

FIELD REPORT ON DATA COLLECTION: MIZORAM

The DPIIT-IPR Chair at NLUJAA undertook a field visit to Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, on **27 March 2026**. The northeastern region of India represents one of the richest reservoirs of indigenous knowledge systems, cultural practices, and biodiversity. Among these states, Mizoram stands out for its deeply rooted tribal traditions, vibrant textile heritage, and strong community-based cultural structures.

Mizoram is predominantly inhabited by the Mizo tribes, who follow a community-centric lifestyle governed by customary laws and traditions. The concept of “**Tlawmngaihna**” (selfless service and community obligation) forms the ethical foundation of Mizo society.



The Mizo people have historically preserved their customs, crafts, and ecological knowledge through oral traditions and community practices rather than formal legal systems. Traditional knowledge in Mizoram is reflected in:

- Textile weaving patterns unique to specific tribes
- Bamboo and cane craftsmanship
- Indigenous agricultural practices such as jhum cultivation
- Folk music, dances, and oral narratives
- Unlike codified knowledge systems, these traditions are transmitted across generations orally, making them vulnerable to loss and exploitation.

In the contemporary global economy, however, such traditional knowledge (TK) and traditional cultural expressions (TCEs) face increasing risks of misappropriation, commodification without consent, and erosion due to modernization. Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), when appropriately contextualized, can serve as a tool to safeguard these traditions while enabling economic empowerment.

Against this backdrop, the visit aimed to engage directly with governmental bodies, cultural institutions, and local stakeholders to understand the current status of TK and TCE protection and to explore the applicability of IPR frameworks in the region. The study adopted a qualitative and interaction-based approach:

- **Field Interactions:** Meetings with government officials and institutional representatives.

- **Institutional Visits:** Examination of cultural repositories and museums.
- **Policy Discussions:** Engagement with authorities on legal frameworks and implementation.
- **Observational Analysis:** Study of artifacts, textiles, and cultural materials.

This report details the meaningful interactions held with government officials and cultural institutions, focusing on the documentation, protection, and economic empowerment of Mizo tribal communities through Intellectual Property (IP) frameworks.

DEPARTMENTAL ENGAGEMENTS AND STRATEGIC DISCUSSIONS

1. Interaction with the Department of Commerce & Industries



The delegation met with **Dr. H. Lianzela**, Director of the Commerce & Industries Department, Government of Mizoram. The discussion focused on strengthening legal frameworks for the documentation and protection of TK and TCEs. Key areas of focus included:

- **Geographical Indications (GI):** exploring the potential for GI registration of unique tribal products to protect regional identity and quality. The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 provides a mechanism to link products for instance the traditional handloom products created by artisans. For Mizoram, this holds significant promise, particularly for textiles and handicrafts in order to prevent the same from any apprehensive misappropriation or unauthorised use as was seen in the case of the traditional shawl 'Puan' which is a handwoven garment used as a shawl and wrap around skirt.

- **Collective Marks:** discussing the use of collective marks to empower tribal communities and ensure shared economic benefits. Collective marks can be employed to create a sense of distinctive identity of the community and provide a trademark to the name 'Mizo' to protect from infringement of the community identity and traditional knowledge.
- **Artisan Support:** The chair was informed of the National Handloom Development Organisation's efforts to create awareness among artisans and facilitate economic incentives, including support for filing applications for authorized users.

A key insight was that while policy frameworks exist, **implementation gaps** remain significant due to limited awareness and technical expertise.

2. Meeting with the Directorate of Art & Culture



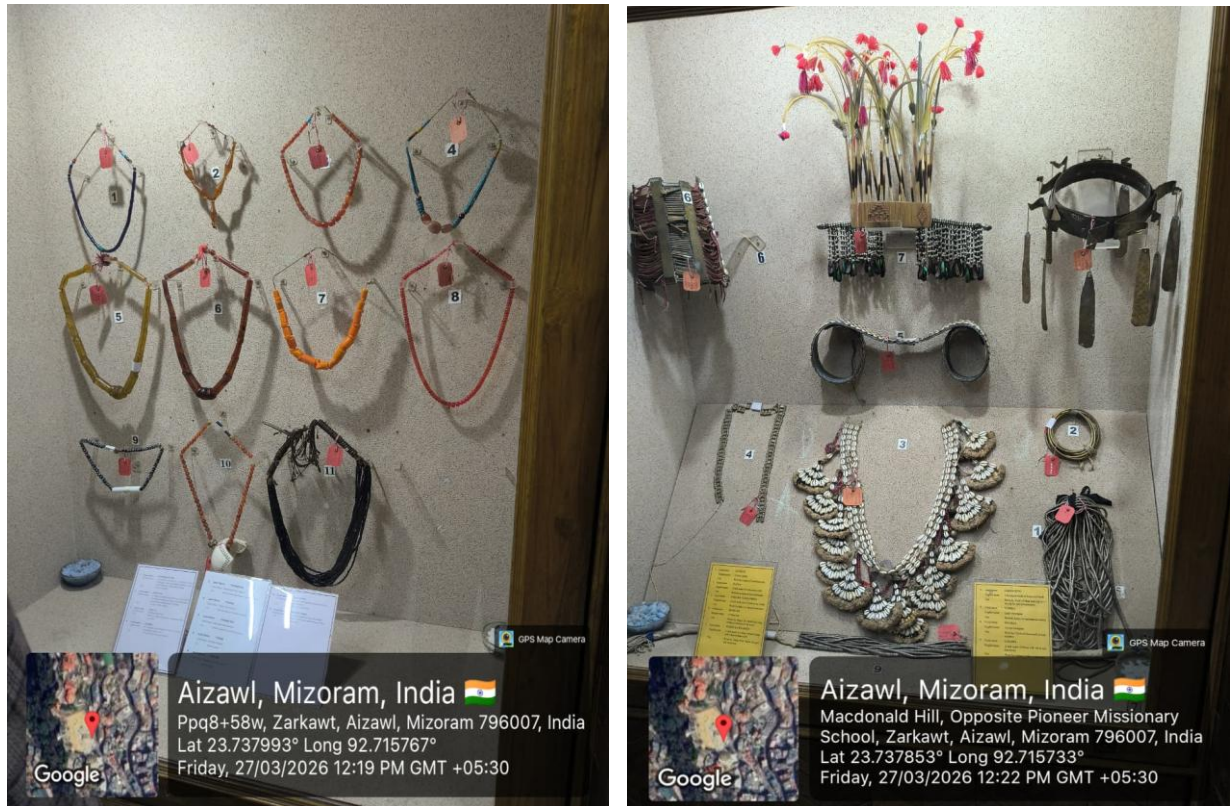
A fruitful meeting with the Directorate led to an in-depth exchange on preserving indigenous knowledge systems. The discussion, highlighted by **DPIIT IPR Chair Professor Dr. Nalanda Bala Murugan**, emphasized:

- The preservation of and cultural expressions including the folklore, songs, and the famous bamboo dance of the Mizo people.
- The role of community-driven documentation in preventing misappropriation.
- The use of IP tools to provide sustainable and inclusive economic opportunities for the Mizo people.

The discussion highlighted a fundamental issue: preservation without empowerment risks reducing culture to static display.

CULTURAL DOCUMENTATION: MIZORAM STATE MUSEUM

The Chair visited the **Mizoram State Museum**, a space where history and heritage are carefully preserved. This institution located at **Bawlhmun, Macdonald Hill, Zarkawt**, is an



ethnographic museum that displays objects that serve multiple purposes and offers a showcase of tribal evolution through:

- **Traditional Textiles and Ornaments:** Exquisite displays of ceremonial headgear and clothing, each narrating stories of identity and craftsmanship. Amongst these, the ‘Vakiria’ is a headgear which is worn by women of the Mizo community specifically while performing their traditional bamboo dance, ‘Cheraw’ during their festivals. These ornaments reflect the distinct culture of the Mizo community, it highlights the use of different materials like brass metals, seeds of trees, feathers of birds, and skin of different wild animals.
- **Tribal Weaponry and Instruments:** Sections dedicated to objects that once held functional and cultural significance but now stand as quiet reminders of traditions gradually receding with time. These weapons highlight the essence of the warrior and headhunting practices of the tribal communities.



- **Tribal musical Instruments:** The **Rawchhem** is a traditional wind instrument constructed from a dried gourd and bamboo pipes. It produces a distinct polyphonic sound but requires high levels of breath control and technical skill to play. According to local guides, the influence of modernization has led to a significant decline in this cultural practice, with fewer people today retaining the specialized knowledge needed to play these traditional instruments.

CORE INSIGHTS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The visit highlighted several critical needs for the region, mirroring the systemic challenges found in other indigenous contexts:

- **Strengthening Repositories:** Enhancing the documentation of traditional knowledge including traditional cultural expression particularly with respect to non-medicinal aspects across Northeast India to prevent biopiracy and cultural loss. As the northeastern part of India consist of diverse heritage and practices which are unique from the other states of the country. The different tribal societies include unique traditional knowledge such as medicinal practices, healing practices with herbal remedies, thereby highlighting the need for a proper documentation system of all the traditional knowledge in order to protect the identity and knowledge of the tribes in the state.
- **Branding and Value Addition:** The tribal products of the region have unique characteristics and vibrant designs which can be branded in the international arena and with this the tribal communities can be provided with an identification. This initiative would also help in empowering the local artisans involved in creating such unique and vibrant textile through the mechanism of collective marks which would provide a safeguard with reference to the distinctive name to the tribe. This would help to link tribal products more closely to community identity through formal IP protections.

- **Community Rights:** Promoting collective rights would help in protection of their deep-rooted culture and their distinct ethnic identity, alongside biodiversity protection for the specific herbs, medicinal plants etc that are grown by the community and used in their day-to-day life.
- **Institutional Collaboration:** Partnering with the **Tribal Research Institute, Mizoram**, would help in gaining more understanding of the tribal culture, their practices for the purpose preservation of their traditional knowledge and cultural practice and joint publications.
- **Policy Intervention:** Policy intervention is an important aspect of IPR law and its enforcement requires effective implementation , lack of awareness amongst the local people involved in producing unique textiles and goods, leads to a gap in the enforcement mechanism of the existing legal policies. Therefore, proposing a joint intervention to the state minister to bridge the gap between grassroots knowledge and modern IP law.

FUTURE INITIATIVES

Building on these discussions, preliminary plans were initiated for:

- **National Conference (June 2026):** The DPIIT IPR Chair through their initiative in organising a National Conference with tribes from different parts of the country but mainly focusing on the North-eastern aspect with the objective of boosting textile exports and formalizing regional collaborations to create opportunities for the communities involved.
- **MoU Development:** This Memorandum of Understanding establishes a formal collaborative framework with the Directorate to advance the protection and promotion of regional textiles and indigenous heritage. By combining academic legal expertise with administrative resources, the parties will undertake joint initiatives focused on the comprehensive documentation of Geographical Indications (GI), the creation of a centralized repository for traditional knowledge, and the implementation of community-driven outreach programs. This partnership aims to bridge the gap between traditional craftsmanship and formal intellectual property protections, fostering regional awareness and creating a sustainable ecosystem for the documentation and global promotion of traditional cultural expressions.

What emerges from the visit is not a simple solution but a careful balancing act. Protection must be pursued, but not at the cost of reducing culture to a commodity. Documentation must be strengthened, but in a manner that respects community control. Economic opportunities must be expanded, but without eroding the meaning embedded in traditional practices. Any meaningful approach will require collaboration, between state institutions, local communities, and academic bodies such as the Tribal Research Institute Mizoram. More importantly, it will require a shift in perspective: from imposing legal categories to adapting them.