

North Eastern Social Research Centre Guwahati



Annual Report April 2025 to March 2026

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The Director and Staff are proud to present this report for 2025-26. While presenting it, we assure our partners, friends, associates & former staff that NESRC remains committed to contributing to an inclusive society in NEI, in which every community and social segment is counted and given a voice in shaping their own destiny. Most of our former staff maintain this spirit, including those who left NESRC during 2025 after completing their contracts. We thank them for their contribution during their tenure, as NESRC owes what it has achieved to its staff. Four studies were completed during the year, and six publications were brought out. We organised three seminars and joined others in organising two more. Our library and documentation continue to serve young scholars of the region.

The Mission Statement of NESRC

The mission of the North Eastern Social Research Centre (NESRC) is to encourage the youth of Northeast India to serve the tribal, indigenous, Adivasi, and other marginalised communities of the Northeast, particularly women among them.

** NESRC will attempt to live up to this mission by itself doing research and networking with civil society groups, researchers and decision-makers for advocacy for change of policies in favour of the marginalised communities.*

** Its main tool to accomplish it is to combine good quality professional research with concerted action to accompany these communities in their search for peace and reconciliation based on justice and equality.*

** Conflict and peace studies, tribal, gender, ecology and livelihood issues will get priority in the research and field action of NESRC.*

** In these efforts, NESRC will inspire the youth of the Region to undertake research and action in favour of these and other communities on the margins of society.*

** These activities are undertaken in order to move towards a just society in Northeast India, based on peace and justice, equality and reconciliation.*

Staff of North Eastern Social Research Centre, 2025-26



NESRC is able to serve the people of NEI because of its committed staff members
(Front row L-R): Mary Nomita Devi (Documentation), Taniya Khangembam (Research Associate – RA), Rita Xess (Librarian), Pallabi Deka (RA), Tejaswinee Hazarika (RA), Dr Walter Fernandes (Director); (Second Row): Ashpriya Rohman (Accounts, Admin), Dr Samir Talati (Asst Director), Nirab Bora (Publication in charge), Dr Vizokhole Ltu (Senior RA)

During its silver jubilee year, NESRC gave all its staff the opportunity to spend three days at Mawshoroh in Meghalaya for a staff retreat to reflect on its work in light of the situation in NEI and plan the next year. Since we found this initiative useful for our staff's growth, we decided to continue it in 2025-26. All the staff spent three days, November 29-December 1, at NEISSR, Choumukedima, Nagaland, where the well-known Editor, writer, and activist Dr Akum Longchari facilitated a reflection on the present situation of the Northeast and NESRC's response to it. The reflection, combined with our aspirations for NESRC, led to NESRC's vision for the next ten years. During the year, we continued to reflect on it during our staff meetings. We are grateful to Dr Akum Longchari, who guided us, and to Dr C. P. Anto, Director, Peace Channel, for hosting us during the staff retreat.

Research

Social Research is integral to NESRC's identity. During 2025-26, NESRC completed four studies on tribal land, the indigenous issue, peace processes, and the impact of the poor health infrastructure on the marginalised, particularly the tribes in the hill areas.

STUDIES COMPLETED

Dr. Vizokhole Ltu, Dejna Daulagupu & Raysha Alvir. 2025. *Tribal Land in Northeast India, Constitutional Provisions & Laws: Implications and Solutions.* Completed in April 2025, the study, conducted in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Meghalaya, sought to understand the implications of existing constitutional, statutory, and customary laws regarding land and natural resources, and to recommend suitable solutions. The study sought to explore the complex and dynamic social relations that lead to land acquisition and alienation for state infrastructural projects; the interface between statutory laws and customary practices; and internal land transactions, driven by forces such as capital and markets.

Noihrit Gogoi with staff members of the partner organisations of the peace project. 2025. *Empowering Communities and Institutions for Peace Building in Northeast India*

This project combined training with research to help peace activists to develop their analytical skills and facilitate peace processes among communities in conflict. Over the years, it became evident that many peace activists had themselves internalised stereotypes that their community held about other communities. To be effective, these biases had to be confronted, and the study aimed to support peace activists from five partner organisations to recognise and address such internalised prejudices. Research was part of this effort. They were also encouraged to conduct fieldwork, write research papers, and present them at seminars organised by NESRC.



Dr Vizokhole Ltu & Taniya Khangembam. 2026. *Healthcare on the Margins: Understanding Accessibility Challenges in the Northeast of India*

The aim of this study was to understand how health is influenced beyond biology and medical care, primarily by the social environment. Socio-economic factors like access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, shaped by political and economic systems, drive disparities, especially for marginalised groups. Beyond limited infrastructure and poor service delivery, interconnected factors such as historical legacies, political dynamics, geographic isolation, cultural differences, and ecological vulnerability affect health outcomes and access, and create a complex web of challenges that increase health risks and hinder equitable healthcare for vulnerable communities. Focusing on Arunachal, Assam, Meghalaya, and Nagaland as representative of the Northeast, the study examined the complex historical, geopolitical, socio-economic, ecological, and cultural factors that shape health outcomes.

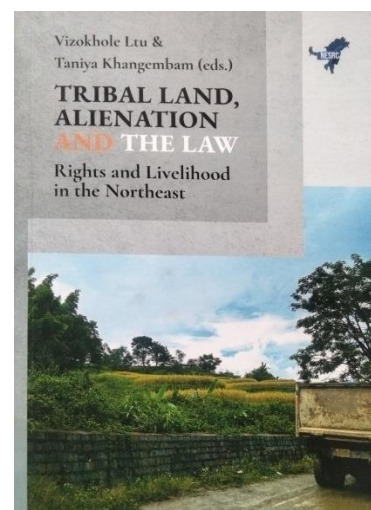
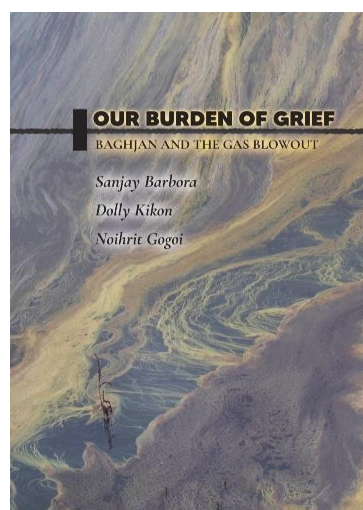
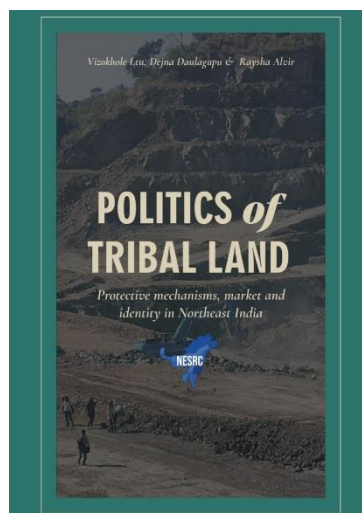


Dr Samir Talati, Pallabi Deka & Tejaswinee Hazarika, 2026. *The Indigenous Issue in Northeast India: Challenges of Land, Identity and Power Sharing*

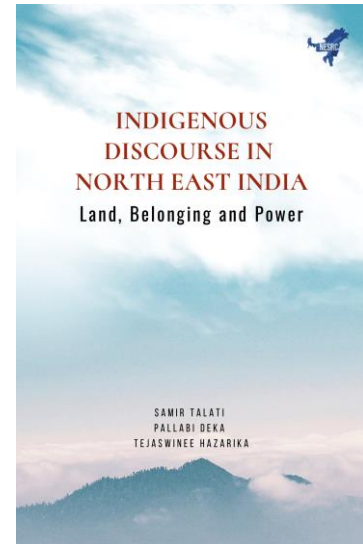
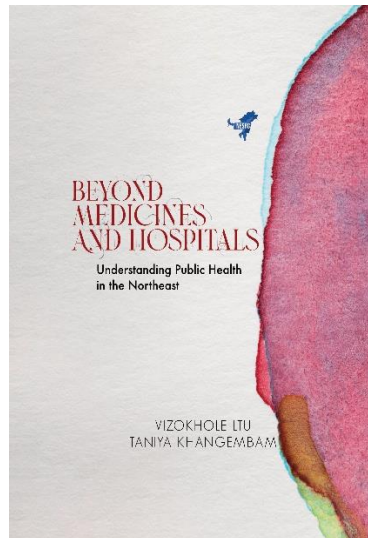
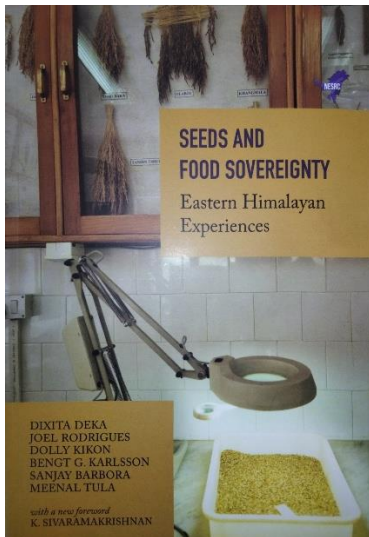
This is a nuanced and empirically grounded exploration of the politics surrounding the indigenous question in North East India, where the term “indigenous” is not limited to claims of original inhabitation but is shaped by lived experiences, political struggles, and shifting histories of migration and settlement. At its core is the close relationship between land and identity. The study shows how different communities invoke indigenous claims strategically to resist marginalisation, assert rights, or consolidate power. Based on extensive fieldwork and by distinguishing between “indigenous” as a claim to historical rootedness and “indigeneity” as an ongoing, dynamic process shaped by power relations, the authors provide a clear analytical framework. This distinction enables a critical engagement with global indigenous discourse and its specific manifestations in North East India.

PUBLICATIONS: BOOKS

NESRC published the findings of its research in the following publications. Our staff members, in their turn, published some professional articles and newspaper articles



1. Vizokhole Ltu, Dejna Daulagupu & Raysha Alvir. 2025. *Politics of Tribal Land: Protective Mechanisms, Market and Identity in Northeast India*. Pages. xviii+218. Price INR 250 USD 12, Euro 12 (PB), INR 500, USD 20, Euro 20 (HB). ISBN: 978-81-943578-7-2.
2. Sanjay Barbora, Dolly Kikon & Noihrit Gogoi. 2025. *Our Burden of Grief: Baghjan and The Gas Blowout*. Pages 236; Price: INR 200, USD 12, Euro 10 (PB). ISBN: 978-81-943578-8-9.
3. Vizokhole Ltu & Taniya Khangembam (eds). 2026. *Tribal Land, Alienation and The Law: Rights and Livelihood in the Northeast*. Pages x+202; Price. INR 250, USD 15, Euro 15 (PB). ISBN: 978-81-996041-1-7.
4. Dixita Deka, Joel Rodrigues, Dolly Kikon, Bengt G. Karlsson, Sanjay Barbora, Meenal Tula. 2025. *Seeds and Food Sovereignty: Eastern Himalayan Experiences – Second Revised Edition* (PB). Pages. vii+231, Price INR 200, USD 12, Euro 10. ISBN 978-81-953024-9-9
5. Vizokhole Ltu & Taniya Khangembam. 2026. *Beyond Medicines and Hospitals: Understanding Public Health in the Northeast*. Pages xviii+250. Price INR 250 USD 10 Euro 10 (PB). INR 500, USD 20, Euro 20 (HB). ISBN 978-81-996041-4-8.



6. Samir Talati, Pallabi Deka & Tejaswinee Hazarika. 2026. *Indigenous Discourse in North East India: Land, Belonging and Power*. Pages x+275. Price INR300, USD 12, Euro 12 (PB). INR 600, USD 20, Euro 20 (HB). ISBN 978-81-996041-3-1.

As in the past, this year too North Eastern Social Research Centre participated in the Assam Book Fair, held at the Veterinary College Grounds, December 24, 2025 to January 6, 2026. As part of our participation, on January 3, 2026, we organised a discussion session for young researchers titled "Doing Research in the Northeast". Around 60 young researchers attended this session in a hall meant for 70 persons. Three publications of NESRC were released. It was followed by a presentation by the authors, Dr Dixita Deka and Dr Vizokhole Ltu, on the study's methodology, constraints and challenges, and strategies for overcoming them. A lively discussion followed with the young researchers present.

NESRC also took part in the inaugural Jowai West Jaintia Hills Bookfair, organised by the Kyrshan Foundation. It was our way of supporting young researchers in a remote area of the Northeast.

PROFESSIONAL PAPERS

The fruits of research often find outlets in journals, edited books, and professional articles. The staff members of NESRC published the following articles during 2025-26

Dr Walter Fernandes. 2025. "History to Justify Conflicts and for Peacebuilding," *Pax Lumina*, Vol. 06, No.04, July 2025, pp. 50-53.

Tejaswinee Hazarika. 2025. "Studying the Self-located in Conflict", *Pax Lumina*, Vol 06, No.05, September 2025, pp. 57-59.

Dr Samir Talati. "Access to Justice for Indigenous Women & Girls in Northeast India," *Debates Indigenas*, a Journal of IWGIA, Copenhagen, 1 March 2026.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Newspaper articles are another way to share the findings of our research. The staff members of NESRC wrote a few articles during 2025-26.

Pallabi Deka. “How Women Shape Economies, Communities via Trade in Bodoland”, *East Mojo*, 16 September 2025.

Dr. Walter Fernandes

“What Two Deaths Say about ‘Peninsular’ India’s Insular View of the North East”, *Scroll.in*, 23 June 2025.

“Tribal Women and Equality in Land Rights: Why a Legal Order Isn’t Enough”, *The Wire*, 8 August 2025.

Taniya Khangembam, “Politics of Tradition and Tolerance: How Class and Gender Shape Marriage Morality”, *Imphal Times*, 30 July 2025.

Dr. Vizokhole Ltu

“Can Legal Reform Truly Salvage the Inheritance Rights of Tribal Women?”, *The Morung Express*, 10th August 2025.

“Affirmative Action: A Fundamental Right for Sustainable Change,” *The Morung Express*, 15th August 2025.

“How Accessible are Our Urban Spaces?” *The Morung Express*, 19th August 2025.

“When Care is Not a Right but a Privilege: Nagaland’s Bleak Healthcare System.” *The Morung Express*, 12th February 2026.

Dr. Samir Talati

“The Sixth Schedule: Land to Industry and Multiculturalism”, *The Shillong Times*, 29 August 2025.

“A Context-Specific Education for Northeast India”, *The Shillong Times*, 6 September 2025.

“Between Belonging and Exclusion: The Racialisation of Northeastern Identities in Delhi”, *The Morung Express*, 22 October 2025.

“200 Years of Yandaboo Treaty”, *The Assam Tribune*, 24 February 2026.

SEMINARS & WORKSHOPS

Seminars are meant to share our research, and to build alliances with civil society, researchers, and policymakers to drive policy changes in favour of the marginalised. NESRC organised three seminars during 2025-26, and joined others in organising two more of them

Organised by North Eastern Social Research Centre during 2025-26

1. Children Growing Up in Conflict Zones and Peace Efforts: Focus on Northeast India

The two-day national seminar was organised on 19-20 September 2025. Its 88 participants engaged in discussion and dialogue aimed at identifying children growing up in conflict zones, with a focus on Northeast India. They also sought to understand how conflict affects children and whether children can be political agents in conflicts and peace efforts. Most papers focused on efforts by various civil society organisations to address issues such as child soldiers, the internalisation of attitudes of enmity and conflict among children, and the training of schoolchildren to become agents of peace in their neighbourhood.



2. “Towards Equitable Healthcare: Public Health and Community Approaches in Northeast India.

This national seminar, organised on 20-21 January 2026, in collaboration with the University of California, Santa Cruz, was based on the ongoing study “Health on the Margins.” The presentations at the seminar substantiated the study's findings that “Health for All” cannot be achieved solely by hospitals, medicines, and the curative approach. The socio-political factors that limit marginalised people's access to nutrition, health care, and development must be taken into account, and traditional systems must be integrated with modern ones.

3. Yandaboo’s Afterlives: Colonial Legacies and Indigenous Agency in Northeast India: Commemorating the Bicentenary of the Yandaboo Treaty

NESRC organised this national seminar on 24-25 February 2026 to mark two centuries of the Yandaboo Treaty, which was central to the creation of an entity called The Northeast, its integration into the political map of India, and its colonisation by the East India Company. It also began the attack on the land and identity of its communities, and is used as the basis for the indigenous claims in the region. These issues were discussed at the seminar.



Organised by other organisations and co-sponsored by NESRC

1. National Seminar, Digital, Diversity, Democracy & Development: Exploring the Internet's Impact on Conflict Dynamics, Peacebuilding, Democracy, and Regional Development in North East India, organised by the Department of Political Science, Manipur University, Imphal on 24-25 July 2025.

2. National Seminar Climate Change and Livelihood in Northeast India: Challenges and Opportunities for Food Security, Health and Social Cohesion organised by the Department of Sociology, Assam Royal Global University. 14-15 November 2025.

Participation and Presentations at Seminars

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

Pallabi Deka

“Cinematic Representation of Trauma, Grief, and Memory: A Study on the Upcoming Film *Birangana Xaadhani*,” At the National Seminar *Locating Marginalities within Margins: A Study of Cinemas from North East India*, New Delhi: Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research, Jamia Milia Islamia, 26-27 November, 2025.

“Embodied Knowledge: Women’s Indigenous Practices and Everyday Healing in Rural Context”, *National Seminar Towards Equitable Healthcare: Public Health and Community Approaches in Northeast India*,” Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre & University of California, Santa Cruz, 20-21 January 2026.

Tejaswinee Hazarika, “Indigenous Practices, Community Space & Public Health Policies: Importance of Studying Menstrual Subjectivity in Assam,” National Seminar, *Towards Equitable Healthcare: Public Health & Community Approaches in Northeast India*. Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre & University of California, Santa Cruz, 20-21 Jan, 2026.

Taniya Khangembam

“Between Classrooms and Curfews: A Clash of Ideologies in Manipur,” National Seminar *Children Growing Up in Conflict Zones and Peace Efforts: Focus on North-East India* organised by North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati on 19-20 September 2025.

“Indigenous Beyond Territory: Manipuri Identity, Memory and Belonging in Barak Valley,” National Seminar *Yandaboo’s Afterlives: Colonial Legacies and Indigenous Agency in Northeast India: Commemorating the Bicentenary of the Yandaboo Treaty*. Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, 24-25 February, 2026.

Dr Vizokhole Ltu, “The Politics of Mobility: War, State and Identity in the Naga Hills,” NEC-Sponsored Seminar *“State-Making in the Northeast Borderlands: Land Relations, Indigenous Mobilities, Governance*. Silchar: Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology, 21-22 November 2025.

Dr Samir Talati

“Bridging the Digital Divide: Social Media, Narrative Framing, and Peace-Building in Northeast India,” National Seminar, *Digital, Diversity, Democracy & Development Exploring the Internet’s Impact on Conflict Dynamics, Peacebuilding, Democracy, and Regional Development in North East India*, Imphal: Department of Political Science, Manipur University, (Co-sponsored by NESRC) 24-25 July, 2025.

“Multiculturalism as Governance Strategy: A Case Study of Northeast India,” Conference on *Democracy, Governance and Inclusive Development in India: A Vision for Inclusive Development for India*. Satyodayam, Secunderabad: Jesuit Social Scientists of South Asia Forum (JSSSA). January 31-February 1, 2026.



Resource Persons

A special event was the visit on 9th March, 2026, of a six-member delegation from the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, led by Ms Aparna Roy IFS, Joint Secretary, who spent around two hours with the senior staff of NESRC discussing issues related to the link between North East India and Southeast Asia with special reference to the Act East Policy.

Dr Walter Fernandes

“Indigenous People and Modernisation in Northeast India,” *Online Lecture for the International Day of Indigenous Peoples*, organised by the Department of Sociology, Nagaland University, Lumami Campus, August 9, 2025.

“The Situation in Northeast India and Response of the Churches,” *Triennial Meeting of United Christian Forum*, Shillong: Presbyterian Headquarters, November 6, 2025.

“Human Trafficking in the Northeast and Measures to Counter It,” Guwahati: Oasis organised meeting of civil society groups, 11th February, 2026

“The situation in the Northeast and Students’ Response,” Guwahati: SCM, 21st February, 2026.

Dr Vizokhole Ltu. “*In-depth Interviews: Techniques & Practices (Focus Group Discussion, Participant Observation & Field Notes)*,” At the ICSSR-sponsored three-day workshop on *Qualitative Research Tools and Approaches*. Guwahati: Assam Don Bosco University, March 26, 2026.

Dr Samir Talati.

Conducted an Orientation Programme for 60 school teachers on “Situating Education in the Socio-Political Context of Northeast India.” Maibang, St. Xavier’s School, 14th February 2026.

“Organising & Coding Qualitative Data, Thematic Analysis & Interpretation,” at the ICSSR-sponsored three-day workshop on *Qualitative Research Tools and Approaches*. Guwahati: Assam Don Bosco University, March 27, 2026

Participation at Seminars

Dr Walter Fernandes, Dr Vizokhole Ltu & Dr Samir Talati participated in the *Consultation on a National Tribal Policy*, Guwahati: Bosco Reach-out, November 4-5, 2025.

Dr Walter Fernandes & Dr Samir Talati participated in the *DKA Partners’ Meeting*. Patna: Seva Kendra, January 28-29, 2026.

Pallabi Deka, Tejaswinee Hazarika and Taniya Khangembam attended a session, *Strengthening Climate Resistance by Scaling Up Agroecology: Focus on Global South*, organised by All India Peoples Science Network, Bosco Reach-out, 29th May 2025.

Dr Vizokhole Ltu and Tejaswinee Hazarika attended a one-day training programme on *Chapter X of the Assam Land & Revenue Regulations, 1886*, organised by the Assam Institute of Research for Tribals & Scheduled Castes, sponsored by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, GOI. Guwahati: AIRTSC Seminar Hall, 2nd August 2025.

Dr Walter Fernandes

Participated in the 40th anniversary event of FST, 9th January, 2026.

Meeting on Climate Change and Policy in Assam. Guwahati: Organised by I-Forest in collaboration with the Department of Climate Change, Government of Assam, 9th February, 2026.

NEIRBC Commission for Scheduled Tribes, Guwahati: February 19-20, 2026.

Dr Vizokhole Ltu

Chaired the technical session “Role of Gender, Identity & Social Location in Conflicts,” National Seminar, *Children Growing Up in Conflict Zones and Peace Efforts: Focus on North-East India*. Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, September 19-20, 2025.

Chaired the technical session “Colonial Legacies, Environment, and Resource Conflicts,” National Seminar *Yandaboo’s Afterlives: Colonial Legacies and Indigenous Agency in the Northeast: Commemorating the Bicentenary of the Yandaboo Treaty*. Guwahati: NESRC, February 24-25.

Dr Samir Talati

Represented NESRC at the Release of our publication *Our Burden of Grief: Baghjan and the Gas Blowout*, at Tinsukia: 18th December, 2025.

Chaired the Technical Session “Health Inequalities, Environment, and Vulnerability,” National Seminar *Towards Equitable Healthcare: Understanding Public Health and Community Approaches in Northeast India*. Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research & University of California, Santa Clara, 20-21 January 2026.



Library of North Eastern Social Research Centre

During the year, the library experienced significant growth, thus consolidating its role as a specialised knowledge hub in the social sciences in Northeast India. Today, the number of books in the library stands at 11,859. The new titles span a diverse range of contemporary and interdisciplinary themes, including epidemics and their societal impacts, ecological and indigenous issues, health, and other topics. This expansion aligns with evolving academic and research interests and ensures that the library responds to current scholarly needs. In addition to books, the library maintains active subscriptions to around 30 periodicals and publications. Academic periodicals are systematically bound and made available for future reference and research. A major highlight of this year has been the progress made in digitising documentation and archival work. Material from five newspapers covering the past 25 years is being scanned and catalogued. Over 20,000 individual newspaper items have already been digitised, catalogued, and uploaded during the year. It is a significant step toward preserving regional historical records and improving accessibility for researchers.

The library continues to attract a diverse group of users, other than NESRC staff, from India and abroad. All visitors have free access to the library's resources in its well-equipped reading room, fostering an inclusive and supportive research environment. To further assist users, the NESRC offers supplementary services such as photocopying and printing at nominal charges. Efforts are currently underway to enhance accessibility and user engagement through digital means. The library catalogue has been uploaded to the NESRC website, enabling users to explore available resources remotely. Selected documentation materials are also expected to be made available online in the near future. With continued expansion and technological integration, these services position it well to serve as a vital resource centre for regional and interdisciplinary research in the years ahead.

As we conclude this report, we place on record our gratitude to all those who have accompanied us in the past and throughout the past year in various ways, through their moral, professional, and financial support, encouragement in moments of need, and other forms of support. Prominent among them are the Governing Board and General Body, the present and former staff of NESRC, partners like Peace Channel, Choumukedima, JUST, Agartala, Jirsong Asong, Diphu, BGSS, Bongaigaon, DSSS Imphal, NEDSSS, Guwahati, Misereor, Aachen, DKA Vienna, IWGIA, Copenhagen, Jesuiten Mission, Nurnberg, Jesuiten Weltweit, Zurich, University of California, Santa Cruz, and Stockholm University.



North Eastern Social Research Centre
Guwahati, 31-05-2026

Dr John Walter Fernandes
Director