

# North Eastern Social Research Centre Guwahati



## Annual Report *April 2020 to March 2021*

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## Introduction

With immense joy and with gratitude to all those who have supported us during the year we present to you the Annual Report 2020-21 of North Eastern Social Research Centre (NESRC), Guwahati. Despite the obstacles posed by the pandemic during the year, NESRC was able to be quite productive in its research, publications and webinars. We conducted several studies but COVID-19 stopped us from organising local level seminars and meetings of leaders of ethnic communities in conflict which it normally does at Agartala, Bongaigon and Imphal. The meetings that were planned had to be cancelled. Webinars took the place of seminars. The international webinar in July 2020 organised jointly with Don Bosco College, Golaghat focused on tribal land alienation while the national webinar of February 2021 was on fundamentalism in the Northeast. They brought together on a common platform scholars, students, peace activists and civil society leaders to engage with issues around peace and religion. Some staff members presented papers at seminars organised by other institutions.

Publications too suffered because of the pandemic. NESRC offices were closed for many months and printing presses did not function. In spite of it NESRC published five books during the year on land, displacement and gender implications of tribal customary laws. Some staff members also wrote professional and newspaper articles during the year.

The library is being put to good use by research scholars and NESRC continued to improve it. The library has more than 10,000 volumes, around 50 percent of them on the Northeast. These facilities are made available free of cost to scholars and others. The plan to digitalise the documentation centre had to be delayed because of COVID related problems.

**In this report we collate details of some of the work done by NESRC from April 2020 to March 2021. This was a year of change. On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 Dr Hector D'Souza handed the charge of Director over to Dr Walter Fernandes, its Founder-Director. Some staff members completed their contract and left the centre and others joined and continued its work. They have been productive and have contributed to the mandate of NESRC of combining serious research with networking and action in order to facilitate social change and adapt official policies and social processes to the needs of the marginalised**

## STUDIES

Research is the mainstay of NESRC. Some studies were completed during the year and others are ongoing. The main study completed is on the Gender Implications of the Tribal Customary Law in the Northeast. Others included conflicts and peace and land issues.

### A. Studies Completed

**1. Walter Fernandes & Namrata Kalita.** *Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms of the Tribes in North East India.*

The objective of this study is to bring people together for confidence building measures with long term peace in view. The attempt in this study was to look at the traditions of eight tribes on conflict resolution and possibilities of updating them to suit the present situation.

**2. Walter Fernandes & Thomas Malsom***Development-Induced Displacement in Tripura 1947-2010.*

**3. Walter Fernandes, Vanlal Pari, Lalruahmawi Bela and Zonum Wania.** Development-Induced Displacement in Mizoram 1947-2010.

These two studies belong to the series undertaken by NESRC from its inception, in order to create a database on the extent and type of land acquired for national development since the first five-year plan, the number and type of people deprived of sustenance, the number rehabilitated and their present state. This database will hopefully be a tool of advocacy for policy changes in favour of the marginalised. Studies in six States have been completed and published. Two more were published during 2020-21 and 3 will be published during 2021-22.

**4. Bineeta Sarma.** *The Assam Budget 2020-21 and the Girl Child.*

During 2020-21 NESRC resumed the studies that it had interrupted for three years on the child budget in Assam in collaboration with HAQ – Child Rights Organisation, New Delhi. Its focus this year was the girl child, the type of Central and State schemes, Assam's budget allocation for them, the revised estimates and actual spending. Because of the restrictions posed by the pandemic fieldwork could not be done on the nature of their implementation.

## **B. Ongoing Studies**

Five studies being conducted or updated will be completed during 2021-22.

**1. Meenal Tula & Upasana Goswami:** *Customary Laws, Land Rights and Women in the Context of Socio-Economic Transformation in Northeast India*

The study aims to take a close look at the changing agricultural practices along with land ownership and occupational patterns of women in four communities of Northeast India, the Garo, Karbi, Dimasa and Angami, to better understand the relationship between women and land. These communities provide a suitably varied context with regard to both inheritance patterns and traditional agricultural practices. The Garo, the Karbi and the Dimasa practise shifting cultivation while the Angami are terrace cultivators. While among the Garo property flows through the female line (matrilineal), the other three communities are patrilineal.

**2. Walter Fernandes & Ratika Yumnam.***Development-Induced Displacement in Manipur 1947-2010.*

**3. Walter Fernandes, Marge Nyori & Dusu Sambyo.***Development-Induced Displacement in Arunachal Pradesh 1947-2010.*

These two studies on Development-Induced Displacement (DID) delayed because of the COVID linked restriction, will be completed and published by the end of 2021.

**4. Joseph Zoliana, Theophilus Basumatary, Cassimir Isha Nungchim & Joten Reang.***The Impact of COVID-19 on the Migrant Workers & Students of Assam, Manipur & Tripura.*

The nationwide lockdown critically dislocated India's migrant population. Lacking jobs and money, and with public transport shut down, they as well as hundreds of students were forced to return to their homes, at times walking hundreds of miles. The attempt in the study is to understand the processes that led to joblessness and greater poverty among the migrants. Its hypothesis is that the pandemic did not create but intensified the already existing inequalities in the Indian social system. Students too felt the impact of the poor educational infrastructure in the region. The study is being done in the BTAD area of Assam, in Manipur and Tripura.

**5. Joseph Zoliana, Sarah Phanchopi, Samuel Horo and Manpang Nyiam.***Traditional Tribal Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in Nagaland and Karbi Anglong, Assam.*

While ethnic conflicts are a reality in the Northeast, it is equally true that the tribes had their traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. By studying the Karbi-Dimasa conflict of 2005 and the ongoing land related Pochury-Chakesang tension in Nagaland an attempt is made to understand the traditional systems and the possibility of updating them to suit present day conflicts. Its hypothesis is that tradition does not have all the answers to present day questions but it can be updated to suit the present and can be modernised to solve the conflicts.

## **SEMINARS, WORKSHOPS AND COLLOQUIUMS**

Seminars and conferences are basic to the mandate of NESRC to network with civil society groups, researchers, field and legal activists and government officials to reflect together on the social processes and facilitate social and policy changes in favour of the marginalised

**1. International Webinar *Politics of Tribal Exploitation in North East India: An Unexplored Slice of Paradise*** July 16-17, 2020. Jointly organised by Don Bosco College, Golaghat & NESRC it dwelt on the causes & impact of and possible solutions to tribal land alienation. 2,288 persons from 13 countries registered but attendance was limited to 500.

**2. National Webinar on Fundamentalism, Secularism and Conflicts in India.** *February 19-20, 2021.* The theme, though All India in nature, was restricted to the Northeast. A national dimension was given to it by Prof. Udayon Misra the keynote speaker. Seven papers were presented, one each from the Seven Sisters of the Northeast. It had 96 participants.

For effective advocacy in support of the marginalised, the findings of the studies and deliberations of the seminars or workshops are made available in the form of professional and popular publications. NESRC published five books during 2020-2021. The first of them was

the last of 14 on the gender implications of the tribal customary law. The book on land relations is an offshoot of the seminar held at Tezpur University in 2018. The one in the conflict and peace series is based on a seminar held in 2019. Two are in the series on DID.

**1. Melvil Pereira, Jyotikona Chetia, H. Witting Mawsor and Kyntiewbianglin Mawsor.** *Reviewing Norms, Reforming Practices: The Lyngama of Meghalaya.*

**2. Erik de Maaker & Meenal Tula (eds).** *Unequal Land Relations in North East India: Custom, Gender and the Market.* 2020.

**3. Meenal Tula & Kusumika Ghosh (eds).** *Women and Peacebuilding: Perspectives from the Field.* 2021 (NESRC Peace Studies Series-15).

**4. Walter Fernandes, Savio Abreu, Niraj Naik & Simon Fernandes.** *Inclusive or Unequal Progress?: Development-Induced Displacement in Goa 1965-2010.* (with XCHR) 2021.

**5. Walter Fernandes, Thomas Malsom, Gita Bharali & Meenal Tula.** *Land Alienation and Ethnic Conflicts: Development-Induced Displacement in Tripura 1947-2010.* 2021.

### PROFESSIONAL ARTICLES

Apart from our own publications, NESRC staff members share their findings also through professional journals, edited books and newspapers. They published the following articles:

**Dr Meenal Tula.** “Gentrified fantasies: women singers on the gramophone in late colonial India” published in *Women’s History Review* (A Taylor & Francis Journal) 23 September 2020 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2020.1825170>. (Print version forthcoming)

**Dr Walter Fernandes. 2020.**

“The Problem” (of the Northeast) *Seminar* August 2020, Introduction Special Issue on NEI.

“Politics of Impositions and their Pastoral Challenges,” in Graviour Augustine a& Kuriakose Poovathumkudy (eds). *Belonging to Christ & the Church: A Festschrift in Honour of Fr Thomas Manjaly*, Shillong: Oriens Publications, pp. 354-368.

Dr Walter Fernandes & Dr Melvil Pereira. 2020. “Swept Away? Responses to Shifts in Land and Livelihood Patterns in Northeast India,” in Erik de Maaker & Meenal Tula (eds). *Unequal Land Relations in North East India: Custom, Gender and the Market.* Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, pp. 31-61.

### NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

**Dr Walter Fernandes**

‘North Easterners Return Home to Poor Public Health Infrastructure,’ *The Citizen*, April 1, 2020

“Jesuits Celebrate Fifty Years in the Northeast” *The Shillong Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2020.

“Jesuits in the Northeast Celebrate Golden Jubilee,” *The Morung Express* e-paper, 22<sup>nd</sup> April.

“COVID and the Challenge of a New Economy” *The Shillong Times* 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2020.

“Do Lowered Caste Lives Matter?” *The Citizen*, 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2020.

“Punishing the Messengers of Justice” *The Assam Tribune*, 18<sup>th</sup> October, 2020.

“Why are Messengers of Justice Punished?” *The Morung Express* 25<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

“Laws of Their Land” *Outlook India* November 16-22, 2020.

“Kohima Region: A Seed Blossoms,” *Jesuits 2021*, pp. 146-148.

## RESOURCE PERSON

Apart from organising seminars, the staff members of NESRC also presented papers, lectures at seminars, webinars and refresher courses and participated in some of them.

### **Dr Walter Fernandes**

“A New Economy to be Normal,” Keynote Address at the zoom webinar on *What is normal after COVID-19?* organised by Oikotree India, 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2020.

“Processes of Tribal Land Alienation in the Northeast,” International webinar *Politics of Tribal Exploitation in North East India: An Unexplored Slice of Paradise*, July 16-17, 2020.

“The Implications of the Arrest of Stan Swamy,” *A webinar to Support the Jailed Human Rights Activists* organised by North East Solidarity, 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2020.

“Why are Human Rights Activists Punished?” Webinar organised by ICD-NE, Oct. 22, 2020.

“Tribal Land Alienation in the Northeast” webinar organised by the Justice and Peace Commission on *Social Justice in Northeast India*, November 21, 2020.

“Traditional Farmers’ and Tribal Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights” *Seminar on Intellectual Property Rights*, organised by Rangia College, Rangia, November 30, 2020.

“Customary Law and Land in the North East” National Webinar on *Customary Law and Equality: With Reference to North East India* organised by the Department of Sociology and Research Cell, Kohima College, Kohima on 7 December 2020.

“Tribal Land and Forest Rights,” Meeting of tribal leaders and activists organised by HRLN and LCHR. 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2021.

### **Dr Meenal Tula**

“Customary Law and Gender in the North East,” At the National Webinar on *Customary Law and Equality: With reference to North East India* organised by the Department of Sociology and Research Cell, Kohima College, Kohima on 7 December 2020

*“Customary Law and Gender Equality in North-East India”* for a Refresher Course on Gender Studies and Social Justice organised by UGC Human resource Development Centre, Gauhati University on 15 December 2020.

## **PARTICIPATED IN SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES**

### **Dr Walter Fernandes**

Chaired a webinar on the new *Environmental Impact Assessment Policy of the Government of India*, organised by the Impact and Policy Research Institute, New Delhi, 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2020.

### **Dr Meenal Tula**

Web Lecture: P. Sainath on *'Imagining Post-Covid Rainfed Agriculture: Learning from the Current Crisis'* organised by Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture Network on 3, May 2020.

*"Gendered Sites, Everyday Lives": A Series of Web Lectures on Gender and the Present times* organised by Centre for Women's Studies, Cotton University, Guwahati on 12-13 July, 2020.

### **Upasana Goswami**

Why are dams being built anyway? Reflections on dam building in North East by If we do not rise Northeast on September 19th, 2020. webinar

IAWS Regional e-conference: Gender during Covid-19: Perspectives from NEI, Aug. 25-27

Draft Environmental Impact Assessment Notification: Organised by IMPRI, Aug. 18, 2020.

The Missing Language: Contemporary problems and future prospects by Missing Students Association Delhi (MiSAD) on August 30, 2020 (zoom webinar)

### **Joseph Zoliana**

Lecture Series on Justice & Equality, Lengpui, Department of Political Science, St Xavier's College, October 9, 2020.

Webinar, Customary Laws & Equality in NEI. Department of Sociology Kohima College, December 7, 2020

National Webinar on Fundamentalism, Secularism, and Conflicts in India, Organised by North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati. 19-20 February, 2021.

### **Ashpriya Rohman**

Attended the Meeting of Partners of the Conflict and Peace Studies in the Northeast.

The library of NESRC has been growing in terms of holdings, especially books and journals. These resources are being used by a growing number of students, scholars and researchers. It has earned the name of a specialised library for the kind of exquisite collection of books it has on specific topics in the social sciences and on Northeast India. More than 50 percent of the titles in the library deal with various socio-economic-political aspects of North East India. Its main sections are on women, gender, children, caste, and on the Northeast. 487 new titles were added during 2020-21 and on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 it had 10,111 titles and 30 journals and periodicals. Some journals are preserved as bound volumes for future reference. The library is used by the researchers NESRC and also by students and scholars from various colleges and universities. The institutions whose scholars used it during 2020-21 include TISS (Tata Institute of Social Sciences), Guwahati, NEF group of Colleges, Guwahati University, Assam Don Bosco University, Assam University, Silchar, JNU, IIT, Delhi University, Jamia Milia Islamia. We have also welcomed some foreign scholars doing research on the region. Also some journalists and activists are among its users. Free access to the library ensures its wider usage. During 2021-22 the library catalogue will be uploaded on the NESRC website in order to make it easier for the users to access it.

The documentation centre has more than 200,000 paper cuttings of the last two decades on various issues concerning the world, India and the Northeast. The plan to digitalise them from January 2021 had to be delayed by a year because of COVID related problems.

## CONCLUSION

***NESRC was able to make some contribution to the people of North East India thanks to the commitment of its staff members: Dr Walter Fernandes, Director, Dr Meenal Tula, Senior Research Associate, Upasana Goswami, Joseph Zoliana, Bineeta Sarma, Research Associates, Ms Ashpriya Rohman, Accounts & Administration, Ms Rita Xess, Library, Mr Nirab Bora, Publications, Ms . Dipanjali Kalita and Tahsin Khan, documentation.***

This contribution has been ably supported by the generosity of those who have provided financial assistance to our work. Among them are DKA/KFO, Austria, Jesuitenmission, Nurnberg and Zurich, Misereor, Germany, Referrat, Germany, HAQ, Child Rights Organisation, Malala Foundation, NED Social Forum, Guwahati and others.

We have worked in partnership with many individuals and organisations. Among our partners are LCHR, Guwahati, Peace Channel, Dimapur, JUST Agartala, DSSS, Imphal, BGSS, Bongaigaon, Jirsong Asong, Diphu, Tata Institute of Social Sciences Guwahati Campus, NED Social Forum, Guwahati, St Xavier's College, Lengpui, Don Bosco College, Itanagar.

We place on record our immense gratitude to all of them.

Guwahati  
31<sup>st</sup> July, 2021

Dr Walter Fernandes  
Director