

North Eastern Social Research Centre Guwahati

Annual Report April 2021 to March 2022

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Introduction

I am happy to place before you the Annual Report 2021-22 of North Eastern Social Research Centre (NESRC). The mandate of NESRC which began on March 1, 2000, is to combine serious research with involvement in the field and encourage others to do research on issues of relevance to the Northeast. From the beginning NESRC has tried to live up to this mandate through research, library, documentation, and networking with peace activists and civil society groups active among the marginalised or those involved in processes aimed at policy changes in favour of the poor. Also its publications and professional and newspaper articles attempt to support the marginalised. However, the COVID-19 linked lockdown placed serious restrictions on our field involvement and in-person seminars. We had to limit ourselves to research, publications and webinars with very little follow up in the field and with civil society.

Thus, despite the pandemic much was achieved during the year in research, publications and webinars. NESRC completed nine studies, brought out three publications and organised a webinar. The book on development-induced displacement (DID) in Mizoram 1947-2010 is an addition to the studies on DID Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura published already. The remaining two on Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur will be published in September 2022. During the year, we completed important studies on land management and gender, the impact of COVID-19 on the education of the marginalised communities in Assam, forests in Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura, the Assam Budget and girls' education in Assam, the role of the customary law in conflict resolution in the tribal traditions of the Northeast and one on women and migration in Guwahati,. Some books born out of these studies were published during 2021-22. The library continued to serve researchers though at a reduced scale because of COVID-19.

The pages below provide more information on the activities of NESRC during 2021-22. While presenting this Annual Report to you we want to assure you that NESRC remains committed to the building of an inclusive society where everyone is counted, included, wanted, and provided with a voice in shaping their own destiny. Some staff members completed their contract and left the centre and others joined and continued its work. All of them 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. During the year we studied land management and gender among three tribes, conflicts and peace, COVID-19 and education, child budget, and migration.

Studies Completed

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

The study took a close look at the changing agricultural practices along with land ownership or access and occupational patterns of women in three communities of Northeast India: the Garo from East Garo Hills Meghalaya, the Karbi from West Karbi Anglong, and the Dimasas in Dima Hasao in Assam, to better understand the changes in the relationship between women and land. These communities provide a suitably varied context with regard to inheritance, customs and traditional and current agricultural practices, as well as their linkages to market economies.

2. *An Analysis of the Assam Child Budget 2021-22 with Focus on Girls' Education: A Review. Anurag Das.*

For fifteen years NESRC has been studying the share of children in the Assam budget and has successfully advocated for a child budget component in it. Its focus has now shifted to the girl children because they are more neglected. Special attention is paid to the tea garden areas.

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

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

These two studies on Development-Induced Displacement delayed because of the COVID linked restrictions, were completed and will be published by September 2022. They are the last in the series of studies done in the eight States of the Northeast and in four other States of India

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

The study done in the BTAD area of Assam, in Manipur and Tripura is an attempt to understand the impact of the nationwide lockdown that dislocated the migrant population. With no jobs, no money, with public transport shut down, thousands of them had to return to their homes, at times walking hundreds of kilometres. The attempt in the study was to understand the processes that led to joblessness and greater poverty among them. Its hypothesis is that the pandemic did not create inequalities but intensified the inequalities already existing in the Indian social system.

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

Stereotypes are rampant about the Northeast as a region of ethnic conflicts. But little is known about the traditional tribal conflict resolution mechanisms. By studying the Karbi-Dimasa conflict of 2005 and the ongoing land related Pochury-Chakesang tension in Nagaland an attempt was made in the study to understand the traditional systems and the possibility of updating them to suit present day needs. Its hypothesis is that no tradition has all the answers to present day questions but they can be updated and modernised to suit present needs.

7. *A Study of Forest Legislation and Implementation in Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura: An Introduction. Dr Walter Fernandes, Asojiini Rachel Kashena, Vareishang Phungshok (Manipur), Prof. Lanusashi Longkumer, (Nagaland) and Sanat Chakraborty, (Tripura)*

Much is being invested in the forests of the Northeast since this region has been identified as the carbon sink for Western Europe. In this effort one sees the possibility of the project turning purely into greenery and commercial forests. The people who depend on them run the risk of being excluded. In an effort to understand the role of the tribal communities in the scheme, three States were chosen with three different legal systems. Nagaland is governed according to the tribal customary law under Article 371A. In Manipur the tribes in the hill areas claim control over its land and forests and there is much ambiguity in its legal system. Forests in Tripura are managed under the Indian Forest Act even though the State has an autonomous district council under the Sixth Schedule. People's role was studied under these legal regimes.

8. *Tracking Learning Loss during COVID-19 in Assam Upasana Sarma and Sonakshi Goswami*

The COVID-related lockdown disrupted the system of education. In this sector too, the pandemic intensified the already existing inequalities. While the middle class that could afford smart phones had the alternative of online education, two thirds of the families from the marginalised communities could not afford the smart phone. A big proportion of teachers in the backward districts lacked the training and the equipment required for it. As a result one witnessed among the children of these communities, loss of learning rather than progress in teaching.

9. *Women Migrants in the Times of a Global Pandemic in Guwahati City. Abhisruti Sarma*

The study on migrant women navigating their lives and livelihoods during and after COVID-19 was an attempt to understand the socio-cultural and economic ties and sentiments that migrant women maintain with their homes, lands and resources and the manner in which they 'make homes' in the new spaces that they come to inhabit. Explored was also the depth of the migrant women's entanglement with the infrastructures of the city as well as with the resources at home.

Ongoing Studies

A few studies started before March 2022 are continuing during 2022-23

1. *Practising Food Sovereignty: Indigenous Peoples and Agro-ecological Relationships in the Eastern Himalayas*. **Dr Meenal Tula and Dr Dixita Deka** in collaboration with the Department of Anthropology, Stockholm University.

2. *Searching for Local Alternatives to Migration Forced by Poverty*. **Dr Walter Fernandes with partners in Manipur and Tripura**

3. *Ecological Development for Peace Building*. **Joseph Zoliana and Theophilus Basumatary, BGSS, Bongaigaon.**

4. *Reflection on Ethnic Conflicts in Karbi Anglong and on Peace Builders in Nagaland*. **Joseph Zoliana with Jirsong Asong and Peace Channel**

5. *Assam Child Budget: Focus on the Girl Child in the Tea Garden Areas*. **Anurag Das**

PUBLICATIONS: BOOKS

Some of our research saw the light of day in the form of the following publications of NESRC while some professional articles were published by the staff members of NESRC.

1. Walter Fernandes. 2021. *The Poor Pay the Price: Development-Induced Displacement*. (published by Council for Social Development, Hyderabad).

2. Meenal Tula and Upasana Goswami. 2022. *Intimate Inheritance: Indigenous Women, Land and Customs in Northeast India*. ISBN 9678-81-953024-5-1.

3. Walter Fernandes, Meenal Tual, Vanlalpari, C. Zonunmawia & Lalhruaimawii. 2022. *Identity Search and Security: Development-Induced Displacement in Mizoram 1947-2010*. ISBN: 978-81-953024-06

4. Joseph Zoliana (ed). *Customary Law and Changing Trends among Eight Tribes of Northeast India*. 978-81-953024-1-3

PROFESSIONAL ARTICLES

The fruits of research often find outlets in professional journals and edited books, in the form of professional articles. The staff of NESRC published the following articles during 2021-22

Dixita Deka. 2021. "The pandemic and the tests of civilization: reading Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* today," in Bapukan Saikia (ed). *Gandhian Ideas and Principles*. Guwahati: Purbayon Publication, pp. 25-29.

Walter Fernandes

1. 2021. "Eminent Jesuits Contributing to the Social Sciences in India," in Joan Dias, Savio Abreu & Keith D'Souza (ed). *Jesuit Initiatives in Indian Higher Education*. Mumbai: Heras Institute of History and Culture, St Xavier's College, pp. 127-140.
2. 2021. 'Indian Tribals and Search for an Indigenous Identity,' in Vinay Kumar Srivastava (ed). *India's Tribes: Unfolding Realities*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 267-282.
3. 2021. "Tripura Catholics: Role in Conflicts and Peacemaking," in David R. Syiemlieh & Ivan D'Silva (eds). *Legacy of Catholic Church in Tripura (1996-2021): Pathways Ahead*. Delhi: ISPCK, pp. 137-150.
4. 2022. "L'India Ferita dalla Pandemia," *Aggiornamenti Sociali* 73 (n. 1, January), pp. 41-47.

Meenal Tula. "Gentrified Fantasies: Women Singers on the Gramophone in Late Colonial India," *Women's History Review*, Volume 30, 2021 - Issue 7, pp. 1119-1140.

[**NEWSPAPER ARTICLES**]

Newspaper articles are one more way of sharing the findings of our research. A few such articles were written during the year

Anurag Das

1. "Marginalised Children and Assam Budget 2021-22," *The Assam Tribune*, 15th August, 2021.
2. "Manipur Govt. Orders Eviction of 25 villages from Pumlun Pat Wetland," *Land Conflict Watch*, January 2022

Dr Walter Fernandes

1. "The Canon Ball that Changed History," *The Shillong Times*, June 6, 2021
2. "A Prophet is a Threat to the Powerful" *The Arunachal Times & Countercurrents* July 6, 2021
3. "A Tribute to Stan Swamy the Prophet" *Scroll.in*. July 6, 2021

SEMINARS & WORKSHOPS

Seminars are meant to share our findings and build alliances with researchers, civil society and policy makers, in an effort to change policies in favour of the marginalised. Because of COVID-19 only one webinar could be organised but the staff members participated in seminars and lectures organised by others, and gave some lectures & presented papers.

NESRC organised a webinar on *Inequalities as Sources of Conflicts: the Case of COVID-19* February 18-19, 2022. The keynote address was given by Prof. Udayon Misra. Some of the papers on various facets of COVID and inequalities will be published during 2022.

Seminars organised Jointly with Others

With ASHA and Sanat Chakraborty organised a one day seminar at Agartala on “*Forests and People’s Participation in Tripura.*” on 15th November, 2021

One-day Consultation on “Forests and Tribal Ownership” Imphal, 17th November 2021

With the Department of Geography, Nagaland University, one-day Seminar on “*Forests and People in Nagaland*” 24th November, 2021.

The staff members of NESRC presented the following papers at seminars or gave lectures

Dr Walter Fernandes

1. “Indigenous People in Northeast India” online lecture on the International Day of Indigenous Peoples, August 9, 2021, organised by the Department of Anthropology, Sikkim University.
2. “Development-Induced Displacement and Human Rights” Online Lecture, Council for Social Development, Hyderabad, September 9, 2021.
3. Chaired a session of the *Virtual Summer School on Mountain Ecosystems and Resource Management* organised by the Grassroots Institute, Montreal, Canada, September 22, 2021.
4. “Main Laws and Issues around the Indigenous Issue in the Northeast” *Legal Convention* organised by HRLN at DBI, Guwahati. December 12, 2021
5. “Land and the Sixth Schedule in Tripura,” webinar on The Sixth Schedule in Tripura, organised by NAPM. 19th December, 2021

Abhisruti Sarma. "The lives of migrant women at the times of a global pandemic in Guwahati city" at the National Webinar on "Inequalities as Sources of Conflicts: the Case of Covid 19" organised by the North Eastern Social Research Centre, February 18-19, 2022

Upasana Sarma & Sonakshi Goswami “The Pandemic and Learning Loss, An Overview” National Webinar *Inequalities as Sources of Conflicts: the Case of Covid 19* organised by North Eastern Social Research Centre, February 18-19, 2022

Dr Meenal Tula. Special Lecture on *The Importance of Gender Based Research Interventions in Northeast India.* Modern College, Dzüvürü, Kohima, Nagaland on 14th March, 2022.

Seminars attended

Dr Meenal Tula Revival, Preservation, and Documentation of Dimasa Indigenous Knowledge. Organised by Dimasa Scholars' League. Nov. 7, 2021.

2. *Joseph Zoliana. Human Rights Convention on the Law in the North East* organised by HRLN. 11th to 13th December 2021

Webinars Attended

Anurag Das, Abhisruti Sarma, Sonakshi Goswami, Upasana Sarma and Joseph Zoliana

Webinar on *Inequalities as Sources of Conflicts: The Case of Covid19.* hosted by North Eastern Social Research Centre, February 18-19, 2022

Anurag Das and Joseph Zoliana attended

“Indigenous People in Northeast India” online lecture of Dr Walter Fernandes, August 9, 2021, International Day of Indigenous Peoples, Department of Anthropology, Sikkim University.

Anurag Das

1. “Fractured Friendships: The Politics of Befriending in Conflict Zones” by Dr Soibam HariPriya, Organised by :Kerala Council for Historical Research, 2nd September 2021.

2. “The Pegasus Hack and its Digital Rights Implications” Organised by Freedom Foundation, 20th September 2021

Dr Dixita Deka

1. *The British Academy Effective Academic Writing Workshop* (Online) organised by the British Academy, The Highland Institute, and the University of Edinburgh (13-17 December 2021)

2. *Academic Writing Workshop* (Online) organized by the Centre for Development Practice and Research, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Patna (2,5,8, and 17 August 2021)

Abhisruti Sarma

1. Lecture on "Desire and Delirium in Highland Northeast India" by Dr. Jelle J.P. Wouters, organised by the Special Centre for the Study of Northeast India, JNU. September 24, 2021

2. International Conference on "Indigenous knowledge and Climate Change: Issue, Challenges and Coping mechanism" organised by the Central University of Karnataka. October 25-27, 2021

3. "On Trees: A Conversation with Peter Wohlleben, Jessica J. Lee, and Sumana Roy" organised by Orion Magazine and Yale Forestry School. January 11, 2022

Upasana Sarma

Effective Academic Writing Workshop Highland Inst, Edinburgh University, Dec. 13-17, 2021.

Dr Meenal Tula

1. ‘Motherhood+Mourning’ in *RaceTalks* (Webinar) with Erica Lawson, Organised by University of Cambridge Centre for Gender Studies on June 18, 2021.
2. Geraldine Forbes: 'Whose Gaze? History, Photography and Gender in Colonial India'. Distinguished Lecture Series. Deptt. of Cultural Studies, Tezpur University. 3 March, 2022.
3. Indigenous Peoples’ resilience and adaptation in face of the COVID-19 crisis (Part of Webinars on Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) for COVID-19), Organised by Food and Agricultural Organisation for United Nations, 10 February, 2022.
4. Lecture Dina Gilio Whitaker *Environmental Justice in Indian Country and Moving towards a Transformation Land Ethic*. Inst of Historical Studies Univ. of Texas, Austin, Feb 26, 2022.

Joseph Zoliana

1. Peace on Boundary Issues. Northeast Solidarity/NESCOM, August 9, 2021
2. International Webinar On Inter-culturality: Panikkar’s Way. Chennai: Satya Nilayam Institute of Philosophy and Culture, August 21, 2021
3. Zionism is Racism. Movement for Liberation from Nakba, August 28, 2021
4. Gautam Bhatia. “Dissent is not Treason: Understand National Security Laws.” Gauri Memorial Trust & Citizens for Justice and Peace, August 29, 2021
5. Harsh Mander. Understanding Stan Swamy’s Message for Today’s India. SJES Aug. 31, 2021
6. Development-Induced Displacement and Human Rights. Hyderabad: CSD, September 9, 2021
7. Preparing Joint Stakeholders Report for India’s UUPR. National Solidarity, Sept. 11, 2021.
8. COVID-19 Effect on Student Life. Chennai: Satya Nilayam Research Institute, Oct. 28, 2021

LIBRARY

The library of NESRC with 10,337 titles, is used by a growing number of students, scholars and researchers. It is considered a specialised library for its exquisite collection of books on specific topics in the social sciences and on Northeast India. Its main sections are on women, gender,

children, caste, and on the Northeast. Because of the closure of the office for many months only 224 new titles could be added to it during 2021-22. The closure of the office also posed challenges to cataloguing new titles. Some of the 30 journals we subscribe to are bound and preserved for future reference. The library is used by researchers of NESRC and by students and scholars from various colleges and universities like Tata Institute of Social Sciences, NEF group of Colleges, Gauhati University, Don Bosco University, Assam University, JNU, IIT, and others. We have also welcomed some foreign scholars doing research on the region so also some journalists and activists. Free access to the library ensures its wider use. The documentation centre has more than 200,000 paper cuttings from the five daily newspapers got during more than two decades. They have been catalogued by various issues on the world, India and the Northeast. They are being digitalised in order to make this collection available to research scholars



NESRC was able to achieve something during the year because of the commitment of its staff. (Seated left to right first row) Upasana Goswami, Upasana Sarma, Dr Walter Fernandes, Sonakshi Goswami, (second row) Joseph Zoliana, Dr Dixita Deka, Dr Vijay D'Souza, Director, NEILAC, Nirab Bora, Ashpriya Rohman, Anurag Das, Dr Meenal Tula, Rita Xess, Abhishruti Sarma.

As we end this report we place on record our gratitude to those who have given us financial and professional support. We would not have been able to do what we have done without it. We thank NED Social Forum, Guwahati, Prof. Sanjay Barbora, Guwahati, HAQ Centre for Child Rights, New Delhi, Aide et Action South Asia, Guwahati, Misereor, Aachen, Germany, Jesuiten Mission, Nurnberg, Germany, Stiftung Asienhaus, Cologne, Germany, Child Aid Network, Hoehenblick, Germany, DKA, Wien, Austria, Stiftung Jesuit Welweit, Zurich, Switzerland, Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University, Jesuit International Mission, Chicago, USA and many others.

31st July 2022

Dr Walter Fernandes
Director, NESRC