



ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) Component

Japan Fund for Global Environment (JFGE) Project

Project Title	Preserving Traditional Land Use through New Livelihood Methods in Zunheboto, Nagaland, India: Satoyama Approach
Reporting Period:	April 2025- March 2026
Project Site:	Zunheboto, Nagaland, India
Prepared By:	The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)
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1. Project Overview:

This report presents the annual progress of the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) component under the Japan Fund for Global Environment (JFGE) project, covering the reporting period of April 2025 to March 2026. The project is a three-year initiative implemented by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) in Zunheboto, Nagaland, India, under the Satoyama framework for sustainable land use and biodiversity conservation.

The TEK book will be developed as both a scholarly and community resource. It seeks to document centuries-old traditional wisdom relating to land and forest management, biodiversity conservation, agricultural practices, ethnomedicine, cultural rituals, and ecological forecasting. The urgency of this effort is underscored by the widening inter-generational knowledge gap, as younger generations of the Sumi community increasingly lose contact with their ecological heritage.

The publication will be made available in both English and the Sumi language, ensuring that it resonates with community members while remaining accessible to a global academic audience. It will be published as a non-commercial, open-access resource through TERI Publication.

2. Objectives of the Book:

The proposed TEK book is designed primarily as a resource for the Sumi community. Its primary goal is to ensure that the rich body of traditional ecological knowledge accumulated over generations is preserved, celebrated, and transmitted to future protectors of the land. The specific objectives are as follows:



- To document and safeguard the depth of Sumi ecological practices, spanning traditional rituals, land and forest management, sustainable food systems, biodiversity conservation, and customary healing methods.
- To support the intergenerational transfer of traditional knowledge by creating a reliable and accessible reference that connects Sumi elders and younger community members.
- To raise awareness among researchers, educators, policymakers, and broader audiences about the contemporary relevance and significance of traditional ecological knowledge for sustainable development and cultural heritage preservation.

3. Literature Analysis of Sumi Traditional Ecological Knowledge

A review of existing studies shows that the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) of the Sumi Naga community is deeply rooted in lived practices but remains poorly documented in academic literature. While Naga communities in Nagaland have attracted increasing scholarly interest across disciplines such as anthropology, ethnobotany, and environmental studies, the Sumi Naga community has received very limited focused attention. This lack of documentation highlights the importance and urgency of the present effort to record and preserve their knowledge.

3.1 Existing Documentation and Scholarly Work

Published works on Nagaland TEK are predominantly broad-based, covering multiple tribes without sufficient depth on the Sumi community. Relevant contributions include ethnobotanical surveys conducted in Nagaland that catalogue medicinal plant usage, agricultural documentation related to jhum (shifting cultivation) systems, and anthropological studies on clan structures and customary law. Scholars such as those affiliated with the Firebird Foundation, Dibrugarh University, and various North-East Indian research institutions have contributed to piecemeal documentation of Naga ecological practices, including agricultural cycles and harvesting traditions.

Dr. Vikavi K. Assumi's doctoral research on Naga dietary practices, cultural transitions, clothing, and everyday life represents one of the few academically rigorous, community-specific contributions relevant to the Sumi community. Similarly, Dr. Alino Sumi's literary contributions on Naga heritage offer contextual and cultural frameworks, though these remain largely within the domain of cultural narrative rather than ecological documentation.

The Sumi Literature Board (SLB) and the Sutsah Academy have preserved elements of Sumi linguistic and cultural knowledge, and existing ethnic medicine literature cited during stakeholder consultations represents a valuable foundational resource. However, these materials are largely in the Sumi language and have not been systematically compiled, translated, or made accessible to wider audiences.

3.2 Identified Gaps in Literature

The review identifies several critical gaps that the TEK book will directly address:

- **Absence of a comprehensive, community-validated resource:** No publication currently consolidates the full breadth of Sumi community's TEK spanning ecology, medicine, agriculture, disaster management, weather forecasting, and cultural landscapes into an accessible format.



- **Limited bilingual documentation:** Existing materials are either in English (and thus inaccessible to many community members) or in the Sumi language (and thus inaccessible to researchers and policymakers). A bilingual publication is absent.
- **Under representation of oral traditions:** A significant proportion of Sumi community's TEK is transmitted orally through elders, folk songs, and ritual narratives. This knowledge exists outside the formal written record and is at serious risk of loss.
- **Gaps in ecological indicator documentation:** Traditional knowledge related to phenological indicators, moon-cycle calendars, and animal behavior for weather and disaster prediction has not been formally documented for the Sumi community.
- **Youth disconnection:** The erosion of intergenerational knowledge transfer, driven by urbanization and changing educational priorities, means that experiential TEK held by elders is not being transmitted in structured forms.

3.3 Positioning of the TEK Book

The proposed TEK book occupies a distinct and necessary position in existing literature. It will be the first comprehensive, bilingual, community-authenticated publication dedicated exclusively to the TEK of the Sumi Naga people. By combining participatory research methods with rigorous editorial and peer review processes led by the Sumi Literature Board, it will serve simultaneously as a scholarly reference, a community resource, and a policy advocacy tool for the recognition of traditional ecological knowledge in sustainable development planning.



4. Project Flow Chart:

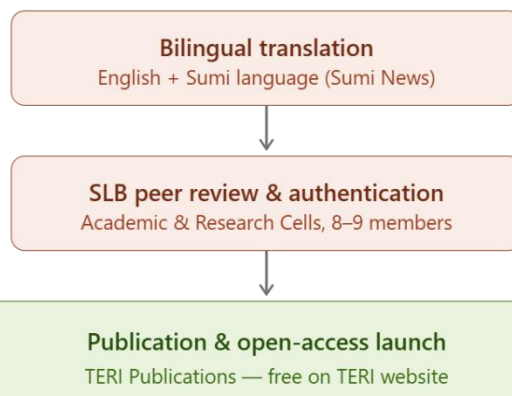
Phase 1 — Foundations



Phase 2 — Documentation



Phase 3 — Finalisation



- Foundations
- Documentation
- Finalisation
- Output



5. Methodology and Approach

The documentation of the book demands a research methodology that is both academically rigorous and deeply sensitive to community protocols, cultural contexts, and ethical obligations. The methodology adopted for this project combines established qualitative research tools with indigenous knowledge documentation frameworks, ensuring that the process itself reflects the values of reciprocity, transparency, and community ownership that underpin the publication's mandate. The following subsections describe the key elements of this approach.

5.1 Participatory Community Engagement

The foundation of the book rests on direct engagement with Sumi elders, who serve as the primary knowledge holders. Their oral narratives, folk songs, and field-based practices are being systematically documented through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews. Subject matter specialists with deep cultural and ecological expertise have been identified as authors and are being on board to draft individual chapters.

- **Participatory Rural Appraisal:** PRA sessions will be conducted across selected villages in Zunheboto district, bringing together community members, with particular emphasis on elders, women, and traditional knowledge practitioners. All PRA outputs will be recorded, photographed, and translated for integration into the relevant book chapters by the authors.
- **Focused Group Discussion:** Separate FGDs will be organized for different knowledge holder groups: agricultural practitioners, traditional healers, weavers, hunters and fishers, elders with knowledge of customary governance, and youth as emerging inheritors of this knowledge. Sessions will be documented with participant consent and subsequently translated.
- **Interviews and Oral History Documentation:** Individual interviews will be conducted with identified knowledge holders, particularly elders whose expertise spans multiple domains of TEK. With informed consent, video documentation will be undertaken by the photographer to capture demonstrations of practices such as traditional weaving techniques, medicinal plant preparation, or seed saving.
- **Community Verification Workshops:** Following the completion of the fieldwork and initial drafting, community verification workshops will be convened to present findings back to the community. These workshops serve two purposes: first, to validate the accuracy and completeness of the documented knowledge; and second, to identify any omissions, misrepresentations, or culturally sensitive content that requires revision. Verification workshops will be held at the Zunheboto district level, with possible extension to Kohima and Dimapur as proposed during the SLB consultation.

5.2 Ethical Framework and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)

The project strictly adheres to FPIC protocols throughout the documentation process. All personal narratives, case stories, and community archives are utilized only with explicit, informed permission from the knowledge holders. This ensures absolute respect for privacy, cultural values, and traditional rights, in line with national and international standards for the ethical documentation of traditional knowledge.



5.3 Community-Based Project Team:

In keeping with the project's commitment to community ownership and authentic representation, all key contributors will be identified from within the Sumi community itself. This includes chapter authors, translators (English to Sumi language), and a community photographer who will be selected to document fieldwork, cultural practices, and landscapes for inclusion in the publication. This approach ensures the book is not only about the Sumi community but is produced, in large part, by it.

5.4 Accessibility in Two Languages:

To ensure the publication resonates authentically with community members, elders and youth alike while remaining accessible to global academics and scholars, the entire work will be translated into both English and the Sumi language. This bilingual approach is central to the book's mandate of serving both local and international readerships.

5.5 Cultural Sensitivity and Translation

Preventing cultural distortion is a core priority of the proposed book. Meticulous attention will be given to linguistic nuance and cultural accuracy at every stage of drafting. Active collaboration with Sumi authors, the Sumi Literature Board (SLB), and the Sutsah Academy will ensure that all terminology, concepts, and descriptions align with established cultural guidelines.

5.6 Publication and Open-Access Strategy

The book will be published by TERI Publications to ensure quality, reach, and institutional credibility. Consistent with the project's commitment to equitable benefit-sharing and the prevention of plagiarism, the publication will be a non-commercial, open-access resource hosted freely on TERI's online platform.

5.7 Copyright and Peer Review

The Copyright model between SLB and TERI is under discussion. This arrangement will leverage TERI's established publishing infrastructure while firmly cementing SLB's role as the primary knowledge custodian. The Academic and Research Cells of SLB, comprising 8–9 experienced members with established publishing records, will provide the final peer review to authenticate all content before publication.

6. Key Activities During the Reporting Period:

Significant progress was made across multiple fronts during the reporting period, spanning structural development of the book, consultative meetings with key stakeholders, and the identification of subject-matter experts and contributing authors. Each activity is detailed below.

6.1. Structural Development: Concept Note and Table of Contents

As one of the foundational steps, a concept note was developed in close consultation with project partners. This document articulates the project's urgency, establishes the joint copyright framework, and formally defines the open-access mandate. Building on this, a comprehensive 15-chapter structure was crafted to encompass the full span of the Sumi Naga's ecological and cultural heritage. The proposed structure is presented in the table below:



Table: The Book Structure

Chapter	Theme	Key Focus Areas
1	Introduction to TEK	Importance, global and Indian context, integration with modern science, and the purpose of safeguarding Sumi TEK.
2	The Sumi Naga: People and Land	Geography, village settlements, oral history, clan systems, social structure, and relationships with natural resources.
3	Rituals, Festivals and Ecology	Agricultural links to Tuluni and Ahuna festivals; rituals for fertility and rain; traditional games; oral folklore.
4	Natural Dye and Weaving	Dye preparation, traditional garment weaving techniques, raw materials, tools, and traditional attire accessories.
5	Cultural Landscapes and Sacred Sites	Sacred forests and rivers, place-name history, ancestral ecological wisdom, customary laws, and community governance.
6	Forests and Biodiversity	Forest typology, multipurpose species nomenclature, customary conservation taboos, and cultural significance of species.
7	Hunting, Fishing and Animal Knowledge	Trapping tools, community fishing techniques, animal behavior, and ecological indicators for weather and disaster prediction.
8	Agriculture and Land Management	Jhum (shifting cultivation) cycles, crop diversity, seed saving, soil fertility, traditional pest control, and livestock rearing.
9	Weather and Ecological Forecasting	Traditional moon-cycle seasonal calendars and phenological indicators for disaster prediction and harvest readiness.
10	Food Systems and Dietary Practices	Foraging (wild fruits, insects, mushrooms), food preservation, traditional fermented foods and beverages, and dietary taboos.
11	Ethnomedicine and Healing	Medicinal plant usage, the role of healers, and ethical rituals and protocols for plant collection.
12	Traditional Building Materials	Roofing techniques, specialized timber selection (termite- and fire-resistant), and architectural ornamental objects.



Chapter	Theme	Key Focus Areas
13	Disaster Management	Traditional mitigation strategies for landslides, soil erosion, forest fires, cyclones, and hailstorms.
14	Knowledge Transmission	Storytelling as education, gender roles in TEK, learning by doing, and intergenerational transfer mechanisms.
15	The Way Forward	Emerging threats to TEK, community-led revival strategies, youth engagement, and blending tradition with modern opportunities.

6.2 Stakeholder Consultation: Meeting with the Sumi Literature Board (SLB)

A formal stakeholder consultation was conducted at Sutsah Academy in Zunheboto district, Nagaland, on 19th January 2026, bringing together representatives from TERI, members of the Sumi Literature Board (SLB), and faculty and students of Sutsah Academy (other than TERI, 34 participants). The primary objective of the meeting was to establish a collaborative framework for TEK documentation, define the structure of the proposed book, and identify potential contributors.

- The Secretary of SLB opened the meeting with introductory remarks, stressing the importance of TEK documentation as an enduring resource for future generations. The TERI team then provided a comprehensive briefing on their decade-long engagement in Zunheboto since 2014, followed by a presentation on the project's objectives, methodology, and proposed book structure.
- The Chairman of SLB contextualized the initiative within both cultural and statutory frameworks, citing the example of the Oriental Pied Hornbill's traditional role as a predictor of rainfall. He highlighted the agricultural foundations of the Sumi forefathers and reaffirmed SLB's statutory responsibility as guardian of the Sutsah language. He also requested that workshops be extended to Kohima and Dimapur to broaden community participation.
- Key administrative and legal decisions were reached during the meeting. It was agreed that TERI Press would publish the book, with SLB providing final review and certification. The copyright model was discussed at length: while SLB initially sought full copyright, a Joint Copyright arrangement was proposed as a more equitable and collaborative framework, a matter to be finalized through further dialogue. It was confirmed that the book would be non-commercial and freely accessible on TERI's website. Concerns around plagiarism, content authenticity, and project timelines were also addressed, with SLB's Academic and Research Cells assigned responsibility for content authorization.

- Youth engagement emerged as a cross-cutting theme, with proposals put forward to revitalize the traditional Morung system, engage young people as co-authors, and draw upon existing ethnic medicine literature to cultivate interest among the next generation.



Figure: Meeting with Sumi Literature Board in Sutsah Academy, Zunheboto dist. Nagaland

6.3 Expert Consultation: Meeting with Dr. Alino Sumi

A targeted consultation was held with Dr. Alino Sumi in Dimapur, Nagaland, on 21st January 2026 with the objective of reviewing publication strategies and identifying avenues for academic collaboration. Dr. Alino provided a valuable overview of her existing and forthcoming literary contributions on Naga heritage, offering important insights into the cultural and scholarly context of the TEK documentation attempt.

Among the key recommendations put forward during the meeting:

- Dr. Alino recommended coordination with Dr. Kanato Chophy, Assistant Professor of Social Anthropology at Dibrugarh University, as a prospective collaborator, citing his expertise in the anthropological dimensions of Naga culture.
- She advised that research activities be conducted independently of the SLB to mitigate potential delays and ensure timely execution of the documentation process.

- She suggested engaging Sumi News as a translation support partner, which would help ensure the book's accessibility to a wider community audience.

The meeting was productive in providing both strategic direction and practical pathways for advancing the TEK publication. Dr. Alino's extensive prior publishing experience was identified as a valuable resource to guide the project going forward.



Figure: Meeting with Dr. Alino Sumi in Dimapur, Nagaland.

6.4 Meeting with Dr. Vikavi K. Assumi

A consultative meeting was held with Dr. Vikavi K. Assumi in Guwahati on 22nd January 2026 to explore his potential contribution as a chapter author. Dr. Assumi has completed doctoral research on the Sumi Naga community, encompassing their cultural transitions over the last century, dietary practices, everyday customs, clothing, and aspects of Sumi history. He expressed keen interest in contributing a dedicated chapter on food systems and dietary practices, informed by his academic expertise and his fieldwork documenting community rituals and traditions.

Dr. Assumi also shared information about his current collaborative work with the Firebird Foundation, where he is engaged in documenting agricultural cycles and harvesting practices across 13–14 villages in Nagaland research that directly complements the thematic scope of the TEK book.

Additionally, Dr. Assumi recommended involving Dr. Hotoku, based in Dimapur, who possesses extensive knowledge of Sumi rituals, festivals, and cultural landscapes. Dr. Hotoku's involvement, in an advisory capacity drawing on his experience as a keynote speaker on Sumi culture, is expected to enrich the authenticity and depth of the publication.

Dr. Assumi's strong academic profile and sustained community engagement position him as a key contributor, and his focus on food and dietary traditions is expected to significantly strengthen the cultural depth of the publication.



7. Activity Timeline

The following Gantt chart presents the planned timeline for all key activities across the three-year project period (April 2024 – March 2027). Activities are organised by phase and year, with indicative quarterly scheduling.

Activity	Year 1 (Apr 2024 – Mar 2025)				Year 2 (Apr 2025 – Mar 2026)				Year 3 (Apr 2026 – Mar 2027)			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Phase 1: Foundations												
Concept note, Literature Review and development of draft structure of the book												
Stakeholder consultations (SLB, experts)												
Copyright and FPIC framework finalization												
Community team selection (authors, translators, photographer)												
Phase 2: Documentation												
Onboarding of contributing authors												
Chapter drafting (Year 2)												
Community verification workshops												
Stakeholder review of draft chapters												



Phase 3: Finalisation & Publication												
English–Sumi language translation									Planned	Planned	Planned	
Photography curation and design layout									Planned	Planned		
SLB peer review and authentication										Planned	Planned	
Publication (TERI Publications)											Planned	Planned
Dissemination and regional seminars												Planned



9. Way Forward

The coming year represents a critical phase in the TEK book project, transitioning from the consultative and structural groundwork accomplished during this reporting period to active fieldwork, drafting, and editorial processes. The following steps will guide progress in the next reporting period:

- **Finalization of the Copyright Agreement:** Ongoing discussions with the TERI Press and Sumi Literature Board regarding the Copyright framework will be brought to a formal conclusion. A signed agreement will be the prerequisite for initiating the full drafting process.
- **Onboarding of Contributing Authors:** Based on consultations conducted during this reporting period, identified subject-matter experts including Dr. Alino Sumi, Dr. Vikavi K. Assumi and other identified authors, will be formally onboard and assigned specific chapters.
- **Onboarding of Community Photographer:** Photographers from the community will be identified and formally onboarded to support the visual documentation of the TEK book, including the capture of archival materials, cultural practices, and ecological landscapes.
- **Community Fieldwork and FGD Workshops:** A series of focused group discussions and in-depth interviews with Sumi elders will be conducted across villages in Zunheboto, with potential extension to Kohima and Dimapur as requested by the SLB Chairman. All field activities will adhere strictly to FPIC protocols.



- **Drafting and Iterative Review:** Authors will commence with drafting the chapters, with iterative review cycles involving TERI's editorial team, Sumi cultural experts, and the SLB's Academic and Research Cells to ensure accuracy, authenticity, and cultural sensitivity.
 - **Translation into the Sumi Language:** Collaboration with Sumi News and the Sutsah Academy will be formalized for the translation of the complete manuscript into the Sumi language, ensuring the bilingual character of the final publication.
 - **Peer Review and Authentication:** SLB's Academic and Research Cells will conduct the final peer review of the completed manuscript, providing formal verification of all documented knowledge.
 - **Publication and Launch:** Upon completion of the review process, the manuscript will be submitted to TERI Publications for design, layout, and printing. The book will be simultaneously made available as a free, open-access digital resource on TERI's website.
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