



1ST NORTH-EAST LAND CONFERENCE

Venue: MLCU, Shillong, Meghalaya.

January 30-31, 2020

Conference Summery Report



The North-East Land Conference, organized by the Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU), Shillong, North-Eastern Region Community Resource Management Programme (NERCORMP), Shillong; North East Network (NEN), NRMCCentre for Land Governance (NRMCC-LG); and Rongmei Naga Baptist Convention (RNBA), Manipur evident the significance tenure dynamics and development paradigms in North East Region deliberating on land, laws, locals and livelihoods on 30-31st January, 2020 at Shillong.

The first attempt was made to establish a regional platform around land governance in North East India to open dialogue around challenges and opportunities around customary laws and practices among indigenous community.

Day 1: 30th January, 2020

Inaugural Session

The soulful rendition of a *Khasi* music entitled “*Ka hok ba tam*” by the department of Music, MLCU set the tune of the conference valuing the people’s rights over land and natural resources, adhering to prevailing truth of the land. The gracious welcome at MLCU to over 70 participants from NE region across sectors made began the day with joy and happiness that symbolises the indigenous community of the region. Delegates from international and national realm enhanced the experience with knowledge and information.

Started with the welcome address by Dr. Vincent T. Darlong, Vice-Chancellor of MLCU set the tune of the workshop to generate an outcome that would be beneficial for the community and region with adequate scope of research and investigation. As land issues in the North Eastern Region pertain to the community, Dr. Darlong urged for developing an appropriate academic and practical definition of the term “Community”.

Elaborating the purpose of the conference, Pranab Ranjan Choudhury from Center for Land Governance introduced and spelt out the objectives

of the Conference, and envisaged an informed land advocacy as an outcome. He talked about land diversity in the north eastern region (NER) providing learning to all. Historic migration in NER has in fact enriched the culture, biodiversity and life style of the tribal people in this region. He made a reference to Article 371(a) and 371(g) besides a host of Central and State laws including village laws being practiced by the community. He spoke about the challenges arising out of activities like mining, socio-economic disparities, ethnic conflict and farmer’s transition to alternative farming, posing a threat to the land and its management. Shri Choudhury called for building a strong relationship between the Government and the communities for resolving intricate and complex land related issues. He made a brief reference to the land owning rights being conferred upon forest fringe dwellers under the Forest Rights Act of 2005, on the challenges coming from investment projects like mining, railway or industries. He concluded citing the fact that threats to the customary tenure and community land regimes now are not only coming from national development and growth ambitions, but also from the high aspirations of local elites to hold large patches of land for personal gains.

Mihin Doillo, Director (NRM), NERCORMP in his inaugural address mentioned about land being critical and vital for natural resources management and livelihood for the diverse community in the NER. He called for proper planning to understand the complex land issues and how land is an important resource for development planning for NE Region.

Dimgong Rongmei, Secretary of RNBA informed the gathering about RNBA starting the land discourse in Manipur in 2006 wherein, they found issues pertaining to traditional land tenure systems varying from one community to another. He further opined that each village was an independent unit having similarities and differences. Such a complex system leads to insecurity. Though Article 371 is applicable to Manipur, there are legal and administrative pluralities about the nature of land governance with confusions around Schedule VI provisions and imposition of Manipur Land Reform Act in the valley as well as part of hill districts. The situation is

further complicated by the absence of any land records for the hill districts covering 90% of geographical area, often accentuating land conflicts. He spoke about the efforts of RNBA in using DGPS for land documentation with community participation.

Dr. Monisha Behal, CEO of North East Network, a leading NGO working in NE Region, threw light on the journey traversed by NEN in engaging women, village and local authorities in land management especially seed storage. She talked about customary laws in the hill region with village councils having no role for women. She also articulated their experience on gender role in land governance and how women are losing space in land governance in NE Region.

Ms. Rina Chandran from Thomas Reuters Foundation, Thailand, as Chief Guest, in her Keynote address, narrated her experience of covering ethnic conflicts in Kabul ravaged by 4 decades by war. She witnessed land conflicts in Kabul with warlords snatching land from the people. But the redeeming feature was the extraordinary hope seen among people becoming aware of land rights. In the end she appreciated the hope and resilience displayed by women in NE region of India despite threats, violence and alienation.

From Afghanistan to Agartala, women are in forefront of society and development. Their courage, care, resilience & humour while fighting for justice & Rights are hallmark transformations, which must be recognised & supported.

Rina Chandran

The inaugural session closed with a very positive note and vote of thanks to the dignitaries by Dr Maribon Viray, Organising Secretary of the Conference.

Technical Session 1: "Community Land Governance and Customary Tenure: Documentation, Enquiries and Change Dynamics"

Chairperson: Dr. Mangcha Thouthang, School of Social Science, MLCU, Shillong.

Presenter 1: Dr. VT Darlong, presented a paper entitled "**How secured is the customary land tenure system for sustainable livelihood perspective-a preliminary study from two different customary land system through the lens of the land-based development programmes in NE India**". He spoke about land tenure systems vis-a-vis the livelihood of Naga and Kuki tribe in NE Region. His study found Naga villagers having larger social support system compared to Kukis, whereas household migrations, due to socio-economic reasons, were more among the Kukis. The salient feature of his study was the increased feminization of farming in both the communities. He called for a more evidence based research to modernize the Kuki land system.

Answering a query, Dr. Darlong informed the gathering that Naga women were more educated and active with regards to management of community conserved areas (CCA) than Kuki women.

With traditional methods of farming disappearing among indigenous people, land degradation is happening faster, biodiversity is decreasing and forest fires are more frequent

Vincent Darlong

Presenter 2: Dr. Fabian Lyngdoh, presented a paper on "**The problem of landlessness among Khasis in Meghalaya**". He pointed out the flaws in Khasi land tenure system calling for a relook into the narrative of tradition. He went on to talk about the alteration in the Khasi land tenure system by the British. According to him there was no individual inheritance as the *Kur* (clan) was the primary member of the society; a body corporate with perpetual succession and collective institutional inheritance. According to him the *Kur* economy of the Khasi matrilineal system depended on the efforts of the maternal uncles. The problem of modern Khasi society is that it is only the village authority, and not the State government of District Council which has territorial authority over the land.

Landlessness among the Khasis is rooted in Meghalaya's colonial history. The British gave authority to tribal chiefs over their communities and this translated to individual ownership and exclusion. **Dr. Fabian Lyngdoh**

In reply to a question about the role of customary laws of protecting tribal lands, Dr. Fabian regretted that the elite section of the society had hijacked the very narrative of the Khasi traditions on land ownership system.

Technical Session 2: “Land Rights of Indigenous Women in North East India”

Session Organizer: Housing and Land Rights Network and Centre for Research and Advocacy, Manipur

Chairperson: Ms Patricia Mukhim, Editor, The Shillong Times

Should we challenge or endorse words like indigenous and land rights, which are more western constructs? Culturally we share resources & believe in sharing & caring resources. Either we remain indigenous or argue for individual land rights? - Patricia Mukhim

Panellist 1: Ms Christina Lalremdik of Centre for Research and Advocacy, Manipur, highlighted on land displacement, unemployment and work load, forced labour work, drugs and other substance undermining health and livelihood issues. She mentioned water scarcity and domestic violence being created as a result of land displacement. The impact on women is more visible. She further added that in Manipur, the role of women could be seen in contribution to state economy, primary production, farming and handloom, agriculture. She regretted that traditional customary laws are a hindrance and government developmental programmes take away the land holding rights of the people.

Development projects including roads, power plants and dams are wreaking havoc in Manipur, displacing indigenous people and hurting their livelihoods.

Christina Lalremdik

Panellist 2: Ms Mayalmit Lepcha, President, Indigenous Rights Network, Sikkim, spoke about the plight of the Lepcha communities as a result of dam construction in the area. Land displacement; as a result of dam construction have resulted in climate

refugees, landslides, water pollution, large scale ecosystem damage and prostitution. Lack of development and the area being in seismic zone have further worsened the situation. She called for a more proactive movement to carry out development in harmony with nature.

Panellist 3: Ms Seno Tsuhah, North East Network, Nagaland, spoke about the customary practices or land rights in Chakesang District where women are not given inheritance rights, over movable properties. She further added that Naga women have no property rights but debates and discussions are going on for equal distribution of land among male and female children. There are three types of land, viz, community lands, clan lands and individual lands. Some of the challenges faced by the Naga society are:

1. The weakening of village institutions in challenging the local elite who have the capitalist mindset.
2. Whether women can claim collective ownership of the land.
3. Whether women should have space in carrying out in any development project.
4. Whether women should have rights over forest cultivable lands and inheritance.

As patriarchy still regulates the land ownership, she calls for introspection by the community to bring about fair distribution and ownership of land among men and women.

Private capitalist interests have infiltrated our social fabric as well. If we are to restore the sustainability and dignity quotient in our lives, we must take individual responsibility for building collectives.

Seno Tsuhah

Panellist 4: Ms Agnes Kharshiing, President, Civil Society Women’s Organization, spoke about the deprived section of the society being thrown out of their land by the people in power. She cited examples of poor villagers being made to leave their hearths and homes for not conforming to the diktats of the village council in Meghalaya. She was of the view that land displacement severely affected the indigenous people especially the marginalized.

Summary by the Chair:

Ms Patricia Mukhim summed up the panel discussion by observing that women have neither any voice nor any agency to express their views in a patriarchal system. In most of the cases women are reduced to begging and commercial sex as a result of land displacement. She urged the DoNER Ministry to address this issue urgently. Then she opened the floor for discussion.

Dr. Mangcha intervened to talk about the biggest anti dam protest in Churachandpur, Manipur, in 2005 and its non-functional condition till date.

To a question on women's resistance in securing land rights by Ms Shivani, Ms Mayalmit talked about dam protestors being more vocal in keeping their rivers in North Sikkim free flowing.

Ms Seno hastened to add that women in Phek district have adopted collective farming instead of shifting cultivation and revived seed keeping as a tradition.

Dr. V T Darlong threw light on the diversity of shifting cultivation and different laws in tribal areas recognizing the rights of the people to practice jhum cultivation. He also added that these acts favoured tree plantation and spraying seeds on fallow lands.

Technical Session 3: "Dialogue on Land Rights Issues in Manipur"

Organizer: RNBA, Manipur

Chairperson: Dimgonglung Rongmei

Panellist 1: Simon L Hrangchal, EAC, Churachanpur, talked about land holding systems among Hmar tribes where the chief was the owner and villagers were the tenants. He informed the gathering that EAC along with RNBA works on NRM, livelihood, orange and areca plantations and growing up seasonal crops in the areas. He highlighted on the problems on land tenure are arising as a result of the following:

1. No proper land records available

2. The Hmar chiefs stay in towns and still controlling the village councils
3. When developmental programmes and terrace farming was initiated

He further added that EAC is trying to negotiate with the village authority to confer land holding certificates to women along with their husbands jointly to be countersigned by the village chief. He expressed happiness about the village authority exceeding to their requests.

Panellist 2: Holkhomang Haokip, RAS, Churachanpur, spoke about lands as properties among the Kuki tribes, were similar to a feudal system, where the chiefs have the overriding power over land. The Kuki land holding system is based on customary laws having jurisdiction over forest, land, playground, etc. The chieftainship is caused by historical succession. He regretted that the hereditary chieftainship system is being commercialized. The Kuki chief exercises overriding political, social administrative, executive and judicial powers. Women do not have any role in the land holding system. He called for awareness, documentation of land records, land mapping and land rights as a possible measure for removing the disparity.

Panellist 3: Namkhinlung Pamei, PESCH, Jiribam, dwelt on the land holding system of the Rongmei community where the youngest son inherited the land. Landlessness and boundary conflicts arise due to the absence of land records. There are also disputes arising out of compensation for mega projects, or wealthy people acquiring a large amount of land. He urged for legalizing the customary laws in order to make it more powerful and effective.

Panellist 4: Romen, PRDA, Bishnupur, spoke about his organization working in the field of environmental conservation, disaster management, gender, climate change and society. He pointed out a gap between customary laws and modern system and urged for the introduction of a horticultural farming on a long term basis, and documentation of land tenure records to improve security. He was of the view that government should recognize the

village councils and carry out consultation before carrying out any developmental project.

Dr. Darlong called for a balanced development based on nature which allows not more than 10% area under monoculture cultivation. He urged for developing ecological principles in villages including pest predator relationship and favouring insect pollination for preserving the natural forest.

Dimgonglung Rongmei summarised the session and called for a development of an effective land tenure system, horticultural system, jhum cultivation, and home-stays.

DAY 2: 31st January, 2020

Technical Session 4: “Community Led Land Mapping for Customary Tenure Rights in Manipur”

Session Organizer: RNBA, Manipur & NRM Centre for Land Governance, Bhubaneswar

Session Moderator: Pravanjan Mohapatra, NRM Centre for Land Governance

The keynote presentation was given by Navin Amang, who introduced on the objective of the Project and highlighted on the processes involved on household surveys, mapping of individual plots and village boundaries. The project is financed by the Cadasta Land Right Challenge Fund to enabling the communities to map their own land and have their own rights.

Panelists: The panelists were, Prisca Gongmei, Chingkhiong Kamei, Julia Thamei of RNBA, Imphal, Manipur; Gaihemliu Gongmei of PESCH, Tamenglong, Manipur; Julius Kamson of RBA, Nagaland; Samungou Seram of PRDA, Bishnupur, Manipur; and L. Ruthy of EAC, Churachanpur, Manipur.

The panellists of the session highlighted on their field experiences in community-led land mapping in Manipur. How participatory approach was evolved in land mapping, from village meeting for consultation and awareness of the programme, informed consent, mapping meeting to the actual process of mapping and issuance of Land tenure certificates were described.

Community sensitisation & locally relevant land tenure mapping can enhance gender equity & tenure security- Julius

The panellists informed that the villagers were interested in the mapping project, and requests were also made for mapping of villages' boundaries. The village map and the maps of individuals' plots of land are recognized as legal documents as they are authenticated by the chairman or chief and secretary of the village as well as recognized by the Government. These land maps which have the consent from the village authority are distribute to the villagers and recorded in the village registry.

In the open discussion, Anthony Debbarma questioned the legality of those land tenure certificates and its legal recognition. He shared his concern that mapping and codification of traditional land tenure system might place a limitation on tribal lands. Whether, the tribal people have land records or not, the Government needs to consult and cannot go ahead acquiring tribal lands without consultation with the people in public hearing.

Jiten Yumnam from Manipur also urged upon the new land use policy may change the way of community owned land, and pave the way for commercialization of land and aggressive use of land for infrastructural projects. His concern was issuing of land tenure certificate might lead to individualization of land and easy transfer of land. With regard to community and clan lands, a person may hold tenure only for a particular period of time. Hence, mapping and confirming his/ her private ownership on common clan land or clan land while in possession for a definite period of time might create some conflict of interest in the future.

Individualization of land ownership may infringe upon tribals' common ownership and collective interests. Moreover, the Government might claim all tribal lands and forests that remain unmapped.

Aunungla Aier, on the other hand, highlighted that tenure documentation of individual ownership is necessary because the trends are changing; the

traditional chiefs become the absolute owner of the land, and in case of mega projects, only the chiefs and the elite enjoy the land compensations while the rest become outsiders in their own land where their very life is not secure. This traditional system can no longer co-exist with the current trend; the traditional values are gone as land is looked upon as commercial commodity. It is tenure mapping and documentation of the existing tenure system, and not individualization. If the land belongs to the people, why does the Government build dams and other constructions without consultation with the community concerned? Hence, tenure mapping of individuals' lands would be able to give some form of ownership to the community and security to the individuals.

Pravanjan Mohapatra, Session Chair summarized that within the given social and political limitation within the customary law, land tenure mapping would provide a tenural security to the cultivator for making investments in land and enhancing the production and income. However, the land tenure certificate is the recognition of current tenure assigned by the village council to the respective cultivators within the provisions of the customary laws prevailing in NE Region.

Technical Session 5: "Development, Investments and Displacement in North East India"

Session Organizer: Centre for Research and Advocacy Manipur and Housing and Land Rights Network, New Delhi

Session Moderator: Ms Shivani Chaudhry, Housing and Land Rights Network, New Delhi

Opening the session Ms Shivani said that land is perceived differently by different actors. For the tribal communities land is the basis of human right and linked to other rights; right to life, right to food, water, cultural identify, self expression, health, and the right to live in dignity. Human rights are also collective; it implies the access to use by all. Land is worshipped as sacred and spiritual. But in individualistic societies, land is viewed as a commercial resource which frequently leads to conflict and clash. Development initiatives for

some are happening at the cost of rights of some others. She informed the house that not much data is available on the displacement and evictions taking place in the North East, but highest number of evictions took place in Manipur and Assam.

Panellist 1: Bhai Chhatradara of the People's Movement for Subansiri Valley, Assam, spoke about issues related to displacement in Assam. Development-induced displacement has taken place since 1840 when the most fertile land of the indigenous people had been taken away in the name of tea gardens. Coal, mining in upper Assam and the construction of dams for hydro-electric projects created loss of indigenous land rights and displacement of many people. One hundred and fifty nine MoU's have been signed for the construction of dams in North East which might lead to the loss tribal identity, culture, economy, and the eco system. Beautiful places in North East have been taken away from the tribals in the name of development.

Panellist 2: Jiten Yumnam, Centre for Research and Advocacy, Manipur, spoke about the issue of displacement in Manipur. He said that land is an important foundation for the existence and survival of indigenous tribal communities. Hydro projects, extracting industries, and infrastructural projects, had brought about conflicts and displacement of people. In Manipur, 32 dams are to be constructed by the Government. Five villages including forests have been submerged. The Loktak project, 1993, had impacted the lives of more than one lakh people. The Government had evicted more than 1000 floating huts in 2011, which moved women to take lead in the protest. Some hydro projects are already defunct, and does not justify the impact of displacement. The Tipaimukh Dam will submerge more than 2700 hectares of forest land, and will affect the climate and ecosystem of the area.

Manipur is rich in resources and the Government is favouring corporations, targeting our land resources due to our strategic geographic location. Series of policies have of late been introduced to serve the profit maximization of corporations without much thought about and the rights of the indigenous people. Oil exploration, Trans Asian Roads & Railways, Draft forest policy, etc., are all intended to harness the resources, and sometimes the paramilitary forces were used to

met their ends. Unity and solidarity among the indigenous people can only be the way forward.

Panellist 3: Anthony Debbarma of the Borok People's Human Rights Organization, Tripura said that, "when their no land there is no identity and no culture." He pointed out that many of us in North East India are very much project-oriented and do not go further than the project. But when all our lands and resources are taken away, then we shall have to cry for land rights and survival. The North East had been neglected and never considered by India before Independence. But today, it is becoming an integral part of India. Anthony said that the Special Forces Armed Act is no longer needed in the North East, but why paramilitary and military forces should still be positioned in this region. He avers that the intention is to take away the resource of NE tribal people in the name of security and development. He appealed that the Government should not take away without reasonable and adequate compensations for people's entire forest lands, paddy and community lands in the name of Act East Policy, rail connection, power grid projects, etc. The tribals' traditional system should not be polluted by western and mainland talks of land use, forest management, etc., that are foreign to the people. The ecological system has been destroyed, due to Government policies. He warned that the so called 'Satellite Mapping' is dangerous for us, and we need to be careful about it as it may destroy our traditional land system, while on the other hand, it might become a tool for the corporations to misuse of the system.

Anthony further opined that just for the sake of development, the community lands and resources, and their cultural systems should not be destroyed. Free prior informed consent should be there, impact assessments should be done, in terms of dams, not just displacement but biodiversity is also disturbed thus affecting the livelihood of the people.

Technical Session 6: "Gender, Identity and Land"

Session Organizer: North East Network (NEN)

Session Moderator: Akole Tshuah

Opening the session, Akole Tshuah said that the issues of gender and land very closely interlinked. In the context of North East, men govern land, except for

Meghalaya. Women contribute so much for the maintenance of land, but they do not have the right to ownership.

Panellist 1: Aunangla Aier said that land is the cultural cradle of indigenous people's identity. People usually present the North East as a homogenous entity, ethnically and culturally. But the problems faced by each community are unique to themselves even though commonalities are there. The issues are different; people ask how to converge those issues and think forward for the development of North East. The idea of converging the issues in some cases maybe not possible. The elitist issues, and modernization, as external factors maybe similar but the internal contextual issue may not be the same. Focusing on the State of Nagaland, Aunangla Aier said that land is the cradle in all our geographical markers and features. Nagas have always geographical and topographic markers to relate stories of their ancestors. When you ask a Naga person to identify the boundaries of a village, they will always use geographical markers, and all are recorded in the oral text. Oral texts are recognized as accepted as legal rights, and no documents are required to prove ownership. There are stories on each spot, and the people can tell the story, sing songs, and dance as proofs of ownership of land. Mythologies of origin reinforce the historical experiences and people's connection to the land. People of each Naga tribe have their own narratives, and hardly change their village affiliations. They define themselves by connecting to the land; not just community land or private land, but it is the land of their ancestors, with a sense of belongingness as a tribe deeply embedded in their cultural memory. Oral narratives, beliefs, and customary laws, build together the cultural memory of the people.

But when gender perspective is brought into the picture, Aier said that patriarchal element prominently comes to the fore. Women have no say in land rights. With monetization and commoditization of land, the difference became all the more prominent. There is dilemma how would a married woman assume and express her identity - will she take her husband village affiliation or her village of birth as proof of her identity. In all the debates about land and identity, women are in between. There is a need for legal recognition of customary laws, but at the same time, codification of

customary laws would only strengthen inequality and discrimination especially with regard to women. Customary practices evolve as the society changes and adapts to the new changes. If we are to codify the customary practices as prevalent today, they will stop evolving, and they would no longer be customary as they would not be different from a statutory law. There are many elements in the tribals' customary practices which are not women friendly. Thus, if some of these discriminatory elements of customs are codified, that would marginalize the women even further and defeat the very process of women's empowerment. Documentation of customary practices can be done and use as reference material for making decisions in courts, but there would be problems if customs are codified into legal instruments. Whatever good practices that we have inherited from our ancestors must be upheld, and nobody can make us feel small just because we don't have written history written documents. No one can take away our rights. It is we who are divided who allow people to find cracks in our traditional systems.

Panellist 2: Linda Chhakchhuak pointed out that everything seems so important and urgent with the situations of the tribes and indigenous people of North East India. No issue is there that does not come out of the land issue. Land is the ultimate connection of ideology, worldview, and whatever the tribals think of the earth. Based on this kind of argument, evolved the kind of politics we have here, that the people have a special way of life, hence, special Articles are in place to protect the region and the people.

Linda opined that in the past it was true that land was the cradle of our culture, but with coming of modernity the tribes have been pulled in to new paradigms and relationships which are very different from the past. Land is the source of wealth in the economic sense, and it defined traditional relationships. But in the modern capitalist system, new problems propped up in tribal communities beginning from the time when land itself has been given a price. The traditional saying is that land and nature belong to God, and hence, belong to all members of the community. But today, the traditional human-nature relationship is broken. The earth is being recognized as a commodity, and individualization of land ownership is pushed, inducing a clash between individual and collective rights. The

new liberalism that advocates the right of individual above all rights has led to the rise of numerous conflicts because it is new to tribals. For the tribals, human rights for a community, is more important than individual's right. The corporate world recognizes individual human right which is marketable, and not community human right which is not marketable. Tribes and communities should build on the basic foundation of sharing in common; a system that does not leave anyone out.

We must try and build back the basic foundation of commons, be it natural resources or culture-

Linda Chhakchhuak

Panellist 3: Dr. Lavinia Mawlong spoke on women's land rights among the Khasis in the past, the present issues, and future perspectives. Based on her research in Ri Bhoi District of Meghalaya, Dr. Lavinia spoke about the transformation of the traditional land system. Privatization of land community lands in the Khasi Hills had taken place for 4 decades. In all the process of transformation from traditional to modern, only actions of men in the *darbars* were involved. Women are absent from decision-making, and there is no room for them to negotiate for their rights and reforms.

Technical Session 7: "Livelihoods, land, Development-Induced Land Acquisition and Laws"

Session Moderator: Dr. Vincent T Darlong

Presenter 1: Mehin Dalo, Director (NRM), NERCORMP, spoke on managing land use transformation and tenureship security in shifting agriculture in North East India. Mehin Dalo said that the major land use among tribals is shifting agriculture which is perceived as economically unviable by other stakeholders. The positive impact of shifting cultivation is that it protects and strengthens collective and community ownership of land, and the negative impact is that in the present monetary and market system, the transition from traditional need-based to modern cash-driven farming has led to the inequitable transformation of common ownership of land to private ownership. The NERCORMP is bringing out community resource

management among the people, and tried to help them to transform land use to semi permanent kind of thing. The intervention involves the transformation of traditional jhum to home garden, terrace-based cash crop, agro-forestry, and conversion of fallow forests into Community Conserved areas.

Presenter 2: Thoudam James Singh who spoke on the interrelationship between land tenure system and floral diversity and livelihood in the eco-sensitive zone of Nongkhylllem Wildlife Sanctuary in Meghalaya.

Presenter 3: HH Morhmen, spoke on the land system in Jaintia hills where the lands are owned by the clans. In today's situations, instead of farming the people are engaged in the mining of limestone. The traditional land tenure is no longer there, and the members of the clan after division, have given the lands to the highest bidder. In the Nongkhylliem area, further deep into the interior of Jaintia hills, people still maintain the traditional tenure system, but again at some point of time, the Lafarge Company came with a plan to start a cement plant in the area which has a large number of caves. Before the coming of the Lafarge, the community still owned the land, and there was no registration of lands with the District Council. But after the coming of the Lafarge, people saw the monetary value of the land, and the traditional chief of the area called the *Daloi* was the first to register the land in the name of his family. Post the mining ban in 2014 community land in the Umkyrpong area was sold to the miners, thus converting community forest land into private individual land as there is no law that's bars a person to do so. In the Narpuh area, most of the land is now under the control of the cement companies owned by non tribal entities. Hence, in spite of having a traditional system of land tenure tribals are losing their lands and cultures.

Valedictory Session

Chaired and moderated by Dr. Vincent Darlong, VC, MLCU briefed the deliberations and highlights of the two days of conference and requested the key note speaker Dr. Walter Fernandez to share his experience in land governance system in NE Region.

Dr. Fernandez spoke on land laws and conflicts, and the issue of transition and change over from the customary law to formal law. He also touched on the development paradigm and land laws in North East. The real culprit is the not customary law, but it is the formal-customary interface that brought about alienation of tribal lands. The present pattern of infrastructural development focuses on the city and city-to-city transport, while the rural areas are neglected. The poor in the rural areas have to sell land due to educational and health issues, hence, they become landless and poorer. The possible solution is not to go back to the past, because that is impossible, but it requires the reformation of the customary laws. It requires protection against class formation, and protection of women's rights. Having a new law will not help the situation. Under globalization, the concept of public-private-partnership (PPP) is meant only for corporate profits and not meant for people. It would be beneficial if PPP is directed to civil organizations, religious and educational institutions, and not to profit-oriented corporations.

On behalf of the organising committee Mr. Pravanjan Mohapatra, NRMCC-CLG offered the vote of thanks and invited the session organisers, delegates and participants to look forward for the second edition of the NELC in coming year. He also requested all delegates to share their views and opinions on improving engagement of NELC in policy advocacy and research.



'Reporting on land rights is need of the hour'

Journalism training workshop on land and property rights and its impact on people

Morning Express News
Innovation training workshop on Reporting Land Rights for South East India was held at Manipal Institute of Technology (MIT) Shillong, Meghalaya on January 25.

The workshop was organised as a pre-conference event for the 10th National Land Conference (NLC) Land Con 2020 held on January 30 and 31 at MLCU, Shillong, jointly organised by National Institute of Land Studies, MLCU, Foundation for Land Governance (FLG) and NRMCC-CLG (Chairman Sit Land Governance).

Bina Chandran, Team Social Sciences Foundation, Prashant Rajan Choudhary, Vice President, NRMCC-CLG, Prashant Mishra, IAS, and the Shillong Times and other journalists who were the resource persons for the workshop.

Briefing on the importance of the workshop, Bina Chandran shared about why reporting land rights is important. Bina said land rights are human

rights which affect every citizen of our country. Reporting on land rights is the need of the hour.

More than 100 participants from 15 states and union territories took part in the intensive training workshop.

Parash Choudhary gave a broad overview of land laws and conflicts in the region. Sharing about the complex nature of land laws in the North-east states, he talked about who owns and controls land rights in the region.

The workshop has seen participation from various parts of the North-east states. A number of participants from Meghalaya and Assam were invited to the workshop.

Manojkumar, Meghalaya State Agency shared about development projects on land and people. She said that the State Agency is working on the documentation of land rights in Meghalaya and how the customary law and modern law are conflicting.

Altogether 10 journalists from different organisations took part in the intensive training workshop.

The organisations were The Morning Express, The Shillong Times, Prashant Rajan Choudhary, Prashant Mishra, IAS, and the Shillong Times and other journalists who were the resource persons for the workshop.

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MEX FILE

PDJESA call off proposed agitation

DIMAPUR, JANUARY 31 (MEXN): The Power Department Engineer's Section Association (PDJESA) has called off the agitation proposed on February 7, 2020. According to the report, the agitation has been called off after 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th and 31st.

Suni Council Dimapur meeting on February 1

DIMAPUR, JANUARY 31 (MEXN): All office bearers, advisors and executives of Suni Council Dimapur are scheduled to meet on February 1 at 10:00 am. All concerned are requested to attend the meeting without fail.

TSUD executive meeting on Feb 1

DIMAPUR, JANUARY 31 (MEXN): The Terym Student Union (TSUD) has convened a meeting with all the executives on February 1 (Sunday) at 10:00 am. All the executives are requested to attend the meeting without fail.

HSIC & HSSLC examination committee meeting on Feb 4

KOCHI, JANUARY 31 (MEXN): A meeting regarding the conduct of HSSLC & HSSIC Examinations 2020 has been convened on February 4 at 11:00 am in the DDC Conference Hall, Kottayam. In this regard, DDC Kottayam, Group Director DDC has requested all concerned members of the Examination Committee to

**NORTH-EAST
LAND CONFERENCE 2020**

**Venue: MLCU, Shillong, Meghalaya
January 30-31, 2020**

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