

# North Eastern Social Research Centre Guwahati

## Annual Report April 2022 to March 2023

Jagriti (2<sup>nd</sup> floor)  
Arunodai Path, GMCH Road  
Christian Basti  
Guwahati 781005  
Assam, India

**Telephone:** +91-361-2340179; Mobile: 8473869715

**Email:** nesrcghy@gmail.com

**Website:** [www.nesrc.org](http://www.nesrc.org).

## Introduction

With gratitude to the staff members and to all those who have stood by us during the year I place before you the Annual Report 2022-23 of North Eastern Social Research Centre (NESRC), Guwahati. NESRC which began on March 1, 2000 is now in its 24<sup>th</sup> year. Its mandate 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 civil society groups active among the marginalised communities and others who are involved in processes aimed at policy changes in favour of the poor. Also its publications and professional and newspaper articles of its staff members attempt to support the marginalised. Since during the year we got over the COVID-19 linked lockdown that had placed serious restrictions on our field involvement and in-person seminars, we have attempted to begin again the processes leading to networking and follow up in the field and with civil society.

Much has been achieved during the year in research, publications and seminars. During 2022-23 NESRC completed four important studies on Climate Change and Forests in Manipur and Tripura, Human-Animal Relationships in Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland, the Assam Budget and girls' education in Assam, and the Myanmar Refugees. It brought out six publications and organised three seminars. The book on development-induced displacement (DID) in Arunachal Pradesh 1947-2015 added to the studies on DID in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura published already. The Manipur study will be published during 2023-24. We joined other organisations in sponsoring seminars. Some books born out of these studies and seminars were published. The library continued to serve researchers though at a reduced scale because of continued effects of COVID-19.

**The pages below provide some information on our activities during 2022-23. While presenting this Annual Report to you we assure you and our other partners that NESRC remains committed to the building of an inclusive society where all are counted, included, and provided with a voice in shaping their own destiny.**

**Some staff members left after completing their contract and others joined and continued the NESRC mandate of combining serious research with networking and action to facilitate social change and advocacy for policies in favour 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. *An Analysis of the Assam Child Budget 2020-23 with Focus on Girls' Education.* **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. After completing several

studies on various aspects of the child budget, during the last three years its focus has shifted to the girl child because girls are more neglected. Special attention is paid to the tea garden areas. The study was completed during the year and was presented to child rights activists, researchers on children and to some government officials at an interface on February 24.

2. “Forest Development and Climate Change Adaptation in Manipur and Tripura.” Coordinated by *Dr Walter Fernandes* inputs by *Dr Anthony Dias, Salaam Rajesh and Ramananda Wangkeirakpam (Manipur), and Sanat Kumar Chakraborty (Tripura)*.

The Northeast of India has been identified as the carbon sink for Western Europe. Much is, therefore, being invested in the forests of the region. One sees in this move the possibility of the project turning purely into greenery and commercial forests, to the exclusion of the people who depend on them. The study is an effort to understand the role of the tribal communities in the scheme in Manipur and Tripura that were chosen for it. The effort is made also to identify the climate change related adaptation components in the project, study their implications for the communities depending on them and ensuring their involvement.

3. “Human-Animal Relationships in Northeast India with Special Focus on the *Mithun* (bos frontalis).” *Abhishruti Sarma & Joseph Zoliana*. The study explored the ways in which the mithun is entangled in the cultural practices and community relationships in Northeast India and more specifically how it is ‘valued’ socially and economically and also the various practices of rearing, eating, being with in Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland.

4. A Baseline Survey of the Myanmar Refugees in Manipur and Mizoram. *Dr Walter Fernandes*. Because of the unrest in Myanmar there is a sudden rush of refugees to Mizoram and to districts of Manipur whose populations belong to the Chin-Kuki-Mizo family. Relief had to be organised for them so NESRC did the baseline survey at the request of JRS-SA.

## 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, Dr Dixita Deka, Prof. Sanjay Barbora, Joel Rodrigues* in collaboration with the Department of Anthropology, Stockholm University.

2. The Impact of Migration on Women in the Northeast. *Nipasa Dutta*. The assumption that migration was mainly a male phenomenon and that women migrated after marriage is questioned in recent years and this study is intrinsic to such questioning.

## PUBLICATIONS: BOOKS

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

1. Joseph Zoliana (ed). 2022. *Inequalities as Sources of Conflicts: The Case of COVID-19*. 2022. Pages. viii+144. Price INR 200 USD 15, Euro 15 (PB), INR 440, USD 25, Euro 25 (HB). ISBN: 978-81-953024-7-5.
2. Walter Fernandes (ed). 2022. *Pathways to Harmony: The Role of religion in Conflicts and Peace*. Pages xii+200; Price. INR 250, USD 15, Euro 15 (PB); INR 500, USD 25, Euro 25 (HB). ISBN: 978-81-953024-6-8.
3. Walter Fernandes, Bitopi Dutta, Dusu Sambyo, Marge Nyori & Upasana Goswami. 2023. *In the Name of Lighting My House: Displaced for Development, Arunachal Pradesh 1947-2015*. (Published jointly with Don Bosco College, Itanagar) Pages xiv+266; Price: INR 250, USD 12, Euro 12 (PB); INR 500, USD 25, Euro 25 (HB). ISBN: 978-81-953084-8-2.
4. Dixita Deka, Joel Rodrigues, Dolly Kikon, Bengt G. Karlsson, Sanjay Barbora & Meenal Tula. 2023. *Seeds and Food Sovereignty: Eastern Himalayan Experiences*. Pages 228, Price INR 200, USD 10, Euro 10. ISBN: 978-81-953024-9-9.
5. Anurag Das. 2023. *Budgeting Inequalities and the Status of Girls' Education in Assam 2020-23*. Published jointly with HAQ Child Rights Agency. Pages: xiv+98. Price: INR 125; USD 8, Euro 8. ISBN: 978-81-960850-1-8.
6. Abhishruti Sarma & Joseph Zoliana. 2023. *Changing Affinities: Ecologies of Human-Mithun Relationship in Northeast India*. Pages xiv+194. Price: INR 200; USD 10; Euro 10 (PB), INR 400; USD 16, Euro 16 (HB). ISBN: 978-81-960850-2-5.

## PROFESSIONAL PAPERS

The fruits of research often find outlets in journals and edited books, as professional articles. The staff members of NESRC published the following articles during 2022-23

**Dixita Deka**. 2022. "Tigers are our Brothers: Anthropology of Wildlife Conservation in Northeast India" *LSE Review of Books*, 23 September.  
<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2022/09/23/book-review-tigers-are-our-brothers-anthropology-of-wildlife-conservation-in-northeast-india-by-ambika-aiyadurai/>

**Dolly Kikon & Dixita Deka**. 2022. "Strawberry Farms: Adopting New Crops in Northeast India" *Raiot*, 1st June. <https://raiot.in/strawberry-farms-new-crops-in-northeast-india/>

**Dr Walter Fernandes**.

6. 2022. "Development-Induced Displacement," in Jelle J. P. Wouters & Tanka B. Subba (ed). *The Routledge Companion to Northeast India*. London & New York: Routledge, pp. 133-137.

**Abhishruti Sarma**. 2022. "Migrant Women in times of a Global Pandemic in Guwahati City," in Joseph Zoliana (ed). *Inequalities as Sources of Conflicts: The Case of COVID-19*. Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, pp. 27-56.

Meenal Tula and Upasana Goswami. 2023. 'Making It Work: Women, Land and Labour in West Karbi Anglong, Assam', *Asian Ethnicity*. Volume 24, Issue 2, pp. 278-300.

Joseph Zoliana. 2022. "Language Hegemony and Fundamentalism in Mizoram," In: Walter Fernandes (ed) *Pathways to Harmony: The Role of Religion in Conflicts and Peace*. Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, 98-115.

**Joseph Zoliana. 2023.** "Inequalities as Causes of Conflicts in the North East with Special Reference to Covid-19" *Pax Lumina* Vol. 04 Issue. 02, March, pp. 17-10.

## NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Newspaper articles are one more way of sharing the findings of our research. The staff members of NESRC wrote a few such articles during the year

### **Anurag Das**

1. "An Endless War: The Story of Afghanistan," *The New Leam*, October 4, 2022. <https://www.thenewleam.com/2022/10/an-endless-war-the-story-of-afghanistan/>
2. "Contestation against community land dispossession due to proposed Zeilad Wildlife Sanctuary" (Land Conflict [Watch.org](http://Watch.org)), February 15, 2023.
3. "Sixty nine houses demolished in Waithou Protected Reserve forest" (July 2022) (Land Conflict [Watch.org](http://Watch.org))

### **Walter Fernandes**

1. "Measuring Success of Narmada Rehabilitation," *The Citizen*, 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2022
2. "Smoke and Mirrors: Religious Conversion is a Ruse for Vested Interests" *The Telegraph* 16<sup>th</sup> January 2023

**Joseph Zoliana.** "Assam Tribal Christians: Myth versus Reality," *The Sentinel*, 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2023.

## SEMINARS & WORKSHOPS

*Seminars are an important step in sharing our research and of building alliances with civil society, researchers and policy makers for policy changes in favour of the marginalised. NESRC organised three seminars during 2022-23 and co-sponsored some others.*

**Organised by North Eastern Social Research Centre during 2022-23**

1. **Conflict and Coping in North East India: The Role of Memory**

Every conflict creates its own history and memory which play a role in continuing conflicts. Can the same memory be used to bring peace? The seminar held on September 24-25, 2022 was coordinated by Mr Anurag Das and Ms Nipasa Dutta.

## **2. *Agro-ecological Relationships in the Eastern Himalayas.***

Coordinated by Dr Meenal Tula and organised at Dibrugarh University, December 14-16, 2022, in collaboration with the Department of Political Science, Dibrugarh University & Centre for Ecology, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati, this interactive workshop, part of the *Practising Food Sovereignty* Project on emerging areas of conflict and cooperation in fragile ecological areas in the Northeast brought together academics, activists, filmmakers, journalists and young researchers. It was aimed at understanding how reactions and reflections from environmental disasters like the 2020 Baghjan blowout offer insights on emerging challenges on agricultural sustainability, to human & non-human communities to build a collective understanding of ecological and agricultural worlds in the Eastern Himalayas.

## **3. *Interface on the Assam Child Budget 2020-23 and the Role of the Girl Child,***

Organised on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2023 jointly with HAQ, Centre for Child Rights, New Delhi, the interface was meant to be a feedback session on the study of the share of the girl child's education in the Assam budgets of 2020-23. It brought together academics, child rights activists and government officials in an effort to form a network around child rights in Assam. It was coordinated by Mr Anurag Das.

## **Seminars organised by other organisations and co-sponsored by NESRC**

1. ***“Possibility of Preventing Forced Migration from Tripura,”*** 12<sup>th</sup> August, 2022, organised by Jana Unnayan Stmiti Tripura, 12<sup>th</sup> August 2022.

2. ***“Professional Dialogue for Peace,”*** organised by DSSS, Imphal, 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2022.

3. ***“The Role of Civil Society in Peace Building in Nagaland,”*** organised by Peace Channel, Dimapur, Nagaland

4. ***“Land Alienation and Conflicts in Karbi Anglong,”*** organised by Jirsong Asong, Diphu, 26<sup>th</sup> August, 2022.

5. ***Seeds for the Future*** September 15-16, 2022, coordinated by Dr Dixita Deka, organised at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati.

6. ***Redefining Peace towards a Just, Non-violent and Sustainable Future of the World,*** organised by The Asia-Pacific Peace Research Association. Guwahati: October 20-22, 2022.

**Apart from organising seminars, the staff members of NESRC presented the following papers at seminars or gave lectures or attended seminars or were resource persons**

**Anurag Das.** “Fake Encounters in Manipur Commemoration and the Role of Memory,” National Seminar *Conflicts and Coping in North East India: The Role of Memory*’ North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati, September 24-25, 2022.

**Dr Dixita Deka.** “Memories of Dissent: People, Politics, and the Pandemic in North East India (Online) at ASAA Conference 2022 *Social Justice in Pandemic Times*, Monash University, 5-8 July 2022.

**Dr Walter Fernandes**

1. “Concerns about Peace in the Northeast,” *Peace Conclave* organised by HRLN, Guwahati, at NEDSSS, April 5-7, 2022
2. “The Role of the Church in Preventing Climate Change in the Northeast,” *North East India Pastoral Conference*, Guwahati: September 12-14, 2022.
3. “The Role of Civil Society in Peace Building in Northeast India,” International Seminar *Redefining Peace towards a Just, Non-violent and Sustainable Future of the World*, Organised by Asia-Pacific Peace Research Association. Guwahati: October 10-12, 2022.

**Abhisruti Sarma.** “Culture, Consumption, and Conservation: The Mithun in Arunachal Pradesh,” Seminar on *Agro-ecological Relationships in the Eastern Himalayas*, Organised by NESRC, Dibrugarh University, December 14-16, 2022.

**Meenal Tula.** “Economies of Care: Imagining Food Sovereign Communities in Eastern Himalayas at Sustainable Futures,” Seminar on *Agro-ecological Relationships in Eastern Himalayas*. Organised by NESRC, Dibrugarh University, December 14-16, 2022.

**Participation in Seminars or Training Programmes**

**Anurag Das.** *Budgets for Justice*. A one day workshop conducted by Civic Data Lab on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2022 to analyse the law and justice related budget in Assam.

**Nipasa Dutta**

1. *Young Women's Transformative Leadership Programme*. 1st-4th September, 2022. Organised by National Alliance of Women (NAWO) and Dept. cum Centre for Women's Studies and Development, Punjab University, supported by UN Women.
2. *Short term Qualitative Research Methodology Workshop*, 12-18 March, 2023. Organised by OKDISCD, Guwahati.

**Dr Walter Fernandes**

1. *India Land and Development Conference* organised by Azim Premji Foundation, Bengaluru, December 7-9, 2022.
2. *The Convention of Coordinators of Peace in South Asia*, Indian Social Institute, Bengaluru, February 17-19, 2023.

**Dr Walter Fernandes, Dr Tony Dias and Joseph Zoliana** participated in the *North Zone Convention of Jesuit Social Scientists* at Matigara, Darjeeling district, March 3-5, 2023.

**Ashpriya Rohman**

1. *New system of TDS for the Peace Project*, at NEDSSS, Guwahati, 5<sup>th</sup> May 2022.
2. Review Meeting of Peace Partners at NEDSSS, Guwahati, 13<sup>th</sup> June, 2022.
3. *India- A Wealth Creation Destination* organised by Sarawgi Finserves, Guwahati, 5<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

#### ***Dr Meenal Tula***

Attended the *Workshop on Community Seed Banks, Seed Management and Storage*. organised by North East Network, Guwahati. January 19, 2023.

***Joseph Zoliana***. *Peace Conclave* organised by HRLN, Guwahati, at NEDSS, April 5-7, 2022

## RESOURCE PERSONS

#### ***Dr Walter Fernandes***

1. Gave a session on “Development-Induced Displacement in India,” at the *Winter School on Land* organised by Azim Premji Foundation and Bengaluru, December 10, 2023
2. Gave a session on *Internally Displaced Persons and the Pattern of Development* to a group from Frankfurt University at Assam Don Bosco University.
2. Was a panellist at the Victoria University online session of “Tell Me Your Story” (TMYS) on *Tribal Habitations, Land and Ecology*, 1<sup>st</sup> February, 2023.

#### ***Dr Meenal Tula***.

1. Has been appointed a member of the Governing Body of *North East Network*.
2. Took a Class for Week 12: Lesson 24: Class Discussion on habitus, fieldwork, and social justice, for MA, Sociology & Social Anthropology at TISS, Guwahati on 27 April, 2022.

***Dr Meenal Tula and Prof. Bengt Karlsson*** delivered a book talk on the book, *Seed and Food Sovereignty: Eastern Himalayan Experiences* at:

1. Cafe Kalimpong, in Kalimpong, **March, 15, 2022**
2. Mayel Lyang Lepcha School in Pudung, Near Kalimpong, West Bengal, **March 15, 2022**.

## LIBRARY

With the addition of 502 new titles during the year, the number of books in the library has grown to 10,839 books at the end of March 2023. The new titles are related to food practices and indigenous food culture, studies on the pandemic and its effects on society, new methodologies such as internet studies, media studies and data analysis. The biggest number of books purchased is related to Northeast India. In addition the documentation centre has



more than 200,000 paper cuttings from five daily newspapers got during more than two decades. They have been catalogued by various issues on the world, India and the Northeast. The project of digitalising the documentation is underway and English newspapers till 2019 have been scanned and are being catalogued. That work will continue during the next year.

The library is used by a growing number of students, scholars and researchers since 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. The number of its users that had declined during the pandemic is picking up slowly. Some of the 30 journals we subscribe to are bound and preserved for future reference. Apart from 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 the library has also welcomed some foreign scholars doing research on the region so also some journalists and activists. Free access to the library adds to its usefulness.



**Most of what NESRC has achieved during the year is because of the commitment of its staff. (Seated left to right) Abhshruti Sarma, Dr Walter Fernandes, Dr Anthony Dias, Anurag Das. (Standing) Nipasa Dutta, Dr Dixita Deka, Rita Xess, Joseph Zoliana, Dr Meenal Tula, Ashpriya Rohman, Nirab Bora, Mrinimoy Kalita, Joel Rodrigues.**

**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, TISS, Guwahati, HAQ Centre for Child Rights, New Delhi, Misereor, Aachen, Germany, Jesuiten Mission, Nurnberg, Germany, Stiftung Asienhaus, Cologne, Germany, DKA, Wien, Austria, Stiftung Jesuit Welweit, Zurich, Switzerland, Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University and many others.**

1<sup>st</sup> May 2023

Dr Walter Fernandes  
Director, NESRC

