Pune*

Aanchal, *Kalpavriksh / Vikalp Sangam, Pune*

Aadya Singh, *Margshala Foundation, Uttarakhand*

Deepika Nandan, *Western Himalayan Vikalp Sangam/ Margshala Foundation, Uttarakhand*

Akanksha Pandey, *Western Himalayan Vikalp Sangam / Jagori, Himachal Pradesh*

Arun Prasad, *Devalsari Society, Uttarakhand*

Mohamad Meer Hamja, *Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sangathan*

Vijay Singh Negi (Biju), *Beej Bachao Andolan / Hind Swaraj Manch, Uttarakhand*

Tsewang Namgail, *Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust, Ladakh*

Shreya Bhatia, *Srishti Films, Srishti Manipal Institute*

Manisha Jhalaan, *Jagori Rural Charitable Trust, Himachal Pradesh*

Diya Gambhir, *Srishti Films, Srishti Manipal Institute*

Winona Lepcha, *Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT), Sikkim*

Seno Tsehah, *Nenterprise Chizami Weaves & North East Network, Nagaland*

Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman, *Heinrich Boell Stiftung, India*

Fayaz Ahmad Dar, *MOOL Sustainability Research and Training Center, Kashmir*

Shaheena Parveen, *MOOL Sustainability Research and Training Center, Kashmir*

Umer Qadir Sheikh, *MOOL Sustainability Research and Training Center, Kashmir*

Lubna Rafiqi, *MOOL Sustainability Research and Training Center, Kashmir*

Mohammad Kamran Dar, *MOOL Sustainability Research and Training Center, Kashmir*

Sheikh Ghulam Rasool, *School for Rural Development and Environment (SRDE), Kashmir*

Lubna Qadri, *School for Development and Environment (SRDE), Kashmir*

Zahid Parwaz Choudhary, *Forest Rights Coalition / SRDE, Kashmir*

Naseer Ahmad Dar, *Wular Fisherfolk Union, Kashmir*

Ovee Thorat, *Nature Classrooms and Anthra, Kashmir*

Yasir Qureshi, *Indo Global Social Service Society (IGSSS), Kashmir*

Mushtaq Ahmad Malla, *Department of Social Work, Government Degree College, Baramulla, Kashmir*

Shahid Hameed, *Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF), Kashmir*

Naveed Bukhtiyar, *Uri Foundation, Kashmir*





Day 2

The second day began with a guided tour of SAGG Eco Village, led by its founder Fayaz Ahmad Dar. The detailed tour offered participants an immersive understanding of the village’s regenerative design, which seamlessly integrates traditional Kashmiri living with modern ecological principles. This walk set the stage for a day dedicated to addressing challenges, exploring opportunities, and developing alternative solutions for sustainable development in the Himalayas.

The morning continued with a reflective song led by Biju Negi, fostering a spirit of purpose and collaboration. The first session on challenges and opportunities was co-moderated by Fayaz (MOOL) and Soumya (MAUASM). Participants were encouraged to think beyond conventional approaches, embrace innovative ideas, and collaborate boldly, keeping their dreams in focus and shedding fears of failure.

The gathering welcomed a three-member team from the Eicher Group Foundation—Aditi Chanchani, Arathi Hanumanthappa, and Shreyansh Kala—alongside three MOOL fellows: Nusrat Farooq, Zubair Ahmad Malla, and Muneer Gashie, who actively contributed to the discussions and activities of the day.

The Past, Present, and Future of WHVS

This session, facilitated by Sanjay Sondhi (Titli Trust) and Aadya Singh (Margshala), provided an insightful overview of the Western Himalayan Vikalp Sangam (WHVS), reflecting on its journey, achievements, and future direction. WHVS, as part of the larger Vikalp Sangam, is envisioned as a transformational process rather than a project. In their presentation, Aadya and Sanjay highlighted the following points:

Initiated in 2014 with three states, Vikalp Sangam, the Confluence of Alternatives, expanded to include 10 states by 2016, addressing critical issues such as damming, mining, and access rights. The process gained significant momentum in 2018 with the Beej Mantra Baitakh, which brought together organizations like Goonj and Maati.

A pivotal milestone was the creation of a manifesto for the Western Himalayan region—an integrated model for ecological development. Widely shared with media and political entities, the manifesto catalyzed deeper discussions on rural revival, agritourism, climate change, waste management, and youth engagement.



Notable progress was achieved in subsequent years:

- 2020: Thematic groups focused on agritourism, climate issues, and youth engagement.
- 2021: The Devalsari Sangam delved deeper into these themes, refining the manifesto into a charter.
- COVID-19 Response: WHVS conducted webinars for communities and provided relief aid.
- 2024: A three-year project funded by Eicher Group Foundation began, focusing on advocacy, webinars (e.g., gender equality with Local Futures and climate change with Jagori), the "Nature Guide Series" in Hindi, and reviving the WHVS website as a repository.

Key milestones from 2024 include:

- Core group meetings in each state, including work on a well-being index in Ladakh as an alternative to GDP.
- The Ladakh Sangam was themed on "Tourism," marking the 50th year of tourism in the region.
- Compilation and sharing of success stories on alternative practices.

A need was expressed to produce materials in regional languages such as Ladakhi and Kashmiri to reach a broader audience, as current resources are primarily in English and Hindi.

This overview set the stage for group discussions, providing a rich context for participants to deliberate on specific themes and contribute to WHVS's ongoing transformational process.

Following this, participants engaged in a group exercise, where they were divided into mixed teams to brainstorm, write, and illustrate challenges, learnings, and alternative pathways. Afterward, they regrouped into clusters of six to discuss their insights and share perspectives on solutions for sustainable progress.

Summary of Group Discussions

The groups explored challenges, learnings, and future aspirations across various dimensions of sustainability, community engagement, and policy advocacy.

Key Challenges

- **Social and Environmental:** Poverty, climate change, disasters, deforestation, waste management, and militarization emerged as critical challenges. Tourism and mining were identified as major disruptors, impacting community resilience and wildlife corridors.
- **Community and Governance:** Issues such as lack of safe spaces, limited funding, shrinking democratic spaces, and political interference were noted. Participants highlighted the absence of collaborative success stories, with individual agendas often overshadowing collective efforts.
- **Knowledge and Policy:** Traditional knowledge is under-documented and missing from educational curricula, limiting its integration into policy. Development-led disasters and human-animal conflicts require targeted interventions like insurance schemes and community-based disaster management.
- **Youth Engagement:** Societal pressures and a lack of employment opportunities prevent youth from joining sustainable initiatives.

Key Learnings

- Incorporating traditional knowledge and fostering local livelihoods were recognized as sustainable approaches. Collective actions, such as farmer group formations and community-driven rights-based work, have shown positive results.
- **Collaboration and Synergies:** Cross-learning and collaborative platforms like WHVS amplify local voices and encourage innovative solutions. Documentation and knowledge-sharing were emphasized to strengthen collective efforts.
- **Holistic and Consistent Efforts:** The need for a consistent and multi-level approach—self-practice, community engagement, and policy advocacy—was underlined as crucial for impact.

Future Aspirations

- Expand the Himalayan network with more opportunities for collaboration, exchange programs, and sustainable entrepreneurship.
- Develop place-based policies and comprehensive disaster management plans that integrate community participation and indigenous knowledge.
- Reimagine platforms like WHVS to include longer, theme-specific Sangams and tangible initiatives like "Vikalp Gram" (demonstration villages).
- Advocate for a balance between employment generation and ecological sustainability while empowering younger generations to lead.

Participants emphasized mutual respect, dignity, and healing for communities and ecosystems, envisioning a collective future rooted in shared learning and solidarity. Creativity and collaboration were highlighted as key tools to address the pressing issues facing the Himalayan region.

Key Discussions and Questions

The discussion following the group presentations centered on addressing challenges in the Western Himalayan region, such as diminished community power, privatization, and corporate dominance. Strategies for advocacy, collaboration, and community empowerment were explored, with a focus on actionable steps to tackle these pressing issues.

Advocacy and Collaboration

- Key Questions:
 - How can we effectively push for necessary changes through advocacy, such as working with MLAs or pre-legislative consultations?
 - Can the Western Himalayas be envisioned as a borderless region, with shared demands like water rights across the bioregion?
- Discussion Highlights:
 - Advocate for rights through policies like the Forest Rights Act (FRA), RTI, Public Service Guarantee Act, and gender-equity laws.
 - Strengthen local governance systems and document traditional practices for advocacy and capacity building.
 - Shift terminology like "ecotourism" to community-centered alternatives.



Community Empowerment

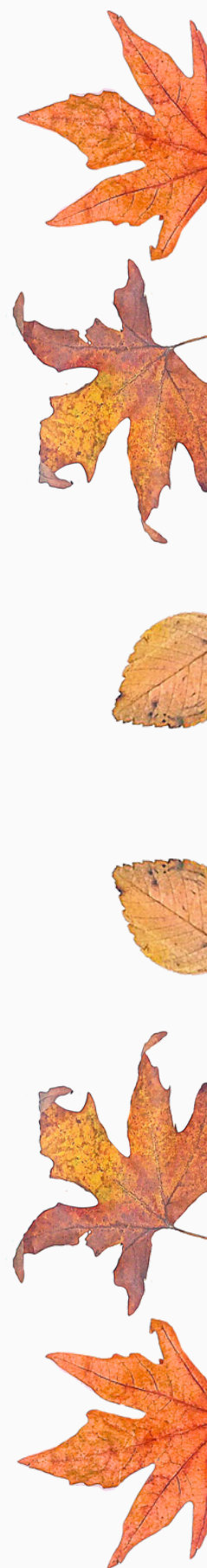
- Key Questions:
 - How can the power of local communities be increased in light of growing centralization and privatization?
 - What tools, awareness programs, and initiatives can empower communities to take charge of their own development?
- Discussion Highlights:
 - Develop toolkits, awareness programs, and fellowships to enhance community capacity.
 - Highlight youth returning to their roots through articles, films, and podcasts to inspire others.
 - Address human-wildlife interactions and promote sustainable agriculture and climate resilience.

Expertise and Support

- Key Questions:
 - Can experts within the Sangam be mobilized to support specific challenges (e.g., human-wildlife conflicts, governance issues)?
 - How can Sangam members support organizations struggling with financial resources?
- Discussion Highlights:
 - Identify Sangam experts for specific issues (e.g., Tsewang Namgail addressing human-wildlife conflicts).

Communication and Learning

- Key Questions:
 - What more can be done to ensure timely and effective communication among Sangam members?
 - How can cross-learning between organizations and regions be prioritized in the next year's budget?
- Discussion Highlights:
 - Improve internal communication channels for better information flow.
 - Create concise, accessible policy documents for shared use by multiple organizations.
 - Focus next year's budget on cross-learning programs and regional exchanges.



Documentation and Knowledge Sharing

- Key Questions:
 - How can local governance systems be documented and strengthened?
 - Where and how should documentation be stored to ensure accessibility while avoiding issues like those faced with the TKDL?
- Discussion Highlights:
 - Systematically document governance practices and build capacity for local systems.
 - Ensure stored information is accessible to communities while protecting traditional knowledge from exploitation.

Funding and Partnerships

- Key Questions:
 - Can CSR funding be a viable option for supporting Sangam initiatives?
 - How should Sangam approach corporates to balance funding opportunities with community values?
- Discussion Highlights:
 - Explore CSR funding and corporate partnerships carefully, ensuring community interests remain central.
 - Encourage financial resource pooling among members for mutual benefit.

By addressing these key questions and implementing the discussed recommendations, WHVS aims to empower communities, enhance advocacy efforts, and foster collaboration for sustainable development in the Western Himalayan region.



Eastern Himalayas and Ladakh: Summary of Discussions

Facilitated by Winona Lepcha from Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT), Sikkim, and Kunzang Deachen from Local Futures, Ladakh, with contributions from Seno Tshuhah from Nenterprise Chizami Weaves and North East Network, Nagaland, the session explored the potential for expanding the Sangam model to the Eastern Himalayas while addressing shared challenges across the region.

Key highlights included:

- Tourism and Livelihoods:
 - a. Ladakh's 50th year of tourism reopening inspired the creation of a "People's Charter for Tourism," potentially replicable in other Himalayan regions.
 - b. In Sikkim, the Zongu community adopted ecotourism-based livelihoods to counter the impact of large dams and reduce dependence on government support.
- Regional Challenges and Aspirations:
 - c. Common issues include cloudbursts, dam failures, and the need for sustainable tourism and livelihoods.
 - d. The Eastern Himalayas' multiculturalism, with over 100 ethnic groups, calls for a gender-inclusive approach to address political, social, and economic disparities.
- Future Directions:
 - e. A dream of hosting a Sangam in the Eastern Himalayas was shared, with suggestions to collaborate with organizations like Sambhavana Institute's *Pahaad aur Hum* and *Northeast Water Talks*.
 - f. Online networking events and exchanges could help build connections.

Important Assertion by Ashish Kothari: It is not for external groups to push for organizing an Eastern Himalaya Vikalp Sangam. Instead, members and networks within the region should take the lead if they want to.

Food and Sustainability:

- a. Focus on promoting Himalayan foods using terms like "natural foods" instead of "organic" to avoid corporatization.
- b. A vision of an "Organic Himalayas" was discussed with caution.

Next Steps:

- a. Identify and engage organizations and groups in the Northeast to strengthen collaborations.
- b. Convene a small group to discuss the feasibility of a Northeast Sangam.
- c. Invite Northeast representatives to existing Sangam events to foster connections.

The idea of rebranding as the "Himalayan Vikalp Sangam" and crafting a catchy slogan to unify efforts was also proposed.

Day 3

The day began with a morning village walk led by Shaheena Parveen (MOOL) through Chanthan Gulab Pora in Ganderbal, Kashmir. Participants explored the surroundings, spotting diverse flora and fauna, traditional houses with intricate woodwork, and vibrant persimmon trees. They interacted with locals and enjoyed the sweet, tangy taste of apples and grapes. The walk offered a glimpse into the village's deep connection with nature.

This was followed by a detailed discussion on the WHVS activities for the year 2025-2026, highlighting the following key initiatives and action points.

Key Initiatives and Action Points

Planning the Yatra

- Proposal to be finalized by December, with planning starting on April 25, 2025.
- Focus on smaller yatras (e.g., a 30 km Food Yatra), highlighting local issues and documenting ongoing work in the region.
- Suggestions included river and wetland yatras and single-day mini-yatras across the Himalayas.
- Team Leads: Zahid and Arun, with contributions from Mohammad, Nasir, Pradeep, Hamza, Akansha, and Lubna (SRDE).

Vikalp Gram (Demonstration Village)

- Initiate demonstration villages in each state to showcase Vikalp practices across areas like gender and sustainable livelihoods.
- Villages with ongoing work or connections to Sangam members will be prioritized.
- Team Leads: Akansha, Shaheena, Namgyal, Hamza, Nasir, and Lubna (SRDE).

Wellbeing Index

- Progress in Ladakh, Himachal, and Sikkim focused on cultural, mental, ecological, and spiritual well-being.
- A presentation is planned for December 2024.
- Team Members: Namgail, Mushtaq, Ovee, Shaheed, and Ashish.

Vikalp Katha (Stories)

- Plan to document eight stories, emphasizing collaborations and including stories from the Northeast.
- Team Members: Deepika, Akansha, Sanjay, Manisha, and Mirza.

Website and Translations

- Focus on publishing stories in regional languages (Urdu and Hindi) and translating existing materials.
- Team Members: Deepika (lead), Zahid, Biju, Gokul, and Rujuta.

Webinars and Events

- Proposals for both online and in-person events, including thematic series on human-animal conflict, gender, and ecotourism.
- Expanding on initiatives like Titli Trust's nature guide series and Dehradun's Signs of Hope.
- Team Leads: Namgyal, Sanjay, Akansha, Shaheena, and Winona.

Sangams

- Suggestion to have fewer but longer Sangams.
- 2025 plans include a February Sangam in Uttarakhand and possibly a single annual Sangam in Himachal.
- Team Members: Sanjay, Arun, Hamza, and Pradeep.

Cross-Learning and Resource Sharing

- Develop a database of resources and expertise.
- Allocate budget for expert teams to travel to regions in need.
- Team Members: Ovee, Akansha, Shaheena, and Sanjay.

Jammu and Kashmir Collaboration

- Lead: Fayaz, with Zahid and Dr. Shaikh.

Bridging Eastern and Western Himalayas

- Strengthen connections and collaborations.
- Team Members: Seno, Mirza, Deepika, and Winona.

People's Charter

- Update the WH Manifesto 2019 and Philosophy 2021 documents to incorporate inputs from all regions. Finalize comments by March 2025.
- Team Members: Biju, Dr. Shaikh, Mirza, Kunzang, Namgail, and Akansha.

Structure of Vikalp Sangam

- Discussions on alternative terms and structure refinement.
- Team Members: Akansha, Shrishti, and Anchal.

Wellbeing of the Members

- Team Members: Ovee and Lubna Rafiqi.

The session concluded with a commitment to ongoing collaboration and action to strengthen the Sangam's initiatives across the Himalayas.

Session with Zareef Ahmad Zareef

The session with Zareef Ahmad Zareef, a distinguished Kashmiri poet, writer, social activist, and environmentalist, was introduced by Fayaz Ahmad Dar, Founder of MOOL Sustainability Research and Training Center. Fayaz highlighted the universality of Zareef Sahib's work, which resonates deeply across professions and contexts, whether one is in an office, a field, on the road, or repairing something.

Zareef Sahib spoke passionately about Kashmir's documented 5000-year history, emphasizing the importance of preserving its cultural and environmental heritage. He made a poignant reference to *Byoun*, the Kashmiri name for the majestic Chinar tree, symbolizing resilience and the nurturing relationship between people and nature.

Through his poetry, Zareef Sahib evoked a deep connection to Kashmir's lost traditions and environmental treasures. He reminisced about his childhood, when fresh snow was carried to Srinagar and sold, contrasting it with today's scarcity of water even during summer. He lamented the loss of practices such as planting chinar trees and maintaining wetlands, which once ensured ecological balance and human well-being.

A memorable moment was a lighthearted dialogue between Zareef Sahib and Biju Bhai, who teasingly asked if Zareef Sahib possessed a romantic nature. Zareef Sahib humorously attempted to refute the claim, bringing laughter to the audience and highlighting his ability to connect through wit and charm.

Zareef Sahib also recited his poetry, weaving themes of history, environmental preservation, and cultural identity. His literary contributions, including seven published books (one of which earned the Sahitya Akademi Award), and his advocacy for societal and ecological justice, have made him a custodian of Kashmir's heritage.

The session served as an inspiring reminder of the power of storytelling and poetry in advocating for a harmonious relationship between culture, environment, and humanity.

Community Visit: Wular Lake

This was followed by a community visit to Wular Lake in Zurimanz, organized and facilitated by SRDE (School of Rural Development and Environment). The visit was led by Naseer Ahmad Dar of the Wular Fisherfolk Union, where the group had the opportunity to engage with local unions and learn about their journey, challenges, successes, and needs. During the visit, the group was welcomed into one of the members' homes, where they enjoyed a traditional cup of kehwe, a Kashmiri tea, and listened to the community's stories.

Participants also took a boat ride across Wular Lake, experiencing the raw, rough, and cold conditions faced by the local fisherfolk. The lake, which once teemed with abundant fish, now held only a few small catches, highlighting the environmental challenges the community faces. The boat ride served as a poignant reminder of the harsh realities of life on the lake and the urgent need for sustainable practices to protect its ecosystem. This visit provided the group with a deeper understanding of the local community's struggles and sparked valuable discussions on ways to address these challenges.



Day 4

On the last day, the group began the morning by painting a wall at SAGG Eco Village.

MOOL, SRDE, and organizations and individuals working in Kashmir, including NCF, IGSSS, Mushtaq, and Ashish, explored how local organizations can carry this conversation forward by renewing their exchanges and collaborations. This was followed by a discussion on envisioning the future of Kashmir—whether it should be viewed as Jammu-Kashmir-Ladakh (LJK) or simply Jammu and Kashmir. A central point of the conversation focused on how to organize activities that encompass the entire region.

The discussion also centered on inviting other aligned groups and organizations to join the network. One of the key topics addressed was the concept of alternatives, and the group deliberated on what defines an alternative within the Kashmir context.

It was suggested that the group may meet again to continue the conversation and take it forward. However, even if it does not become a collective, the dialogue and collaboration will persist, fostering ongoing connections and efforts to address the region's challenges.





Brief Interaction with the Local Media

There was a brief interaction with the local media during the event. A press release outlining the objectives of the gathering and the key outcomes of the discussions was shared with the media. Additionally, Ashish, Akanksha, and Dr. Sheikh engaged with a small group from the media to further elaborate on the purpose of the gathering, highlighting the collaborative efforts and the outcomes of the discussions.

Some Highlights:

ziraattimes.com/2024/10/25-himalayan-organisations-resolve-to-work-together-at-3-day-kashmir-meet/

Other Noteworthy Highlights

During the event, a cloth banner was painted for the Western Himalayan Vikalp Sangam (WHVS), with contributions from most of the members present. The SAGG Eco Village provided an opportunity to enjoy delicious local foods. Several members also took time to appreciate the natural surroundings, engaging in birdwatching and nature walks in and around the village, further enriching their experience of connecting with the environment.

Reflections

The event brought together diverse perspectives and created a meaningful platform for dialogue. While the time allotted was not enough to cover all the discussions in depth, the sessions were highly impactful, fostering a sense of shared purpose among the participants.

The sessions provided an invaluable opportunity to forge connections, exchange ideas, and collaborate on solutions for the region's challenges. The energy and enthusiasm of the participants were evident, and it was clear that there is a strong commitment to working together towards a sustainable and inclusive future for the Himalayan region. This experience will serve as a foundation for continued collaboration and progress.

Acknowledgements

- Zareef Ahmad Zareef Sahib for his invaluable time, presence, meaningful contributions, and for sharing his quintessential poetry and literary works with the participants.
- Ashish Kothari and the team at Kalpavriksh for inputs on the program, and the bags and t-shirts for the participants.
- Ovee Thorat and Kunzang Deachen for recording the minutes of the program and taking notes.
- Akanksha Pandey (Coordinator WHVS) for the overall coordination.
- WHVS Core Group for its inputs on the event.
- WHVS Media Team and The Himalaya Collective for their inputs on media related outcomes.
- Team at MOOL for their collaboration and local coordination in Kashmir.
- Team at SRDE for organising the community visit.
- All the participants for their time, participation, and contribution.
- SAGG Eco Village team for their hospitality.
- Eicher Group Foundation for their support.
- Jagori Charitable Rural Trust for their support and financial coordination.
- Srishti Films for their documentation and presence.
- All the vendors who provided their support and services for the event.
- Fisherfolk Union at Wular for their time and insights during the community visit.
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A WHVS Initiative

About the *Western Himalaya Vikalp Sangam*

The *Western Himalaya Vikalp Sangam* (WHVS) is a process to bring together people and organisations working on or interested in alternatives, ideologically and in practice in Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. WHVS is a part of the *Vikalp Sangam*, the Confluence on Alternatives, and has been active since 2016. Our initiatives include launching and maintaining The Himalaya Collective, a platform and website that curates and shares work, success stories, events, and news from the region.

thehimalayacollective.com

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