

North Eastern Social Research Centre

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Annual Report 2005-2006

Keeping with its mandate of becoming a centre that encourages serious intellectual pursuits with involvement in the field, during 2005-06 NESRC did field research and got involved in issues of relevance to the Northeast. It developed its library and documentation further and organised some workshops in order to help various ethnic communities to come together. It improved its network with field groups in the process of organising them. We are grateful to Andy Alexander and his colleagues at the Collaborative Ministry of Creighton University for sharing their server with us and for building a website for us.

Staff of NESRC

We work with a small staff of Dr Walter Fernandes, Gita Bharali, Anamika Deka, Leon Brooks and Khuntala Choudhury. Melville Pereira who was research associate has taken a break for his doctoral studies. Besides, we employed temporary staff for individual projects, for example Vizalenu Khatso as research associate and others as investigators for the study on the tribal customary law, for the case studies on tribal land alienation and development-induced displacement in West Bengal, Assam and other States. Our past staff members like Sanjay Barbora and Kazimuddin Ahmed continue to be associated with us

1. Research

The mandate of NESRC is to combine research with action. We try to live up to it through our publications, workshops and networking with field groups. During this year we completed four studies. Their follow up is being planned. More studies are in progress and will be completed during 2006-07. A few more projects will be started during this year.

- 1. Gender Implications of the Tribal Customary Law in the Northeast.** Walter Fernandes, Melville Pereira and Vizalenu Khatso. September 2005. In most tribal traditions women enjoy a relatively high status without being equal to men. However, many modern inputs that are superimposed on their tradition result in class formation and strengthen patriarchy in their egalitarian societies. Some reinterpret their customary law that is linked to their identity to suit these processes. The study among five tribes, funded by the National Commission for women, looked at its implications and the possibility of modernising their tradition. The National Commission for Women will publish the report in book form. NESRC hopes to bring the leaders of these tribes together to reflect on its findings and to devise strategies to deal with the issues it raises.
- 2. Tribal Land Alienation in the Northeast.** The origin of this study funded by the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs and done in collaboration with the

Indigenous Women's Association of Northeast India is in the macro-study conducted by NESRC on changing land relations in the Northeast. By March 2006 we could complete 8 of the 12 planned case studies in seven States of the Northeast. They were presented at a workshop at Guwahati during which suggestions were made for follow up. Its popular report has been published and a professional report is being planned.

3. ***Development-Induced Displacement and Deprivation in West Bengal 1947-2000: A Quantitative and Qualitative Database:*** Walter Fernandes, Shanti Chhetri, Sherry Joseph and Satyen Lama. February 2006. During the 2001 Assembly election campaign, the ruling coalition of the State promised to create a climate favouring foreign and Indian private investment. That motivated us to study the impact of displacement in the past because West Bengal was a favourite destination of capital till the 1970s. The study based on more than 20,000 Gazette notifications, 8,000 official files, other research and interviews with knowledgeable persons and 724 displaced families from 13 projects, showed that some 47.6 lakh acres (2 million ha) of land has been used by development projects 1947-2000. It has deprived 70 lakh persons of their livelihood, 20% of them tribals and 30% Dalits. The projects have resettled only around 9% of the persons they displaced. It shows the need for a law and a policy to minimise displacement and to rehabilitate people. This study was funded by Misereor, Cordaid and Missionsprokur.
4. ***Development-Induced Displacement and Deprivation in Assam 1947-2000: A Quantitative and Qualitative Study of its Extent and Nature:*** Walter Fernandes and Gita Bharali. March 2006. The study, the first to be completed in the region and similar to that of West Bengal, is integral to an All India effort to create a reliable database on all displacement and deprivation 1947-2000. It has been completed in 6 States and is in progress in Gujarat. It was funded by Action Aid India, IGSSS and DKA-KFO.

Studies in Progress

1. ***Development-Induced Displacement and Deprivation in Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura.*** The displacement studies in these three States had to be interrupted because of lack of funds. We are trying to get money and resume them this year. If we get funds we shall begin the studies also in the remaining four States of the region, including Sikkim. We also plan to do another study on the cost-benefit analysis of the displacing projects.
2. ***An Evaluation of the U.N. Decade of the Indigenous Peoples:*** At the request of ICIMOD, Kathmandu, NESRC has agreed to do this study with Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, with the directors of NESRC and ISI as coordinators. The UN has launched the second decade of the indigenous peoples 2005-2014 and wants to see the effectiveness of the first. It has three components. Prof. Ritu Dewan of the University of Mumbai is studying the annual budgets 1995-2004 of the Union and of Assam to see to what extent the decade has influenced them. Part II is a study of its impact on the All India policies and those of Assam in the Northeast, Himachal Pradesh in the Northwest and of Jharkhand-Bihar and Chattisgarh-Madhya Pradesh in the East. Its third part is a study of the awareness of the decade among the people and their suggestions for the second decade. NESRC is studying the Northeast.

2. Conferences Organised and Attended

Conferences are a way of sharing our experiences of research and field involvement. We ourselves organise some of them and attend and present papers at those organised by others. Research took most of our time during this year and we could organise only a few such conferences or seminars but we took part in many others in the region and outside.

Conferences Organised

- 1. Seminar on Water Resources and Management in the Northeast:*** At the request of UELCI, Walter Fernandes, Gita Bharali and Sanjay Barbora organised and facilitated two seminars on September 22, 2005 and March 1-2, 2006 on water resources in the Northeast for Lutheran Church leaders from Assam and Manipur. Assam is flood prone and ways have to be found of dealing with it. There is a threat to the water resources of the region because 48 major dams are being planned in the region. Deforestation and environmental degradation show the need for watershed management.
- 2. Tribal Land Alienation in North Eastern India:*** This conference co-sponsored by the Indigenous Women's Forum brought together some representatives of tribals from all seven States, on March 9-11, 2006. The case studies done were presented and discussed and suggestions made for a follow up and networking on the issue of land alienation.
- 3. Education of Plantation Labourers' Children in Assam:*** Our 2003 study drew attention to the very low educational status and neglect of the tea garden workers' children but it was difficult for us to follow up on it. When PAJHRA, an Adivasi coordinating body of Assam showed interest in its follow up we agreed willingly to join them in organising a workshop on it on March 22-23, 2006. Walter Fernandes and Gita Bharali functioned as resource persons at it. The meeting funded by the National Commission for Women and attended by around 100 persons analysed the situation of their education and devised strategies to put pressure on the decision-makers to ensure their access to education and to motivate parents to send their children to school.
- 4. Meeting on the Natural Resources in the Northeast:*** NESRC was one of several organisations that came together around this issue when a meeting was held in Guwahati on modes of optimising the use of the region's water and forest resources.

Conferences and Seminars Attended

Apart from the above, we also participated in and presented papers at seminars organised by others. Besides, we gave training sessions like the one on the water resources.

Gita Bharali attended:

Seminar on Green Governance, Guwahati: Bombay Natural History Society, May 14-15, 2005.

Was a Resource person at:

A Discussion on “Resource, Gender and IDPs” *Third Annual Winter Course on Forced Migration* organised by Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, December 6, 2005.

Presented the following Papers:

1. “Displacement by Water Resource Projects in Assam,” *Seminar Water as Life, Water as Right* organised by NESRC for the Lutheran Church Leaders, 1-2 March 2006.
2. “Primary Education of Girl Children of Plantation Labourers,” Keynote Address, Seminar on *Education of Girl Children in the Tea Plantations of Assam*. Guwahati: PAJRAH and NESRC, 21 -22 March 2006.

Walter Fernandes attended:

1. *AFPRO Consultation Workshop*. Guwahati: April 27, 2005.
2. *Regional Workshop on Access and Benefit-Sharing of Biodiversity Resources for the Marginalised Peoples of the Eastern Himalayas*. Katmandu: ICIMOD, July 19-21, 2005.
2. *Workshop on Planning and Partnership Access Rights to and Benefit-Sharing of Biological Resources for the Marginalized Peoples of the Eastern Himalayas*, ICIMOD. Kathmandu: 5-7th September 2005.
3. *Preparatory Meeting on Research for Justice*, Bhubaneshwar: Kolkata, The Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, September 10, 2005.
4. *Review Meeting on CRS Projects*, Guwahati: February 7, 2006.
5. *Partners’ Meeting on the Adivasis*. Guwahati: NED Social Forum, February 14, 2006.

Was a Resource Person at:

1. *Training Programme for Resettlement Administrators*, New Delhi: Council for Social Development, June 28-30, 2005.
2. *Water for Life, Water as Right*. Seminar Organised by NESRC for Lutheran Church leaders, September 22, 2005 and March 1-2, 2006.
3. *Third Annual Winter Course on Forced Migration*. Kolkata: organised by Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, December 6, 2005.
4. *A Meeting of NGOs*, Guwahati: NED Social Forum, December 8-9, 2005.

Presented the following papers

1. "The Role of Christianity in the Development of the Northeast," National Conference, *The Role of Christianity in the Northeast*, organised by: Indian Council of Philosophical Research and Department of Philosophy, Manipur University, April 4-6, 2005.
2. "The Implications of Major Dams in the Northeast for Green Governance," Seminar on Green Governance. Guwahati: Bombay Natural History Society, May
3. "Education for Social Change: The Role of Church-run Institutions," *Regional Conference on Education for Social Change*. Guwahati: Don Bosco Institute, November 3-6, 2005.
4. "Tribal Customary and Formal Law Interface in North Eastern India: Implications for Land Relations," *Conference on Land Laws in India*, organised by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, New Delhi: January 5-6, 2006.
5. "Self-Rule and Development: Are They Exclusive?" Keynote address at the *National Seminar on Democratic Governance and Local Government Institutions*, Department of Political Science, Calcutta University, January 28, 2006.
6. "Displacement and the Pattern of Development in the Context of Kalinga Nagar," *Workshop on Present and Future Role of Civil Society for Justice and Sustainable Development*. Bhubaneswar: Orissa Development Action Forum. February 3-4, 2006.
7. "Globalisation and Fundamentalism" Keynote Address at a one day workshop on *Globalisation and Secularism in India*, Nagaon: B. Ed College, February 8, 2006.
8. "Tribal Traditional Systems: Can They Survive the Modern Onslaught?" *National Seminar on Traditional Institutions and Development Institutions*, National Institute of Rural Development, NERC, Guwahati, February 20-22, 2006.
9. "The Situation in Assam and Meghalaya," Paper presented at a *Consultation on Peace, Governance and Justice*. Guwahati: NEICC and CASA, March 29-31.

3. Publications

Apart from organising workshops and seminars, we also write in professional journals, books and newspapers. We could bring out only two publications since most of our time was spent on completing studies that will be published during the next financial year. As stated above the National Commission for Women, Government of India will themselves publish the study we completed on the gender implications of the tribal customary laws in the Northeast. During the year we could only bring out the reprint in English and Assamese, of the booklet on the plantation act, 1951. We also brought out an executive summary of the papers presented at the Conference on Tribal Land Alienation on March 9-11, 2006.

The following booklets were published during 2005-06

1. Ravi Sagar. 2001. *Plantation Labourers Know Your Rights: The Plantation Labour Act 1951 and the Plantation Labour Rules 1956*. pp. 14, price Rs 10. (English and Assamese) (1st reprint English version, 4th reprint Assamese 2005).
2. Walter Fernandes. 2005. *North Eastern India: Land, Identity and Conflicts*. Allahabad: Govind Ballabh Pant Social Science Institute.
3. U. A. Shimray. 2006. *Tribal Land Alienation in North East India: Laws and Land Relations*. Pp. 70. NPG. Published in English, Assamese and six tribal languages of the region, jointly with the Indigenous Women's Forum of Northeast India.

Besides, the staff members of NESRC wrote in professional journals and newspapers. Most of them are based on the research done by us.

Professional Articles

Vizalenu Khatso. 2005. "Customary Laws and the Gender Issues in Northeast India," *Bulletin of the Tribal Research Institute*. Guwahati: May.

Melville Pereira. 2005. "Changing Land Relations and Conflicts in Northeast India," *Bulletin of the Tribal Research Institute*. Guwahati: May.

Walter Fernandes

2005. "Rehabilitation as a Right: Where is the Policy?" *Social Action* 55 (n. 2, April-June), pp. 123-137.

2005. "Globalisation: Implications and Christian Response," in Thomas D'Sa (ed). *The Church in India in the Emerging Third Millennium*. Bangalore: NBCLC, pp. 45-49.

2005. "Touring Sisters: Agents of Reconciliation," in Angeline Lotrsuro and Philomena Mathew (eds). *Touring Sisters in North East India*: Guwahati: Peace Centre, pp. 94-103.

2005. "Modernisation and Tribal Women's Status," *Bulletin of the Tribal Research Institute*. Guwahati: May.

2006. "Ecology and Women: Whose Degradation?" *Women's Link*, 12 (n. 1, Jan-March), pp. 2-8.

2006. "Environment: For Whose Development?" *Jnanadeepa*, 9 (n. 1, Jan. 2006), pp. 139-157

2006. "Development-induced Displacement and Tribal Women" in G. C. Rath (ed). *Tribal Development in India: The Contemporary Debate*. Delhi: Sage, pp.112-130.

2006. "Liberalisation and Development-Induced Displacement." *Social Change*, 36 (n. 1, Jan-March), pp. 109-123.

Newspaper Articles

Walter Fernandes

“Rebuild Strategy on Green Belt,” *The Telegraph*, April 22, 2005

“Tea Crisis and the Workers,” *The Telegraph*, May 30, 2005.

“Blinkered Critics: Tribals Want Change on Their Own Terms,” *Down to Earth*, June 30, 2005.

“Why Not A Common Civil Code?” *The Assam Tribune*, 22nd July 2005.

“Naga Imbroglio,” *The Statesman*, 30th July 2005.

“One More Women’ Day?” *The Assam Tribune*, March 8, 2006.

4. Library and Documentation

NESRC tries to render an important service to the Northeast through its library and documentation. It has only more than 4,000 volumes but our effort has been to buy only carefully selected books that are relevant to the Northeast. It has an All India section divided into units such as tribals, working class, displacement, globalisation, children, women and others. It also has professional sections such as sociology, anthropology, social thought and others. But its focus is on the Northeast and during 2005-06 we bought around 500 new books on issues concerning the region. We added three more journals on the region in addition to the 35 journals we are subscribed to. The library is being reorganised and computerised at present.

North Eastern Social Research Centre
May 31, 2006

Dr Walter Fernandes
Director
