

## **INSEE- RGU Capacity Building Workshop**

### **Ecology, Society and Development in North East India: Concepts and Methods**

September 21-24, 2015,

Department of Economics, Rajiv Gandhi University, Doimukh, Arunachal Pradesh



The workshop brought together 19 participants and five resource persons / faculty engaged in different fields around the nature-society-economy complex. The workshop was inaugurated by the Vice Chancellor of Rajiv Gandhi University in a ceremony on the 21<sup>st</sup> (Monday), where senior faculty from the department of economics as well as INSEE resource persons spoke about meaning and relevance of the workshop. There after the mode of workshop followed the planned format: each participant presenting their respective concept note for a study to be done in the North eastern Region, which had already been reviewed by the resource persons. Each presenter had 15 minutes to talk and another 15 minutes of discussion ensued after each presentation, led by faculty and supplemented by other participants.

Thus the first two days of the workshop consisted of deliberations around presentations on various topics like nature-society dynamics in the context of organic farming in Sikkim, brick kilns of Murshidabad, eco-tourism in Arunachal, managing rural commons in Arunachal, livelihoods in Muga silk production, rice production system in the flood plains, urbanisation problems in Guwahati, mining in Meghalaya, dams and power production in The NER etc.

Once this series of deliberations got over around all submitted proposals, resource persons deliberated on identified areas that were found to be in need of strengthening or in need of deeper exposure. Thus the third day was for the faculty to dwell deeper on selected aspects. Arupjyoti Saikia started this part of the workshop with a discussion on how geography prevailed upon human forces in the NER – a unique region with a mighty water and mountain scape. His talk illuminated landscape as archives of this history of human- nature interaction surrounding how changing course of rivers, occurrence of floods and earth quakes and non-human players in the region were prominent and well-integrated into this society's unique ways of existence, cultures, agriculture or establishing settlements.

Following this very interesting introduction to the history behind the geography of this socio-ecologically sensitive region, Jagdish Krishnaswamy clarified to the participants, the framework of ecosystem services and the field of landscape ecology. He differentiated ecological functions and ecosystem services, emphasised the co-production of ecosystem services by nature and humans as also the trade-offs involved among different services. He also explained the temporal and spatial insights possible to be drawn from a landscape ecology approach, how the field of landscape ecology could be construed at different scales as also the challenges in data collection.

During the first two days of discussions on submitted proposals, it was found that there was a tendency to mention the 'social' in the title or in the objective of the proposal without putting in any commensurate attention to it in the methods. Sudha Vasan aimed to clarify what it means to do serious research on social issues, using ethnography. Her talk also dwelled upon what kind of approaches can actually be called ethnography. The other important purpose that Sudha's talk delivered was on what will be the political-ecological approach to studying the interface of nature and society. Sudha also touched upon the triviality of investing time during this workshop (intended to build interdisciplinary perspectives) on specific tools to pick up for each one's research. Like the previous two this talk also generated good discussion among the participants.

Kalyan Das filled the gap in the workshop discussion so far by addressing the regulatory and governance gaps that often cause the tension between ecology and development. He did this with specific reference to silk weaving, mining and brick kilns in the NER. Much like how the unseen history of the local geography was found to explain a lot of things about the development in the NER; regulatory and governance gaps or lacunae may also throw light on the crisis indicators of livelihoods in the region.

Seema Purushothaman tried to reinforce the needed commitment for an interdisciplinary researcher in the interface of nature-society-economy: both in terms of plurality of methods to be used and the inclusive nature of research process to be adopted. Seema's talk also compared and contrasted the evolution of ecological economics with that of other similar approaches. The third aspect she addressed was the potential and limitations of economic valuation exercise.

Once the above two phases of the workshop were over, the participants were asked to reflect on the discussion on their individual proposals, discussion on other proposals and the insights provided by resource persons and come back the next (and last) day with the take home messages for each of them. This also generated further responses from resource persons before concluding the workshop that covered ethics and communication aspects involved in interdisciplinary research.

Once the participants expressed what the workshop accomplished for them, *vis a vis* what they expected and the format of the workshop, it was time for the valedictory function. Acting dean of social sciences at RGU- Prof. N.C Roy and Dr. Vandana Upadhyay, HoD, department of economics graced the occasion and distributed certificates.

#### **Feedback:**

The organisers gathered some immediate feedback from the participants on the last day, though a written template for this will be circulated within a week, giving them some time to reflect on their

take on the workshop. The immediate feeling was found to be of three types: a few slightly disappointed with respect to learning certain specific methodological tools (e.g. travel cost method for evaluating tourism or assessing fluvial hazards); a few clearly seeing the point that their proposals need to do justice to interdisciplinarity in terms of actual methods employed and most happy about the interdisciplinary perspectives gained from the workshop as well as about its interactive format. Altogether, it was a gratifying sharing and learning experience for both faculty and the participants studying the interface of nature, society and development in the most socio-ecologically sensitive region of the country.



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#### Programme Schedule:

<b>21<sup>st</sup> September</b>		
9.30 – 10.30	Inaugural Functions – About the Workshop, About INSEE	Vice Chancellor, RGU; Seema Purushothaman, Jagdish Krishnaswamy
11.00 - 13.30	<b>Concepts note presentation and discussion</b> Dynamics of Nature Society relationships – organic farming – Sikkim	Dawa Sherpa
	Techno-Economic viability and sustainability of rice production - Assam	Annewesha Mech
	Socio-economic impacts of Muga Silk production –Assam	Niranjan Das
	Livelihood through indigenous knowledge: Case of Muga silk in Assam	Amrit Paul
14.15 - 17.30	Significance of water poverty index and agriculture sustainability in Himalayan region	Suman Ghimire
	Measuring sustainability of India at state level: An Ecological Footprint approach	Bandana Khataniar
	Conservation of water resources: Management of a Watershed	Kenli Basar
<b>22<sup>nd</sup> September</b>		
9.00 - 13.30	Dependency, Resource Sustainability and Livelihood Options of CPRS in Arunachal	Tagam Dabi
	Conserving Sacred Grooves of Arunachal	Gomar Basar
	Economic Valuation of Wetlands: Shally and Mehao Lacks of Dibang Valley District	Femes Linggi

	Valuation of Environmental Amenities	Anup Das
	Ecotourism and Environmental Conservation: Arunachal Pradesh	Maila Lama
14.15 - 17.30	Social Impacts of Mapithel Dam, Manipur	RatikaYumnam
	Developing India's future powerhouse in Neoliberal Era	Paragjyoti Saikia
	Fluvial Hazards – Morphology of a changing river	Rinkilou Chai
	Human and environmental dimensions of Brick Kilns	Rakibul Islam
	Sustainable Development in Rat-hole Coal Mining, Meghalaya	Lekha Mukhopadhyaya
	Unplanned City Expansions: Human Environment Conflicts	Prasenjit Bujar Baruah
	Traditional Healing Practices: Arunachal	Dani Yama
<b>23<sup>rd</sup> September</b>		
9.00-13.30	Landscape Geography: Northeast India	Arupjyoti Saikia
	Landscape Ecology and Ecosystem Services	Jagdish Krishnaswamy
	Ethnography and Political Ecological Approach	Sudha Vasani
14.30 – 17.00	Regulation, Governance and Sustainability	Kalyan Das
	Research at the interface of Nature-Society-Economy; Evolution of Ecological Economics; Potential and Limitation of Valuation Exercise	Seema Purushothaman
<b>24<sup>th</sup> September</b>		
9.00 – 14.00	Review - Participants' reflection on the discussion on their individual proposals	Participants and Resource Persons
	Ethics and Communications Aspects	Seema Purushothaman
	Valedictory speech	Prof. N C Roy