

"The local community must get the rights to the forest, land and water".

Jyotsna Tirkey, a member of the Oraon ethnic community from Chaibasa in Jharkhand state in northern India, talks of the problems of forest destruction faced by the local communities due to "development".

"I come from a farming family. We grow both rice and other pulses. I am working with a small village group with the women in our community on programmes for alternative development.

"Our forest area is disappearing very fast and our cultivation area is also getting smaller; the decrease in the forests is reducing the underground water table in our area.

"The Saranda forest area is one of the largest forest areas in Asia. We used to get many medicinal herbs from the forest area. In Jharkhand, there used to be more than 5,000 medicinal herbs species, but now only about 2,200 exist. In the Raj Mahal Hill region, for example, the herbs are disappearing because multinational medicine companies come and lure villagers to collect the herbs and then take the herbs away.

"The forests are disappearing because a timber mafia is cutting them down. Also, there are large-scale open cast mining operations for coal, bauxite and uranium. These mining operations are causing deforestation and pollution. The HCL Company's copper mining releases reddish wastewater into our fields and destroys our rice cultivation. Another mine is the Uranium Corporation uranium mining that is also causing serious health impacts. The hospitals in the
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It's a question of democracy, not just the environment ...

Devjit Nandy from Bilaspur in Chattisgarh in central India, says that the ethnic communities are trying to link the concerns at their community level with the international discussions about climate change

"Chattisgarh is a new state, only two years old. But the process of making the new state has not solved any of our previous problems. For example, we are still fighting a World Bank-funded forestry project that was begun in 1993 and is taking away the resources from the tribal people who have lived in the forest for many generations.

"We believe that the people cannot be separated from the forest and the wildlife. The forest and the people cannot be seen in isolation and protected in small bits in different areas, because the diversity of wildlife and the forest and the tribals are connected and form part of the whole ecosystem.

The problem of climate change is visible in our areas. The older generation of people in our area used to be able to predict the rainfall from observing nature such as the falling of leaves or the appearance of birds. Now, these patterns are being disrupted. Many bird species are

not seen in the area anymore.

"The Government of India follows what the United States (US) and the United Nations (UN) dictate to us. We need to protest against this, and make sure that the resources are not taken away from the people. So it's a question of democracy and not just an environmental problem. We have to make sure that local people can make the linkages to the global level and so that we can be prepared to also fight in the international level.



The Delhi Declaration of The Ecosystem Communities on Climate Change and Sustainable Communities

From the communities from the five ecosystems of India and others active among them gathered in New Delhi on the occasion of the Eight Session of the Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC.

Excerpts from the Declaration

Context

Forest communities experience threats to our forests, medicinal plants and wildlife while environmental degradation has introduced new diseases among us. The floristic composition of the Himalayan forest is being changed from soil and water conserving hetero-cultures of broad leaf native species to soil and water depleting and vulnerable monoculture of commercial species. This not only leads to an eco-disaster in the mountain areas but also has serious repercussions on communities in the distant plains.

The urban poor experience more than the others do, the ill effects of transport and industrial emissions and of bio-medical waste. We are deprived of our right to drinking water. The little water we get is often polluted by industrial effluents. In the name of environmental hygiene, slums are cleared and the land handed over to real estate speculators for concrete buildings and unplanned development.

These adverse effects are exacerbated by the failure of the Government to enforce the coastal zone regulations.

Failure to recognise the land, forest, pasture, marine and other resources as our livelihood and denial of ownership rights over them as well as our traditional land, makes it impossible for us to adapt to changes.

The Delhi Declaration

Traditional communities in coastal, forest and mountainous regions are still contributing to a situation of ecological balance the benefits of which are accruing to the rich countries and rich and middle classes within poor countries. Our communities are victims of a geo-political perspective that cuts us off from the mainstream and keeps us on the periphery.

Most mega projects such as dams and environment conservation schemes like biosphere reserves and national parks and sanctuaries and industrial townships are being created in our ecosystems, impervious to our needs and our involvement.

We derive no benefits from these projects but suffer their adverse effects. The tourism infrastructure in the coastal, forest and mountain zones is insensitive to local culture and values. Moreover it deprives our

communities of its benefits. The globalisation and the infrastructure projects linked to it are further destroying our land, forests and mountain areas that are our livelihood. Our communities have experienced erratic rainfall, loss of land productivity, depletion of ground water, pollution of water resources, diminishing green cover, rise in temperatures, drying up of perennial streams, droughts and floods, food insecurity and other threats to our livelihood.

As a result, our communities are impoverished and forced to migrate to the urban areas to fill their slums thus putting additional pressure on the urban resources. So even after migration our quality of life deteriorates and we are deprived of our right to a life with dignity.

In the arid zones, particularly those of Gujarat and Rajasthan, we have been forced to move away from our traditional livestock such as camels and cows to sheep and goats that are more destructive of nature. Sand dunes are advancing. In the coastal zones we have experienced changing winds and ocean currents that affect fish breeding, shifting bar-mouths on the backwaters, loss of mangroves due to sedimentation, changing salinity levels and erosion of the waterfronts, change in the fish breeding and feeding grounds affecting the full marine food chain.

Reaffirming that economic and social development and poverty eradication are the first and overriding priorities of the Developing country Parties, We believe that the official Delhi Declaration does not respond to our needs and problems because it is highly market oriented and is meant to follow market rules that have impoverished us during the last several decades. Communities are not involved in the decision-making process.

In order to respond to the challenges we face now and in the future, climate change and its effects should be considered within the framework of sustainable communities as the centre of sustainable development through enhanced international co-operation.

In this context we call for the following measures:

Policies and measures to protect the climate system against human-induced change should be appropriate for the specific conditions of each party and the specificity of each ecosystem and should be integrated with national and local level development programmes, taking into account that economic development is essential for adopting measures to address climate change.

Developed countries and the middle and upper classes

in countries like India, should take concrete measures to reduce emissions by changing their lifestyles. The commitments made in 1997 by the industrialised countries to reduce their emissions by 5.2% below the 1990 level before 2008-2012 should be made applicable to all these countries and classes.

These countries and communities that are more responsible for non-judicious use of our resources resulting in adverse climatic changes and global warming must be identified, brought to the notice of international communities and penalised in the form of heavy taxes based on the principle that the polluter pays.

We reaffirm our right to have control over our livelihood and knowledge and our participation in decision-making concerning our resources.

We demand that the communities of the arid zone, coastal, forest and mountain ecosystems are not referred to any more as inhabitants but as the traditional users of these resources having a right over them as their livelihood.

Compensate our communities for the losses we have suffered till now according to the principle of polluter pays, regenerate land that has been destroyed by mining, resettle those who have been deprived of their land and livelihoods by development projects and ecological degradation and recognise our traditional rights over these resources as our livelihood.

Ecosystem specific planning strategies should be the focus of the national and regional development plans.

Priority given to renewable, people-centred, decentralised energy options and clear commitment to reduce dependence on fossil fuel based energy options.

In the place of big dams, centralised thermal plants and unscientific mining, we demand mini hydro, solar and wind energy projects. Priority should be given to renewable, people-centred, decentralised energy options.

Tourism should be under the control of our communities and for our development and of our ecosystem. Renaissance of cultural heritage including pilgrimages, should be an essential aspect of such development. This combined with our traditional industries can generate employment for our livelihood.

A national disaster mitigation policy should be formulated.

In the arid zones traditional water harvesting measures should be revived and grazing lands should be revived in order to ensure that they do not encroach on non-traditional grazing areas. All encroachment in

water catchment areas should be prevented. Traditional tree plantation meant for this ecosystem should be promoted in order to prevent desertification and greater salinity. Forests remain the core of our life and livelihood. They can only be preserved, maintained and renewed if our communities are at the centre of their control and management. So we refuse to allow them to be traded only as carbon sinks. For the ecological regeneration of the lofty Himalayan region mining should be banned completely in these hills. Electricity generation from mountain streams is to be treated as a viable, eco-friendly and safe alternative to major dams and other centralised mega-projects. In the urban areas, waste management should be based on recycling and on the principle of zero garbage neighbourhoods.

The local community...

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area know about the health impacts of the mine but they don't give the information to the people. Because of the logging and mining activity, many small townships have appeared and the increasing number of people and this is also worsening the degradation of the forests.

"We wanted to raise these problems in the COP 8 conference. But our status in the conference is only as an "observer" so we cannot do much. Everyday, we talk to the media but the media is not taking up our concerns. The media does not fully print or reflect on what we are saying, and the real picture is lost. We find that what we say is being censored, because the press is also part of the power system. "But there are other events happening during the conference where we can talk to other people who have similar problems and with similar thinking.

"When I go back to my communities, I want to tell them about this drama that is going on in our country, the rhetoric about saving the environment that is happening at the global level. And our struggles for our water, land and forest will continue.

"The local community must get the rights to the forest, land and water. Only the communities are capable of protecting the land and forest and only through them can our climate be protected".

Rising temperatures...

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changes has deteriorated the quality of fruits and neem trees are not bearing fruits and therefore there are no neem seeds for reproduction and for other uses. At this moment we are in the midst of famine but no government programmes have come, government has to do famine relief in a big way.

A Fisher Speaks ...

According to T.K. Rahiman, a fisher from Vishakapatnam in the eastern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, his small-scale fishing community used to harvest a variety of catch from the sea: white prawns, tiger prawns, pomphret, tuna, shark, catfish. But the fish catch has been decreasing over the years due to various reasons including large-scale trawler fishing and changes in climate patterns.

"There used to be three to four tons of prawns in each catch. In my own experience, we had a haul of 13 tons of black and white pomphret and about five to six tons of mackarel [both high value commercial fish species].

"But now the catch has been decreasing. Now not even one kilo of fish is available in the catch. The pomphret has totally disappeared. Because, the large trawlers come to fish in the same waters where we fish. In the fish catch, the trawlers take only the prawns and throw the other dead fish back into the sea. The dead fish decay and increase water pollution.

"The number of trawlers has increased; the owners of the trawlers are not fishers but business people who come from different places like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Bangalore, Gujarat, Bengal, Maharashtra but are based in Vishakapatnam.

"We can notice the change in the climate patterns that are having an impacts on our fishing. Each fish species lives and breeds at a specific temperature range and at various depths in the sea. Tuna, for example, prefers a temperature of about 32 degrees. So when the temperature pattern changes, the tuna migrates to other areas and is no longer found in our fishing ground.

"The traditional fishing people who comprise about 500,000 in Andhra Pradesh suffer most because of the declines in the fish catch. We can earn only Rs.100 to 200 a week (US\$2 to \$4) so we have to borrow money at high rates of interest. We are often not able to pay back the borrowed money. Our women in the village are forced to go work as domestic servants in the cities. They can earn up to Rs.300 a month (US\$6). The fishers are giving up their occupation and going to the cities to find work as carpenters, in tea shops, or construction. Only a few of the children in our communities are able to go to school since we do not have money to pay the fees.

"The state government of Andhra Pradesh has ordered our communities to leave the area because the government wants to increase tourism. But where can we go? What work can we get?

Rising temperatures and desert miseries

My name is Harlal Mehra. I am from the district of Barmer in Rajasthan. I have experienced over the last twenty five years our conditions getting from bad to worse. It was much better 25years ago. Then, there were regular rains. Our farming and animal husbandry were rewarding. During the last 15years many things have changed. Temperatures have risen. Rains are very scanty. We are facing problems in farming, animal husbandry and in every walk of life. We have ceased to rear cows and camels, which we used to do due to scarcity of fodder. We switched over to sheep and goat rearing. The famine situation we have now has made that also difficult. The famines have transformed us from a farmer to a labourer and we became mine workers.

We are involved in gypsum mining now. This mining prevailed originally over an area of about five kilometres and now it occupies an area of about 25sq. km. There are deep pits on the land all around. Our farms have been destroyed. We cannot anymore earn from our farming. In the rainy season even the mining work is stopped and we are rendered workless and are unemployed. We remain unemployed for about 4 months in a year and we migrate to Gujarat in search of work.

Our seeds do not germinate with the increasing heat and lack of moisture in the soil. We have to use hybrid seeds and for which we need chemical fertilizers but this practice in dry arid soils makes our fields even more barren.

Rain patterns also have become very erratic. In the monsoon season, there would be strong winds and storms making sand dunes in a desert area like ours. The crops are embedded below these dunes and all get destroyed. It makes our plight even more miserable. Side by side illicit mining is taking place on gauchar (grazing) lands further destroying our fodder resources and severely affecting animal production. Traditionally in our desert ecosystem we had a tree called babool and for camel fodder we used to use local bush type crop called khenjri. Now an exotic thorny bush which we call angrezi babool (english babool otherwise known as prosopis juliflora) that has been introduced into our areas and is spreading very rapidly and affecting our lands, water resources and other crops. Natural species are also fast vanishing and no efforts are being made to conserve and increase the fast disappearing local species of plants. Climatic
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