

Immersion Activity Programme in Kamad, Uttarakhand

Development Alternatives (DA) has successfully designed, anchored, and implemented its first 'Immersion Activity (rural) Programme' in the clusters of Kamad, Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand. The main objective of this 12-day long intense and intellectually invigorating programme was to expose third-year architecture students of the Nirma University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat to the concept of 'Built Environment and Habitat Systems' by applying various lenses of sustainability.

The students were provided with an opportunity to study and experience the interventions undertaken by DA on-ground, such as the homestays developed as a part of the Eco-tourism Project, which was implemented under the National Mission on Himalayan Studies (NMHS) to promote livelihood generation and the Sustainable Community Building, which was constructed by DA under the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India's programme, Technological Intervention in Mountain Ecosystem for Livelihood and Environment Action in Rural Network (DST TIME LEARN).

The programme kicked off with giving the students a tour of the DA Headquarters building in New Delhi, which was built by incorporating various passive design and sustainable construction techniques.

To further bridge the gap between theory and practice, the students travelled to the project sites in the Kamad village cluster in Uttarakhand. They did a recce visit to the village clusters where they acquired a sense of the surroundings, climatic conditions, local communities, flora and fauna, local food, cultural and religious practices, etc. Current practices of modern construction in the mountain terrain along with the traditional methods of construction were studied and documented in detail.

As the immersion programme gained momentum, students went on to interact with local masons and artisans who were trained by DA as part of the DST TIME LEARN Project. The masons shared their knowledge about the importance of adopting and practising local and sustainable methods of construction that they learnt and implemented during the capacity-building and skill upgradation programme. They mentioned that there is an utmost need to scale up such practices since it is a fragile ecosystem and people must be mindful of blindly adopting modern-day construction practices that are not suitable for the mountain terrain.



A local community member shares insights about her daily chore with the student. The student was amazed by the fact that ladies on hills work almost 18 hrs per day, managing and balancing both the domestic and field work. To this, the community member added by saying, "what other choice do we people have"?

The groundwork was in full swing as the students continued their on-ground research and thorough documentation by interacting with community members of different age groups including women and youth. They tried to understand the factors responsible for reverse and in-migration and discussed the same with the villagers. Further, they dug deeper into new and environmentally sustainable methods of construction and their myriad technicalities. They also learned about various construction practices that the local masons have adopted to address the threats that local buildings face from earthquakes and other natural disasters.

The resulting architectural drawings and community observations made by the students were influenced by the distinctive stories associated with the local houses and the mythological beliefs prevalent in the region. The students noted that every household held a unique story within itself. As the main outcome of the study, the students, through qualitative data assimilation, plain observation, and development of detailed architectural drawings, will try to understand the housing and construction practices including material typologies and technologies, along with how waste and water systems are managed at the community level. Zeenat Niazi, Senior Vice President, DA will be conducting the final assessment of the students' work at an external jury event that is to be organised by the Nirma University by the end of August.



A group picture of the students and the local masons. These masons were trained earlier by Development Alternatives under DST TIME LEARN project