

REPORT ON THE 1ST WORLD MOUNTAIN PEOPLES ASSOCIATION (WMPA)
NORTH EAST MEETING



VENUE: HOTEL YALANA, SHILLONG, MEGHALAYA, INDIA

ORGANISED BY: WMPA (NORTH-EAST CHAPTER)

HOSTED BY: VOLUNTARY HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF MEGHALAYA

DATE: 8TH TO THE 10TH OF MARCH 2006

Day I: 8th March 2006

The first meeting of the WMPA North East India was an outcome of the Tripuradevi meeting that was held from the 9th to the 11th of April 2005. Then, the need had been felt that the WMPA North East and India networks should go on strengthening and concretising their objectives. The meeting was supported by WMPA Board and hosted by the Voluntary Health Association of Meghalaya (VHAM). The Voluntary Health Association of Meghalaya is an organisation that works towards making health a reality for the people in Meghalaya. Its objectives are:

- To promote primary health care.
- Promote and extend public health care which results in prevention of diseases.
- Protect and encourage Indian system of medicines.
- Capacitating communities through trainings, livelihood for sustainability
- advocacy

The meeting began with a welcome address from the representative of the WMPA North East, Miss Mayfereen Rynthiang. It was a great pleasure for her to welcome the participants and most especially Dr. Denis Blamont, vice president WMPA, to the meeting and to the abode of clouds, Meghalaya. She briefly portrayed Meghalaya, and how it got its statehood, its resources like limestone, flora and fauna and others that are either depleting or yet to be tapped. She also explained the objectives of the meeting being:

1. To bring people from the different parts of North East India as Mountain people, to come together using one platform to raise our voices on issues concerning our people, environment and more.
2. Secondly, to concretize the objectives of WMPA North East and start the North East Chapter anew.
3. To strengthen and focus our agendas

Phidahun from the Voluntary Health Association of Meghalaya thanked the WMPA for its financial support, for hosting the programme, participants for coming to participate despite their busy schedules, TATA Infotech for the lcd projector, and Yalana Hotel for the accommodation and food.

Background of WMPA:

Dr. Denis Blamont, Vice President (research), WMPA Executive Bureau, Paris:

Giving a brief background of WMPA, Dr. Blamont stressed on the need to have mountain people and communities to organise themselves and advocate for their rights.

WMPA aims at being an association where the mountain populations will be in a position to identify by themselves their own issues and priorities and determine the ways to tackle them, and also to implement their own decisions. By knowing each other they will also know better and value more their

own culture, institutions and ways of living and being and, through exchanges, will be able to find their own ways to face the new emerging challenges, like population growth, climatic change and globalisation. In short term Mountain People claim the right to have the responsibility of an appropriate management of their territory, "appropriate" meaning both "adequate" and "appropriated by the local communities".

To achieve this long term objective, WMPA needs to have a strategy based on short term concrete issues and actions in each mountain region of the world. It is thus suggested for the North East Chapter to elaborate concrete objectives, such as:

- Reinforce the ancestral social practices which have proved efficient in the management of the resources and territories
- Identify ways and means for the mountain communities to achieve a sustainable livelihood in tune with their specific cultural mountain identity
- Identify marketable mountain products and activities and enhance their quality and specificity in order to be able to justify their higher cost.
- identify common issue/s on which the network can be built



Dr Denis Blamont

Resource centres, research on and extension of craft techniques for non directly agro-pastoral sources of income: Rashmi Bharti, Avani:

Rashmi Bharti is a founding member of the organisation in Uttaranchal called AVANI and also one of the founding members of the WMPA. During her presentation Rashmi shared the work of AVANI that is working in the Pithoragarh District of Uttaranchal on issues related to solar energy, rain water harvesting, spinning and weaving of wool and silk textiles, natural dye, organic farming and others. Rashmi stressed on the certification of the mountain products, on the basis of quality standards, which is still one of the challenges, that mountain people face.



Rashmi Bharti

Certification process in India – Miss Sheary, Deputy Director, Ministry of Small Scale Industries, Shillong

Miss Sherry of the ministry of small-scale industries shared with us the functions and roles of the ministry, and the registration procedures. She also welcomes us to avail the assistance of the ministry. The activities of the ministry are:

- Assistance/Consultancy to Prospective Entrepreneurs.
- Preparation of State Industrial Profiles
- Preparation/Updating of district Industrial Potential Surveys
- Project Profiles
- Entrepreneurship Development Programmes
- Motivational Campaigns
- Production Index
- Management Development Programmes
- Skill Development Programmes
- Energy Conservation
- Pollution Control
- Quality Control & Up gradation
- Export Promotion
- Ancillary Development
- Common Facility Workshop/Lab
- Preparation of Directory of Specific Industry
- Intensive Technical Assistance

- Coordination with DICs
- Linkage with State Govt. Functionaries
- Buyers-Sellers meet



Miss Sherry

The Ministry also assists youth groups by imparting trainings within the purview of the Ministry like shoe making, jam making and others. Apart from the trainings the Ministry also assists the entrepreneurs by reimbursing 75% of the registration fees on ISO 9000. She also informed us that gold mark for gold products will be mandatory from the year 2008.

Organic Agriculture in the North East – Father Joseph: Bosco Reach Out.

Father Joseph shared with us the positive impact of organic farming where Bosco Reach Out, have been practicing for the last couple of years. He stressed the importance of going organic and avoid traditional practices of *jhum* (or shifting) cultivation, because organic farming is viable ecologically, socially, and economically. Bosco Reach Out have a Rural Resource and Training Centre (RRTC) in Umrang, Ri Bhoi district just 35kms from Shillong. The centre aims at advocating for and propagating sufficient, sustainable and safe food production. It also imparts training to the rural people on livestock, agriculture, horticulture, fishery, and many others.



Father Joseph and Pitent

Eco/community tourism: sharing of experiences from the Meghalaya Tourism Development Forum (MTDF): Mr. Deepak Laloo, joint secretary, MTDF:

Mr. *Deepak Laloo* shared the project in *Mawlynnong* village, a village which is approximately 80kms from Shillong. The forum aims at promoting eco/community tourism in order to boost the tourism potentials of the State and to also generate employment of the village thus making the village grow economically, and making the activity their own socially, economically, and environmentally, and transmit it to the future generation in viable form. Moreover, the forum also involves 10 adjoining villages of *Mawlynnong*. *Mawlynnong* is rich in biodiversity and untapped or virgin natural scenic beauty. One of the most significant must see is the living root bridge which was there since time immemorial. (see the front page image)



Mr. Deepak Laloo

Day II: 9th March 2006:

Community Forestry:

Mr. Nongbri, District Forest Officer, Ri Bhoi District, Forest Department, Govt of Meghalaya

Mr. Nongbri one of the active officers of the Social Forestry Department shared with us the traditional conservation concept of the *Khasis* and *Jaintais*. He informed us that there is about 95% community forest land in Meghalaya and that most of the lands are owned by clans or community or *raid*. The land or forest under the *raid* is controlled by a three tier traditional system called the *durbar* headed by the chief or the *syiem*. The chief or the *syiem* is selected from the royal clan as being the first son of the mother, Meghalaya being a matrilineal society. There are also forests that are reserved by the Autonomous District Councils.



Mr Nongbri

Challenges faced:

- Privatisation of land
- Lack of documentation of traditional know how and
- Ignorance of the richness of one's own resources.

Water Resource Management: Susan Abraham, New Delhi:

Susan Abraham has been working with communities for the past 8 years and is still continuing. She

intends to work in *Medhuka* in West *Siang* District of Arunachal Pradesh, on micro hydro project. In her presentation she talks about the issue of depleting fresh water sources as one of the concerns to all humans whether they live in the mountains, the deserts or the plains. The per capita consumption of water is increasing twice as fast as the worlds population. Environmental degradation, development strategies that are focused on an overexploitation of the resource and pollution are all interlinked and all endangering this very precious resource. Conflicts over water are intensifying at all levels whether they are interpersonal, between corporations and the state, between corporation and people, between the state and people, between states, between countries. It has been said, many times, that “the third world war will be fought over water”. It is a strange thing that most people in the world have not realised that the resources of the earth and especially water cannot be owned by us. They do not belong to us. We have to use it responsibly and keep it undamaged for others to benefit from if we are to survive.



Susan Abraham

Arunachal Pradesh, it is said, has the largest potential for hydropower generation in the country. It is estimated to have a potential of 50,000 MW. Arunachal rivers face the impact of jhum agriculture, large scale deforestation, pollution from chemical fertilisers, pesticides and human waste and the mining of its river beds to construct a bridge across in the Brahmaputra in Assam are all threatening the existence of the as yet pristine rivers of Arunachal. One of the largest looming threats is the large hydroelectric projects planned for the state. The National Hydro Power Corporation (NHPC) promises to capture up to 30,0000 MW of power from Arunachal rivers.

The cost of large hydroelectric projects to human life and to the environment has been well documented all over the world. The positive impact of these projects is suspect at best, India's most recent example is the Bhakra Nangal project – touted till recently as a shining success story. Add to this , Arunachal is in a seismically active zone, its mountains are young, its biodiversity is fragile, there are landslides for five months of the year and its people have not been adequately informed about the impact of the projects about to be undertaken. The Chief Minister of Arunachal has written letters on

three occasions to the NHPC, asking for a stay on certain projects, pending a review – but his letters have remained unanswered. None of the power from the large projects planned is intended for the people of Arunachal. It will all be exported out of the state.

The Social Work and Research Centre intends to start work in Mechukha circle. They will set up a community managed, community controlled micro-hydroelectric unit that will provide enough energy to meet the needs of the local population. Mechukha is the last human settlement before the Indo-Tibet border – 36 Kms away. It is the first habitation to catch the snow melt in the streams. By using the water responsibly for the benefit of the local population and by returning this water unpolluted back to the river for the use of those living downstream, we intend to demonstrate that it is possible to use hydro power for energy in a way that will not damage the environment and will be of benefit to local communities. We hope this initiative will lend voice to the growing campaign against the overexploitation of Arunachal rivers.

Presentations from organisations present:

Rilum foundation, Smit, East Khasi Hills: Rilum Foundation for Sustainable Development (RFSD), is a non-profit, secular and a Non Governmental Organisation with its Headquarters at Smit (15 Km from Shillong the State Capital), It works for the welfare of the deprived and marginalized sections of the community. It promotes project for a self-reliant community, sustainability in the area of institution building, health, livelihood, environment, as well as disaster, relief, rehabilitation and cottage industry development.

Their areas of work are:

- Farm: for food security
- Kitchen garden
- Organic Farming
- Off Farm:
 - Bee Keeping
 - Eco tourism
- Natural Resource Management:
- Protect & Promote Community
- Forestry & Sacred Grove
- Save River Campaign

Voluntary Health Association of Meghalaya, Shillong, East Khasi hills: VHAMS vision is to make health a reality for the people in Meghalaya. Their areas of work are:

- Reproductive Child health.
- Community Health (Public health, primary care)
- HIV/AIDS, STDs, Substance Abuse (including tobacco)
- Adolescent Health.
- Advocacy

- Publishing and Translation (VHAI Publications, and Quarterly News letter on health Issues.)
- Livelihood



Wanda

Voluntary Health Association of Arunachal, Arunachal Pradesh: The organisation is working on issues of reproductive health and other health related issues. At present they are the facilitation Ngo for the mother NGO Scheme project in Arunachal Pradesh.



Sravani

Donipolo youth Federation, Arunachal Pradesh: The youth federation works on issues of culture, education and health. It is also at present trying to revive the cultural richness of the state.



Dr. Natung

Ri Bhoi Area Welfare Association, Ri Bhoi District, Meghalaya: RAWA works in the Ri bhoi District of the state on issues of old age, health, community development. Its work stressed mostly in the areas of Ri Bhoi District where they also act as a facilitator or a bridge between the government and other agencies and the people.



Gabriel

Western Cultural Socio Welfare Association, Nongstoin, West Khasi Hills: WCSWA is a non profit organisation working on natural resource management and at present is having a free open school for children to promote literacy rate in the district.



Kenneth

Ellen Welfare Society, Mon District, Nagaland: Ellen Welfare Society is an organisation working in Mon District of Nagaland and is presently working with issues of HIV/AIDS, Eco-Literacy, Gender, Globalization, Peace process and substance abuse. So far they have been able to impact their work with people's organisation and other community based organisations.



Bongtao

Eco Tourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim, (ECOSS) Gangtok, Sikkim:

ECOSS came about in the year 2001, because they felt an urgent need to stress that Ecotourism is the only way forward for the tourism in Sikkim. We cannot have tourism the way it is spreading its tentacles to other pristine areas.



Adrian

Its core mandate is:

- To develop and promote Sikkim as an Eco-tourism destination.
- To build awareness and capacity of the local people
- To promote research in conservation and ecotourism.
- Advocate for appropriate policy changes
- To work with National and International partners.

Discussion on the WMPA North East chapter: facilitated by Dr. Cajee, Mayfereen and Rashmi:

Rashmi Bharti from Avani, Uttaranchal, informed us that there has not been any activity of the Indian chapter of the WMPA except the meeting that was held from 9th to 11th of April 2005 at Tripuradevi.

Denis Blamont presented WMPA activities in the framework of the Mountain International Partnership Initiative "Law and Policy ". The reason of this presentation was to emphasise the fact that WMPA wishes to concentrate, and maybe even base its actions, on local traditional institutions where ever they exist and are efficient. In many places, these institutions need to be better known and enforced but also allowed to change and adapt themselves to new issues and to the new conditions of the contemporary world.

He also described the project of the Inter-ministerial Conference which will be held tentatively in December 2006, in Paris, proposed by WMPA and organised by French Government, wishing that the North-East Chapter should concretely contribute to the WMPA General Assembly which will be held before this conference and will present the views, opinions and wishes of the Mountain Populations of the world concerning their own future and the future of their territories.

In the Tripuradevi meeting there were representations from Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura,

Darjeeling, Nainital, Uttaranchal and more. The need was felt by both the chapters that we need to focus on issue/s and have a North East platform and a state wise body. but first we need to:

- Understand the issues or problems before we move ahead
- have a clear concept of the issue
- Understand the concerns and voice it from the platform
- Empower the communities
- To revisit and reintegrate traditional institutions

Issues suggested by the WMPA North East:

- Forest management
- Water
- Mining
- Registration of herbal medicines and dyes
- Documentation of traditional knowledge systems and disseminate the information
- Land alienation
- Human rights

Plan of action:

- Find clarity about an issue/s
- Networking among the communities, CBOs and NGOs
- To register the N.E Chapter using the Quito charter and others.
- To find a coordinating NGO or group
- Rotate members of the board from the Himalayas
- To have another N.E meeting to re -concretise our agendas, issues and activities.
- Broad basing the participant profile within the network (have some more members with a more diverse work profile and not only one kind of NGOs)
- To discuss the concept of the WMPA with the communities before the next NE meeting so that the issues to be addressed can be prioritised
- To ensure that at least one village representative is accompanied by the supporting NGO to participate in the next WMPA NE meeting
- Evolve a profile of membership to the network that will define the criteria for application

Day III: 10th March 2006:

This day is dedicated to a field visit to *Mawlynnong* village where eco/community tourism is going on. We made a visit to this village in order to observe their knowledge of community tourism and moreover to promote the tourism potential of the village. *Mawlynnong* village is awarded the cleanest village in Asia and observing, we found it to be true. We feel that there should be a banned on throwing plastics in and around the village territory to further hold the award truer. It was an enjoyable trip and the people were very hospitable, kind and enterprising. They seemed to think ahead of time and hope the other adjoining villages replicate the good works of *Mawlynnong* village.

During this visit we also had a signature campaign to support the move of Mr. Jean Lassalle the president of WMPA in his effort to stop the shifting of the Toyal Japanese factory from the Pyrenees mountain to the plains. The factory is supporting the livelihood of 150 families.



Field trip to Mawlynnong

Conclusion: At the end of it all we conclude that another North East meeting is required and that, in this meeting, the communities will be involved directly in order to also give them a platform to voice their concerns, issues, and most importantly to advocate for what is theirs.