

RESISTANCE REVISITED

The Chutka Anti- Nuclear Power Plant Movement
Madhya Pradesh

Community Conversations Report



Abha Bhaiya

With Vaishali Barua and Padmini Ghosh

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Pradesh

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WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK

www.womensregionalnetwork.org

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Abbreviations

DP – Displaced Persons

GNP – Gross National Product

IDP – Internally Displaced Persons

NAPM – National Alliance of People’s Movement

NBA – Narmada Bachao Andolan

NEP – New Economic Policy

NPCIL - Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited

NPP – Nuclear Power Plant

PAP – Project Affected Persons

PESA – Panchayats (Extension to Schedule Areas) Act, 1996

Glossary

ChutkaParmanuSangharshVirodhiSamiti – Anti-Chutka Nuclear Power Plant Resistance Committee

Gram Sabha – Village Assembly

Panchayat – Village Council

Tehsildar – Land Revenue Officer

Biographies

Abha Bhaiya

Abha Bhaiya is one of the WRN founding members and the board member. She established Jagori, a feminist organization in 1984 in Delhi; and thereafter she visualised and formed a community based organization Jagori Rural in 2000 in Himachal Pradesh which now has an outreach to 150 villages. She has been active in women's movements in India and South Asia for more than 35 years and has worked on a range of issues including women's socio, political, and economic rights, regional peace, the status of single women, women's right to health bodily integrity and well-being, against militarization, fundamentalisms and increasing erosion of civil rights, food securities and livelihoods. Her major contribution has been in the field of feminist training methodologies and research; and building feminist institutions. She has published on a range of feminist issues, she is acclaimed for her analytical and critical thinking. She continues to make constructive contribution to several national and international organization and forums.

Padmini Ghosh

Padmini is the WRN India Country Coordinator. She is a lawyer by qualification, and has also studied Political Science, and Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding. Her interests lie in inter and cross disciplinary studies of law, human rights, gender studies, and conflict and peace studies. She has earlier written on education for peace and conflict sensitive journalism.

Vaishali Barua

Vaishali Barua is currently a research scholar at the Centre for Women's Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. She has worked with Plan India, Jagori and International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW). Her research work focuses on studying forced migrations from a gender perspective.

1. Introduction

Women's Regional Network (WRN) is a network of women civil society leaders working together to advance women's rights and regional peace in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. The core-purpose of WRN is to amplify the voices of unheard, marginalized women, and together address the interlinked issues of peace and security, justice and governance and growing militarization in South Asia. WRN envisages women working in solidarity "within and across borders to ensure human rights, equitable development and the full participation of women in building a 'just peace'."¹

1.1. Community Conversations (CCs):

Through their distinctive Community Conversations (CC), WRN has sought to amplify the voices of women living in conflict zones to ensure that affected women's concerns and voices directly shape political discourse and policy. Through the CC project WRN documents the expressions of women going beyond the positioning of women as victims to that of survivors, making visible the often unheard, unacknowledged and unrecognised agency of women.

The objective behind conducting such Community Conversations are to:

- Explore women's strategies of resistance, and agency in managing survival of family and communities, building peace, pursuing justice.
- Assess the response of state institutions and civil society sphere.
- Share site experiences on promoting women's rights and policy leverage.
- Intersectionality of sites of conflicts²

Genesis of Community Conversations:

The first round of CCs across Afghanistan, Pakistan and India documented the gendered experiences of conflict. WRN members travelled across conflict zones speaking to women about their fears and insecurities, learning from their lived experiences, the impact of militarization, extremism and corruption, their access to and struggles for peace, rights and entitlement and justice. The Indian WRN team expanded the definition of conflict-affected areas beyond the notion of "militarised zones". Through CC's, the following sites were documented –

¹Manchanda, Rita. (2013) "Unequal Citizens: Women's Narratives Of Resistance, Militarisation, Corruption And Security." Women's Regional Network

²Idib.

- Border and non-international armed conflict like the border districts of Jammu & Kashmir,
- Identity conflict in Tripura, the North-East.
- Communal conflict in Orissa, this CC engaged with the women living in the aftermath of communal violence in Kandhamal, Odisha exploring their perspectives and challenges of co-sharing spaces with perpetrators, and their tribulations in accessing justice.
- Conflict arising out of the predatory development- the anti Posco movement in Orissa, the struggle against a mining Ore project by the multinational Korean company- POSCO in Orissa. Reflecting how predatory development models stand in conflict with the rights of the indigenous people, the CC documented the role of women in the people's resistance movement against the MNC.

Second Round of Community conversations:

While documenting the impact of conflict, extremism, militarization and corruption in the lives of women and also men in different conflict-affected areas, WRN members found it pertinent to document the vulnerability of Internally Displaced People (IDP) in order to bring the vulnerability in the public domain. WRN undertook a second round of CC's to warrant that voices of women IDPs are heard in the development processes with the broader objective that women's voices reach national and international forum.³ The Indian CC's brought to fore the vulnerable situation of IDP women, and their 'disempowerment as political subjects' in India's North East.

Third Round of Community Conversations:

Confronted with the huge and relentless production of forcibly displaced persons, WRN researchers travelled to remote and conflicted-affected areas in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India to understand and document the everyday realities of IDP women as they cope with flight and insecurity, ruptured families, destroyed homesteads, uprooted livelihoods and equally importantly the struggle to rebuild lives. Compounding the situation of deprivation, state response is framed within an ad hoc welfare mode, and not as constitutional obligation to its own citizens. Unlike refugees, IDPs continue to reside in their country of origin and therefore have a constitutional right to protection by the state. The documentation of CCs brought to light, the reality of women across the region, the ad



FGD with Community members in Madhya Pradesh

³Naz, R. (2016). Women in Conflict: Voices for Equality. Internally Displaced Women from North and South Waziristan, Pakistan. Women's Regional Network.

hoc policies of the state that failed the promises to the displaced as they were fraught with false promises and corruption. In the second cycle of CC, displacement was the focus, again as caused by conflict and predatory development. Here the predominant focus was violent “conflict affected displacement”. However, WRN interprets “conflict” to include predatory development induced displacements, especially people’s struggles confronting highly securitized situations often in conflict affected zones.

The present document is an extensive narration of people’s resistance against a proposed Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) in Chutka, Madhya Pradesh as part of a continued struggle against predatory form of development and multiple displacements as well as the response of the state violating its own legal framework.

1.2 Site Selection and Major Issues

The study conducted by the WRN team lead by Abha Bhaiya is located within the context of broader development-induced conflict. It documents the nine-year long ongoing struggle of residents from three villages - Chutka, Tatigath and Kundla in District Mandla, Madhya Pradesh -opposing the setting up of Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) authorised by the government. The state of Madhya Pradesh is part of the contiguous central tribal belt of the country which stretches across 10 tribal states from the west to the East. The tribal lands are mostly forested. The Mandla District comes under the Vth schedule extension, which provides for the protection of the cultural distinctiveness of the tribal under the constitution of India. “It also provides protection to the tribal people on account of their economic disadvantages so that they could maintain their tribal identity without any coercion or exploitation”. The protective clauses of the PESA Kanoon (law)⁴ are also applicable to the region. The people from these three villages facing threats of multiple and protracted displacement is only the tip of the iceberg. There are in fact 54 villages that will bear the immediate dangerous consequences of the NPP but in reality the residents of 142 villages will be dangerously affected.. The affected community’s struggle is also against the connivance of the authorities to forcibly displace the affected villagers against all rules of the land that prohibit the taking over of their lands without their common consent, as mandated by the Vth schedule of the Constitution and the PESA Kanoon.

⁴PESA - Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 was enacted to protect the rights of the marginalised tribal communities from further loss of access to forests, land and other community resources due to development projects. PESA was initiated to prevent further land acquisition from and displacement of such vulnerable communities. The objective of PESA was to introduce a framework of development where the pace and priority of their development would be decided by the tribal communities living in schedules areas themselves.

1.3. Methodology

The report is an outcome of face to face individual and collective meetings profiling leaders in the front line, especially women. Participatory dialogue including triangulation of sources, including secondary, ethnographic and observational research as methods in line with the objective of the study. Group meetings were conducted (FGDs) with women and men both, in addition to meetings and discussion held with Key informants (KIIs), the senior members and the office bearers of the Anti-Chutka movement committee

Abha Bhaiya as a lead researcher of the WRN team travelled to the affected areas across the forests, covering eight villages spread across 450 kilometres, meeting nearly 170 villagers, both women and men. In addition also met senior members and office bearers of the Anti-Chutka NPP movement committee present in various villages. Visits were also made to the exact plant site.

Ethnographic and observational research was done through rounds of field visits to the affected villages, in August 2017 and June and July 2018. One of the team members participated in a public event organized by a large number of movements in an around Narmada..

Data analysis of documents from Government of India and State government, various stakeholders, written material pamphlets, letters, brochures of people's resistance submitted to authorities, local and national news reporting on the movement, mainstream and alternative media reports of more than nine years, as well as all other relevant academic writings. This report is conceptualized analysing data from all the above sources.

1.4. Challenges and Limitations

Given the very nature of the research, and the continued state repression and false cases that the movement is facing from the government, conducting field-visits to the area was met with a lot of challenges. This made it difficult for anyone outside of the area to visit the villages and the sites, as it would pose security threats to the villagers. WRN had to be mindful of not causing any additional hardship to the local-partners therefore a number of times the visits had to be rescheduled. The visits to the area also unfolded the plight of different communities struggling against the state such as the forest dwellers being forcefully displaced by filing false cases.



Effects of Bargi Dam Project – First Round of Displacement faced by the community

2. Understanding Displacement

The magnitude of the IDP problem can be seen in terms of the number, where for every one refugee who has crossed an international border, there are two IDPs within national borders facing similar danger of forced migration and displacement. IDPs are increasingly at the forefront of the humanitarian agenda with no international agency having a formal mandate to aid them.⁵

In 2003, during the war in Iraq, hundreds of thousands of displaced people remained at risk inside the country; only a very small number were able to flee abroad. In some African humanitarian crises, there were ten internally displaced persons for every one refugee. Currently there are an estimated 1.4 million people displaced by conflict in Uganda, at least 1.5 million in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and 6 million in Sudan. But only 30,000 displaced people from Uganda have gone on to become refugees, while the numbers for the DRC and Sudan are 469,000 and 703,000, respectively. In 2004 there were between 20–25 million internally displaced persons. By then the number of refugees—those who fled or had been pushed out of their own countries—had declined to 9.2 million from 9.6 million in 2003.

Nonetheless, the displaced do have special needs as the process breaks up families and severs community ties and leads to unemployment and limits access to land, education, food and shelter. The displaced are particularly vulnerable to violence.

2.1 An overview of displacements with reference to India

With the end of the Cold War and the systematic push for a “unipolar” world order spearheaded by the United States of America, the “new world order” entered into a phase of what is popularly known as ‘globalization’. It is a process by which the “regional



Protesting women against the nuclear power plant at Koodankulam in TamilNadu

economies, societies and cultures” came to be disrupted through a network of trade for profit and extraction resulting in large scale displacement and movements of indigenous communities in search of livelihood. These were influenced by the ideology of “modern and developed nation” which mainly referred to economic growth through accumulation, combined with political modernization.

⁵<http://www.unhcr.org/afr/4444afce0.pdf>

The statistics on internally displaced persons generally count only those who are displaced by conflict and persecution but displacement has many causes - it includes all those uprooted by conflict and human rights violations that generally arouse the most concern. The overwhelming need of these people for protection from their own governments draws international attention to their plight.

However, internally displaced persons are often intentionally uprooted by their governments on ethnic, religious or political grounds, or as part of counterinsurgency campaigns. In civil wars along racial, ethnic, linguistic or religious lines, the displaced are often perceived as the enemy.

A group of Indian scholars put together a “typology” of the varied kinds of displaced in South Asia⁶. India faces IDP situations because of i) Development-induced displacement (already discussed); ii) ethnicity-related displacement where exclusive claims by a certain community in a region leads to ethnic tensions between different groups; iii) Border-related displacement which “can be divided into two kinds: a) internal border-related disputes and displacement (for example, border disputes between Manipur and Nagaland in India’s Northeast); b) external or international border related conflicts and displacement (for example, displacement owing to Indo-Pak border conflicts).”⁷; iv) External-induced displacement which results when a large number of outsiders put pressure on the land and livelihood of the indigenous people, and often lead to “protest” movements; v) Potentially displaced people when those like the old, sick, women & children may not have technically left their homes but live in displacement-like situations constantly.

With regard to the conflict-induced IDP, the count in India is at 796,000 of which 448,000 were new conflict induced IDPs as of 2016⁸. The trajectory of forced migrations and displacement in India can be drawn back to the history of partition, followed by the redrawing of administrative-territorial units. The examples of these can be found in ethnic tensions in Assam, Tripura, Manipur and Nagaland; the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits and the long-standing Indo-Kashmir-Pak dispute which created a large number of IDPs. There are also the very pertinent experiences of conflict over land, mineral and forest resources, for instance in the case of the people from Odisha (the anti-posco



Women protesters building a human chain at the anti-POSCO movement in Odisha

⁶Das,S, Basu Ray Chaudhury.S and Bose.T (2000).Forced Migration in South Asia: A Critical View. *Refugee Studies Quarterly*, 19(2), 51-52.

⁷Basu, S.P. (2013) Background Report–The ‘Other’ in the ‘Self ’: The IDPs in India. In *Reassessing Internal Displacement in South Asia*.(p 84). Colombo: South Asians for Human Rights.

⁸Global Report on Internal Displacement, IDMC & NRC, 2017.

movement), or those living in the ear-marked Special Economic Zones. In continuum with many other similar struggles like the ones in Tarapur, Maharashtra⁹, Koondankulam in Tamil Nadu¹⁰, Fatehbad in Haryana, Kovvada in Andhra Pradesh¹¹, a glaring example can be found in those resisting the building of a nuclear power plant in Chutka, Madhya Pradesh who have been displaced earlier and face the threat of being displaced yet again. The Government of India has not yet come up with any national policy to respond to any of the above situations of displacement resulting out of conflict or predatory development, especially as the State refuses to accept the existence of any such conflict.

In addition to this, the new models of economy and development that India adapted – acquisition of large amounts of land to construct industries, dams, power stations, highways et al - led to a situation of multiple and protracted displacement of the marginalized population. However, these shining models enlightening the paths of India's development primarily benefit the bourgeois – the rich, the resourceful and the powerful, both economically and politically. The fact is undeniable given the current scenario of the country that though the political system stands on the secular and socialist ideologies in the Constitution, the backbone of our policies and functioning is Capitalistic in nature, thus moving in the direction of the bourgeois and further away from the common masses, the proletariat. Furthermore, it isn't astounding that these predatory forms of development (as documented by WRN CCs in Odisha, and now Madhya Pradesh) are a manifestation of entrenched local and global economic power blocks working in connivance using modes of bribery and corruption among other illegal means in exploiting natural resources and cheap labour; needless to say that these projects have devastating effect on people's lives and livelihood as well as on natural resources. They often constitute a violation of existing constitutional and legal frameworks of the state.

Ironically, it will thus not be an exaggeration to state that development projects cause extensive internal displacement. Poor, indigenous and marginalized groups are frequently displaced without consultation, violating their right, to make way for grand national projects. Not only are the rights of such people ignored, they are rarely offered resettlement or adequate compensation, posing major threat to the lives and livelihoods of the vulnerable communities. The forcible accession of lands and multiple and protracted displacement of people is unconstitutional as they violate their rights as citizens of the country.

⁹SiddharthSrivastava (October 27, 2011). "India's Rising Nuclear Safety Concerns".Asia Sentinel.<https://www.asiasentinel.com/blog/indias-rising-nuclear-safety-concerns/>. Also see, RanjitDevraj (October 25, 2011). "Prospects Dim for India's Nuclear Power Expansion as Grassroots Uprising Spreads". Inside Climate News.<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/20111024/india-nuclear-energy-expansion-grassroots-uprising-jaitapur-maharashtra-tamil-nadu-west-bengal-fukushima>

¹⁰B. Skanthakumar (October 5, 2012) India: 'Nuclear energy is not a national issue – it is a global issue' -- anti-nuclear movement gains momentum. <http://links.org.au/node/3049>

¹¹Sundaram, P K. (September 28, 2011) "Nuclear Power Projects in India and Displacement of People" <http://www.dianuke.org/nuclear-power-projects-displacement/>

In fact, development-induced displacement is one of the primary forms of forced migration and displacement of people in India. As Walter Fernandes writes, there is a need to realize the enormous magnitudes of forced displacements in India, as well as the likelihood that with the increase in development projects, development-induced displacements are expected to become a national crisis. State governments, however, do not maintain any official statistics or database on the total number of “displaced persons (DPs)” and “project-affected persons (PAPs)”. As estimated, per his research reconstructing the statistics of displacement, in 1998 the first estimate was of about 21.3 million DPs/PAPs in India for the period of 1951-90 (Fernandes 1998: 231). Continued research and added information from covering more States concluded that for the period from 1947-2000 the total number of development-displaced (DP) and others economically deprived of their livelihood without physical relocation (PAP) has become more than 60 million. (Fernandes 2007: 203).¹²

The proponents of development projects may argue that such projects brought economic prosperity to the country, but this lop sided ‘prosperity’ was achieved at the cost of forcibly displacing a large majority of people from their ancestral lands depriving them of their fundamental rights as guaranteed by the constitution. As Roy proclaims, “The millions of displaced people in India are nothing but refugees of an unacknowledged war.”¹³The attitude of the state can be attributed to the fact that “most displaced persons are asset-less rural poor like landless labourers, small and marginal farmers (Gandhi’s last man), fisherfolks, forest dwellers and pasture communities. The Tribal communities, who comprise 8.08% of India’s population, are estimated to be more than 40% of the displaced population. Dalits constitute 20% of displaced persons.”¹⁴

The question thus remains that whose development is it and who is benefiting from these projects of economic development? Who is carrying the cross and in whose name is progress being promised? Whose economy is it and is it real development when the world is shouting from roof-tops about sustainable development. The question to face is, whose lives is it sustaining?

We took to sitting in water with only our head above water for days together

¹²Fernandes, Walter. (2008, November) “India's Forced Displacement Policy and Practice” Retrieved from <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/NESRC/Walter/chp-7.pdf>

¹³Roy, Arundhati. (1999, June 4) The Greater Common Good, Frontline,

¹⁴Fernandes, Walter. (1999, November 6) “Displacement - What is all the fuss about?” Humanscape. pp. 13-16

3. Narmada River Projects – From Narmada to Chutka

3.1) Projects on river Narmada

The central-tribal belt of India with rich forest areas and mineral resources is primarily populated by multiple tribal and indigenous communities. The river Narmada is a central source of life-line in Madhya Pradesh, providing millions of people living on and near the banks of the river with livelihood and sustenance. In 1947 a proposal was made to make the optimum utilisation of the Narmada River for irrigation, power generation and flood control. proponents of this project cited benefits such as agricultural development increased dairying projects, employment generation, industrialisation, re-forestation, rural electrification etc¹⁵. The Government, indifferent to the plight of the people and cost of

environmental degradation, went ahead with the decision of the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal (NWDT) in 1979 to construct 30 major, 135 medium and 3000 small dams. These projects displaced multitudes of people affecting their lives and livelihoods for ever. The original inhabitants – tribal people organised their struggle under the Narmada Bachao Andolan -Save Narmada Movement (NBA) in 1989. With slogans like Narmada Bachao, Manav Bachao” (Save Narmada, Save Humans); “Vinash nahi Vikas chahiye” (We want development without destruction), they opposed the construction of large dams as the government not only flouts environmental norms, but also fails to provide adequate compensation or rehabilitation.

The Rehabilitation Scam

Timeline on court proceedings related to the scam

- 2002: Supreme Court asks the Madhya Pradesh government to give two hectares of land as compensation to each of the families displaced because of the SardarSarovar dam project on the Narmada
- 2005: State government announces a rehabilitation package for victims to buy land. The package says part of the compensation will be given to victims after the registration of the sale deed
- 2007: Narmada BachaoAndolan files case in Jabalpur High Court regarding the rampant corruption in the rehabilitation process
- August 21, 2008: High Court sets up the S.S. Jha Commission
- 24 April, 2009: State government challenges the commission
- 14 July, 2015: In a progress report, the commission says many land deeds appear to be fake. It also says police and officials not cooperative
- January 2016: Commission submits final report to the High Court. State government moves an application to ensure the report is presented only in the state Assembly. The application is rejected
- 30 March, 2016: State government moves the Supreme Court which agrees with the state government but demands an action plan on the implementation of the commission recommendations by June.
- On 8th August, 2017 , the Supreme Court judgement states that those who did not get land in return of 5.58 lakhs, as per the special rehabilitation package announced by MP government, are now eligible to a compensation amount of 60 lakhs to be paid by the MP government.
- It was stated after the Supreme Court’s verdict in August 2017 that all those who are to be rehabilitated should vacate their existing houses/land by July 31, 2018. If such is not done, the authorities can use force to demand such vacating. However, those who are supposed to vacate their houses or land still do not know where they will be relocated, have not been given any plot/house number yet. Plus, none of the rehabilitations sites are ready with all facilities as was recommended by the NWDT award.

¹⁵Raja.K. Short Essay on Narmada Project Valley Project. Retrieved from <http://www.preservearticles.com/2012020122324/short-essay-on-narmada-valley-project.html> (Accessed on 22 July 2017)

The NBA provided a strong critique to the project by the Narmada Valley Development Authority (NVDA) and questioned the project's cost-benefit analysis, its hydrologic and seismicity-related assumptions and stressed that it was iniquitous. Till today people did not get fair compensation to the displaced. The World Bank was forced to do an independent review (also known as the Morse Commission) of the project in 1991. The Commission gave an adverse report following which the Government of India pulled out of the loan agreement with the World Bank.¹⁶

3.2) Bargi dam and displacement

As a continuum, Bargi, which is the name of the village and the site where the dam is built, is one of the first completed dams among the chain of 30 major dams to be constructed on river Narmada.

162 villages in districts Mandla, Seoni and Jabalpur were affected, submerging about 82 villages completely. The tribal people from the villages of Chutka, Tatigath and Kundla have lived memories of their earlier struggle and fight against the Bargi Dam project, construction of which displaced them from 1975 to 1990. People ran to the periphery of the forests, their ancestral habitat, where their huts were once again broken by the forest department officials. Large number of them also migrated to the nearby cities in search of work, where they lived in the slums. Their struggles led to heightened insecurity, a reality of their everyday lives. Among the 82 villages and more than 7000 families that were displaced, 43% were Tribal's, 12% Dalits, 38% OBCs and 7% others. (Source: Plan For Roof, Report by Mr. K.C. Dubey, Commissioner, Jabalpur Division, Jabalpur, 28th February 1987)¹⁷



The Bargi Dam

¹⁶World Bank. (1985). India - Narmada River Development - Gujarat :SardarSarovar Dam and Power Project (English). Washington, DC: World Bank.
<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/908161468258856200/India-Narmada-River-Development-Gujarat-Sardar-Sarovar-Dam-and-Power-Project>

World Bank. (1993). Lessons learned from Narmada (English). Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.
<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/221941467991015938/Lessons-learned-from-Narmada>

¹⁷ "The Human Cost of The Bargi Dam" "The Human Cost of The Bargi Dam" states, thatthe Central Water and Power Commission in 1968, conceptualized the proposed construction of the dam that envisaged irrigation in 2.98 lakh ha. and hydro-power generation capacity of 105 MW. (Source: DPR, Govt of M.P. 1968). Thereafter the Bargi diversion scheme was planned, increasing the total irrigation potential to 4.37 lakh ha. Work on construction started in 1974 and was completed in 1990. The height of the dam is 69 mts. and length 5.4 kms, geographically spread over a lake of about 75 kms in length and 4.5 kms width, spreading over 26797 ha. in Jabalpur, Mandla and Seoni districts is formed when the water is impounded upto the dam FRL of 422.76m. Of the 26797 ha of land submerged, 14750 ha. was ownership land, 8478 ha. forest land and 3569 ha. other government land. Retrieved from <http://www.narmada.org/nvdp.dams/bargi/bargi.html> (accessed on 04-08-2018)

The government sanctioned more dams to be constructed on the river Narmada, increasing the risk of displacement for the tribal people living in that area as well as permanently damaging the ecology of the area.. However, the record for rehabilitation was extremely poor in the early stages and there was a dismal failure of the promises that the government made to ousted people. The failure of the government and the fraud played by the local state-bodies has led to the erosion of people’s faith in government commitments and compensatory packages.

“We were displaced from the village Sarangpur(Bijasen) during the Bargi dam project. In that year our houses got completely flooded. We held our children close to us and ran towards the forest. Men were still watching the increasing levels of water....our entire granaries were filled with water....so there was no grain left in our houses. We were forced to build temporary homes as shelters in the forest but before we could settle down, the forest guards came and broke our huts. Now we have once again rebuilt them. In fact we rebuilt our houses three times. Today if the roof is broken and leaking, we do not feel like even repairing it as we know it will be broken again. These officers who come suddenly from the block office (an administrative unit) and make false promises of compensation etc. we now know their games. Little they realized that we will not be lured by them.” – A woman activist from the movement.

Yet another axe will now fall on the lives of the same community as the fear of being displaced for a third time is looming large. This is due to the a project proposed and pushed forth by the government under its agency the Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL), for the construction of a Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) in Chutka, district Mandla, in Madhya Pradesh. For the villagers, living in the area surrounding the proposed plant site, having been displaced twice earlier during the Bargi dam construction, a nuclear plant in and around the village is a revival of the threat of forced displacement.

4. Nuclear power plants: sites for disaster

The examples of Fukushima Daiichi, Chernobyl nuclear plant disasters, and Bhopal “gas tragedy” – world’s worst industrial disasters, recur in the voices that constitute a continuous struggle. These concerns are also part of international platforms, like Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, and the Nuclear Information and Resource Service. As a result of the movements and the international discourse by these networks, most countries of the global north have started decommissioning all existing nuclear plants, initiating the use of renewable energy sources. Through these measures the “developed” countries recognize that development of nuclear technology and disposal of nuclear waste is not a viable option, economically, technologically or in humanitarian context with regards to safety of people

and natural resources, and a movement toward total disarmament world over is the order of the day.

Nuclear power involves the use of nuclear reactions that release nuclear energy to generate heat, which is then used to produce electricity. The use of uranium as fuel, the process of mining uranium, building NPPs and the transport of radioactive waste – all contribute to high emissions of carbon dioxide into the environment.¹⁸

4.1 Adverse effects

The construction of the NPPs potentially pose severe environmental damage which includes: Air pollution; Biodiversity loss (wildlife, agro-diversity); Genetic contamination; Loss of landscape/aesthetic degradation; Soil contamination; Deforestation and loss of



D-Nuke Protest in Madhya Pradesh

vegetation cover; Surface water pollution/Decreasing water (physico-chemical, biological) quality, degradation of aquatic ecosystem; Ground water pollution or depletion; Large-scale disturbance of hydro and geological systems, ecological / hydrological connectivity; and Contamination of Water Bodies.¹⁹ In turn these consequences also threaten the lives and health of the affected community/villages.

Radioactive wastes produced by NPPs cause damage to cell structures leading to irreversible damage in living beings due to its highly carcinogenic nature which can also cause genetic disorders and mutations as evident in various NPP sites. In fact, the community in and around Chutka noted how radioactive and polluted water is a major cause of cancer and other life threatening health problems. This would affect the people living in areas along the downstream of Narmada River. It was expressed by them, “So many countries are even closing down the existing nuclear power plants, while Indian government is building new ones and that too on tribal lands in so many areas. We are the victims of development!”

While around the world there is an on-going movement against nuclear power, however, India continues to move forward toward setting up of nuclear power plant projects, some

¹⁸http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/science/add_edexcel/radioactive_materials/radioactiveproblemsrev1.shtml (accessed on 16.08.2018)

¹⁹Sohan Prasad Shah and Swapan Kuamr Patra. Environmental Justice Atlas. “Chutka Nuclear Power Plant.” 2014 <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/chutka-nuclear-power-plant-india>

proposed and some already active, in the name of development, infrastructural expansion and employment generation.

4.2. Government of India's Plans on Nuclear Energy and Power Plants

The Indian nuclear power industry is expected to undergo a significant expansion in the coming years, in part due to the passing of the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement, which allows India to carry out trade of nuclear fuel and technologies with other countries and significantly enhance its power generation capacity. When the agreement goes through, India is expected to generate an additional 25 GW of nuclear power by 2020, bringing total estimated nuclear power generation to 45 GW. Risks related to nuclear power generation prompted Indian legislators to enact the 2010 Nuclear Liability Act which stipulates that nuclear suppliers, contractors and operators must bear financial responsibility in case of an accident. The legislation addresses key issues such as nuclear radiation and safety regulations, operational control and maintenance management of nuclear power plants, compensation in the event of a radiation-leak accident, disaster clean-up costs, operator responsibility and supplier liability. A nuclear accident like the 2011 'Fukushima Daiichi



Protest by effected people against the Koodankulam NPP

Nuclear Disaster would have dire economic consequences in heavily populated India as did the 1984 Union Carbide Bhopal disaster, considered among the world's worst industrial disasters.'

Decommissioning of large nuclear projects in the "developed" countries had no impact on Multinational Companies (MNCs), supplying such nuclear technologies and reactors including fuels, to countries like India which has been systematically made dependent on agencies like: World Bank, IMF and other MNCs. The Government of India is signing agreements with the US diluting the nuclear liability clauses in order to facilitate the construction of large scale nuclear power plants. This is being done wilfully ignoring the adverse scientific, technical, environmental, economic and human cost.

Currently, people's resistance movements continue to wage their struggle against other proposed nuclear plants at Jaitpur in Maharashtra, MithliVirdi in Gujarat, Gorakhpur in Fatehabad district of Haryana, Kovvad in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh, Rawatbhata in Rajasthan (and under operational reactors in Koondankulam in Tamil Nadu).

The struggle by *ChutkaParmanuVirodhiSangarshSamiti* and the people forming the anti-nuclear power movements, continue to voice their opposition to the proposed project. They cite the various disastrous effects of setting up of nuclear energy plants and the radioactive

waste that it will produce, leading to severe human and environmental damages. They question the politics of such forms of development that creates a divide among citizens declaring the marginalised as unequal citizens of the country, disadvantaging the already marginalized sections.

“Nuclear Power plant is not development. It is a destructive deadened street. We will not allow this plant to come up. We want to decide what is development of us” (a male activist leader of the movement) - one of the woman activists of the anti chutka movement

5. The Nuclear Power Plant in Chutka: Government proposes, people dispose

In 2009, the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL), proposed a project to set up an atomic power station in Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh, to generate 1,400 MW power. Madhya Pradesh Power Generating Company Limited (MPPGCL) is the nodal agency to facilitate the execution of the project. Two nuclear plants of 700 MW each are being planned in the near future by the NPCIL, which is likely to be followed by two other plants of the same capacity – 2800 MW in all. In the first phase, inhabitants of four villages are likely to be displaced. Their lingering havoc of the second displacement was more treacherous with far reaching consequences as they have hardly settled in. This phenomenon of two displacements within a generation , and now potentially a third one, reveal the extent to which the concerns of tribal’s and other marginalised people are being violated in the name of planned development.



Location of the proposed Chutka NPP

It is reported that the plant will swallow 7 crore 25 lakh 76 thousand cubic meter water every year from the reservoir which will reduce the total flow of water in the Narmada River. The water thrown from the plant will be radioactive and thus pollute the reservoir,

They told us that they will give us housing, a job, and instead, our homes were flooded and all our grains rotted.

as experienced in Rawatbhata (Rajasthan) Nuclear Power Plant, where the NPCIL has prohibited fishing around 12 km. radius of the plant.²⁰

Geographically, the proposed location of the plant is in a volatile zone which has been earmarked as seismic zone III.²¹ In addition to danger of a probable natural disaster which might just be accelerated given the location of the plant, it also adversely affects the biodiversity of the region in contrast to the lifestyle of the indigenous population which has inherent practices of preserving the same. In fact the location/region does have past experience of natural calamity as was evident from the 1997 earthquake and the minor volcanic eruptions in April, 2011. Despite the environmental vulnerability of the region in terms of the effects on the surrounding land, soil, water and air, and not receiving a clearance from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, the nexus of political and corporate power continues to push for the nuclear-plant.

As per the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Government of India, "The State of Madhya Pradesh is vulnerable to natural disasters owing to its unique geo - climatic features. The major natural hazards for the State are earthquake, floods, drought, fire, etc. The State is also vulnerable to man made disaster. There are more than 400 industries working in various districts"²². In the state of MP there are several hydroelectric power plants and nineteen thermal power plants, thereby providing surplus of resources and electricity. The people therefore question the governments' need to build such plants, which comes with potential human and environmental costs.

The people of Chutka maintain that this project benefits no one except the MNCs, the Government and other stakeholders who are the proponents of nuclear energy. This will spell a huge disaster for the original inhabitants, and the natural bounty of the area. Their ancestral lands on which they depend for their livelihoods are taken away. All of this is done without extensive consultation, compensation or alternatives of sustainable livelihood options. In fact, there is no



Media Coverage of the Anti-Chutka NPP movement

²⁰ Dialogues and Resources on Nuclear, Nature And Society. "Chutka n-plant: local protest meeting demonstrates people's resolve to fight" (June 2015) <http://www.dianuke.org/chutka-n-plant-local-protest-meeting-demonstrates-peoples-resolve-to-fight/>

²¹Department Building Material and Technology Promotion Council Ministry, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (Government of India), and Madhya Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority, suggest that the proposed location of the plant is actually in a volatile zone and has been ear-marked as seismic zone-III.

²²National Disaster Management Authority, Government of India. <https://ndma.gov.in/en/madhya-pradesh-sdma-office> (Accessed on 8 July 2018)

way to justify these actions in the name of development, the development is actually mal(e)-development.

5.1. Government – A diary of Deceitful Actions and Strategies

The nine year long people’s struggle has been a witness to deceit and violation by the actions and coercive strategies of the government. The local community describes it as “corrupt”, “corporate friendly” instead of being “people friendly”. In conversations with the researcher, the people shared that government agencies often used their powers to disempower the communities that are in opposition to their policies and “development” projects. The rights of the people have been unconstitutionally violated through use of State forces like the police and other departments. The conflict between government and the people is also reflected in the violation of the “PESA Kanoon”, the people and Gram Sabhas opposing the NPP project and the Government systematically ignoring their opposition. The government has also neglected the fact that “environmental clearance” which is to be received after conducting Environmental Impact Assessment, has not yet been obtained from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. The people rightfully ask “Why did it ignore the Gram Sabha (village general assembly) resolutions and the “no clearance from the environment and forest and climate ministry?” This is a glaring example of a government framing a “kanoon” (law) and violating it.

Different stakeholders conspired against the community by implicating them in false charges, and also labelling the peaceful protestors as trouble-makers. This implies criminalising the indigenous demands that arose from the community and making way for



One of the forest dwellers falsely implicated to appropriate her land

more harassment by the authorities, as the Maoists in India are labelled as troublemakers working against the state.

Raising false and fabricated allegations behind the movement are clear attempts by the governments to shift the attention from the issue of land acquisition and displacement of indigenous communities, the harmful effects of the NPP on people, environment and natural resources. In reality it is the GOI that is forming a nexus between MNCs, private firms and themselves. The Chutka nuclear plant is a product of a Korean MNC which is funding the projects via national agency of India, like Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL).

The forest dwellers in Rajgarh, in the presence of activists of the movements, grieved during conversations with the WRN team, that nearly 24 families have been implicated falsely and have received notice to vacate the land. Forest dwellers have been harassed and held by the

police under false cases of theft, killing of animals and birds, fraudulent ownership of land. This is a systematic process of disempowering the people, violating their constitutional rights, and attempting to dislocate them from the movement.

This is the most common form of deceit used by the government, as expressed by the people. A women activist says *“They get us entangled in all their deals and false cases against us to harass us, now they are distributing cooking gas cylinders and then will charge exorbitantly rate from us when we go to fill the empty cylinders. Today all our cylinder are sitting empty and we are back to our wood earthen stove. This is the way they make us pauper and get us indebted for life. They have distributed so many ID cards including the Below Poverty Line ID but in return we get nothing. They are so clever that they tell us your name is not in the computer and we are illiterate so we have no way of knowing the truth. We have now begun to understand the treacherous ways of this government.”*

The alliance between the government, scientists and bureaucrats of MP is clearly discernible when the NPCIL declared that Chutka nuclear power plant is safe. In 2014, after an environment impact assessment (EIA) filed by the corporation, an assessment was conducted by the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute, Nagpur citing that the project is in the low seismic activity zone–II and is therefore “environmentally benign, techno-economically viable and sustainable.”²³ This is a technical support institute and not the authentic agency to give environmental clearances. However, till date the proposed project has not received clearance from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate, which is the authentic body to provide the clearance. It is also important to note that as per NDMA (a government body) categorisation of (as mentioned earlier) this area comes under seismic zone III and is not as benign as this report would like to portray.

Obtaining bank accounts of land-owners of the affected community/villages is another such example of deceit and violation on the part of the government, as these were obtained through the Aadhaar numbers of the people who had registered themselves at the time of creation of MNREGA accounts. This was done to maintain government records of “compensation” paid to the people for acquiring their lands. It must be noted that the amount was neither what was promised nor remotely enough to rebuild the lives of those facing protracted displacement. All this was done without the consent of the affected people. In fact, the villagers had informed the bank not to disclose their bank account.

The people repeatedly fall prey to the unconstitutional eviction politics of the state. The legal premise for the acquisition of tribal lands in the scheduled area is constitutionally mandated as contained in Article 244 and the Fifth Schedule. Paragraph 5 of the Fifth Schedule requires the Governor to enact Regulation for the advancement of peace and good government, including prohibition or restriction of “the transfer of land by or among

²³TOI. “Clamour grows against nuclear plant in Madhya Pradesh” 18th February 2017. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/clamour-grows-against-nuclear-plant-in-madhya-pradesh/articleshow/57220047.cms> (Accessed on 5th August 2018)

members of the Scheduled Tribes in such area.”²⁴ The constitutional framework itself mandates to enact laws preventing land alienation, recognising the fact that tribal/indigenous people are vulnerable to the vagaries of the land market, and require the protection of the law in order to prevent the takeover of their lands by dominant groups from within the areas, or from market savvy populations who have migrated into these areas from other parts of the country. NPCIL is a non-tribal company therefore the allocation of the tribal land in favour of the company by the government is unconstitutional.

In March 2010, a survey team from the Nuclear Power Corporation of India NPCIL arrived without intimation, to collect sample soil from the proposed project site. This was done despite the villagers being told that no step would be taken without consultation because of the specific status under Vth schedule of Constitution and rights under PESA. This was another act of deceit on the part of the government and there have been many such instances of deceitful actions since then.

The year 2012 saw rising insensitivity on the part of the authorities while responding to the growing concerns of people living on these lands. As they responded by assembling police and using force to disrupt and weaken the people’s movement and voices. As early as May 2012, the tehsildar (revenue officer) of the village unlawfully directed Gram Sabhas (village general assembly’s to pass a resolution to change the land use of the area from agriculture to wasteland to facilitate land acquisition. The villagers were also threatened that if they did not cooperate, the land would be acquired by force. However, the people continued their opposition with conviction despite all such threats.

On June 29, 2012, a new district collector issued a notice of land acquisition. The notice took 26 days to reach the villagers, and they had only 4 days’ time to file objections. The collector had initially refused to accept the objections but due to collective opposition and protests he was forced to accept it. In August 2012, the villagers met the governor who continually persuaded them to accept the project. In October of the same year, the Collector of the district organised a public hearing but when the villagers reached to register complaints against falsely organised, she threatened them with arrest.

The politics of unequal development practices and the consequent resistance brings forth an increasing



Collective opposition and protest against the Chutka NPP

²⁴ Ministry of Tribal Affairs and UNDP, GOI (2014) “Land and Governance Under Fifth Schedule” Annual Report 2013-14. pp. 41-42. Retrieved from <https://www.tribal.nic.in/FRA/data/LandandGovernanceunderFifthSchedule.pdf>

divide in the citizenry of the country and the two different economies that operate within the system. While those who advocate for such large-scale development projects claim these would generate employment and progress for the whole nation, the reality is that it benefits one set of Indians at the cost of impoverishing the other. The protest against Chutka nuclear power plant has crystallized into a strong voice against nuclear power programmes of India. It has also raised questions on the bankrupt development paradigm that promotes uninhibited and inequitable consumption of power and the role of global corporate capital in pushing nuclear power projects in India.

The people's movements which have continuously challenged such developmental projects deserves due credit for stalling the attempts of the Government-MNC nexus to push forward the 'silent nuclear bombs' over the lives of people.

5.2. The Anti Chutka Nuclear Power Plant and Peoples Struggle

It is in this context that the Anti-Nuclear Power plant struggle, popularly known as anti-Chutka movement has been opposing the plant for the last 9 years. It is part of a continued struggle against the predatory forms of "development" projects carried forward by the government. It would also be useful to situate this movement in the setting of the movements that began in the 90's around the river Narmada, against the rising number of development projects funded by agencies of the "developed" countries. The "Narmada Bachao Andolan" or save Narmada (as mentioned in sections above), a socio-political movement which led the struggle of anti-dam movements by the people of the affected land and water bodies, forms the larger milieu of the ethos of the Chutka struggle.

"We will not move from our land, come what may." (In a public meeting in village Chutka)

"We have not forgotten the pain of our forced displacement at the time of the Bargi dam construction in the same area. Now the government has no right to displace us again" (said a woman activist)

However, it must be noted that these struggles in India are not anti-development, as they are made to be in popular narratives floated mostly by the wealthier and more powerful agencies– the government, its agents and stakeholders. The struggle instead questions the politics of development that operates on the practice of unequal power dynamics in the country, to the advantage of one and at the cost of the other. This 'other' is often the marginalized citizens of this country, whose rights and entitlements come in direct conflict to the project 'development and modernisation'. Secondly, when in the race with the nation's ambition of economic advancement at any cost.

To understand the socio-political location of the people who are a part of this resistance movement, it was noted that the primary issues with regards to the people and their struggle against the building of the Chutka Power Plant, were concerned with – **i) how to**

strengthen the struggle; ii) how to evolve legal and administrative strategies keeping people at the centre; iii) how to ensure the support from other similar movements and the media; iv) how to build large scale mobilization of village community to escalate the demand for the closure of the plant.

The Gram Sabha's (village assembly) demand for the closure and cancellation of the proposed NPP was expressed in a signed resolution was sent to the Chief Judge of the People's court in Bhopal, the capital of the state. People from the affected communities/villages registered their objection during a "public hearing" organized by the State pollution control board on 24th May and July 31st, 2013, and successfully forced the state to cancel the event through sustained agitation and opposition. It is important to note that a public hearing which the government had systematically and strategically executed with the help of police force later on February 17th, 2014 is a direct violation of constitutional provisions and PESA act.

It is public knowledge that the NPP project has not received environmental clearance from a legitimate and appropriate authority so far. Without this clearance, appropriation of the land and the project related activities is deemed as against the law of the land. A collective objection was registered at the collectors' office in Mandala, after receiving the eviction notice. The notice was also individually objected to by all the members in writing and submitted at the block office, Mandala on 24 August 2013. The objection categorically cited section 165 of the MP Land Revenue Act, 1959 which states that the land which comes under the 5th schedule whereby tribal people's land cannot be transferred to a non-tribal. On 26 January 1977 there was a total ban on the transfer.

In spite of the repressive strategies by the government and the State, the struggle continues. People of the movement are mobilizing to express their opposition and make demands visible through mass rallies, long protest action, boat rallies, sit-in barricading the officials from entering the area, petitions and memorandum to the state authorities, including court cases. It must be noted that if the proposed project does not receive the required ethical clearances from all concerned authorities by 2020, which will be five years since its revised and ratified avatar, it is bound to be called off officially by the government.

What we have lost through this struggle is not important anymore. We have become strong and learned about our power.

5.3. The Struggle continues

A struggle of close to nine years has seen residents from 54 villages against the installation of a NPP, since the government order of the year 2000, which was revised and ratified in 2015. This order sanctions the commencement of the plant and acquisition of three village lands, Chutka, Tatighat and Kundla, for setting up the project.

Three Gram Sabhas (Village General Assembly) – Patha, Kunda and Tatighat (Chutka is in one of these) – unanimously passed resolutions rejecting the government proposal to set up the nuclear project in their area. According to the Indian Constitution and complimentary law, with Mandla District being in Schedule V and under “PESA Kanoon”, the opposition and



A protest march organized by the community

rejection by Gram Sabhas should mean that the project must be withdrawn as the government is violating its own legal provision. An example of such can be cited from Niyamgiri, Odisha in the case of Vedanta Aluminium.²⁵ However, the opposition and resistance from people and several Gram Sabhas (village general assembly) against such installation, acquisition of lands by force, and consequent protracted displacement, environmental and health degradation have been systematically ignored. Infact, violation of the Vth schedule of the constitution, and the PESA Kanoon, along with continued defiance of the opposition and rejection of the Gram Sabhas is one of the most significant unconstitutional action committed by the state.

The people of affected community/villages fear for their lands and livelihood, their forests and the River Narmada, as those are their life saving natural resources. Should this proposed project come through for implementation, affected farmers, the forest dwellers, fisher folks are all at the risk of losing their ancestral traditional modes of livelihood. Instead of piecemeal compensation today their demand is for zero-eviction policy and simultaneously better health services and transportation facilities, regulated drinking water and electricity, the primary needs of the villagers.

The people maintained that “development vultures” have their eyes on the lands in the tribal forests due to their rich natural resources including water bodies

As expressed by an affected woman community member; *“My village is in the reserve forest. I have, after a long struggle, received the land documents. Earlier we were into dairy*

²⁵Shah, Prasad Soham and Kumar, PatraSwapan.(2014) “Chutka Nuclear Power Plant.”Environmental Justice Atlas. Retrieved from <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/chutka-nuclear-power-plant-india>

business and had a large number of cattle which we lost because of displacement. But now my village will come under the adversely affected area for the nuclear plant.”

Another woman activist from an affected village voiced, *“Narmada River is the life line of our lives, we oppose the policy of the government that destroys us poor and supports the development of the capitalists.”*

As expressed by one of the women activists, *“You are sending huge electricity bills in our names, by generating electricity on our land promising us free electricity but now so many of us are paying 600 to 700 Rupees for using two bulbs. So Many villages still do not have electricity and you made such tall promises when you displaced us – all lies. Why don’t you give us poison instead?”*



A Public Hearing organized by the ChutkaParmanuSanghrashSamiti

In an interview for The Wire, Rajkumar Sinha, the co-ordinator of an organisation of Bargi dam evictees, said that they have been raising their voice against the displacement as well as raising concerns over the potential health and other hazards. He shared that people facing displacement visited other nuclear plants sites like Rawatbhata, where they met people who were suffering from serious permanent health ailments. Earlier, their voices were not heard seriously, but after the Fukushima disaster they began to get more attention.²⁶

5.4) Innovative Mobilization Strategies – journey of the people’s movement

People living in and around Chutka have organised themselves under the *ChutkaParmanuVirodhiSangharshSamiti* to protest against the nuclear plant. People from a large number of villages much beyond the core displacement zone have joined the protest, knowing how extensive are the hazards of a nuclear plant. Several organisations and political movements have also raised voice against the proposed 1400 MW nuclear power plant, and a number of organisations from Bhopal, Jabalpur and elsewhere are standing in solidarity with the struggle. Farmers, fisherfolk, indigenous groups or traditional communities, landless peasants, local government/political parties, neighbours/citizens/communities are all various stakeholders in this struggle. They also have the support of local, national and international e-journal and media correspondence,

²⁶Dogra, B and Baba, M. (2017, March 16) “For Tribals Displaced by Madhya Pradesh’s Bargi Dam, a Second Displacement Looms” The Wire. Retrieved from <https://thewire.in/rights/tribals-madhya-pradesh-displacement> (Accessed on 17th July 2018)

who continue to report regularly on the struggle, giving space to alternative voice against such “development” and so called advancement by the governments at the cost of people and their lives and livelihoods, into the virtual world.

A large number of other organizations have also come out in solidarity with the anti- Chutka NPP campaign which includes the labour organizations, women’s organizations, student forums and other popular people’s movement.

The movement is built in a way to ensure strategic mobilization, and knowledge dissemination amongst the people by organising street plays, through poster exhibition and meetings and distributing booklets and handbills with information about nuclear



A Protest march organized to generate public awareness

power plants and their disasters elsewhere in the world. This has created an extensive understanding of the consequences of disaster. Boycotting official procedures/non-participation in official meetings, occupying land to hold protests, alternative media based activism, and organizing street protest/marches, are some other means of mass mobilization for peaceful resistance against unconstitutional initiatives of the state.

Some of their earlier strategies included a number of public rallies and demonstrations, sittings-ins, not allowing the surveyors to conduct the land survey, stopping the falsely organized two Gram Sabhas to take place twice as these were organized by bribing the youth to prove that the villagers were willing to take compensation. Majority of the village residents who opposed the plant signed and submitted in writing two resolutions against the NPP, citing the instances of constitutional violation by the state authorities of their own legal provisions for the scheduled area.

Noting the trajectory of the events since 2009 brings forth both the coercive tactics of those in power and the resistance strategies of the community. It dates back to 2009 where the villages were not even informed by the government of the proposed nuclear plant project to be built on their lands. Their first source of knowledge was from newspaper reports. That’s when people began organizing themselves into ChutkaParamanuSangharshSamiti (CPSS), forming themselves into collectives and using various modes of resistance to stand against the attempts of the government stakeholder toward the establishment of a nuclear power plant. On 22 December 2009, the “Chutka Nuclear Power Struggle Committee” that comprised affected people from 46 villages and 2 districts, wrote a letter to the Governor of Madhya Pradesh and urged for clarification and information to be provided to the committee on their principal concerns **i) the number of villages that will face direct or**

partial threat of being wiped out completely as a result of the construction of a NPP ii) the potential effects of NPP project on public health iii) the potential displacement of villagers, who were already displaced twice before due to the Bargi Dam project. IV) the status of government's' promise to provide employment to the displaced families from the Bargi dam project, yet to be fulfilled. vi) the concerns regarding extermination of the tribal/indigenous people with construction of Chutka Nuclear Power plant. vii) the potential threats to natural water bodies, forests and land viii) the environmental pollution caused by this construction. ix) the unwillingness of farmers to give an inch of land to the government for Nuclear Power Plant. They are clear that the Chutka Nuclear Power Plant will only benefit the government and capitalists not the villagers.

In 2013, a public-hearing on the nuclear power plant project, for the assessment of environmental aspect of the project was to be conducted by the Madhya Pradesh Pollution Control Board in order to get clearance from Union Ministry of Environment and Forest. This hearing was first scheduled to be held on 24th May and was later forced to be postponed for a second time to 31st July due to the protest by the affected people. After sustained protests by the people of the region, the movement emerged victorious in 2013, when they were able to cancel a government aided "Public-Hearing" in favour of Chutka Nuclear Project. This was an important marker of the people asserting and reclaiming their rights. However, the government strategically shifted the site of public hearing from Chutka to another village Malegaon so that protestors do not reach the site. Even that strategy failed.

In 2015, with the Cabinet's decision to acquire 41 acres of land for the project, without



Public gathering to alert the community regarding the dangers of NPP

taking the community into confidence and without the permission of the gram sabhas, the resistance of the people and the movement became even stronger against the deceitful actions and strategies of the government. After a meeting with the state governor on 15th October, the tribal community decided to start an indefinite agitation from 25th October, said Navratan Dubey, secretary of ChutkaParmanuVirodhiSangharshSamiti, protesting against the setting up of the nuclear power plant.²⁷

In 2017, the movement displayed the strength of people's continued peaceful struggle against the NPP. As the movement matured the informed struggled built a critical knowledge base. In February, in order to present their viewpoints to the government they

²⁷Santoshi, Neeraj and Chaudhari, Neelesh. (2015, September 26) "Chutka nuclear power project: Villagers threaten to launch agitation." Hindustan Times. Retrieved from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/bhopal/chukta-nuclear-power-project-villagers-threaten-to-launch-agitation-from-oct-25/story-ehLY9sQRaPYGoNYaYdVBI.html>

launched a “sadbudhisatyagraha” (Passive Political resistance demanding wisdom) against the authorities and managed to stall the project for a while. In July, the tribal people in the Mandla district refused to allow drilling for soil samples for the proposed NPP in the area, stating that their demands and concerns were not being addressed by the authorities. *ChutkaParmanuVirodhiSangarshSamitisecretary’s* comment in the HT, said that tribal people from gram sabhas of three of the four affected villages -Chutka, Tatighat, and Manegoan- gave their conditional approval to the project while the gram sabha of Kunda village didn’t give any approval and continues to oppose the project. “We gave approval provided our demands are conceded which included Rs 60 lakh compensation per acre of land, a job to a family member, five acre land to landless and Rs. 25 lakh per family for construction of a house”.

Between July-December 2017, several calls for strengthening international solidarity were made and several protest rallies and meetings were organized. On October 4, 2017, the *Narmada bachao andolan* joined the people’s movement and struggle against NPP, and “Narmada Sanskriti Samvaad” (Narmada Cultural Conversation) invited people to join them from October 7-8 for a meeting which was in collaboration with the ongoing “Zero Evictions Campaign” across the world. The movement received coverage from several media and news agencies, thereby making its visibility stronger in the national context. From the position of demanding compensation, the movement has moved on with a slogan – Zero eviction camp.

In February 2018, ex-chief minister of the state Digvijay Singh visited the village Chutka and wrote to the Prime Minister of India, asking him to reconsider the controversial project. In the letter he categorically penned that he found that the river area was shrinking and getting polluted. He warned the government that establishing a NPP in such a situation not only destroy biodiversity of the Narmada river but would also prove disastrous for the water body.²⁸ In fact, the number of villages that will face the life threatening consequences due to nuclear dust, the radiation as well as the land that will be dumped with Nuclear waste, will affect 144 villages. Realizing that the policy makers and government, blinded by neo-liberal and growth-centric models of development, were showing no regard for the demands of the people from the tribal lands and to the potential destruction of fragile ecologies and traditional sources of livelihood.

The movement took to organizing “Soil Satyagraha” (soil non-cooperation) against a 17,000 crore Chutka NPP. Farmers in Mandla stopped researchers from a Mumbai based private company to collect soil samples. This was supported by the ex-chief minister Digvijay Singh,

²⁸Sundaram, Kumar. (2018, February 21) “Chutka Nuclear Project: Former CM Digvijay Singh Voices Opposition, Will India’s Political Class Wake Up?” DiaNuke. Retrieved from <http://www.dianuke.org/chutka-nuclear-project-former-cm-digvijay-singh-voices-opposition-will-indias-political-class-wake/>

who brought to notice the geographically vulnerable position of Mandla district, due to it being in seismic zone making it prone to earthquakes.²⁹

On April 23, 2018, during the PM's visit, a memorandum demanding that the PM cancel the proposed nuclear power plant at Chutka was submitted to Mandla district collector by "ChutkaParmanuVirodhiSangarshSamiti" (CPSS).³⁰

In June 2018, along with the farmers' movement, in collaboration with Narbada Bachao Andolan a huge public event was organised, and attended by nearly 2000 people. A public hearing was also held in the presence of two senior ex judges. The movement continues to grow stronger against government deceit and violations of the rights of the tribal people of Madhya Pradesh. The renewed effort by the movement is to gather further support from notable environmental activists, academics, journalists, film and art personalities and bring people who were survivors of similar violations on a common platform. Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) has led the struggle of anti-dam movements by the people of the affected land and water bodies. The Anti Chutka movement is a continuum of this struggle. In the immediate future, the movement proposes to hold all-women's rallies, including women from 54 villages that will get affected by the plant if it were to come up. It must be noted that if the proposed project does not receive proper ethical clearances from all the concerned authorities by 2020, which will be five years since it was ratified; it is mandatory to call off the project as stipulated by the state policy.

The discussions with the community brought to fore their most fundamental demand saying that: "We want Water, Forest and Land. Even if we have to let go of our lives, we will not leave the land. We want our freedom and auto nom. In fact, one of our demands is to set up an inquiry committee to look into corruption and corrupt officers. Yes, there is insecurity all around us."

The struggling people came together to plan their strategies for the ongoing struggle and to draft their action agenda against the most powerful state and non-state actors. The resolve of the people is not to give up their entitlements under any circumstance. They demanded forest rights of the forest dwellers and land sovereignty of the farmers. They called for legal measures to oppose the NPP and also to save traditional means of livelihood of the fishing, tribal and forest-dwellers communities. The movement has also highlighted the loss of inter community relationships and mental peace due to the psychological stress.

²⁹“Soil Satyagraha against Chutka nuclear power plant project.” (2018, February 22). Times of India. Retrieved from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/soil-satyagraha-against-chutka-n-plant/articleshow/63020572.cms>

³⁰“PM NarendraModi to launch RashtriyaGraminSwarajAbhiyan from Madhya Pradesh tomorrow” (2018, April 23). Financial Express. Retrieved from <https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/pm-narendra-modi-to-launch-rashtriya-gramin-swaraj-abhiyan-from-madhya-pradesh-tomorrow/1142830/>

6. Women's voices from the movement

The anti-NPP movement derives its strength from the invisible, strong voices of women activists. Women being the mainstay of this movement were loud and clear in formulating their demands. The several losses that affected the community were shared by women speaking both for themselves and for the community.

Women form the backbone of the anti- NPP movement. They speak and act with tremendous commitment and determination, standing against the deceitful neo-liberal policies and actions of the government.



Women activists from the movement sharing their opinion

With no compartmentalization of roles based on their gender, as proclaimed by themselves, the women and men in this movement have emerged as leaders, calling themselves “tribal people in resistance.” Here are some of the most powerful voices of women activist: proclaiming themselves as “jungle ke raja” (Kings of the Jungles) “we live as per our wishes.” There is a strong display of pride and a sense of self sufficiency in their stories about their lives and the land, their most precious asset. One of the women said “A farmer always has enough rations through the year even after providing for their guests.

When men were asked about the reasons behind women attending more meetings as compared to men, they replied “women do not compromise.”



Those who call us poor do not know that we were the richest. We tribal women are very resourceful.

Women across different livelihood communities, including farmers and fisherfolk proclaiming how “those who call us poor do not know that we were the richest people with amazing capacity to labour on the land and produce the best and plentiful food. We never bought green vegetables from the market. We tribal women are very resourceful.”

They shared stories of their participation in the struggle along with menfolk from the affected community/villages. Their concerns were primarily around the larger issues of sovereignty of the community and tribal lands, forests and water bodies and the resolve not to give up their efforts at any cost.

With the knowledge gained over time through their struggle, a woman executive member of the decision making body of the CPSS shared her opinion on such development projects articulating, “This movement has made us very knowledgeable. We have been marching on foot all over and have seen and know the disastrous reality of nuclear power plants. They cause irreparable damage to the life and environment. Is this what the government should be doing, do they want to kill us?”

Another woman executive member noted, “According to the UN guidelines any development project must improve the quality of life of those who are being displaced. The state has been illegally changing the land use. They must define the meaning of public interest. They are only land grabbers and work in the interest of the rich and the powerful as their pockets are warmed up with bribes. We will continue to demand our land back. Those who were displaced decades back, even today, continue to suffer the aftermath of displacement without promised compensation. These same people sacrificed their lives in the struggle”.



Women activists of D-Nuke movement

Questioning whether there is a justification of “overriding and compelling public interests”³¹, a woman activist states, “Those who want to eat electricity let them have it, we want food. Now nearly 52 villages will get submerged but the harmful impact of the nuclear power plant will cover a much larger area.” The women collectively said that they are against big dams as “we need smaller dams on government land without displacing people.”

A woman farmer and activist questioning the policies of the state government and reclaiming the self-sufficiency of farmers said, “a farmer is very self-sufficient but their (government) policies are making us paupers.”

In oppression to the state authorities, a woman community member said “I once again occupied 7 acres of land. But the forest officers started digging holes in my land... I filed an application, protesting the actions of the forest officer. I gave my application to all departments but after some time they did the same again. I was out raged; I collected courage and picked up a thick stick in my hand. I requested the mother earth to protect me. This was a struggle of either losing my life or gaining my rights...I was ready.”

Forests not only provide for an ecologically sustainable means of livelihood for the tribal communities, but hold greater significance. As recounted by one of the women from

³¹ UNHCR Guiding Principles on Internal Displacements, principle 6 (2) (C)

Manegad, who said, “forests are our resources and a source of happiness. We will give our lives but not the land. The government thinks we are animals.”

Recounting their lived experiences of earlier displacements and government violations, women collectively said “We have not forgotten the pain of our forced displacement at the time of the Bargi dam construction in the same area. Now the government has no right to displace us again.”

As one woman said, “My village is in the reserve forest. I have, after a long struggle, received the land document. We were into dairy business and had a large number of cattle. But now my village will come under the submerged area for the nuclear plant.”

They recounted how when their ancestral lands were previously submerged, it drastically changed the dynamics of relationships not just within the household, but also with the neighbours, destroying the life securities and tribal cultural practices of interdependence, including food and festivals.

Speaking of traditional modes of livelihood, women from the fishing communities spoke in unison about the ability, of both women and men, to sustain themselves without the



Long march by fearless women demanding the closure of the Chutka NPP

intervention of any outside body or organization. “We are not dependent on any one for fishing and earning our livelihood. We women row the boat and men throw the net for fishing. We are very capable people. But look at our huts that we built with our hard labour

and now they want to snatch away even these and livelihood from us. Since centuries our ancestors have been fishing and living close to the river. (a woman activist in a public meeting)

Against government responses to the struggle that the people posed, the women mentioned how often times the police resorted to corrupt measures, such as tutoring and bribing young people to support the plant in order for them to officially declare their willingness to leave their ancestral lands and receive compensation from the government. Women were noted saying that such proclamations by the government and its agents are “absolute lies!”

Disorientation caused the loss of land and livelihood is another concern raised by the women who spoke about landowners who took compensation but were now working on minimum wages as labourers in the fishing trade syndicates, earning lesser compared to fishing as ancestral occupation. They further voiced, “The Rally for the Valley struggle is on. Still 45000 families are sitting on strike. The issue of displacement in this area is more than 40 years old. For the new young generation, it is the quest for livelihood...they have lost hope. They have also been used for corrupt practices and are lured by the market. But we, ‘The tribal community’ members are engaged in the struggle for our own existence. Therefore the unity is so crucial. If we lose that, we will be displaced.”

Over a period of time, the movement has strengthened the voices of women, who have vociferously reclaimed their rights and entitlements from the state government and other stakeholders. Giving an example of one such incident, one of the older activist recounted “46 of us women decided to forcefully occupy the forest land. When they (forest officials) came to disperse us we told the officer we know about the laws related to the forest land, it’s our by right. We know how local government officers cheat us all the time. We will not move from here.”

6.1. Women’s stake in the movement

Speaking about their reasons to join the movement against setting up of the NPP, the women collectively resonated that it was their only option to unapologetically make them heard. They added, “Wherever there was a struggle we all would arrive there. This is a struggle for saving our rights. We were arrested several times and sent to Jail” There was no trace of fear. There was no reason for us to be “scared.” For us, it is a “struggle for the land and not about saving our life.”

Whenever we saw a motorboat coming, one of the activists would blow a horn and thousands of us would come out to stop the officers from entering our area.

Not only has the movement brought the women of the tribal communities to the fore, but has also proven to be a liberating experience for them as the movement pushed them out of



Women leading the continued opposition to the Chutka NPP

the realms of the household into the public sphere. As was shared by one of the women activists, “So far I had only known my earthen fire, my veil, fetching water...and looking after the family and my land. Now I have learnt to fight the police officer. We are fearless. We even had the courage to snatch away the rifles from the hands of the police.”

According to the women the agents of the state are selling the nation and bringing destruction to their lives. One of the women activists said, we strategized to ensure that the deputy collector attended a meeting that they had organized, and challenged the dynamics of hierarchy by forcing him to sit on the floor with them. Women asked for “freedom and autonomy” of the community. This long struggle has only made them “bolder and stronger.” They decided to make a “Protection squad” against these agents of the state.

Women leaders have displayed immense courage and endurance throughout this movement. Speaking of their experiences and tussle with the agents of the state, they say, “We went on hunger strike, took shelter in the water (Jal Samadhi) sat with half our bodies in the water for days together. Only our face was above the water level. The government is waiting for us to die.”

“We are losing our land, we are hungry and they resort to beating us with sticks. We got badly hurt and they dragged us away in the boat. We stayed in Jail for 14 days for the first time. But we did not give up our resolve. 136 women and some men continued the struggle.

There is a strong sense of ownership reflected in the voices of the women as they speak about their lands. They see themselves as leaders and equal partners. Using slogans like, ‘We are all leaders, we are the owners of this land’. They have dealt with agents of the state, like the police, who came to forcefully evict them from their lands. Today women refused to accept any kind of compensation, provided to them against their lands. As a strategy of defiance a large number of land owners refused to encash the cheques given to them by the authorities of the government.

There is an overall sense of empowerment that the women have proclaimed to have gained from this movement. In the words of one of the male activist leaders, “It is not important that we as individuals succeeded in being part of this struggle for so long, but the empowerment of women has changed them and made them very brave. Women have been the most vocal and courageous. They do not compromise unlike men.”

The women understand the movement as a social cause and seek to include concerns beyond the issue of the NPP. In this regard, two particular concerns that were brought forth by the women were issues of corruption and the problem of alcoholism in the villages. They have resolved that they would like to set up an inquiry committee to look into the matters of corruption and corrupt officers. The women also called for closing of all shops that sell alcohol. Their resilience is evident when they state, “we will struggle to oppose the project and also do creative and constructive work; both go hand in hand for us. This has been a long struggle. Not to give up!”

6.2. Feminist Articulation and perspective

The Chutka Anti-Nuclear Power Plant movement would neither be complete nor possible without equal participation of both women and men of the affected communities/villages. Women’s participation is considered most powerful and critical, and they have strongly articulated the issues of the affected communities in their ongoing involvement in the movement as community leaders. They are part of the democratic decision making body, as members of the executive committee, in Chutka. The gender composition within these bodies is equal. The tribal communities argue that the women cannot be easily divided as they have stood together; making them the most powerful figure of the movement. There is a sense of self sufficiency and pride in the voices of women when they speak of their roles as participants in the movement. From forcefully occupying the forest lands, leading protest marches, to standing up against the authorities of the state, they are the central spirit of the movement. As established through the accounts of the tribal people themselves, the movement relies heavily on the active participation of both women and men, of which women are in a way, the flag bearers of the movement.

I only knew my veil, my earthen stove, and my tools to do agriculture. This struggle has taught me to be fearless of the police and to be daring enough to snatch his gun.



The women not only actively participated in the movement, but also the main mobilisers of the movement since the beginning.

A woman recounts, “We went from village to village on foot...we did foot marches and more and more men and women started joining the movement. Our unity started becoming strong, making our organization larger and larger. Whatever we achieved smallest to biggest rights, it was through our movement.” The “mahila march” (Women’s Platform) in July 2018 (as mentioned above), was in fact initiated by the women themselves as they have a very strong stake in the movement.

However, the multiple roles and the nature of support that women provide to the movement, is not really analysed or understood through a lens of gender by both women and men. “Gendered division of labour and feminization of the movement”, where the burden of the woman is invariably higher as compared to the men, is something not addressed by the male leaders.

The women proclaimed that there is no compartmentalization of roles based on their gender, as said by one of the fisherfolks – “we row the boat, while our men lay the net for fishing.” But the fact that “rowing the boat” is as important as fishing, and that one cannot happen without the other is something that has been not a consciousness of the women, yet. That the work they do is considered supporting roles is something that has been

internalized. It is important to note that the support provided by the women cannot be discounted or discredited, but the movement is yet to realise that these roles are not merely supportive in nature but in fact complementary to sustain the movement.

In conclusion, it is evident that issues of domestic violence, women's multiple burdens, established division of labour are some of the issue that have not been included in the narratives of the struggle."

Despite such shortcomings, one aspect that makes this movement particularly different and more progressive from many others is that women have not been instrumentalised in this movement by the men. This is evident in the way the women participate in the decision-making and executive bodies. In fact, being a part of the movement has been a liberating experience for the women, and emboldened them to continue with the quest for reaffirming their rights. As reiterated by one of the women activists, "This was the struggle for the land and not about saving our life. We do not fear being arrested, as it is a matter of our rights on our lands".

While on one hand there is increasing curtailing of democratic spaces, on the other , it is the people's movements resisting autocratic crackdowns that has kept the democracy alive and vibrant. The heightened resilience of the people living in and around Chutka is in conjunction with similar other struggles by marginalised communities across the spectre. Be it farmers, dalits, fisherfolk, tribals - each community on its own and in alliance with the others has continuously been reminding the government over the last 40 years of their rights that cannot be taken away from them and the corollary responsibility that the government owes to these communities. These people's movements together are creating a powerful unified voice.

7. Key Findings:

- **Strength in alliance building with other movements** - The anti-chutka NPP movement does not see itself in isolation and therefore works in close alliance with other similar people's movements like the NBA and NAPM. The issues of these three movements are many a times over-lapping, and the community believes that they draw their strength of perseverance from their fellow brethren across these movements. The strategy of alliance building also makes a strong case for the people of the movement as it highlights the inter linkages of the myriad issues that are of pertinent concern to them.
- **Sustainability of the movement despite socio-political and economic marginalisation-** Despite hailing from marginalised communities who have been repeatedly deprived of their rights by the state, the self-sustainability of the movement is commendable. It not only underscores the sheer power of perseverance of such grassroots movements but also the compelling needs of the communities so affected.

- **Impunity of the state** - Violation of the Vth schedule of the constitution, and the PESA Kanoon, along with continued defiance of the opposition and rejection of the Gram Sabhas is one of the most significant unconstitutional act committed by the government. In addition, the state continues to push for the NPP in utter denial of the potential hazard to the people and the environment, and the required environmental clearance. The blatant use of the threat of force by different state authorities much to the chagrin of the people indicates another example of state impunity.
- **Contest between these voices and the mainstream narratives** - While the mainstream narratives continue to portray such predatory development projects as markers of a prosperous and “shining” India, it is these voices that bring forth the reality and the human and environmental costs of such large-scale developmental projects. These two different sets of narratives that bear clear evidence to the two varied sets of aspirations of the unequal citizenry that operates in the country.
- **Role of media** - The media which is supposed to be the fourth pillar of a democratic state remained largely ignorant of this significant people’s movement. Most reportage regarding the movement was limited to local media and did not see a bottom-up approach in the national media until 2017. While alternate media forums had covered the issue, the mainstream national media has so far given very limited coverage.

8. Demands and Recommendations

The principal demands of the people in the movement from the government include:

- 1) Immediate cancellation of all nuclear power projects in India including Chutka Nuclear Power Project.
- 2) Scrapping of country’s nuclear energy programme and safe dismantling of the existing nuclear reactors.
- 3) Immediate halt of uranium mining activities in India.
- 4) Putting in public domain all information related to country’s nuclear energy programme.
- 5) Stopping wasteful and luxury use of power and ensuring its equitable distribution and use.
- 6) Development of non-polluting power resources on participatory basis without any commercial motive or profiteering.

We were the kings of this forest -- entirely self-sufficient. We could feed all those who came to our door and yet our granary was never empty. But the evil plans of Sarkar (the state) has made us into beggars...

WRN's Recommendations:

- Given the multiple examples of not only the disastrous effects of NPP but also the experiences of disasters because of NPP across the world, there should be a total ban on the further production of nuclear energy.
- The state should shift its efforts toward increased concentration on sustainable energy.
- Instead of false-promises of providing piecemeal compensations to the displaced, the state should take it as a responsibility of ensuring that its citizens are not displaced unethically and arbitrarily.
- The government of MP should effectively implement the provisions of the MP Ideal Displacement Policy 2002, which prohibits multiple displacements.
- Immediate payment of all the compensations which are due from the earlier displacements.

If it was not for women unity, this struggle would not have been possible. We do not want any nuclear power. We know what radiation will do to our bodies and the body of our land. We do not want destruction in the name of development.

IT IS A KILLER BUSINESS.



Founded in 2011, the Women's Regional Network (WRN) is a network of women civil society leaders working together to advance women's rights and regional peace. To this end, WRN connects women peace advocates, committed to working collectively within and across national borders in an open, respectful, learning environment.

www.womensregionalnetwork.org

Email: infowrn@gmail.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/WomensRegionalNetwork

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