

Summary Report
4th NATIONAL CONFERENCE
26-28, MAY 2012
NATIONAL FORUM OF FOREST PEOPLE AND FOREST WORKERS, (N.F.F.P.F.W.)
NOORALAM NAGAR
DEHRADUN, UTTARAKHAND



The 4th national conference of NFFPFW was organized with lot of enthusiasm and expectation. The spontaneous participation of member and fraternal delegates was very encouraging. Around 500 delegates from around 19 states and three neighboring countries Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal participated in this conference. More than 80% delegates were from the forest communities. The participation of the South Asian fraternal delegates in this conference made this conference very significant. With their participation many important issues regarding the natural resources could be discussed at the South Asian level.

Most significant feature of this conference was that the women from diverse communities came together in large numbers to assert their position on crucial issues and set the agenda for the future struggle against the neo-liberal capitalist onslaught on the natural resources. The assertions of women groups came up very strongly who said that they are the real custodian of the natural resources and not the Forest Department (FD). They raised important political questions on community governance and also suggested strategies to deal with such issues at social and political levels. With their forceful and forthright expression against the eminent domain the entire conference atmosphere was charged with the women strength. Resolutions were adopted at the end of the conference.

The main theme of the conference was around five issues –

- 1. Setting the people's agenda for struggle against neo-liberal regime: collective struggle by the natural resource based traditional working people for protection of livelihood and resources.*
- 2. Strengthening the collective process of production and reproduction of natural resources i.e. forestry, agriculture, fisheries and mining*
- 3. Strategic alliance building with other natural resource based working people's organizations focusing on vulnerable areas with workers' movements*
- 4. Self strengthening process of community leadership in the forest rights movement to create an alternative forest governance system under the community leadership.*
- 5. Women and Forest Governance, Strengthening of women leadership at all levels in the movement and in the organization from local to national level.*

Public Hearing-26th May 2012



On the first day morning, 26th May 2012, Public Hearing was organized in Com. Bharati Sabhagar, on the issue of “National Parks/ Sanctuaries (NP’s/S) and implementation of FRA” in which around 1200 people participated from different NP’s/Sanctuaries of 12 regions. This public hearing was organized to address the difficult areas in the implementation of FRA and the challenges ahead for the national level organization NFFPFW to adopt various strategies to deal with such issues. The public hearing set the momentum for the national conference of NFFPFW in a very high pitch. The depositions made were mostly from the Tiger project and elephant project such as Dudhwa Tiger project (UP), Corbett Tiger Project (Uttarakhand), Buxa Tiger Reserve (North Bengal), Sundarban Tiger Reserve (West Bengal), Kumbhalgarh wild life sanctuary (Rajasthan), Rajaji National Park (UK), Great Himalayan NP (Himachal Pradesh), Achanakmar (Chattisgarh), Van Santuary (Bihar), Kaimur, Ranipur, Sohagibarua, Katarniaghat (UP). The deposition of village Jayanti, Buxa Tiger reserve was given in written as they reached late. These depositions revealed the status of implementation of FRA in the country, where no stone is unturned to evict people brutally by the F.D. with the support of the local administration. The forest people narrated their tales and woes and the extent of human rights violation that is taking place inside the park areas so much so that even after the enforcement of FRA the basic Constitutional rights are still denied to the residents of the NP’s. The residents are being forced to take the package of Rs. 10L or move out without compensation by applying repressive methods for eviction. The stories from Dudhwa, Sundarban, Rajaji, Katarniaghat, Kumbhalgarh were horrifying and it depicted how the *civil and state administrations* are still surrendering before the hegemony of the Forest Department (FD) and is not showing any political will to implement the Special Act that has been passed by the Parliament to protect the forest rights of the forest people. However, few success stories were also narrated where in NP’s some major achievements have been attained after coming of FRA. These were the cases from Dudhwa NP where village Soorma, a forest village was granted the rights and is now in the process of conversion into revenue village. Second was Granting of titles in Tongia forest village around the Sohagibarua Sanctuary in Mahrajganj, UP to OTFD. And the other achievement was High Court judgment from Nanital HC regarding settling the vangujjar nomadic tribes in the Rajaji NP according to FRA.

The public hearing set the political agenda for the conference and the depositions clearly said that “Now the forest should be handed over to the forest people and FD is not capable of protection of the forest resources, it hails the colonial legacy, there should be change in the overall structure of FD and they should be moved out of the forest.”

Many delegates from important forest areas of Tamilnadu, Karnataka, A.P., and Kerala could not reach Dehradun due to problem in getting train reservations. They sent their written reports later. The important delegation from Assam could not reach because of arrest of KMSS leader Akhil Gogoi during anti big dam agitation.

The organizers of the conference invited the officials and the Minister Social Welfare that is the nodal agency for implementing FRA. The official from Uttarakhand Govt and Ministers did not attend the proceeding even after their confirmations. The F.D. created a fear among the govt officials and the ministries that the programme was organized to capture the Rajaji N.P., where struggle has been carried on against the attempt to evict Vangujjars for last 5 years. It is to be noted that the F.D. has been functioning more as a political group working against the Law and Constitution and not as a govt department obliged to follow the rule of law.

The Inaugural session



The Inaugural session was started in the evening of 26th May 2012 at 6.PM at **NoorAlam Nagar** in Geetanjali Gardens. At the beginning, all the delegates paid tribute to the departed leaders of the forest movement that included – **Goura Devi, Dr. Viniyan, Bharati Roy Chowdhury, Dr. Ramdayal Munda, NoorAlam, Prem Khawas, Vallsamma, Mahendra Bhalla**. Slogans were raised and songs were sung to mark tribute to the departed leaders. The women walked into the Prem Khawas Gate and Dr. Vinayan Square with the flag pole and red flag of NFFPPFW in their hands. For some moments they stood still in front of the stage, in memory of their beloved comrades. Then in a scoop of emotions, they posted the flag in front of **Dr. Vinayan Square and Revolutionary poet Girda manch** - amidst raising of slogans 'Long Live Martyrs' and the singing of International in Hindi and Urdu. The Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Nepali women stood shoulder to shoulder with Indian forest working women in an amazing moment of South Asian working class unity. This whole moment charged the delegates and the guests who had participated in the conference. The flag was held by the women and they raised slogans while posting the flag collectively on the ground.



The inaugural session was conducted in Dr. Viniyan Square. Before formally beginning the inaugural address a cultural evening was performed in Girda culture square by Dr. Subhendu Ghosh who is a renowned Hindustani Classical singer and also founder member of the cultural organization **Pratidhwani**. He was introduced by **Vijayan MJ from 'Sangharsh'** to the delegates with the thematic issues of the cultural struggles. He sang beautiful songs that represented the four streams of the social and political movement since independence struggle. These four streams were also the theme of the conference. **The four themes that was sung by Dr. Subhendu Ghosh was the revolutionary spirit of Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh "Uru-ze kamyabi par kabhi hindostan hoga", the radical peasant movement spirit by Maqdoom Mohiudeen "yeh jung hai jung-e azadi, azadi ke parcham ke tale", the contribution of Birsa Munda and Adivasi struggles in independence movement "Chal khandh hature janam lenam Birsa" and the vision and strength of women movement, a poetry of Gorakh Pandey on a dream of a dalit women "satal rehli sapan ek dekhli" was sung. Along with this poetry of "Faiz Ahmed Faiz" was also sung.** This presentation colored the entire atmosphere with a revolutionary spirit and set the momentum of the conference.



The inaugural session was conducted by Roma. The theme of the inaugural session was on *"setting the people's agenda against the neo-liberal regime – collective struggle by natural resource based traditional working people for protection of livelihood and resources."* The Chief Guest of the inaugural session was Mr. Abhay Sahoo, POSCO partirodh sangram samiti, Guest of Honour Sh S.P. Baghel (MP, Rajya Sabha); other distinguished guest who were invited on the dias were Co-Chairpersons Ms. Jarjum ete (Ex member, Jt review committee GOI on FRA) and Com.D Thankappan(President, NTUI);other leaders of fraternal organizations Fraoorq Tariq, Azra Shad(Pakistan), Bhola Bhattaria, Babita Chowdhury(Nepal), Manjurani Pramanik(Bangladesh), Guman singh (Himalayan Niti Abhiyan), Gautam Bandopadhaya(Nadi Ghati Morcha), Anil chaudhary (PEACE), Vijayan MJ (PSA), Madhuresh (NAPM), Ashim Roy (NTUI). The welcome address was given by the Chairperson of the Reception Committee Shri Sanjay Garg (EX State Minister, UP Govt) . He welcomed all the delegates of NFFPFW and fraternal delegates. Sh. Sanjay Garg introduced the subject and theme of the inaugural session too. The programme of

the conference was discussed by him narrating the important sessions that will take place in coming two days. He strongly said that the main onslaught on the natural resources is from the neo-liberal regime and that needs to be fought. Rajya Sabha MP Sh. SPS Baghel declared the opening of the 4th conference and said that he was very happy to address the meet on forest and natural resources that turned to be an international meeting. He made very significant points on the relation of forest people with forest and how strategy needs to be built to integrate both and work on this aspect. Chief Guest Abhay Sahoo made a very heartening speech in context of the



POSCO struggle and protection of the natural resources from the loot of the corporate and the government. He emphasized the role of women and children in the resistance movement against the biggest FDI project by a giant international corporation. He extended full support to the movements for protection of natural resources and said that all the movements taking place on the natural resources needs to be united and needs to be federated. The session was adjourned at 9.30 pm and reconvened on the second day morning when the guest speakers from Pakistan, Nepal and Bangla Desh spoke eloquently and with the previous day's enthusiasm about the commonness of the problems and struggles of South Asian Nations. The session was concluded with the speeches of Chairpersons **Ms Jarjum** and **D.Thankappan**.

On the second day, NTUI Gen Sect Ashim Roy introduced the organizational issues in the forest rights movement and emphasized building of leadership and the organization from the forest range level to the national level. He also stressed the need for building up effective alliances with other movements.



Then convener's report was placed by Sh. Ashok Chowdhury, Convener, NFFPFW. He explained the details of the report focusing on

1. Genesis of forest rights movements in India during and after colonial period.
2. The history of NFFPFW from 1992-1998, the formation of NFFPFW in 1998 in Ranchi and the period from then to present situation.

3. Political situation in the context of NFFPPFW movement focusing community leadership and its relations with other sections of the society.
4. Alliance building with other natural resource based working people's movements.
5. Organizational questions: the role of community leadership, role of middle class activists, strengthening of women and youth leadership.
6. Proposed organizational structural changes. Need to create a federation structure from the Forum structure. Formation of secretariat in place of steering committee, with President, General Sect. and Secretaries.

Discussion on the report followed after that. Delegates from each constituent, distinguished guest and fraternal delegates made their interventions on the convener report.

Later during the next sessions till the last day the decisions to work towards alternate institutions and create collectives to protect land from alienation by demanding community rights instead of individual rights came up very strongly especially from the women delegates. On the third day, in the Women and Forest Governance session the articulation of their demands and determination with which women delegates raised their strong view points on their issues indicated that the tribal belts in various regions are poised for a strong movement to regain their rights. Women community leaders strongly resolved to take leadership in establishing Community Forest Governance in all the forest regions and would drive out F.D. from the forest area if it continues to oppose the community rights which are already ensured in F.R.A. So, the movement for reclaiming the lost space(land and forest) will continue. In the concluding note of this session Roma, Shantaji, all the women delegates and also men recalled the contribution of departed comrade Bharati Roy chowdhury in building women's land right movement. Every member became emotionally charged in raising slogans and singing song in her memory. It was felt she is very much present there.

The conference expressed that it is important that the continued opposition of the Forest Department and state administrations against the land claims and other rights including the right to collect forest produce is a matter in which Forest Authorities and State Administrations cannot hold on for long. In fact their credibility is getting eroded and they are losing their moral right to control and manage forests in the wake of continued destruction of the forests under their management. On the contrary the forest dwellers claim that they are legitimately working towards protection of forests. Their claim is getting popular support and in the official corridors this claim is becoming a legitimate claim of the struggling millions of forest dwellers. Simultaneously, this is an opportune time to launch a strong national movement. A movement that can catch the attention of the nation and create conducive environment for the movement to sustain.



The conference took note of the fact that Govt is currently finalizing certain amendments in the FRA Rules to remove certain anomalies and ambiguities in the Act and the Tribal Welfare Ministry of GOI is moving towards announcing a minimum support price for 13 items to tribals for forest produce **like tendu, bamboo, resin**, etc, to provide direct income to the tribal and other forest dweller rather than to the middlemen who control the **Rs. 50,000 cr** annual trades today. It has been said that “the intention of the ministry is to see that the forest communities get better price and with the MSP, the middlemen can be eliminated”. If the intention of the ministry is to be made really beneficial, the government must create a conducive atmosphere for the communities to collect the forest produce and create alternate collective institutions to replace middlemen. The need for creation of cooperatives in forest communities needs to be argued very strongly now. Such initiative of the communities must necessarily be supported by the government action. Otherwise mafia rooted in the trade along with all others with vested interests will sabotage the entire effort.

The above two announcements at this juncture will have to be properly utilized by appropriate memorandum to government for amendment in the FRA Rules for promoting community rights and collective management through alternate institutions. In order to really give benefits to tribal and other forest dweller communities, alternate management system for forests is a necessity and creation of cooperatives of the forest communities to procure forest produce and market it to secure better price and eliminate middlemen is important.



Organizational Decisions:

Amendments in Constitution were proposed –

- Forming a Federation structure to strengthen the regional bodies.
- Establishing a Secretariat in place of Steering Committee by electing Secretaries from movement groups;
- Election of Chairperson and General Secretary.

1. In order to form the federation structure a new Constitution has to be drafted. Three member committee on constitution drafting for the proposed Federation will be set up in consultation with leading activists and with all the constituents as well.
2. The decision to elect the National Committee with two representatives from each constituent or around 30 regions was taken.

3. The decision to elect minimum 16 secretaries to carry on various organizational responsibilities through consultations with the constituents and finalize formalities in respect of finalization of Interim Secretariat of the Federation.
4. The draft constitution will be placed before the Interim Secretariat for finalization.
5. Finally the approved draft constitution should be placed for adoption in a formally constituted delegate session.
6. In order to consolidate the organization and its functions all the above will be done within the next 3-4 months to provide a structure of the proposed federation.
7. Regional level meetings will be convened to discuss the new structure of the organization across the country.
8. To draft the memorandum based on the discussions emerged out of the three day conference and be submitted by a delegation to the Tribal Affair Minister as soon as possible.
9. ***The conference has elected Ms. Jarjum Ete as President and. Sh. Ashok Choudhury as Gen. Secretary of NFFPFW.*** The rest of the organizational decisions will be taken in the national committee meeting in July 2012 in Delhi.
10. Decision to form National Advisory Committee was also taken. The NAC will provide guidance to the organization on political, legal matters and on conducting research studies. Sh. Sanjay Garg will be co-coordinating the committee. This committee will be constituted by the National Committee.



The valedictory session was addressed by M. Aslam Khan (Ex. Forest Minister, UP Govt) and Sh. Suresh Prabhu (Ex. Environment Minister, GOI). They both emphasized that the implementation of FRA and protection of the forest resources now depends of the community who is custodian of these resources. They said the F.D has a colonial legacy and they have failed to protect this vital resource that is why FRA has come. They both said that the village level organization needs to be strengthened in the leadership of the women than only the forest resources could be protected. They also said that it is up to the community to take a lead role in climate justice issues also.



Resolutions

1. This conference resolves to undertake a comprehensive programme to rejuvenate forests through collective efforts at village level in the coming five years. We the community will do a mapping of the natural resources available or local to our habitats and develop a plan to cultivate welfare of the community. This conference resolves to work for women's equal right in forest and land and unequal structures prevalent in our patriarchal society. We assert the equal rights to property and community resources and their decision-making institutions at all levels and recognize that women's knowledge and experiences which have been ignored and undermined, this needs to be acknowledged as fundamental in creating a new social and economic order. The conference resolves that mass organization will be strengthened by developing mass leadership of women and men. Extra efforts will be made to make the women leadership and organization strong.
2. The views of the conference that the hitherto experiences indicate clearly that the Forest Department can no longer protect the forests. Their involvement in destruction of the forests in the past is also a matter to be viewed seriously by the government to create



alternate institutions to manage the forests by withdrawing the forest dept from its current role. Our federation and the forest communities are prepared to propose an alternate arrangement with the involvement of forest communities and respective gram Sabha. We can work out a credible alternative of community Forest governance involving forest communities. An innovative system of governance that will have the involvement and commitment of forest communities to protect the forest. Our Federation must work towards such an arrangement with the concurrence of the Govt. and commitment and involvement from the forest communities.

3. The existing provision of the community right must be amended appropriately so as to grant community entitlement of land that will enable them to engage in collective/cooperative farming and forestry. We may also argue that such a conceptual move on the part of the communities will ensure the prevention of land alienation in the future. Such an arrangement will also ensure a collective responsibility of the communities to protect the forest and other natural resources.
4. This conference extends its solidarity to:

- The struggle of fish workers, agricultural workers and others against the proposed destructive nuclear power plants at koodam kulam(Tamil Nadu) and Jaitapur (Maharashtra).We understand and join these struggles with the conviction that these two struggles will be subjected to the worst forms of authoritarianism that the Indian state will unleash.
- We support and join the very important battle being fought by the agricultural workers, farmers, and fish workers of Jagatsinghpur (Orissa) against the POSCO steel plant and port. We salute revolutionary struggle being led by POSCO Pratisodh Sangram Samiti. We share the understanding that the struggle against POSCO by the people of Orissa is an iconic battle against global capitalism and Foreign Direct Investment.
- NFFPFW endorses the struggles of our constituent organization against the Forest Department Police and other repressive institutions of the Indian state. Governance of natural resources must be through a process of decentralization of governing structure as against the present form of highly centralized structure. We unilaterally extend solidarity to the constituent members in Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar , West Bengal, Gorkhaland, Andra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, entire North East, etc. against national and multinational corporations through their destructive



projects. We condemn the brutal police, FD's and feudal mafia attack on movements in Khiri UP, Rewa MP, and other forest areas.

- NFFPFW extends solidarity to the people's struggles against mega dams in North East India, led by people of Assam (KMSS), Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur (Mapithel and Tipamukh movements)
 - NFFPFW extends solidarity to the North East and Jammu & Kashmir people's struggles against AFSPA and demands the withdrawal of the colonial, draconian Act.
5. We resolve to ensure the constitution of Forest Rights committees in all the villages where the organization is active as per the procedures specified in the FRA, 2006. We resolve to get the committees reconstituted if they do not adhere to the ACT or now been constituted without the consent and full participation of people in the gram sabha. Our work will involve activating these committees so that they can undertake the filling and processing of claims forms under FRA.
 6. We recognize that we need to strengthen our organization at the level of the village. We resolve to undertake programmes and activities which can ensure effective village

governance through the instrument of the gram sabha. It is through a strong village level organization that we can ensure that welfare schemes can be implemented to the benefit of the working people. We will ensure that all the village resources will be protected and used to provide sustainable livelihoods to the people.

7. We reject the model of development pursued by the Indian State which is neo-liberal and based on the logic of supremacy of the market forces. We have taken on the challenge to evolve alternative development model. Our alternatives will be based on the rights of the people to natural resources and we will evolve forms of co-operative systems to produce, manage, market and distribute the minor forest produce from each region. In addition, we resolve to undertake co-operative farming. Our alternative models will address both the economic and social issues confronting the people through knowledge sharing of legal provisions and co-operative management.
8. We understand that peace can be ensured only when there is equality and justice. We resolve that this will aim at greater co-ordination between various working people organizations across South Asian countries. This conference also demands that the visa regimes be abandoned between south Asian countries.
9. We assert that the current ecological crisis can be resolved not through technical development but only by rejecting the current world order which is based on unequal distributions of resource between and within countries. Only a civilization opposed to the imperialistic and capitalist global system can resolve the climate crisis and protect the environment. The perspectives of the natural resource based communities and indigenous communities have to play an important role in ensuring climate justice.



The list of distinguished delegates and fraternal delegates given below:

Note : The main sessions took place in Com. Bharati Hall, dinner and lunch served to our foreign delegates was in "Sahadat Hasan Manto South Asian Mandup", the small group discussion were organized in " Gaura devi Mandup" and " Mahendra Bhalla Mandup



Names of the Pakistani delegates: **Farooq Tariq**, Spokesperson , Pakistan Labour Party, **Azra Shad**, chairperson Women Workers Help Line (WWHL), **Riffet Maqsood** general secretary WWHL, **Yousaf Baluch**, chairman National Trade Union Federation, **Mehmood Butt**, general secretary Pakistan Bhatta Mazdoor Union, **Ashfaq Ali** president Labour Qaumi Movement Faisalabad division, , **Bilal Gauri** Journalist Daily Express Lahore, **Mazhar Iqbal** Chief Reporter ARY TV Channel, **Salma Yasmin**, **Asif Toor**, coordination secretary of National Trade Union Federation Punjab.

Name of the Nepalese delegates: Mr. **Bhola Bhattarai** he is facilitating/advising to forestry federations and trade union movement in Nepal, **Bachu Shah Kanu**, Member, National Executive committee, Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal (FECOFUN), Kathmandu Nepal, **Satya Narayan Tharu**, Member, Center committee, Association Of Collaborative Forest Users, Nepal (ACOFUN), **Babita Chaudhary**, Member Center commiittee, ACOFUN, **Menaka Raigai**, Member, CC, ACOFUN, **Hari Maharjan**, General Secretary, Construction and Allied Workers Union, Nepal CAWUN), Kathmandu Nepal.

Name of delegate from Bangladesh: **Manjurani Pramanik**, Ex Director, Shoroney, Dhaka, Bangladesh, working with Tribal people.

Speakers Name in delegate sessions: Various distinguished guests and community leaders addressed the sessions and were made a very strong presence in the conference. They included **Tapan Bose (PIFPD)** **Prafulla Samantra (Samajbadi Jan Parishad, Odisha)**, **Prashant**

Paikray , D. Thankappan, Ashim Roy (President and Gen. Sect. NTUI), Ditthi Bhattacharya (NTUI), Tarun Joshi (Van Panchaya manch Uttarakhand), Munnilal, KN Tiwari, Kamala Pant, Ganga Arya, Parvati devi Jahanvi,(Uttarakhand) Gautam Bandopadhaya, Rashmi(Chhatisgad), Guman Singh, D.Dukhia, Puran Chand, Nandlal, Akshay (Himalaya Niti Abhiyan,Himachal), Jarjum Ete, Ojinhasing, (Arunanchal Pradesh), Prabhat Sinha (Rajasthan Mazdoor Kisan Union), Debashish (NFF, WB), Gilbert (NFF, TN) Madhuresh (NAPM), Harsh Dhobal (HRLN), Vijayan M.J, Anil Vergese (PSA), Sushovan Dhar, Pratip Nag, Angul Das,(Sundarban Banadhikar Samiti), Jahoor Hasan, Noorjamal(Rajaji N.P. Uttarakhand), Ramchander Rana, Rajnish, Sokalo devi, Lalti Devi, Shanta Bhattacharjee, , Kaushalrani, Behna devi, Nabada devi, Rukma devi, Kamla rani, Prema, Kadma devi, Fatima, Shakuntala, Kismata devi, Amar singh, Hari singh, Jung Bahadur, Phulmati, Ramesh Shukla, Ravi Srivastava,Ramdas(U.P.),Rani,Matadyal(M.P.)ArjunBhai,BijoyJena(Odisha)Balkeshwar ,Shanker(Bihar), Gourango(N.Bengal), Prabhat Sinha (Rajasthan)

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Important political speakers in innaguaral & valedictory sessions were: Abhay Sahoo (National Council Member,C.P.I.) Prashant Paikarey (Posco Pratirodh Sangram Samiti) SPS Baghel (MP, Rajya Sabha), Sh. Aslam Khan (Ex. Forest Minister, UP Govt, Gen Secy, Samajvadi Party), Sh. Sanjay Garg (Ex. Minister UP Govt, Sh. Suresh Prabhu (Ex. Environ Minister, GOI) P.C. Tiwary (Advocate Uttarakhand High Court,Nainital)

